

# OVER THE TOP

WITH THE

# 25<sup>th</sup>



BY

*Lewis*

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A Table of Contents with links has been included for the use of the reader.

Obvious typographical errors have been corrected. For a complete list, please see the [end of this document](#).

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Lieut. R. Lewis, M.M.  
LIEUT. R. LEWIS, M.M.

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# **OVER THE TOP WITH THE 25TH**

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**CHRONICLE OF EVENTS  
AT VIMY RIDGE AND  
COURCELLETTE**

**BY**

**LIEUT R. LEWIS, M.M.**

**1918  
H.H. MARSHALL, LIMITED  
HALIFAX, CANADA**



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## **Chapter One**

The end of August, 1914, found me following my usual employment as second mate on a small steamboat plying between St. John's, Newfoundland, and various stations on the coast of Labrador. The news from the front aroused my patriotism, and though my captain, who was a Britisher through and through, strongly urged me to remain with him because of the great difficulty of securing another man, I was fully made up in my mind that my clear, plain duty was to enlist. On my return trip to St. John's I found, greatly to my disappointment, that it was all too late to enroll my name in the already organized Newfoundland regiment. There was nothing for it but to cross to Canada and try my luck at enlisting there. Arriving at Sydney, and making enquiries, I discovered that the second division was not going to be formed up for some little time, and I therefore enlisted in the 94th Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders. With them I remained in Sydney until October of the same year when the 25th Battalion was organized—a battalion which has since covered itself with glory and earned the legitimately proud title of "The Fighting Twenty-Fifth."

Although I was one of them myself, I do not hesitate to assert that a finer bunch of men never left the shores of Nova Scotia to take up arms for Britain in the fields of France and Flanders than the gallant boys of the splendid Twenty-fifth. The general public does not appear to know very much of the achievements of this battalion and this perhaps may be due to the fact that we left Canada in May of 1915, and that we had been in France some nineteen months before any other Nova Scotia Battalion went into action as a unit. This story is not being penned with the slightest idea of seeking in any way to disparage the Nova Scotia Highlanders; that intrepid body of superb fighters have fought splendidly and well and their glorious record is fresh in the minds of all.

It has been my privilege to be with the Twenty-Fifth right from the day of its organization until the 23rd of April, 1917, and now, from records and diaries which I have kept from the beginning, I am attempting to relate the true story of the wonderful work accomplished by this battalion.

As previously intimated, we organized in the October of 1914, and at that time I was a private under Major MacRae. Since then, to quote the words of Kipling,

"Things 'ave transpired which made me learn  
The size and meanin' of the game.  
I did no more than others did,  
I don't know where the change began;  
I started as an average kid,  
I finished as a thinkin' man."

In those early days following upon enlistment we enjoyed some real good times in Halifax and the old boys will always recall with genuine appreciation the many kindnesses shown us by the citizens. Taking all the various circumstances into consideration we were well looked after by the military authorities; of course, our one burning eagerness was to get over to France and plunge into the thick of things as speedily as possible, and when it was rumored that we were going to be put on home duty feeling ran pretty high among the men and some quite lively times were experienced! The rumor, however, came to nothing and we settled down to the routine of our daily drill. By this time I had transferred to the Machine Gun Section and became linked up with "B" Co. with Lieutenant Medcalfe second in command. I shall not waste space in telling

you about the time we strutted about, proud of our khaki uniforms, hugging the fond thought that we were real soldiers, even as not a few who today, still at home, wearing the uniform, are victims of the same absurd delusion. At last the great day came—the day of our embarkation; we were going to say our farewell to the land of our birth, sail away over the ocean and begin our great adventure, taking our place among the soldiers of the King and Empire in the greatest fight for liberty and right which the world has ever witnessed.

Eager and keen, and with spirits high, we stepped aboard the old "Saxonia" along with the 22nd French-Canadian regiment, and sailed on the 20th of May, 1915, arriving in England after a pleasant but uneventful voyage. We found the training in England far more thorough than anything we had before experienced. We had to work, and real hard, too, but undoubtedly the process made us better men and tended to increase our confidence as soldiers.

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## Chapter Two ToC

It is obvious that to relate to my readers the truth concerning the Twenty-Fifth it is necessary to be somewhat critical, and I shall endeavor to be absolutely impartial. To begin with, let it be said, and said with perfect candor, that the credit of handling our battalion in England which eventually helped us to go across to France must be given to our own officers.

