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CANADIANS IN BATTLE, 1915-1918

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The scale upon which the Great War was fought—the wide extent of theatres and battle-fields, the immense number of men engaged, and the diversity of their technical employment—makes the grouping, focusing, and framing of a satisfactory picture of Canadian participation a delicate and perplexing operation. The Canadian effort is the sum of individual actions, carried out in many places, at different times, and under varying conditions during a period of fifty-one months—a definite integral. These actions, often apparently unrelated except as to general motive, exerted their eventual cumulative effect at the point of contact—the front line, and a brief examination of what certain individuals did under specific known conditions on the battle-field may serve to give a general impression otherwise obtainable only after close study of the vast mass of material still being examined and arranged in the Historical Section of the General Staff at Ottawa.

Although in some battles first one side and then the other took the offensive, most of the major Canadian engagements in the Great War were of an offensive nature: Festubert, the Battles of the Somme in 1916, Vimy, Hill 70, Passchendaele, and the battles of 1918—Amiens, Arras, Drocourt-Quéant, Canal du Nord, Cambrai, Valenciennes, the advance to, and capture of, Mons; and there were several most important defensive battles: the Battle of Ypres, 1915, including the First Gas Attack, and the Battles of the Somme, 1918—familiarily known as the German March Offensive. These battles were all different: the conditions under which they were fought varied as to personnel, armament, field defences, tactics, and topography.

The personnel of the First Contingent were for the most part British born, but the great majority of the officers were Canadian born and had served in the militia. As time passed the personnel of the Overseas Military Forces became more representative of the whole community. The training of the First Contingent was carried out without full knowledge of the work which the troops would have to perform; by 1917 the policy of granting commissions from the ranks, established shortly after the first of our divisions arrived in France in February, 1915, had been extended to the almost complete exclusion of others; the later training, based on experience in the field, was suited to conditions, and combined experience had extended the possibilities of co-operation. Not until March, 1918, did men called up under the Military Service Act begin to arrive in France; they were readily absorbed, for the spirit of the First Contingent had been preserved, although by that time the strength, as well as the organization, of the Canadian forces in the field had multiplied and changed beyond all recognition.

The progressive development of armament, and the use of concrete and mining methods in the construction of field defences, brought about

a complete change in the tactics and in the employment of the troops, particularly in the British Armies, where in the days of rapid expansion there was an appalling lack of military supplies—of heavy guns, machine guns, trench mortars, and ammunition, including grenades. The introduction of poison gas as a weapon, the advent of tanks, and the increased use of aeroplanes all had their effect. The conduct of all the engagements varied also, depending upon whether they were offensive or defensive actions, and they partook in varying degree of the attributes of siege, semi-siege, and open warfare. Although all the major battles in which Canadians took part were on the Western Front, there was great variety in topography, still further increased by weather conditions.

Every general action in which Canadians fought was in one sense or another a critical action—either because of the consequences, or potential consequences, or because of the effect upon the morale of the troops, or because of the lessons learned which were applied later. In every general action there were specific individual actions which had a critical bearing upon the success or failure of the operation as a whole. As a background for the attitude and action of Canadians, the conditions prevailing must be set out, after which the part played by the commands and staff can be exemplified by the performance of an individual in the light of the orders and instructions issued before and during an engagement. Similarly the critical action of an individual may be cited to illustrate the general attitude of mind and resulting performance of the fighting troops.

It is interesting to consider the previous history and training of the individual, but pre-war trade or profession in Canada gives no clue to the probable performance of the man in battle. The principal occupational groups, embracing nearly one-third of these individuals, were "Agriculture", 123,000, and "Other Labourers", 75,600. Between 50,000 and 60,000 each were employed in "Building Trades", in "Transportation", including railways, and on "Clerical Work". From 20,000 to 30,000 were in "Domestic and Personal Services", in "Professions", in "Iron and Steel Trades", and in "Mercantile Pursuits". There were 15,000 "Students", 14,000 "Miners". "Forestry", "Engineers and Firemen", and those occupied with "Food and Allied Products", each numbered 11,000 to 13,000. The remaining 12 per cent. were otherwise engaged, and included 2,456 professional soldiers. No two of all these individuals had precisely the same antecedents, and, even if previous experience had been the same, no two were ever faced with identical problems in battle. Each, however, could be relied upon to do his duty as he saw it, a quality manifested by the brilliant record and resolute spirit of the Canadian Corps, which was the sum of the temper of each individual in it.

Let us then consider the application of a few typical and significant cases.

