DAD Alfred Arthur Bates 1899 – 1993

Index

1. ALPHA

My Diary – In the Beginning

The Adventures of a Pioneer Infantryman.

Born at Woolwich 1899 10th June. My Father was retired from the British Army after serving over 20 years. After retirement he was engaged at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, Kent England. I was a choir boy at the Academy Chapel.

The family sailed to Canada on Aug 25, 1912 and arrived in Victoria Sep 1912. Our family then consisted of three boys and three girls. Boys: Frederick (Frank), Alfred Arthur (Sonny) and John, (called Jack) Girls: Kathleen, Rose Ellen and Norah.

They could have stayed temporarily with grandmother's older brother, George W Hughes, at 851 Johnson St.... In 1914 the Bates family lived at 938 Collinson St.

August 10th, 1914 I enlisted in the 50th Gordon Highlanders at Victoria as a bugler, and was employed at the Western Union Tel. Coy. The Gordons were a Militia Unit. We paraded twice a week at a building on Fort St. We lived at a house near the corner of Fort and Cook. Still standing at the writing of this diary. My Father was employed at the Can. Bank of Commerce as a messenger.

News of war. 4th of August 1914 Germany declared war on France. England declared war on Germany for invading Belgium. Germany declared war on England. Canada at war.

Our unit was mobilized the first week in August, and marched with full pack to the Willows Fair grounds Oak Bay. Col Currie was our colonel (later General of the Canadian Armies in France) We were assigned to duties of guarding main points around Victoria, such as the Reservoirs, bridges, railways and powder factories. I was assigned as bugler with detachment sent to Telegraph Bay to guard a powder factory. Later went to Goldstream reservoir, was there for Xmas of 1914 with Maj. Monteith. Returned to Willows Camp in the New Year. New regiments were being formed at Willows such as the 30th Bn, 88th Bn (Esquimalt), 2nd C.M.R., 48th Bn and the 67th Bn.

In 1915 the Germans sank the Lusitania, and riots broke out in Victoria over this. In the meantime I had joined the 48th Regt. As a bugler. Our Regt, was called out with others to guard German businesses in Victoria against the mob. We lined the streets with rifles and ammo. Lots of excitement prevailed in Victoria for a number of days. Was at Goldstream Flats on bivouac when news came for us to proceed back the Willows Camp to prepare to proceed overseas.

Great rejoicing by the troops.

We left Victoria in June 1915. I was now 16. We arrived in England July 1915 and proceeded to Ceasars Camp in Kent, Eng. Lived in tents here and spent Xmas here. We were flooded out. We had a brown bear for a mascot, called "Bruno", but sent it to the zoo when we proceeded to France in March 1916 – under Lt. Col W. J. H. Holmes, DSO.

Note: Our family sailed from England on the "Grampian" of the Allan Line. This was in Aug 1912. The Titanic had sailed earlier in April, and she struck an iceberg and sank. We had passed thru the same area where she went down and the sea was covered with icebergs.

2. Preface

Before beginning this autobiography I would like to discourse on certain aspects concerning the life one leads whilst engaged in the capacity of a Pioneer Infantryman, and later as a stretcher bearer and runner.

The pioneer is not associated as most people think with building roads, felling trees etc. etc. Their duty was to go forward with the Infantry in the attack for the purpose of helping to fortify any ground that was captured by the infantry. If and when the occasion occurred, to actually fight alongside infantry when due to heavy casualties suffered by the infantry, or to augment the number that was required to defend the area captured.

The Pioneer Infantry Bn, usually followed a few hundred yards behind the Infantry, carrying, sandbags, shovels, wire, grenades and of cause they were armed with rifle.

Some of our Regt. were actually mixed up in the odd scrap with the Infantry and suffered considerable casualties doing so. I did have the occasion to be mixed up in a melee of this kind, that is my coy, did during the 2rd Battle of Ypres June 1916, we had the occasion to be present in the trenches with the 43rd Highlanders at Ypres, to repel an attack by the enemy at close quarters. Our most dangerous work lay in No Man's Land, erecting barb wire which was about 30 to 50 yds in front. This work to say the least was most strenuous, due to the fact that we worked between our lines and the enemy's.

In some cases our trenches were only about 100 yards apart, and at other places up to 200 yds. Altho we were supported by our own troops, we were responsible to ourselves for protection, and posted sentries to keep a lookout for enemy patrols. We kept our rifles close by us at all times, and some times had to work with them slung across our shoulders, ready for instant use. Sometimes it was necessary to erect barbwire when the moon was full. Peculiar to relate, frequently the German did not bother us altho he could see us out there putting up barbwire or digging “T” trenches. The reason on his part for not interfering was that he also had parties out doing the same thing. This to say the least was most amusing. When going out into No Man's Land, we left a certain part of out line with the intention of returning at some other part. Therefore it was necessary to have our front line defenders warned that we would return in at a certain point and at a certain time. This was necessary, so as our side would not fire at us, mistaking us for the enemy. When out like this the sentry usually had a rope with him which led to our own line, certain number of tugs on the line meant something, such as we are coming in, etc.

Usually (At Ypres) we left our billets at dusk so as to reach the front line as early as possible in the dark to get the work done quickly. We toted with us material that was required for a particular type of work. Barbwire was in rolls,

timber for bolstering the trenches with, shovels for digging, and picks. We usually worked up until if in the summer about an hour before dawn so as to reach cover before daylight. On reaching our billets, we had breakfast, and slept until around lunch time, when we cleaned our equipment, and uniforms, and prepared for another trip that night. So it was night after night. We might skip one night a week and then more routine. Predictable for now !

3. Retrospect

This journal is not a literary gem. I am not an eloquent person, therefore I consider I am not a writer of worth. My intention is to convey to you the facts in a moderate and simple manner, the events of that part of my life from an early age to maturity, before and during the years of the First World War, thru the intervening peace, the Second World War and thence to retirement.

Leaving an English public school at age 13 at Woolwich in the county of Kent, I with my family embarked for Canada. My Father was retired from the British Army after serving for many years. On our arrival in Canada, looking forward to a life in new surroundings, and wondering of future that was in store for us. I really did not relish the idea of returning to school, and was not pressed to do so by my parents. So I joined the Western Union Telegraph Coy, as a messenger. And 1914 I enlisted in the 50th Gordon Highlanders as a drummer.

Incidentally my progress at school in England was satisfactory, as I was awarded fairly good marks and awarded bronze medals and books. It was not until seventeen years later that I attained the necessary education that was to pave the way for promotion in the army (Canadian). I was awarded the 1st Class Certificate of Education, which was equivalent to College Entrance, if I so wished.

I was a determined lad and inclined to be individualistic and independent, to look after myself and not be dependent upon others. In spare time I became interested in electricity, I became extremely interested in art. I became fairly proficient in drawing, a man may allow himself on various subjects even upon matters of expedience and duty, and after all he must determine his course of action and not be influenced by others, and it was that decided me eventually to become a soldier, to serve my country, as my Father had in his time. So my course was set and nothing was to deter me from it. That course I had set in 1914 in enlisting in the Army was the beginning of a life that I loved and respected above anything else and to say the least the most gratifying.

Consequently in the four and a half years following the start of the First World War (1914 – 1918) I endured the ordeals of war, in blood and suffering that was eventually to affect my life. Altho it is my opinion that a man who dons the uniform of his country should at least once during his service have his "blood-letting" if the opportunity occurs and not to shirk his duty as a soldier. I was to survive that ordeal like many others and perchance to die of old age, which to me is rather terrifying.

I emerged from the war a silent and morose young man, and to wit fatalistically inclined, which word is in contradiction to the experience of dieing of old age mentioned above. I had a longing for solitude to get away from

crowds, to walk in the countryside and along the seashore and to me it meant the epitome of peace.

On my return from war I entered civil life like many of my comrades wondering what the future would bring. Up till then I decided to lounge around for awhile before deciding anything. Perhaps we all dream of great deeds and high positions, away from the pettiness and humdrum of ordinary life. Dream we must by all means and aspire by all means if one is to succeed when one has made up his mind. To make the most of what you have and are. Perhaps your trivial, immediate task is your own sure way of proving your mettle. Do the things at hand and great things will come to your hand to be done. Misfortune overtakes us, difficulties confront us I thought, but these things must not induce us to give up our inspirations whether it be military or civilian occupation. Perhaps in your youth we picture ourselves as we will be in the future, and to me the future had arrived with the present. I considered myself not as a rabid, Pollyanna optimist, I believed in loving Divine Providence who expects you to play the game to the limit, for I believe to those who won have rest and peace; and to those who had died over there have more. I felt that the present time was important to me in regard to my future planes. I was mature enough to realize that I decided to enter into the way of things that now developed after the war. We who had returned from the war living as we did in those far off days in France, Belgium and Germany, and now entering upon a new life back home, it as not very easy to suddenly change ones life in twenty minutes from a life that was adventuress, dangerous, exhilarating, tiresome, boring and yet sometimes gay. So here we were back home again and wondering where the future lay.

After a short trip on a whaling schooner to the North Pacific, I decided that the life of a sailor was not for me. The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry had sent a coy here from London Ontario to Work Point Bks, and a friend of mine by name of Robinson and I decided to enlist again. It proved to be the turning point of my life. It was something that I had longed for, the orderliness, the discipline, the comradeship that we had obtained overseas. I took to discipline like a duck to water As Dionysuis said "Better late than never".

Nearly all of the men in "B" Coy P.P.C.L.I. had serviced overseas, and we realized that we were amongst men whom we knew. I came from a family of soldiers. My Father having served in far away places as India and Africa.

Where he was sent we also followed as it was the custom in those days. His last station was in Ireland, and on his return from there he was retired but served unofficially in the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, where I was choir boy at the Military Chapel.

It pleased my Father greatly when he saw that I had decided to follow in his footsteps. Somehow it seemed I was closer to Father than to Mother, it was an affinity that was foreseeable I suppose. My Father concurred at my decision to go to war, but Mother was decidedly against it, but it was to be as I saw it and away I went.

My thoughts go back to the day when our regiment departed from Victoria July 1915. It was thrilling to hear the military music, the cheering crowds, that lined the streets as we made our way to the boat for Vancouver, and thence by train across Canada. I was fortunate to see my folks at the dockside and they saw me and we waved a final goodbye and I was not ashamed to shed a few tears.

What had this adventure to offer us in the months or even years to come. The joy of returning home was to overshadow the joy we felt at leaving. Many would not return. But some of us returned, and I a much sadder but wiser man.

4. A Crtical Analysis

A critical analysis is the essence of military history has an intellectual interest of its own. But it is not the essence of a battle: it does not describe a human experience. Historians can see a battle calmly as a whole, but no soldier in battle sees anything of the sort. He may be half blinded by gunsmoke, half deafened by noise, and either half-paralyzed by fright or driven to a kind of madness by exaltation and the hype of glory. The more thoroughly one analyses a battle, the harder it becomes to remember what it felt like to the people who were in it.

Individual actions of soldiers during battle is sometimes done on the spur of the moment sometimes during an angry outburst against the enemy, although the outburst may not be a personal nature as he is quite unaware of whom he is angry with at the moment, the anger is probably the war in general, and he is personally involved in the war as a whole not against the individual enemy soldier against whom he is fighting. Perhaps he has witnessed the killing of a very personal friend of his by the enemy, and become enflamed with the idea of revenge, or he like many men, has become inflamed with the desire to kill as many of the enemy as possible thru patriotic zeal, I personally was inflamed with the desire for revenge after I witnessed the death of comrades, which I thought at the time unnecessary, but was restrained by self discipline, or perhaps an inner thought that if I had acted on a compulsion to seek revenge for my own satisfaction, it would only result in own extinction. Soldiers relate stories abut certain actions in which they were involved. What they saw or heard and felt the little that that they knew, the trivialities they remembered afterwards, and elementary tales or ideas of what it was all about at the time. We are prone to exaggerate our actions afterwards, but on the whole they are mostly true if slightly off tune. For example a soldier was asked what a certain action was all about, and he on the morning after, and he replied “I’m hanged if I know much about the matter as I was too bloody busy at the time to remember about what was happening around me. A soldier is really unaware what is happening except in the immediate vicinity, say within a few yards or so.

During the battle of Vimy Ridge, I was a centre of a great activity, men were rushing about, men were shouting, bombs were exploding, M.Gs rattling, and I with other men were moving along a trench where dead men lying around, others were just standing, some looking confused, enemy prisoners were just sitting around with their hands on their hands, looking very much afraid, these I noticed, a Canadian Sgt was lying across a trench block and on the other side a German lay, they lay there face to face, both were dead, probably they had killed each other. These observations as we advanced along the trench, but

immediately dismissed from the mind as other we progressed. Other times Germans appeared to our rear and front, but immediately dismissed it from my mind as I quickly noted that there were unarmed. Everyone seemed to be on the move, and I was a part of it. Sometimes I felt that I was in danger, and other times I felt relieved that I was in no immediate danger at the time, but was continually anticipating sometime that would we would not affect personally.

There is a moral in this story, for anyone who cares to look at it. Of course what a General does in a battle seems more important than what a soldier does in a battle, or what he thinks; but the deeds and thoughts of soldiers have a special interest, because they sometimes illuminate the mystery of military life. The mystery is this; what makes a man, who is an army and puts on a uniform, behave on the word of command entirely unlike himself, but like a ferocious animal when under marital stress. This is a question of more than historical interest, because the same thing still has to happen in any successful army when it goes to war. The battles of the first war, it was an impersonal war, as regards the behaviour of men. The German and Canadians admired each other, and most of the time their thoughts were impersonal. We were aware of the atrocities their armies committed in Belgium, and when the time arrived when the opposing sides met in the field separated by only a few yards of "No Man's Land" and held in check by miles of barbed wire, we wondered what the enemy soldiers were like, especially when at the time we had no actual contact with any of them. Yes, I used to try to visualize what they looked like as I peered across No Man's Land and wondered. Perhaps they were like us in all ways, human, some the father's of families, some with sweethearts left behind. Quite often we could hear them singing, and the playing of mouth organs. Yet there we were facing each other, ready at the drop of a glove to jump out and slaughter each other. And for what ?

I came under the spell of army life at an early age. I was following in the footsteps of my Father. He spent many years in the British Arms, in India and South Africa. I enlisted in the Gordon Highlanders as a bugler. And I admit I became a very good bugler.

Many nights I used to polish the button of my tunic, and comb the hairs of the sporran. Parade twice a week at the school grounds, sometimes march thru town at the swirl of the pipes. That was stirring music to my soul. I'm sure my Father was proud of me.

Then war came. Our regiment was mobilized and we were off to war, I had no visions of what was like only from my history lessons learned at school. I used to read as many was stories of the British Army as I could, and would wonder what it was like to be a soldier. I felt very important when the time came that I was to proceed with my coy to guard the city reservoir, that was

Xmas of 1915. We were there about a month before being relieved by another coy. I felt that I had actually been on active duty in serving my country during a war. As the war progressed I eventually became a private soldier. Dreams of Empire had always been in my mind, and that some day my dreams would come true, whatever the consequences would be. I wanted very much to be a soldier, it was uppermost in my mind. My Mother did not approve of what went on in my mind, but I had made up my mind at the age of 16. The dye was cast that would affect my future life. I have had no regrets for the action I took. The British Empire was much the fore in those early days of the first war. For King and Country was the cry every where.

At the present time of writing this the might of the British Empire had waned and is no more. The pity of it. Its greatness has declined somewhat like the Roman Empire. Even the United States admit that they miss the strength of Britain at her side.

I do not know whether I will be able to finish this narrative, but will endeavor to continue some day. I wish to express my thoughts of a soldier whether it be in peace or war, as I think I have the desire to put into print as it were my experience of soldiering, because soldiering was my life and I felt actually married to it.

5. Training for Battle

It was once the popular conception of battles that they were won "On the playing fields of Eton". Eton is a famous Public School in England, where some of the soldiers of latter days were educated. But since those far off days that expression has been discarded, and now one would say that they are won on the parade ground square, where discipline is instilled into the soldier, to learn to obey the will of the leader.

Discipline with Esprit de Corps, Élan and courage are the true foundations for the winning of battles, if troops are properly led, for without these virtues formations of troops in action will result in defeat and chaos.

One example of lack of discipline occurred at Ypres in 1915, when the Germans sent chlorine gas over trenches held by French troops and the Canadians. The African troops fled in disorder leaving the left flank of the Canadians in the air. The Canadians held the line. Another example of this lack occurred during the same war when the Portuguese troops fled to the rear.

Physical courage in a soldier is not enough; this courage must be augmented by the willingness of the soldier to obey his leader. He learns to obey during his earliest training, and that is on the parade ground. Then after learning this he is taught to handle the weapons of his trade. After learning weapons not only kill the enemy but prevents himself from being killed. Courage may be normal in the average man, but he must be taught how to handle this courage in the proper manner. By this I mean that he will not act in a courageous manner for the mere sake of being heroic, but for the sake killing the enemy to safeguard his comrades, so as to enable them to overcome the resistance of the enemy, and therefore to win the battle.

Every man has courage in some form or other, some men have a higher courage than others, and given the opportunity will act in a manner that will instill into others the courage necessary to win. Fear is in all of us in some form or other. Some may show fear in battle, but in most disciplined troops this fear is only temporary, if he has been disciplined by the fire and the sword this fear will be overcome when he actually has to go forward and engage the enemy. I have seen fear, and have suffered this malady a number of times under fire, but this fear was the fear of being hurt, not the fear of coming against an individual of the other side. Some men show fear by shedding tears in the face of danger, other show it by cringing, but still this may only be temporary due to inaction before engaging the enemy.

Being pinned to the ground and unable to advance due to heavy enemy shellfire can shake the morale of troops, especially green troops. Men who see comrades being killed by their side and expecting to be killed themselves may

falter and at the first opportunity will run to the rear. Properly disciplined troops can learn to "take it".

What is Fear ?

I have yet to meet a man who doesn't know fear. There is the fear of reprisal. There is the fear of one's own safety. There is the mental fear of poverty. There is the fear of physical harm. There is the fear of dictatorship whether by government or by private action. Fear of fire. Fear of deluge. It's one hell of a note when a citizen speaks out on a subject only to be subjected to harassment, property damage or even physical violence.

Being fearless will not get you an astronaut's position or an airplane pilot's job. You have to know fear and know how to handle it if certain conditions warrant it. The old saying about he who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day, is made up of common sense.

I say that "Early and provident fear is the mother of common sense. "God planted fear in a soul as truly as he implanted hope or courage. It is the kind of going which rings the mind into quick life and avoidance on the approach of danger. It is the soul's signal for rallying".

I say that there is nothing shameful about fear, but it is despicable for people to implant fear in others. It is a cowardly approach, often a weapon of a mob. You often hear the remark, "Please don't use my name, something might happen to my family."

In war fear is something quite understandable, but not always understood. I have found by personal experience in war that fear is present during actions against the enemy where you and your comrades are personally involved. Fear can be controlled by discipline. Discipline is essential in the life of a soldier. He learns discipline on the parade ground. Discipline and fear are linked in the life of a soldier. Without discipline in an army, the army becomes an undisciplined mob, and eventually runs away in the presence of the enemy. As witnessed during the war between the States. Here whole armies just disintegrated and ran away.

Another example of fear of the unknown was exhibited by the French Colonial troops during the first gas attack by the Germans north of Ypres in April 1915. A huge gap was created in the front line of the Canadians, when the French troops ran panic stricken to the rear. Only the valour and the discipline of the Canadians saved the situation. On another occasion, in French in 1916 when the Portuguese troops were unable to withstand the shelling and the blowing of mines, fear ran thru their ranks and they all ran to the rear stricken with fear.

I personally have experienced fear during the war, fear for my life and no doubt my comrades near me also must have suffered the same emotions, but discipline was inherent in us to withstand.

Men have been shot for showing cowardice in the face of the enemy. In their case their far became uncontrolled, probably due to lack of army discipline or of personal emotions that they were unable to control, a fear of a physical hurt that they imagined would happen to them. Life in the trenches as I experienced became a daily routine, although in these cases the daily routine of standing watch over enemy actions, anticipating some action on the part of the enemy towards us either during the day or by night that would ultimately perchance end in physical actions between you and the enemy, would enter your mind, but with the presence of your comrades in the vicinity would bolster your morale, and eventually would set your mind at rest, that help was at hand, that would eventually drive from your mind the idea of certain personal feelings that you could overcome, but at the same time not being without fear could be dangerous to you and you could become careless in your actions and unconsciously expose yourself to danger unnecessarily lose your life.

Becoming immobile during some part of trench warfare, that is to say, during an enemy bombardment, the troops had no recourse but to stay where they are and wait for the enemy action to cease. Here discipline counts, and that discipline would save countless lives, although during the actions by shellfire one does experience some sort of fear, a fear that is controlled, altho at any moment you expected to be blown apart, or at least seriously wounded. One becomes a fatalist during, saying to oneself, oh well, what the hell, I will go sometime, but deep in your mind you wonder how or what the end will be, what the action you would take, either physically or mentally, courage is essentially a part of man's physically makeup and having this inherent courage will no doubt assist him to overcome mental fear.

It is known that men have (as I have) appealed to his maker to pull him thru in times of danger, and that this appeal to HIM assists him greatly to overcome danger. I have personally appealed to HIM during moments of danger, and during these moments, I have felt mentally at peace, and I'm sure it helped me to overcome any other action on my part that would have increased the danger to myself. Being a fatalist has its good points and also it's bad. I think that being a fatalist could become one's enemy, being fatalistic could cause one to become careless in moments of danger, one becomes overcautious and consequently endanger ones life unnecessary, when a little caution on your part would eliminate carelessness to you and your comrades. One hears of actions taken by men during a battle "over and beyond the call of duty" in that he did expose himself to danger to save the life or lives of his comrades and was

eventually rewarded the highest honour by his country. Actions like these was executed on the spur of the moment, or as the opportunity occurred, that to him was necessary regardless of the consequences to him. He overcame fear, during that momentous action, and the actual action (physical) helped him to forget mentally what he intended to do. Also most men had been in action for so long that they became immune to that way of life, month after month, year after year, living dangerously that became one's way of life so to speak. Eventually it became a game between you and the unknown; the unknown may be the enemy, in which in most cases it was. You and the enemy were complete strangers and sometimes it would be months before you actually saw enemy in person, but eventually you knew you would someday be confronted with them, and you would be in doubt as to how you would someday be confronted with them, and you would be in doubt as to how you act towards him.

I was in France about three months before I actually saw an enemy, and when the time came I became curious as to what he looked like and probably he was also curious.

During the Somme battle 1916 (Sept) also at Vimy, and at Passchendaele, I saw FEAR on the faces of the enemy. And it was actual fear to say the least. They were actually demoralized, the young and the old. Of course they were on the losing side later, and victorious troops do not exhibit fear because they know that they have the enemy on the run, and when troops are on the run they have fear in their minds. Fear can be exhibited in many ways.

Men who have fear may attack to overcome their fear, or some may fear the dark, the unknown may be fearsome to many, fear of consequence, fear of fear.

During the battle of Vimy, we came to where the Germans had dug deep steps to underground places, and instead of going down there to capture the enemy we threw hand grenades. Why didn't men go down there, I say it was because of the unknown, the fear of what may happen when you attempted to go down, and having grenades it helped to overcome fear by killing the enemy at a distance? Fear, takes many forms in one's life, from childhood to adulthood. But fear it is said can be overcome. Can it? That is the question, to be or not to be afraid.

If one has confidence in oneself one can overcome fear up to a point. One may say that very strong man has no fear if he knows that his opponent is weak either mentally or physically and will attack his opponent without thought of the consequence of his acts. Perhaps you might think that his actions were cowardly, but one must remember that the weak (whether mentally or physically) would stoop to unknown tricks that would endanger the life of the

other person and therefore the stronger person must anticipate such action and act accordingly, and therefore he may be called cowardly himself.

Fear is not always present. Some persons are strong willed, and say that they are fearless. That may be so, but still there may come a time in their lives in they will be overcome by some incident that will cause them to act that may seem strange to them.

Fear is ever present in man, but it can be controlled to a certain extent, when a person lacks physical courage, is it that he is afraid? Is there such a thing as mental torture? Is the mental attitude attached to the physical attitude? I think so. The brain exercises the mental attitude of a person. The brain signals to physical side telling the person to act or not to act or even to think. The brain signals the person thru physical action to commit certain actions. If the brain signals negatively the person will not act, if the person acts on the spur of the moment as it were, it may be an act of impulsion, or instinct, an impulsive action that may save the life of himself or other persons.

A person who claims he is not afraid, the feeling remains in the subconscious, it does not come to the surface, therefore he feels free to commit some brave action, follow somewhat by a mild mental reaction, or mild shock to his system, following his action.

“I propose that fear sometimes is “wisdom”.

“I think every soldier is badly frightened at times but discipline a sense of duty and reluctance to show cowardice before his comrades keeps him steady.”

6. The Approach to the Front

Those who served in other arms felt a certain humility when they compare their lot with that of the infantryman. Infantry casualties especially in the attack, were far greater than those of the artillery, the engineers or other troops. Altho as far as the engineers, we did see some engineers in the forward areas, that is with some infantry, the Pioneers of the Divisions were also classed as infantry, when in an emergency, as for instance they always worked in the trenches, sometimes right in No Man's Land, erecting barbwire and working on other defenses that were vital to the defence and being supported by the infantry, until the work was done, and similarly in the attack, were sometimes involved in the fighting.

The Pioneers roamed all along the front, some whose civilian occupation was involved in mining, were employed in minding the enemy positions, and in some cases were captured, and or went up with the mines.

They with the infantry braved the machine gun fire, struggled thru the mud, got hung up on the wire. In defence they suffered the concentrations of shell fire and mortar. Even in so called static periods (quiet front) they worked at the mercy of the weather, wading thru mud and water in undrained trenches, seldom having adequate shelter from the elements. Soldiers of other arms would speak of the "the poor bloody infantry" – abbreviated P.B.I. the bare words may seem to imply a shade of condescension; in fact they were a tribute of respect.

In whatever echelon of the military machine the soldier happened to find himself, he had a profound conviction that the man in the echelon behind him had a pretty easy and safe time of it. The men in Bn H.Qrs, professed scorn for the easy life of the fellows at Brigade H.Qrs or at Coy Hqrs. felt the same way for those at Bn Hqrs and so it went. There was the story of a section corporal who spoke bitterly of the "bombproofers" back at platoon headquarters—all of 100 yds behind the front line.

Our March to the Front Lines

On arriving at Bourlouge France, we marched to St. Martins Camp at top of the hill here we were camped in tents; the snow lay on the ground about a foot deep. Each tent was occupied by ten men for warmth. We stayed here for a week, and then eventually orders came to pack up. Marched down the hill to waiting box cars. After a long trip we eventually arrived at Armentieres, France. Here we left the railcars and marched towards the front. We passes smashed and broken farmhouses and cottages, stunted willow, stagnant ditches, battery pits and torn up mounds; then, thru zigzag cuttings in marshy ground containing

wire, eventually reached the front lines. Here the trenches in the low-lying area were breastworks, ridges cast upon both sides of a shallow trench dug down to the water level. These trenches were capped with sandbags, and were held in place by brushwood hurdles, corrugated iron and wired stakes and frames. Beneath the trench floorboards and slats (called duckboards) the water was foul smelling.

The Approach of the Front Line

As we approached towards the front line, (the Armentieres front) the first signs of war's destruction we noticed were the wounded trees. It was not until we got within about a thousand yards of the combat area that we saw completely shattered trunks. But some miles back, here and there we saw a fine tree blasted, usually one of the poplars bordering the long straight granite-paved chausees.

It was over these roads that the armies in France and Flanders endlessly marched and were carried in busses (London type). The shell-struck tree might have only a large wrenched off, leaving a splintery fragment. But it never failed to arouse the thought, "We're getting near it", and the conjecture that what could happen to the limb of the tree could happen to a human limb. Then as we got closer to the front line in the areas where had been intense fighting, the trees had been whittled down by high explosives and shrapnel to stumps pointing a sheaf of slivers to the sky. What had been blown off was soon collected for firewood always in short supply. And so my thoughts wandered during the present and the future.

Then there were the houses with shell damage. I thought of Bruce Bairnsfather's cartoon of the inquisitive newcomer to the front asking Old Bill "Wot made thar 'ole" and the sour reply, "Mice". As we approached nearer to the front, damage increased, until soon nothing was left but the scattered bricks and splintered wood. Some of the farmhouses had been used as headquarters of Bns or Coys. Cellars originally provided some protection from shrapnel and or burst of high explosives. One thing I noticed was the absence of civilians. The last civilian we saw was at Dickiebusch. Here and there we noticed the odd farmer working in the fields.

The condition of the country was more or less the same, right up to and including the Ypres front. Civilians had moved back to the towns by their own free will or in some cases for safety reasons, and in other cases where they were too close to the firing lines they had been ordered back to the authorities.

French Farm Houses

The farmhouse and outbuildings were constructed on the standard model (French) for those parts: the farmhouse on one side, the stables and barn on the other two sides, and the whole forming a "U" in plan. They enclosed the midden, on which the animal manure and other refuse was deposited to ripen until it should be required for fertilizing the fields.

At first we found the stink formidable but we soon got to know that there many worse smells in war. Older soldiers informed newcomers to the Bn that the size of the midden was an index of the farmer's prosperity. It was also suggested that the local people considered the effluvium to be healthy as perhaps conferring some kind of immunity to various diseases.

When one particular farmhouse was undamaged and within easy range of German artillery, this immunity gave rise to some unkind thoughts; the latrine gossip was the burgermeister (The Mayor) was somehow persona grata (that is friendly with the enemy) perhaps even to the extent of supplying them with information. I don't think anyone too this too seriously; doubtless the I(b) organization (counter espionage) was effective enough to have detected any improper actions on the part of this locally prominent citizen. But spies and spying were something of an obsession in the early days of the war. It was known that the Germans had planted spies as farmers before the wear. Defeats, even minor tactical setbacks were often attributed to prior German knowledge of our plans, which they discovered by underhanded intelligence metgods. For instance there were the actions of certain farmers, whilst their ground, pointed the furrows made by hand plows towards where some of our batteries were concealed, and when German planes came over and saw the signed on the ground they immediately directed their own artillery onto the target.

At one farmhouse near where we were, a German long range gun which we nicknamed "Pushful Percy" sent over a very will grouped number of fine-nines, fortunately none of the building had been hit, but a shell had landed in the farm midden, and besides spreading some of the manure where it would do no good, one of the shell fragments had wounded the farmer's daughter. This young woman, solidly built on the Flemish rural pattern, had been growing more beautiful day by day—at least in the eyes of the men quartered near by, deprived of the sight of any other female face and figure. So when the small piece of shrapnel imbedded itself in her ample posterior, numerous solicitous volunteers were there to apply first field dressings.

At The Front

Most old soldiers "don't look back in anger". We like to reminisce about funny incidents, the better times, short and inconsequential though they may be

on the whole grim chronicle of war. All wartime service was not a horrifying sequence of blood and guts, especially when at rest behind the lines for few days, one seems to want to forget the conditions up front. But this is not to minimize the fear, hardship and suffering undergone by nearby soldier in the infantry, etc. whose duties took them frequently into the zone where they fought and had his experiences.

No one wants to remember that he was afraid; to remember the death of comrades, the man beside one cut off from life in a second by a rifle or machinegun bullet, an exploding shell's conversion of the human body from the image of God to offal. When at rest in the back areas, sleeping accommodation was fairly good, usually in the barns, where we slept on hay, and when not engaged in sports of somewhat sort. If a field was available nearby we played soccer, or held an impromptu field day, consisting of relay races, tug-O-war, etc.

The periods of rest usually about two weeks seem to pass very quickly, and soon we would be on our way to the trenches, sometimes to relive other troops holding the reserve trenches, or perhaps to the support trenches, these two lines of trenches, were usually well built, with dugouts, and nearby the H.Qrs of the Bn, of the Coys, where the mobile kitchens were established, and had the opportunity to enjoy the nightly sleep with being undisturbed but in the front lines, it was not so. Here the meals were sent up by carrying parties, at least we enjoyed one hot meal a day, usually in the evening.

We were attached to the 2nd Bn 1st Div (Red Patch) for indoctrination in trench warfare. Duties started with "stand to arms" at first light the likely hour for attack; then the protective wire was checked, then the strengthening of the breastworks. At night some of us went out on patrol, and worst of all, listening posts, pushed forward into the "devil's strip", were manned. Near by were some farmhouses partially destroyed called Antiaircraft Farm. It was a quiet sector, but still we felt the brooding of the front. New digging disclosed rusty metal, bones, rotted cloth and putrescent flesh. A good deal of lime was used here. The whole area smelt of death, huge rats was common place here, they lived on the remains of bodies, and we sometimes chased them with our bayonets.

We were told by men of the Bn that we were attached that the enemy trenches were only about forty yards away in some places. Bullets zipped overhead or wailed in ricocheting from the strands of wire and jagged metal which lay in No Man's Land. A few shells would occasionally go screaming overhead. When one landed close by prompted a quick "Get Down!" from the experienced man of the other battalion. We eventually got to learn to interpret the sounds of different caliber of shells as they approach us. When one did land near us the ground was gouged into a shower of spouting mud, and the parapet

in some places simply collapsed into the trench, while pieces of metal from the shall sang away in different directions.

Here on this front we were told the policy by both sides was "Live and let live" if no liberties were taken. Rockets were set near the parapet, where a sentry was posted who kept a sharp lookout towards the enemy trench in case of attack, where at the rocket was fired to warn our artillery for support fire. The Germans once put up a toy horse on their parapet; this was promptly knocked down by our chaps by rifle fire, it appeared a few seconds later bandaged around the neck. What a sense of humour under such circumstances. I thought. The nights were a strange experience to me, and perhaps to other fellows. German flares soared up to curve to the ground, or suspend by a small parachute, sank slowly, distorting the torn landscape with eerie light and shadows. When I looked over the enemy's parapet seemed frightening close. Men who happened to be in No Man's Land at the time froze upon the ground until the light died. We learned that whenever we were in No Man's Land and we heard the plop of flare pistol that was the time to hit the ground, otherwise if you acted too late you had to immediately freeze and hope that Fritz would mistake you for a shattered tree or a wiring post.

The front line here contained no dugouts, and when we were off sentry duty or whatever we had to get some sleep lying on the trench mat. It was cold although we had our greatcoats. Sleeping thru the night was sometimes impossible due to someone knocking you as they passed by or due to the occasional crack of rifle, artillery rumbling in the distance or our guns crashing out behind us. It was the rainy season here in northern France (Feb). Here we placed our groundsheet over us. Our Coy suffered a few casualties, due to sniper fire; probably the men who were hit became too careless. Signs were posted here and there about German snipers.

We spent a week here in the Plugstreet area. Our Bn then moved out to the village of Haver's Kerque where we cleaned up, and usually spent out time roaming around in pairs or spending an evening in the estaminets imbibing red and white wine 'Vin blanc and vinrouge'. The beer was horrible. At night we could see the flares going up from the trenches about three miles away. One night I could see continued flashes away to the right but could hear the guns, so figured that someone was getting hell miles away. Other times we could hear the guns in a continued roar a few miles away, this was called "drum fire" as it sounded like drums beating.

About the beginning of April our Bn packed up and started the march to Ypres away to the North of Belgium. Passing the hill of Mont de Cats (the hill of the cats) it was called, where were told that the monastery at the top of the hill which we could see, was or had been held by Fritz, and where the nuns had been

raped. As the foot of the hill was the village Godesveldt, where we stayed awhile where the troops visited the estaminet, which was graced by a pretty barmaid whose name was Marie. Later we continued our march to Ypres. We passed thru the town of Poperridge and thence to Kruuistaate, where we were subjected to a tear gas barrage and had to don our tear gas goggles. We eventually reached the destroyed town of Ypres, passed thru the town square and were allotted billets in the town. Our coy was billeted in the cellars of the Notre Dame Hospital near the Menin Gate. So ended the first phase of our experience in war.

7. The Armentieres Front March 1916

We proceeded here when we first landed in France

Plug Street Tea Farm Anti Aircraft Farm Lovers Lane

Arrival in France March 9, 1916

Our Commanding Officer was a Col. Holmes (Dugout Bill) who was a graduate of the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ont. We fired our musketry courses at Hythe Ranges near the sea. Here we were stationed at Risboro Bks. West Sandling Camp. Some regiments were broken up to supply reinforcements to the units in France where battles were raging, especially in Belgium.

There was fear that our Regt would be broken up as reinforcements but eventually our Regt was formed into a Pioneer Infantry Bn known as the 3rd Pioneers, (48th Canadians). A number of units on arrival in England had been disbanded to reinforce units that were in France. We lost a number of men this way. Our Regt. consisted of woodsmen, surveyors, carpenters, miners, etc., so it was decided by the powers that be to from us into a Pioneer Bn. We were very fortunate at not being disbanded. There was great rejoicing at this news. We were to remain as a whole unit after all.

Whilst in England I was in the bugle band under St. Hoy. I was rather annoyed being a bugler as I wanted to be in the ranks of the 2nd Coy under Capt. Abbott now living (at the writing of this chapter) in Abbottsford, BC. I was so disgusted that one day I told the Bugle Sgt to go to Hell, and was paraded to the C.O. for insubordination. Here I told him that I came over to see some active service and not to be in a band. He said I would be given that opportunity when we reach France.

Went on leave to Woolwich where I visited the home of one of my boyhood friends Joe Wood and also the Phillips family. Also the Hadleys, old friends of my parents. We were also given leave of a few days just before leaving England and I went to Whittlesea in Huntingdonshire where I visited my Mothers' parents.

Before going further I wish to state that on arrival in France the bugle band was disbanded and the buglers and drummers allotted to coys. I with another bugler went to No. 2 Coy, commanded by Capt. Abbott (Bunny). The average age of the men ranged from 16 yrs to 35. I was sixteen when I landed in France, but was tough for my age.

In the Trenches on the Armentieres Front – March 1916

On arriving at the front from Boulogne, we detrained somewhere near the town, and proceeding on foot towards the front lines. We arrived at some trenches during the evening (all movements were at night) our Coy separated from the Regt. and proceeded up the trench (Communicating) towards where some star shells were soaring into the night sky. Well I thought to myself here we are at last after traveling all the way from Canada to where we all longed to be. Some of us were no doubt to be sorry as the months and years crept by, but it was rather too late to turn back now. All conversation was done as whispers and now and again verbal messages were passed from front to the rear of the Coy. We eventually came to a halt, and we separated by platoons up a trench. Here and there posted up were signs "Caution enemy snipers" "Keep your head down". We didn't have to be reminded later regarding these signs. Everywhere we went we walked in a crouching position. The Regt that we were attached to for blood letting, as it was called, was a unit of First Div. Red patches on their shoulders. Ours were grey. The trenches were in some places very muddy and contained at least a foot of water. The weather was lousy, wet and cloudy. We slept in dugout just below the level of the trench floor, and the entrance was covered with a waterproof sheet. Each dugout contained about 6 men that is a complete section. We took turns at night and day sentry duty. This consisted of just standing or sitting on a dry spot if we could fine one. One man acting as a sentry close to the rocket on a pole. This rocket was for the purpose of calling for artillery fire in case of enemy attack. Here and there were periscopes that we looked thru towards the enemy positions, that were roughly about in some places 200 yards away, the distance varied. Looking thru these scopes we could discern dead bodies lying here and there, barbed wire, shell holes, long grass and the movements of huge rats, as big as cats it seemed.

A star shell occasionally soared into the sky, some from our trenches and from the enemy side. These very lights would soar up to bout 200 ft. and burst into light that lit up a considerable part of the terrain. Everything turned ghostly, it was fascinating to watch it drop to the ground, where on alighting it would smolder for a second and then go out. Meals were brought up to the front line from the rear where the cook kitchens were at H.Qrs. They were brought up in dixies, for breakfast we usually had bacon and beans, bread and tea. Lunch consisted of cheese, jam and bread and tea, supper consisted of a hot meal. Early morning all were issued a tot of rum. This front was considered by our side and the enemy as a rest front. The only activity here consisted of a mortar bombs dropping, fired by the mortar section. The Regt'l snipers were busy early in the mornings on both sides. The drawback of this type of warfare was

impressed on my mind by one of my early experiences in conducting what was called a 'carrying party' to the front line on a dark night. The guide who met us mistook it (the trench where we were supposed to go with the wire, etc. that we were carrying) for a support line trench, and led us on until a flare revealed that we were in No Man's Land, close to the German front line. It was not a pleasant situation, we decided, especially when carrying corrugated sheet iron, revetting screens, sand bags, etc. but managed to get into our front line trench just before a German machine gun swept the ground where we had been. Incidentally the guide received a good dressing down by our officer. We suffered a few casualties from sniper fire, the people involved became rather careless, regardless of the warnings posted. During the day we had the opportunity to chase some rats and spear them with our bayonets.

Another characteristic of trench warfare was the 'deadness' of the daytime and the 'aliveness' of the night. In contrast with civilian sensation the atmosphere of the dark was pervaded with friendliness-partly because darkness was a natural cloak of protection and partly because company precluded loneliness. To be alone was the worst of wartime experiences, indeed, that when it happened it produced an acute sense of unease. This I was to experience later in other situations.

'Throughout the war the men's worst nightmare—to be alone and lost and in danger. The fear of being captured, of being struck down somewhere where there was no one to find me. Later I was to hundreds of men who had suffered this fate. What it was to die alone. The monotony of trench life was occasionally broken by visits of some visiting parties of officers, and very rarely by a newspaper correspondent. Everybody wanted their pictures taken with the hope that they would appear in their home town newspapers.

It was here at Plugstreet that I witnessed a man killed by a sniper. I was so close to him, actually in front of him as he squatted in the top of the trench. I head the vicious snap of the enemy rifle and instinctly ducked, and the bullet hit this man if the Engineers in the stomach. I felt quite shaken after it occurred. It may have been me instead of him.

The daytime was the most dreary part of the routine. One couldn't move about, one couldn't stay in the dugout all the time. Very few books to read. We smoked issue cigarettes, sometimes using these fags as money in poker games. Sometimes took a peep thru the periscope towards the enemy and wondered what they were doing. Occasionally the enemy would shell the back areas and we could hear noise of the shell as it passed overhead, and wondered who was on the receiving end. Ration parties would appear in the early evening, with bread, cigarettes and goodies. Water came up in petrol cans (one gal). Ten days were spent by units in the front line then moved to the support lines and then

eventually to reserve. Then finally out to the read areas where we could have a hot shower, a change of clothing. Rest of the time consisted of platoon, Coy and Bn drill, gas drill, bayonet drill, sports, and whatever the powers that be would think of.

Landing in France

On landing in France we were camped outside the town on a hill, St. Martin's Hill. Slept in tents. The ground was covered with snow. Very cold. On arrival at the camp we were detailed off by companies to our tents. Each tent was occupied by about ten men (bell tents, because of their bell shape). When bedding down for the night we kept our clothes on and lay with our feet towards the centre. Our rifles were strapped to the centre pole. With so many men in the tent it was quite warm. We stayed as far as I remember, about a and then proceeded to Messines, where the front line was.

Passed thru Mont de Cats to the trenches at Lover's Lane near Tea Farm. The trenches were partly filled with water and the rats were numerous and big, we killed quite a few number of them with our bayonets. German snipers were active here. Suffered a few casualties from them. We then boarded a train which consisted of box cars which were formerly used for horses and cattle. Our train proceeded North towards the front lines. We stopped a few places on the way for exercise, which consisted of walking up and down the tracks.

We finally came after a few days journey to the town of Hazebroucke in France, there we disembarked and marched to Messines a small town in Belgium. The wound of gun firing in the distance was heard, and knew that we were getting close to the front. We continued our march forward to the area of Plug Street. At night we entered the trenches amid a myriad shower of star shells which were being sent up from the enemy and our own trenches. There were two farms on our front, called Tea Farm and Anti-aircraft Farm. Here we were attached to the 2nd Bn for blood letting as the saying goes.

On our way in we paused thru the town of Godersveldt which lay near the Monastery of Mont de cats which was situated on a high hill. We were told that the British Cavalry clashed with German Uhlans (cavalry) in late 1914.