For the most part we greatly enjoyed our stay in England. We had a splendid time in Folkestone, a beautiful sea-side place; and for company we had about 50,000 Canadians in addition to some English cavalry. After a little more than three months' training the welcome news arrived that the next item on the program was France and the firing line. This information was received with the

utmost enthusiasm, for the boys were getting somewhat "fed up" with training and were anxious for a crack at the Hun. On going over, we had to leave some of our officers behind, as they were "extra" to the establishment. Among them were Will Cameron, Charlie MacAloney and others. They came out later and proved their worth as fighters. Arthur Weston, who was second in command, refused to stay behind and accompanied us to France as quartermaster, thus setting a fine example to a good many majors and captains who would rather hang on to a job in England than cross to France and fight. Weston was not of this type. He was a soldier and a man.

We landed in France on the 15th of September, 1915, and I will never forget that first march, heavily accoutred, over a big hill to our first camp. You could easily have picked out our train by reason of the boots etc., strewn along the line of march, and followed us without difficulty from the day we left Boulogne till we finally arrived at a little village in Flanders called ——. Here, within sound of the guns, we bivouacked for the night, some of the officers going ahead to look over the trenches we were so soon to occupy. The next night, under cover of darkness, two platoons from each company went up to the trenches. I well remember that night, the long march up the rough shell-torn road, and then along the communication trenches where we were received by the Imperial troops who, during the next few days, showed us all around and taught us what to do. Two nights later the remainder of our own boys came in, and the English soldiers went south to take part in the battle of Loos. It was about this time that Major Jones, as fine a soldier as ever went overseas, suffered a breakdown in his health. The heavy responsibilities thrown upon him proved too much.

After spending eight days in the trenches we came out for a well-earned rest. My particular company was stationed at a farmhouse which was situated quite close to the firing line. The owner was generally considered to be pro-German, his father, according to rumor, having previously been shot as a spy. The farmer had a dog which had been tied up for about nine months, and our sentries had strict orders that if any of the civilians left the house we were to halt them, and if they did not halt on the word of command we were to shoot. But I think at that time it would have been a case of "shoot first," for we were imagining all sorts of things. As it happened somebody let the dog loose, and as the sentries felt sure he was going over to the German lines with despatches, they just shot him dead. Major MacKenzie had to pay 30 francs for him to satisfy the farmer and to



prevent headquarters hearing of the matter.

At the termination of our six days' rest we went back to the trenches and relieved the 24th Battalion. "B" Company, to which I belonged, occupied H 3, J 3, 4, 5 and H 4. Every little while Fritz would "strafe" us with rifle grenades, and there was some mining reported in H 4. This was a small salient; and was held by about forty men under Capt. Medcalfe.

On the evening of October 8th about six p.m. we were all chatting together, some papers from home had been received by some of the boys and we were discussing the names of the newly formed 36th Battery, when all of a sudden there was quite an explosion on our right. The Germans had blown up several small mines. Capt. Medcalfe at once gave the order to "stand to," but before I had time to get my rifle and equipment, the ground trembled and rocked beneath us and everything went up into the air. The explosion took away fully half of H 4 trench, and left a crater about 10 feet deep. Those of us who were lucky enough to escape without being wounded managed, I don't know how, to make our way into H 3 trench. Fortunately for us the enemy was very erratic in his artillery fire. It was all going between our second and third line trenches and consequently did no damage. This was our first real bombardment, and quite naturally we all felt more or less "shaky"—I know I said my prayers that night as I never said them before! The papers had it that the Germans got into our trenches and that we drove them out again. Such a thing never happened. They made an attack on us, but our artillery, rifle and machine gun fire caught them in "No Man's Land." By a happy coincidence the West Lancashire Artillery was just relieving the 7th Battery of Artillery and we had the support of both of them, and, believe me, they sure did some wonderful work.

Our front line officers, such as MacRae, Logan, MacKenzie, Tupper, Roberts, Johnson and others, were all out on the job; unfortunately the same cannot be said of headquarters. As I was merely a private at the time I do not know just what really transpired; but we never saw the colonel at all that night. About four the next morning the major came and paid us a visit when we had a new parapet built. The Germans, however, failed to get into our trenches; and up to this day the 25th can with perfect truth declare that they never failed in the critical hour, for if we did not always have competent officers at the head of the battalion we

certainly had them in our companies. Following this action we were marched out of the trenches for a rest, and prior to going back again, we were visited by General Alderson, who gave us a pretty severe lecture. He said he had every confidence in the men. A few days later Colonel Hilliam took over the command, and Major Stan Bauld was appointed second in command.