On a fine spring afternoon in Flanders a Canadian Company Commander watched the German bombardment from behind a wretched parapet where his company held the extreme left of the Canadian line. He looked at the sinking sun and noticed that it was tinged with a greenish haze. Then he saw the troops on his left running to the rear, and soon they were obscured by a dense cloud of what appeared to be smoke: actually it was gas—the first discharged in modern war. Thus, his left flank was exposed; as night fell the enemy attacked and annihilated the supporting

troops; by midnight he was hemmed in on three sides. Yet he and his men held on to the position for twenty-seven hours, during which time reserves checked the enemy by counter-attacks. Eventually, he withdrew his company according to orders into the new alignment. The reports which he sent back at the time, and from Germany after his capture, are available. The effect of his determined stand may be traced directly by messages—at the time hardly credited—through battalion, brigade, divisional, corps, and army headquarters. General Foch, who commanded on the left, did not believe that any troops could hold out in such a position. This Canadian before the war was a stockbroker and since 1918 has continued to be a stockbroker; but anticipating that his services might one day be required he had voluntarily undergone military service of thirteen years in the Canadian militia, and when the day came he was not found wanting. Had he failed others also might have failed, and the enemy might well have pressed forward to capture Ypres, and cut off the three divisions holding the Salient—to destroy or capture one-quarter of the British Army on the Western Front.

Other critical incidents of this battle, probably the most complicated ever fought by British troops, may similarly be followed by field messages, war diaries, letters, and reports. The main features of the Allied action can be followed in the British and the French official history, and for the other side there is the German official history. But the inter-relation and inter-dependence of the action of individual units were so involved that, to find out exactly what happened, it was necessary to tabulate, from documentary sources, the position and occupation of over eighty British and Canadian battalions at three-hour intervals during fourteen days of battle. Aided by these tabular statements, it has been possible to compile complete and accurate maps of dispositions at critical junctures of the battle, and these, when correlated with the Germans' account of their own action, coupled with contemporary Canadian reports of enemy activity, make it possible to follow the continuity of the battle as a whole, and to visualize the conditions prevailing in any part of the field at any time, and the performance of every unit engaged. The same procedure has been followed in the study of other Canadian battles, notably those of the last hundred days, for which a complete set of maps of 1/20,000 scale with explanatory charts of employment on a time basis, has been compiled. These show the position of every battery and the location and movements of every company throughout each engagement. Other series of maps, 1/40,000, 1/100,000, and 1/1,000,000, show the relation of the Canadian troops to other formations in the Allied line.

At Festubert the Canadians were hurried into a costly battle already in progress. The Germans in the preceding three months had by assiduous labour developed most elaborate and efficient field defences, the British lacked heavy artillery, and our field guns were incapable of clearing the broad belts of wire, or of subduing the protected German machine guns, cunningly placed to enfilade No-man's-land. In the recent fighting here British battalions had lost over sixty per cent. of their strength in the first few minutes of the assault, and a Canadian attack, employing the same tactics, was projected. We have it on high authority that a Canadian Commander—a wholesale merchant who had fought in South Africa—protested, saying that such an attack was "bloody murder". The tactical

plan was changed. Within a few days an Anglican Bishop also applied the word "murder" to the British sacrifices incurred through unpreparedness. Yet it must not be forgotten that the British High Command was faced with an insoluble problem: there was a lack of guns and still greater lack of ammunition. But the French were making it quite clear that in their opinion the British Army was not pulling its weight on the Western Front: the war must go on, the lives of men must be expended for lack of metal.

When at about this time the War Office issued a call for more troops from overseas, the Minister of Militia, with the assurance of a school-master, the acumen of a journalist, and the directness of a soldier—he had been all three—replied that for such tactics not men were wanted but Texas steers, and he advised placing orders for ten times the number of machine guns and heavy ordnance then in hand.

Although Festubert, and subsequently Givenchy, failed to achieve the results intended, they were critical engagements in that they brought to public attention the need for shells, and particularly for high explosives. The immense increase in production of arms and ammunition during the next three years was the sequel.

But the great lesson learned by the Canadians here was that, for the precision required in modern warfare, correct and detailed maps were absolutely essential. This battle-field was an area of alluvial farm-land, reclaimed from the original swamp by a network of ditches, some of them twelve feet wide and six deep. The maps issued at the time purported to show in detail these and other obstacles, but they were worse than useless, for the plotting was wrong in some instances to the extent of 500 yards, and they were printed upside down.