In The Trenches

On arrival in the trenches we were allotted sectors, where we occupied shallow dugouts. It was wet and cold here. We were shown around the sector by the 2nd Bn. During the day took over some of the duties, such as sentries, fixing trenches where they had caved in, filling sandbags to bolster the parapets and parados. Rats were numerous here, and we were astonished at the size of

them. Probably they had plenty to fee on as dead bodies lay out in front. We chased them with our bayonets. Enemy snipers were also active here. It was quiet except for occasional rifle fire and the explosion of shells that landed here and there. At night we watched the very lights soar up into the air, making the immediate area very eerie; out in front we saw barbwire, ours and the Germans. No Man's Land looked very desolate and awesome to us. The ground out in front was pock-marked with shell holes.

We were being continually warned to keep down when moving around because of the activity of enemy snipers. We were issued with a shot of rum daily. An incident occurred here that distressed me very much, in as much that another man was killed, whilst I nearly escaped death from the fire of the sniper. I will mention about this later on. Our unit suffered a few casualties from sniper fire, and possibly also because we were green to this trench life. Some of the men became careless, or possibly curious when on sentry duty, to see more of No Man's Land thus losing their lives.

We remained on this front fro about two weeks, after having learned what trench life was, most of us considered we had learned enough to be able to look after ourselves to a certain extent in relation to normal trench life.

About the beginning of April 1916 we left the trenches (Lover's Lane, Tea Farm etc.) and headed for the rear areas. We were billeted in the town of Godesveldt. Near by was an estaminet (pub) which was situated at a cross roads, at the bottom of the Mont de Cats Hill, the scene of a British cavalry charge.

The estaminet was run by two French women, one was called Marie. Here we obtained red and white wine. When walking around the town we always went in pairs with loaded rifles. After a week's stay here we headed north towards Belgium. Marching mostly at night we finally came to the town of Ypres. This town was about the size of Victoria, and was completely in ruins. Entering the town from the south we crossed the Square, and each Coy. was led to their particular billeting area. Our Coy made way towards the Menin Gate at the North end of town, and our platoon was billeted in the cellars of a hospital, not far from the walls of the town.

Before we were able to settle down we scrounged around the houses and found beds (double and single) with old mattresses, a few chairs and tables which were in abundance everywhere, and with these we were able to be rather comfortable. It was now the beginning of May and the weather was beginning to get warmed up. Around the gardens flowers were beginning to bloom.

The front lines were about one and a half miles away, and at night we could see the star shells soaring up indicating the exact place where the front lines were. The front was considered a quiet one at the time.

A few miles to the North at Langemark and St. Julien was where the Germans put over chlorine gas against the Canadians (1st Div) and French African troops, when the 2nd Battle of Ypres was in progress. The Africans panicked and ran to the rear leaving the Canadians left flank uncovered. The Germans advanced behind the gas but was eventually stopped by the Canadians….April / May 1915.

At the Menin Gate was a causeway leading thru the walls across the moat which ran completely around the city. Hear at the gate a few Canadians with machine guns held up the German Army from entering the city. The Front was eventually established to where it was when we arrived there. Here at Ypres we were to spend the months of May, June, July and August 1916. Here we were to spend the nights digging trenches, dugouts, erecting barbwire in No Man's Land, burying the dead and eventually to become engaged with the enemy in June.

Was digging in a trench one night, and an Engineer Cpl was crouching on the parados of the trench just behind me, when a sniper's rifle went off, I ducked down in time but the Cpl was shot in the stomach. He died later. I was rather shaken up over this, as it was the first person I had seen killed. I considered myself lucky at that. We were attached to the 2nd Batt here for blood letting.

We stayed in this sector for about a month, and then proceeded to Ypres. This is a walled town in Northern Belgium. On the way there we passed thru Mont de Cats and Godersveldth.

Arrived in Ypres at night. This town is as big as Victoria but completely destroyed by German shellfire. My platoon of which I was now a member (the bugle band was disbanded on arrival in France) was billeted in a hospital near the Menin Gate. The Front line was 1 ½ mils away. This line ran around in a half circle around Ypres.

The duty of our Regt was to keep the front lines in repair, erect barbed wire in No Man's Land and other duties pertaining to the front line duties, and if found necessary act as Infantry.

All work and movement was done at night, as the Germans were able to look right down into our area. As I said before this town was surrounded by a very thick brick wall under which the units here had their H.Qrs. and around it there was a moat about 25 feet wide. Here was the Canadian Artillery of 4.7's. About a mile and a half beyond lay the front line, with the light guns of the Lahore Btys about half a mile to their rear. (18 pounders).

One night whiles engaged in a poker game in the cellar of this hospital we were visited by a chap dressed in the uniform of an Interpreter, who asked us if we were quartered here and where other units were. We told him yes. He then left and a few minutes later one of our officers came down and asked us if we

had seen such a person and we told him it was so, he then said that the fellow was a German spy. All were ordered out to search the city to find him, but with no avail. Night after night we proceeded to the front lines carrying picks and shovels, wire to repair the trenches. In these trips we always suffered casualties thru sniper fire or shell fire. A sand bag wall was built diagonally across this front to protect us from the flanking fire.

This was called the China Wall. There were to main gates to the City facing the German lines. The Menin Gate where some Canadians held up the German Army with machine guns in 1915 and the Lille Gate. The Menin Gate was the one we usually used from where we were billeted. This road ran up thru the German lines, and he was able to fire right down it with his machine guns. This road was cobbled and lined with shattered trees, and where the side road to Zillebeke met, this was called Hell Fire Corner. It was a hot spot, and no one lingered here too long. We built a sand bag wall just beyond this point to stop this M.G. fire, but the enemy always knocked it down by shell fire. On reaching the trenches, they ran under the road to Forresters Lane, this was called the culvert, where the ration parties stooped, and one was able to enjoy a smoke. Food was carried in gunny sacks and water in tin cans. Our front lines ran in a half circle from the left of Ypres thru this point then thru the hamlet of De La Hooge along Observatory Ridge, then thru Maple Copse, Armagh Wood and thence to Sorrel Hill and Hill 60. All the high ground was held by the enemy, who was able to keep us under continual observation by day. Consequently no movement was possible by day. If when making our way back from the line and found that the Menin Gate route was impossible we then took the Lillie Gate route, by crossing the fields. All the trenches had names. The R.S. trenches and so on. The Zillebeke Bund was where the dressing station was and also where anyone who was unable to make the city before daylight had to stay till nightfall.

The enemy put up observation balloons, by day and night to spot our gun positions and movement of troops.

Some of our platoons were engaged in making saps and mining them. These ran under the German trenches. The Germans were also mining under our trenches. Along one of the trenches there was a spot where the enemy kept knocking down, and we had to make a dash past it, a enemy snipers were trained onto it, and caused us casualties, especially in the head and shoulders. This was called the “Gap”. An enemy sniper was posted in No Man’s Land in a place called a “Cage”. He was a German American. He was eventually bombed out and captured. The Saxons were our opposite numbers on this front, and they erected a sign on top of their trench telling us they were our friends and didn’t want to fight. Some Canadians went over the brought it back. The Saxons next

day gave us a bit of trouble by firing at us. The air was always putrid with the smell of dead bodies and dank earth. It was here that the British Armies on their retreat from Mons in Belgium, put up a stand (1914). Quite often we dug up parts of dead horses and men. (British) We came across badges, legs, heads and arms, lots of rifles. If a rifle (the British Lee Enfield) was in fairly good condition we cleaned it and kept it as the Enfield was a much better rifle than ours the Ross. Making our way out one early morning, we happened to climb out of the trench and in doing so must have made some noise, and enemy machine guns opened up right at us. I lay spread eagled on the ground and I could have sworn that some of the bullets hit between my legs. When bullets sound with a "crack' instead of "thump" then you had better start praying.

When the fire stopped we jumped up ran like hell for the lower ground. Later in May our Coy. moved into other billets near the Lille Gate, into a Brasserie (Brewery)

Hand written note:

From now on we always left by this gate, sometimes returning via the Menin Gate depending upon the "safety" angle.

Snipers

Waiting to file out of the trench, one early morning, a man was killed by a sniper, he was about the 4th man ahead of me. There was a distant "crack" and we heard a cry and the body falling. I think the chap's name was Turner.

The worst job we had to perform was erecting barb wire in No Man's Land. Here we had first to drive in wooden posts about ten feet apart, then lay barbed wire from post to post crisscrossed fashion. This was extremely dangerous when the moon rode high. We were troubled with M.G. fire and posted sentries to keep a watch out for enemy patrols. When erecting this wire we were encumbered with our rifle (The Ross). We had no use for the Ross rifle as it was too long, so some of us dug up the British Army Lee Enfield which was much shorter, we cleaned these rifles and kept them for use, and left our own Rosses where we could pick them up later. Later, before we proceeded to the Somme battlefield we were issued with these Enfields.

The distance between our trenches and the enemy's varied. In places the distance was 100 yds, others 150. So one had to keep a close watch at all times for raiders and patrols. Raids were frequently carried out by our troops with the idea of capturing a prisoner for information.

About the end of May there were rumours of German attacks in this sector. The Germans became very quiet, too damn quiet for the nerves. We sensed they were up to something. The engineers and sappers reported undue tunneling from the German side.

Some nights the mist lay heavy on the ground along Observatory Ridge and Sanctuary Wood. When this mist occurred we used to be a little more bold on our movements in the open. These were good nights for erecting barb wire. The enemy also used these nights for their wire and patrols.

I met Capt (Bunny) Abbott a few weeks ago in Victoria. He wrote that he would be over here and I went to see him. The last time I saw him was before the Battle of Lens at Vimy. He reminded me that I used to be with him at Ypres, during the 3rd Battles June 3rd 1916. He said he remembered me shouting to him to run like hell up the Menin Road and that I pushed him along to hurry him up. Fancy me a mere Pte urging a Capt to get going thru enemy fire. We laughed over the incident.

Last week of May (1916) the alert went round the sector that the enemy were about to start something, what, we were not sure of.

<u>3rd of June.</u>

Some of us were at the Culvert about 200 yds from the front line, when the enemy blew up some mines in the area of Observatory Ridge, to Mount Sorrel. The din was terrific. Some of our Regt. went up with the mines. Then the Boche came over shouting and waving shovels and rifles. I do not know what Regt's were in the line at the time but the P.P.C.L.I. was up front.

We of the 48th who happened to be there at the time made our way back to the China Wall and waited. The din was terrific up ahead. Bombs, M.G. fire and plus artillery barrage the enemy had put across the fields behind to prevent the Canadians from sending up reinforcements. In their first attack they advanced 900 yds which brought them to within 10 miles of the town. Being Pioneers and being scattered over a large area of the front, we were ignorant of the true state of affairs.

It was said during the initial attack that a German dressed in the uniform of the P.P.C.L.I. tried to lead some of that regiment back to their lines. But he was shot down. Trickett and I (we wore rubber boots) made our way back to the town and news. We couldn't reach the town by the Menin or the Lille Gates due to enemy artillery fire laid down, so made straight for the walls, crawled thru the wire in front of our guns and incidentally doing so passed a gun which fired, the

battery commander was greatly surprised to see us and said "by hell if you can get thru that wire I'm dam sure the Heinies can." We made our way across a small bridge that spanned the moat and thence thru a hole in the Ramparts (or wall). The Germans broke thru to about a depth of 900 yds. The Canadian light guns were captured by them but recovered.

Hand written note:

Shells began to drop near us and M.G. bullets caused the men to cling to the ground, it certainly was a hot spot, behind us the enemy had put a barrage down across the fields to prevent reinforcements coming up. We couldn't see up front very well due to smoke, but somebody was getting hell up there. Orders came to make a move and we all got up and made our way to the rear, getting up and dropping down if the fire got too hot.
Some of us always wondered why we were not ordered up to where the fighting was taking place. Never did find out....strange!
We did not have to go very far at that. "There's not to reason why"…….

8TH OF June 1916 (Approx) Ypres – Salient

It was after the Canadian had counter-attacked and recaptured all the ground they had lost and had forced the enemy back to his own territory, that it was imperative that our trench system which had been virtually destroyed, with the exception of a few sectors here and there, should be restored to their former condition, that is if the enemy should give us the opportunity so to do.

On the night in question, our regiment was ordered up to the front, each Coy designated to a particular area. Ours was in the vicinity of Maple Copse-Sanctuary Wood which lay just below Observatory Ridge. This also included Chateau de la Hooge and Armagh Wood.

As I say our job was to repair and consolidate this area as quickly as possible. By night fall, which fell about 9:30 pm we left Ypres by the Lille Gate, crossed the fields, passed close to the China Wall which was badly shattered, and where the platoons were placed to commence operations.

Our particular area lay near Hooge on the Menin Road. On arriving there we deposited our loads of shovels and barbwire. The Infantry who were holding this part of the line lay behind us, but close. They were behind sandbags which they had been able to fill with earth which offered them some protection.

Our platoon was told to extend along the ground, each man about two paces apart. Here we laid down our rifles close by, and commenced to dig. The ground was wet and the air was heavy and cold, bodies lay around, broken rifles,

gas masks, tins, torn sandbags, helmets, and all the flotsam of war. There wasn't a solid piece of ground anywhere. Nothing but shell holes that were linked up with each other. The Infantry had previously beaten off enemy attacks; probably one of these attacks had occurred the time we lay that night by the railway track, when the enemy was laying a barrage across the field to our front.

Our infantry had done what they could to dig themselves in more securely and using sandbags where they were able to find some that were still usable. The dead still lay where they had fallen, they would be taken out when opportunities came. The German positions lay about 150 yds away we thought by the distance the very lights were going up. Of course at night it was rather difficult to gauge the correct distance. Anyway the lights lit up the whole area as bright as day.

There was an occasional burst of rifle fire, but on the whole it was considered "comfortable". We commenced to dig, with the object of connecting up with the man next to us. As the evening wore on, the enemy began to step up his fire. Probably he was aware of the activity to his front, and was getting nervous, or it was possible that he was also putting his house in order. We worked as fast as we were able, and wishing the job done, and get away from the place. The enemy started to sweep the area with a machine gun, this fire tended to slow us up somewhat as we had to hug the ground as the gun swung in our direction. It was a vicious sound as the gun swung to us, and the bullets zipped overhead. When the gun stopped we immediately resume our work. The lights continued to soar at intervals. We were hoping the enemy would not attack. Well, we finally finished the work, leaving the barbwire there; we picked up our rifles and filed to the rear. Dawn was coming up and we had to get out of there and within the walls of Ypres before clear light.

The following night we were up again to the same place, to erect the barbwire. The Infantry in the meanwhile had occupied the trench we had dug the night before. Why the hell didn't the Engineer do some of this work?

Digging here we found was doubly hard, as we continually encountered broken rifles, wet sandbags and other impediments of war, mixed in with the mud. The conditions were the same as the previous night. Flares, gun fire and what have you. Erecting wire was worse than digging holes for trenches. The type of wiring here was called "trip wire" which was erected about a foot above the ground. A man dug a hole about two feet deep, and another placed the post into it. The wire was strung from post to post every which-a-way. The Germans never seemed to run out of flares it seemed to us. Our side refrained from sending them up. Digging a trench gave us the opportunity of getting a little cover, but putting in stakes kept us above ground. When too many flares went up we hugged the ground and as soon as the flare hit the ground and went

out we immediately jumped up and went at it again. I was wet with sweat. Finally we finished enough wire here, and then we filed to the rear.

The moon came out bright and clear, lighting up the night, a we crossed the fields towards the Gate. The ground pockmarked with shell holes made the area look exactly like the picture one sees in magazines of a lunar landscape or the extinct volcanoes on the moon. We reached "home" without incident, had a shot of rum, and thence to bed. According to our regimental records this battle was known as "Sorrell Hill".

Moving On

The battle was still raging up front. On that day there happened to be two Canadian Generals (Mercer and Turner) who were inspecting the front lines due to the fact the enemy were due to attack. Gen. Mercer was killed and Turner taken prisoner. Capturing two Generals was considered good booty by anyone.

The remains of our Regt finally got back to the city for reorganization. Looking towards the front the whole area was covered by smoke. On having the Regt checked, it was found that we has suffered quite a large number of casualties due to the mines, captured and missing. That night our Coy made our way towards the front with the intention of aiding our troops in consolidating their positions by digging fresh trenches for them to get into, as some of them lay in the open. Here our particular platoon was directed to the hamlet of Hooge. Leaving the Lille Gate we passed some troops lying down near a railway track which ran outside the city. Some of them were mere lads and a few of them were crying. Probably new out from England, and possibly because of the German shelling up ahead across the fields, across which we had to cross to get to the Menin Road where lay Hooge.

We suffered some casualties getting thru the barrage of fire, and eventually the outskirts of Hooge. It was night. We reached the protection of the w3alls of the chateau. Flares were continually going up from the German side and the air was thick with the smoke and smell of cordite and dead bodies. We passed thru some Canadians who were lying in the open. We immediately set to work digging some holes big enough to offer shelter for these men.

We were bothered with rifle fire from the enemy who seem to be about 200 yds or so away from us. But they did not attack, so we able to finish what we were sent to do. We had to hurry before it became light. As we passé thru the Menin the open some of them waved to us.

We made our way back with the hope of getting back to the town by the Menin Road as it was the shortest route. We came across a trench that led towards the Zillebeek Road. Just as we were about to get out and get across the

road and into it again, we heard the approach of heavy enemy shells. I'm sure they sounded like 9.5 or 5.9s. They landed amongst us. There was a terrific noise, shouting and people running around. I felt a terrible shock hit me and I hit the ground, and lay there, unable to move. My head hurt, as if I had a terrific headache and pounding in my ears. There was more shouting from someone to get the hell out of there before there was a repeat performance. I don't know how long I lay there, but eventually was able to stagger across the road into the trench.

Quite a few were killed here, Pte Pellow (Wollaston St. Victoria) lost an arm. Pte Whiteside had his head severed from his body. Somehow we made our way back to our billets, by this time I had gone completely blind, accompanied by a headache.

I lay on my bed for quite a few days, eventually all pain passed away and I was able to see quite clearly again. Since, I have suffered from headaches periodically. As a reminder of this, the same thing occurred at Heal's Camp near Victoria in 1923, whilst engaged in a musketry course. I was then a Cpl. in the P.P.C.L.I. of which Regt I had joined after the war.

Later, we received reinforcements from England, some from the 75th Bn. During one of our trips to the line after the Canadians had recaptured all the trenches they had lost, we had occasion to pass the C.M.R. Regt near the Zillebeek Road at night. We stopped and the officer of the party of men asked us where a certain trench was. During which he pulled out a trench map and flashed his torch on it. Immediately the enemy sent over a number of whizz bangs. 18 Pdr shells which landed close by. There was a ready scattering of troops and cursing. That officer whoever he was wasn't very popular from there on with his men.

Incident of a June night during the battle.

We were ordered up to the front in the vicinity of Maple Copse. (a Copse is a small wood, in this case of maple trees). Only the stumps remained. After suffering some casualties on the way up, we made our way to within about a 100 yards of a trench which we could see up ahead, due to enemy flares that were going up. The rifle fire was noisy, and we had to crawl the rest of the way, and a few at a time, jumped into the trench which was manned by the 43rd Highlanders. They seemed quite surprised to see us. We were jammed like sardines in that trench. After awhile the rifle fire from us increased and a few grenades went off to our right, more star shells were going up now and landing into the small wood to our front. Coming thru the wood were the enemy, running and dodging thru the stumps of trees, about 50 yds away.

We all opened up with our rifles, some of them got very close, and shot down by our fire, some of the behind continued to come on, but they never had a chance, but were mowed down, finally they gave up and made off to their trenches. We were rather expecting them to make another try, but after awhile things quieten down, and we stayed there talking to the Highlanders, then we handed what ammunition we had left over to them, and got out of there, as it was beginning to get light. I do not remember now many rounds of ammunition I had fired, but it must have been considerable. Ones rifle becomes rather warm after firing rapidly. The enemy guns were sending shells onto the fields where our route to the city lay, but after considerable dodging and waiting for a lull in this shelling we finally reach the Lille Gate, and then to our billets.

So it turned out to have been rather an exciting night for us. Sometime about the 10th of June (my birthday) the enemy sent over chlorine gas. This gas has a tendency to hug the low lying areas. Consequently we had to wear our gas masks for a few nights. I continued to suffer from headaches. I did not complain about this phenomenon because I was afraid I would be sent to the rear. We continued to make nightly trips to the trenches, and here we saw the damage caused by the mines (enemy) and shell fire. Most of the trenches were flattened and gave little cover from fire. So it was the case of dig, and keep digging out the dead and restore them somewhat to their original condition. It was back breaking work, what with sniper fire, mud, and hauling aside the dead. Due to the good work our regiment performed during the battle it was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, and the Colonel (Holmes) received it on behalf of the Regt. We had suffered about 300 casualties, and later received new men from England. We were now up to strength again.

An incident occurred here at Ypres. The Prince of Wales (Edward) accompanied by General Ross who invented the Ross Rifle of which the Canadians were armed, visited Ypres one day, when Ross appeared and began a speech, he was booed by some of the men. The Ross rifle was a good arm for the rifle ranges and hunting, but certainly was no use in the trenches. It had a straight bolt action, and used to get stuck, due to the mud and damp. It was rather heavy by our standards, and too long, not like the British Lee Enfield, which was shorter and lighter.

July

The rest of July we continued to rebuild trenches with the help of the infantry. Rumours were now rife regarding the Canadians leaving the Salient which perked us up somewhat. Eventually we were relieved by the Australians the beginning of August. We finally left Ypres for Steenvoorde about 5 miles to

the rear. This area was abundant with hops fields. Here we were inoculated twice, and issued with the British Lee Enfields.

We lay in rest for about two weeks, and then headed for the Somme about 200 miles to the south.

Under the walls of the town in this area were the H.Qrs of the Artillery, Infantry, Signals, Medicals and Army Supply. The enemy was aware of this and consistently pounded the walls with heavy shells that shook the ground. Just outside these walls and beyond the moat were the artillery of 5.9s which were protected by barbed wire.
An occasional wooden bridge was erected here and then across the moat to holes in the wall for communication with H.Qrs.

The road (cobbled) and lined with shattered poplar trees ran from the Menin Gate to the town of Menin, which was held by the enemy. Another gate was situated at another part of the town, this was the Lille Gate where the road ran to the town of Lille also in enemy hands. These two gates were used by the troops when entering or leaving the town to make their way up to the firing line.

During the day the enemy's and our observation balloons went up to observe movements behind each other's lines. Occasionally these balloons were shot down. It was quite a sight to watch these big balloons going down in smoke and flame. No movement was permitted during the daylight hours beyond the walls.

Sometimes during the day after lunch, I roamed thru some of the empty but ruined houses looking for useful articles that may come in useful for our billets, such as pots and pans, brooms, chinaware, furniture and what have you. This town had been shelled continually since the early days of 1914 until now not a house stood complete. This city was again stormed by the Germans in the Second World War. 1944.

What made Ypres and area such a dangerous place, was due to the fact that the front line ran half way round the city, and the ground was in the shape of a saucer, with enemy holding the high ground. Consequently our side had no alternative but to remain completely hidden during the day, and only venture out at night. Therefore movements of troops, rations parties, ammunition columns, etc. was essentially at night, and woe to them who were unfortunate to be above ground as it were during the daylight, they would quickly receive attention from the enemy machine gun and artillery fire.

After having become established in billets, the Regt. was divided into four groups, each group was assigned to a portion of the front. Our Coy's allotted front was from the left side of the Menin Road to take in Observatory Ridge, Armanugh Wood, Maple Copse, Sanctuary Wood. The remaining Coy's taking

over from there to Sorrel Wood. The remaining Coy's taking over from Sorrel Hill and thence towards Hill 60.

At Hell Fire Corner there was a sign erected warning troops not linger here. At night ammunition wagons (horse drawn) would use this road to the Sorrel Hill area, carrying barb wire, timber, bombs, ammo, rations, tools and so forth. They were occasionally shelled near Hell Fire Corner, and would complete their journey down the Zillebeke at a fast gallop. On our way up we sometimes came across wagons and horses strewn along the rod, dead along with their drivers.

The enemy were also taking advantage of night to convey material up to their front lines, the noise made by their transports was quite discernable, moving along the cobbled roads.

Before the barricade was erected at Hell Fire Corner, the odd transport would inadvertently continue straight on instead of turning right towards Zillebeke, and there was one incident when a driver did this and on reaching near our front line the troops called out to him to get the hell out of it. It was said that he got his team turned around and galloped down that road at high speed with machine gun bullets helping him along. When we erected a barrier across at this point the enemy would know it down by shell fire, and we would put it up again. This was a hot spot to say the least.

Knowing we were using the road the enemy would consistently shell and machine gun the whole area at night, so that we would occasionally run into this fire unexpectedly, thus causing casualties amongst us. Of course there was the quiet night, and beside it was much shorter to the Hooge and Sanctuary Wood area where we worked.

The trenches in the Salient were in bad condition now due to the bad winters that prevailed here in Belgium. Most of the trenches contained at least a foot of water, due to the drainage, the water coming down to us from the high ground held by the enemy. The weather was gradually turning warm, spring was turning into summer, and we hoped that the ground would dry out.

Engineer's dumps were located in certain spots behind our line where we picked up barb wire, timber, and tools. We had to carry so much that we sometimes left our rifles here, with the knowledge that the infantry would no doubt protect us from enemy action when engaged in work that took us between the lines.

The Canadians were armed with the Ross Rifle, which was cumbersome, heavy and awkward to carry (and rather too long) in addition with carrying supplies from the dump. The Ross was an excellent rifle for the rifle range and hunting, but of no use actually in wet country. It had a straight bold action, and when mud or wet got into the action it clogged and became useless. Many a

man was killed because of this. We were eventually armed with the British Lee Enfield in August before proceeding to the Somme.

August 1916

It seems that the Infantry were always glad to see us during the night hours. We would be engaged in tasks that took us toiling thru to the false dawn, when we would quickly get out from there to the city, either via the fields toward the Lille Gate if the enemy was shooting up the Menin Rd.

Enemy snipers were very active all along this front, causing casualties to occur amongst our troops. It was practically ever night that we lost men due to the activities of these pests. During the month of May a heavy mist would cover the ground in the late night and early dawn. It would hug the low lying area like a blanket, all troops were alert, our side and the enemy shooting up star shells continually to ensure against surprise raids on each other. If the enemy did decide to raid we sometimes being in No Man's Land erecting barbwire would no doubt find ourselves as prisoners, altho we always posted a sentry to warn of us anything untoward.

No doubt the enemy also took advantage of the mists to strength their positions. We could sometimes hear them at work, and no doubt they us. Altogether it was exciting work that we were engaged in. and we continued digging every night, accompanied by occasional sniper and shell fire (whizz bangs). Very lights rose every few minutes, the nights were quite darks. During these digging operations we occasionally came across dismembered bodies, such as skulls, legs and what have you; the stench here was terrible. Sometimes we could hear gun fire to the South, as if somebody was beating drums as in a roll. One would remark that somebody was getting hell down there.

One trench which we were repairing was called Forrester's Lane and to reach it we crawled thru a tunnel under the Menin Road. This trench was held only machine gun posts. It was at this tunnel entrance, called the "Culvert" by the troops that ration parties came and rations distributed to men along the front lines. Water was carried in gasoline cans, bread and other things in sacks. Here was a good place to have a smoke as it was well sheltered.

When leaving by the Lille Gate for the trenches, we crossed open fields pockmarked with shell holes and barbwire. Eventually we would come to the "China Wall", this was a sandbagged wall erected for the purpose of protecting our left flank from enemy M.G. and rifle fire. Alongside this wall was a board walk about two feet wide. The ground each side of it was churned up by shell holes, filled with water. In some places the board walk did not exist, and we had to either jump or wade across to where it began again. Men walked in single

fire, and when the leading man came across a gap he would call out "shell hole on the right" or left and the men behind would walk to the opposite side. Occasionally a man would call out the wrong side and men following behind would fall into the water filled holes. This maneuver would occasion roars of laughter from the "safe ones" further behind. The Saxons (enemy) were our opposite numbers on this front, and one night they erected a sign on top of their trenches, and it was visible the following morning with the inscription "Canadians, we are your brothers, we do not want to fight you". The following night a raiding party went over from our side and brought it back – 58th Bn.

The enemy showed their wrath at this unseemly trick and peppered our side with fire. Digging up the remains of past battles, wallowing in mud, stench of cordite and bodies, dodging sniper fire, the crouching down in the trench to escape from the shell fire when it did come over, was beginning to get on my nerves. But Spring was in the air, and we hoped that it would get warmers, and perhaps the water would drain off from the trenches, and make it easier for us.

So passed the remaining days of April and then into May. The weather was gradually turning for the best. In the city the flowers were beginning to appear thru the rubble in the gardens, and the scent of the flowers was grand. Over towards Zillebeke one could hear nightingales during evenings.

It was beginning to get dark later now and that meant we would not leave for the front until at least eight o'clock, but that we would leave the trenches much earlier at dawn.

Some men of the regiment who were miners in civil life were engaged in digging tunnels towards the enemy lines for the purpose of blowing them up. It was common knowledge what was going on, even the enemy must have suspected it, as we were also able to hear their miners at work on the same maneuver.

Since our arrival on this front the Regt. had suffered somewhat from casualties thru enemy action, sickness, and other causes. During the middle part of May the enemy became unusually active. Snipers became more numerous, shelling became more frequent, especially on the front line and at the back areas. This fire activity became quite dangerous, one was continually in the crouched position, it became quite exasperating. Their whiz bangs would come over in salvos on different parts of the front. These shells came over very fast, that one would not have a chance to take shelter if he happened to be clear of shelter at the time.

One dawn we had finished work and were waiting to file out, and on receiving the word we half stood up but one man who was three or four paces in front of me stood upright to stretch and "crack" went a sniper's rifles, and he fell down shot thru the head. The good die young

"Oh Death, where is thy sting:
"Oh Life thy victory" Who the Hell quoted that line?

Some mornings as we returned to the City via the fields or the Menin Road we would run thru a gauntlet of fire that caused a number of casualties amongst the Coy, and probably thru other Coys as well. There was considerable talk amongst the troops as to the reason of this increased activity by the enemy.

The Ypres front was considered a "quiet one" and had been for some months with the exception of raids by both sides to capture prisoners for information. Ypres had to be held at all costs we knew, if taken it would open the road to the lower French coast and perhaps to Paris. The enemy wanted it badly, but had not attempted a break thru since 1915.

Altho considered quiet here, the whole area was foul smelling, due to the damp earth, dead bodies, and smell of cordite from bursting shells. During the day it wasn't so bad but at night it seemed different. Star shells soaring up, sentries peering over the top towards enemy lines. The enemy seemed more nervous than our side, they continually sent star shells up all thru the night, lighting up No Man's Land, making it look eerie, outlining the barbwire, shell holes and debris that littered the ground in front.

Some of the star shells had parachutes attached, taking at least two minutes to drop, when this type of light went up the enemy would rake the front with M.G. fire, which caused casualties to us if we happened to be out in front erecting barbwire. Erecting barbwire was the worst job of all. The distance between the opposing lines differed along the front, some places only 100 yds and widened to about 250 yds.

Barbwire was strung about 25 yds to 50 yds in front. First, posts had to be driven in about 10 yds apart; hitting these posts with a mallet caused considerable noise. We would hit the posts a couple of whacks, then hurriedly hit the ground due to a star shell soaring up, followed by enemy M.G. fire, then a few more whacks, we would connect up with other men to the right and left, eventually unrolling the wire and winding it around the posts. During these operations we were covered by the infantry. Sometimes it was impossible to complete a job. On returning some nights we would find that parts of our wire had been cut by the enemy and we had to repair it. Wire had to be checked to see if HE had cut, as wire had to be cut for the purpose of raiding.
"T" trenches were constructed by both sides for the purpose of getting closer for bombing distance.

We continued to carry on the work, but at different parts of the line. The area to the South towards Hill 60 was not in bad condition as around Hooge-Sanctuary Wood-Sorrel Hill.

The town of Ypres was utterly in ruins, and after lunch, some of us would wander thru the houses, looking for souvenirs. One Regt. found a printing shop and was able to reconstruct a complete machine from the wreck, and published a weekly paper. We were able to fix up our "home" in the cellar of the brewery with beds, linen, chairs, tables, and what not. We were really comfortable. It was something to look forward to after a night up the line. Our section had a gramophone, and one particular record I'll always remember it was "Sympathy". We played it over and over again. This was the place where German airman came over and fired his machine gun at us as we were lined up for lunch. A few days later the enemy sent over some bit shells, probably the airman notified the gunners that we were billeted there. A cellar which housed some N.C.O. behind us was hit by a shell and the men killed.

Some of our men wandered too far from the billets looking thru the houses, until they eventually wandered into the sector of the British Guards who immediately arrested them on suspicion, until our H.Qrs were notified and they were released.

Possibly because the majority of the Regt. happened to be in that area when the mines were blown up by the enemy, we lost a considerable number of men thereby. The town contained a large square as most Belgium towns had, where the town's people gathered Saturdays with wares for sale. A few picture postcards that I purchased at the canteen show the parts of the town before and after the town was destroyed. I have placed these at the back of this book.

The moat around the town was filled with water, and here and there a hole was blown thru the thick walls and a footbridge was placed across for easy access to the field outside. Under the walls that faced the front was the H.Qtrs of the Regts, that were holding the line. The enemy shelled the walls every day with big stuff that made the walls shake, but they held firm. To the North and East lay the field of Waterloo with their monuments of Lions.

To the rear about five miles away was our rest camp where we went by Coys once in every two weeks for two or three days rest. This camp was known as "H" Camp. Here the defaulters of the unit were sent to carry out their sentence of "field punishment" which consisted of being tied to the wheels of wagons for two hours at a time. This camp was within range of enemy heavy guns. A few shells had landed inside the camp time and again.

A couple of miles away was Poperringe. Quite a large city, there potatoes and eggs, red and white wine. Before entering the city of Ypres we had to pass thru a village called Steenvoorde. Here were a considerable number of hop fields. Further on was a hamlet called Kruustraate.

It was devoid of people and partly in ruins. The enemy kept this place drenched with tear gas (Lachrymatory). We were supplied with tear gas goggles, but once the gas entered ones eyes it was useless to put them on.

Often we entered Ypres with tears streaming from our eyes. The more we rubbed them the worse the eyes became inflamed. It seemed to take hours for the eyes to become normal again. Consequently when we reached the place we ran thru it with great hast.

Just outside the gate where one entered to cross the "Square" was a railroad point called Flamentinge. It consisted of a railway station and a few houses. It was a hot spot where one did not linger as it was continually shelled. On entering the Gate facing the Square a huge shell hole was encountered, it was so large that two or three horses could swim in it. It was made by a "Coal Box" shell, the noise of its approach sounded like an express train. To the right were the ruins of Belgian Army Barracks, where troops were quartered in the cellars. All movement thru the city was at night, as it was under observation of enemy observation balloons.

Just outside the walls facing the front were the guns of the Canadian Artillery, with yards and yards of barbwire for protection. Passing thru the Menin Gate towards the front line one came across a cemetery, it also had been heavily shelled and the graves were piled all over the place.

The Menin Road like most main roads in Belgium was made of cobbled stones, and lined with poplar trees. The trees now were mostly shattered by shell fire. Continuing up the road you come to the juncture of the "Hell Fire Corner", Menin and Zillebeke Rds, which ran to the right towards the Village of the same name, where nearby was Zillebeke Lake, where during May one could hear the cuckoos at night, and it was said that a swan still swam upon the lake. At this road function was a sign erected stating it as "Hell Fire Corner" "Do Not Linger". Up ahead a few hundred yds was the Chateau of De La Hooge, a place of utter desolation and death. It was here that the front lines were.

The month of July we continued to work on the front line trenches, erecting wire where needed, bolstering trenches with revetting wire and timber.

Things were much quieter now, and the nights were warm and balmy. In the city, the flowers in the gardens were in bloom amidst the rubble. Here and there in the fields the ground was covered with red poppies, these poppies inspired a poet to write "Where Poppies Bloom in Flanders Fields".

It seemed that we were not destined to completely finish the job of making the front secure. The Australians were to relieve the Canadians in August, and were to trek South to the Somme after a rest at villages behind the front. We all were greatly relieved with the news that at last we were to leave this front after sojourning here for four months.

The Australians with the British later in the year were to drive the enemy back a few lines to Passchendaele, thus forever ending the Salient that half encircled the City of Ypres. But the movement of the Canadians to the South was not done wholesale. Some Canadians were left there to deceive the enemy, and also to show the place to the "Diggers".

In the meantime the remainder of the Army moved South towards Albert 130 miles away. We moved by night and kept out of sight during the day, being billeted in villages and towns on the way. I do not remember how long it took us to get there (Albert) at least a week must have gone by due perhaps to time we stopped during the day.

By this time we had been reinforced by troops from England and were again up to strength. We also considered ourselves "Old Sweats', and perhaps more or less seasoned troops by now. It was quite some time since we had heard from home, as the mail had not been delivered during the march, and quite some time after that before the mail did arrive and when it did, frequently we received two or three letters, not to mention a parcel containing socks, candy, chocolate and a cake.

Mentioning parcels, that reminds me of an American from Texas, who was in my platoon. He was a young chap about my age. His parcels contained a tobacco called "Bull Durham", and this lad was quite generous with the contents. We were making our way up to the front at Ypres, and whilst creeping along the China Wall a few shells landed close to us causing u to dive for cover into shell holes. I last saw him as he made a leap for one, I never saw him again there. Whether he had been blown up or wounded and taken out after that I never knew.

In our letters home we were never allowed to mention where we were, where we were going, or anything that may have been useful to the enemy. The only opportunity we had of mentioning these things was when we were either back in England or Paris on 7 days leave. All letters were censored by our Platoon officer. It was strictly forbidden to keep a diary, in the event it may fall into the hands of the enemy, if you were captured. Our band Sgt kept one and was court martialed for doing so, his name Sgt. Meade. The Pl. Sgt was Lannaway who later was commissioned to Captain. Sgt. Delance Green, Sgt. Martin Harris and Pte Trickett, who was wounded and returned home to Victoria and who eventually met my Father and mentioned that he had been with me. Pte

Pellow who lost his arm at Ypres also a Pte Thorpe who now resides Duncan, since died 1970. We moved to a house on Wollaston St. in 1953 and I saw Mr. Pellow who lived across the Rd.

Letters from home were always welcome by the troops. It was a red letter day to all of us. The call of "Mail" would sound when we had been established in an area of any front. The Orderly Sgt would stand surrounded by the men handing out letters to the lucky ones with parcels thrown in for luck.

I used to read mine over and over again, telling me about the home front. One letter I received at Ypres stated that Victoria had been snowed under, that troops from the Willows Camp had been employed in digging out the town. We received socks from women with their names tucked inside. Consequently this was the source of increased mail from the girls who had knitted them. Sometimes the socks were too big, and the chocolate was in all sorts of shapes, due to the handling and different temperatures while in transit. We received weekly supply of cigarettes with our rations. When playing poker we often used these cigarettes for money. We also received 15 francs every two weeks, this we spent in buying tins of fruit at the Y.M.C.A. or Sally Anne. The beer in Belgium and France was awful. Vin Rouge and Vin Blanc were more or less fit to drink, this we obtained at the village pubs or "Café".

I experienced an embarrassing moment at a house where I went to have a hot bath. Outside the houses of this Village of Pearnes, (where I was undergoing a course in bombing) were signs stating "Bath Two Francs." I had not experienced a good hot bath for months, where one could simply lie down and wallow in hot water. I paid Madame the two francs and was shown a bedroom where stood a large bathtub placed directly in the center of the room. I hurriedly undressed and stepped into the tub, and soaped myself all over and lay or sat down in the refreshing and soothing hot water. After enjoying this for about half-an-hour I was drying myself, when I heard giggling and looking towards the door, I saw the faces of two females looking at me thru the transom.

I hurriedly threw the towel around me and made haste to get dressed out of sight of those prying eyes. So there was a reason for placing that tub in the centre of the room. I wondered how long they had been there at the transom. The women of Belgium and France are very broad minded it seemed. Another incident I witnessed in a town of France. A number of girls were walking down the street, suddenly they formed a circle whilst one of them relieve herself right there and then, they then continued their walk.

The majority of the men in towns and villages were away to the war, all one saw were middle aged men and women and girls. The women were kept busy tilling the fields. It was a common sight to witness women busy plowing their fields, guiding the plow which was drawn by a skinny horse. Each village

had its square and farm houses had its yard where pigs, cows wandered at will and in the centre of the yard was piled the manure which stank to high heaven.

One old woman in a village where we were billeted on our way to Germany used to come out to the front garden and make water. She used to hail us with a high falsetto "Bonjour Mesuirs". The grass where Madam made water was conspicuous by its absence. I am somewhat ashamed to say that we were aware of Madam's maneuver in her garden was watched by us who had previously concealed ourselves nearby. "Cest la Guere".

A few words about the people of Belgium. The Northern part of the country is populated by the Flemings (Flemish) whilst the South speak French and are called Walloons. Rivalry between the Flems and Walloons has long been a critical political issue. The Flemish of the North region are also of Germanic stock and a large percentage of them speak German. Belgium has long been known as the "Slaughter House of Europe" and had been occupied by foreign troops during wars that have raged thru that country since the 17th Century.

During 1915 (late) it was known that Belgium had fired on the Canadians and the British. It also was a known fact that some peasant whilst plowing their farms just behind the lines contrived to arrange certain furrows to point in the direction of our artillery batteries, and in conjunction with enemy spies and German aircraft were able to knock out these batteries. Some were caught and shot on the spot.

8. Ypres Area – April, May, June, July 1916

Battle of June 1 – 13th

Sorrel Hill	Sanctuary Wood
Maple Copse	Hell Fire Corner
Armagh Wood	Shrapnel Corner
Suicide Corner	China Wall
Chateau de la Hooge	Zillebeke Village and the Lake
Forrester's Lane	Stirling Castle
Menin Gate	Lille Gate

Journal Note

This journal may seem to the reader to be rather clumsily written, you may even be appalled at the stilted manner and the slight lack of continuity of some of the happenings. This may be the result of time that has elapsed due to a fading memory as to months and days, place names and names of individuals, but on the whole it may convey to you the experiences I underwent as a private soldier and finally as a commissioned officer, during my term of service in war and peace.

I may have left out certain episodes that to might have sounded to the reader to be far fetched. To me nothing is far fetched in war, although one may be inclined to exaggerate sometimes when relating one's experiences, it seems to add zest to the reading. To add zest I mean that one is sometimes prone to add that "the enemy appeared in large numbers" when in reality they were but a few in number. Or "we march 250 miles" (forced) when actually we only may have marched a matter of a 200 miles, as for example when our Div. marched from Belgium to the Somme in France. Soldiers are prone to exaggerate to some extent it seems to satisfy one's ego so to speak.

It is also rather difficult to describe the activities of the units that were on the flanks of one's own, although we knew who the regiments were, all we were concerned with was going on in our immediate area, such as our own company, even at times our own platoon. But on the whole I think I have described things as I honestly believe they had happened at the time and place concerned. As an example of an exaggeration, during the enemy attack on the trench at Maple Copse, when our platoon was in it with the 43rd Highlanders, it was night and we all opened fire at the enemy as they advanced thru the wood, it seemed to us that the enemy were considerable in number due to the very lights that were shot up

to illuminate the area, and as the lights fell, the shadows of the trees and the moving enemy cast innumerable moving shadows on the ground which may have caused the illusion of large numbers. Consequently in view of this fact we were firing at the shadows, trees and the enemy. NIGHT WAR

Nein dier ict gut, ch nix fast

The steel helmet ("tin hat") was first worn by Canadian troops in the battle for St. Eloi craters in the Ypres Salient on April 4 – 19, 1916, before and during Battle of Sorrel Hill June 1916.

The Canadian trenches of the front and support lines were practically destroyed due to the bombardment of enemy artillery and mines. These had to be repaired as quickly as possible for occupation by troops. The trenches around De La Hooge were non existence and required to be newly dug quickly so as our infantry could have protection, because they were lying out in the open. Our Company (2nd) was detailed for this job.