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### Chapter Three ToC

When officers arrive in England they are given the option of going to France as lieutenants or going back home. That is the reason you see so many bold footed officers holding down staff jobs in England and Canada. Colonel Hilliam who was now our commanding officer, says that the 25th battalion made his name; but the 25th boys are equally positive that he made the battalion. It was truly wonderful the confidence we placed in him and he never disappointed us. He was very strong on discipline, and when all is said and done that is most essential in the army. Without it a battalion simply becomes a mob. During the winter we were on the Kimmel front. It was a bad year in the trenches, for the rain and mud were something awful. The mud was waist deep and of such a nature that once a fellow got stuck it took another chap to get him out. For about two months they were trenches in name only; they were caved right in and the boys that were doing front line work would go in at 8 o'clock one night and would not be relieved until 8 o'clock the next night—twenty-four hours without any hot food. I must say that we found the hot rum ration that winter to be a most desirable thing.

Our colonel was a regular fire eater, and wanted to be at it all the time. He organized a raiding party in charge of Capt. Tupper along with Brooks, Cameron and Roberts. All four of them proved to be great fighters. They were the pick of the battalion.

And now enters that great hero—Toby Jones—"the Man who came back!" He was machine gun officer, and the Colonel also put him in charge of a wire cutting party, and thus he was carrying the responsibility of both jobs. He would be around his guns all day and at night he would be scouting all over "No Man's land" and in December, 1915 it was no joke crawling around in the mud. He never got any rest. He would not eat, and the day of the raid Fritz had straffed us quite a lot. I was in trench S.P. 12 along with Toby when a message came to tell us that a shell had knocked in one of the dugouts and had killed one of our N.C.O's, Corporal Ferguson, a chap who was well liked by everybody. A road named the "V.C. Road" separated us from J 4. The Germans were shelling this road pretty bad; but as soon as Toby got the message he did not hesitate one minute but went across to J 4. He seemed to have had a charmed life. Shells were bursting all around him but he never got a scratch. That night Corporal Ingraham and the McNeil brothers, the three biggest dare devils that were in our battalion left our dugout on a wire cutting expedition. Imagine, three or four men lying on their backs in mud and water cutting at Fritz's wire just a few feet away from his trench! Jones would go around his gun teams to make sure that everything was all right and then he would visit his wire cutting party.

Night after night Toby would be engaged in this dangerous and tiring work. It proved too much for flesh and blood, and one night just as a visit was planned he broke right down and was carried to our lines on a stretcher. Well, Toby got the blame for the failure of that evening and left our battalion; but as the old adage puts it "You can't keep a good man down" and Toby Jones enlisted again as a private in the 42nd Battalion—won back his commission with the D.C.M. and a bar. Every man in the "Fighting Twenty-Fifth" lifts his hat to Toby Jones—the greatest hero of them all!

We carried out several raids the next few weeks on the Kimmel front, and, as a matter of fact, it is no exaggeration to say that trench-raiding which has since been carried out so extensively was really initiated by the "Fighting Twenty-Fifth." Before proceeding further, let me describe a trench. They are all transversed, because if a shell or bomb should burst in one part of the trench the transverse prevents the spread of the shrapnel. A communication trench is usually to connect the trenches together, and sometimes these trenches are a mile long reaching from the front line to some part behind the line where it is comparatively safe to walk around. They are very deep and zig-zag in shape so that they cannot be enfiladed.

On the Belgian front we could not have deep dugouts for the soil was so soft. To dig down a few feet was to strike water. At first we only had sand bags shelters, then we had the corrugated iron ones which were shrapnel and bomb proof.

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## Chapter Four [ToC](#)

We stayed on the Kimmel front from September 15th until sometime in February. We were never in anything big here for it was winter time and we had all our work cut out in repairing and rebuilding trenches. Now I have made mention of the fact that we came out for a rest, but that does not mean to say that we didn't work, for whilst we were resting we figured in many working parties. We all learned to believe that

Our section was the best in the Platoon  
Our Platoon the best in the Company,  
Our Company the best in the Battalion,  
Our Battalion the best in the Brigade,  
Our Brigade the best in the Division,  
Our Division the best in the Corps,  
Our Corps the best in the Army,  
And that the British were the best in the world.

Our old Colonel would have concerts and lectures arranged for us when we went to rest, and on Christmas day we had quite a big dinner, thanks to the

people at home who helped by sending us quite a lot of nice things.