In September, 1915, the troops of the Second Contingent arrived in France, among them a young Canadian, born in the East, who had gone west to seek his fortune and sell insurance. A year before the war he had joined the militia and had been commissioned as lieutenant. He was in charge of the battalion scouts and had been told that a German prisoner was required. He therefore selected a suitable section of the German line about 125 yards from the Canadian, and with the aid of aeroplane photographs and scouts' reports made a detailed map of No-man's-land. In the rear area he laid out with white tapes a duplicate of the opposing trenches. He selected thirty-three scouts and bombers and they practised the approach and entry repeatedly and carefully by day and then by night, each man crawling the exact distance to be covered and taking the time. By the appointed night each man was thoroughly familiar with the area and knew the relative position of all his comrades at each stage. Two of the party spent four hours cutting paths through the wire right up to the German parapet. All had their faces blackened and had electric flashlights strapped to their rifles to dazzle and identify the enemy, and all wore cotton gloves to keep their hands free from mud until they reached the German trench. They laid a telephone line as they moved forward and so kept in touch with battalion headquarters. The raid was a success, a large number of the enemy were killed and valuable identifications were secured, which established the presence of a fresh German division brought from Russia. The officer in charge was soon promoted Staff Captain Intelligence; he was a Brigade Major at Vimy, and a G.S.O.2 at Hill 70 and Passchendaele, after which he was appointed senior General Staff Officer

of a division and was desperately wounded when visiting the line during the German March offensive. He made a good recovery, however, brought his old battalion back to Canada from the Rhine, and is now managing a furniture factory.

The early months of 1916 saw great developments in the practical application of aerial photography to Intelligence. Immediately after the British 3rd Division had exploded mines under the mound at St. Eloi and captured a small piece of ground, Canadian troops took over, in the dark and under protest, an unknown frontage not yet consolidated. The Germans deluged the area with shells, broke through, and recaptured the craters; but the Canadian companies in that uncharted chaos of mud insisted that they still held several of the craters. For some days rain and fog prevented the taking of aerial photographs, and even when photographs did come through showing German trenches on the lips of the craters, the Canadian artillery were not allowed to fire on them in case the occupants might be our own men; the Germans, as they have recorded, consolidated their position.

On June 2, 1916, the Germans again demonstrated the power of artillery on a narrow front by an intense bombardment of a sector of the Canadian line at Mount Sorrel. The trench garrison was exterminated and with them perished the Divisional Commander, in civil life a barrister-at-law, who happened to be visiting them; the Brigade Commander, an officer of the Canadian Permanent Force, was wounded and taken prisoner. A Canadian artillery subaltern—lately an undergraduate and the son of a Canadian General, who as a bombardier had been noticed for gallantry in action at Second Ypres—fought his two sacrifice guns to a finish; his body and the charred remains of his gunners were found a fortnight later when the Canadian counter-attack, covered by an equally intense bombardment, recovered the position. But losses had been nearly 10,000, and seven Canadian Battalion Commanders had fallen in the battle, five of them killed. They had come from Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia, where before the war they were following the occupations of A.D.C. to the Governor-General, officer in the permanent cavalry, broker, insurance agent, civil engineer, rancher, advocate, and federal M.P.

The history of the German regiment chiefly concerned shows how similar were the tactics employed by both sides, and how futile it was in trench warfare to expend men and ammunition in attempts to "improve" local tactical conditions on a narrow front.

Two weeks later the great allied offensive opened on the Somme; but not until the end of August did the Canadian Corps move southwards to plunge into what the Germans appropriately referred to as "der Blutbad"—"the Bath of Blood". In the first important Canadian attack, tanks were employed for the first time; they were effective chiefly because of surprise, and they had but a short life and a limited radius of operation, so that when fresh Canadian troops were hurried forward in the late afternoon to exploit success no tanks remained in action. In command of the left company in this attack, and at the pivot of the movement, was a major—one of the few officers of his battalion who had survived Mount Sorrel, where he had fought with conspicuous gallantry and been wounded. He had served ten years in the ranks, and four as an officer, of the Canadian

militia and was a manufacturer's agent in civil life. Arrived at the assembly position he could see no sign of the sister-company that was due to attack on his immediate right, but having been ordered to assault, and realizing that speed was essential or the covering artillery fire would be lost, he extended his own men on the two-company frontage and led them to the assault. After a stiff fight they captured two lines of enemy trench which they consolidated and maintained until reinforcements arrived. Had he hesitated there would have been a gap of a quarter of a mile in the Canadian attacking line, for the missing company had been cut to pieces by artillery and machine-gun fire on the way forward.

The story of the subsequent phases of Canadian action in the Somme is largely that of individual deeds of heroism, and of extreme physical exhaustion suffered by men and horses, in appalling conditions of rain and mud of which Canadian official photographs give ocular proof.