During the attack the enemy had advanced at least about 880 – 900 yds from his original position. We left Ypres at dusk and proceeded towards the scene of action, via the Lille Gate over the city moat, then across the open fields hoping to gain the China Wall, where we finally arrived only to find it practically flat. Star shells (Very lights) were continually reached the Zillebeke Rd. where we veered off to the left towards Hooge. We had in the meantime picked up shovels and picks at a dump. We were armed with the Ross Rifle and 120 rounds of ammunition. Arriving at Hooge we clambered over the rubble of the Chateau and extended over the open each man about five paces from each other. We noticed the infantry lying in the open. We guessed the enemy were somewhere to the front, because they were sending up very lights which made the area as bright as day. Everytime they went up we had to keep still. Sgt Lanaway of our Platoon directed us where to start digging. There was occasionally machine gun fire from the enemy. The whole area smelled of gas, cordite fumes and the stench of dead bodies. We started to dig in a hurry, as it seems we had quite a job to do before daylight. We had to stop work when the lights went up, but happily we not bothered with enemy, probably because he was perhaps doing the same thing, improving his position which he had taken the previous day. By distance of the lights I guessed the Germans must be about at 200 yds away.

We dug furiously, and anxiously to get the job done before light. If the enemy did attack we had the satisfaction of knowing that the infantry were close by. With our equipment off and the rifle close by and loaded I began to sweat with the exertion of digging. It being summer dawn came about 5-30 AM. So

we had to complete the job and get back to Ypres before that otherwise anyone caught in the open fields in front of the town was in trouble.

To those who are wont to think of war as an occupation teeming excitement, the digging of an assembly trench will, probably seem a singular flat entertainment, except that the digging of it was for a very special reason, the saving of lives. Since work of this sort is sometimes arduous, depending on the type of soil one is digging in. There is no glory in this, Digging trenches is for the benefit of ones salvation or life, so with that in thought dig, dig, dig, for a quick finish. Eventually after what seemed to be hours of digging, we eventually finished our job. Way off the South probably around Hill 60 there was the sound of heavy and steady gunfire. Someone remarked that somebody was getting hell that way. Something eerie seems to hover around, the quiet of the night, the occasional report of a rifle or the burst of machine gun, the star shells going up causing everyone to stop and crouch, the smell of the earth. No one in my vicinity was hit that night, but there was that anticipation of sudden death coming from the other side. The trench we had dug was sufficient to protect our Infantry, that is four feet deep and three feet wide. To the East the sky was beginning to lighten, that was a familiar sight to us.

It was the false dawn appearing, but not for long, we had experienced this many times before and knew that the real dawn was not far behind. The order came to get ready to move, so we picked up our equipment and rifles and prepared to move out. Forming up we moved off by platoon again, via Hooge and thence to the Menin Rd.

As soon as we moved off the infantry rose up and ran forward and got into the trenches waving their hands to us. Dawn was quickly coming and we wondered whether w would make it. Our chances were fairly good as we intended to enter the city by the Menin, which was not as far away as Lille Gate.

We proceeded along the road keeping close to the side of the road because the enemy was able fire down the road from where he was. The road was of cobble stones lined with poplar trees all of which had been destroyed by shell fire. Suddenly an enemy M.G. opened up and we could hear the bullets hitting the stones and ricocheting off into the night, one of the bursts came close to us and we dived off into the grass, and in so ding I pushed Capt. Abbott sending him flying, and just in time as the bullets whizzed right over where we had been before we hit the ground. Many years after Capt. Abbott came to Victoria and I got in touch with him to say hello. He remarked about the incident about me pushing him to the ground in an effort to save myself.

One night before the battle, we had been strengthening a trench in the Hooge area and as dawn was approaching it was time to move out, so instead of moving down the trench towards the China Wall we decided to again make for

the Menin Gate. We climbed over the back of the trench, and were not quite clear of the top when an enemy machine gun opened up and started to traverse, we dropped to the ground, and there I lay with outstretch legs literally trying to disappear into the ground, as the gun swung in our direction, the bullets passed over us, the vicious snap of the gun, I anticipated the bullets hitting me they seemed that close. The instant the gun stopped we jumped up and slid down the other side. Probably some clown had kicked a tin, of which many lay around there tossed over by the troops and which had attracted the enemy fire. I wondered if my hair had turned white with the scare of the fire.

Another night whilst returning from the front line via the Menin Rd. a German gun directed its fire down the road. (The Menin Rd. ran from Ypres (Menin Gate) straight thru to the town on Menin which was occupied by the enemy). This gun opened up suddenly and we could hear the bullets striking the cobbled stones as they came towards us, we just had time to jumped into the ditch and the bullets sped by and ricocheted off into space.

Hell Fire Corner is where the Zillebeke Rd. branched off the right from the Menin Rd. and during the night the horse transport used the road to take supplies to the ration dumps near the Zillebeke Lake. The Germans also used horse transport, as we could hear moving behind the lines. Sometimes the enemy if he was able to hear our transport, would open up and spray the road killing the horses and drivers. The drivers would wrap sand bags over the horse hoofs to deaden the sound on the cobbles. Occasionally we would come across the bodies of horses and men on our way to the part of the front, which lay towards Zillebeke Lake. We called it Suicide Corner. During the summer months we could hear the nightingales singing there, and it was reported that a swan was on the lake.

Our Coy moved away from the vicinity of the Gate towards the Lille Gate, to a Brewerie (Brasserie) there we were quarted in the cellars. It contained a large courtyard, probably where the carts pulled up to load the beer. We scrounged thru the ruined houses for mattresses, chairs, and bedsteads. We were rather comfortable here. Some of the junior N.C.O.s clubbed together in the cellars of the houses nearby. There was a very high smoke stack here and the Germans were using it as a land mark for their guns, as we could hear the shells passing over to explode further inland. Occasionally the odd shell would explode in the court yard. One shell made a direct hit on the house where the N.C.O.s were and killed them.

One day we were lined up for breakfast after returning from a trip to the lines, and a German aircraft appeared and dived at us with his machine gun firing, we were a good target for him. Everybody scattered for cover, and some of the men were wounded. We moved our Coy kitchen elsewhere after that.

On our way up to the trenches one night we met some troops who had stopped for a rest, and one of their officers suddenly turned on his flash light to study a trench map, within minutes the enemy over came a salve of whiz-bangs which exploded amongst them. We all scattered to escape the next salvo a few minutes later. This unit was the 2nd C.M.R.s. We finally reorganized and continued on our way. The Germans had a complete view of the Salient at all times, during the day they had observation balloons aloft, searching the area. The Ypres Salient area was like a saucer, they occupied the rim and were down on the flats. The Germans were very methodical as far as shelling certain spots such as Hell Fire Corner, Suicide Corner, Shrapnel Corner, and the Square in the centre of the city. It was just a matter of trying timing passing these places at night.

Tear Gas Shells

About four miles to the rear of the city was our rest camp called "H" Camp. Here was our H.Gr. for dental, first aid centre, and for men who reported for leave, and reinforcements. On the way the City from "H" there was a small hamlet called Scrutaat. It was in ruins like many villages on that front. The enemy new that troops and transport passed thru there on their way up to the front. So they occasionally sprayed it with tear gas. It was considered necessary to pass thru there quickly as possible. The place was thick with the smell of the gas. It was necessary for us to don our tear gas goggles, to protect our eyes, as once your eyes were affected by the gas it was useless to put on the goggles. If your eyes became affected before they became very sore, and caused shedding of tears. Troops were warned not to rub their eyes, as it would cause infection.

"H" Camp was where men were sent after being sentenced for military crimes. If he was awarded field punishment he was tied spread eagled on the wheels of a gun carriage. Sometimes the Germans shelled the area and once when I reported to the dentist I saw one man in such a position on the wagon.

Ypres

Far, Far, from Ypres I long to be,
Where German snipers cannot get me.
Think of me crouching where the worms creep,
Waiting for someone to sing me to sleep.

Many impressions have given orally and otherwise of the Salient by men who have endured the sufferings physically and mentally during there tour of duty, whether it be Australians, British, Canadians, French Colonial troops who withstood the onslaught of Germans.

The advantage of using the right name "YPRE" are immediately apparent: The Flanders front, apart from its allure as a traditional British battle ground as the last strip of free Belgium soil, embodied two ideas, one defensive protection of the Channel Ports; one offensive aimed at breaking out of the salient. The tactical reality was the Salient. Shaped by the hazards of the First Battle of Ypres 1914, dented by the gas onslaught of April 1915 (involved were Canadians and French Colonial troops) bulged first this way and then that throughout 1916. Our lines were overlooked on three sides by the Germans, the Ypres Salient was at once the symbol of the heroic stubbornness of the troops of the Empire, with its only communications through the bottleneck of the shattered twon. The idea of breaking OUT was significant. This part of Belgium was called the "The Cockpit of Europe". The traditional battle ground of the continental armies of Marlboro, Napoleon. Duke of Wellington.

Brussels only a few miles distance was near the scene of Waterloo. The distance from the front line to the city was about two miles. That is at the arte of miles per hour of marching one could reach there in about one hour or less, if one walked in a straight line. But doing that was out of the question. There were obstacles to overcome. All activity was down at night up to dawn. There were trenches to travel thru, shell holes, the condition of the ground, etc. The distance to the lines differed on the flanks of the Salient. The front lines broadened out some what on the flanks.

Some cartoonists during the war usually likened it to the mouth of a skull, the teeth of which were biting down on Ypres. For to advance further into the open mouth would leave anyone of being swallowed up altogether. I thought that the salient represented the half of a saucer, German occupied the rim with us at the bottom. The Salient was formed in October 1915.

After leaving our trenches, via the scaling ladder, we had to travel across an open stretch of ground of 100 yards. As we neared the enemy trenches, we came under concentrated machine gun fire and men were falling under it's hail until by the time we had reached the enemy trenches, there were only about a dozen of our platoon left. On reaching the trench aforementioned we jumped into and encountered about twenty of the enemy, who immediately raised their hands, shouting "Kamarad" "Kamarad" Others of our platoon ran up the trench either way but encountered no other enemy. We searched the prisoners for grenades and other weapons, cut the buttons off their trousers to prevent them

escaping, boosted them up to the parado and made our way back to our own lines, without suffering further casualties.

On the night of the 27th our platoon was detailed for a patrol. It was for the purpose of entering the enemy trench and try to capture a prisoner for indentification purposes. Lt. Balanger who commanded our platoon, gave us a briefing that afternoon in Sugar Trench. We were to leave our trench at 1000 hrs. Lanes had been made in our wire for free passage. Sgt Lanaway was to send up a white Very Light to signal that the platoon was to return to our own lines. If we suffered casualties we were to bring our dead and wounded back with us. Heavy M.G.s had been sighted (our own) to delay pursuit or interference by the enemy as we made our way back.

We assembled in Sugar Trench, checking our equipment and arms, leaving all means of indentification behind which may have been of use to the enemy. Lt. Balanger stood near by checking his watch for zero time. He raised his hand and we climbed the ladders assembled in No Man's Land. Two men went ahead to show where the wire had been cut, and by sections we made forward. We successfully passed thru our wise without mishap or alerting the enemy who were about a hundred yards away. On the signal went forward in lines of sections, thus: 1 Sec. 2 Sec. 3 Sec. 4 Sec.

We already had fixed bayonets, but had orders to not to shoot unless we really encountered the enemy at close quarters. Coming to a trench we jumped into it. Luckily all four sections at the same time. Lt. Balanger ordered two sections to go to the right and left, with one of the sections traveling along the top of the trench to assist the other one in it. Our Sec No 2 was ordered on top with No 1 in the trench. The Very Light was to warn us to return at point of departure where the Lt and the Sgt was to stay, but on top of the trench. We made our way along the top keeping in line with No 1 Sec, suddenly there was a shout from the trench, and a grenade explosion, it sounded like a German. We increased our pace ahead of No 1 Sec, and saw a few of the enemy milling around in it. No 1 Sec had stopped and was engaging the enemy by fire. We tossed some grenades into the enemy in the trench, which was followed by shouts, then followed by cries of Kamarad. Firing had ceased, and No Sec came up and disarmed the enemy. As we wee about to round up the enemy and return to the place of departure, we heard a rush of feet approaching from the left of us, and by the light of the moon which had appeared suddenly thru clouds, we discerned men approaching, wearing the telltale coal scuttle helmet. As they reached a distance of about 30 yards they opened fire upon us. The Germans whom we had captured dropped to the ground, Bill Thompson who was standing near me uttered a cry and sank to the ground with a groan. I stooped down and looked at him, and then realized that I had better do like the others and dropped

down and opened fire upon the enemy who had stopped. We were outlined on top of the trench against the sky and made good targets. No 1 Sec, suddenly made a dash towards the enemy hurling their grenades. Fire from the enemy stopped and our sec also dashed towards there the enemy were. On arriving there we saw that there were only about four left of them, the remainder either were lying in the trench or had taken off. We gathered up these four and returned to where the other prisoners who we discovered had not run towards their own line. We counted the prisoners, and found we had ten of them. At that moment we aw the signal go up for the return. We made our way along the top of the trench to the starting point. On arriving to where Lt and the Sgt were, we found that Secs 4 and 5 was already there. They also had captured six Germans.

Everything was quite around us, and we took stock of our casualties, and discovered that besides Bill Thompson whom we had taken back with us, we had suffered one badly wounded (Thompson) and three others who had leg and arm injuries. Five of the enemy were wounded but were able to walk. Thompson was carried back by two Germans. On reaching our trench, we made our way back to Coy. H.Qrs. On reaching there we all received a tot of rum, and went to a dugout near by to sleep till lunch. By the time we had left out trench at 1000 hrs earlier to the time we returned about forty minutes had elapsed. We learned that the enemy we had captured belong to the 263rd Bavarian Reserve Regt. It was more of a fighting patrol than recce, but that's what may happen any time when leaving on these night excursions.

About a month later while improving our system of trench which had caved in due to enemy shell fire, Sgt Lanaway informed me that I was to accompany him into No Man's Land, for the purpose of showing two British Army officers around. The two officers were waiting for us at Point "F" in Lover's Lane trench, which was a part of the front line.

After arrangements had been made with our own men that we would be out in front, and that the troops had been warned to expect us to re-enter at another part of the line, so as to prevent them firing upon us, altho we had been informed of the pass word which was "Haig". We climbed out of the trench followed by the two officers. One was rather tall whilst the other was short and a bit on the plump side. We told them previously what to do in certain circumstances, that is when Very Lights went up, they were to stand still if they didn't have time to drop, as usually one could hear the top of the pistol first, and above all to keep close to us. They had just arrived from England and were a bit on the jittery side. We left the trench and made our way into No Man's Land, passing thru a gap in our wire, although I thought it would have been better if we had stayed on our side of the wire, so as to be nearer our trench if something happened, such as encountering an enemy patrol, etc.

No Man's Land consisted of shell holes some filled with water, with here and there debris which had been tossed out from the trenches. We were very wary of kicking tin cans, or falling into shell holes especially those filled with water. The night was dark, very dark, with rain coming down in a slight drizzle. We were armed of course.

On leaving the trench we turned to the left after passing thru the wire. The two officers kept close to us but to our rear. We were making our way slowly, making our war around shell holes, etc. same time ensuring that the two officers were close at hand.

Suddenly a familiar pop was heard from the direction of the enemy trench which was about 150 yds away. The Sgt whispered "drop" to two officers, who immediately did so, the fat one was rather slow getting there, the light soared up casting a weird light over the area for quite a few yards. It finally landed in a shell hole filled with water just a few yards from us making a loud sizzling noise as it hit the water. We picked ourselves up, and signaled the two officers to come on. We could see that they were getting rather jittery by now, of cause I did'nt blame them, what with the condition of the ground, the smell of death and wet earth, and especially lying there the light coming down, perhaps anticipating sudden death and all that. They began to lag a little, perhaps again anticipating another light going up, and trying to be near a shell hole when it did. After traveling for quite a number of yards another light soared up but this time the two officers instead of remaining perfectly still in a crouched position, due the fact that we had no time to drop. If one stood perfectly still one could be mistaken for a tree stump or one of the posts that held up the barbed wire, being caught in this position we had no way of knowing that the enemy had recognized us what we really were, until he opened up with a machine gun, and then we really had to drop and hope for the best.

Luckily he did'nt open up. After the light went out, we got up searched the ground for the two officers. We finally located them a few yards away, crouching in a shell hole.

We continued on, and suddenly the Sgt whispered something and we stopped. To our right where the enemy were, came sounds of coughing, and someone was playing a mouthorgan, they sounded rather close, perhaps owing to us wandering off our line too much to the right, we lay down and listened to all this for awhile. Continuing on our way after a few minutes we kept more to our left so as to keep clear of the German wire. We lost time by continuing to insist that the officers keep up with us, because of their insistent in diving for holes some distance from us. Well we eventually reached the point where we had to enter our own trenches. I suppose they (the officers) considered it quite some experience that they had undergone. Then there was no real danger during

the whole trip, at least they can boast to their fellow officers that they had ventured into No Man's Land. Personally I did'nt see any real significance attached to the whole thing. At least it broke the monotony of digging in the mud for the rest of the night.

Shell Fire

It was surprising what the human mind and body can endure sometime. I am referring to what we had to undergo from the effects of shellfire, especially when caught in a trench without the opportunity to escape from the devastating effects of it. Normally in everyday trench life one could move around a bit to escape the odd shell that may land in your vicinity. But in some instances that is impossible due to the fact that when a continuing salvo of shells land where you happened to be, you have no alternative but to hug the earth, and hope for the best. I have experienced this on many occasion. If a dugout is handy one can seek its shelter with the chance of survival, especially if the dugout is on the protective side of the trench, altho even if it was on the exposed side one's chance was considered fairly good, unless just by chance a shell exploded inside the entrance, where the occupants could be buried alive. Or inadvertently a shell could pass down into the dugout and blow the occupants to Kingdom Come. But what concerned most of us was being caught in a trench with no protection whatever aside from one's helmet or perhaps a piece of corrugated iron.

It's surprising what one in such circumstances will do to try and protect himself. A number of men caught thus can just do nothing but pray. Having experienced such an occasion I with others have been caught without the opportunity to get away from the place. Ones thoughts cannot be really be voiced at the time. My only thought at the time was, will I be killed or wounded. Being at the age of 17 and considering myself as an experienced front line soldier, having been in France some considerable time dodging sniper's bullets, trench mortar fire, etc, etc, my thoughts during one of these dangerous situations was to say the least not seriously religeous, altho I believed in the Almighty in a nonchalant way so to speak. One did'nt really had time to think in that direction until after, when one would really breath a sigh of relief for deliverance and thank God for a timely escape.

During the attack on Passchendaele, heavy casualties were expected to occur, and I with others of our Coy were detailed to act as stretcher bearers. Our job was to convey the wounded during the attack to the first aid post which was located in a captured German pill box about 400 yds to the rear. During one trip forward some of us had to make our way up a hill called Abraham Heights, to an area on the left of the village. On our way up we moved forward in pairs

carrying a stretcher between us, and a silence that one could feel after weeks of normal noises of sniper fire intermixed with M.G. and shell fire. This silence prevailed for three days until the 3rd June 1916. Something was up, yes, something was in the wind.

Just before real daylight of the 3rd, the enemy blew up his mines at which he had been working on for weeks. We were fully informed that he was laying mines just as we were doing. It was a case of who "blew" first.
We had been working in the front line and were on our way out around the reserve trenches, when they went up. They made a terrific noise, and enemy shells began to fall thickly all over the front and across the fields to the rear.

There seemed to be a lot of fighting going on to the front, shouting, grenades bursting, M.G. fire, and star shells soaring up to light up the whole area. We lay there in the trench looking over the top when we had the opportunity from shell fire. It was'nt quite daylight, and the front lay covered by a thick haze from the smoke of shells and mist which lay close to ground.

Up to the present time we had not engaged in a fight with the enemy, and wondered what if that time ever occurred how we would all act, individually or collectively. We had been thru lots of experiences with gun fires, snipers and machine guns, but this was something new to us green troops. The ground simply trembled. The noise up ahead continued for sometime and gradually slackened. We had received no orders to go forward or anywhere by our Coy. Commander. I guess he knew what he was about and was perhaps carrying out orders previously issued in case of an attack.

Quiet reigned up ahead except for the occasionally shell that whined overhead and some rifle fire here and there. So we presumed that the enemy had been stopped on our immediate front. Orders finally came thru to move on out, and we hastily reassembled and made our way back to Ypres and our cellars.

Some of our men in the other coys. of our Regt. were not so lucky. They disappeared up with some of the mines, and some were taken prisoner we heard. The enemy had advanced in some places a distance of four or five hundred yards. Our light guns were captured, and all our work over the weeks had been destroyed by gunfire. Generals Mercer and Brig. Gen Williams happened to be in the trenches at the time of the attack, we had seen them that evening looking around. Gen Mercer was killed and some said that Brig Gen Williams had been captured.

That night as soon as dusk had settled we were ordered up to the front towards Hooge astride the Menin Road (See map) to dig trenches for some of our infantry who lay in the open. Leaving by the Lille gate we turned left & halted by a railway line. We stopped near where lay an infantry Bn. Some of these men youngsters, a few were crying. We talked with them awhile and

made ready to go forward. Suddenly the enemy lay down a barrage of fire and across the fields to our front where we had to make our way to Hooge.

We stopped and lay down for cover. It was a terrible sight to watch. It seemed it was a continuous line of fire of bursting shells, the earth simply shook. The enemy must be attacking again and had lain this line of fire to prevent supports from going up. It was an amazing sight to behold, the continuous flash of the bursting shells, the rumble shook the ground. I suppose it was about 400 yds ahead of us. Pieces of shrapnel were flying thru the air. Luckily no was was hit, and finally the fire subsided and we made our way forward, followed by the infantry Bn. Being the Month of June it did'nt get dark till about 10 o'clock, and it must have been now about 11 o'clock as we doubled forward by platoons, dodging the odd shell that came over.

The area up ahead was lighted up by soaring very lights that made the night into day. We were carrying besides our rifles, sandbags and shovels, plus 120 rounds of ammunition per man.

We finally reach the Menin road and entered the Chateau of Hooge. The mist lay thick in places, and the ground was covered with dead. The section I was with reached a wall that surrounded the Chateau, we crepted along it followed by the other sections. Leaving the protection of the wall we made our way to where infantry lay in the open. We passed thru them in extended order for a distance of about a hundred yards, and started digging.

The ground had been churned up by enemy gunfire, we dug crazily, stopping only until the very lights that the enemy were shooting up to go out, making a spluttering noise as they hit the ground. I was sweating profusely by now, we couldn't take off our equipment, but our rifles we lay down close to us.

Bullets were zipping here and there, luckily the mist that lay near the ground helped to conceal us. We knew not how far the enemy lay away to the front. We were thankful for the presence of that infantry unit close to our rear.

Finally we managed to dig holes about 4 feet deep, deep enough for protection. Orders came whispered along the line to get out, and we picked up our rifles and made our way thru the infantry. They waved to us as we passed thru. I could feel my clothes sticking to me. We had worked hard and fast without hardly a pause. We then proceeded on towards the China Wall or what was left of it.

By the direction we were going it was intended to enter the city by the Lille Gate, where we had left it earlier in the evening. A few shells were coming over. Leaving the China Wall we entered a trench that ran towards the Zillebeke Road. I remembered I longed for a cigarette, but could'nt smoke here. I noticed that some of the men ahead were getting out of the trench and knew we had reached the road.

Suddenly we heard the familiar sound of big shells approaching, I thought there must have been a least 4 or five of them. They were big ones alright.

They arrived with a roar and exploded right amongst us. I felt as if I had been lifted by a giant hand and slammed down again onto the ground. I lay there feeling stunned, and unable to utter a sound. I could hear the cries of the wounded near by, and shouts for stretcher bearers. I will always remember that night, the approaching noise of the shells, the descending roar, and deafening explosions that followed. I don't know how long I lay there with others of my section. Then again we heard the noise of approaching shells, their swish and crash, but these landed slightly beyond us, probably amongst the troops that had gotten out of the trench earlier.

I felt terrible, I could'nt speak, and felt that I could'nt as much as get up. Finally it seemed I came to my senses and staggered up shaking all over as with the ague. I with a few others got to the road where lay the forms of some of our men. No more shells came over, as if the enemy were satisfied with their nights work so to speak. My head ached, and I had lost my steel helmet and rifle. Men were moving around, some singly, others in groups.

After, it seemed hours when we all made the gate and made our way to our cellars. I collapsed onto my bed and lay there. I had a terrific headache and could hardly see. After a few days rest I seemed to have recovered somewhat, and the rest of our platoon rested up. Later I noticed that my speech was affected. I realized that I had suffered a concussion. I had seen sometime before men who suffered from this thing. They were simply a bundle of nerves, suffering with the shakes. Later on I again saw four or five men walking suffering from concussion. They looked a pitiable sight. My speech was affected in such way that I found myself stuttering, especially when I became agitated, also I found that sometimes I had to count a little before I could speak. Pte. Pellow had his left arm severed from his body, Pte Whitside had his head cuff by a fragment of shrapnel, others that we had known well had been killed or wounded that night on the Zillebeke Road.

To continue with the results of the battle. The 2nd Div. went forward with the remnants of the 3rd and retook all the trenches that were lost, and recaptured our light guns. For a few days after the opening of the attack by the enemy, we made nightly trips up the line to begin the job of establishing our line to the condition it was before the attack.

The whole line from Hooge to Sorrel Hill was a shambles. Hardly a trench was in any condition for troops to hold. Dead lay all over the ground, ours and the enemy's. Barbwire lay twisted all over the ground, sandbags lay all topsy turvy. Firm ground there was none. Rifles lay splintered, boxes of grenades lay around, clothing ragged and torn hanging from bodies. What a sight to behold.

The area smelt of cordite and dank earth. The area where our platoon was to work lay near Maple Copse. It was a copse no longer, the trees were still standing but they had all been shattered by shellfire.

The first night we were ordered to this area, we left by the Lille Gate and cut across the open ground. Up ahead the very lights were going up, mostly from the German side. It was'nt quiet by any means. As we neared to where we were to work the very lights caused us to hug the ground, until it was so bright to got to crawling towards a trench which we could see ahead. It seemed to take us a long time to get there, what with crawling, stopping, and crawling again. The enemy must be very close and very very nervous, otherwise why all the very lights.

Then a command came to get and make a dash for the trench, which we did. Jumping into the trench, we saw that it was held by the 43rd Highlanders. The small wood lay to our front. We stood talking with the 43rd for awhile, keeping our heads down to escape the sniping that was going on.

Suddenly a grenade explodes, and then intense rifle fire and machine gun fire opened up from both sides. Some shouted, "Here they come." Yes, the enemy were coming thru the wood. Their shadows moved thru the trees, and could be plainly seen by the very lights that were now going up from our side.

We all opened fire with our rifles at them, the enemy were dodging thru the trees, some were crawling others were running. Grenades were exploding making the din terrific. This was the first opportunity we had of actually firing at the enemy, and we let them have it. I could feel my rifle getting warm from firing it quickly. Some of the enemy got quite close, it was'nt a big attack, probably a couple of platoons. What with the fire of the 43rd supplemented by by our fire he never had a chance. What remained of them made their way back to their own side. So that was that. We stayed there for awhile, then orders came to move out. We never did any work that night. The trench seemed to be in fairly good condition. Perhaps we had arrived at the wrong place, anyway we were glad to get out of that area, and we arrived at our billets rather early for once. After having downed our tot of rum we ate a good early breakfast (about 4 o'clock in the morning) and went to sleep.

I continued to suffer from headaches, but otherwise was alright. We continued to make nightly trips up the line, rebuilding our trenches, putting out barbwire. The enemy seemed nervous, and made our work rather hard put to. We suffered casualties every night from snipers, and the occasional burst of machinegun fire. Others of our coys were also working on other parts of the front.

Working up at the front before the battle was apple pie to what we had to undergo these nights. Probably the enemy had the notion that the Canadians

would want revenge and make an attack upon them. But it seemed we were content to remain where we were, and consolidate our line as best we could.

At this point I wish to state that for the work and the casualties our Regt. had suffered during the battle, we were award the Distinguished Service Cross, and our Colonel received it on behalf of the Regt. Well, that was something.

There was an incident during the start of the battle that is worth mentioning. The P.P.C.L.I. was engaged around the area of Sanctuary Wood, and during the melee, a German dressed as a sergeant of that Regt. endevoured to entice some of the Patricia's over to their lines, but he was shot down. Up to his tricks again. In 1914, the enemy time and again resorted to tricks like, showing the white flag of truce and then when the British went forward to talk, shot them down. Or at another time they appeared at the top of a hill with their hands up, and the British came out of their trenches to take them prisoner, suddenly the men with their hands dropped to the ground, and enemy appeared suddenly from the hill and shot down the British Tommies.

There was an incident that I would like to write about. This occurred before the attack. Near Maple Copse one night, Sgt Lannaway our platoon Sgt. asked me to accompany him on a trip thru No Man's Land. He told me that he had to make the trip with two British Officers. This was around two o'clock in the morning. We climbed out of the trench, crawled thru our wire with these officers. One was a stout fellow and the t'other was a tall chap. Getting thru the wire we turned left and made our way forward. Now the fun started. We decide to make the trip as fast as possible. They kept behind us, the enemy occasionally sent up a very light, and the Sgt and I kept perfectly still while the light traveled up, but the officers immediately dived for a shell hole. We wasted some time getting these officers to keep going. If we heard the report of the enemy very light pistol we dropped to the ground, sometimes it was too late to do this, and had to keep still, sometimes in a crouched position. Often we had to go back to find where the officers were. After a while they kept close to us and did what we did. Sometimes we were able to hear Germans talking, or whistling and one playing a mouth organ. I was getting rather fed up with this nonsense, and the Sgt decided to get back to our own lines again. Finally crawled thru the wire and jumped into a trench. It was rather comical to watch the antics of the officers jumping into the shell holes. I always wondered why the hell the SGT PICKED ON ME TO ACCOMPANY him on that trip. I mentioned this to him at a reunion dinner at Victoria in June of 1960. The enemy were venting his spleen upon us no doubt at having been driven back.

Before the attack the nights up here were considered quite mild to what we had to undergo now. Continuing dodging, lying down to escape machine gun fire, crawling thru the mud and old barbwire was to say the least disconcerting,

and very tiring. It got on our nerves, and on reaching the protection of the China Wall we sat down, and lit cigarettes, not saying a word to each other, keeping our thoughts to ourselves. I became morose, and easily lost my temper, at the slightest thing. We cursed like troopers, most of the time when at work on the job. What a life, but hell we volunteered for it, so here we were and here we stayed. Oh, to get back to our billets and have our shot of rum which was issued to us every night. The enemy put over come chlorine gas a week later, and we had to wear our gas masks a few nights after that. This gas kept to the low ground due to its heaviness.

One of our companies suffered heavy casualties at Sorrel Hill which lay over the the right towards Hill 60. July was spent in building up the trenches which had been flattened by gun fire.

August arrived and our Div. was relieved by the Australians. We then marched to the Somme, arriving there in Early September. 1916. Our work here was the same routine as at Ypres. Digging, digging, always digging it seemed, erecting barbwire in front of the trenches. Our regiment had been reinforced by new men from England, this brought us up to strength again. We considered ourselves hardened troops by now. Here on the Somme, we underwent new experiences. I had reached my 17th birthday at Ypres on the tenth of June 1916, and considered myself now a man, able to do a man's work and to undergo any type of hardship, I drank and smoked and cursed as good as the next one, not with the idea of appearing tough to hide my age, but actually it was something that I had acquired thru experience beyond my years, in other words I had become a man before my time, so to speak. But on the whole I came to enjoy the experiences, strange to say, and would not exchange this life for the school room at any price, altho at times when feeling despondent and morose I would wish I wee else where than here wallowing thru the mud, dodging bullets, and smelling the dead. Enough of the Somme and its mud. We then headed for Vimy Ridge end of September 1916.

Note:

Pte Seymour of the 7th Bn 2nd Div. on the 3rd of June, during the Battle of Sorrel Hill buried two jugs of rum (S.R.D.) behind Sanctuary Wood. 44 years later he made a trip to the Ypres front and dug up the jugs, with the rum still intake and somewhat aged.

On our march to the Somme from Ypres, we sometimes made forced marches to reach some town ahead before daylight arrived, and quite often during these forced marches, I felt myself falling asleep whilst actually marching, subconsciously feeling the man in front of me, quite a number of the men experienced this.

In this landscape nothing existed but a measureless bog of military rubble, shattered houses, and tree stumps. It was pitted with shell holes containing fetid water. Overhead usually hung clouds (during the winter) with fog and smoke. The very ground was sodden with soured with poison gas. Not one building was intact.

In the centre of this incarnation of ruin lay the dead city of Ypres—Wipers" it was always called, obliterated, crushed like a pile of discarded baby's toys left out in the rain. In the centre of the town only two buildings could, with difficulty be recognized, the enormous Cloth Hall. Its interior was open to the sun and rain. Dense weeds and grasses waved, rats scurried, birds built their nests in the bombed out walls. The Menin road issued out from the Menin Gate to the East of the town. Ypres was surrounded by the remains of its medieval walls and moat, stilled filled with water. Houses moulded under the clay, trees were blackened stumps, the meadows outside the twon were mud and reeking water. During the months of March, April and May, the trenches were wet, drainage was terrible, sometimes water was up to our knees. This water smelt horrible, due to the dead bodies, smell of cordite. Some trenches had to be built up with sandbags, due to the condition of the ground. The earth wasn't solid enough to hold, we had to use revetting screens nailed to uprights. Here and there it was possible to lay down wooden trench mats to walk upon. At times it became quite nauseating, and believe it or not, we were issued with McDonald's chewing tobacco, prevent vomiting. The tobacco made me vomit until I became to it. In Flanders the ground is almost pure pure-fine grained clay, sometimes with a crust of sand on top, or thin coating of loam. The rain cannot escape and tens to stagnate over some areas, especially in low lying places. During the Months of May, June and July the ground dried and cracked open, then when it happened to rain even in Summer (which it did often) the rain entered the fissures, then the clay toppled. When the trenches were dug started to fill, we wore gum boots up to the knees.

Under the ancient walls near the Menin Gate were canteens, artillery H.Q., Signal sections, some infantry H.Q. I purchased some picture postcards of the town, which I still have. The walls shake when heavy enemy shells explode on them. One of our Coy, commanders a Major Whiteside was killed just out side the walls. Engineers built footbridges across the moat for quick communication with the guns just outside the walls. The Canadian front line ran from a position north of the Menin Road, called Forrester's Lane, trench which we reached by a culvert under the road. Thence to Chateau De La Hooge, then to Observatory Ridge, Sanctuary Wood, Armagh Wood, Maple Copse, Sorrel Hill thence to Hill 60 and down to Messines. All the high ground throughout was occupied by the enemy. No movement was possible during the day,

between the twon and the trenches, as it was under constant observation, enemy troops and observation balloons.

An eerier silence prevailed in the Salient at night. For then the whole area seem to come to life, troops moving up to the line or relieved. Bns making their way to the city after 10 days sojourn in the line. Working parties, ration parties, horse transport making their way up the Menin Rd to Hell Fire Corner and by a right turn down the Zillebeke Rd. of ill fame to Suicide Corner, and return if they were fortunate enough to survive the trip. Oh, how many times have we traversed this area during our stay of four and a half months. Before the Battle of Sorrel Hill the front was what we considered quiet, with an occasional raid on enemy trenches by our troops, of the 3rd Div. Snipers were very active all along the front. Signs are continually seen in the trenches to warn troops to keep their head down.

The nights, early evening was taken advantage of by both sides. It seemed almost or one sensed that both sides had declared some sort of armistice, for that was when troops were being relieved, wounded were taken out, trenches were repaired. On our way up to the lines we would pass another battalion, and we would whisper to them enquiring what outfit they belonged.

Occasionally following a trench by one side or the other things would liven, especially around Sorrel Hill. This place was usually a hot spot, when the Germans would send over minenwerfers (mortar shells). These bombs when landing delivered a terrific roar, and did terrible damage. They gave us a previous warning. One could hear the mortar firing then one could see a trail of sparks rising into the dark sky, announcing their arrival, whereat the troops in that area ran down the hill along the communication trenches. When the firing ceased, they would return, and then the mortarmen on our side would retaliate. These bombs inflicted terrible bombs.

There was one bright side of this war that we looked forward to, and that when we went to “H” Camp for rest. We were not far from Poperringe, a good sized town a couple of miles away. Here we could sit in the estamines (pubs) and drink vin blanc, or vin rouge (white and red wine) or to those who to wish to stomach Belgium beer. We wander around and look at the shops and buy fancy lace handerkerchiefs or postcards and send them home. In our letters we were not allowed to say where we were or what we were doing. All letters were censored by the Coy. Cmdr. in our coy it was Capt. Abbott. During the day we cleaned our kit, had a hot shower and clean underwear, new boots to those who required, or a new uniform and puttees. On Sunday there was church parade, German long distance guns would now and again lob shell into the area. After eight or ten days of this up we would again to be the familiar smells.

It was during one of these rest periods we received reinforcements from the 75th from England. Around the countryside where we rested it was a sort of carnival time for the troops seeking pleasures in town, soccer was played between coys. The Sally Ann and the Red Cross provided canteens. We would mix with other companies of the Regt, and here and there would recognize a friend and remake "Hullo, "I thought were dead". "Are you enjoying the war!" , "Got a fag". The month or May behind the lines was joy to behold, leafy trees, farm houses where one could purchase eggs. It was a good life it seemed we enjoyed during those few days at rest. Once a week we filed into the washing sheds, for hot showers and a change of underclothes, some singing that immortal ballad:

> Whiter than the whitewash on the wall,
> Whiter than the whitewash on the wall,
> Wash me in your water
> That you wash your dirty daughter
> And I shall be whiter than the whitewash on the wall.

And scarcely dressed again than a warning itch proved we would as louse as ever in the morning.

Returning to Ypres our Coy occupied the same cellars at the brewery. May was a reasonably nice month in regard to weather. Flowers were beginning to sow in the gardens of the houses. The nightly trips to the trenches would begin again but now we wouldn't start unto much later as dusk fell at around 8 PM or so, and that meant we would not be in the trenches that much longer, and that meant nearly dawn. We suffered the usual casualties of dead and wounded every night. My friend Barnes was shot by a sniper, I heard the shot and a cry, and someone called "Barnes is shot" Probably he became too careless and shoved his head above the parapet. So the usual routine continued till the Germans attacked our positions at Sorrel Hill, which they captured, and the attack extended right. Our Div. lost Sanctuary Wood, Sorrel Hill, Armagh Wood, Maple Copse, Hooge and most of Observatory Ridge.

9. The Somme Battle September 1916

Pozieres	Courcelette and Sugar Refinery
Piccadilly Circus	Tom's Cut
Zollern Redoubt	The Two Sunken Roads
La Boiselle	Mad Cow Farm
Regina Trench	

The Somme Battlefield 1916 (Sept-Oct)

Prior to leaving Ypres Belgium, we were issued with the British Army Lee Enfield rifle which was a much better weapon than our own (the Ross Rifle) It was much shorter and weighed less, and had a longer bayonet. We were also issued with the new gas masks, which did away with the stinking hoods that we had to wear, two of them plus an eye shield for or against tear gas. This new respirator was protection against chlorine and phosgene gasses.

At our camp here we were also vaccinated. Then we started out for the Somme in France about 120 miles to the south. We marched by night and kept under cover during the day so as to prevent enemy aircraft from spotting the Canadian Army on the move, as this was supposed to be a secret to prevent the enemy from knowing that we had left Belgium. Altho two regiments were left in Belgium in the front lines to fool the enemy that the Canadians were still in Belgium.

I have forgotten how long it took us to get to the Somme, but it was quite a march. We finally reached the twon of Albert, quite a large one it was the cathedral had been hit by enemy shells and the statue of the Virgin with Child had been hit as it was leaning over. From here the front lay about 4 miles away, and occasionally we could hear the guns firing

We did not stop in the twon but towards the front on the Albert Bapaume Rd. which was in fairly good shape (Cobble stones as usual) After marching about two miles we left the road and made for some dugouts to the left. On arriving here the Coys were detailed to their own areas. Our Coy was allotted some dugouts here. They were not very deep say about six feet below the level of the ground. The country here in France consisted of chalk, which was no different from Belgium. Even some of the houses here round about were built of squares of chalk. Further up towards the front and on the right side of the road were some chalk pits, here some other troops were quarted in dugouts.

The battle of the Somme ha been going on for about five months, the British and Australians had been here until the Canadian Army relieved them in

Sept. and so here we were at last on a new front and away from that stinking hell of Ypres.

Our Div. had been allotted a part of the front lines around The Sugar Refinery, Courcelette, Regina Trench, the two sunken roads (which more later) Piccadilly Circus, Tom's Cut, Hohenzollern Trench and Redoubt.

Eventually all our Coys were allotted certain areas in the front line, and supports also the trenches leading up to them. All movement was at night, as we were under observation by the enemy. They had observation balloons up during the day as at Ypres. The weather was beginning to for the worst, rain and more rain, and then it would let up for a few days and start again. What a country. The first task our coy was allotted was to dig a cable trench, in this trench a cable was to be laid from the artillery observations Post to the front lines and was for the purpose of communication from the front lines to the artillery for artillery support for our troops if and when the enemy decided to start something. The engineers had formed a dump where we picked up shovels, picks, barbed wire and other materials that were used for the upkeep of the trenches. Here also were picked up grenades, bombs for trench mortars. First aid posts were scattered here and there for the battalions up front.

We finally started to carry out certain works up front, the first night as far as I remember was considered quiet. This trench we were to dig was to be about four feet deep and about two feet side. Four feet was considered deep enough so as the shells would not sever the cable. I think we were about 500 yds from the front line here as much as we could guess from the star shells rising from the front lines. So we considered it safe enough to discard our equipment and rifles near by but close enough to get to them in case of trouble. We occasionally came upon dead bodies bits of equipment, rifles, etc. When we eventually came to the chalk which lay about a couple of feet down the digging became rather hard. We had to use the picks to loosen and then get rid of it. The chalk that was thrown out was eventually covered by dirt to hide it from enemy observation. The odd enemy shell that came over mostly landed somewhere to the rear. About a half hour before dawn we stooped work picked up our equipment and made for our dugouts which was about a mile to the rear.

On reaching them we lined up for a tot of rum and then to sleep, rising at eight A.M. we had breakfast and then cleaned our puttees and boots, also our rifles, during the day we sometimes had gas drill with our new gasmasks. Sentries were posted around coy areas to watch for enemy aircraft, which on appearing we made for our dugouts. Most of the rest of the day we played cards, wrote letters home using the green envelope. All our letters were censored by the coy Commander, No one was allowed to say in their letters the whereabouts of our positions in France, and no diaries were to be kept, in case

we were captured by the enemy. Sgt Mead of the band (Brass band which was quarted at Bn H.Qrs got into trouble for keeping a diary.)

On our way out from the trenches no smoking was allowed until we reached our dugouts, as it was possible for the enemy to see the light of the matches. So we had to forego smoking until we reached home (as it were) We heard that the Canadians were to attack in a few days, in the vicinity of the Sugar Refinery, and Courcelette and the first sunken road.

During this attack we moved up but kept our distance. But we were not needed until about a few days later. Our job as pioneers as I have related before was to consolidate the trenches won by our troops. The 22nd Bn (French Canadians) captured the Sugar Trench and Courcelette, and here we were to work for quite a considerable time afterwards. The village of Courcelette was in a shambles, the Sugar Refinery was just a ruin of bricks and chalk. The enemy shelled this area every night, after the attack and it was quite a hot spot for us.

We suffered a few casualties on the way out as well as going up. Going out was the worst, every night we had to run the gauntlet of enemy gun fire. Many a time thought I would never make it to the trench. We would stop and take refuge in any trench or hole we could find and then during the lull we would run like hell until we had to take cover again.