As you might know we had quite a lot of Cape Breton boys. They were needed to do some mining and they were splendid at that work. The miners work is as follows; first they sink a shaft so many feet down, and then when they get down deep enough they start sapping forward, putting up timbers as they go. They have to work very quietly as Fritz also does some sapping and if too much noise is made the miners themselves are liable to go up in the air and come down in pieces, and I do not think that anybody would relish that idea. Mining is done now on a very large scale. So you see this war is carried on underneath the earth as well as underneath the water.

I will remember a certain officer who got the creeps after the October affair and would always go around wearing armored body plates, and every time he heard a rat scratch he thought it was a mine. He heard a noise in his dugout and he cleared all the men out of his trench and had the miners up. They dug down and found that his place must have been over an old dugout and that there were quite a number of rats running around having a good time all to themselves. Certainly, I must admit that I was no hero myself. When our front trenches started to cave in we had to get out in front into No Man's Land and dig a new trench and what earth we excavated we had to throw up against our own front line trench, and although at the present time I would think nothing of it I was sure some scared. But after you are there awhile you do not mind it at all. The first winter Bill Cameron, along with his scouts used to live in No Man's Land. They thought nothing of doing that. They used to be planning to do all sorts of things, but the opportunity only seldom came for them to do anything out of the way, except it was to go over No Man's Land searching for dead bodies and curios, and those chaps were game enough for anything.

Lieut. Canning, M.M.

LIEUT. CANNING, M.M.

Major Macrae

MAJOR MACRAE

OFFICER COMMANDING "A" CO., 25th BATT.

The whole time we were on this front everything went very smoothly, for we had one great man at the head of our Battalion. We were great friends with the French-Canadian Battalion, but there was another Battalion in our Brigade with whom we did not pull at all, and there was always a certain amount of jealousy between us, which was a good thing as we were always trying to outdo the other. Their Commanding Officer thought that they were the best battalion that ever left Canada, and Hilliam, the bulldog that he was, would not stand for that; so there was always a certain amount of rivalry between us.

On one occasion there were a few Canadians guarding a road where people were not supposed to travel by night unless they had a pass, and a "Twenty-fifth" man who had been having a good time was coming home. "Halt," cried the sentry, "who goes there?" Answer "25th," "Pass 25th all is well," so the 25th man went on his way home. Along came another belated traveller. The same performance was gone thru and he gave the number of his battalion which was not the 25th. The answer came back from the sentry, "Turn out the guard," and they put this poor soldier into the guard room. It was all due to their petty notions as to what they should not do. But still it always works out well; a little jealousy between the battalions always makes one try to outdo the other. But thanks to our Commanding Officer we never took second place to any battalion in France.

Shortly after we were ordered to move up to the M. and N. trenches where we relieved some of the 4th Brigade for a time. There was a trench in this locality named the "International" because of it's changing hands so often. Well, about a month before this the Germans had made an attack on the Scotties and they were just relieving and were not prepared for the Huns. But they fought until they saw that they would have to plan a surprise attack to get it back. The Scottish Division then went out for a rest and left Fritz master of the trench. But the canny Scot was not giving in so easily. When they had been reorganized they came back with one intention and that was to take back the "International" trench and they did.

Well here we were in the Vierstrutt trench, and we held it for a week. Our

artillery would open up every couple of hours and we could look over our parapets and watch them pounding Cain out of Fritz's trench—it was wonderful. We kept this up for about four or five days so that Fritz could not have much of a trench left. The idea of the heavy bombardment was to give him the notion that we were going to make an attack at this point. On the morning that the Scotties were to take back the trench Bill Cameron, George Roberts, together with Canning, and some of the other boys, played quite a trick on Fritz. They got a couple of very long steam pipes and filled them up with explosives; carried them across and put them underneath Fritz's barb wire. There was a long fuse attached.

Now to describe it:—The hour is 4 a.m. Everybody is anxiously waiting for the bombardment to take place. We never gave a thought to the possibility of Fritz bombarding us. The attack starts, but we do not leave our trench, but set fire to the fuse. That fuse did all sorts of fancy turns and twists travelling across No Man's Land, and then the explosion! Fritz's wires are all blown to pieces. He was sure then that we are making the attack and sends up all sorts of S.O.S. signals that look very pretty. His artillery opens up, but it seems there is something the matter with his range for he cannot reach us at all. But what is taking place on the right of us? The Scotties, without firing a shot, walk over No Man's Land, jump into Fritz's trench and bomb the dugouts, capturing quite a few prisoners, and once more the "International" is ours and has not changed hands since.

decoration



**Chapter Five**[ToC](#)

Our Battalion did not remain long on the Kimmel front, but on being relieved by some English troops, we were sent for a rest to a little village called Berthem. We were situated in a French farm house and received splendid treatment from the occupants. Here it was that we met the Anzacs, fresh from their terrible fighting at Gallipoli; and there was quite a little friendly rivalry between them and our Canadian boys.