Of all the battles in which Canadians took part, Vimy is the most famous. This fame cannot be altogether justified, either from the historical or military standpoint. It was not the hardest fought, nor the most fruitful of immediate results; but it was almost exclusively a Canadian battle, for the first and only time all four of our divisions attacked simultaneously, and for the first time the possibility of breaking through a fortified position was demonstrated. In planning this battle the Commander of the Canadian Corps—an officer of the British Regular Army with a brilliant record, who later became Governor-General of Canada—developed co-ordination of action between all the arms and services to such an extent that the chain of mutual responsibility and mutual confidence was welded complete in every link from the Corps Commander to the private in the line. Maps formed the basis for instruction: there were maps showing enemy activity, defence works, dispositions of guns and reserves; there were other maps of the Canadian area showing traffic routes to be followed by motor vehicles, horse transport, fighting troops, and walking wounded; there were artillery barrage maps, maps of water-supply installed and projected; still other maps showing boundaries, locations, and moves of combatant units in every phase, and timed to the exact minute until the final objectives should be reached. By the study of such maps—40,000 were issued in the Canadian Corps—and of models in relief, and by practice attacks over a full-scale model upon which German defence works and Canadian unit boundaries were marked out with tapes and flags, every man knew on the day of battle where he was to go and what he had to do.

With all arms and services it was the same—labour crowned with success. The Heavy Artillery destroyed the field defences, silenced the enemy's batteries and broke up his reserves; the Field Artillery fired a perfect barrage under which the infantry moved steadily forward in accordance with an exact time-table overcoming one centre of resistance after another and proceeding to one objective after another; and as each objective was reached it was consolidated and machine guns disposed to meet counter-attacks.

The wounded were brought back and cared for; ammunition, rations, and forage were brought forward at the proper time and in the proper order; there was neither hurry, nor confusion, nor delay. To an unusual extent the course of this battle can be followed by the orders issued.

Advance arrangements for the attack even included the designation of concrete dugouts, upwards of a mile behind the enemy's line, as Canadian unit headquarters; after capture these were duly occupied at the appointed times.

The significance of Vimy in Canadian history, however, lies in the fact that there the Corps was consolidated into one homogeneous entity; the most powerful self-contained striking force on any battle-front.

The capture of Vimy Ridge was followed by three months of fighting on the Douai Plain beyond. Early in August the Canadian Corps moved northwards to capture Hill 70—an entirely different proposition, for here the low hill was set about with the mining villages, pit-heads, and slag heaps adjoining the northern suburbs of Lens. The principles of Vimy were applied, again arrangements were of the most detailed character and again the operation was a success. As at Vimy, the morale of the troops was at the highest, and their self-confidence was complete. Each man had a picture of his proper function and acted accordingly. A piper of one of the attacking battalions—a stalwart Highland immigrant of twenty-six who had played his company from Valcartier—being in doubt as to whether he would have time to clear the parapet and take his accustomed place in front of the company when the assault began, laid his predicament before the Company Sergeant Major, who referred the matter to the Company Commander; he directed that the piper should take up his position at whatever time he thought fit. This happened during a pre-arranged pause in the advance, when the company, exposed to enemy shell fire, was waiting for the covering barrage to lift. Noting the impatience of his comrades and determined to “mak siccar”, the piper stepped out of the trench, “gave them wind” and played as he marched up and down the parapet, on the front not only of his own but of the adjoining companies, in full view of the enemy. At the critical moment of the assault he was in position and played his company forward. It was a gruelling fight: when the enemy counter-attacked he exchanged his pipes for a rifle, and there is reliable evidence that he could handle with equal dexterity a rifle, a chanter, or a pick—in civil life he was a labourer. After the battle he was reported “missing”, and his body was never found.

The Battle of Hill 70 had been undertaken to distract German forces from Flanders, where the British offensive, which had secured Messines but not yet Passchendaele, was in progress. The new Corps Commander, in laying his plans, had correctly assumed that the Germans, to remove the menace to Lens which Canadian possession of Hill 70 would offer, would bring up fresh troops; but there was no Canadian intention of taking Lens. The provocative threat served its purpose; one fresh division after another was thrown in by the enemy, and each in turn was blasted by the Canadian heavy guns, decimated by the barrage of the field artillery and machine guns, or finally disposed of by bomb and bayonet at the Canadian front line.

In mid-October the Canadian Corps moved out of line northwards towards Ypres; the task was to capture the Passchendaele Ridge. The Ypres Salient was far different from what it had been in the spring of 1915. For ten weeks the battle had been in progress, carried on by British, Australian, and New Zealand troops, with an attached French Army on the left flank. The shells fired during three years of war had obliterated

all features of the landscape, buildings were level with the ground, the heavy autumn rains and the choked drainage system had converted the area into a featureless muddy swamp, in which stood out derelict British tanks, and at irregular intervals "pillboxes"—concrete machine-gun emplacements, arranged in an open pattern for defence in depth, entirely different from the heavily manned lines of trenches with deep dugouts encountered on the Somme. In the whole forward area only the shallowest trenches were occasionally possible, for the water table as a rule coincided with the surface of the ground; a warning had been issued to the Canadian Medical Service that it required six bearers per stretcher to move one casualty two miles in six hours, and it was found that some of the field guns which the Canadians were called upon to take over were sunk in the mud over the axle. To fight under such conditions called for the highest degree of physical endurance and for the most self-sacrificing devotion: neither were lacking and the Canadian infantry made steady if slow progress.