One night in particular, on our way out from here the enemy shelled the area real bad. Quite a considerable number of our coy were killed and wounded. On this night one our men by the name of McDonald (his brother was also in the same platoon) was wounded badly, he was screaming his head off, we picked him up and made our way as best we could for the Albert Rd, which lay about a couple of hundred yards. On reaching the road we laid him down, and he was still screaming and telling us to finish him off.

Of course we couldn't do that. We eventually packed him out to one of the dressing stations, where he eventually died of his wounds. His brother was also wounded that night. I shared a dugout out with four other men of our platoon. On arriving there one night there were only three of us left. Then later on another night there was only two of us, possibly this was happening in other dugouts. I wondered when my time was to come, or was my luck to continue as at Ypres.

The weather was wet and damp, and stench came from the bodies. It seemed we did nothing but dig, dig, dig. Finally after a week of this the cable was laid. Thereon we went beyond and closer to the front line, Regina Trench and other places.

As I say there were two sunken roads running parallel to each other. It was very difficult to keep direction owing to the maze of trenches, which were filled with dead.

We would leave our dugout at dusk and make for the front a distance of 2 miles. Sometimes we would follow the road other times we would go by Artillery Valley both routes led to Courcelette, which lay about 800 yds behind the front line. Night after night we made the trek to and from our billets, to repair trenches, put up barb wire in exposed places. We suffered some casualties every night. One particular night on our way OUT and passing Courcellette on the right to Artillery Valley the enemy fire was very heavy at a certain spot which the enemy seemed to select knowing no doubt that we used that route.

This night as we reached the spot he opened up and with whiz bangs (light guns) very fast, with a whistling sound. We had encountered this fire before but still our officers insisted on using this route, with the idea I suppose of a short cut with possible casualties in dead and wounded. We kept rather bunched up so as not to cause straggling on our part. The shells fell right in amongst us. We scattered like chaff before the wind as it were. Earth rained on us like hail from the explosions. Well, those of our platoon who got thru stopped. One man McMillan laying screaming on the ground he was suffering so much that we had difficulty lifting him to the Albert road. He begged us to finish him off, put him out of his misery. Of course that we could not do. He died and was buried.

The following night we again took the same route out, and again suffered, and quite a few of the men refused to abbey the order to go thru. This was really mutiny no doubt, but was justified under the circumstances. There was hell to pay after that. It was just plain stupidity on their part to insist on taking that route. Some nights it was quiet and we just took the chance of going by that way. In my dugout there were six of us, and over a period of time the number was getting less. We wondered who was to go next.

It was here that I contacted ptomaine poisoning. This was due to a dirty mess kit, after the evening meal we had a rush job to do and I left my mess tin with food in it. The following morning I was so tired that I never bothered to clean it out before breakfast. I mixed my breakfast in with the dirt in the can. Around late that morning, I began to suffer the pangs of poisoning. I was carried to the Doctor and treated for it. It was quite some hours before I was able to get around. The Dr. said I had had a near shave.

As I related, the front was a maze of trenches where one could become lost. Quite often our troops went up to occupy a trench to repair it and found the occupants consisted of the enemy. As we lay in the first sunken road with some 2nd C.M.R. men the enemy began shelling us. As the enemy had dug the funk holes here also the trenches they knew where they were. A few men were hit by shrapnel, and a piece of it swooshed down hit the butt of my rifle and slid onto my thigh and it began to burn thru my pants and I let out a shout. It was so

sudden. Shrapnel when released is quite hot, and can cause a bad wound depending upon its size and shape. If I get home I'm going to sleep for 6 months.

The weather now began to turn for the worst. Owing to the churned up condition of the ground the whole front began to become a sea of mud.

We were busily engaged in digging a trench when hell broke loose up front shouting and firing. The Canadians had taken Regina Trench. German prisoners began coming thru our lines. They were a sorry looking lot to say the least, a number of quite old men and quite a few youngsters. They made a pitiful sight.

The work was beginning to become tiresome. Packing up barbwire, timber, ammunition, bombs, shovels to dig with, plus our equipment and rifles made quite a load to tote.

Our party was out in the open near Regina trench which had been captured earlier, and we were digging away, having posted a sentry as a lookout for enemy patrols, it was rather quiet for awhile, when we suddenly saw a number of people approaching, we were down below the skyline, and as they came near we saw the silhouette of the german bucket like helmet. We had been making a certain amount of noise. We had cast our rifles some distance away from us (against orders). There must have been about ten of them at least. They were moving slowly. What they were doing there we couldn't guess, possibly as I have said, owing to the condition of the trenches up front it was quite possible for enemy patrols to slip thru to our rear. It was also possible they knew we were there and were gradually stalking us. As of one accord we jumped up and ran to where our equipment was. Needless to say we grabbed what we could, our rifles had not been loaded, as we thought it was not necessary, thinking it was really safe so to speak. We should have known better, as we were considered seasoned troops, after Ypres. I dare not venture to think what the outcome would have been if they had suddenly come upon us unarmed as we were. But we thought discretion was better than valour, so off we went.

There was quite a discussion amongst us later. Personally I prefer anything than to become prisoners. We never enjoyed a cigarette more than on those nights when we thought we were safe enough away from the front line to light up a fag to be inhaled deeply. It helped to sooth our nerves. Owing to the condition I was in, I felt I was not in good shape at all. It was hard traveling up there due to the mud, and when we did reach our dugouts we were so tired that we did not bother even to undress but lay down and went to sleep till the morning.

After breakfast we took off our puttees and clothing scraped off the mud. This was a daily occurrence. Some of us thought if this was the life of a front

line Pioneer Infantry Bn, then it would be better to delete the word Pioneer from our caps, and become Infantry and done with it. With the Infantry, they went up the line and stayed therefore 10 days with the option of killing somebody or being killed. We were really becoming fatalists. We had no say in the matter as regards being pioneers, at least we landed in France as a whole unit and not being disbanded like some good units were to reinforce others. But alas, our military existence as a whole unit was not to last long after leaving this quagmire, called the Somme.

Here I have a word regarding the services of the Y.M.C.A. In a dugout along side the Albert road which we used to pass on the way out, those of us who were fortunate to have the odd franc in his pocket, used it to purchase a mug of coffee or hot chocolate, and say a packet of biscuits. Most of the time we were destitute of cash, and being like other troops who were fed up, tired, muddy, with a days growth of beard, yearned for something to help us along the last few miles to our dugouts. A mug of coffee coast 10 centimes or say ten pennies. Many a time we begged for cup -- free – was it forthcoming, not on your life. No money no coffee. The Salvation Army were most good to us.

Hand written notes on the back of this page.

Tanks
A considerable number of dummy tanks, made of wood and canvas were placed on high spots to deceive the enemy, they looked real from a distance.
Note:
A Canadian ammunitions dump which lay near the Menin Road here was hit by Germans Artillery. We could see the glare of it from the trenches and on our way we had to skirt it owing to the exploding shells from it. Quite a racket.
Telephone lines from H.Qs to Platoons were sometimes damaged by shellfire.
Sometimes it was not possible to transcript messages by field telephone so the runner had to do the job.
A runner wore a RED ARM BAND on LEFT ARM to carry messages BETWEEN COY and Bn Hqrs. Often under fire.

TANKS

During September the Canadians made the first use of tanks. These were lumbering vehicles. (See picture)

One day we were sitting outside our dugouts when we discerned some sort of deep rumble towards the City of Albert. The noise came nearer and nearer. Then in the distance we could make out some sort of column of moving

objects moving up the Albert road. Eventually those got quite close to where we were, and then we saw that they were some sort of land ship. Guns were protruding on their sides and behind them were two wheels which were being used as rudders.

These were the tanks that Churchill had thought of to bring the war to a close. They were going about 5 knots an hour. They made a considerable racket as they trundled up that road. There were names printed on the sides. One, was named "Crème de Menth".

An attack was launched by Canadians later and these tanks helped to pave the way for the Infantry. Later on during one of our trips to help the Infantry to dig in, we came across some of them. Most all of them came to an inglorious end. Some were stuck head on in the trenches, due to some trenches being too wide for them to get across. Others lay broadside in trenches, whilst others stood with their caterpillar tracks broken sticking in the air.

They certainly caused confusion in the enemy ranks. Thousands of prisoners were streaming to our rear. They were a sorry looking lot. Mere youngsters some of them, and a considerable number of them over 40.

Capt Abbott came to me and asked how I was. I was beginning to show fatigue and I suppose he saw my condition. He asked me if I would like to be his runner and I jumped at the chance, thinking that for once I could possibly wear clean clothes, have a decent meal once in awhile, and above all rest. I felt that I was not shirking my duty be becoming a runner. Another point of view which I thought at the time, was that the inmates of our particular dugout were getting fewer and fewer due to someone not returning from these nightly trips. Here was my chance to get out from under at least for awhile. So I became an officer's runner.

Now one of the duties of an Officer's runner is to accompany him when he goes up the line, and to act as his runner. A runner's duty was to carry messages to different parts of the unit to which the officer belonged. Sometimes this was dangerous work to undertake. But I thought this better than slaving in the mud and as I found this out at Vimy Ridge, Mericourt. But this did not prevent me having to detour places where the shelling was bad, but at least I was more or less on my own and not having to be a member of a group of ground hogs so to speak who had to stay together, which makes rather a good target for shell fire.

I was able to steer clear of groups of men making their way hither and yon, so it got such a habit with me to be on my own with Abbott that it became with me a complex of keeping on my own and have the feeling of being free from the common herd. It was safer, when alone one could doge things when

they became dangerous but there was the possibility of being wounded when alone and no one knowing where you were.

But apart from this, there is one incident they lay in my mind that occurred on the Somme. I was proceeding to the front line and was apart from my section and I came across two Canadians lying on the ground. One lay in the lap of the other who was sitting up. The boy who lay there was badly wounded and his pal was also in a bad way. They had been wounded that day after an attack just a few hours ago. It was a particularly hot spot where we were. I slowed up as I came up to them. What hurt my conscience most was that I couldn't do anything for them. They had the most disquieting look on their faces, and looked as if they had decided that they had had their day so to speak. I could see that both had been badly wounded that day. We couldn't stop for them, but kept going quickly forward. I had become hardened to scenes like that. Possibly some stretcher bearers would come across them and take them to the rear. I often thought of them as we moved up. Further I came across a wounded german lying on his back.

As we passed he called out "Wasser, wasser" meaning water. I had none for him and none of the rest of my platoon went to him. Subconsciously my sympathy was not for him. Altho I pitied him. He really looked done in.

Enemy prisoners showed great willingness to assist in carrying our wounded to the rear. Glad to get out of it I suppose. They were making their way to our rear in groups unescorted by Canadians. It wasn't necessary to escort them, they would be picked up as they arrived at the rear areas by the Provost Corps and Cavalry R.C.M.P.

The differences between the German infantryman here and at Vimy was striking. Here on the Somme there was an abundance of boys and elderly men. Were they running short of men power?

It was here also that we saw a considerable number of mules. They were used to pack up ammunition for the forward guns. A considerable number of them lay around dead.

The Somme was chalk country intermixed with clay and earth. Consequently it became difficult to dig with ease, especially when we happened to dig along an old trench that had been heavily shelled. Around Hohenzollern Redoubt and Regina Trench which had been captured by the Canadians, we frequently came across bodies buried deep, which became gruesome and unnerving, because in digging out the captured trench, many dead Germans and Canadians and British were found blocking the vigorous thrust of the spades.

Here we again experienced the most desperate business of all – the "wiring" out there in the open under the eye of the soaring lights. In ones and twos we tumbled over the top, dragging stakes and coils of wire. We managed

to drive short stakes and run trip wires between them without the enemy suspecting them

When the light flamed, every man dropped flat in the mud and lay still as they descended to the ground and went out. In the brief intervals of darkness we drove the stakes with muffled hammers (wood) and ran the lengths of barb wire between them. We worked with one eye on the dimly seen hammer, watching for the first upward trail sparks of the flares. A few men were hit of course, because, light or dark, the bullets were kept flying, but there was no pause in the work, not even to help the wounded in.

A working party like this was carefully detailed and each man's duty marked out before they crawled again into the open with long stakes and strands of barbed wire. We lay there minute after minute, thru periods of light and darkness, until the offer game an arranged signal, whereat every man leapt to his feet, the stakes were planted, and quick blows after blows drove them home. A light would soar up and every man dropped and held his breath, waiting for the crash of fire that would tell that we were discovered, but the flares died out and the work continued. Occasionally the darkness held for some time, and the stakes were planted, the wires fastened, and cross-pieces of wood with inter-lacings of barbwire already rolled out and pegged down without another light showing.

Eventually the word was passed down the line to get back. If a considerable time elapsed between lights it was a sure sign that the enemy were also laying out his wire. And so it went on and on night after night. I accompanied Capt Abbott every night.

He was a tall man well over six feet, and devil may care chap, he didn't seem to care a damn where he went, and of cause I had to go with him. Any-
I also didn't give a damn one way or another, as long as he wasn't taken prisoner. We used to wander all over the front of our battalion, visit other H. Qrs, other platoon areas. We had a few narrow escapes from machine gun fire. And this same chap was recommended for the V.C. at Hill 70, but was awarded the D.S.C.

We used to wander into the front lines, and while he used to chat with other officers, I spent the time talking with the men, waiting for him to make up his mind and get out of there. Sometimes we would hip a hot spot, and wait for the moment and the opportunity to make a dash for the communication trench and away from the exploding enemy trench mortars.

One particular spot we had to traverse was thru the Zollern Redoubt. Here the German dead lay piled on top of one and other. To get thru to the other side we had no recourse than to walk on the bodies, bodies lay everywhere, ours and the enemy. No time was available to get them out or to bury them by the

medical men due to enemy artillery and machine gun fire which was more or less continual throughout the night and day. I was able to gather a few photos or enemy soldiers. Letters and photos, belts and rifles, lay all over the area. The belt buckle of the Germans had "Got mit uns" stamped on them. We came across some of our tanks. One had attempted to cross a trench and became stuck, the trench was too wide for it. They were big machines. Another near the chalk pits just off the road lay with its tracks sticking up into the air. Another had slid sideways into a trench. Our tanks did't get very far during the attack, but they certainly made an impression on the enemy when they appeared thru the smoke. They surrendered by the hundreds. The ones we saw looked in terrible shape. They came over with their hands up shouting "Kamarad".

One thing that worried me was that the Capt would go too far on his wanderings and wander into the German lines. Altho some of our battalion were now digging well forward, sometimes making a jumping off place for infantry, and his duty was to keep in touch with his men. It was possible that some of our battalion had been taken prisoner, due to the fact that they were to proceed to an area, and on arriving there found it occupied by the enemy, and they were taken. And as I say I hope this would not happen to the Capt and me. Well eventually our division was relieved by the 4th division, and we all proceeded out of the Somme, and made our by route march to the Vimy front. Arriving there sometime in October 1916.

Here the Regt. was to receive reinforcements from the 75th Bn. And here on this front after the Battle of Vimy our Regt, with a few others were to be disbanded to reinforce other infantry battalions. The 3rd and 4th (67th) Bns, Pioneer Regts., were to disband, we were considered as first line troops and suited and experienced as infantrymen. At least we were to go to a western battalion the 29th Regt. of Foot from Vancouver, and the 7th Battalion, from there we would endure other adventures, finally to participate in the march to Germany and the Rhine, which was to all of us the grand finale.

A concise recollection of how this transfer of troops was completed is covered in the 29th Battalion history.

In conclusion I thought that the difference between the Ypres area and the Somme, brought us in experience in this war, we as a Pioneer Infantry Bn we experienced a closer contact with the enemy at Ypres than we did at the Somme. due no doubt to the conditions and that we were more or encircled by enemy trenches around the town of Ypres, the closeness of the ground occupied by us in relation to the ground held by the enemy. It was a matter of standing up and

getting shot at, or having the feeling of a mole, that has to burrow to remain a live.

The Somme Sept – Oct 1916

It was not long after our arrival on this front that the rain began to fall heavily, and conditions steadily became worse in the forward areas, where the ground had been churned up by the artillery of both sides during the previous battles.

During our trips to the front lines the trenches in a number of places had been reduced to ditches knee-deep with water. The constant rain permeated the ground to form the infamous Somme mud. No one who struggles thru it will ever forget it. The overlaying clay soil, saturated with the downpour, was puddled with the chalk turned up by shellfire and trench-digging, and became a viscous mass, sticking to our boots in great heavy lumps, covering our clothing, rendering every step a burden, treacherously, slippery, causing many falls, being loaded with various types of equipment, such as the pack, 120 pounds of ammunition, a shovel or a pick, gas mask, trenching tool, water bottle (filled).

The route we used to take to the front lines, led past the sugar factory, near the destroyed village of Courcelette. A broken down tank remained to mark the area where the tanks had first been used after arrival on this front.

I remember when they had arrived on the Albert-Bapaume road, and wondered greatly as we saw then trundle past us towards the front and go into the attack.

Other grim reminders were the number of dead lying around, both ours and the enemy. Most of the bodies lying in stiffened positions, their faces black. I recall one evening on our way UP and nearing the Zollern Redoubt, a German strong point that had been captured earlier, we had recourse to walk on the bodied of Germans, as there was no other way, except overland and that was considered impossible due to enemy machine gun fire. One German I stepped on, caused a grunt to come from it, it was the air or gas coming from it. His clothes had been torn off, and his flesh where visible was green, and so this horrid sight excited no more than a moment's shock and disgust. But the memory remained.

The Germans had held this area before being pushed back, and therfor knew the area well, and ceaselessly shelled it, knowing that it was being used by our troops, as it was the main approach to what lay beyond. Consequently the German dugouts entrances were facing the wrong way. Most of the dugouts were quite steep and I noticed that most of them were occupied by our troops.

I recall one evening on reaching the area where we had to erect some barbwire, that there seemed to be an absence of our troops. We knew we were in the most forward part of the line, and we expected to see our troops there,

We were always cautioned to be alert, and when working a sentry was always posted nearby to alert us to any signs of movement to our front. The trenches here as in the Salient, were ran all directions, and so signs had been posted indicted the name of the trench. The last signs we had seen was Piccadilly Circus, Tom's Cat, and Zoller.

On the Somme 1916

We left our dugouts at dusk, moving up the Albert Bapaume Road. Nearing the sight of Boiselle, which had been blown to bits by a mine, we (our Coy) struck off to the left of the Sugar Refinery near Courcellette, we came to a sunken road.

This whole area was always being shelled by the Hun, they knowing full well that this area was always being used by troops when moving up to the front lines. We always seemed to suffer a few casualties either going up or returning to the read. The Sugar Refinery had been captured by the 2nd Div a few days before, and our Div, had captured Mouquet Farm and Theipval.

During this attack on our Bn, was ordered to follow the infantry, to help consolidate in preparation for a counterattack by the enemy. A couple of tanks had been allotted to our troops, and it was quite a sight to watch them as they went forward, demolishing barbwire and slithering across trenches.

It was daylight when we moved forward, I think around about noon, and it was raining. The ground was muddy and we slipped and slithered along. Our guns were firing continually now, and I could actually hear the shells as they passed overhead. Up ahead it was possible to observe the shells exploding.

One of the tanks was firing its 4Pdr gun, and the other was only firing its machine guns. The one with the gun was a male tank and the other with no gun was called female. Some one had scrawled across the hull of the male take the words "Crème de Menthe". What wit. Also each tank was guided by a man, who walked in front of it so as the driver was able to see him thru his observation hole.

Shells started to drop around the leading tank (the male) but no direct so far. We did not follow too close to the infantry, I think about 200 yds behind them, but at that distance we were able to observe what was going on, and contemplating on where and what we would be doing when the time came to do our bit.

Enemy soldiers were now appearing coming towards us, but they were not armed, I took a good look at them as they passed us, they were a sorry looking lot, and they appeared very much afraid, probably they had cause to be, after the shelling they had received, and on seeing the appearance of those iron monsters coming at them. They were now surrendering in numbers, and they were making their way as fast as they could to our rear, not even being escorted by our men.

The ground we were moving over was pitted with thousands of shell holes, and it was hard going for us, being loaded, with sandbags and shovels, which was to be used in consolidation, also we carried rifles, and the usual 70 rounds of ammunition. The tanks dipped and rose and just went on relentlessly guided by that foot soldier. We noticed quite a number of Germans in groups standing with their hands held high in the air, but considerable numbers were running to their rear. I think the appearance of the tanks took them completely by surprise, and no doubt had a demoralizing effect on them.

The enemy now started to shell the ground that their troops had given and up, which we were now passing over. Some of our men were hit by shrapnel, that is of our platoon, possibly the other platoons were also being the same way.

My observations naturally were of my own platoon, as is usually the case as one never had the time or thought to think of what was happening anywhere else, to reduce casualties troops always move in an extended formation, called "waves". This helped to reduce casualties.

Our platoon eventually some trenches, that were more or less in fairly good condition, but really offered very little shelter from shell fire, we immediately spread out along this trench, a considerable number of enemy dead lay along the top and at the bottom of the trench. Our Pl Cdr, gave orders to heave the bodies over the trench, this took some doing, taking at least four men to lift one of them.

Finally out part of the trench was cleared of them and we then spread out and started to fill the sandbags, with mud and chalk, as this part of France was seemed to be made of chalk. It began to rain and the ground was thick with mud and chalk, and having no gloves, our hands became cold as I held up a sand bag to be filled, what bloody mess to be in, and wished I was back in our dugout again, but one had a job to do, we piled the bags on top of the trench on the enemy side and the men up there placed them in position so as to form a parado.

Our infantry had now halted somewhere in front, and were probably waiting for the counterattack, that usually followed an action. I wondered how far up ahead they were, and we discussed this as we worked, hoping that the distance was great. Finishing this job, we were ordered to move forward overland towards where the Infantry were. The shelling now became in earnest,

as we moved forward, and enemy machine guns began to chatter. We came to a communication trench, and we were told to fill sandbags and block these up, then moved forward again, I could see the tops of helmets, and the tips of bayonets, bobbing around in a trench a few yards ahead, then we again dropped into a trench. Our Pl. Cdr told us to get busing again as the troops we could see were our Infantry.

The enemy M.G.s were now working overtime spraying our front, and the bullets were hitting the parados, and tow of men were hit, probably exposing themselves too much as they worked.

Some shouting was heard up ahead, and someone yelled that the Germans were advancing against our troops, who we considered were about 200 Yds in front of us.

Looking carefully over the top, we observed a long line of Germans advancing, they looked big with their coalscuttle helmets, and downright menacing even at that distance. Then we heard our troops firing their rifles and machine guns, and the enemy were dropping down some throwing their arms into the air as they toppled. Our Pl. Cdr., shouted to us to drop our work and to fix our bayonets, and extend out along the trench, the rest of the Coy were probably were doing the same thing.

Our guns opened up and started to shell the enemy, and, firing slackened up to our front, and again looking over noticed that the enemy were, those that were left were running back, through our artillery barrage and finally were lost sight thru the smoke of cordite they lay thick along the ground.

We never caught sight of our tanks again until on our way back in the early evening. Our Pl. Cdr. then told us to get on with it. Finally the shelling stopped except for a few shells that came over from the enemy. I remember this day, not really watching the enemy, and the shelling, but for the rain that came down in torrents, and I felt the pangers of hunger, what with the lifting the heavy sandbags, and the sweat that covered me, and it was damn cold.

Some infantry of our Div (Grey patch) (I do not remember the Regt.) came moving up and spread along the trench that we had strengthening, and we filed out with silent thanksgiving. Moving backed by platoons I suppose, we again came to the sunken road, here it was piled with dead, both of enemy and our own troops.

We that is our Coy, stopped to rest, and having had nothing to eat since an early breakfast, we got permission to open up our iron rations, which consisted of a tine of bully beef, and hard tack. It really tasted good, and washed down with water, completed our meal. It was here as mentioned in other parts of my biography that whilst sitting on the side of this sunken road that a piece of shrapnel from an occasional enemy shell that was bursting overhead hit the butt

of my rifle and slid onto my thigh, shrapnel pieces from a shell is quite hot, and as it landed on my rifle I immediately brushed it off and it fell onto my thigh, and I felt the hot sting of it, and grunted aload, and the chap next to me if I had been hit. By George it stung, if it had struck my thigh first instead of my rifle it would have caused a bad wound.

It was now dusk, and eventually the orders came to file out, and the Coy moved out by scattered platoons. The shelling again began in earnest by the enemy, they were shelling the back areas, orders came to for sections to move separately, so as no doubt to reduce casualties. Our section kept going now at the double, being quite dark now we moved in the general direction of the Albert Bapsume Rd. Passing the rear of the Sugar Refinery, sometimes it seemed to rain shells, as probably they were being fired in salvos, and landing in groups here and there.

There were heard the cries of "stretcher bearers" as men were being hit. We were dodging now hoping to escape some of these salvos. If it were daylight now the scene would have been to watcher a scene of confusion as he would be witnessing men running all directions, probably some in groups others singly, all with the thought of escaping the rain of shells that were falling. The enemy gunners were in their element, firing their guns. Luckily our section escaped without casualties, but no doubt some were suffering badly, as it proved after we finally arrived in the area of our dugouts, which lay about a little over a mile from the forward lines.

The next days we were kept busy cleaning our uniforms of mud, cleaning of rifle, renewing the emergency rations that we had eaten that night. Word got around that the Regt had suffered quite a number of casualties, that night.

The rest of our stay on this front we made treks to the front line areas, strengthening the trenches, suffering casualties, every night.

10. Vimy 1917

The Ridge
The Pimple
Petit Vimy
Leivin
Mericourt
St Lazaire Church and Village
Souchez Valley
Maison Blanche (The White House)
Neuville St. Vaast
Arras
Neville Vitasse
Thelus Wood (On top of the Ridge)
Villers Au Bois (Village in the Wood)
Mont St Elois
Hill 70 (In Paris)

Vimy Ridge

Feb. Mar. April, May June, July, August, Sept. Oct. 1917

The beginning of Oct 1916 we left the Somme and headed for Vimy Ridge. This was a new front to us. Before moving into the trenches at the Ridge our Div. went to rest area our particular town was called Bouracq. (In France) Here we spent the Xmas of 1916. It was in this area that the troop of the Bdes underwent rigid training, preparation for the capture of Vimy Ridge. Miniature battle grounds representing the trenches (ours and the Germans) were laid out and the troops went thru the area in mock battles, we called these maneuvers "going over the tapes".

The real battles were not to take place until April 1917. So considerable time was spent in this training. Our Bn. Being pioneers, were also going thru our work, work that was to be required at the Ridge. We continued to receive reinforcements. New men continued to come out from the reserve camps in England.

Vimy Ridge was held by the Germans. It was a high piece of ground, and the Germans trenches extended to a point about half way down the ridge. They had continued observation over our positions. The French were unable to take it in 1915. The British Army failed to take it 1915.

The Canadian Corps assisted by some British troops succeeded on 7th April 1916. Eventually the Canadian Corps took over all the trenches held by British in the beginning of the new year (1917). The trenches were in good shape with deep dugouts. At the bottom of the ridge astride the Arras Road out Coy H.Qrs was established. This was a chalk block house called the Maison Blanch (The White House) Capt. Abbott and I had a dugout near the road across from this house. Near us was a destroyed village called Neuville St. Vaast. We were told that this village had been a great gambling resort.
One day the Mayor with other civilians turned up and was seen poking around the ruins. They eventually left carrying something that contained thousands of francs. To think that all that money had been nears us, and never knew anything about it.

"Oh death, where is thy sting, oh riches thy victory."

This front quickly opened up when the Canadians took over. They began to harass the enemy by raids and capturing prisoners for information. The enemy replied by shelling our positions daily.
On the way up to the front line an Engineer's Dump had been established, where our men stopped to pick up sandbags, shovels and other parathanalia that was required to carry out our work.
One afternoon I was at this dump with others talking to the Engineers, when we heard the sounds of running feet. We looked towards where this came from, suddenly a form came running around the corner of the trench, we were greatly surprized to see a German soldier. As he came near one of the engineer threw a shovel at him and he fell. It seems that he became lost somehow and continued right into our lines.

Our men were living caves, dugouts and other man made holes. The Infantry called us "The Rats". Along the aforementioned road that ran to Arras, were trees, these had been shattered by shell fire over a period of time, and one of them had been hollowed out to house an Artillery Observer, (our side). The enemy got wise to this and made it very uncomfortable for our men to continue to use it.

"We witnessed quite a number of dog fights in the skies over Vimy Ridge. I witnessed one of our planes disintegrate in the air, it simply fell apart, and these fights were exciting to watch. Ours and the enemy planes would circle round and round, when suddenly one of ours or theirs would start spiraling down to earth trailing smoke and flames. Both sides had observation balloons up, and one would see one of them falling to earth in flames, it was a grand sight to watch. One of our balloons with the basket below it was crammed with high explosives, this was a trap for the enemy flier, who would dive towards the

balloon and fire into it, and the explosive would explode taking the enemy plane with it. An enemy flier was downed over near by.

Our Regt roamed over the lower half of the ridge to become familiar with it. In the meantime I accompanied Capt Abbott over the area. For one since my arrival in France I had no work to do digging trenches, erecting wire and so forth.

This was a rather interesting front, a little different to what we had been used to. Altho we had to contend with enemy shell fire that he continued to rake our positions since our arrival here, snipers were very active also, but otherwise it was'nt bad at all. We suffered a few casualties, due to sniper fire, enemy mortars.\

The weather began to get worse, sometimes it would rain continuously for three or four days, and being situated half way down the slope of the ridge we had considerable trouble keeping our trenches reasonable dry. The dugouts were quite damp.

On this front and not very far from our H.Qrs., were deep caved, which had been dug and used during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Some of the caves were blocked up (by the French) and as one approached them we encountered a sweet smell.
This smell was from the caves, the French was supposed to have trapped numbers of Germans there and had hurled in gas grenades, and then blocked the entrances.

Balloons

Balloons were held captive by a wire to the windlass fixed to a heavy truck. They were let up to distance of about 800 to 1000 feet, depending on what they wanted to observe.

Before the Ridge was taken, a few deserters of the 22nd Regt were shot near the village of St. Eloi. On the way up to the Ridge along a communication trench there was a skull of a French soldier stuck in the side of the trench. It had perfect teeth and seemed to be grinning. Every time we passed it we would greet it with a salutation. This front (Vimy) was'nt so bad for us regarding our digging tools. We simply had to pick them up at an Engineers dump half way up, and drop them there on the way back. Along the Arras Road where our Coy Head Quarters was there was a line of shell battered trees, and one of these was hollow, and was used as an observation post, it was suspected by the enemy and was a hot spot to pass at time.

The Town of Arras lay to the rear about 3 miles, and some units of our Div. were suspected of looting some of the houses, thee were hardly any civilians in

the town. Once our Brigade (suspected) came out of the line and reached our transport lines at St. Eloi, no sooner had we arrive there, we were ordered up the line again for another ten days as punishment. The Germans overlooked our positions (before the attack) but the British whom we relieved, had made a good job of strengthening our trenches, and the C.T. were quite deep. The trenches even had duck boards to walk upon. Around here there were tunnels and caves, which by report were dug during the war of 1870 (French German war) Some caves had been blocked up and supposed to contain bodies of German soldiers. This was a good front to work as regards us pioneers. Lots of protection when there, but was extremely dangerous to venture out into the open, where one quickly received attention from snipers, and whizz bangs.

It was here on this front that our duties as pioneers ceased, due to disbandment. I was posted to No 2 Coy of the 29th Bn (Vancouver) as a stretcher bearer. After the Ridge was taken, our Regt. (29th) took over the Mericourt section, other side of the Ridge. The enemy had dug in and things came to a halt. We suffered a few casualties here, so kept us more or less packing the wounded out to the First Aid Post.

Our Div, then proceeded to the Amiens front to the South and pushed the enemy back about 16 miles to the town of Rosieres. The casualties here were due mostly to mostly to enemy machine gun fire which seemed to be very low, one could hear the whispering of the bullets and around knee high. I was quite concerned about getting hit in the legs. Consequently packing out stretcher cases was rather worrying to say the least. The ground was open in this area, and rather level so it made stretcher carrying easy.

Our Colonel (Latta) was wounded near Rosieres. As bearers we had opportunities for finding souvenirs, and we collected quite a bit looting enemy packsacks which lay all over the field, drooped by him in his hurry to get away. We got some from enemy prisoners, taking their watches, pictures, rings and what have you. One man was suspected of biting a German finger off to get a ring. (The German of cause was dead) The enemy lay all over the place, some in trees, others in sunken roads, and in the fields. Here our work was lightened by using the enemy as bearers, who were most anxious to help, perhaps eager to get out of it all. Prisoners were walking out to our rear, some without escorts. They gave us no trouble at all, perhaps glad it was over for them. Collecting posts were established close behind the front line where we deposited the wounded for pick up by ambulances.

This area was also chalk country. The villages hereabouts were built with chalk blocks. About three miles to our rear was a village called St. Eloi. It had a ruined church, which we could see from our trenches. Here were the Infantry horse lines. It was also here that a few French Canadians were shot as deserters. Civilians were sill living in this and other villages near by. The large town of Arras lay over to the right about five miles away.

On proceeding along one of the communication trenches, one came across the skull of a French soldier, it was placed in a niche in the side of the trench. As you came across it, you had the impression that it was grinning at you. I noticed that it had a complete set of teeth. We would give a mock salute as we passed. Casualties continued to occur amongst Canadians here, from enemy trench mortars. At night one could see the trail of them coming over at a high angle, (by the fuze burning) Day time one could actually see the bomb coming over and had a reasonable chance to get out of the way as it came down. These bombs caused terrible wounds. Whole sections of trenches would be blasted on, consequently meant more work for our men to repair them.

Mobile baths had been established about 1 ½ miles to the rear where the troops by Bns had the opportunity to have a good wash, and where they also obtained fresh underclothes. We were all bothered with lice on this front.

It was a common sight to see men sitting down, with picking out the eggs from the seams where they lodged. Others would have trench candles lit and running the shirt over the flame to burn them.

About 4 miles to the left and on our side of the line was a town called Ablain St. Nazaire. Occasionally we had the opportunity to get over there and purchase things we needed, and have a feed of potatoe chips and eggs. It contained a ruined church made of chalk blocks, and at night it would loom ghostly due to the whiteness of the chalk.

About Feb. our Div, again went out for a rest, and our Regt. was billited in the village of Lozzingham. We stayed here for about two weeks and again proceeded up the line to the same areas as before. The towns behind this front were situated in coal mining area. Slag heaps rose here and there.

The weather continued wet right up to Easter Day the 9th of April, when the assault was launched that drove the Germans finally from the ridge and into the Douai Plain.

The Assault on the Ridge

9th April 1917

Two days before the assault our Brigade was pulled out of the line and encamped at Villers au Bois, near the village of Mont St. Eloi. We were under cover in the woods there, and warming ourselves beside camp fires, we were enjoying a shot of rum, and then we slept in the open. The following night the 8th April we moved up towards the front into our old positions.

The night of April 8th and ninth the front was continually lit up by star shells, consisting of reds, greens, and whites. The front wasn't what we considered quiet. The enemy was anticipating something and was more or less nervous. A few guns were firing, our troops were moving up into the front line trenches, and the supports were already settled into the support and the reserve trenches. All day of the 8th of April our side of the front was quiet and all troops were out of sight in dugouts and wherever they could conceal themselves from enemy planes. Both sides had observation balloons up.

Our Regt. was concentrated at the bottom of the ridge by coys. My Coy was at the Maison Blanch. That night there was renewed activity in the form of myriads of start shells, being set up by the enemy. The weather was cool and damp with the promise of snow.

Promptly at five A.M. our guns opened up with a deafening roar. We could hear the shells passing overhead with one continuing whisper. There must have been hundreds of very lights going up all along the top of the ridge. It was an awe inspiring sight. By the light of the lights the air top of the ridge was thick with smoke of the shells bursting.

The Canadian and British bombardment became a continuing rumble, the earth simply shook. Enemy shells began to land in our trenches, causing a few casualties. The Maison Blanch was in the area of the reserve trenches, which consisted of dugouts about ten or fifteen feet deep. I was in a dugout there before, and the enemy shells that landed shook the ground. Eventually after a period of bombardment ceased for awhile, and then way up ahead could be heard the shouts of the Canadians going over to the assault. Our guns again opened up but this time they were do doubt shelling the rear area of the enemy to prevent reinforcements from coming up. It was now daylight, and the snow was beginning to fall, mixed with sleet. Our Regt. by Coys began making their way up the slope behind the support troops. Our job was to consolidate the ground as it was taken. The air was thick with the acrid smoke of cordite. We were not informed as to the outcome of the first assault of our troops, but as our Regt. continued up enemy prisoners began to pass us. They looked dazed, and

as on the Somme a majority of them consisted of youngsters and middle aged men.

Eventually we passed completely thru our own front line and into the captured German first line trenches. The scene here was indescribable. I with my section made our way up a trench and came across a bomb block. A bomb block consists of sandbags filled with earth, and is placed across a trench from where our troops fired and threw grenades at any enemy that tried to recapture that part of the trench. At this bomb block lay two bodies. A German lay on one side and a Canadian Sgt lay on the other.

I noticed that they were very close to each, in fact they were so close that their bodies nearly touched. It was obvious that they both met death at the same time. Up ahead the noise was terrific, with the noise of rifles, bombs exploding. We were going at a fast pace now. The German trenches here were a shambles. Dead lay all over the place, some even on top of the trenches. At the entrance to the dugouts the bodies lay sprawled in grotesque shapes. German prisoners were now streaming to our rear, they were not even escorted by our troops, a sure sign they were only too glad to be out of it. Barbwire lay twisted and torn amid sandbags, bodies, tins, equipment, empty ammo boxes and with here and thee shattered limbs of men. We were beginning to get close to where our forward troops were assaulting around in the area of the enemy reserve trenches.

Thelus Wood had been captured, also the Pimple, and probably the rest of the Ridge had been captured by this time by the other Bdes of Canadians with the British. Of cause we were anaware of this as all we knew of the action was in the immediate area of our own front. We were now well ahead, and getting close to our forward troops, who were still fighting the enemy, enemy troops were coming out of their dugouts shouting “Kamarad” which in their parlance meant ‘we give up’ or probably it meant “Comrade”.

They were certainly a bedraggled looking lot, and no mistake about it. They must have suffered a lot by our bombardment that day. All that morning and the afternoon of the 9th April the battle raged all over the front. Snow continued to fall in the afternoon, and it was quite cold.

The ground was slippery as the wet snow mixed with the loose earth caused by the morning bombardment. Visibility was restricted due to snow, smoke that lay thick and heavy. Some units had to use compasses to keep direction. Altho none of our regiment took an actual part in the battle we were close enough to witness some of the action. We were mixed up with our supports and reserves as they went forward.

They were certainly loaded down carrying grenades, mortar bombs, and rifle ammunition. The day advanced, and as night fell, came to the top of the Ridge. Star shells continually went up but now they emanated from the enemy

who were now down the other side of the Ridge where they had been pushed. The night continued with incessant gun firing from both sides, mixed with rifle and machine gun fire. The following day the enemy counter attacked but were repulsed. As the new day dawned, the whole country ahead came into view. Down the valley we saw the village of Petit Vimy, and ahead a few miles lay the big town of Daoui. Over to the left lay Levin with its coal slag heaps. The country was quite flat.

Further over to the right lay Mericourt, where later in the Fall of that year (1917) as members of the 29th Bn. we occupied the trenches. The village of Lens was one of the villages that was captured, this lay also over to the left down on the Souchez Valley area. This was a coal mining town as witness by the huge slag heaps that lay around the town.

It was here that the 29th Bn (of whom two of our Coys of the 48th had been transferred after the battle of Vimy) met the enemy in No Man's Land and drove them back. More of that later.

After the battle the 2nd and 3rd Divs were withdrawn from the front for a few weeks of rest, to recuperate and to receive reinforcements. Our Regt. returned to our old positions at Maison Blanche. It was here whilst resting that we were informed that we were to be disbanded. Two Coys, One and two were to go the 29th Bn. (a Vancouver Regt) whiles three and four Coys were to go to the 7th Bn. also from Vancouver. It was a sad day to say the least.

It was said that Western Canada had too many regiments at the front, and that our Regt, with others were disbanded for that reason, and also to reinforce western Bns, that had suffered during the recent battle.

It was here at Maison Blanche we erected across the inscription "Raised by patriotism and killed by politics" on it. Being a member of the 2nd Coy, I went to the 29th Bn.

As a reminder of that battle I received a slight wound in the palm of the left hand. Whether it was a bullet or a piece of shrapnel it is hard to say, as I suddenly felt something strike my hand and I looked down and saw blood running from it. To me being there at the scene of the battle, seeing and hearing all that went on, the shells bursting, machine guns chattering, grenades exploding, the prisoners making their way to the rear, the churned earth, the snow falling gently, the crumpled trenches, barbwire all twisted around everything, dead bodies of German and our own troops all mixed up together, was something never to be forgotten, and will always remain in my memory, with the scenes of past actions at Ypres, Somme, Passchendaele, Amiens, the Canals, Cambrai and finally the March thru Germany to the Rhine River.

We joined the 29th Bn. at a town where we once rested the previous year, with the 48th Bn. the town of Bouracq. I was posted to no. Two Coy, and my Pl.

Cmdr. was a Lt. Dakers, the Coy. Sgt. Major was "Buck" Taylor. We spent the month of May and part of June 1917 at this place.

The Vimy Front A Quiet Front Mericourt winter 1917

We again arrived on the Vimy front, in October 1917 and were to stay here until we left for the North (Passchendaele) The front here had been established, during the day our stay on the Somme (Sept)

Here we stayed in the trenches for 10 days, and then to the supports for another ten days, then to the reserve for 10. This went on until about the first week in Nov. Life in the trenches was no sinecure. The rainy season had set in and the trenches in some places contained about a foot of water, due to the inability to have them drained. But a fire step had been built in most and that's where the men stood. During the day sentries were posted who kept a continued watch over the top of the trench towards the enemy. In some places periscopes against snipers, who were rather active.

Sometimes the periscope was hit by a sniper and the glass had to be replaced and the scope moved to another place. Where the trench became narrow it was possible to stretch a ground sheet across for protection against the rain. During the day most of the men slept, but at dusk till the dawn everyone was awake and standing by.

I was now posted as a Coy runner to Capt. Abbott. A job most suitable to me as it provided me the opportunity to get around and not stay in one place all the time. A runner's duty was to accompany the Coy. Cmdr around the front held by his men. I had a excellent opportunity to observe what was going on. During the scrap the runner carried messages to Bn. Hqrs. also to the Platoon Cmdrs. He must know where and how to get there by the shortest route and occasionally had to travel thru shell fire.

A runner was known by the red armband he word on the right arm. He either had a rifle or a pistol. A pistol was more to his liking than the rifle. Occasionally at night a sentry would fire at something he thought he had seen to his front. Sentries were to familiarize themselves during the day the ground in front, as to position their wire, any bushes or what have you so at night they would not get the wind up and start firing at some imaginary movement.

A hot meal was served to the troops from the field kitchens at Coy Hd. Qrs. These meals were brought up in dixies. Tins of metholated spirits were issued so that they could boil some water to make tea, for breakfast to drink. Men passed the time during daylight hours with writing letters, smoking or just staring into space. Rounds were made once by day and once by night by the

officers. A pass word was necessary for safety reasons. These were frequently changed. It was essential that everyone knew the pass-word.

One night as I stood talking to a sentry, we heard someone coming along the trench, a form loomed into sight a few yards away. The sentry called "Halt who goes there and give the password". The person did'nt say a word but kept coming. The sentry pushed back his safety catch and held up his rifle ready to fire. Again he called out to the man to stop. He finally stopped. He was one of our men, and after he had given the password, came up to us. The sentry gave him hell, for being slow in answering.

Enemy artillery would sometimes send over a salvo of shells which caused everybody duck for cover. The cover in this case consisted of funkholes dug in the parapet side of the trench, and were big enough for a man to crouch down into, and to have a nap during the day. He usually placed his waterproof sheet over the holes. In the support trenches dugouts were built to a depth of about 10 feet, sometimes deeper. The entrance was covered with a gas proof sheet, and just outside was a pan which contained bleach, this was necessary in case mustard gas was present on the ground and if the man happened to walk into the gas, he, before entering the dugout stepped into tray of bleach which neutralized the liquid gas that may have been on his boots.