Contrary to our expectations we did not remain for any length of time at Berthem. Some big fighting was in progress at St. Eloi, and the Imperials had planned a strong offensive movement. Several mines were exploded, and an attack was launched the objective of which, in the first instance, was to gain part of the Messines Ridge. The attack was a considerable success but not wholly so, because the Germans were able to get in some pretty effective artillery work; the Fourth Brigade was thereupon sent to their assistance and managed to drive Fritz back for quite a distance.

For the next three days there was some very hard fighting in this St. Eloi district in which our men participated with great valor. Some of our boys were obliged to remain in those mine craters for twenty-four hours with no chance of communication with the rear. Howard Johnstone beat off no less than five attacks in four hours. Guy Matheson, who had crossed over as a sergeant won the M.M. in this action, and here it was that Corporal Ingram gained the D.C.M. They really deserved the V.C. Captain Brooks did wonderful work, but I cannot continue to mention individuals or I should have to mention every name in the entire Battalion. After some days the intensity of the fighting died down and the ordinary trench warfare was resumed. We had hard work rebuilding our badly shattered trenches and were very glad of the opportunity to enjoy our divisional rest. While out on rest on one occasion we were visited by the King and Queen. Their Majesties, accompanied by Colonel Hilliam, walked through our lines and appeared much interested in our welfare.

It was in St. Eloi that we captured some prisoners who gave us the information that there was going to be a gas attack on the Kimmel Front. We warned the Imperials who were at that point, so they were quite prepared. The Germans sent over the gas, and then came over themselves. Our fellows fell back in the centre and thus surrounded them, capturing or killing every one that came over. It was while in those trenches that we first started to use the Lewis gun and the Stokes trench mortar.



The Lewis machine gun is a wonderful weapon. Like a rifle it can be fired from the shoulder and the discharge is at the rate of about 500 rounds a minute. The Stokes gun is much like a stove pipe; and as fast as the shells, which weigh 13 lbs., are dropped into it, they go flying through the air right to their object, and then burst and create an awful havoc. The Germans have invented quite a number of trench mortars, but nothing to come up to this.

One night whilst we were in those trenches a few Germans managed to get into a part of our trench which we were not occupying, as we knew that they had a mine there ready to blow up at any minute. As we discovered, by the bombs and other stuff that they had left behind, that they had been in our trench we decided to go and look for them, so Lieut. Dennis Stairs took a party out. He had with him Sergt. Canning, who has since won the M.M. and his commission. They wandered about No Man's Land for awhile when they suddenly came upon a supply of Fritz's bombs. There were a few hundred of them, so it was quite plain that they intended to make a big raid on us. But when he had the "25th" to contend with he had the wrong crowd. The next night the same party went out, prepared for anything that might happen and they waited by that supply of bombs, and sure enough, quite a few Huns appeared. Our fellows then threw the bombs, and I can assure you there were many Huns who never got back home again. We got a little information from the prisoners taken and that was most important.

Another night, as usual, we had our listening posts out in some of the shell holes, when one of the men of the "A" Company posts saw a couple of Huns quite close and immediately opened fire on them, killing one and wounding the other. It was by means such as these that we were able to gather very desirable information regarding the enemy, his strength, probable intentions, and sometimes the effect of our artillery fire. In fact one of the main reasons for making these raids was for the very purpose of getting information and also to weaken the morale of the Germans opposite to us.

While we were here at this section of the front, about June 9th, the Third Division had to withstand a very heavy bombardment, followed by a terrible barrage fire, and subsequently a fierce attack. The Germans managed to get into the trenches but not without paying a dreadful price.

It was found necessary to send for reinforcements if the trench was to be re-

captured. Imperials relieved us on the St. Eloi front, and we were speedily conveyed by motor lorries and rushed up to the Ypres section. Our boys all knew they were in for a hot time but we were keen to be at it for we were "just spoiling for a fight." We got it all right, and though we were only here for two days, such was the severe nature of the fighting, that our casualty list was very heavy. Incessant rain added to our discomfiture; but the spirit of the boys was something wonderful to behold.