In command of a company in one of these attacks was an acting major; born in the south of England, he had completed three years' service in the Royal North West Mounted Police and had joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force early in 1915 as a private; he had been commissioned in the field a year later, fought with distinction at the Somme, and had been thrice wounded. On this occasion he was again wounded just prior to the advance but led his men forward, plunging through the mud. At one stage their further progress was threatened by a strong point in the area assigned to the adjoining battalion which had been held up, so he captured it, and in due course disposed his company in the allotted objective. Now both his flanks were exposed for a considerable depth and, although the enemy counter-attacked repeatedly, he held on; the reports which his runners somehow managed to deliver to the Battalion Commander brought support which maintained and consolidated the position. His tenacity had made unnecessary a repetition of the attack—with another heavy casualty list. By such actions the Passchendaele Ridge was captured, and after a month, exhausted and depleted, but not disheartened, the Canadian Corps returned to the Lens front.

The scheme of the Battle of Passchendaele was simple: set-piece attacks, covered by intense artillery fire and with close limited objectives. Apart from the determination of the infantry and machine gunners in attack, the features of the battle were the methodical silencing of the enemy's guns by our counter-batteries, the supply of ammunition and maintenance of barrage fire by the field batteries, against whom the German artillery was chiefly directed, and the heroic work of the stretcher-bearers in bringing out wounded across country to the boarded tracks which the Corps Commander had insisted must be constructed before the Canadian troops were engaged.

The Canadian cavalry and the motor machine gunners came into prominence during the German offensive in March and April, 1918.

On the second day—March 22, 1918—the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade, of five batteries and armed with forty guns carried on motor cars, was ordered from the Vimy front to Amiens and thence to Villers-Bretonneux—in all forty miles. The Germans had attacked on a sixty-mile front and were driving back the British line at the rate of three

miles or more a day. All the batteries were heavily engaged, taking advantage of their mobility to acquire and transmit authentic information rapidly and to assist the hard-pressed infantry by filling gaps in the line or by stiffening the defence at critical points. The latter rôle was assigned to two of the batteries at two o'clock in the morning of the 24th. They moved forward by congested roads along the valley of the Somme and by eight o'clock two advanced guns came into action in the eastern outskirts of a village, just as the Germans were entering it from the north. One of these guns was destroyed, the other was brought out after a running fight with revolvers. Meanwhile the remaining fourteen guns were being disposed in a shallow trench on a ridge, a thousand yards to the west, across which the infantry fell back as the enemy pressed forward to the assault. Early in the fight the senior Battery Commander was mortally wounded and the other—a university undergraduate—took command; having had no previous military training he had enlisted in the ranks of the Second Contingent; he received his commission in the field before the Somme and had fought with gallantry at Passchendaele where he was wounded. All through the day the enemy's repeated assaults upon the position were stopped and attempts to work around the open flanks were defeated. But by artillery fire and snipers the garrison was depleted, and the enemy worked up closer and threw hand-grenades at the guns. Finally, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, a combined assault from front and flanks drove the garrison out. The infantry had been ordered to withdraw, and the Commander brought back the two batteries, now mustering one n.c.o. and four men with one gun, and himself. He lost his right arm in the fight; the five other officers lost their lives, and many of the men were shot through the head by enemy snipers. Their determined defence had held up a German division for over eight hours.

During the ensuing week the German advance continued; they were almost within sight of Amiens; another three miles and they would cut a vital artery—the main lateral railway line from Paris. The Canadian Cavalry Brigade, which had been fighting rearguard actions, mounted and on foot, since the opening of the battle, was ordered to seize a wood, which the Germans were in the act of occupying, along the eastern scarp of the Avre Valley. The whole brigade moved quickly forward; orders were issued to units detailing their action in a combined plan, which consisted of an encircling movement north and south of the wood and a frontal attack in the centre. One of the squadrons—commanded by a fruit-farmer who, since Valcartier, had risen from the ranks—was given the special mission of moving round the north-eastern corner at the gallop to engage enemy reinforcements which might be entering the wood. The Squadron Commander led his men up a deep draw 1,000 yards north of the wood, and detached one troop as vanguard in anticipation of mounted action; but on going forward to reconnoitre he saw that the enemy's position extended north-eastwards outside the wood—two lines of infantry, each about sixty strong and 200 yards apart, with machine guns in the centre and on the flanks. He ordered the leading troop to attack dismounted through the north-eastern portion of the wood and to mount their Hotchkiss guns at the edge of it; he himself led the remaining three troops to the charge against the position outside the wood. On the sudden appearance of the squadron the enemy in front opened fire; with rifles,

machine guns, trench mortars on the left flank, and a six-inch howitzer about 600 yards in the rear, they attempted to stop the advance; throwing a shower of bombs, the front line ran to meet the attack with the bayonet and showed no signs of surrender when the horsemen charged home with the sabre, wheeled about, and charged again. The few surviving Germans broke and fled; the fifteen remaining cavalrymen made their way to the eastern face of the wood. The Squadron Commander died of his wounds next day.