The worst menace the troops had to contend with during the front and support line duty was enemy trench mortar fire. At night one was able to see the mortar bombs coming over, by the fuze that was burning. The bomb sailed high into the air, making an ominous sound. It would land with a terrific roar. It caused terrible casualties among the troops. Our side also had mortars. The bombs looked like this.

PENCIL DRAWING

Each man was given a rum ration, which was served in a nose cap of a shell. Some men saved their rations of rum until that a bottle full. It was very good rum.

Stand to

Attacks were usually made at dawn, dawn consisted of "false" and "true" dawn. This is difficult to explain to the average person not familiar to the expression. Anyway at dawn troops along the front "stand to" that is they line their trenches with bayonets fixed and rifles loaded, with extra sentries watching

over towards the line of the enemy who were no doubt exercising the same precaution. This continues until it became quite bright.

Our particular front, we jumped out of our trenches and crawled about 25 yds towards our wire and lay down there, until it was considered O.K. to return to the trench.

The Front is a juicy spot indeed. It is sometimes so wet that, some would remark regarding the growing web feet if we stayed around here too long. "Cheer up, lad' he would no doubt say "Iv'e always 'eard as 'ow the first seven years of the war is the worst".

Some of the trenches we have taken over, we inherit the lice which are both regimental and patriotic. They march up your back in lines of four and down the other side without breaking ranks. They way they cling to your clothes assures you of their patriotism and their desire never to leave you.

Sometimes the front is quite noisy. The Boche send over long shells called Coal Boxes or Jack Johnsons. This is a 5.9 howitzer shell which you hear a long way off like an express train and then explodes like thunder, throwing great clouds of dense white and yellow smoke.

Then they have high explosives shells in med woolley Bears which explode in the air, throwing great clouds of dense of black smoke. Someone made up a jingle like this:

"Woof, woof, woolley bear, whizzing high and low,
Making little soldier-boys hug the parado,
Bursting here, bursting there, detonations mighty,
Strewing iron all around and sending blokes to Blighty."

The Boche also has an aerial torpedo which comes across at night with a trail of sparks and falls with the darndest noise you ever heard. The blighters have a rudder on them which makes them swerve before they drop and you can't tell for the life of you which way they will fall.

As I have remarked before about the "stand to" at dawn, the men line the trench bayonets fixed, sometimes shivering in the raw-edged cold of the breaking dawn. Sometimes this was for an hour, listening to the whine of over-head bullets and the sharp slap of well aimed ones into the parapet, the swish and crash of shells, the distant patter of rifle fire and the boom of far off guns.

That hour is perhaps always the worst of the twenty four. The rousing from sleep, the turning out from warm funk holes, covered with a wet blanket, standing still in a water-logged trench, with everthing-fingers and clothes and rifle and trench sides—cold and wet and clammy to the touch, and smeared with sticky mud and clay, all combine to make the morning "stand to arms" an

experience that no amount of repetition ever accustoms one to or makes more bearable.

After stand down has been ordered, the men set to lighting small fires in cans or what have you, frying bacon in their mess tin lids, after that they being their ordinary routine work of daily trench life.

Picked men are told off as snipers to worry and harass the enemy. They are posted at loopholes and in various positions commanded a good outlook, and they fire carefully and deliberately at loopholes in the enemy parapet, at doors and windows of wrecked buildings in rear of the German lines at hand or head that showed the German parapet, every yard of ground, every tree or bush, that looked a likely spot to make cover for a sniper on the other side. Sometimes our snipers were forced to vacate their positions due to a watchful enemy sniper.

Along the firing (front) trench communication trenches parties are set to work of various sorts, baling out water from the trench bottom, putting in sandbags where required, in readiness for night work and repairs on any portion damaged by a shell fire.

During the day the men keep well down below the parapet, and not to linger in the communication trenches that were enfiladed by shrapnel, stooping low and pass quickly at exposed spots where snipers waited a chance to catch an unwary head.

Range cards are made out for the Lewis Guns, showing the distance to certain targets by day, so at night they can fire straight at them in a fixed position. For ten days the Regt. stays in the line, the range of the men's vision will be the walls of the trench, the piled sandbags, the inside of their dugouts, and a view thru a loophole or reflected in a periscope mirror of about fifty to 200 yds of "neutral ground" and the German parapet beyond.

The neutral ground is sometimes covered with a jungle of course grass, edged on both sides with a tangle of barbed wire. In some places one may see huddled heads of dead of both sides, some caught on the wire others lay sprawled in difference positions. The drowsy silence is broken at intervals by a rifle shot; a grenade exploding, or strange to say a bird, perhaps a lark, sending out a thrilling song.

A stretcher party carrying a wounded man may pass towards the rear. A Coy signaler, recognized by his blue and white armband, trying to follow a field telephone wire for the purpose of repairing it. A sentry standing disconsolately by a rocket, ready to send it soaring into the air, requesting artillery support to repell an enemy attack.

Holes are dug in the side of the trench to hold in readiness hand grenade. Men are busy cleaning their rifles, but not all at the same time. Others are busily

engaged in enlarging their funk holes which are dug above the water line in the parapet, where they will eat and sleep.

One may come across a sap hole where Engineers assisted by Pioneers are engaged in digging a tunnel towards the enemy lines, for the purpose off laying mines to blow up the enemy trench, as at Ypres. Here and there, if the weather is cold, charcoal braziers are burning brightly, and a few are grouped around it warming their hands, and having a smoke. Cozy you might say?

There is not too much movement during the day, especially when enemy planes are above. The Coy. Comdr may be seen making his rounds, checking, making suggestions here and there.

A ten day tour in the line may be quiet or it may result in having to withstand enemy fire, either from shells or stepped up machine gun fire.
Some particular part of the line would take a beating from enemy heavies. Some shells would land just in front of the trench, others either in or just over. If one landed in the trench, men would be killed or wounded, perhaps one would land close sending over huge clods of earth, spilling over the braziers spilling over a mess can that contained water for tea. Some shells roared up and smashed into the soft ground behind the trench, hurting no one, but driving the whole section to crouch low in the trench.

Sometime this would last for half an hour, the shells fell with systematic and regular precision along the line of the front trench, behind it on the bare ground, and further back towards the supports' trench. A shell would inadvertently fall just short of the parapet and drive in the forward wall of the trench in a tumbled slide of mud and earth, completely burying some men in a dugout. A party would immediately set to work with spades with frantic haste to get them out.

After the enemy eased to fire, our guns would open up in retaliation, and it was the enemy's turn to cower and suffer casualties. One could hear our shells passing overhead and some would give a low cheer.

With the coming night, things remained much the same, with the possibility of placing double sentries. No fires were allowed, braziers were extinguished in the trench, but not in dugouts. Everyone was reminded of the password. Frequent rounds were may be the officers.

Reliefs.

Reliefs were conducted at night. The relieving Regt. was led up to their positions by guides.

11.

A Quiet Front After Vimy Mericourt 1917

After the battle of Vimy, everything moreless calmed down, as the Germans realized that they would be unable to retake the Ridge, and decided to call it quits. Daily routine settled down on both fronts.

The enemy and us strengthened their trenches ready for the Winter. Thus the expression "A Quiet Front". Both sides were using this front as arrest area for their troops. An occasional raid was carried out by both sides here, with daily shelling by both sides. Mortars were a nuisance from the German side. Each Bn. did ten days in the line, and thence to the rear areas for a rest and cleanup.

Trench Life

I was delegated as "runner" to Capt. Abbott who came with us from the 48th. He was a good officer. A runner accompanied his Coy Officer around the front, took messages to other parts of the Regt'l area, offtimes under fire. A runner word a red band around his upper right arm. I used to accompany Abbott around the trenches. On these trips we often ran into trouble as regards shell fire or mortar bombardment by the enemy. The mortars made a terrific noise exploding and caused considerable damage to the trenches and among the men. At night one could see the course of the mortars by the burning fuze, and had a reasonable chance to dodge away or take cover.

During the day one could see it approaching high in the air. We had a few narrow escapes from these things. Most of the enemy shelling came in the form of whiz-bangs, that is, they whiz over very fast, that the only one can do is immediately duck and hope for the best.

We made these trips at night in the early morning at "stand to" where everybody at dawn climbed out of their trenches and crawled out about 50 yards, and lay down. This is the usual time for raids by the enemy or by our side. It gave one an eerily feeling laying out there amongst the barb wire, mud and tall rank grass waiting to see if Jerrie decided to do something or not. After reaching our own lines again trench life continues as before. Breakfast was the first thing followed by posting of sentries, cleaning of rifles. Everyone did not clean his rifle at the same time, rifles were usually cleaned by sections, so as not to be taken by surprise by the enemy. Sentries were always looking over the top towards the enemy lines. Near them was a large rocket, which when in case of enemy attack it was fired and it soared up into the air showering green and red lights, a signal for our artillery to open up to stop the attack.

Some of the front line trenches were a foot deep in water, and here and there a ground sheet was propped up on sticks to give cover from the rain, as at this time of the year it rained frequently. Funk holes were dug on the parapet side of the trench for men to crouch in and have a nap, to write letters or smoke, and finally to think, think and think. A nice and cozy occupation to say the least.

The Germans were rather methodical as regards their artillery shelling. It seems that they had a routine to carry out and at certain times of the day and night they would shell a certain cross-road or line of trenches, with a salvo of about five shells. Then again snipers were active at all times from both sides. When one walked one had to assume the crouch position, sometimes a man would become too careless and receive a bullet thru the head, and probably his body would not be discovered until later by someone.

One mustn't imagine that the front line is held by a solid line of troops standing shoulder unless in case of attack, some parts of the trenches are not help at all but covered by fire. Here and there may be a light machine gun position and nobody else in sight.

At intervals along the trench are crevasses in the wall of the trench to hold primed hand grenades, or a box of rifle ammo. Men carried 120 rounds of ammo. Plus a bandolier of 50.

In the early morning just before dawn the Regt'l snipers would arrive in the front line and station themselves there they could get a look at the enemy lines with the hope of getting a "bag". These snipers wee a bloody nuisance to the troops, as they would draw fire and kind of make the place unhealthy. They would not settle at one place they would wander up and down the trenches seeking a likely spot to make the "kill".

Sometimes during these trips thru the lines the explosion of enemy mortars or flammenwurfers could be heard up ahead and the Capt and I used to wait a minute or two before proceeding towards the place. On arriving there we would come across a scene of destruction and death. The trench would be caved in and bodies of our men lying there with terrible wounds. Here the stretcher bearers had their work to do. Some of these sights are unforgettable.

When on these trips we had to give the password for the day. This was important especially at night. The sentry would call out "Halt, who goes there". We would answer "Friend" He would then say "Advance one and be recognize". The password was'nt said in a loud voice, hardly above a whisper.

Lunch was always looked forward too, although it wasn't substantial, usually consisting of break, tea, cheese and jam and butter. But it was a break in the routine of napping, smoking and thinking. An occasional plane would pass overhead, either one of ours or the enemy's. We would witness an aerial fight

between a few planes, and when one of the enemy planes was knocked down we would give a cheer.

The distance between the lines varied, some place it was 50 yards, others up to 150 yds. Barbwire was erected in front for protection, No Man's Land was the ground between the lines, bare and barren with rank grass intermixed with barbwire, shell holes, tin cans, pieces of wood and other debris of trench warfare. Sometimes tin cans were tied to the wire to guard against surprise. Rats abounded here and one would hit a tin can, which would immediately cause the sentry to become alert. He may or may not fire a few rounds towards the sound and a Very Light would soar up to illuminate the ground. The enemy were more generous with their lights than us. Some of their lights were attached to parachutes and would fall slowly to the ground and there burn out. A Very Light is fired from a pistol that looked like a small blunderbuss, it opened like a shot gun and the shell inserted in.

These shells contained difference coloured lights. Red lights were usually for the artillery support during a raid or attack. Relief of sentries were carted out every two hours during the day and at night. At night all men were usually alert until the dawn, when a complete "stand to" was ordered.

Supper was of the heated variety, such as stew or "milligan", tea, bread, butter and jam. This hot meal was carried up from the support trenches where the Coy HQrs was, in dixies, by the Coy cooks, and eaten from mess cans. Night came early and everything was quiet. Officers made their rounds with runners.. Here I must not forget the issue of a tot of rum, consisting of a couple of ounces of the best. Shells of heavy caliber could be heard passing overhead day and night, these were headed for the rear areas, such as ammo dumps, cross roads, H.Qrs of units or just plain harassing fire.

Sometimes away to the South drum fire could be heard, called drum, because it sounded like someone beating a "roll" on a drum. Usually it meant an all out attack by one side of the other. Once a day the mail came up from the rear for the troops, and needless to say this was a joyful occasion. It would sometimes rain for days at a time and everything became soggy, the trenches became here and there up to two feet of water or more. They were drained as best they could by digging small side trenches to the rear, but there always remained at least a foot, which over a period of time would cause trench feet among the men.

The rifles of the men were covered with a breech cover of brown canvas, around the bolt action, and the muzzles covered lightly with a rag of some sort.

Raids

Just to pep things up raids were organized by both sides. This was for the purpose of capturing a prisoner for information, or to see if the enemy were preparing something not to our liking.

The Capt and I were at Rear H.Qrs, when a great noise broke out on our front. Rifle fire mixed with the stutter of light guns, very lights soaring up shell passing overhead. This continued for some time and ceased except for the occasional very light and rifle fire. We made our way up towards the noise, and then was surprised to see German prisoners coming down the trench. There were big fellows, and moved along with their hands in the air. We watched them go by. It turned out that they belonged to a German or Prussian Guard unit, and had raided our lines.

Prior to a raid, the area to be raided was selected, and then our wire was cut to allow the men thru, and perchance the enemy wire had been cut by our men the previous night. All identifications are left behind, sometimes faces are blackened (these raids are usually at night or dawn)

Grenades are issued, ammo checked etc., etc. On reaching the enemy trenches the men throw the grenades into them, scatter the trench with rifle fire, raid up and down the allotted trench, perhaps capture a prisoner, and immediately after a signal by the Comdr. of the raid to collect our wounded if any, and make our way back as quickly as possible. After a raid the enemy replies by a quick bombardment of our trenches, very lights by the score are soaring up making the night like day. I never had the bad luck to be on one of these raids, only in the proximity of one. I've been on patrol without mishap now and again.

What impressed me a lot was the comming of the dawn, especially when our platoon was required to crawl out to the front and await it. There are two types of dawn. First there is the false dawn, that is a faint light that seems to be all around, and then the gradual lighting of the sky to the east, something uncanny it seemed, what with the smell of the damp earth the early cold that made on shiver, the staring ahead towards the enemy, and finally the quick get up and move to our trench. Watching the dawn coming up, ones fingers, clothing rifle and sides of the trench cold and damp, with sticky mud clinging to ones puttees, combining to make the "stand to arms" an experience no amount of repetition ever accustoms one to or makes more abearable.

After the "stand to" the men set about making small fires from canned heat tins to make tea or eating rations. Men were posted and sentries peeped thru periscopes towards the enemy lines.

Men were occupied in strengthening the trench with sandbags, draining water, and other occupations that made up trench life. These daily and nightly trips with the Capt. helped to break the monotony of life although I became

apprehensive regarding the outcome of these visits. But I thought if the men in the front line could stand it for ten days continually in the same place, the chances of coming out alive or even wounded was fairly good so why worry.

If we at that time (Oct 1917) knew what was in store for the Canadian Corps our thoughts of escaping scot free on this front would have been pleasant. Eventually our brigade moved out to rest at Lozinham about 10 miles to the rear. Here we cleaned up, and issued new clothing where required, then headed for our old stamping ground of Belgium, Ypres area in short.

Capt Abbott was wounded five times during a battle on this quiet front before the Regt. moved up to Belgium. Where was I, why I was on leave in Paris, and did not know of it until I rejoined the Regt. My lucky start and a rabbit's foot.

I was no longer a runner after this and joined my platoon when we headed North, where I was eventually to become a stretcher bearer along with many others at Passchendaele. (Or the 3rd Battle of Ypres)

Moved again to the front, known as Mericourt, which lay on right end of Vimy Ridge but not on the Ridge. Rather quiet here. At dawn we crawled out into the no man's land to stand to, in case of an attack by the enemy. It was the custom to do this so as not to be surprized by the enemy in our trenches.
It was rather eirie liying out there in the grass watching the day come up. Usual trench routine, men sleeping, some watching. Here and there in the forward trenches, there stood a large rocket attached to the trench. This was to be fired if the enemy attacked and the artillery could open up on the enemy and hope to destroy. The flares from huge rocket contained colours of green over red over green.

We were in the support trenches in June 1917 here when the German Guards came over on a raid. They were driven back and a number of prisoners were taken. They passed us, and we noticed what bit chaps they were.
Each Regt, spent 10 days in the line and out for ten days. The Regt, moved over towards Lens the coal mining town. This occurred in August 1917. My leave came thru, and I proceeded to Paris. A signaler by the name of Fripp went with me. We stayed at the Hotel Diena, a YMCA Hotel for troops on leave. Very nice. Visited the Arc de Triumph, also the Eifel Tower. During our stay in Paris we heard that the Regt, attacked the Germans. In fact the matter was the Germans went over the same time and met in no man's land. Capt Abbott was wounded five times. And rumour had it that he was awarded the Victoria Cross. But he never received it. I never saw him again until we arrived in Vancouver on May 23, 1919. He retired to Abbottsford, B.C.

12. Hill 70 August 1917

After the capture of Vimy Ridge the trend for the Corps was northward towards Lens and Hill 70, which overlooked the small town of Lens (Coalmining). This place was the northern hinge of the enemy's Oppy-Mericourt Line.
In 1915 Hill 70 had been lost to the British in the battle of Loos. Lens was strongly defended, and the enemy had every intention of holding it at all costs. It contained deep cellars and pillboxes. We were told that this area was to be taken by the Canadian Corps, on the 1st of August 1917.

Near the end of July it started to rain, not unusual to thought. Precious leave, which had been cancelled was now granted – to the delight of all the troops. Since I had landed in France in March 1916 I with others of the old 48th Bn, had nor had any leave up till now and we hoped that now this would be granted to some of us. That is I had been in France over a year and I hoped that I would be granted some leave of at least 15 days.

In the meantime our Bn took its turn in the trenches with other Bns of the Gde. that is the 27th, 28th and the 31st Bns. The trenches were in poor shape and I remember the mornings we in our Sec had erected our groundsheets onto poles for shelter as we cooked our tea and bacon. During these days before the attack we were told that our Div was to support the 1st Div when the attack started.

About a week before the attack, that I was informed that I was to proceed on leave. The attack was to be launched on the 15th of August. We were in the support trenches. But no actual word had been issued when we were to go on leave. On the 15th the 1st Div went over the top. We moved up to support them. Word was received that the 1st Div had captured Hill 70, and we gave three cheers, but our turn was to come. The enemy bombarded our positions and it lasted all that day of the 17th of Aug. We suffered quite a number of casualties. Personally I was wishing that my leave would come thru, and thought it had been cancelled due to the battle. We moved forward over Hill 70, and the whole area was shambles, the houses were all destroyed and hardly a tree standing. We had up to now not seen any Germans with the exception of a number of prisoners that were trooping to the rear. As I remember they looked a sorry lot, and probably glad to have survived, and some of them were grinning,. We moved into Cite St. Pierre. The Germans were still shelling our positions probably in preparation for a counter-attack. My thoughts were still on whether some of us would get away on leave.

Before the attacks most of the men had written letters home as was the usual things prior to going over the top, of cause our letters were censored in

case some would tell their folks where they really were. Of cause the public knew that the Canadians wee still in the region of the Ridge, but that was all.

I thought when my leave came thru I would get to England and visit my grand parents whom I had not seen sine 1915 before we went to France, and I had thoughts of seeing Scotland. Again we moved forward and occupied some battered trenches, and waited for the word to go forward. I noticed Capt. Abbott standing there with his pistol in his hand, and also his whistle was out ready to blow. Then I heard my name called with others, I got up as the Sgt came and he informed me that my leave had been granted, and to proceed to the rear and make my way the Bn Hqrs. Some of the men near by called "You lucky bastard'. I noticed that other men were making their way to the rear, and I met Signalman Fripp our Coy signaler, also moving out. Arriving at Bn H.Qrs, we received our passes for 15 days leave, and to report to the Q.M. Stores at the horse lines to new uniforms which we needed as the one we were wearing were rather not in good condition for leave.

Here we all packed up our gear, rifle bayonet, and pack, except our gas mask, which we took with us. Here we were told that it perhaps it was not possible for us to proceed to England as German submarines were active in the Straights of Dover, and that we had better take in the sights of Paris instead. Well I thought that would be a good idea as I always had the thought of seeing Paris and the country around it.

We boarded the train at Etaples (E-Tapps) and headed for Gay Paree. There was about ten of us altogether.

Arriving at Paris we were at a loss where to go. But the Red Cross informed us that the Hotel Dienna had been taken over for the use of Canadians troops on leave. We finally arrived there, which was not very far from the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triumph. It was a posh hotel, and it even sported chamber maids. Fripp and I decided to chum around together whilst here, and we were accorded single rooms. Here for the first time since leaving England I slept in a real bed with sheets and blankets.

During our short stay in Paris we visited the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triumph which had been built during the war of 1870, when the French were defeated by the Germans. Near by was the Bois de Boulounge. Walked thru the Place de la Republic and other places of interest. Saw Norte Dame Cathederal, The Bastille.

During our stay the Germans began firing on Paris with huge guns that could fire a distance of seventy miles from the Forest de Compienge. Some people were killed, and we inspected the shell holes made by the shells. They were not very big, only about two or three feet deep and about seven or eight feet across, depending upon whether the ground was hard or soft. Well

eventually our leave came to an end and we boarded the train at the Gare du Nord (The North Station) and headed for the front again. On arriving at St Pol we were informed by a couple of our Quartermaster Sgts who were proceeding on leave that the Regt had gone over the top and had met the enemy in the middle of No Man's Land but had pushed them back, but the casualties had been heavy. When I heard this, I silently gave thanks how lucky I had been and the others also thought that way. Arriving at Amiens, then out towards Arras and then by transport to Estree Cauchie ('Extra Cushy')

Here we reported to our platoons, and heard what really happened. Here Gen. Currie inspected the 6th Brigade (ours) with him was Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig. Several awards were given to members of the Bn., C.S.M. Hanna received the Victoria Cross, with several Military Crosses to Officers, and many D.C.M.s and M.M.s to others. Capt Abbott had been wounded five times and was on his way to England. I was never to see him again until the 23rd May 1919 at Vancouver, on our way home.

A number of new officers appeared and posted to platoons, and eventually the Regt was brought up to strength again. Quite a few old faces were missing, our new Pl. commander was Lt. Cruickshank. Here I also met Sgt. A Armstrong, he had been awarded the D.C.M. and later at Amiens Aug. 1918 he was awarded the M.M. On enlisting in the P.P.C.L.I. later we met again and finally he died in Decmeber, 1925 at Work Point Bks, Vic. B.C.

We finally moved forward to Camblain-L'Abbe and Neuville St. Vaast on the Arras Road in the vicinity of where we of the 48th Bn had been disbanded after the Battle of Vimy.

We furnished working parties for night training, and in going over the tapes in preparation for the Passchendaele show then in progress up in Belgium. Then the Regt moved to La Chaudiene front line area in October and was relieved later by the British Bn the 4th Gloucesters. Our Bde was inspected by Gen Horne of the 1st Army.

We entrained at Savy for Cassel, from there we marched to Hondegem. Gen Burstall our Div Commander (the 6th) Inspected. Gen Ketchen was our Bde. Cmdr. Looking at the official report later I se we arrived in the Ypres Salient on the 3rd November 1917.

Note:

I wish to state there that I frequently have to look at official history for exact dates, villages and towns, that I have forgotten, dates of arrival, different fronts, otherwise I would only have to guess to within a few days of arrival or leaving. The months and years are easily to remember, as they are related to the

main actions of the Canadian of which I and my platoon and sec, was only a small part. But looking back after all those years have passed away I feel proud that I and my comrades were a small part in making of history and that although at many times during those war years I wished that I was clear of it, and at other times I really enjoyed the life, especially during the rest periods in the back areas. Altho I was rather sad at times to witness the death of comrades, faces that one saw around you being replaced by new ones, who eventually came to be new friends.

13. The Third Battle of Ypres

(Battle of Passchendaele) November 1917

Approximately at the end of October 1917 we left our billets at Bouracq France and set out by route march for Belgium.
During our stay on the Vimy front the British and Australians had opened an offensive north of Ypres for the purpose of driving the enemy completely away from the vicinity of Ypres and also to straighten the line by eliminating the old Ypres Salient. Their advance took them to the vicinity of Passchendaele which lay atop the ridge of the same name.

Finally it seemed that they were unable to advance any further, having suffered thousands of casualties. The powers that be decided to employ the use of the Canadian Corp composed of 1st, 2nd and 3rd Divs the fourth was employed elsewhere also the 5th.

By devious routes so it seemed to us who had to make the march, we arrived at the town of Ypres of bitter memories of 1916. We passed thru the town which seemed to be much the same as we last saw it in Aug 1916.

No civilians were in evidence, altho I could not see where they could live in that vast area of destruction. The town would have to be completely rebuilt after the war which eventually it was. Passing thru the Menin Gate we were now on familiar ground. Hell Fire Corner, the Chateau of De La Hooge, Sanctuary Wood and other places. But beyond these places where the enemy had been entrenched in 1916 we were as it seemed in a strange land.

Brigadier Ketchen and other officers of the staff watched us as we went past them. It was reported later than Gen. Currie had looked over the battle ground where we were headed for and had reported that it did not look good. The Can. Corp relieved the Australians and took over the ground below the ridge. The country here was a terrible sight. The guns had to be moved up after a wooden road had been built by the Engineers over the mud. The ground for miles was pockmarked with shell holes, and with the rainy season now on did not improve it.

With the prospects of heavy casualties during the battle stretcher bearers would be in great demand, and consequently so many men were required to act as such as were taken from each regiment. Regt'l bands usually acted as bearers during a battle, I was selected as one of many to act in this capacity.

The regiment moved up to the forward area, passing thru our guns of all calibers. Here and there were heavy M.G.s of the M.G.Corp (Canadians). The area was spotted with German concrete pill boxes, and to one of these we were to pack the wounded from the battlefield. All stretcher bearers of the Regiment

were congregated and supplied with stretchers at one of these emplacements. A Col Drum and Col. Anderson were the doctors at the one I was at.

I have forgotten the exact date of the assault upon the ridge but it was about the second week of Nov. The battle opened with a heavy bombardment by our guns, and the noise was terrific. There must have been hundreds of guns there. We moved up during this bombardment towards the front where our Regt. was or perhaps had been, as now they had commenced the assault. Some of us were assigned as single red cross men and others in pairs and fours. Most of the stretchers required 4 men due to the condition of the ground. The whole area it seemed as far as the eye could see was one mass of mud and water, with hardly a piece of solid ground anywhere.

As we went forward our guns were still firing. Here and there I noticed men lying half in and out shell holes probably drowned due to the heavy packs. The going was rough due to the mud. Enemy shells began to fall throwing the mud in all directions. We were not moving forward together but were scattered with the exception where it was required to have 4 to 2 men to a stretcher. Our route lay towards a high piece of ground known as Abraham Heights, which was slightly to the left of Passchendaele Ridge. The village of this name lay on the top of the ridge. Some of the bearers began to fall and it looked real bad. I with another chap forged ahead with our stretcher dropping to the ground as the odd shell exploded near us. Some of the shells failed to explode due to the mud, others that were timed exploded on contact.

Others were timed to explode overhead and shrapnel from these flew in all directions. More men were being hit. I felt not ashamed to pray to God to carry me thru, Yes, I prayed, and it seemed to give me comfort of some sort. Probably the other men might have been doing the same, who knows.

The stretchers were heavy and we took turns carrying it, sometimes one man carried it. We passed over the ground from where our Regt. had started to attack. The dead and wounded lay all over the place.

Now our work was to begin in earnest. The pill box to where we had to take the wounded lay about ½ a mile to the rear. All that day we carried the wounded to this place. It was one hell of a trek, at the dressing station wounded lay all over the place. I noticed quite a number had been wounded in the seat. One big chap was actually crying due to his wound. Another fellow lay with a shoulder completely shot away, he was calmly smoking. What a sight to behold. I do not recollect how many trips we made that first day.

In the meantime up front the single bearers were planting the mans rifle into the ground with his helmet on top, to indicate to us where they were lying. Later that first day we were fortunate to obtain a shot of rum at the dressing station. The next day we were getting closer and closer to the actual firing line.

The Canadians had captured the ridge and the town, and were dug in. The shelling never seemed to stop. The enemy was plastering the front continually. Casualties were increasing among stretcher bearers, as we saw stretchers lying in the shell holes and other places along with the bearers.

We packed out German wounded as well but, but occasionally these were dropped in preference to our own men. The Royal Canadian Medical Corp had men there as well to alleviate the suffering of the wounded by applying first aid to them in preparation for us to take them out. German prisoners were streaming to our rear. Considerable number of them were without escorts. We utilized prisoners to help pack the wounded out. They seem most willing to help, glad no doubt to get out of it.

I wish to reiterate here that our previous Regt the 48th had been disbanded after Vimy along with other Western units to bolster other units that had suffered badly at Vimy, and that 1 and 2 Coys (I was in the 2nd Coy) went to the 29th Bn (Vancouver) and Coys. 3 & 4 went to the 7th Bn. also of Vancouver. Some of the older men went to Railway Troops and back arears.

Col. Latta was the C.O. of the 29th. The Coloured patch we word on our shoulders was like this and coloured blue. In war all men are furnished with two identity discs which are worn around the neck, these are checked periodically. One is red the other green. They indicate the name, number and religion of the man. When killed one is taken for record purposes. Each man also had a first field dressing in a small pocket of his jacket. We applied these dressings to the wound until hw was taken out, and on reaching the dressing station, the wound was taken care of by the medics.

Once I witnessed an amusing scene whilst nearing the front. A small Canadian was chasing a big German. The Canadian was prodding the Jerry in the seat with his bayonet, I may say that German was traveling somewhat fast for his bulk. Both were jumping from shell hole to shell hole, sometimes slipping and sliding, until they disappeared from sight.

I was beginning to grow a beard. All our gear had been left behind at the transport lines, and all we carried was haversack with rations and dressings. Red Cross men were not allowed to carry firearms, under the Geneva Regulations, as it was presumed they were considered inviolate, but it was'nt the first time that the enemy had fired on ambulances and red cross men before, and I must admit that I carried a Webley pistol under my jacket for self protection, and no doubt others were carrying the same.

The second day another chap on arriving at the D.S. was told that some men were lying out in front of our lines and that an attempt was to be made to get them in. I said to my partner lets get out of here and try for them. It was dangerous hanging around that dressing station due to the shelling. Not taking a

stretcher with us we made our way to where our outposts were. We made good headway not being burdened with a stretcher, passing bearers making their way to the rear. We certainly had lost quite a number bearers as evidence by the stretchers that lay here and there, these included members of our pipe band who wore kilts.

We had to crawl quite a distance to where our men were dug in, and they pointed to where the men lay out in front, we could see three of them there about 50 yards out, some of the men dug in asked us why the hell did we come up there as it would attract the enemy's fire to them by our movement. Anyway we crawled over to where they lay and checked them, but unfortunately we found that they were dead, but before we had a chance to get back, we heard a plane approaching very low, we lay perfect still, and looking up I saw a German fly over us low enough to see the face of the flyer, he circled around for a few minutes and then took off, I was fearful for a minute that he might have machine gunned us and the troops near by. The arear where we were was quite high and the ground sloped to a valley to where there lay a village which I presumed was occupied by the enemy. After the plane had gone we crawled back and made our way back passing the village of Passchendaele. Most of the wounded had by now been taken out but a few were possibly still laying around somewhere, and about the third day I became separated from the others, and was wandering around the front looking for them, and coming across some dugouts. I lifted the groundsheet and saw two men sitting there, I asked them if they would give me something to eat as I was without rations of any sort, having foraged what I could from haversacks that happened to be lying around. I looked at them but they never answered me, and suddenly I realized they were dead. They were staring straight at me, sitting there side by side. I got away from there sharp.

I WISH TO DIGRESS HERE FROM THE PREVIOUS PAGES TO EXPLAIN…..The ground for miles was one vast areas of shell holes mostly filled with water. Here and there we saw men who had fallen into them and had been unable to get out due to the heavy equipment they had on, or were wounded and helpless and had drowned.

Suddenly enemy shells began to fall around us, and they increased in such number that we had trouble getting forward, if the ground had been dry we could have been able to move faster, quite a considerable number of our group were knocked out, and some shells landed uncomfortably close, I noticed that a few shells on landing did'nt explode due to the muddy ground. Pieces of shrapnel were flying around us, and some of the shells consisted of shrapnel type which exploded in the air about 50 feet or so up. It was'nt any use in finding shelter in shell holes owing to the water, but we kept moving which to me at least was the most desirable thing to do moving around added a sense of

security, as by this time it became a regular deluge of shells. I am not ashamed to admit that I fervently offered up a prayer to the Almighty, for although now in retrospect I cannot recall what I said to myself, my thoughts were of HIM, and to me those thoughts of god were as a prayer. I believe one does not actually voice his thoughts, that is say out loud "Lord deliver me".

Eventually we reached the cover of the Heights, and looked back the way we had come, and it was hard to believe that we had traversed all that ground without being killed or even hit, although a considerable had been. I might add that one does'nt always voice or think a prayer when one is in danger, quite often I would just hug the earth and hope for the best, after having experienced different kinds of danger one becomes hardened to things of this sort and you really believe that you will again come out scot free and take it for granted that you did so. There always seemed to be a sense of self survival, after having endured danger over a long period of time one became a fatalist.

I wandered around that vast area, in the distance I could see stretcher bearers on the move and so made my way over towards them, this about the 4th day after the first attack. I made my way to the rear to look for our dressing station to see what was going on and to enquire whether the Regiment was still in the line. Wounded still lay outside the D.S. and was informed that the Regt had moved out and was in the vicinity of Ypres. I with others made our way towards the Menin gate. We could see a number of tents this side of the walls of the town, and made towards them. Our Regt. was there, and I made for one of the tents and went inside and lay down. It seemed hours since I had had sleep. I had'nt there very long when I heard the drone of planes, and by the noise of the engines I knew they were enemy bombers. They flew over the camp of tents and dropped some bombs, some were very close, in fact one exploded not far from where I was that I could see the flash as it exploded.

Tents make good targets, being white and showed up good targets at night. They circled around to drop a few more and then took off. It was well on to the morning when I finally wokeup, and reported in to the Coy, tent. I looked around to see if I could locate my kit so as to clean up and have a shave. Some of the men said that I with others had been reported missing and my kit had been with others taken by some of them. Anyway things got straightened out.

Later on the next day, the Canadian Consert Party gave a concert for the troops and I with others went to see it. Whilst there I heard my name called, and someone slapped me on the back, looking around I saw it was my brother Frank. We delighted to see each other, and proceeded to have a good time the rest of the evening. He was in the Service Corps, 4th Divisional Train, associated with the Artillery, and his Battery had been position for the battle, possibly I had

passed him, who knows, on the first day as we made our way thru the guns towards the front.

I had'nt seen him since I left Canada in 1915. It certainly was a lucky chance coming across like that. He had enquired amongst the troops where the 29th Bn. was and it took some time to locate me. I never saw or heard from him again until 1919 after I arrived home. After the war he went to sea in the Merchant Marine on the East Coast. He was the wandering kind. Later in 1947 I received a telegram saying that he with the rest of the crew of a ship had foundered off the American coast during a storm.

"The end of a good fellow"

Our Brigade with other units of the army returned to the Vimy front, but not before we enjoyed a rest behind the lines at a town called Au Ritz here we spent the Xmas of 1917.

Here Andy Armstrong stole a barrel of wine from a French farmhouse, and rolled it down the main street to the delight of the troops. Sorry, the barrel had to be returned to its owner, but not until some of its contents had been consumed by the troops. Armstrong later won the M.M. (Military Medal) at Amiens (he was under the influence when winning this award. I met him again when I joined the P.P.C.L.I. in Victoria in Jan 1921. He was our Coy P.T. Sgt.

This was war, and war is not respecter of persons. Some bearers had to work alone as in the case of a man lying out in front of the lines. Here the bearer crawled out to him and brought him in safely. At Passchendaele, another man and I crawled out a distance of about 100 yards to bring in two men. On arriving there we discovered that they had died of their wounds. They had been out there a few days.

I was hoping they would be alive, naturally. Bearing is very strenuous, especially when the ground is deep in mud and water, which made it difficult to carry a stretcher with a man on it. The man may be heavy, he would'nt keep still due to his suffering, and other reasons.

The bearers follow up behind the infantry, who when a man is wounded would stick the man's rifle into the ground by the bayonet and place his tin hat on top so as to attract the attention of the bearers. Each man carried a first aid dressing inside his tunic, and when able to would adjust it to his wound, or if not his comrade would do it for him. On arrival of the bearer the wound would be examined and redressed, and then he would be packed out.

I have seen some awful sights when acting as a bearer. Men with their intestines hanging out, the man trying to hold them in place with his hands. Men with half their face shot off. Others with their brains oozing out. One big

chap had a wounded hand and was crying like a child, and near by was a youngster with a much worse wound sitting by not saying a word. A man when wounded wants a cigarette. Why? Because it helps to soothe his nerves.

Cigarettes were a great help. One learns a lot about the anatomy of the human form. Frequently one comes across two bearers with a wounded man aboard lying, killed by shell fire. Bearers have tales to tell, tales that he can tell about men dying, whispering about his Mother, or of this or that. Tales that he would not rather hear, of men crying for help in the dark. Some men lay for days in the open, unable to make their way back to their own side, when as night arrives one can hear them crying in the dark, for water or to be helped. Over a period of time in war one becomes hardened and callous to suffering. He sees so much of it in his daily routine during a battle. I saw so much suffering in this way that I as a bearer became more or less au automation, I find it impossible to express my feelings as a youngster, one has'nt time when engaged in such work to digress mentally or orally on the sufferings of man. He comes inured to all this as time goes on, and eventually takes it all as a matter of course. He shows no feeling at all, due to the fact no doubt that he sees too much of it to affect him.

"And this I hate - not men nor flag nor race,
But only war with its wild, grinning face.

God strike it till its eyes be blind as night,
And all its members tremble with affright!

Oh, let it hear in its death's agony,
The wail of mothers for their best loved ones.

And on its head descend the venomed curse of its sons,
Who followed her deluded,
Where its guns had dyed the poppies red."

We had a pleasant Xmas, with the usual dinner of turkey and everything that went with it. The rest of the time was spent in cleaning up, drilling, sentry duty, and what have you.

Here I remember having imbibed too much French wine and was slightly under the weather for it, and not caring very much I offered to fight the Coy. clerk, needless to say I received a punch that knocked me out for awhile.

The beginning of the New Year our Div. moved up the Vimy front again, taking over another sector that lay to the left of Mericourt where we had been before we left for Passchendaele.

Note:

It was during this scrap at Passchendaele that I witnessed a very stirring air battle over the Ridge. It started with one or two German planes and ours. They were chasing each other around in circles. Then over a period of time more German and Canadian and British planes appeared until it seemed there were hundreds up there trying to down each other. I'm sure as I remember it there must have been at least a hundred planes circling around. An enemy plane would suddenly spiral to the ground in flames, followed by one of ours. This continued for an about an hour. Some of the planes crashed behind our lines whilst others landed behind the German lines. Occasionally one would go down like a falling leaf, bellowing smoke behind it. Machine guns were rattling all the time. I had witnessed other air battles before but nothing like this. The whole lot seemed to go around and round as in a merry-go-round. It eventually thinned out, but not until both sides had lost quite a number of planes. Then it seemed that every one of the planes seemed to separate and streaked off to their own side of the line, and then quiet settled over the front, except for one or two that continued to circle around for awhile and then they too went their way.

Passchendaele Oct – Nov 1917

As a stretcher bearer or first aid man with many others of our regiment we saw and experienced conditions of extraordinary difficulty and discouragement.

Every day conditions grew worse, rain, mud, shell holes filled with water which contained dead bodies and equipment. The wounded came streaming back from the forward line, some soaked in blood, their field dressing carelessly applied by themselves. The action was still going on up ahead, and too make matters worse for everyone here stray bullets were buzzing about, the odd shell exploding here and there. The first seriously wounded wee attended first, then the slightly wounded, then the Germans.

Many Germans we had to ignore. Dead lay everywhere. We assisted those who were unable to walk to the Regt'l aid post a few hundred yards away in a German pill box. Here doctors worked on the men. When the shelling increased and exploded in the area, wounded were again wounded, whilst were finished off for good. It seemed that the progress of our the Bde the 6th was

going well, and the Germans were retiring up the ridge towards the village of Passchendaele. German prisoners were forced to help us evacuating the wounded.

The prisoners needed no escort, they willingly assisted us with the wounded and glad they were out of the fighting. As our Brigade advanced we followed up, wounded of both sides lay everywhere. Many had fallen into water filled shellholes and drowned, probably too weak to hold themselves up. A shell hole with blood on its water usually meant another corpse lay underneath. These sights were common, a khaki-clad leg, three heads in a row, rest of the bodies submerged. Sometimes a hand gripping a rifle is all that is visible. The dead with staring eyes. One German was pinned to the ground by a bayonet around which his hands gripped and stiffened as he tried to withdraw it.
A Cpl's trousers had been blown off and his belly ripped open up to the chest. The faces everywhere were aghast their white teeth always showing.

What a nightmare we were living in to be sure. It rained and rained, the rain it sees to help the enemy instead of us.

Like the verse in the 'Ancient Mariner',
"Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink."

More troops were arriving to assist in the attack, slipping and sliding and colliding with each other with their heavy equipment, some toppled into shell holes and had to be hauled out by others who extended their rifle butts to them. It was common practice to wrap sacking over the boots for better footage. Everybody it seemed was daubed with slime and mud. It would stop raining for awhile and then start again.

Everybody was drenched to the skin. Rations there none, and we searched haversacks for the iron rations they contained, which contained a tin of bully beef and a few biscuits. Often hampered by machine gun fire or shells. A chap by the name of Knapp and I teamed up without a stretcher to look for the wounded.

On the third day our brigade captured by the village. Our Bde consisted of the 28th, 29th, 27th and 31st Bns. We were not aware that the Bde had pulled out, having been relieved by others. We continued to work, the practice of sticking the rifle in the ground by the bayonet and placing the wounded man's helmet on top indicated to others that their assistance was required. It was agreed by all that the condition here was worse then at the Somme in 1916 winter. As Napoleon who remarked "God – besides water, rain, air, earth and fire has created a fifth element ----- mud". During this battle an unofficial truce

was declared to allow both sides to remove the wounded, but anyone carrying a rifle was immediately shot.

During the attack in our areas, the rain stopped momentarily, and visibility was fairly good and the enemy sprayed the troops with machine guns, the bullets lashing and whining all about from their pill boxes. Our troops moved from shell hole to shell hole. We lay (Jimmy Clapp and I) in a shell hole and decided to wait awhile before emerging into the open. Some of the advancing men we noticed seemed to pause and bow their heads; then sink to their knees, then roll over slowly into the mud. Others were yelling when they hit, rolled and tumbled and that's how we found them when we moved forward again. Strange about some of the shells as they landed into the mud they did not exploded as frequently as when they landed on hard ground, probably that to prevent a lot of casualties amongst our troops including us. We came across some men wearing kilts, and discovered that they were members of our pipe band who were acting as stretcher bearers. They died along side their stretchers with the wounded man still on it. I often wondered whether we would get out of this mess alive. The enemy had constructed hundreds of concrete pill boxes manned by their machine gunners.