After a twenty-four hour rest in the huts at Ypres we went to the now famous "Hill 60" where we remained for seven days. It was while we were here at "Hill 60" that Sergt. Duffet got the D.C.M., though he afterwards died of the wounds which he had received.

After leaving "Hill 60" we went back to the St. Eloi front again, and had the usual routine of work to perform—trench warfare and plenty of working parties. Just imagine a party of about a hundred men carrying wire trench mats across the open in full view of Fritz. A flare goes up; everybody stands still; a machine gun opens fire; everybody goes down so that they will not be hit; and then every thing is still again. All of a sudden somebody swears as he trips over a shell hole, but the oath is made in such a reverent way that it is more of a prayer than a curse word. Thus it continues night after night.



## Chapter Six [ToC](#)

As I have previously said, there is always a certain amount of rivalry between the Battalions. In illustration of this we got word that a Battalion on our right was going to pull off a raid. Our Colonel immediately ordered Lieut. Wise (he went over with the 25th as a Sergt. and is now a Major and second in command

of the Battalion) to take a party of men and make a raid into Fritz's trench. They set off and after wandering around "No Man's Land" for a while found an opening in his wire. They got into his trench and bombarded him right and left, killing quite a few and bringing back valuable information. Unluckily we had a few wounded, and Sergt. Anderson got no further back than Fritz's wire when he was hit. Lieut. Wise made three or four gallant attempts to get him out, but, owing to the machine gun and rifle fire, it was impossible. Lieut. Wise, who was badly wounded got the Military Cross and Cross de Guerre, and several of the boys got the Military Medal, so the Battalion on our right had to postpone their raid.

A few nights later we planned another. There were three parties, one under Lieut. Matheson, one under Lieut. Daley, and one under Lieut. Hiltz, the whole being under the command of Major Grant. Lieut. Dennis Stairs also took part in this. We were all ready to raid the trench when we got orders that the Battalion on our right was going to pull off a raid and that we must postpone ours. The same night that Lieut. Wise pulled off his raid so successfully, the Fourth Brigade "put one over" on the Hun. They raided his trench, bringing back some prisoners and doing quite a lot of damage to his trench.

But one of their men had been missing and had been given up for lost. Two days later one of the Artillery officers, while observing our fire, noticed a chap wandering around No Man's Land, and he would have fired at him only the man turned round and the observer saw his black face and knew right away that it was the missing man. A couple of boys crawled out and brought him in. He was quite delirious. It seemed that he had been wounded and bled quite a lot and became unconscious. The sun dried the wound, but left him insane and he had started wandering around No Man's Land.

Just before we left the St. Eloi front we had some of the Fourth Division in with us, and we showed them what they had to do and left them to play their part and show the Huns that they were Canadians—and this they have undoubtedly done.

The Somme fighting was on about this time. I well remember the 1st of July. Our aeroplanes went over the German lines and brought down about six or seven of their observation balloons before you could say "Jack Robinson." It was pretty slick work, with some new explosive that our fellows had kept very secret.

In leaving the St. Eloi front we marched for three days to a little town quite

close to St. Omer called ——, where we drilled from five in the morning till seven or eight at night, doing the usual training so as to get us fit for the fray. By this time I was a full fledged Lance Corporal in charge of "C" Company's Lewis guns. We had a great time here. A couple of days in the week we would have sports and then we would play games of baseball. Some of the boys would help the French girls make up their crops. Another thing that helped to make us so comfortable here was the difference in the people. They were most hospitable and could not do enough for us. We would scatter our straw on the floor, spread our blanket and go to sleep as happy and contented as possible. I tell you when you have a tiled floor for a mattress, your pack for a pillow and your overcoat for a blanket you can appreciate such a comfort as straw and blankets.

We all knew that we were going to the Somme to take part in that big show and we were very anxious to get down upon them. The First Division had gone down a little ahead of us, but we were going to show them that the 25th could play its part as well as any of the Battalions and we did so.

We stayed a while here in training and then we started on our journey. We would march about fifteen miles each day and would camp or bivouac for the night. Before turning in to sleep we would have a sing-song, all the men being in the best of spirits for at last we knew we were going to have a real scrap with the Hun, and although we had been in France twelve months, we had always been on the defensive and that is always the hardest kind of fighting. As we had quite a lot of old scores to pay off, we were just eager to get at the foe. After a long march we finally arrived at the brickfield in Albert, and there we saw for our first time the brass statute on the Church of Albert which was hanging head down. You would think that it would fall at any moment, but it was well secured so that the person who made the prophecy that when the statute on the church at Albert fell, the war would end, must have known that the war would last a long time.