Much has been written by participants about this action and it has even been described as the turning-point of the war; that is somewhat of an exaggeration but it did mark the high tide of the German advance. On account of the independent action of Canadian squadrons in this engagement, and the employment of British reinforcing units in the later stages, added to the rapidity and complexity of movement, it had been found difficult to correlate and reconcile the different existing reports, but, as in other cases, by circulating a draft account to survivors and co-ordinating the additional information which they have supplied, an accurate and comprehensive narrative has been compiled.

During the early summer months the Germans swept forward on other parts of the front, but at last the tide turned and the Canadian Corps was ordered to join in driving back the enemy, now well established along the wooded scarp overlooking the Avre and northwards. The southward move of forty miles was carried out with the utmost secrecy, and meanwhile a few senior Canadian officers, also in secret, visited the new front. One of them was responsible for drawing up a plan to silence the German batteries during an attack. He was born in the Canadian West, educated in the East; he had been a university professor for two years and when war broke out he was a consultant in electrical high-tension transmission, and a thoroughly proficient major in the militia; wounded in the Gas Attack at Ypres, and again when visiting the French at Soissons, he had a distinguished record in the field. He collected information as to enemy gun positions; he reconnoitred and selected positions for the artillery to cover the Canadian advance, and developed a plan of counter-battery action which he submitted to the British Army Staff under which the Canadian Corps would fight. To his intense chagrin his plan was condemned as too complicated and therefore impracticable. There was no time to develop another plan even had such been desirable or possible, so he communicated by telephone with his superior officer, the General Officer Commanding the Artillery of the Canadian Corps—another militia gunner, who had been a newspaper editor. The conversation was short: "My plan has been condemned." "Are you yourself satisfied with it?" "Yes." "Then it will be carried out." The batteries were brought in under cover of darkness, they remained silent until zero hour. His plan was carried out and it was an unqualified success.

As heretofore, success, although this time chiefly due to surprise effect, was largely attributable to meticulous care in making proper arrangements to meet any eventuality and in seeing that they were thoroughly understood by all concerned. The Commander of the right Canadian division adjoining the French—he was a British regular officer on loan to Canada before the war and was killed in No-man's land by a sniper four weeks before the armistice—arranged with the French Divi-

sional Commander that a combined Franco-Canadian force of two platoons, with machine guns, should, under cover of the initial burst of artillery fire, thrust forward up a draw that marked the inter-Allied boundary and in the probable confusion slip through the German line for a mile to seize a small copse on the plateau, from which, with an excellent field of fire across open country, they could forestall enemy reinforcements. The Canadian Divisional Commander ordered one of his staff to see that proper arrangements were made: that officer, a railroad engineer of three years' regimental and staff experience in France, went to call on his opposite number, the Sous Chef d'État Major of the French division; together they consulted the Commander of the French divisional artillery and arranged for a suitable programme of fire, and then the Commander of the French divisional infantry, who referred the Canadian to the French Infantry Commander, the Battalion Commander, and the Company Commander in the front line; the last-mentioned Commander recalled from an outpost the French subaltern who would lead the French detachment, and the details of the plan—for the ninth time—were explained to him and the rendezvous was agreed upon. The staff officer now had to ensure that parallel arrangements were made on the Canadian side of the boundary: he visited in turn the Canadian flanking brigade, Battalion and Company Commanders, and interviewed the subaltern selected to lead the Canadian detachment; finally, having expounded the scheme for the fifteenth and last time to the Canadian Artillery Commander, he reported to his Divisional Commander that arrangements had been made. When the attack took place the inter-Allied party carried out their mission to the letter, and throughout the advance there was complete understanding and unity of action along the inter-Allied boundary.

This battle, and others in which Canadians participated, is referred to in publications of the German State Archives, and also in the published memoirs of German High Commanders, so that sidelights are available to verify the perspective from the German side. A detailed narrative of the part taken by the French was published some years ago.

After the break-through at Amiens there followed two days of open warfare, until the entrenched area of the opposing lines held in 1917 was reached. One of the Canadian divisions reverted to trench warfare tactics to avoid the delay and casualties inseparable from a set-piece attack. The method was for platoons acting in unison with Lewis gun, bomb, and bayonet, to work in on a flank and clear up the labyrinth of dilapidated trenches piecemeal. A certain platoon took a wrong turning in the maze of trenches and headed along a communication trench running straight into the German lines. The officers having become casualties the senior n.c.o. took charge. The Major of a neighbouring Canadian battalion of another division, noticing the loss of direction, proceeded to join them; he found the party making steady progress; they had bombed and rushed one machine gun after another, and in his own words "the spirit was such that the men continually cheered". It was noticed that a certain private—a Danish immigrant, a civil engineer who went farming in Kenya after demobilization—was invariably in the lead, and when the party returned after having penetrated the German line for a thousand yards and broken up several counter-attacks, a recommendation was put forward for a

suitable award. The private, who had been in France only five months, was granted a commission and suitably rewarded.