Eventually these concrete placements came in very handy for us as we and others carried our wounded to them for shelter, and where the Medical Corps doctors were able to attend to them with a certain amount of safety. One pill box contained a large number of wounded. The stench was terrible, dead lay everywhere, the ground about us were covered with them. In some places the dead had been looted of their valuables and letters and papers and photos lay in the mud or floated on the water.

We ruffled through the packs of the dead for bully beef and biscuits. Some of the German bread was black. I could go on and on with our adventures but I think this is quite sufficient as regards the events at Passchendaele. I must say that we were very fortunate to have survived.

Hand written at the bottom of the page "Yes, some of us were extremely lucky."

THERE ARE SEVERAL NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE ARTICLES AS WELL AS WAR DIARIES FROM COLLECTIONS CANADA, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA, RELATING THE BATTLE OF PASSCHENDAELE THAT FORM PART OF THIS WRITING.

14. The Letter

Written - Hotel Empress. Victoria. B.C.

Dear Arthur,

We called in at the Barracks on Saturday night in the hope of seeing you, before you departed for Sidney. Too bad you were not in, so I thought of writing to you and sending it out to Sidney. How do like my typewriting, not bad for a beginner. Dad gave me a Corona (traveling one) for Xmas, I always wanted one, so my wish has been gratified at last. Dad and Mother both send their regards to you, and they hope you are happy. Sometimes I wonder if you are. When I first met you through my Brother Archie, you never seemed to smile, it seemed as if you were thinking or looking for something, something that you would never hope of getting. I suppose TIME has softened bad memories of overseas, making you forget what you went through. You were young when you went over and it must have impressed you so much. Oh! Archie has told us all about what you did for him at Passchendaele. The poor boy can't forget it, and nor can we. But don't forget, we all like you very much, and have not forgotten you all these years. Dad and Ma always think of you as one of the family, not only because you saved Archie's life, but because you seemed such a nice boy, quiet, serious, although she wished you would smile a little more. She thought you were quite handsome in a quiet way. I remember Mother asking me if you smoked, drank, swore, I said, "does it look as if he does," I believe you only dissipation was being serious and not smiling. You were certainly wrapped up in your drawing when you were here in Toronto in 1920. I guess you had no time for anything else, not even for Claudine, who liked you very much. Sometimes I thought you were a little jealous when Claudine, who liked you was talking to another boy, perhaps I was mistaken. You never seemed to take to girls. You and Archie were always together, when you used to call at our place. Louise and Pat send their regards to you, also "BOY". Archie is always asking after you, although you do not write to him sometimes. Poor boy, he can hardly get around these days, we do all we can for him. Every now and again he talks about the day you brought him in from that German trench, about falling into a shell-hole, and you saying to him that he was going to Heaven, and Archie sure thought he was to, the pain he was going through. He said, he asked if you were going to stick to him, even after he was gone to Heaven, and you said to him "Ad Finem" I thought that was grand. I know what it means. He said you cried like a baby. He sure laughs when he thinks of you crawling out get something for him in the way of drink, and came back with a can of beans. He doesn't remember anything after you lifted him up to take him the rest of way on your

back, until he woke up in the dressing station. Sorry Arthur if I am writing about these happenings, but you understand I Know, and he is our Brother, if it had'nt bee for you we would not have him here with us. We wonder what love you and he had for each other, he would have done the same thing for you too. Archie always has your picture with him. He says that you were a nervous wreck, whilst waiting in that shell hole, shell shocked I think he called it. I saw the tears come to your eyes when you and he met in Toronto in 1910. I guess I had better quit writing like this Arthur, or you'll chastise me if ever you see me again. By the way are you still drawing, I hope so, we still have that picture you drew at the school on Spadine Ave. It is certainly good. Dad and Ma want you to send another one. We are going back to Toronto on Sunday that is tomorrow, awfull we were not able to see you. At least we will hear from you now and again. Perhaps we will be out here next summer, and we'll see you then. We have been visiting relatives in Vancouver and friends in Victoria. I am posting this down at the boat. Dad and Ma think you will be a great artist some day, and so say all of us. Please write as often as you can Arthur, we are always glad to hear from you. The folks were sure surprised when I told them that you had married, that time, in Victoria, and that the girls names was the same (Dorothy is her name is'nt it?) Claudine cried when we told her. She told me that she liked you very much, and did not want any one else to have you, I remember telling at the time that you had not a thought for her, she told me to go and chase myself. She is engaged to a boy in Kingston, and is expeacting to be married sometime next year. Well dear boy we all wish you a most Happy New Year, and if you are out East sometime, drop in on us. We'll have a celebration, or let's call it a reunion, that would be better.

Love and regards from as all. Archie was'nt with us on this trip, he was unable to move, poor boy. So we must hurry back back to him.

Bye, bye, till next time.
Your Dear Friend
Ronald

P.S.
And don't forget,
AD FINEM

(You said that to Archie….OUT THERE.)

I have conducted a "Search for Archie" campaign with no success to date.

15. Amiens - August 1918.

This battle was the black day of the German Army. Our Brigade arrived at Villers Breteneaux. Here the Can. Corps were assembled for the attack. The attack was to be made on the morning of the 8th of August 1918. The objective was a break thru the German Army and out into the open. Our Regt with the 28th 27th and 31st was formed up behind the artillery.

A heavy mist covered the ground and the guns were line up wheel to wheel in the open. Near by was the Cavalry Brigade. Consisting L.S.H. Lord's Strathcona's Horse, Fort Garry Horse, Royal Canadian Dragoons, and another regt. of Light Horse. It was an imposing sight to say the least. It being the first opportunity of seeing our cavalry ready to go into battle.

The line of battle was as follows:

On our left were the Australians. To the right of us were the French. The main target was Rosieres, a large town about 16 miles away, at present in German hands.

The Attack at AMIENS

Thursday August 8th 1918

This narrative is an overall picture of the battle on that August day. This action was undertaken by the Canadian Corps of which our regiment took part and in which I served as a stretcher bearer. In soldier' parlance it was known as the "Big Push" which it actually was, for within three days the Germany Army had been pushed back an average distance of 15 miles on a forty mile front.

This and another "push" on the Arras Front a little to the north of Amiens, in which our regiment took an active part, compelled the German army to retreat along the entire western front. The retreat developed into a rout and the Armistice was signed on the 11th of Nov. 1918, three months later.

Immediately prior to August 8th, the Canadian Division held a relatively quiet sectors of the front further north, when seldom were two of the four divisions in the front line at one time. The others would be resting or training in the back areas. Preparations for the coming offensive were made with the utmost secrecy. A feature was the entire Canadian Corps, complete with artillery, cavalry and ancillary services, was moved nearly 100 miles south without enemy intelligence knowing anything about it.

To deceive the Germans, several infantry regiments were purposely left behind to be withdrawn at the last moment. Their instructions wee to make sure that their presence in the trenches as known to the enemy. This was

accomplished by making repeated raids on the enemy trenches, and when ample identification would be left behind. Also, to conduct conversation in good Canadian accents in hopes that their voices would be heard by the enemy's microphones, which picked up sound transmitted through the earth. Other measures were taken in the back areas.

By different routes and various transportation, including train, bus and marches, the columns moved by night. By day, the men ate and slept in isolated farms and small villages and were never allowed outside. Towns were purposely avoided and conversation with the villagers prohibited.

The soldiers could'nt have told the French civilians much anyway, none had the slightest inkling as to where they were going, or what was coming off. As far as they knew, theirs was the only unit moving.

As the higher command had'nt taken them into its confidence, battalion and battery commanders knew no more about the move than the privates and gunners. Led throughout by an intelligence officer, each unit finally bivouacked in some previously designated wood. (our area was in the Villers Brettoneagh wood). No until then, only a few hours before the battle, did the unit commanders receive their operation orders.

Blankets, greatcoats and all unnecessary weight had been left behind at the last billet and there was little sleep. Fires were not permitted, no lights of any kind. Even smoking was taboo, Zero hour was at 4 a.m. and the night was spent making final preparations.

The French Army was on our right. Australians and British on the left. Dawn broke. The artillery barrage took enemy completely by surprise and the first infantry assault crumbled his front line positions. The second wave (our brigade the 6th) leap frogged through those engaged in the first attack and pressed forward to the second objective.

Our tanks (light and heavy) The light ones were call "whippet" engaged enemy gun positions and isolated points that resisted. Motor machine gun companies cleaned up pockets along the roadside. Our cavalry routed the enemy fleeing columns and low-flying planes strafed troop concentrations in his rear area.

It was a beautiful summer day, with the wheat ripening in the fields. It was a rare sight, too, for this was the first time throughout the entire war when all arms of the Canadian army were seen in action at the same time.

Prisoners by the hundreds commenced filing through our lines within a few hours after the first attack, and by nightfall the compounds were full. Advances up to 10 miles the first day wee reported by some units and one cavalry squadron—Lord Strathcona Horse—penetrated 20 miles behind the enemy lines.

Our horsedrawn artillery experienced difficulty keeping up with the infantry. When darkness brought a respite for the tired troops, it was difficult to ascertain where our forward positions actually were. The absence of any major counter-attack by the enemy proved that the enemy divisions were completely demoralized.

So swift was the advance that many German hospitals, complete with doctors and nurses and patients were captured; so were divisional headquarters (including the generals themselves) ammunition dumps, quartermaster stores and paymaster offices, with their money.

Two days' further fighting resulted in a net gain of 15 miles along a 40 mile front. (roughly the distance from Victoria to Sidney). The Higher Command considered that sufficient for the time being. The forward lines were straightened out, positions consolidated and the Canadian Corps withdrawn. It was left to the British to continue the attack and take advantage of the breakthru by the Canadians. The Germans used a considerable number of machine guns, and their fire was very low causing casualties to legs, and lower body. We could hear the whispering of the bullets around us.

In that one week's fighting the Canadian Corps alone captured 15,000 prisoners and over 2,000 guns and mortars. Machine-guns were too numerous to mention. Identification tags were fixed to cannon and mortars captured by the infantry units and many of them were shipped to the unit's home towns after the war. They are the war souvenirs which once decorated the streets of Victoria and Vancouver and other cities. But most have been since discarded, many to the scarp heap.

The Canadian Corps then moved north and on September 2nd took part in another great assault. This in the front of Arras. This is when the famous "Hindenberg Line", said by the German High Command to be impregnable, was crossed as it if was'nt there.

Cambrai, the Canal du Nord and Valenciences were captured in turn, and finally Mons, which the Canadians captured on Nov. 11 1918 (The 3rd Div) and a few hours later the Armistice was signed. At the time Mons was captured our regiment took the town of San Forien, and we established outposts ahead of the village. We were about 5 miles from Mons. The enemy was fighting a rearguard action to delay us a much as possible.

Often it is the accepted theory by some that battles are fought hand to hand, the advance towards the enemy, the clash of bayonets, and hand to hand struggle. This was true very much in the struggle between the States during the American Civil War. Also a few instances occurred during the opening phases of the war. Both sides awaited their opportunity to get the enemy out into the

open. This battle (Amiens) was one of those opportunities, but for only two days, and then both sides dug in again.

My personal experiences during this battle was fortunately of the "fire fight" type, the reason for this was action of the enemy. The opening phase was a heavy bombardment by thousands of guns heavy and light. The light guns (18 Pdr) were wheel to wheel. The opening bombardment commenced just after dawn, and we had to file thru these light guns in single file to get to where we had to line up for the battle. The guns were actually firing as we filed thru. The noise was deafening to say the least. A few yards to our right the Canadian Cavalry Brigade (Light Brigade) were formed by squadrons, and it was inspiring sight to witness.

The enemy were taken completed by surprise, and thousands surrendered to us as we advanced. Standing wheat hindered our advance, as it was more or less ripe. We could see where the enemy retreated by the paths they made thru the wheat. This battle gradually developed into a fire fight, that is we advanced, by fire and movement. We would run a few yards according to the nearness of the enemy, engage them by rifle and machine gun fire, then the enemy would rise and run to their rear, being followed by us, and so it went like this for about two days. Our Regt entered the town of Caix we search all the houses, captured quite a number of prisoners, and they I might add were quite willing to surrender. Raising their hands and shouting kamerad.

Occasionally the enemy would stand and fire at us at a distance roughly 200 yards then would run rapidly away, casting their packs and equipment as they ran. We overran hundreds of light and heavy guns, some of them had been spiked. Flanking movements wee often made so as to envelope some rockets of the enemy. Here and there I noticed some of the enemy machine guns had been chained to their guns, to prevent from running away. Here and there I noticed some of our light tanks (Whippets) had been destroyed by enemy fire probably at point blank range.

Cavalry horses, riderless, were running all over the battle field. The enemy had a predominance of machine guns (they always did thru out the war) Quite a number of our men were hit in the legs owing to the method of the enemy firing very low so as to bring us down. Sometimes when our platoon was lying down we could hear the whisper of the enemy bullets. I was afraid of being hit in the crotch or groin or my private parts, but we usually carried our entrenching tool in front hanging down over these parts when it was necessary, instead of at the back. We eventually came to a deep sunken road, and a most surprising met our eyes. Here was some kind of headquarters, and quite a considerable of the enemy were lined up for breakfast.

As I say our advance was a complete surprise, as witnessed a number of enemy headquarters were captured, complete with their commanding officers. No shots were fired at us, and they immediately raised their hands. Needless to say the enemy soup kitchens were raided by some of our men. This was around about 8 A.M. I forget to mention regarding the two towns we had captured, that these towns, Caix and Marce Caix, were completely devoid of civilians. The enemy had taken them with them, as it was now their practice right up to the end of the war.

On the second day we noticed that the enemy were using mostly machine guns now, hundreds of cavalry horses lay dead and wounded all across the front. The enemy were really on the run but as I have written regarding the advances, this type of fire slowed us up as we approached the large town of Rosieres. On reaching this town came to barbwire which was strung all across the front, we were now entering upon the old Somme battlefield of 1916.

During the two days advance to Rosieres we had had no meals due to the swiftness of our advance. We had captured a number of German canteens, and here we came across tons of biscuits and cans of honey, which we devoured with great gusto. Warnings were sent out to all troops not to drink from any wells or from captured wine or beer as it was rumoured that the enemy had poisoned them. This type of fighting was to the liking of the troops, as this battle was intended to make a break thru the enemies' lines and get them out into the open and to end once and for all the trench fighting that had been in operation since near the end of the first year 1914.

We were overloaded with souvenirs. I had a small canvas bag of coins. An officer's manicuring set, lots of postcards, a beautiful straight razor, which was popular in those days. But during the succeeding days I lost most of what I had or sold them to engage in poker games. Carrying souvenirs in our packs came rather weighty, what with the gear we had to pack on our backs.

Our Colonel Latta was wounded during the approach to Rosiers. Well I came thru that without a scratch, altho I admit there were a few close shaves, mostly by enemy machine gun fire, which was usually occurred when we rose up to advance gain and the enemy fire swept across our front.

At 4 a.m. the guns on the front opened up with a deafening roar, meanwhile we waited. After hour long bombardment, there was a lull, then the cavalry went forward in extended line by Regiments. It was an imposing sight to watch.

Eventually they were lost to sight in the mist. Our Bde went forward by regiments. Our regt. was in support of the 27th and 31st of the Bds. The ground was quite open. Our guns were now silent. The mist began to clear after we advanced about a mile. We came across dead cavalry horses, with their riders.

The Germans were using lots of machine guns. We came to the village of Caix, the inhabitants had been evacuated by the Germans. More horses were here and in the open country beyond. Some of our Infantry wee seen lying around. The Australians and the French wee advancing well on our flanks. We were keeping well up behind the Regt we were supporting, and saw what was going on. We passed thru Marcel Caix, this town was also deserted.

Next came a sunken road, we were now going fast. In this sunken road, which looked more like a canyon with its sides dotted with large holes, was a considerable number of Germans having their breakfast. Some put up a fight, they were all captured. Some officers were captured in their night attire. It was a complete surprise.

Some Australians partly mopped up a village but left some Germans in it, who fired on them when they had passed, and had to go back and finish the job finishing them up. The country was still open, dotted with trees. Here we found some of the Germans chained in the trees with their Machine Guns.

The German machine gun fire seemed very low, we could hear the bullets whispering near the ground, consequently a lot of our casualties were wounded in the legs. We found a quantity of wine in bottles, but was undrinkable due to poison in them. Some of our light Whippet tanks had been knocked but one I saw had its door open and the gunners had been burned by fire as it caught alight.

We captured a large Quarter Masters Stores, containing uniforms, food, medals (Iron Crosses) etc. Occasionally we had time to rip open German knapsacks which they had dropped in their hasty retreat. We were laden with souviners. They were on the run at last. The area was still strewn with our cavalry horses. Thousands of prisoners were captured here, and they were seen going to the rear in droves. The day was hot. Up ahead was the big town of Rosiers. Near there trenches appeared which had been dug way back in 1916. We reached the outskirts of the town, and came to barbed wire erected by the enemy. We had'nt suffered many casualties, so the work of stretcher bearers, was lightened. Here at Rosiers, was held by the enemy and finally we had to take cover by digging in. A hot fire was coming from the town, and was'nt safe to walk around.

Eventually the town was captured and the advance continued beyond it. It was here that our Col. Latta was wounded, and taken to the rear. Sgt Armstrong was awarded the Military Medal. We attended to the wounded. Our Brigade was eventually withdrawn and again went to the North but this time to Cambrai front, where another attack was to be launched. We pushed on to Cambrai, passing thru the city which was partially on fire. Here again the Germans were moving back under pressure. We held a party of Germans with us for awhile,

they followed us into some houses so as to escape the shells which were landing on the street outside. They gave us no trouble. We had to leave them there, and passed thru the town, again to open country. This was now Sept 1918. We reached a village called Iwy, no inhabitants here, but the windows were filled with fluttering flags which reminds me of the poem of Barbra Frietchie, who in the American Civil War hung out the American flag in defiance of the Confederate soldiers, who capture the town, but on this occasion the flags were fluttering in silent welcome to us. I climbed up the attic of one, took a flag down. I carried it for awhile, but it became too heavy and I finally discarded it.

Beyond this village were to canals that had to be crossed. We came against occasional M.G. fire from the enemy. The Germans had set a few bobby traps in the houses. A dead cat hung on a door, no one dare touch it for fear by cutting it down the house might blow up. We search all the houses, but found nothing.

During the advance here the Germans used chlorine gas in their shells, and one landed close by me I had no time to put on my respirator and consequently inhaled quite a bit of it. I lay on the ground choking for awhile, luckily the wind was'nt too strong at the time, and I finally was able to get up and go forward. It was only a small dose I had inhaled, but it was sufficient to drop me for awhile.

This gas with Phosgene can be deadly to the lungs if taken in sufficient quantities. For day after I could feel a contraction in my throat. Coming to the Canal de Escaut there was no way of crossing, the canal was lined with our troops, trying to protect themselves from the machine gun fire issuing from a village near by. It was too deep, for men with equipment, until one man who we called Irish found a cork float somewhere (same as they do in the movies) which was used to cross. He obtained this running a gauntlet of M.G. fire. He was awarded the Military Medal, being presented to him at our Xmas dinner in Germany

The Germans were well on the run by now, his rearguard gave the troops some trouble here and there. Most of the villages we came to were deserted. The Germans were taking the civilians with them, for what purpose we did not know. At the Canal du Nord, Col. Tobin the original Col of the Regt, rejoined us. The ground was becoming quite wet, and large parts of it were inundated by the enemy to slow us up.

This action at Amiens reminded me of the poem "Barbara Frechie" who during the American Civil War hung out the Northern Flag in defiance of the Confederate soldiers who had captured the town of Fredericks, daring them to desicrate it. But on this occasion the flags were fluttering in silent welcome to us. By platoons and sections we went thru the town from house to house,

looking for any signs of the enemy. I climbed up to the attic of a house and took down one of the flags and put it in my knapsack. I carried it for awhile, but finally had to discard it, as it was too heavy.

The enemy had taken the population with him. Passing thru we headed for a canal. On a door of a house in that town I noticed a cat had been nailed to it. Why! This was the town of Ewy.

The country was rather open here, and we were able to move in open order platoons. The enemy occasionally sent over gas shells containing phosgene or chlorine gas. One of these shells landed quite close to me and it came over so fast that I did not have time to don my gas masks, and consequently breathed in quite a bit of the gas issuing from the shell. Gas shells do not explode like shells. They make a singing noise, and when they hit the ground the gases are released.

As I say, when the shell landed the wind blew it towards me and I inhaled some of it. I felt a constriction in my throat, and was unable to breathe properly. I lay on the ground gasping, and had presence of mind to roll away from it. Phosgene gas taken in fairly good quantities can cause paralyses and finally death. Fortunately I did not consume this gas to any great extent, and after awhile was able to continue. Other men also near by inhaled some of the gas.

The first canal we reached was the Canal de Escaut. Near by was a village from which came enemy M.G. fire. We lay extended along the bank of the canal, trying to escape from this enemy fire. We had to get across somehow but had no means to cross. Some of the men were able to swim across, and lined the opposite bank to protect the remainder as they crossed. A Cpl nicknamed "Irish" suddenly appeared with some sort of raft, Lord's no where he got it from. Meanwhile the other coys were doing likewise, getting across as best they could. We eventually got across, all the while being peppered by M.G. fire. "Irish" was awarded the "Military Medal" at the Xmas dinner we had on arrival in Germany.

The enemy were on the run on our front and probably all along the line. They were fighting a rear guard action. The villages we came to were deserted, the enemy taking the inhabitants with them. The Lord knows why.

The country now was quite open. On reaching the Canal du Nord, Col. Tobin the Regiment's original colonel rejoined the Regt. The ground for miles was being inundated by the enemy to slow up the Canadians and British. In some places over a foot deep, and consequently our feet were continuously wet. During the retreat the enemy were using lots of machine guns, and occasionally a few field guns.

We eventually reached the large city of Valenciennes. As we entered it the enemy were leaving it at the other. The inhabitants were streaming out from

their cellars, shouting and waving their arms. They sure were a happy crowd. Continuing on, we came to the village of San San Forien, which was about 5 miles from Mons. Before reaching this village we had occasion to pass thru a sunken road on the banks of which were dead Canadians and Germans.

No more gun fire could be heard, only machine gun and rifle fire ahead. All the civilians had come out into the street as we entered Valenciences. There was great rejoicing on all sides. We continued thru the city, when we finally reached the village of San San Forien. Here we established outposts, with rumours of an armistice was on the way.

The villagers were dancing in the street. On approaching this village we saw some Canadians lying dead on the banks of a gully with German dead on the other side. Finally an Armistice was proclaimed at 11 o'clock of the 11th of Nov 1918. As we lay in outposts on the edge of this village, some signalers went forward to some houses in amongst some trees and came back saying that there were a few enemy near by.

On the evening of the twelfth of Nov, there came in sight on the main road a number of men who were tottering along, some were hardly able to stand. They were British soldiers, who had released themselves from a German prison camp near by. They were in terrible shape. Some of them died that night and we buried them in the churchyard.

After the armistice had been signed all the 2nd Div, with the exception of troops on outposts held a triumphal parade past the Mayor of Mons and Gen Currie. On conclusion of this our Bde. Marched on to Namur, and was billeted in the village of Flawinne. We stayed in the school house for about two weeks, and then together with the rest of the 2nd Division we continued on our march to the Rhine.

Our route to the Rhine lay thru mountainous country, which was the Ardennes country of Belgium. Here we saw signs of the hasty retreat of the German Army, the valleys were littered with their helmets and equipment.

It began to snow hard, crossing finally thru Belgium and coming to the German border. Entering a German village, and snowing hard we stopped, roused out the inhabitants, and ordered them to bring all their firearms and lay them on their doorsteps. We collected quite a considerable amount of rifles of vintages, from blunderbusses to the latest style.

My section was posted to a house where an old man and his wife with their son and daughter lived. We sat in the kitchen. We only knew a few words of German and managed to make them understand that they wee to go to bed and give us some food before then went. They were really frightened. Well they would not hear of it, and indicated to us to use their beds.

Stayed here a few days and continued into Germany. Still snowing most of the way. Finally we came to a large City of Munsterhausen or Munstereifel which had a university. We noticed some of the youths had saber cuts on their faces. Dueling was a favorite sport with these students before the war.

Some of us went into a store to look around and purchased some mouth organs without paying for them. Orders had been issued to all Commanding Officers that German civilian were to raise their hats to Officers. We were marching along and a German and his son passed us in a farm cart, he failed to raise his hat when he passed the Colonel. The Colonel let out a roar, "Take that fellows hat off for him". Some of the lads rushed to the cart pulled the fellows hats off and threw them on the road. A great roar went up from the troops over this episode. This happened quite a number of times, which brightened the troops up somewhat during the long march to the Rhine.

We noticed a few unarmed German soldiers here in the towns. We finally reached the big city of Bonn on the Rhine. Our Regt. was billeted in the big German barracks. I came across a German cress helmet complete with spike.

We stayed in Bonn about two weeks, and then crossed over to the other side to a village by name Ober Cassel. It was now about the 1st week of December 1916, we were destined to spend the Xmas here. The German army had by now taken up positions the other side of the Rhine about 5 miles away. On our side we carried out patrols day and night to prevent infiltration by them and German civilians. The civilians made frequent attempts to cross over and usually our guard rooms were full of them. We eventually let them go with a warning. Civilians were to be in their houses by 9:00 Pm. We in the meantime had collected all manner of fire arms from the houses. Being friendly with the Germans was prohibited, but after a month of this the troops gradually forgot this order and when the opportunity occurred visited them late at night.

Another and I on our patrol, came up from the Rhine and visited a family name Scmidt who lived on a side street behind the main one where our H.Qrs were. They made coffee for us and we sat around talking to their daughter Kunigunder.

Incidently she made the proposal of marriage, but told her it was no go, and would'nt work out in the long run. Later we visited an old mansion where we sat and listened to Bach, Beethoven, and other old time music masters. His son played the violin, and the old chap the piano. We passed many a quiet evening with them. We enjoyed a very nice Xmas here.

In January 1919 there were rumours that we were going back to France, and when the Germans knew about it they became rather worried whether the French would relieve us. February arrived, and we prepared to move out. My leave came thru again before we did however. I traveled up to Colougne and

then across the border to south France and thence to England, where I spent an enjoyable time seeing London, Woolwich the place of my birth.

Leaving England for France to rejoin my regiment, who in the meantime had moved back to Flawinne, near Namur. Here we were billeted in the Belgium houses.

It seemed by what we were told by one woman, that the Germans had sent all the men to the salt mines in Saxony, and one young lady said that we was expecting your fiancé to return from there very shortly.

We enjoyed our stay in Germany, and strange to say that the Germans on the whole were very nice, in fact I rather took to them than I or we did the Belgiums. March arrived and our brigade prepared to leave for the south to LaHavre in preparation for return to England.

One thing interesting thing happened on our way to Germany, and that after we had passed the large Belgium town of Hoye, we had the occasion to stop (that is our train returning from leave) near a long train with the YWCA markings on the cars. We sent scouts out to see everything was clear then we broke the seals on some of the cars and looted them of fruit, cans of fruit, buiscuts, cigarettes, and other items we had not seen in years. Strange to say our troops were not suspected as far as we knew.

That was the first time we ever were able to receive refreshments from the YMCA free, and needless to say we enjoyed every morsel of it.

Reaching Havre we engaged in recreational activities until the day finally arrived for our departure for England.

Our Regiment was the first to leave. We arrived at a camp near the town of ????? where we bedded down to await our return to Canada. Riots were occurring in some of the Canadian Camps especially one in Wales, where shooting occurred.

It was dreary in these camps nothing to do but wander around the country. Then one rainy night one other Regt of our brigade arrived in camp. The cooks were roused out to make them sort of meal. It seemed this unit rather disliked what the cooks served up, and a riot started. They started with the cookhouse and other buildings, until it began to get serious. Our Regt. was ordered out with fixed bayonets to round them up, majority of our unit refused and made off into the hills. The riot was eventually got under control. The High Command to keep the troops quiet granted leave every few days to London.

End of April arrived and we moved to Southhampton and boarded Olympic and headed for Canada. We enjoyed good meals aboard. Landed in Canada in May and arrived in Victoria 24th of May 1919. At Vancouver Capt. Abbott was there with others to greet us, some we had not seen since the Battle of Lens in 1917.

Proceeded to Willows Camp where we received our discharge from the army. From the time I had joined the regiment till my discharge amounted 4 years 288 days. Trying to settle down to civil life was the hardest part of all. I became restless, suffered from headaches frequently. The Veteran's Association finally caught up to me and ordered me to the Veterans ward at the St. Joseph's Hospital, where I remained for quite a few days and then discharged.

I applied for an art course then and I attended art school at the Shaw School of art for a time and was sent to the Toronto School of Art to undertake a course in Commercial Designing. After finishing I returned to Victoria, but was unable to get a position. Now it was destined at the beginning that I was to take up a career in the Army. (Father's urging) So I decided to follow in his footsteps so to speak.

1921 Jan. The Canadian Army had now been re-organized, with three Infantry Regts and two Cavalry Regts.

The Royal Canadian Regiment (Eastern Canada)
The 22nd (Van Doos) French Canadian - Quebec
The P.P.C.L.I. 1st Battalion Western Canada

Cavalry

The Lord's Strathcona Horse (With horses)
Royal Canadian Dragoons (With horses)

P.P.C.L.I. H.Q at Winnipeg, with One Company at London Ontario and one at Winnipeg. All regiments were not up to strength. The barracks at London were burnt down and that Coy moved to Victoria and I joined them at Work Point Barracks.

Our Coy strength was about 120. Col. Codville was O.C., C.S.M. Ryan was the Sgt. Major. I attended an N.C.O's course for six weeks, and received a L/Cpl stripe for my endeavors. So that was a start.

I enjoyed the army life, it was the natural life that I should live, and I made every endeavor to make a go of it. Took up athletics and rifle shooting. Every June we went to Heals Camp at Saanich and fired our musketry course.

In our yearly sports, I took part as much as I was able, and turned out to be quite a sprinter. I sill have a cigarette ash tray with the Regt'l badge on it that I won in 1923. Here in one event I sprinted a hundred yds in a little over 10 ½ seconds. 1924 at heals in June I again suffered a violent headaches and became blind, until after repeated applications of hot sand over my head I recovered.

At the beginning of 1924, I was awarded my second stripe and was now a corporal. The latter part of 1924 the economical conditions was getting very bad and a recession was in the making. The Army H.Qs at Ottawa sent out orders to all regiments to reduce their strength. A large majority of them were veterans of the war. The troops had the option of voluntary discharge or compulsory discharge. We lost 505. I decided to stay on if I could.

Six months later I was promoted to Sergeant. I was gradually making headway, slow but sure 1926 passed but now after finishing musketry at Heals I was sent to Calgary in 1927 to take "A" Wing. This covered, rifle, Gas, Range Taking, revolver, elementary tactics and bayonet trng. I passed with good marks.

Going back to April 1923, my Father died, and I was able to arrange a military funeral by members of the P.P.C.L.I. He was buried at Ross Bay Cemetery. Sgt. J Watson DCM. MM. was in charge and Cpl Husselton played the Last Post. I knew Dad would have been very happy to have known that. Later my Mother and the girls moved to San Francisco and brother Jack went with them. Brother Frank was back East on the ships somewhere.

The summer of 1929 saw me again in Sarcee Camp South of Calgary engaged in a Machine Gun Course called the "B" Wing. Here I passed with good marks. Summer of 1931 I attended "C" Wing which consisted mastering war gases, passed with honours. There were no more courses to attend, this was it. Finally in 1934 I was posted to the Instructional Cadet of the Regt. Our duties were to train the Militia Units who were scattered over the Province. We received promotion every three years. 1934 I was presented with the Long Service and Good Conduct medal for 18 yrs service.

Infinite

And when God, who sees all and who wishes to save us,
Upsets our designs, we stupidly complain against Him,
We accuse His Providence. We do not comprehend that in
Punishing us, in overturning our plans and causing us
Suffering, he is doing all this to deliver us, to open,
The Infinite to us.

War

I do abhor, and yet how sweet,
The sound along the marching street.
Of drum and fife and I forget,
Broken old mothers, and the whole dark butchering without a soul.

"Bruno"

Our Regimental Mascot
He finally died in a London Zoo.

Thoughts

And sometimes by the sea's relentless verge I'll take my stand,
Where the pounding waves surge against the land.
By day the cliffs, the fields, the varying scene, with joy my soul shall fill,
By night the moon and stars serene shall bless me still.

An Old Country Ballad

A Tall stalwart Lancer lay dying,
And as on his deathbed he lay –he lay.
To his friends who around him were sighing,
These last dying words he did say:

Chorus:
Wrap me up in my old stable-jacket,
And say a poor Buffer lies low—lies low.
Get six stalwart Lancers to carry me,
With steps that are mournful and slow.

Then get you two little white tombstones,
Set one at my head and my toe.
And get a you a jack-knife and scratch thee,
"Here lies a poor Buffer below".

Then get you six brandies and sodas,
And set them all out in a row,
And get you six jolly good fellows,
To Drink to this Buffer below.

Oh had I the wings of a little dove,
Far far away would I fly.
Back to the arms of my true love,
There would I lay me and die.

And then in the hush of the twilight,
When the soft winds are whispering low.
The stars will look down with the bright light,
And pity this Buffer below.

Ypres

Sing me to sleep where the bullets fall,
Let me forget the world and all.
Damp is my dugout, cold are my feet,
Nothing but bully and biscuit to eat.
Sing me to sleep where bombs explode,
And shrapnel shells are a'la Mode.
Over the trenches helmets you find,
Corpses in front of you and corpses behind.

Far, far from Ypres I long to be,

Where German snipers cannot get me.
Think of me crouching where the worms creep,
Waiting for someone to sing me to sleep.

Sing me to sleep in some old shed,
Where the rats are running around my head.
Laying down on my waterproof,
Watching the rain drops thru' the roof.
Sing me to sleep where bombs explodes and shrapnel shells are a la' mode,
Dreaming of home and nights in the east,
Somebody's overshoes on my chest.

Far, far from Ypres, I long to be,
Where German snipers cannot shoot me.
Think of me crouching where the worms creep,
Waiting for the Sgt. to sing me to sleep.

1st World War Songs

I wander on as in a dream,
Where I can hear the bullets scream,
As they go whistling thru' the trees,
The mud up almost to my knees,
In the trench where I am lying,
You can hear the screaming dying,
And the shells as they whistle overhead,
I care not for the stars that shine,
I only want that you me mine,
I only want a blighty, a blighty and its home for mine.

There's a light still burning in the window
In the window of the house upon the hill,
And the light will burn and the heart will yearn
And it always will 'till I return.
And I have only one mother and I know she's waiting still,
And she'll always keep the light burning in the window,
Of the house upon the hill.

17. 1919 --------1939

Peace Time Soldiering The Honourable Profession of Arms.

On returning to Canada after serving overseas from 1915 to 1919 we were discharged from the Canadian Expeditionary Force back to Civvy Street. Most of us having worn the khaki uniform for so many years were rather felt out on a limb so to speak. We had difficulty adjusting ourselves to civilian life. There really was nothing to do in the way of jobs. I admit that felt rather lost but had it in my innermost thoughts to reenlist in the army again. I felt that the life of a soldier was to me the ultimate. My Father had been a soldier for many years in the British Army, had served in India, Africa and North West Frontier of India near Afganistan. His family had all been soldiers. So I guess it was "in the blood" so to speak.

I had at the age of fourteen enlisted in the Gordon Highlanders and thence to the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First War. I liked the life, altho it was rather during the war. The P.P.C.L.I. was stationed at Winnipeg, Man. after the war and it was appealing for recruits, as the Permanent Forces had been reorganized after the war and that regiment was one of the units selected with the R.C.R.s and the 22nd Regt (French Canadians)

"B" Coy had been moved to Esquimalt and was stationed at Work Point Bks, so there with another chap by name of Robinson, I enlisted in the P.P.C.L.I. Jan 25, 1921. I thought the infantry was the only unit to serve in. My Father encouraged me into soldiering and so the die was caste, and a step that for me was most gratifying, which culminated eventually in serving a total of thirty one years in the service of my country.

So on that day Robinson and I reported to the orderly room where we were introduced to the Coy. Sgt. Major Teddy Ryan, an Irishman of the old school. He asked us if we had served overseas in the late war, and we answered that we had. He looked pleased, and we were enlisted on the spot.

After we had drawn our uniforms and equipment we again reported at the orderly room for duty. Ryan looked at me and then for me to report to the Officer's Mess to a Capt. Woods. I made my way the Mess and finally found the officer. He asked me my name and what regiment I had served in during the war, he said that he did'nt want me as his servant, but that I was to report to the C.S.M. and to be a candidate for the next N.C.O's course.

Consequently a few weeks later I with Robinson and a number of others undertook a course in musketry, drill, map reading, military law and administration, etc. This lasted for six weeks, which I enjoyed immencely, as this activity was to my liking and envisaged myself as a junior officer or

something like that. We eventually and were promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal Jan 4, 1922.

I was now a section commander, which consisted of seven men, one of them was the light machine gunner (Lewis gun). We had had preliminary training as section commander duties were to train them in drill, small arms, and elementary military law as regards drunkenness, absent without leave, smartness in dress and military decorum. An N.C.O. when off duty was considered as on duty at all times whether in barracks or on leave in town. We were forbidden to WALK OUT with men or of a higher rank, this was to prevent being familiar with others. Familiarity breeds contempt in the military sense as it were. It was forbidden to carry parcels or to lounge around street corners, the only thing we were to carry was the swagger cane.

My section was No 2 Section of No 5 Platoon of "B" Coy. P.P.C.L.I. We slept in a barrack room which held two platoons. Section Cmdrs slept in the corner under the eye of their sections. The Platoon Cmdrs Sgts slept just outside the door in a cubicle and was responsible for the discipline of their platoons in barracks. My Pl. Sgt. was Sgt. J. Watson DCM. MM. The majority of our coy were veterans of the first world war. So we all had a lot in common, and developed a comradeship of the barracks. Furniture of the barrack consisted of a cot for each man, a barrack room box, placed at the foot on a shelf at the head of the cot held a pair of boots, spare uniform, and behind the head of the cot was a rifle (Lee Enfield) On pegs also held our equipment. (Web) including a gas mask in a haversack.

Every Saturday morning we scrubbed the floor, and tidied up ready for C.Os inspection. Our Coy. was commanded by Lt. Col. B. Codville, an ex cavalry officer of the Royal Canadian Dragoons. A fine soldier and strict disciplinarian. The Coy. Sgt Mjr. Was "Teddy" Ryan also a veteran, and an excellent drill master. Our platoon comdr. was Lieut "Smoky" Woods. The other officers of the coy were, Capt. "Pinky" Carvosso who lost an eye at battle of the Somme. another was Capt "Wingy" MacIntosh who had lost an arm in the war.

Daily routine

Revielle (summertime) 5.30. (Wintertime 6.30) Troops were summoned to breakfast at an hour later after Revielle. The bugler sounded the cookhouse call. The first call was the "Pick'em up, "Pick em up", fifteen minutes before the final call called "Cookhouse". After breakfast, we prepared ourselves for the days duties. The first call was the "Sick Parade" men who felt that way paraded under the Orderly Cpl. and marched to the hospital. The half hour dress for

parade was sounded at eight o'clock, later the quarter hour call was sounded to all that they had 15 mins to get ready to fall in. On the call for "Fall in" the coy fell by Secs and platoons between the barrack block under the Cou.Sgt.Mjr.

The Coy was inspected by the Coy Cdr, after a preliminary inspection by the Pl Cdr. Each platoon then marched off to a selected area for drill, small arms training, or whatever had been planned for them. By the secs cmdrs. At about 10 AM the bugler sounded the Orderly Room call, men charged with offences or requested an interview with Coy.Cdr. was paraded by the C.S.M. to be interviewed by the C.O.

Sometime during day the bugler sounded the "Defaulter" call whereat men who had been sentenced to certain infractions of military duty were paraded by the Ord.Cpl and carried out fatigues, such as cleaning the area and other such tasks as the Cpl could find for them to do. At twelve o'clock, platoons were dismissed and waited for the dinner call. This proceedure was the same as for breakfast. After dinner the Coy again paraded as per bugle calls for the morning parade. Parades were dismissed at 4:30 P.M. all weapons were stored away, and we waited for the supper call at 5:00 P.M.

Men who had been granted passes to Last Post 10 PM, proceed to town, otherwise everybody (Except Sgts) were to be in barracks and standing by their cots at 9;30 PM whereat the "First Post" was sounded and the roll was called by the Ord. Cpl. or Ord. Sgt. Fifteen minutes after the first post was called the bugler sounded the "Last Post' and all men who were in barracks were in bed, waiting the "Light Out" to be sounded whereat all lights were to be extinguished, and silence reigned thru out the barracks.

Bugle Calls (Bugles in the Morning hand written
(Bugles in the Afternoon
(Bugles at Night.

First call (morning) Revielle
Second " " Sick call
Third " " Breakfast (two calls here as stated before) for all meals
Fourth " " Half hour dress for parade..
Fifth " " Quarter hour dress for parade.
Sixth " " Fall in
Seventh " " Orderly Sgt. when requested by CSM.
Eighth " " Orderly Cpl. " " "
Officers Call when requested by the C.O. for all officers to attend the C.O.
Ninth " "Orderly Room. For the attendance of men charged with an Offence.

Tenth " " Dinner call (Two calls as for breakfast)
Eleventh " Afternoon Half hour dress for parade.
Twelfth " " Quarter hour dress for parade.
13th " " Fall in.
14th " " Defaulters Call, For men charged and to carry out fatigues.
15th " " Supper call. Two calls here as for other meals.
16th " Evening Retreat. Here the Flag was lowered at the mast on the Sunset Sunset square. All men to stand at attention within hearing distance.
17th " Evening Fire Piquet Call. Fire Piquet will fall in by the Ord. Sgt. and told their duties in case of fire.
18th " Evening (Night) First Post.
19th " " " Last Post
20th " " " Lights Out.

There is another call by the bugler and that is the "Alarm". This is sounded in case of disturbance at night or day to arouse the troops, who will fall in ready to meet any emergency that may occur.

If the day's duties were to be carried outside such as Coy Drill etc. and the C.O. in his wisdom will order the "No Parade today" call to be sounded. But if the troops show their enthusiasm by cheering, etc, etc, the call is cancelled and the troops will fall in and carry on.

So it is obvious that the bugler certainly earns his army pay. We had two Buglers L/cpl. H. Hall. And a J. Hussleton
Other duties by the Coy, at Work Point Bks. were as follows:

Quarter Guard at the Main Gate.

This was a 24 hr guard performed daily by a guard consisting of a Sgt. Cpl. and six men, who man the Guard at the Main Gate for the protection of the garrison. Also a bugler. This guard mounts at 10'00 AM every morning. The sentry marches smartly up and down the sidewalk outside the guard room. He is relieved every two hours. Inside the guard house are cells to house men or anybody who is arrested and stay there until their case is disposed of.

Also there is a fire picquet on 24hr notice. They are confined to barracks during their tour of duty.

<u>Wet Canteen</u>

A cpl or L/cpl is detailed to be present at the wet canteen during its opening hours usually from 6PM until First Post. He is there to maintain discipline, and to bar anyone who is on the Coy blacklist.

Gambling

Gambling in the barrack rooms was strictly taboo for all ranks, but usually friendly penny anti game was in progress on paynights.

Physical Training

This was usually performed one half hour before breakfast.
Sometimes a Coy smoker was held about once a month. Beer was served at this function. Also a Coy or Garrison dance was held at the Fivescourt. This function was compulsory for all personnel.

Saluting

This was strictly enforced. If any officer caught the eye of any other rank regardless of the distance, a salute was forthcoming by either side.

Parade Ground

The parade ground was strictly sacrosanct. No one on pain of disciplinary action action would cross the parade ground during the day or night.

Pets

In barracks pets were not allowed, altho on one or two occasions I have seen pets of some sought or our barrack room. Pte Warburton (character) had the occasion to bring in a small monkey, and it caused chaos, also he took it into the wet canteen and caused an uproar, this happened during my tour of duty as canteen Cpl. On another occasion, someone put a grass snake in the beer of another man whereupon it developed into a free for all between friends and foe.