Well here we were. Thousands of troops ready for a big attack. One day we saw some queer looking objects coming along the road. We were all wondering what sort of war machines they were. There were all sorts of rumors as to what they were and what they could do. We did not find out what they were until the 15th of September and then we knew that they were the much-talked of "tanks."

Fritz also found that out—much to his loss. We did several working parties here, going up through Contalmaison, Pozieres and other villages. We should not have known that they had been villages only that there were signs there to inform us to that effect.

Anybody who has seen the German trenches here, and the deep dugouts and steep ridges which the British troops had to swarm over could scarcely believe it possible to take any of their positions; but we had a leader in General Haig and he knew what he was doing. The Artillery pounded the Hun with such vigor that if any were left they were properly demoralized, and then the infantry went over and caught the Germans down in their dugouts. By the night of Sept. 14th we were ready to launch our attack. The great Somme fight was on!



## Chapter Seven [ToC](#)

On the way up to the trenches and on seeing the guns, practically speaking, wheel to wheel, we thought it would be impossible to use more artillery at one time. But I know we have four or five times the number of heavy guns in use on the western front now than we had on the Somme, and that is one of the reasons that the morale of the men in the western area is so good.

On the night of September 14th we moved up to a position of reserve, and we were all issued our fighting material which consisted of ammunition, rifles, bombs, with haversack on our backs, rations enough for two days and water bottle filled. We also made sure that we had our field dressing with us. There was also another little thing which we were given and that was our aeroplane signal. As soon as the advance starts our aeroplanes are ready to co-operate with us in all possible ways, and I can tell from what I have seen that Fritz's planes

stand a very poor chance against ours.

Now to describe our action. As soon as we start to dig in we light some of those flares; our planes see them and they signal back with the Klaxon horns, then they drop some signal and do a little fancy flying, and by that means, sometimes combined with wireless, our artillery know just exactly where we are. Some of the men also carry wire cutters, others, shovels and picks. I can assure you that it is no light load but the queer thing is that nobody seems to mind it, until everything is all over.

On the morning of the 15th the 4th and 6th Brigades made the attack for our Division. It was a pretty big affair on about a three mile front. We were back in reserve and we were pretty sore because we were not taking a part in it, when we saw the "Irish Navy," as we called the tank, come puffing up. Little did we think that many who were there talking would be killed or wounded before the day was over. Then all of a sudden the artillery with a mighty roar opened up the most terrific fire.

It was a wonderful sight. Nothing could be seen all along the horizon in the rear but one mass of flame, where our guns were sending out shell after shell. They were there in all sizes from the eighteen pounders up to the fifteen inch guns.

Now, our boys are over with all their objectives well defined. The principal one for our division, at the time, was the Sugar Refinery, and in a very short while the prisoners started to come in. Some of them carrying our wounded with them, others carrying some of their own wounded. They were a demoralized crowd and after the artillery barrage which was put up it is not to be wondered at. Brigade headquarters were very close to us and they were taken there where they were asked all sorts of questions by our intelligence officers. Some would speak, others would not; but our intelligence corps generally got all the information that was needed. Our troops advanced so much that day that some of the artillery had to shift their guns up closer as they were out of range.

That movement was a very pretty sight—the gun limbers being galloped across the shell torn ground, wheeling their guns around and getting into action in very short while. If I were a professional writer, I could describe a lot of things that happened that morning which would be very interesting to the reader but there are a number of incidents which I shall have to omit thru lack of memory.

Now and again, Fritz would throw a shell over at us, but it would do no more harm than fling up dirt over us and we were so used to this that we did not mind it at all.

The tanks did wonderful work puffing along to the German strong points and using their guns. I guess the moral effect was just as terrible as the real. No wonder that the German prisoners were so scared. Anyway, the main thing was the British got all of their objectives and quite a few were still pushing further ahead. We did not think that we would have a chance to take part in the show but at the same time we were prepared for anything that might happen.

At 3 p.m. that same afternoon the Scottish Division on our right took Martinupuch, so General Byng decided that the Canadians should make another drive and take Courcelette, and, as it was, the 4th and 6th Brigades that went over that morning it was our turn for Courcelette.

There was a conference of the four colonels commanding the four battalions in our Brigade and it was decided that the 25th were to go thru the left half of the village, the 22nd thru the right half, the 26th in close support and the 24th in reserve, and altho there have been not a few rumors as to who really took Courcelette all I can say is that the whole Canadian corps played a part one way or another, even to the Army Service Corps who supplied our ammunition. But anyway that is how our brigades went over on the 15th of September.