When after the Battle of Amiens the Canadian Corps moved north to strike again at Arras, the centre division was faced with the problem of capturing a ruined village on the rising ground between the River Scarpe and the Arras-Cambrai road, a position of great tactical strength as the British had learned when they captured it in 1917. The Canadian Divisional Commander secured the services of an officer of the Royal Engineers who had become intimate with the front during and after these earlier operations. Accompanied by this engineer officer, members of his own staff, and the Commanders of the two attacking infantry brigades, the Divisional Commander made a thorough reconnaissance of the front and prepared his plan: the initial assault would be delivered frontally under a barrage but the village would be reduced by an encircling movement carried out on the left by three battalions which, taking advantage of unexpected dead ground south of the river, would move forward, extend, and wheel half right in advancing under an oblique barrage. To check his plan the Divisional Commander then made another reconnaissance accompanied by the two brigadiers—one had been a farmer in Quebec and the other a farmer in Saskatchewan, and both had belonged to the local militia; one had been wounded in the First Gas Attack, the other at Mount Sorrel.

Although time was short the arrangements made for the action of infantry companies and platoons, machine-gun batteries, and artillery, were precise as ever. The village and the hill and the trenches beyond were captured without undue loss: a different story from Festubert and the Somme, for although the German defensive tactics were again directed towards the maintenance of a series of trench lines, the Canadian Corps had developed to a remarkable degree tactical methods made possible only by the closely concerted action and high efficiency of all the arms and services.

In the penetration of the Hindenburg System, and in the subsequent rapid advance the Canadian Corps was continuously engaged from Arras to Mons—a distance of over fifty miles. The tactics were widely different, but the methods were the same, and the spirit of the Corps was constant. In the fighting before the Drocourt-Quéant line a Battalion Commander—an insurance agent in civil life—directed the fight for six hours from a shell hole, although wounded so that he could not move; he had been in every battle including the Gas Attack, and had served for two years on brigade and divisional staffs.

On September 2 the Canadian Corps advanced at dawn and overwhelmed the crowded defenders of the Drocourt-Quéant line. Many deeds of gallantry were performed. A Canadian lance-corporal—a barber who had conducted himself with uniform bravery for forty months with his battalion in France—on foot directed a tank with his signal flag up to and along the German front line, in spite of the concentrated fire of seventeen machine guns later captured. When the advance on the second trench line was held up because of lack of tanks and because the troops on the flank could make no headway, a Battalion Commander—a federal Member of Parliament—personally arranged, under a hail of shells and bullets, for covering fire from machine guns and for a field battery to give close support, and led his men forward to their allotted objective.

By the breaking of the Drocourt-Quéant line the Germans far to the south were outflanked and compelled to fall back upon the last prepared line of the Hindenburg defence system.

The supreme confidence—bred of experience and success—which pervaded the Canadian Corps throughout these last hundred days was exemplified at a conference of medical officers of the Army, when the senior medical officer of the Canadian Corps was called upon to explain his arrangements for clearing the wounded during operations to be undertaken four days later. He had been in private practice in Canada for fourteen years, during which time he had belonged to the non-permanent active militia; in 1912 he joined the permanent force. In France he had been caring for wounded Canadians in every battle since the beginning. At the conference he spoke in a matter-of-fact way of evacuating wounded by broad gauge trains from Quéant village after a certain hour, and when the question was asked how this could be possible, as the track was not laid and the village was overlooked by the enemy on the high ground at Bourlon, he replied that the Canadian Railway Troops had promised to provide trains, and the enemy would not at the hour indicated be in possession of the heights. He did not stress the fact that he had an alternative plan which in the event was not required: in the first five days of the battle over 7,500 wounded were rapidly evacuated on the broad-gauge railway, installed and operated as promised.

The most notable battle of the series as regards numbers engaged, audacity of conception, and brilliance of execution was the crossing of the Canal du Nord. The plan was that the Corps, holding a frontage of 6,000 yards would attack on a front of 2,600 yards, where the canal was dry, and, advancing through this break, capture the Bourlon Heights by a diverging movement which increased the frontage to 16,000 yards. As usual, the Army Commander examined the scheme prepared by the Corps Commander; at the time he was persuaded that it was feasible, but on reflection he was assailed by doubts: should he let the Canadians do it?—the failure of any part of the great machine might easily wreck the whole. But the words of his senior staff officer turned the scale: "If Currie says they can do it, they will"—and they did.