Out of bounds

Sometimes men who had no pass to go outside the bounds of the barracks, climbed over the fence, this was called breaking out of barracks, and if he return by the same route he was also charged with breaking into barracks.

Passes

Sgts were the only N.C.Os who were allowed permanent passes, that is he could be absent legally from after duty to Reveille. All other ranks were allowed out without a pass from after duty till First Post, after that they would be charged with being absent. If a pass was required by them they request it from the orderly Sgt and issued with a paper pass which had to be surrendered at the Main Gate on returning.

Civilian Clothes

Sgts and above were allowed to wear mufto, other ranks with a special permission

Quarter-Master's inspection

Periodically an inspection was held to ensure that all ranks were in possession of the regulation clothing issued to them. This was held in the barracks rooms. A diagram was made showing how the kit was to be laid out on the cots. Each item was carefully inspected. The barracks box was also inspected to see that no unauthorized were in them, except personal items.
If any article was missing from the regular issuee the man was held responsible for it the cost of it was deducted from his pay.
Items for issue were as follows.
Rifle, and bayonet and scabbard. Inside the rifle butt was the pulltru and oil bottle. One cap. Boots 2 pr. (in good repair) two tunics one of summer issue. Puttees 2 pr. Socks two pair or more if desired. Underwear two suits. (Summer and winter) Hold all containing toothbrush. Razor with shaving brush, comb and brush and clothes brush. Button stick and khaki paster. Pt. shoes with white blanco. Identification discs (two) Gas mask. Swagger cane. Full set of equipment.

The Barracks Room

These barracks were built of red brick by the British Royal Engineers in 1890. During out time we were quartered there, they consisted of a pot bellied stove

for cooking, a sixfoot wooden table, with sixfoot wooden benches. No chairs. Electric lights. At one end was a wall cupboard for sundries. Just outside the door was a raised platform on which rested a galvanized tub for the use of the troops during night, and which was emptied by the room orderly. A washroom was available for ablution purposes. Three rooms were available for "B" Coy. P.P.C.L.I. and a lower room was the mess hall. Incidently I had a flair for artistic, and I drew a picture of the Princess Patricia, and had it framed and hung in the mess hall over the door. It now is in the Regimental Museum at Calgary.

Recreation

There were not any facilities for the troops apart from the canteen. I became interesting in musketry, and use to practicing trigger pressure, and the study of the theory of rifle fire. Also practicing platoon drill using matches to represent the sections on the table. Most of the men spent the evening in the wet canteen but this form of amusement did'nt interest me. Some evenings I and another trooper went for a three mile run at night.

Musketry Course (Yearly)

Beginning of June we secured our barrack rooms, and departed in full marching order for Heals Camp way, way in Saanich. It was a march of about ten miles along a dusty unpaved road. We'd sing song along the way, and two or three of the men who had been buglers sometime during army career, played marches. Here on reaching the camp site erected bell tents, usually six men to a tent. The Sgt. and W.Os had their own lines.

Here we fired our yearly musketry course, from 100 yds to 600 yds. I use to enjoy this and took great interest in rifle shooting, eventually after a few years I became a sharpshooter, with the rifle and the light machine gun. On the completion of the course we engaged in tactical schemes around the area. Weekends some of us walked to Durrance Lake to fish for white trout, or climbed up the hills near by to Heals Lake to swim.

We usually held a Coy sports day, and I excelled in running and I and Pte Loiner C. ran the hundreds yards on 10 ½ second, I still have the prize offered, a cigarette ash try with the regimental badge fixed on it. I was proud of that.

End of June we returned to Barracks, and prepared to proceed to the Sarcee Camp at south of Calgary, where the district Small Arms school was established. Sometimes the rest of the regiment stationed at Winnipeg came here for combined exercises on the Indian Reservation to the south.

We usually spent a month of July here before returning to Victoria and to proceed for fourteen days leave.

Sept 1921

The rest of the year (1921) was spent in duties, instruction, and other military duties.

Other Arms at Work Point Barracks

Besides "B" Coy, P.P.C.L.I. were the following units. P.P.C.L.I. Approx strength 170 all ranks.
A Battery of Artillery
A Coy of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps.
The Royal Canadian Army Pay Corps
The Medical Section.
The Administration Corps for the Garrison.
The Royal Canadian Crops of Engineers.
We usually a welcome break came once a year on the 24th of May, Victoria Day. This consisted of a parade bands, floats, marching men, cadets, dogs, horses and of course "B" Coy. P.P.C.L.I. We had no dress uniforms, just plain khaki uniforms. The night before was spent by all ranks in polishing our brass, pressing the uniforms to make a good show in the parade. We had no band, the Regimental band was at Winnipeg.

We always received a good reception as we made our way along the march route in the parade.

Xmas

This was one occasion that troops looked forward to. I being of an artistic mind was always selected to decorate the mess hall. On this occasion the officers served the dinner to the troops. This was usually followed by a few days leave for all ranks. So really ended the years activities, and the New Year brought in the month by month training and duties that affected the life of men in the armed forces.

So the year 1921 passed away, and with it the though by me that as the months passed I would endeavor to improve my image in this man's army, make my way to a goal that I desired, towards promotion in the service and life that I had become devoted come what may.

Promotion

Eventually the came for the next step in promotion that I had diligently worked for thru constant study, of the rudiments that made up for a complete life so desired. I was eventually promoted to the rank of Corporal in Sep 20, 1922. Promotion was very slow, as the Strength of the Infantry was kept down to a minimum due to lack of funds provided for the armed forces. My next step was to prepare myself for First Class certificate of Education. This I was prepared to do as the facilities were available in the Service.

To secure this certificate I had to study, Mathematics, literature, Military geography and History and finally administration and organization.

Needless to say that after weeks of study and a few mental headaches, I was finally to sit for the examination.

I encountered a few difficulties with the papers, but eventually came thru with fairly high marks. I was issued with the desired certificate, which I now have in my possession issued by the Military Department of Education. A year later I was promoted to the exalted rank of Sgt. Things were beginning to look towards the horizon that I had set myself for.

Next came the depression that seem to foul up the country, what with unemployment in civil life, the Armed Forces were cut down to a minimum. The Xmas of 1929 I had a recruit squad of about 25 men, and was nearing the time that I would pass them as trained soldiers, but lo and behold they were discharged.

In the meantime thru the years 1925 to 1927 I had passed with flying colours different course at the Canadian Small Arms School at Sarcee, Alberta.

Eventually I became an Instructor at the Small Arms School instructing in the Rifle M.Gs. Section leading etc, to the Militia Units attending at the Summer Schools.

Eventually in 1930 I was promoted to the rank of Sgt. Instructor at Work Point School of Infantry under St. Mjr. From now on I was assured continued promotion every three years.

I was now in possession of the following certificates of military learning.

First	Class	Certificate	of Education.	
"	"	"	of Infantry	("A" Wing)
"	"	"	of Machine Gunnery	("B" Wing)
"	"	"	of War Gases	("C" Wing)

By Mar 1, 1935 I was promoted to the rank of Sgt. Mjr. Instructor with the initials after my name (I.C.) Instructional Cadre, and was posted on detached duty from the regiment. I was now on my way. During the interim I

had been presented with the Long Service and good Conduct Medal, which was awarded to all after serving 18 years of efficient service.
People on the Instruction Cadre had the job of instructing the Militia besides their own troops in military lore. Some of my tours off duty with the Non Permanent Active Militia or Saturday Night Soldiers as they were sometimes called in derision. But they really were our bread and butter. Some of the units really thought they had the complete manner in things military, and we had to set them straight.

A Highland regiment that I was attached to insisted that they train some of their platoons on specialized training in anticipation of the General Officer's Inspection. I suggested that the best way was not to select certain platoons for the certain activities such as bayonet training. They all had to know the particular subject, as the General would select what he thought he would like to see carry out a certain activity.
No, they would not take our advice. Subsequently when the night came for the inspection of the unit by Gen. Ashton, the C.O. of the unit asked the Gen. to watch the certain platoon in bayonet training, but was surprised by the Gen. selecting a platoon himself. Consequently the platoon selected was unable to carry out the action to the satisfaction of the Gen.

Also he insisted on a certain Coy, to carry out coy drill. The coy was set in motion down the drillhall, and when it came for the coy, to change direction it was unable to perform the movement. Anyway this went most of the evening and from point of observation I watched it with frustration and muttering to myself "I told you so".

Another time I was sent out to an outlying Coy of the same unit. It was during the winter. I enetered to Community Hall where they did their training during the Winter months. On entering the hall it was partially darkness, I sat down and decided to wait for someone to turn up. Eventually the lights were turned on and a few man in civilian clothes entered and sat down. I still decided to wait to see what was to occur. Eventually a few more turned up. I walked over to them and enquired of them who they were. We conversed for a while and then I asked where the equipment was, and some went over and came back with alight machine gun. After handling it the damn fell apart. By this time I was beginning to feel like giving up the ghost and asked what they did during winter months, and one of them said that their C.O. taught them to dance the highland dances and other things. "It was not the reason why, but do and die, into the jaws of death road the six hundred".

The winter of 1934, I and Lt. Wiswell proceeded to Cranbrook B.C. to look into the affairs of the Rocky Mountain Rangers. It was in November. We were to hold a Military School of Part I and II twice a week. We registered at a

hotel and settled down. During the course we decided one night to look into the affairs of the unit' orderly room. We proceeded to delve into papers, enlistment papers etc. We found that they failed to destroy papers of men who were no longer members of the Regiment, so we pulled them, by the time we had completed our search the strength of the unit had been depleted considerably. And so it goes. But I must say they most units were doing very well. We had trained a considerable number of their officers and men at the different schools, Small arms and others. Quite often during travels around western Canada, I had recognized many of the officers and men who had passed thru our different schools of instruction. On the whole they were a very enthusiastic lot. And on the whole there was a mutual feeling of friendship and cooperation, as during certain periods of peacetime training we all felt frustrated by the lack of funds and equipment.

1935 arrived and with it my promotion to the rank of Quarter Master Sgt. Instructor. And in the Month of Nov of the same year was transferred to Calgary to relieve QMSI S. Spiers. There was a blizzard raging on my arrival in Calgary, and proceeded to the nearest hotel across the street from the station. In the days following I got established in the town, and reported for duty at H.Qrs in the Post Officer building in Town. There I found QMSI S Wilson and Sgt "Franco" Baker. Also of the P.P.C.L.I. I had met them before at the Small Arms Schools. Baker was the P.T.I. (Physical Trainer at the University) Slim Wilson was attached to the Calgary Regt and I was eventually attached to the Calgary Highlanders. Here I felt at home with this unit as I had previously attached to other Highlander units. I also had began my military life with a Highland Regiment.

I reported to the C.O. of this unit on a Drill night (Friday) and reported to him who I was. He remarked that he had heard of me sometime before and welcomed me to the Regt. It was a fairly good unit. I was acquainted with a majority of the Officers and men, so did'nt feel as a stranger.

The Officer Commanding the District (No 13) was Brigadier George Pearkes V.C. (an ex P.P.C.L.I. officer)

The Armoury where the Militia trained was the usual type as the one in Victoria. Before proceeding further I wish to state that my Father had died in April 1923 and I requested a military funeral fro him from my C.O. and he was buried at Ross Bay Cemetery. Sgt. J. Watson was Sgt in charge, and Bugler Husselton played the Last Post at the graveside. So passed away my Father whom I adored and missed. A man who had served his country well in my eyes. A man of the old school. Who lived in a different style of soldiering that we were experiencing at the present time.

The days of the British Raj. in India which brings me to the present time. Kitchener, Lord "BOBS" Roberts, Sir Bindon Blood, the African Transvaal, Modder River and the British soldier that Rudyard Kipling wrote about. Stories of the Kyber Pass North West Frontier, etc. The years of Queen Victoria.

I quote from the Recessional (1897)

God our Father, known of old
Lord of our far flung battle line
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold,
Dominion palm and pine---
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget.

Year 1937 – Transferred to Calgary from Esquimalt Nov 20, 1937.
We had an office in the Civic Bld in downtown Calgary. Here and other staff heads of Military Command had offices. I attended the training nights of the Calgary Highlanders, and got along very well with them. Saturday nights I coached their softball team, Wednesday afternoon, I instructed the Separate Schools in Physical training. Eventually I was asked by Wilson to take the supervision of the Calgary City Police revolver range at Police H.Qrs. This was more to my liking as I was a fairly pistol shot. I introduced myself to the Chief, and he said to see me there. I gave demonstrated pistol shooting using the police 38 Special. In the army we used the 45' Colt, a much heavier weapon. I astonished the members one day by off six fast shots at a target at a distance of 40 yds. When firing I did the vertical rise with the pistol, but they always fired using the vertical drop.

<u>Trooping the Colour.</u>

The Calgary Highlanders decided to Troop the Colour. They approached regarding the method of trooping. Now I had never participated in the trooping with the Regt (P.P.C.L.I.) Altho I was familiar with the ceremony. So on training nights I explained to the officers and men by chalk talks on the blackboard how it was conducted. When the time came to actually practice on the ground with the troops of the Regt, we disagreed regarding a certain movement, I insisted that a certain movement was done in a certain way but they disagreed, but eventually it was straightened out.

When the time came for the actual Trooping it was very excellently executed.

Recruiting

In the Victoria Armouries recruiting signs were displayed in front of all the unit H.Qrs. I noticed that in Calgary not a sign was in evidence. On enquiring regarding this I was told that signs were not permitted. I approached the C.O. of the Highlanders in this matter. I asked him if desired more recruits, then I said that it pays to advertise. He agreed, and then I was told no signs were allowed. I informed him that I would find out why.

At the first opportunity I approached Brig. G. Pearkes V.C. regarding the matter. He informed that it would be quite alright in the units did display recruiting signs at the armoury. That's all I wanted to know. So later at the next Training night I informed the units that they had permission to erect the signs for their particular unit. Being somewhat artistically inclined I made two signs for the Highlanders and had them hung outside their H.Qrd. The caretakers came along and informed me that they did not want the signs. I told them the units had now permission to erect them. They insisted that the signs were to be taken down. Told them to leave them alone or I would do something about it. So that how it was, and the signs remained up.

Spent my Saturday nights refereeing soft ball games was beginning to irk, so I decided to try and terminate this somehow without appearing to obvious that I disliked being bound down, and not having the opportunity to have some social outlet. So gradually I began the subtle move of appearing to announce wrong decisions as regards the game. It seemed that I was becoming unpopular as an umpire, and that was to my liking, and to hell with the game. Eventually I became so mad making decisions that I decided to end it at once, and the teams from both sides after arguying with me over the results, I notified them that if they did'nt like to obtain someone else. It was not a military duty, it was that Wilson who had been refereeing them before I came upon the scene asked me to take over. So eventually I was released from this tiresome task, and handed it over to some else.

Another task I had been allotted by Wilson, was the separate schools of physical class at the Roman Catholic school. I had always looked askance at Roman Catholic religion. Having read considerable regarding the history of that church, the Spanish Inquisition in the early days, the torture, the upheavals, et al, the massacre of the Hugonauts in France, etc, etc.

So I decided to come to some decision in regard this obvious task. It also was not considered a military duty. Wilson wanted to get out from under, in regard to this job. So I began to undertake a tough attitude when exercising the boys in physical training. Eventually signs began to appear that they resented my strict attitude towards them, and eventually I quit going there. Well that was

that. There was no retaliation on anyones part. Wilson had volunteered to coach the teams and the Separate Schools.

In regard the activities with the Police Dept. in pistol shooting that was more to my liking, and they were always glad to see me and they (the Police Dept) always invited me to their annual dinner.

Of cause after war was declared in Sept. 1939 I had to quit my relations with the Police as I had other more important duties to perform in regard to the military situation.

On the declaration of was Wilson and I set up a recruiting station in Calgary applying for recruits for the P.P.C.L.I. as it was declared by the authorities to bring the Regt up to strength as soon as possible. We eventually filled our quota and sent them on to Winnipeg where the rest of Regt was assembling. Meantime the Coy at Esquimalt (B) had also been brought to strength and set out for Winnipeg.

In the meantime we were wondering what was to happen to us as personnel of the Instructional Cadre, we were still on the Regt'l strength, but posted as on detached duty. There was quite a considerable number of us. Here in western Canada there were ten altogether, plus those East of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

The R.C.R.s and the 22nd Regt R.C.D. (Permanent Force Units) also had N.C.Os and W.Os on the Cadre. There was talk that we would be enlisted as Adjutants of some regiments due to our military experience. But this did not come about. As the war progressed into 1940 Training Stations were established across Canada and we were instructed to assist in the organization of them.

In Alberta there were to set up. One at Red Deer (Basic Training) and the other at Calgary, (Currie Barrack) Advanced training. In the meantime I had married Miss Mae Phillips at Calgary in Sept the following year. Our job was to train men here ready for units that were to be mobilized. My unit that I was attached to in peace time was being brought up to strength. Wilson's was the Calgary Regt (Tanks)

Eventually they were brought up to strength, and they proceeded East for further training. Meanwhile I continued to train others at the Armoury. Whilst at the job Wilson and Baker had been attached to Curries Bks. That left me out in the cold as it were. I knew that being away from the main stream of activity I stood no chance actually getting anywhere as regards getting overseas. I earnestly wanted to get into things that promised some action on the war front. We also new that it would be some time before any Canadians went overseas as things in Europe had reached a stalemate, and that there was no chance for any Canadians to see any action. So therefore it was up to us of the Cadre to dig in wherever there was a chance. The station at Currie Bks, was used to train men

for units overseas. Personnel of the Permanent Force who were still in Canada were told to get on with the job of training men and we had no recourse but to carry out that order, which was not to our liking.

Eventually Wilson and Baker had received their Officer's Commissions, and had become lieutenants. Training continued thru out 1941 and 1942. Still no action of any Canadian units in England, so as long as that condition there still remained a chance for us forgotten souls.

Brigadier Harvey V.C., had in the meantime relieved Brig. G. Pearkes V.C. as the District C.O. Pearkes had been named as the Commander of the First Div, and had reached England, where he was relieved by Gen McNaughton.
Note: Wilson and Baker were not veterans of the first war so I hoped that they would be able to get overseas and see some action.
This section of my memoirs was intended to deal with soldiering in peacetime but I have no alternative but continue for short while as we were not actually engaged in warlike activities.

The winter of 1940-41 I was sent up to Red Deer the Basic Trng Centre by the C.O. of the District to see what was going on there. Probably some talk as to the way it was being handled had reached H.Qrs. I asked him what authority I had in regard to the situation. He replied that I HAD it. Of course I knew what he meant. For me to use my own discretion, as regards what action I was to proceed with. He also was an officer of the Permanent Force before the war, and of cause we were acquainted, thru the Small Arms Schools.

On reaching Red Deer I reported in to the orderly room. It was commanded by an officer who had been a banker in civil life and also of the Non Active force.
I had seen a considerable number of these officers in position since the war started and I did'nt think much of them. Most of them were appointed politically to these places, and also I had met them at the Royal Schools in the peace time.

The R.S.M. approached me after my arrival and revealed to me the condition of things, but I was cautious, and decided to find out for myself the whys and wherefores of things. Eventually I came to the conclusion the N.C.Os did not have the support of the Officers. The 2nd In Command was a Majr Olliver. (A fat man) no soldier in fact or appearance. The R.S.M. R. Esmond was a veteran of the first war.

I organized the N.C.Os into classes in instruction, re M.Gs, Drill, etc. It being winter, and that there were no men there for basic training at the time, things were very quiet, so we had the opportunity to get on with some vital training. To my eyes this place was not in a military condition to train anybody. One day the R.S.M. came to me as I was engaged in instruction, to release my

classes for them to proceed to construct a skating rink. I was flabbergasted at the suggestion, it was typical of the mentality of those in command here, that a skating rink was more important than training.

I told the R.S.M. to report back the 2 I. C (Ollier) that I would not release the squad for that purpose. He grinned in appreciation at my decision. That was the last I heard of the matter. That surprised me somewhat, as I expected that I would be confronted by someone at the top there, and reprimanded. But I was prepared for the emergency, to the effect that I had the authority to carry on as I saw fit. Discipline was very lacks.

I remained there for four weeks. Meantime at home Mae (my wife) had given birth to our first born named Jack. I received the information by telegram, the time had now arrived for my departure back to Calgary. To eventually bidding goodbye the R.S.M. and N.C.Os, I left hurriedly away from the place and returned to Calgary.

Arriving back I prepared to report regarding the condition of Red Deer. This was in writing. I placed in on the desk of the Commander, and awaited the results of it for weeks. Eventually I was told to report to his at his office. He said he had read my report and that I would hear from him soon.

Eventually I did hear from him, and he said that I was to accompany him to Red Deer and that he would question everybody there one at a time and for me to make a personnel report during the interviews. After our return to Calgary I carried on with military duties at the armouries at Calgary. I proceeded south to the town of McLeod, where an Artillery Training Camp was situated, with the same purpose as I had in Red Deer. I recognized some of the officers whom I had seen at Cranbrook B.C. in winter of 1934. Being an infantryman, I decided to make a different approach here.

The situation here was a little different than that at Red Deer. The discipline was not affected as between the Officers and N.C.Os it was between the men and the N.C.Os. I finally cleared up the situation, but I recommended to the Officers to study their military law books and to watch it. I said to them that they were probably good lawyers but that they were remiss as to certain conditions that applied, especially as they were now on active service. I realized that I was acting as the trouble shooter of the District Officer Comd'g. This suited me very well as I had the opportunity to do what I really wanted to do having the authority also. Well good news awaited later on, and that was that The Dist. Comdr. had recommended for an officer's commission. So I was to be a Commission Officer of Her Majesty's Armed Forces.

I was to proceed to Currie Bks. where I was interviewed by the Comd'g Officer Col. R. Knight. He also recommended me, and eventually I received my commission, a parchment which I still proudly have.

But previously to this I also was sent to northern Alberta place called Metaskewin to exam some officers. Their military education was to say the least very wanting, an I had no recourse but to fail the majority of them, I had become by now a very disliked person amongst some people. The C.O. of the Red Deer Centre was returned to civilian life, the 2 I.C. was put on the staff of Currie Bks. The R.S.M. was promoted to Liet, and came to Currie Bks, and some of the N.C.Os appeared there after my posting there. On my appointment as a Lieut. – Mar 28, 1941, I was posted to the School of Instruction at Currie Bks, where I met Maj. C. Roberts a member of Lord Strathcona's Horse a Permanent Force Unit lie the P.P.C.L.I. We were acquainted with each other thru peace time training. It was the logical place for me to be, in a place of instruction. I enjoyed being there, also the C.O. of the School was a P.P.C.L.I. officer a Mjr. McDonald.

Mjr Wilson was the C.O. of one of the Coys also Baker was a Capt. Altogether in the Centre there were quite a number of P.P.C.L.I. and L.S.H. Eventually Wilson and Baker proceeded overseas. Major Baker returned wounded about a year later. Also Wilson returned. By this time I had arrived at the conclusion that as regards going overseas it was not to be. The C.O. of the training center had been the R.S.M. of the P.P.C.L.I. in the first war. There were quite a number of 1st World War vets.

The year 1943 I received the award of two war medal ribbons. That now totalled five that I now sported on my soldierly chest. I also felt resigned as regards the getting overseas to get into the thick of it again. I felt strongly about this, it was not a case of heroics at all, it was that my place as a professional soldier to be where I had a right to be, and some of them felt the same way. Anyway we consoled ourselves with excuse that we were too old anyway.

I read the war news avidly and imagined myself where the action was.

The School of Instruction was for the purpose of training N.C.Os so that would in turn train me who were being conditioned for overseas. Having had the necessary experience of actual war conditions in the first war we of the school decided to construct an actual battlefield, with mud, barbwire shell holes, and all that went to the making of an actual battle front.

This was constructed quite a distance from the centre. It was a masterpiece. We put a continued stream of N.C.Os and men who were to proceed overseas in the near future. There was a possibility that the next war would be a war of movement, instead of trench warfare, but that did not deter us from putting men thru a rigorous training.

I personally manned a light machine gun using live ammunition, making it as realistic as possible. After a man had gone thru the fighting course from Pointe "A" to Point "B" he was a sight to behold. Covered head to toe with mud

and looking as tho he had been thru Dante's inferno. But personally I think they really enjoyed it, there were very enthusiastic about the whole affair. Yes they had something to talk about in the huts.

I was eventually promoted to Captain Oct 26, 1942 and posted to "F" Coy under Mfr. F. Finnigan, a veteran of the first war, serving in the Canadian Cavalry. We got along together. After my promotion to Capt. I was sent on a Course in Aircraft Recognition at Chilliwack for two weeks. It was a course where troops were taught to recognize friendly and enemy aircraft. Later on I was sent again to Chilliwack to undergo a course in mine and boobytraps. This was a very interesting time. We were instructed in the construction of German and Allied mines, and how to make booby traps, in housed, on doorsteps, and other places. On my return, I had the opportunity of carrying out exercises in conjunction with mines and bobby traps.

As one night after laying some German tanner mines and connected with booby traps, (the mines were dummies but not the booby traps) My Coy went on a night scheme, where we had to pass thru a minefield.

I proceeded one lot, the men prodding the ground with bayonets to uncover the mines, and at one point as I bent down to ensure that one was doing it correctly inadvertently touched off the booby trap, it exploded up into my face, and I felt the blood running down my face. I thought this was it, the man received some of the blast, the scheme was stopped momentary while and the man made our way to the dressing station. The damn fool was careless in that he did not test for a booby trap as he was taught, and became careless. Fortunately it was not a serious wound most tiny bits of metal and dirt had hit my face on the cheek below the left eye.

But it was an opportunity to show that it was important to have the proper training in this type of warfare, as the Germans were expert in this type of warfare, as they eventually found out on their arrival in France.

I first came into this type of warfare in France in the first war, in the town of Iwuy and other places. Men were blown up on entering a house hunting for the enemy they even planted booby traps on dead bodies. One house in Iwuy had a cat nailed to the a door, and it was booby trapped.

Well, it was an interesting life after all, hear at the training centre. Had a another trip to the coast. A Sgt and I were detailed to escort a draft of men destined for the Artillery Camp at Colwood. We eventually arrived there without mishap, and with all personnel present. I was special careful to see that the men I was escorting did not have the opportunity to desert, desertion was rampant in Canada during the war. I obtained a receipt for the men, and the Sgt and I made our way to town. We arrange to meet together later on for our return

trip to Calgary. I made my way to my wife's mother place on Lampson St. Where I stayed a couple of night, before returning to Calgary.

18. The Second World War 1939 ----1945

I have omitted a P.T. course I attended at the Normal School in Victoria and Work Point Bks in 1927. Having been a Coy P.T. instructor thru the years, this course was of no use as regards promotion.

Every summer we proceeded to Sarcee Camp to train the Regular Army N.C.Os and Officers including the Militia units.

The winter of 1934 with Lt Wiswell proceed to Cranbrook B.C. to conduct a course for N.C.O. and Officers of the Rocky Mountain Rangers Regt. Returned to Victoria end of November.

Other infantry units I instructed were the Seaforth Highlanders of Vancouver, 16th Scottish in Victoria, Vancouver Regt. Irish Fusiliers Army Cadets, Duke of Connaught's Own of Vancouver, B.C.

1935 brought me promotion to CSMI (Coy. Sgt. Major Instructor I.C.) Then in Nov 1937 of this year was transferred to Calgary. Here I was attached to the Calgary Highlanders for instructional purposes. Late on in 1939 was promoted to QMSI (Quarter Master Sgt. Instructor IC).

1939….War

Germany declared war on Poland. Sept 3rd 1939
England declared war on Germany.
France " " "
Belgium " " "

The P.P.C.L.I. ordered to mobilize to full strength. I with Sgt. Mjr Wilson became recruiting officers and recruited men for the regiment. The regiment mobilized at Edmonton. We as instructors hoped to be called to the regiment but up to the end of Sept we had not received any instructions. Instead Ottawa sent word that all instructors were to remain at their posts and assist in mobilizing the Militia units. Our hopes were dashed to the ground. I was hoping to get the opportunity of getting overseas again in this war as I did the first. I was now 40 yrs of age (June) It seems we were the band of forgotten men.

I demonstrated the weapons that were in use in the infantry to assembled units at Sarcee Camp Summer of 1940 and received an excellent writ up in the local newspapers. Still no word from Ottawa regarding Regular Army Instructors.

MY NOTE: THIS NEWSPAPER CLIPPING IS ATTACHED AT THE BACK OF THIS

If I had been with the Regt. I would have gone overseas with them. It was my dearest ambition and hope these months to serve again in actual theatre of war.

We assisted local authorities to establish training centres and battle training schools over the country. Eventually a list was established of all Regular Army Instructors for the purpose of being given the opportunity of serving overseas, and not necessarily with our own units, but as casualties occurred we would replace them. So we had to be content with that. A Training Centre had been established at Fort McLeod just south of Edmonton, but there were doubts as to its competence. Col. Harvey VC sent me up there to find out what the trouble was. On arrival there in the winter of 1940 I looked the place over and was'nt satisfied myself with the setup. The Sgt. Mjr and the N.C.Os were disgruntled.

I set up training courses for the N.C.O.s but the officers were civilians called up and knew very little about the army procedure. I gave up in disgust and promised the R.S.M. that I would do something about it in my report to H.Qrs.

On arrival at Calgary I reported to Col. Harvey and he asked me to render a report in writing. The report I tendered to him was to say the least not satisfactory. I was well known in the Province for my integrity and instructional ability.

A few days after rendering my report on McLeod, Col. Harvey called me into his office and said that he had read the report and after considering it he would decide later what his intention would be in regard to the Training Centre. Eventually he called me in again and said that I would accompany him to McLeod and look over the situation.

On arrive there we went immediately to the Orderly Room and interviewed the C.O. (who was a banker in civilian life) Then later the Col and I had each officer come in and he interviewed them one by one including the N.C.Os.

The outcome of these interrogations was that the Training Centre was closed up and all but one of the officers were returned to civil life. The N.C.Os were including the R.S.M. Esmond posted to other Centre.

Later I was sent to another town Innisfail Alberta to examine officer candidates. Quite a number passed thru me that day, and I had the occasion to fail a considerable number of them. The C.O. of the unit came to me and said that and I quote "These men are nice chaps, why did you fail them". I replied,

"That perhaps they were nice chaps, but their knowledge of military matters was quite below that was expected off them as potential leaders of men. Also that if they proceeded into battle with men under their command with the lack of experience that they had it would be "caput" for all." In those early days I took great pleasure in reducing the military status of some men who just because they wore the uniform, they thought they were soldiers. I really detested paying the proper compliments to them as officers. Some were just plain tramps. Eventually as the war progressed these misfits were weeded out, and common sense prevailed in the new army. Late in 1940 I proceeded to an Artillery camp south of Calgary, and here I was to bring them up to date and to instill discipline into the men. Here I met some officers whom I last saw in 1934 at Cranbrook B.C. They had some very crazy ideas as to meaning of Military Law as per the manuals.

The N.C.Os were given wrong sentences, and over all the scene was rather depressing to an old soldier like me, who even then at that time had 22 years service. Some of the officers wee lawyers in civilian life and I had the occasion to remark to them that probably they were good lawyers but their knowledge of Military Law was to say the least was much to be desired.

But we parted good friends. They were artillery men not infantry, altho' I did have some experience as regards the tactical use of guns in relation to the Infantry. As I have said I took great pleasure in putting some of the "people" in there place. I was given authority and I used it to great advantage, it was my job and I carried it out to the great displeasure of some.

It was about this time that I decided to make an application for a commission. I submitted my application to Col. Harvey, and two weeks later my promotion to the rank of Lieutenant came thru and was posted to the Infantry Training Centre at Calgary. On arrival there I was placed on the staff of the School of Military Instruction.

The C.O. here was Maj. "Cock" Roberts of the L.S.H. also an old soldier of the Regular Army. This job was to my liking. I was still hoping to get the opportunity of getting overseas. Military H.Q. at Ottawa still insisted that we of the Regular Army were required for training purposes in Canada, but that as opportunity occurred we would be given a chance to go overseas, not necessarily with our own unit but in others. Quite a considerable number did proceed overseas, probably my age (41) had something to do with my remaining in Canada. Capt "Franco" Baker went overseas was wounded and returned to us, also Maj. "Slim" Wilson departed and returned to us at a later date. After a considerable time at the School I was posted to "F" Reinforcement Coy under Maj. Finnigan. We set up in Indian country south of Calgary a battle ground with the object of putting the men thru actual battle conditions.

We built trenches, placed barbed wire, mines, booby traps, and saw that there was lots of mud and water around to make it difficult as possible.

We fired live ammunitions, and we had a few near casualties. Often I fired light machine guns at these men to give them an idea of what it was to be actually fired at.

We placed the German Teller mines with booby traps out in the fields and at night we showed them how to make their way thru them. I was leading some men thru one of these one night and a booby trap exploded up into my face, I felt the blood running over my face and down my neck. Here was the opportunity to show them that to be careless in cases like this would not do.

It was really exhilarating work, setting up these battle practices under war time conditions. Long marches and the crossing of rivers with full pack was something that they had to undergo. Training continued throughout the remainder of 1942 and 1943. I underwent a course in driving. I learned to drive armoured vehicles, large and small trucks and to ride motorcycles. On passing this course I was promoted to Captain.

We had considerable trouble between the Active Men and the Conscripts. Frequently I was a member of Courts martial that tried men for desertion and other crimes. I was sent down to Medicine Hat as a member of a court to try some German prisoners. Here the accused men were from the Africa Corps, with a sprinkling of submarine man and the German Lufftwafr. (Airforce)

There were accused of attempting to murder one of their men who they said was a homosexual. The defendant certainly looked the type. There were proven guilty and sentenced.

The war overseas was having its ups and downs thru the years 1942, 1943-44. Training continued, with increased fervor. We suffered casualties with a few deaths from disease and training fatalities. There were cases of self inflicted wounds which ended up with a Court martial for the offenders. I attended many of these. As the war progresses I was hoping that my promotion to Major would come thru'.

Two men of my Coy, attempted to desert one morning. They were reported missing on the morning parade, and it was found that they had left their hut and made off. Leaving the Coy. in charge of my 2 I.C. and informing the Provost Martial, I and two others made off in the direction the escapees went. On reaching the open country I could perceive them about 600 yds running for the Bow Rivers. I blew my whistle and shouted to them to halt. They kept on going.

Anticipating where they were headed for I and the other two cut off across country to head them off. I made my way along the river bank whilst the Provost men kept to the high banks of the river. They were lost to sight by now

but I knew they must be along the river bank which was covered with scrub and trees.

Rounding a bend in the river I suddenly came across them crouching amidst the bushes, I approached them, hoping that the Provost had kept in line with me on the bank. I now reached within 30 yds of them and they thinking I was alone started to move towards me, I made a motion with my pistol which all officers carried loaded and during the war. They decide that discretion was the better part of valour and they gave up, when the provost came down the bank. They were sentenced by a court martial.

I found that leading men across these simulated battle fields dodging live ammunition and mines was nothing to instructing men how to throw live grenades. The grenades wee of the H.E. and smoke design. The grenades were thrown from trenches by the recruits under training. Grenades are thrown with a fuse time of 5 to 7 seconds. Withdrawing the safety pin, the grenade was still safe until thrown. One had to watch them closely standing close by them, until they were thrown. Sometimes the men would hit the back of the trench with the hand holding the grenade, and they would drop it and there would be a wild run to get out of the way of the explosion that followed. Men were killed in this way thru being too slow to act. It became rather nerve racking watching them decide in their minds when to throw after the pin was pulled.

The war was progressing in the Allies favour overseas, and reinforcements were on the way continually. Training was stepped up and increased stiffer, go as it were. Eventually Germany collapsed and the war against Japan continued. I was among many who volunteered for action in the Pacific. I was still incensed with the idea of getting over some how somewhere.

My promotion to Major had not gone thru' due to some conniving of a Major Oliver who I had met at the Training Centre at McLeod at the beginning of the war. He was the only officer who was not returned to civilian life after that Training Centre was closed for infantry trng. He was posted to this training centre, and was a friend of the Col. I firmly believed that he with others was responsible for my non promotion. It was politics and personal reasons over again. I requested to see the Col. And he said that my application had gone forward, and I requested him to show it to me. He stalled over this request of mine. I decided not to push it any further, as I considered it useless against such people. Promotion in this way was frequently used against Regular Army personal, who had in some form or other occasioned the dislike of certain men in the Militia before and during the war. I requested an immediate transfer back the Coast. My request was granted by Ottawa. And I with my family returned to Victoria, and was posted to a Regt of Infantry under Col. R. Robertson, whom I knew before the war as a member of the P.P.C.L.I.

The Regular Army (PPCLI) man, especially if he was in contact with the Militia for training purposes a some of us were, became rather disliked due to no doubt our methods and tough demeanor we entertained towards them. The Regular Army units before the war were never up to strength owing to a paucity of funds granted by Ottawa. Consequently we were handicapped by lack of weapons, etc. The Militia units were also suffering under like conditions. Many a time during tactics we had to set up trunks of trees to represent guns, and used gas rattles to simulate the firing of light machine guns. But on the whole we were able to carry out training using our imagination and INGINUITY. During my military training from start to finish I had fully carried out my duties with a desire to become a first rate soldier, come hell and high water. I was disliked but respected by many. I granted very few favours as I considered that being on a friendly basis with some who would when the opportunity occurred "turn you in", and as "familiarity breeds contempt" so being unsoldierly in conduct did not pay in the long run. I took soldiering seriously, as my personal reports showed. It was the object of many whom I knew to join up for the main purpose of having a good time at the expense of the country and of others were trying honestly to improve themselves in the profession of arms.

It was the duty of Officers and N.C.Os to inculcate discipline in the men as without discipline any army would be useless and when engaged in the business of "warring" would become nothing less than an undisciplined mob and would suffer unnecessary casualties.

I consider that during my youth whilst undergoing the baptism of fire in the first war that I underwent a transformation, a transformation was to effect me in no uncertain ways the rest of my life. A person of my age should have been attending school and not cavorting around in a foreign country engaged in a profession that to say the least, unfitting. One phase of this transformation occurred over a period of time when as a stretcher bearer I was witness to stupid and unnecessary slaughter due to stupidity of those in command over us. I developed a lone complex, owing to this urge of men when in danger of bunching up. It is a natural desire when under these conditions to feel that you are or do not wish to feel alone when under fire. To feel that you want your friends to be near you, but this natural human behaviour when in danger caused men to lose their lives. I saw this often and caused me to definitely refrain to keep away from such groups that seemed inclined to group for protection. I've seen and I myself have crawled under sheets of tin or behind small mounds of earth with the firm belief that it afforded adequate protection from small arms fire or shelling.

Consider the case of Ypres 1916 of a number of N.C.Os who were inclined to do exactly this, and consequently they were all wiped out to a man.

There are many other examples to substantiate this unfortunate desire to be near to others. Obviously it may be necessary to become a group such as when preparing to leave a trench to go over, or when passing thru a defile, or say when moving up to the front. Even this calls for extention by larger groups as the formation neared the enemy and then when actually in the process of charging the enemy, the mane become extended in a line with each man about 5 paces away from the man on his right or left. Extended in this manner it has been proved beyond a doubt that extention of the individual has saved many lives. It takes considerable training to develop this type of fighting.

A very most fitting example of this state of affairs occurred the latter stages of the war. This involved some members of the 116th bn. We were following them up and the ground rose to a railway embankment. One coy of this Regt was advancing up this embankment to where the enemy were lined up. Instead of moving in extended line they were doing the classical get together scheme. Consequently they were moved down in bunches. For when we passed thru them they lay scattered over the open ground lying where they were cut down. They lay as if asleep, facing in all directions. Ad Nauseum.
Well this is enough of this theme upon WHICH ONE CAN DISCOURSE.

The Regt to which I was attached was disbanded after the war. I was selected to become the Investigating Officer for the Military District of Victoria. My job was to investigate fire and damage to military personal and property. This lasted from Xmas 1946 to August of the same year.

Then having completed 31 years service I was discharged from the Service and pensioned off as we say. I was awarded a disability pension also for sustained injury to my left leg, also suffering from a hernia. Was an out patient of the Dept. of Veteran's Affairs. May of 1949 underwent operation at the Veterans Hospital for hernia. Later I passed examination for the Civil Service and worked at the Dockyard in Esquimalt. June of 1954 was posted to the Naval Gym as a storesman, and at the time of writing these memoirs am still there, and have (1960) completed 11 years with the Civil Service, and will continue until 65 yrs of age when I will retire.

HAND WRITTEN NOTE AFTER THIS:
My son Jack joined the Cadet Corp (Signals) in 1954. *He instructed them in compass reading and range finding and attended a scheme at Jordan River.*
1956 he joined the Militia, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals
Joined the Regular Army in 1958, Royal Canadian Crops of Signals, and proceeded to the Congo in January 1961 for six months.

"He can go thru it, I had to !

ATTACHED TO THIS LAST SECTION IS THE LAST PAGE OF AN ARTICLE FROM THE CALGARY HERALD: JULY 1937.

"Militiamen See Experts in Action" 'Specialists in War.
Written by Fred Kennedy – Herald Staff Reporter and Dad is mentioned in the article as Sergeant Bates of the PPCLI.

19. Statement of Military Service of Capt. A. A. Bates

Canadian Active Army – P.P.C.L.I.

Q.M.S.I. Instructional Cadre. P.P.C.L.I. Permanent Force

Enlisted in the 50th Gordon Highlanders (N.P.A.M.) 1914 under G.O. of 1913. Commanded by the late Gen Currie.

50th Gordon Highlanders called out on Active Service on the 13th of Aug 1914 (The 1st World War 1914-18)

Served with Gordon Highlanders from 13th Aug. 1914 to 11th March, 1915.
Total service with G.H……193 days.

Enlisted in the 48th Bn (C.E.F) from the Gordon Highlanders on the 12 March, 1915. And proceeded overseas (left Canada) 1st Jul 1915. Arrived in England 10th July 1915.

Became the 48th Bn (3rd Pioneers) C.E.F. and proceeded to France on the 9th March 1916 under Lt. Col. W.J.H. Holmes. DSO

48th Bn (3rd Pioneers) disbanded in France on the 17th April 1917.

Served in the 29th Bn C.E.F. from the 17th April 1917 till disbandment on the 24th May 1919 at Victoria, B.C.

Total service with 48th Bn and 29th Bn (C.E.F.)

Total 4 yrs 107 Days.
Documents state 4 yrs 288 Days. This may be correct.

Enlisted in the P.P.C.L.I. Permanent Force on the 25th Jan 1921.

Served in P.P.C.L.I. from 25th Jan 1921 to 31st Aug 1939.

Total 18 yrs 219 days.

P.P.C.L.I. (P.F.) Placed on active service on the 1st of Sep 1939.
Served on Active Service from 1st Sept 1939 to the present date 28th Aug 1946

Total Service from 1st Sept 1939 to (say) 28 Aug 1946
Total 6 yrs 212 Days. (2nd World War)

Total Service Gordon Highlanders 193 days
48th and 29th Bns (CEF) 4 yrs 107 days
P.P.C.L.I. 18 yrs 219 Days
Active Service 1939 – 46 6 yrs 212 Days

Total Service 30 yrs 1 Day.

The following are extractions from daily orders of
"B" Coy I. Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.
Work Point Barracks, Esquimalt, B.C.
Orders by Major H. W. Niven D.S.O. M.C.

Taken on strength. The under mentioned were taken on strength.

Pte. Alfred Arthur Bate 25th January 1921
Pte. William Robinson 25th January 1921

N.C.O.'s Classes March 10th 1921

Pte. A. A. Bates
Pte. W. Robinson
Pte. A. Nicholson
Pte. W. Coldwell
Pte. S. Lindgren
Pte. A. Vigers
Pte. W. Cahill

Appointments: The following were promoted to L/Cpl with pay after Qualified in such rank

May 15th 1922
Pte. A. A. Bates
Pte. W. Robinson
Pte. A. Nicholson
Pte. W. Cahill

The above promotions to take effect May 15th 1922
Skills at Arms Badges. L/Cpl A.A. Bates L/Cpl. W. Robinson Crossed Rifles.