From these specific cases let us return to the general aspect. With so many variables, the most important of which have been touched upon in this rapid survey, any precise system of integration is impossible; the significance of each action can be gauged only by consideration of the events leading up to it and by its bearing on subsequent events. In the final analysis achievement must be measured by results, but within certain limits it is possible to compute the variables with some degree of accuracy, provided a chart or map has been compiled to fix all known constants as to time, place, unit, and action. Only after these limits have been established can a proper conception be achieved of the degree of permissible variation in evidence as to any particular situation.

A comprehensive history should be not merely an academic dissertation, nor a dry military report, but a store of ordered and authentic information to which the reader may bring his own personality and bear away riches proportionate to the strength of his understanding. It is possible to conduct the reader into the actual battle, and, by reconstructing the circumstances and quoting from messages sent and received at the time,

to project his mind into that of important participants. For this the closest checking of the times at which orders or messages were sent is essential, and still more important the times at which they were received: in battle communications were often interrupted—telephone lines cut by shelling, despatch riders and runners killed—and of verbal communications, which occasionally cancelled or modified what was written, there may be no direct record.

Military service was an experience undergone by one in every three of the male citizens of Canada between eighteen and sixty—by one out of every two fit men—and about one-half of those who went overseas actually were under fire. Thus there is a vast quantity of evidence; the military part of it preserved in the war diaries and records of the 580 Canadian units which served in theatres of war, the personal part impressed on the minds of participants. Compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, the student who would examine evidence bearing upon any of these military operations may expect to find bewildering variety in point of view and in visual angle. The man in the ranks and the regimental officer had knowledge only of his own unit, and occasionally of others in direct contact; the Commanders of higher formations and their staffs alone were in a position to be on intimate terms with the endless intricacies and ramifications of a major operation, to know the dispositions and employment of the units engaged, and to appreciate the interdependent functions of all the arms and services involved.

In battle the horizon of most participants is incredibly close. For the infantryman in trench warfare it was often less than fifty yards, in open warfare it increased to perhaps five hundred yards. For officers of the field artillery, and for Divisional Commanders and staffs, the known area was as a rule five or six miles in depth and one or two miles wide. For the Corps Commander and his staff, and for the officers directing the heavy artillery, the area was about 120 square miles. As distances increase, so local details become of necessity less distinct, and it is important to establish the probable horizon of any participant before weighing his evidence. It must be recognized that participants who had no knowledge of events outside their purview had to fall back on assumptions, and these, although often erroneous, became established in their minds as facts. And further, the impression of what a man saw and did himself is so vivid that all else is correspondingly vague.

Each man took overseas his own individual personality and retained it, but his predispositions were revealed under the stress of battle, when each man reacted according to his own inherent feelings, and his proclivities, good or bad, were accentuated and starkly exposed to his comrades. This is to be remembered when considering apparently contradictory statements which occasionally appear. Unless appropriate adjustment is made, it is easy to be misled by participants who, not fully informed and not having experienced the responsibility for others which comes with promotion, are prone to slight those who bore the heavier burden—the responsibility for the lives of their fellow men.

For finding a way out of such a kaleidoscopic maze there is one satisfactory procedure: to establish primarily and precisely certain control points—not only as to place but as to time and unit also, and so the factors of where, when, and who, can be relatively fixed in the picture plane.

Intention may be discovered from the orders issued. There remains to be discovered what was done, how it was done, and why it was done. The evidence relating these three falls into groups of variables cognate with families of mixed curves which are influenced and diverted proportionately by compelling forces and by change of focal point. But the range of variation is now restricted in two dimensions within the established control points, for the curves of unit action have been related to the co-ordinates of time and space. Evidence is obtainable from other sources as to conditions prevailing, and whatever is reported to have taken place can now be weighed, and a close approximation reached as to method and as to what actually happened. The solution will indicate the proper disposal and form of mass, the intensity and direction of light, and the correct perspective.

Often, original messages, fortunately preserved, give the essence of the story; usually there is a report covering each element of the action, compiled within a few days from the evidence of participants and submitted by the senior surviving officer of each combatant unit engaged. The orders issued by Commanders of formations and their reports on the operation, read in the light of the knowledge they possessed and collated with the actual plotted movements of their units, provide the framework into which details of motive and action may be fitted to form the complete picture, with its inevitable background of suffering, and sorrow, and devotion to duty.

Of the 628,462 men and women who bore the badge of Canada in the Great War, 60,661 met death and passed on. Those who survived brought their experiences home and are relating their memories to a new generation. Not the least of the functions of history is the preservation of the tradition of self-sacrifice, and the transmission to posterity of that precious heritage so dearly bought in battle overseas during the most momentous years in Canadian history.