N.C.O.'s Classes. The following to attend Qualifying Course for the rank of Corporal. Oct 1st 1921

L/Cpl A.A. Bates
L/Cpl W. Robinson
L/Cpl W. Cahill
L/Cpl W. Cummings

Skills at Arms Badges. L/Cpl A.A. Bates L/Cpl W. Robinson L/Cpl W. Cummings

Appointments The following were promoted to Cpl with pay.
May 1st 1922

L/Cpl A.A. Bates
L/Cpl W. Robinson
L/Cpl W. Cahill
L/Cpl W. Cummings

July 30th 1922. Skill at Arms Badges. Cpl A. A. Bates. Cpl. W. Cahill

Awarded Skill at Arms Badges.

August 1923 Crossed Rifles.

1922	Musketry Course at Heals Ranges	
	Awarded Skill at Arms Badge	Cpl A. A. Bates
1923	Awarded Skill at Arms Badge	Cpl. A. A. Bates
1924	Promoted to the rank of Sergeant with pay effective March 1st 1924	
	Awarded Skill at Arms Badge	July 1924
1925	Awarded Skill at Arms Badge	July 1925
1926	Awarded Skill at Arms Badge	July 1926
1927	Awarded Skill at Arms Badge	June 1927

The above extracts are from date of enlistment 25th Jan 1921 to June of 1927. Continuation of services appears on next page 5th October 1927.

The following N.C.O.'s proceeded to the Canadian Small Arms School to attend "A" Wing at Camp Sarcee, Alberta. July 2nd 1927.
On return from this course the following were granted Certificates of Qualifications (Small Arms) Rifle, Bayonet, Lewis Gun, Revolver and Section Leading

20453 Sgt. Spiers. A
21073 Sgt Lawson W
21069 Sgt A. A. Bates

20. Highlights of My Life

Born 10th of June 1899 (Saturday) County of Kent, England. Why!
Father in the British Army. Royal Horse Artillery. Artillery moved to India. The family with Father, 1901. I understand after that we all went in the direction of the North West Frontier. Our family stayed at Decca, where I was christened, Alfred Arthur.

Returned to England 1903. To Woolwich, Kent England. Traveled with Father to Colchester Military Camp, North towards Scotland and finally to Ireland about 1907. Attended Eglington School (Public) for Boys (Grammar school) until 1912 when the family embarked for Canada in August.

Father retired on pension from Army in 1912, whilst at the Royal Military Academy Woolwich. I was a choir boy in the Academy Chapel.
In the early part of 1910 I was selected from my Form with many others to attend the Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary at the Crystal Palace, London. We were presented with a Coronation Mug. During my attendance at the Grammar School I was awarded with two bronze medals and several books.

Moved to Canada with a number of other military families whose fathers had retired from the army. There was a great emigration on during or from 1910 to 1914. Arrived in Victoria, B.C. in Sep 1912. Age 13. Incidentally the Titanic a new ship with three funnels, preceeded us across the Atlantic. I remember our ship slowed up when passing thru a field of ice bergs. I do remember seeing them. We got thru safely but the Titanic struck one below the water line and sank.

Stayed with an Aunt and Uncle of ours until we got settled and lived out near Beacon Hill Park near the stores on Cook Street. I had no intention of returning to school again. I procured employment at the Western Union Telegraph Coy, on Government St. and Bastion Square.

I also enlisted in the Gordon Highlanders (50th) early part of 1914. We then moved to a house on Cook near Fort opposite the bank. I became a drummer in this regiment. I also learnt to play the bugle. I became an excellent player.

August 1914 war broke out. England declared war against Germany, as did Canada and other nations. August 4th our regiment the Gordons was mobilized and marched to the Willows ground in Oak Bay.

During the remainder of 1914 we were busy guarding the vital spots on the Island. The first place my Coy went was to Goldstream to guard the Reservoirs and was there at Xmas 1914. Major Monteith in command. Later returning back to Willows we went to Telegraph Bay to guard the telegraph cable.

In the month of Feb. 1915 the 48th Bn was formed and I enlisted in it and posted to No. 2 Coy, under a Capt. Abbot. Several other units were formed at this time. The 30th, the CMRs, 88th Bn, 67th Bn Western Scots.

In the month of June we route marched to Glen Lake, and bivouacked thee for two days. Then word was received for the regt to return to camp and prepare to move overseas. We all gave three cheers and marched from Oak Bay to the C.P.R. wharf and boarded C.P.R. Princess Mary and sailed to Vancouver.

NOTE. During the month of April or was it May – the German submarine sank the Lusitania and this caused riots in various parts of Canada against German nationals. Here in Victoria we were called out to quell the riots, and during time my coy was spread out guarding some German shops near Fort and Douglas. The mob threw rocks at us.

Across Canada July 1915

We were given a royal send off at Victoria and at the railway stops across Canada. It was a grand time we had. Finally reached Halifax and boarded the "Grampian" and sailed across the sea to jolly England. Met by British destroyers near England as escort against German submarines. Landed at Portsmouth near the Isle of White.

August 15, 1915

Boarded trains and set out for Ceasar's Camp near Folkstone not far from Dover. We were under canvas here for just before November and then moved into an old British Army Barracks at Hythe, Kent November 1915.

March 9, 1916

Embarked for France and landed at Bourlonge. Stayed under canvas here for a couple of weeks and then boarded trains (box cars) for the fighting front.

We set out by route march for the Belgium city of Ypres. Entered City of Ypres about end of Feb 1917. Quite a large city but utterly destroyed by German gunfire and bombs. It was surrounded by a moat and enormous walls. Billeted in the cellars of homes. Our Coy in cellars of a hospital near the Menin Gate.

Kept under cover during days, but at night from dusk to dawn we marched to the front lines and commenced to strengthen the defenses from Hooge to Hill 60, German snipers active along the front.

April 1916

58th Bn raided German trenches. Heard them going over the top. My friend Barnes was killed by sniper. Trenches wet and lots of mud. Stench of dead bodies everywhere. Issued with chewing tobacco to prevent vomiting.
Narrowly escaped death by enemy M.G. fire whilst getting out of trench.
Sgt Lanaway and I escorted two British Army officers along No Man's Land to familiarize them with the front. I didn't like it one bit. German sniper captured in the Cage in No Man's Land. He was a German American.

Gas Masks

We were issued with two hoods saturated with chemicals and goggles for protection against gas. Hoods were to protect us against chlorine and phosgene gases.

May 1916

Our scene of action shifted to Sorrel Hill towards Hill 60. This was a hot spot to say the least. This front was the scene of mortar bombs by both sides. When enemy lobbed them over to us we all ran down the hill a few yards, until fire stopped. Then we and the infantry returned and it was our turn to send over our mortar bombs to them. Quite a game they played in this area. Men were killed or wounded here frequently. We were glad and relieved when the job was done. Remember the beautiful weather. Nightingales were heard over toward the Zillebeke Lake. Flowers beginning to bloom in the gardens amidst the rubble of the houses. Trenches beginning to dry out making it easier to dig, but the heat increased the stench over the area.

Returning to Ypres down the Menin Road which led to the Menin Gate, enemy M.G. opened fire on us suddenly and we all dived for the shelter of the ditch and in so doing I gave Capt. Abbott a push, and the bullets whizzed by over our heads like angry wasps. I met him after the war in Victoria and he asked me if I remembered the incident. We both grinned to remember those far off days in the Salient.

June 1916 Battle of Sorrel Hill

The Canadian Third Division holding the front. 2nd Div. in reserve. Enemy bombarding our positions from Hooge to Sorrel Hill.

Jun 2, 1916

Morning

We were in Ypres getting read to have a nap after breakfast. The rumble of the guns were clearly heard by us as we were only about 1 mile from it. Germans advanced and captured quite a considerable area of trenches. Capturing hundreds of Canadians including P.P.C.L.I. and the R.C.R.s and Mounted Rifles. All regts in the city immediately put on alert and ready. No orders for us to move out, but units of the 2nd Div started to move up thru the city. Maj. Gen O.C. 3rd Div visiting trenches with our Bde Gen V. Williams and Mercer. Mercer was killed and Brg Gen Williams taken prisoner. Lt. Col Buller of the Patricia's was killed at Sanctuary wood. Weather very bad for June.

June 3rd

Our Regt fell in and moved out of Ypres via the Lille Gate about 10 P.M. Prevented from moving towards the trenches by enemy barrage that was falling across the fields. Barrage lifted and we advanced towards the direction of Zillebeke. Our Coy left the Regt and proceeded towards Maple Copse. We entered a trench that was occupied by the 43rd Highlanders. About one in the morning the enemy attacked our position, thru the woods in front of us.

We repelled the attack and drove the remainder of the enemy back. Just before dawn we filed to the rear and made for Ypres. The regt suffered a number of casualties.

On our way back to the city and nearing the Zilebeke Road, our Coy was preparing to leave the trench to cross over the road when I heard the approach of enemy shells that sounded to me like 4.5s. They approached with the roar of thunder it seemed, I mentally thought that they would land beyond us but as they neared, I and I suppose all the others instinctively knew in our minds that the time had come for some of us. As for myself I knew that I could not do anything about it as thru experience of this sort thru the war so far, one must accept things like this when they occur.

The first salvo landed right amongst us. It was the closest experience with sudden death from above as it were, that I had no time to think about anything. I felt myself being lifted upwards and then I landed on something, my mind was a blank that is how I can only explain it. Far away it seemed I heard screams and

shouts for stretcher bearers. I remember getting up and staggering around, my head hurt.

Then I heard as if in a far distance the approach of more shells, and they landed beyond the side of the road, amongst the troops that had crossed the road. More shouts and screams from somewhere. No more shells came, and I ran across the road to where our men were that had received the second salvo. What a mess it was as I saw bodies around me. Those who had escaped quickly made our way from this area as quickly as we were able. A friend of mine by the name of Whitehead was dead and Pte Pellow was also badly wounded and who eventually had his left arm amputated. I met him again when we lived on Wollaston St. My head hurt for a few days, but eventually recovered with no more than shock.

June 6th

Again moved out via the Menin Gate, and proceeded towards the Chateau of Hooge on the Menin Rd. Our Coy went forward with shovels and dug trenches to be occupied by troops (Canadians) who were in the open. These troops protected us during the digging. Enemy did not attack.
June 6th to 12th (Approx) Our Regt lay in supports near Ypres.
All trenches recaptured by enemy retaken by 2nd Div.

Rest of June

The Regt with the engineers strengthened the trenches along the front. Rest of the month was quiet.

July Battle of the Somme

Busy reconstructing the front lines and support trenches. Many casualties by sniper and artillery fire.

August First Week

Relieved by the Australians and New Zealanders.
Our Div. moved out of the line with the 2nd Div to the rear areas around Poperinge. Here we were unoculated, and issued with the British Army Rifle 303. Short Lee Enfield, also with the new type of gas mask retaining our tear gas goggles.

August About third week

The Canadian Army moved south to Picardy in France. We marched by night and stayed under cover in villages during the day. This we were told was to deceive the Germans that the Canadians were still in Ypres.
About end of August we arrived at the Town of Albert with the leaning Virgin top of the cathedral.
Proceed to the dugouts about a mile from the front line then in Area of Courcellete. Canadians took over front from British.

Month of September

Our job again was to strengthen and dig new trenches. Suffered many casualties going to from our position. The country was chalky and difficult to dig.

Sept 2nd week

One night our section narrowly missed captured; by enemy.
Slightly wounded in sunken road by shrapnel on my left thigh. Nothing serious. Enemy shelling terrible here in areas of sunken roads. Here we first saw the armoured tanks used for the first time. Later we saw some of them damaged by shell fire. Enemy occupied trench that we were about to get into; they were surprised, as well as we. Drove them out of the trench.

End of Sept. and beginning of Oct

Canadian army moved out except the 4th Div. Moved up north to the Vimy Ridge area. Our Regt billeted at the foot of Vimy Ridge, near village of Neuville Vittasse. Our Coy H. Qtrs was at the Maison Blanche. (The White Cross) on Arrais Road.

Nov and Dec 1916

Entered trenches on the Armentaires Front, near or in Plustreet.
Attached to the 2nd Bn 1st Div (Red Patch) to gain experience in trench duty. Very wet. Lots of rats as big as kittens. Dead bodies lying out there in No Man's Land.

Dec 1916

Narrowly escaped death by a German sniper. English Engineer with whom I was talking received a bullet into the stomach. Really shook me up a bit. Moved out after ten days here to billets in the rear. We were armed with the Ross rifle a Canadian made rifle, no bloody good. We had no steel helmets those days, not until I think it was May 1916.

Xmas 1916

Our Brigade moved to the rear. Our regt occupied Village of Lossingham. Had some sort of Xmas dinner. Canadians training in rear areas in preparation for the taking of Vimy Ridge. Returned to the front after Xmas, and occupied the same area behind the ridge.

January 1917

Back to the trenches sector of Mericourt. Lots of rain and snow. Trenches wet.

February

The German Guards Regt raided our sector but were driven off. Number of prisoners captured. Saw them as they passed us. Tall fellows and arrogant.

In this sector we used to crawl out about 50 yards in front of our trenches at dawn, wait for about half hour then back to the trench again. This was to ensure that enemy was not preparing to attack, which was the usual time for raiding.The Bde. Shifted over to the left towards left of Vimy. In vicinity of Hill 70.

March 1917

Continued preparation for the attack. Canadian units raid enemy trenches during the time. French Army failed to capture the ridge in 1915.

April

Weather very bad. Rain and snow intermittently. Trenches in some places filled with water.

April 9, 1917

Cold, snow and sleet. Windy 5:30 a.m. bombardment opened up all along the front. Canadians advanced. We followed up behind the infantry of our Bde. 3rd Div. Trenches in some places knee deep in mud. Our infantry engaged with the enemy. We helped to block trenches as they were captured by our troops. Lots of noise. Enemy swarming out of their dug outs with their hands up shouting Kamarad. Received a slight wound on palm of left hand. Nothing serious.

Our Bde advanced up the trenches. P.P.C.L.I. close to us. Kept busy consolidating as troops went forward. Enemy troops captured passed thru us. Sorry looking they were as I remembered them. Lot of youngsters and some quite middle aged. Rifle and machine gun bullets zipped all around us. Were nearing top of ridge. Enemy snipers were in abundance, they had a field day it seems, most of men killed by them.

One chap of the 18th Bn made for a German M.G. saw him bayonet the crew and over turning the gun. He held off some Germans coming at him with his bayonet. Fortunately he was rescued by other men of his unit. We could do nothing about it. At a block in a trench I came across a Canadian Sgt and a German who had just shot each other, as I passed this spot I looked at them and they were practically face to face.

Ridge finally captured.

Looking across Plain of Doaui I saw the enemy troops running as fast as they could towards the Village of Mericourt.

Weather began to clear up a little. Snow stopped, still windy. It was quite a sight to see. Away in the distance was the large town of Douai. We brought tools and wire with us and of course shovels.

Saw for first time our cavalry going forward, the country good for horses other side of the ridge. They couldn't do very much, too many enemy machine guns.

<u>End of battle</u>

<u>May 1917</u>

After the battle, the Divisional Pioneer Bn were phased out and used for reinforcements to infantry Bns. Our Regt was disbanded behind Vimy Ridge. We erected a large wooden cross with the inscription "Raised by patriotism and killed by politics".

Coy A and B went to the 29th Bn or Rgt of Foot from Vancouver and C and D Coys went to the 7th Bn also from Vancouver.

We were now infantry in the true sense of the word. What would happen now I thought. So far I have been lucky.

The Regt the 29th with its brigade moved out of trenches around Mericourt to town of Lozingham, we had been in this town with the 48th. Had good Xmas 1917.

July 1st

Whole Div moved out for rest and training. Dominion Day was celebrated by large sports events. Our planes circled overhead to protect us against enemy aircraft. Returned to trenches Hill 70 area.

August 1917

Proceeded to Paris on leave with friend Fripp. Big German gun firing on Paris. Inspected shell holes made in the Rue de la Republic. Not very large. Returned to Regt. As troops away on leave pulled into station at Amiens, enemy planes dropped near the station and we forced the train out of the station. Women and children were screaming and running all over the station.

During our absence on leave we were told that the Bde including the 29th had raided the enemy trenches. At one time during the scrap the enemy met our Regt in No Man's Land and engaged in hand to hand combat.

Capt. Abbott wounded five times and awarded medal for bravery. Also Coy Sgt. Mjr Bob Hanna was awarded the VC. Our Regt received reinforcements from England. Back to the Lens front amongst the rubble of villages.

Sept. Oct. 1917

Trench routine and periods of rest.

End of October

Canadian Army moved north to Belgium to Ypres and Passchendaele.
Our Bde the 6th, Regts 27th, 28th, 29th, 31st Bns.We moved by the London buses, which had the top removed and a machine gun mounted for protection against enemy aircraft.

Arrived at Ypres back to familiar places again from 1917. Moved up the Menin Road by march route.

Here the Canadian Army relieved the Australians and New Zealanders. They had replaced us in August 1917.
For the capture of Passchendaele the Staffs expected many casualties to occur consequently some men were detailed to act a stretcher bearers to assist the two bands. I with others were some that were detailed for this duty. Bde moved up to the front. The ground for miles was simply one large bog. Shell holes filled with water. Stretcher bearers rendezvoused at a captured pill box (Concrete).

Attacked opened upon areas in front of Passchendaele. It was in this area that Gen Pearkes was the VC. (He was in the 2nd C.M.R.s)
When the Regt moved for to that attack we followed behind them to attend to the wounded. Two men were allotted to a stretcher. Sometimes it took four to carry a man. Ground terrible to move over. It was one vast sea of mud and water. Pill boxes held up the advance here and there. Enemy prisoners were streaming to our rear, and we forced them to assist us in carrying the wounded. Passed quite a few men were drowned in the water filled shell holes. Dressing stations crowded with wounded.

A chap by the name of Clapp and I crawled out in front of the 28th Bn position, to attend to some wounded men that had been reported there. On arriving at the men we found that they were all dead. Whilst inspecting them an enemy aircraft flew over us quite low that I was able to see his face. We lay still until he disappeared. One day during the battle witnessed an air battle between our planes and the enemy. It was quite a show.

The 27th Bn was the first to enter Passchendaele. Honour to our Bde. (Brigade) came across one or two of our pipe band (wearing kilts) lying dead with their stretchers.

Attended the wounded for three days, had grown a beard. Searched enemy and our own haversacks for food. I quoted a section from the "Ancient Mariner", which is as follows. "Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink".

Yes, there was water everywhere but not fit to drink, due to pollution by dead bodies, scum, etc. Some had been wounded lying in shell holes but were too weak to crawl out and subsequently drowned, that was a common occurrence here. Enemy machine gun fire hindered our work. Wounded were crying out for water, German prisoners were a great help to us and no doubt they were only too willing to assist, and glad to get out of the mess.
My friend and I were unaware that the Regt had pulled out after the capture of Passchendaele until we heard that the Bde had left for Ypres, and we also made our way towards the city. It was quite a trek there. Covered with mud, tired, unshaven and hungry.

We eventually arrived at some tents in front of the walls and found the regiment there. Our kits had been taken by somebody, and they said that most of the men who had been detailed as bearers were missing at roll call, and we were amongst the missing.

The first night there enemy bombers came over and dropped a few bombs amongst us. I could see the flashes of the bombs as they exploded. Some men were killed and wounded by them.

The Division Concert Party gave a concert to the troops, and whilst in a canteen a chap said to me that somebody was asking about me. Later I felt a slap on my back and turning I confronted my brother Frank. We had quite a talk about the scrap and home. He was in the Canadian Artillery. I never saw him again until we reach home in 1919.

The Bde pulled out from this area (three cheers) and headed for Haverskerque and into the best billets we had ever had for quite some time.
We then proceeded to Viller au Bois (Behind Vimy). Then to Au Ritz Chadiene area and back to trench routine again. I was still a stretcher bearer. That suited me with hopes of seeing home again. Conscription in Canada. About time we thought.

Out again for some rest to Bourecque. We had been here before when with the 48th in 1917 earlier. Here we spent Xmas and the New Year. Billets were cold and draughty. Continued training in this area, then proceeded to Mt. St. Eloi and Neuville St. Veast.

<u>In trenches at Avions in February 1918</u>

Enemy trenches raided. In and out of trenches. Regt relieved by the 43rd Highlanders. Went from there to GOUY Servins. Here enemy artillery shelled our trenches, but was not followed by a raid. Bn moved to Souchez 12th March 1918.

Here the Regt relieved the 21dt Bn. Whilst enemy bombarded us with gas shells at daybreak and later with mustard gas. Many casualties. We were kept busy with the wounded. Moved out to Divion where Gen. Curry inspected the Brigade (the 6th).

<u>Remainder of March and April 1918.</u>

A few Americans appeared upon the scene, some Americans had landed in France. Moved out to Brelemont for rest.

<u>28th May 1918</u>

Regt relieved the Van Doos (22nd). Regt did a lot of patrolling in this area.

June early

Moved out to Wailly Huts and training again.

July 1st.

Sports day for the Bde.

July 30th approx.

Marched 6 miles to Guignemicourt. Carried on training. Weather wet. Trained here in conjunction with tanks. Also a tank demonstration.

August 1918

The whole Canadian Corp moved south to Amiens front. It was in on this front that British Army was driving back 25 miles.
Whole Bde billeted in area of Lignereuile. Bn prepared to march. Went by train to Ailley-Sur-Somme five miles from Amiens.

Witnessed great assembly of tanks, guns, men, ammo etc. along the roads and in the woods. We were up to something that was sure. Moved into positions for attack on 8th of August. Our Bn was assembled behind the guns that were firing very rapidly, the ground was covered with mist.

We passed thru the guns in single file as they fired. On our right I noticed that the Canadian Cavalry Corps was lined up ready to go forward. A stirring sight. The country in front was covered with standing wheat (August) Truly it was a great sight I witnessed as we moved forward.

The tanks were moving up. Large and small. Mist was beginning to clear away. Then such a sight as most unlikely never to be seen again. Country fairly flat. There we saw the cavalry, tanks, lines of infantry moving. The Cavalry moving by gallop up to the front, with sabers drawn. Aircraft in clouds it seemed overhead. Yet it was indeed a pageant of war. The 21st had captured village of Marcel Caix and being in support we passed thru it.

No inhabitants were in it, absolutely empty except stray cats and dogs.
Hundreds of prisoners were streaming to the rear as well as waling wounded of our troops.

8th of August

Our Regt was on the left of the Bde I noticed, not far from the railway track that went to Rosierres. I noticed that we were not in extended lines but we moved forward in groups of platoons. (Artillery formation it was called) The enemy were on the run now and I could see where they had retreated by the lanes they made in the field of wheat. I could see some Australians on our left other side of the railway.

End of the first day – the 8th.

Riderless cavalry horses were running over the fields.
Our Coy deployed into open formation. On reaching a specified area we came across some cavalry with M.G.s (Hotchkiss).
Some outfit had captured a German canteen. We were able to get some honey and biscuits. Some troops were drinking wine from bottles.
Germans had or were armed with lots of machine guns and one could hear the bullets as they whispered by, now and again. Men were beginning to get hit in the legs which kept us busy.

Great air activity here hundreds of planes of both sides fighting it out.
Quite a sight to see one now and again plunging to earth in smoke or flames. In the distance I could see the spire of the church in Rosiered about 300 yds to the front.

Morning of the 9th of August

I have to check the exact dates from official history. We are now moving towards the town of Rosieres. Passed many captured guns of all sizes. I noticed that some of the German machine gunners were chained to trees to prevent them from running away. Passed some of our tanks that had been knocked, one small one a Whippet was burning and one of our chaps was lying half way thru the door. If that's the proper name of it (door).

Here we came to a deep ravine or sunken road. I noticed enemy food kitchens and German prisoners lined up under guard. Some prisoners we passed were a sorry looking lot. We heard that we had traveled 10 miles from the opening of the attack. It felt like it. We were tired, advancing hardly without a stop. Stretchers were carried by two men.

We were now advancing in rushes we brought up the rear as stretchers were supposed to. I was thankful for that. Altho now the air seemed to be full of bullets from enemy M.G.s, that's why the short rushes. Here our Colonel was wounded (Lt. Col Latta) I noticed that he was not picked up by bearers, but stayed there probably to continue the control of the Bn.

We commandeered some German prisoners to take care of our wounded. They were most willing to help out. As at Passchendaele.

We at last reached the outskirts of Rosieres and it was surrounded with barbwire I noticed. But lanes were to be cut thru to allow us to pass thru.
I noticed a few of our tanks that had been knocked out, and still cavalry horses lay scattered about dead with their legs in the air. It was quite hot.

The town was captured by our Bn and the 31st. In the town trains with their rolling stock, Germany army canteen goods. We were not allowed to drink from the bottles that lay stacked up. Pt. Andy Armstrong was awarded the Military Medal. I wish I had one. Also among the loot was a quarter master stores, which contained clothing, arms and what have.

3rd of August

The 4th Div came up eventually and relieved our division, or so it seemed to me as we began to pull out of the town.
By the number of casualties that we saw in our Bn it all amounted around the 300 mark.

Us bearers had quite a job to do locating the wounded and dodging bullets. I think us bearers were more fortunate than the men in the ranks. We had more opportunity to move around than the men in the ranks. When they couldn't drop to the ground we took advantage of it when the opportunity occurred. We were more less free lances as it were. Altho times when we were taken by surprise by a sudden burst of enemy fire.

I consider now in retrospect that in a small way we were part of history in the making. Looking back now on that 8th day of August 1918, it was a soul stirring scene to see an army in motion, one that would never be seen that way again for quite some time. Infantry, tanks, cavalry, guns, aircraft, all in a motion of their own but coinciding in one vast controlled motion. Yes, it was a glorious few days at Amien, August 8th 1918.

Whilst crossing open country at this juncture, and being in extended order the enemy started to shell us with phosgene gas shells. One shell landed a short distance and the wind sent it in my direction and I felt a feeling in my throat, and I immediately threw myself to the ground. I coughed for a while, then the tightness left. Luckily for me that it was a slight whiff only. I noticed some of the other chaps were on the ground. Some staggering around with their hands to their throats. There is no explosion from the gas shell as it hits the ground only a slight noise. I was alright, so kept going. Nothing could be done once one had a severe attack of the gas and had no time apply his gas mask. The men in the rear took care of those affected.

The Hindenberg Line

27th September 1918 Canal du Nord

Our Div was in reserve to the 1st and 4th Divs. At the start of this battle for the canals. Our Regt followed up behind with the remainder of the Bde. (6th) We were told that when we would be put forward again we would have to capture the town of Iwuy. Town of Cambrai was captured by the forward troops, and we passed thru the town, parts of it were burning.

Some of us had some prisoners with us and we considered them to be a nuisance they kept close to us, I guess they feared for their lives.
The town seemed to be empty, nary a civilian in sight. We presumed that they were taking shelter in their cellars. We crossed the Canal du Nord. Parts of it were dry, as it was under construction. We evacuated the wounded here to the Regt'l aid post.

We halted for quite a spell after crossing the canal. Glad of the rest. A German plane was cruising and down across our position. An officer of another Bn was crossing a field close by coming towards us, and suddenly this plane started taking pot shots at him. The officer made a dash for some trees near by. The officer had a rifle with him and on reaching cover started to fire at the plane. To our surprise, he hit the plane in a vital spot or the airman and the plane started to bank, and then made a safe landing in the field.

The Bde captured some dugouts, and we occupied them for awhile. Enemy bombed our positions. Dugouts came in handy. We continued the advance without opposition by the enemy, probably they were making for a prepared position somewhere to their rear. We had now reached the Canal de L'escaut but not before we had captured the towns of Blecourt.

As we had advanced across this open country, we were in support of the 116th Bn who were quite a distance in front of us. Suddenly enemy M.G.s opened up, and we all hit the ground. Could hear the bullets as they whistled overhead. The ground sloped up towards what seemed to be a railway embankment, and the 116th were moving over it. On reaching the ground leading up the top of the embankment, we came across lots of bodies of the 116th and they were facing in every which way. They all looked tome as they were asleep. I stooped down and stared into their faces. The M.G. that had opened fire previously had caught them unawares, and took a terrible toll of them.

On reaching the embankment (that is the top of it) we could see our troops moving ahead and the enemy were going at the double. No civilians here, Germans had taken them with them. Also overtaken the Bentigny, also no

civilians. Bde kept going behind the English Regt of Manchester. Reached the Town of Cuvillers. Another canal part of the Escaut filled with water. I could see the town of Thunder St. Martin. Reaching here no enemy not in sight. They were on the run. Prepared to cross the canal. Footbridges had to be made for troops to cross. Came under enemy machine fire which kept us down under cover of the banks of the canal. No casualties, so we had no wounded to pack or tend to. Our Regt crossed the canal, and up ahead was the town of Iwuy. Enemy M.G.s still active.

11th October 1918

We entered Iwuy under heavy shell fire and by M.G. fire. Somehow our Regt captured some machine guns and prisoners who began to arrive on our front in considerable numbers. I with others brought the wounded in quickly as we could, using the prisoners to help us.

In going thru the Town of Iwuy we went thru the houses, no civilians here but by the condition of the houses, places were set for meals, cats and dogs roaming the streets. The Germans now were taking all civilians with them. The houses all had flags of many descriptions hanging from the roofs and windows. I took possession of two ornaments from one of the houses. Took them home. It reminded me of the poem "Barbara Fretchie" during the American Civil War.

Town of Fredericks

German prisoners under control of their own officers were assisting carrying out the wounded. The Germans were leaving at the far end of the town as we had entered. Their rear guard had left some machine gunners to hold us up, and the fire of these guns were causing us casualties.

17th October 1918

Bn moved out towards the Canal de le Sensee. We were to cross this canal and take the high ground beyond which we could see, and then to capture the town of Marquette beyond that.

Crossed the canal at night of the 18th of Oct by foot bridges. We moved off after midnight. A heavy fog now appeared. Enemy still using his M.G.s. Our Regt took the high hill with no casualties. Fog still thick.

We came to some trenches but no barbwire to cut. Some of the enemy were seen by us just leaving the far end of the town of Marquette. Enemy started to bombard this town with mortars and high explosives, and we had to take shelter in the cellars.

We continued to advance under cover of the fog. Up ahead somewhere was the large town of Denin. As we neared this town suddenly we could hear cheering. But we did not move out towards this town. We moved back to Sancourt in reserve, here we were very comfortable. The 4th Div had relieved our Div (2nd) and sad to relate instead of us entering Denin, they the 4th entered amid cheering crowds. Civilian began to arrive to inspect their homes, many a sad scene was witnessed by us as they roamed the streets looking for things they had left behind.

Moved back again to Marquette. Guns etc. passed thru here in an endless stream. We were told that the enemy was retreating in great haste towards the city of Valenciennes. Finally we moved out and occupied Fisse St. Roch, a deserted village undamaged, where we all lived in great comfort. We actually slept in real beds.

Army life was becoming luxurious by comparison with the endless discomfort we had endured since September 1915. But the Sgt-Mjr did not bring our breakfast in bed.

29th October 1918

Canadians inspected by Sir Arthur Currie, with the Prince of Wales.

November 1st 1918

Heavy firing could be heard from the direction of Valenciennes. Word came thru that the city had fallen. We prepared to move out.

November 4th 1918

Reached the town of Denain that the 4th Div had captured. It was the first town that we had entered still occupied by civilians. The town gave us a wonderful reception. Our pipe band caused great excitement, probably they had never seen the kilt before. We heard stories here about the brutality of the Germans on the civilian population.

Passed thru this place heading for Valenciennes a short march away. Arrived there our Bde. We all occupied the Cavalry Barracks, where we remained until the 9th of Nov 1918, when after a short march we crossed the

border into Belgium. We continued to march thru villages and towns amid wild cheering by the populace. All the streets were decorated with flags, and shouts of "Vive les Anglais". After discovering we were not British soldiers, the should turned to "Vive les Canadas".

Some German prisoners were lying in a ditch by the road and as we passed them we heard shouts and growls from the Belgians who were also making threatening hisses especially from the women. Some women were advancing upon some more German prisoners that were marching towards us. As our Pipe Band passed them (the Germans) they the Germans dived into the ditch and lay there as we passed.

Nov 10th 1918

It was rumored that the German Army had signed an armistice. But firing was still heard up ahead somewhere. Passed thru more villages, some kind of welcome. Reached the town of Le bouverie which was near the town of Mons. The Regt received orders to attack the enemy rear guard beyond. But no attack took place. Guess most of us were glad and I thought no more wounded to pick up.

11th of Nov 1918

Continued the march in defensive formation and reach Ciply, near Mons in the morning. Continued the march no more firing was heard by us so presumed that the Germans had given up.

Evening of 11th of Nov 1918

Reached the village of San Forien – St. Symphorien. Here the people surrounded us shouting and singing. They had a music machine and started playing it, and next we knew everyone was dancing in the streets.

I noticed a large party of men was moving down a road leading into the village. As they neared we noted the condition they were in. They were ragged and some were limping. It turned out that they were prisoners that had been released from a prison camp further up the road.

We stayed here for a quite a few days. Before leaving however, the whole Bde marched to the City of Mons for a grand march of the Canadian Army. Some sign posts on the roads near by the read 'Ramillies", another read "Malplaquet". These battles were fought many years ago, and I realized that we were in the 'cock pit' of Europe.

We were informed that we had been selected to march to Germany with the First Division. Three cheers for us.

18th of Nov 1918

Marched off morning of 18th of March 1918. We reached the town of Haine St. Pierre. Remained here until 21st of Nov 1918.

21st Nov 1918

Continued the march and reached Courcelles, still receiving cheering and singing by the civilians. Continued the march and reached Wenfercee.

24th Nov 1918

Reached the town of Flawinne. We the 6th Brigade was the advanced guard for our Div, the 27th, 28th, 29th, and 31st Bns. So we had the honour of entering all these towns first and receiving the acclamations of the populace. Given wine, flowers, flags.

In Flawinne I remember we slept in the school house there. We were to return to this same village from Germany in 1919. We crossed the River Meuse. Marched 18 miles we reached Coutisse about 4 m. Next day we reached Miecret, amidst a downpour of rain. Then onto Weris where we were inspected by Gen Currie.

From Weris we marched thru the Ardennes, it was very cold. Marched 17 miles we reach Courtil close to the German border. Rations were short, as we had outmarched our supply column, so we ate bully beef and hardtack. We expected to cross the German frontier on the 4th of Dec 1918.

Before crossing the border, we rested up, cleaned our equipment, etc. Back to normal meals again served from our traveling kitchens.

4th Dec 1918

Reveille at 0500 hrs. Moved off at 0730 hrs.
At 0920 hrs 4th December 1918 we crossed the German border, with our colours flying. The brass band played "O Canada". At St. Vith all males were required to remove their hats as the Bn marched by. Also at St. Vith the inhabitants had piled all their arms outside on their doorsteps. This had been enforced by the Canadian Cavalry who rode in advance of our forces. As advance guard to our

brigade we arrived at Wallrode in the afternoon, picquets were established on the outskirts.

Next day the 6th of Dec 1918 we marched about seven miles to the Schonberg. A second march of about 18 miles brought us to Munstereiffel on 7th Dec. This was a University town. Whole Bn was billeted in the Roman Catholic Church. We departed the next morning. Here some of us obtained some mouth organs without paying for them.

Reached Odendorf in the afternoon (early) 8th Dec. From here we marched to Bonn 10th Dec 1918. (on the River Rhine). On entering the City the R.S.M. kept shouting "Hut ab" which meant take off your hats, to the civilians. Here we marched to the army barracks. (Recently built) We were at lat arrived at the River Rhine. We established outposts on both sides of the river. We patrolled in pairs.

13th Dec 1918

We crossed the Rhine in the morning. Gen Currie and his staff was at the other side of the bridge to take the salute as we march passed.
We reached the small town of Ober Cassel where we were billeted on the inhabitants. "B" Coy was sent on outpost duty the Romlinghoven farther up the river. The Germans were very friendly. I visited Bonn and Cologne. In Bonn I visited the home of Beethoven. All the inhabitants were required to turn in their arms at the local school house.

I learnt to speak a fair amount of German. Another chap and I when on patrol used to circle around and call in a house (Hausen) and have coffee with an old couple who had a daughter by the Name of Kunigunder (Marie) Smidth. One night as we approached the house a way from the rear, and nearing the kitchen door we heard voices, they were speaking German. We drew our pistols and entered quickly. As we drew into the front room we saw two German soldiers in full uniform with packs. We shouted "Achtung" to them which meant in plain words "Hold it". They both immediately put up their hands.
Marie came to us and said 'Meine brudder und friend". We made sure they had no arms. They had just returned from the Russian front. Her brother's friend wanted to return to his parents who live further inland. They had been discharged from the army after the Armistice. We understood that he reached him home alright.

Another night on arriving at the house we heard voices in the kitchen. Someone was speaking Canadian. We recognized the voice of Lt. Cruickshanks one of our officers. He was telling them that no soldiers were permitted to come to their house. We must have been seen sometime entering there. Nothing more

came of it. But we stopped visiting there. Didn't want to get the old people into trouble.

Later on during stay here some of us contrived to visit an old chap with his son in an old mansion. Here we enjoyed some musical evenings. The Son played the violin. We had a very enjoyable Xmas here. At the house where I was billeted the folks hung Xmas stockings at the ends or our beds.

I became acquainted with a fraulein at a house on the main street, the Wilhelmstrasse. She was pregnant I discovered. One night I helped her to get the wood from the cellar, and she made advances to me. I said to her "Nein" "Nein" which meant in plain Canadian, nothing doing. I did not know how long we would be in the country and did not want to accused of fathering her child.

The townspeople always were polite to us, saying when they met us on the streets with the greeting of "Guten Morgan" or "Guten Abend" Good morning and good evening or sometimes "Guten Tag" Good day. Xmas trees were in abundance on the streets and in the homes. Soap was scarce and we gave some of them ours. It was against orders to fraternize with the Germans. But it was done just the same wherever possible by us. It was great fun.

We all enjoyed a sumptuous Xmas dinner, turkey, pudding and everything that made Xmas so enjoyable. Baseball games were organized with the Americans who were at Coblense up the River.

Our guard room was sometimes filled with Germans who had tried to slip thru our outposts without passes; their excuse was they wanted to visit relatives.

Leaves began to com thru, and I was one of the lucky ones. I packed my gear and headed for Bonn with others. I intended to visit Scotland and of course to visit my grandparents at Whittlesea, near the City of Peterborough but alas on reaching London I finished my leave there. Here at the Canadian Maple Leaf Club I ran across a chap whom I knew in my Coy of the 48th Bn. The last I saw him was during the battle of Sorrel Hill. He was diving for a shell hole as we crept along the China Wall in the Ypres Salient. The shelling was very heavy that night as I remember it, quite a number of our men were killed and wounded. He told me that he had received a wound that night and had been carried out the next day. He was an American and he received parcels from the States. He introduced me to Bull Durham tobacco. A kind of powdered tobacco, which we had to roll into cigarettes.

On termination of my leave, we headed for La Havre in France to rejoin our regiment, whom we thought was still in Germany. On reaching France we were informed that the Bde. (in fact all of the Canadian Army had left Germany, having been relieved by the French Army. Our Regt was at Flawinne in Belgium. We entrained for that town. It was the same town where we had been billeted in before our march to Germany.

I visited Brussels and other places along the river Muese. At the house where we were billeted the girl there told us that all the men of the town had been sent to the salt mines in Saxony during the war by the Germans. In fact I noticed that there were very few men in the town. They were expecting their man back very soon.

I told them my name was Bates, they pronounced it as Battes or in two syllables Bat-tes. I promised to write to them on reaching home. Which I did and they sent me some photographs of the family. I eventually stopped writing.

We eventually left Belgium and headed for France to La Havre. We left Belgium on the 6th of April 1919. We passed thru southern Belgium of bitter memories. We reached La Havre 7th of April 1919. We traveled in boxcars, that were very cold, having no heat in them. Here at La Havre we lived in the tents.

10th of April 1919

We sailed for Southhampton, England 10th April. On arriving there we entrained for Whitley Camp. Here we were billeted in huts. The 2nd Div we were told no longer existed. All ranks were granted leave after medical inspection. The Prince of Wales inspected the 6th Brigade (27th, 28th, 29th, and 331st Bns)

In March 1919 we sailed for Canada from Southhampton for Canada on the R.M.S. "Olympic" docking at Halifax, N.S. Arrived at Vancouver B.C. 23 May 1919. Those for Victoria sailed next day arriving at Victoria 24th of May, in the midst of Victoria Day celebrations. Received our discharge at the Willows Camp Oak Bay where we had left for war in June 1915. The war was over for us at last.

Arrived home to the family. We all received a scroll from the Mayor, welcoming us back to Victoria, praising us for our patriotism, etc, etc, etc, etc.

Where to now?

Accepted a recommendation from the Dept. of Veterans Affairs or Returned Soldiers to attend a course in Illustration and Designing at the Shaw School of Art in Victoria. I accepted this and on completion was granted a Diploma. On completion I was determined to enter the Army as a career. Henceforth I enlisted in the P.P.C.L.I. The new army had been formed following the end of the war, and three regiments were formed. January 1921 was the beginning of a military career that eventually ended on 26th of August 1946.

In taking this step I was following in the footsteps of my Father, who enlisted in the British Army, and who served in India, South Africa, Ireland and

England. It was a natural step for me to take, as I thoroughly enjoy the life of a soldier, its discipline, mode of life, its hardships, comradeship of barrack life, etc. My Father was pleased at the step I had taken.

In April 1923 my Father died and was buried with full military honours. I was determined to make a success of my career, and consequently due to military study and determination to succeed, I was promoted to various ranks until my retirement as a Captain in August 1946, having reached the age of forty seven, and having served thirty one years.

In 1949 (August) I entered the Federal Civil Service from which I eventually retired after 16 years of service. The 10th of June 1965. After my discharge from the army I was granted a disability pension due to war service by the Dept. of Veteran's Affairs.

During the second war most of us professional soldiers were engaged in training troops in Canada. It was considered that were too old for active service, we were engaged in organizing training centres across Canada for the training of troops for the new regiments that were being formed for overseas duty.

On the outbreak of the second war in Sept 1919 I was stationed in Calgary with two other members of the P.P.C.L.I. being on detached duty from our Regiment the P.P.C.L.I. I was transferred to Calgary in Nov 1937 having promoted to C.S.M.I. (IC) that is the Instructional Cadre for the purpose of the Militia.

I enjoyed this form of duty very much, being away from the regiment was to my advantage. On the 29th of Sept 1939 I married Miss Mae Phillips in Calgary. Most of us who were away from the regiment protested to Ottawa regarding serving overseas with our Regiment. We were summarily informed that we had an important job to fulfill, but that we would be considered at a later date as circumstances permitted, regarding service when our regiment went overseas. Nothing came of this consideration as the war continued. I suppose that in their wisdom regarding us, it was essential that we of the old school were best fitted for the job of training troops due to our knowledge of administration, training, etc, etc. Se we had to resign ourselves to it. A majority of us were eventually commissioned. Was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant in 1941, then eventually to the rank of Captain. So I suppose we received a certain satisfaction from this.

I was employed in Schools of Instruction, also at Combat Schools, where I thoroughly enjoyed the work involved at training troops in actual combat.

After the defeat of Germany I was transferred back to Victoria and assisted in the rehabilitation of the Canadians who were captured at Hong Kong by the Japanese, and who were returned to Canada. I eventually became the Area Investigation Officer for the District of Victoria.

It was the intention of the Canadian Gov. to organize an army to participate in the war against Japan, which was then still in operation. I immediately volunteered for overseas service. The Japanese were defeated at end of 1945, and my hopes were dashed at serving overseas in that theatre of war. Eventually retired August 1946.

FINIS

I became interested in the Arts. I executed a considerable number of water colours, thru the years then eventually turned to painting in oils. Exhibited a number of paintings in Victoria, from time to time.

At present time of writing Aug 1973 I am instructing oil painting at the Silver Threads Centre in Esquimalt, which I enjoy very much. I have about two hundred paintings to my credit.

OMEGA