When the colonel came back he held a consultation with his company commanders who were Major Tupper "A" Co., Lieut. Col. Flowers, "B" Co., Capt. Stairs, "C" Co., Major Brooks "D" Co., and the entire scheme was explained to them. I was in the Lewis Gun Corps of "C" Co., so when Captain Stairs called together his platoon officers, I had to be there too, and the scheme was that "A" and "D" companies were to form the first wave. There was a railroad the other side of Courcelette, there they were to dig in, in the most suitable place in front of that. "C" and "B" formed the second wave and were to dig in, just in front of the village. My instructions as to my guns were that I was to plant one gun on the left flank of the company and one on the right. When I saw that D. Co., had consolidated their position I was to start and take the right flank gun up and put it out in a shell hole about 20 yards in front of D. Co. My left flank gun I was to leave as it was guarding a sunken road. It was also an understood thing that we were to leave so many Lewis gunners behind, so when we started over we had but two trained men per gun, and four others, untrained, to carry ammunition.

We started to get into position. The glorious 22nd were on our right, and the 3rd Division on our left, and tho this was our first time "over" everybody was laughing and eager to get at it. There was that grand old colonel of ours with a foot rule held in one hand and a map in the other. We were all lined up in extended order about 1-½ miles from our objective and we had to advance over ground that had been ploughed up pretty badly by our own artillery that morning. Shortly, our colonel gave the order to advance. Almost at the same time our artillery opened up. We advanced in one long extended line. (I must say that we use a different formation today). We were all joking with one another. We had fixed bayonets and as we passed a trench I heard one artillery observing officer say: "By the Gods of War, isn't it fine." One of my gunners asked me for a chew of tobacco. We passed some of the trenches which our boys had taken that morning. I saw a big German lying on his face dead, and a few of our own lying around. Then again we came across a few more dead Huns. Here were a couple of skulls which had been thrown up by our artillery. One of our boys passed the remark that they would not even let the dead rest.

People talk about Fear; I must admit there is such a thing before you start over, but once you get started you are callous to everything. You see you own best friend killed alongside of you, but that does not stop you for you keep right on, never thinking that you may be the next, and even if you did you would say to yourself that you have got to go sooner or later, so what's the odds?

We were getting near to the Sugar Refinery that Fritz had put a barrage across. No matter, we kept on. We got to the trenches held by one of our other brigades. The second wave is supposed to stop here for a few minutes whilst the first wave keeps on. One of the boys who were holding the trench said "Keep on lads, don't be frightened. We gave them hell this morning. You ought to be able to do the same now." I got mad at him for thinking that we were not "playing the game," so I gave my gun team the order to advance. As we passed the Sugar Refinery, Fritz's shells were bursting everywhere—shells bursting in the air, shrapnel coming down on us white hot like snow. One of my men was hit. I took his ammunition and left him to get out the best way he could. Fritz's machine guns were now playing on us.



### Aeroplane map Vimy Ridge

Aeroplane map of the sector in which the "Fighting 25th" were engaged at "Vimy Ridge."

### Aeroplane map Vimy Ridge

Aeroplane map of the sector in which the "Fighting 25th" were engaged at "Vimy Ridge."

We saw some of the boys turn around and then drop dead. It must be a great death, for in the excitement one would never know what struck him. We opened up our machine guns on the Huns who were hiding in a bit of a wood. My team is up with the first wave by now. Then we all made a dash and arrived at the Convent wall in Courcellette. There were lots there before us. The most prominent of all was Colonel Hilliam, with a cigar in his mouth, stick in one hand and watch in the other. He says, "Now boys, the barrage will play there for five minutes and then we will go right thru the village." He was wounded in the hand, but he only smiled at that. I went and found out that both my guns were O.K. and that I was lucky enough to get over with my full amount of ammunition, which was very fortunate considering that we came thru quite an artillery barrage.

Our shells were bursting just in front of the village. You could see nothing but one mass of flame and smoke. Our colonel looked up and said "Now Boys get ready," and then the artillery lifts and we go thru the village. What was once a peaceful village is now nothing but a mass of burning ruins. We got thru, but some of our boys had to bayonet a few Germans to make them be good.

The first wave was now well in front, and I was with my right flank team in the second wave. We came up on the right of "C" Co., just as they were preparing to dig in.

Lieut. Dalley was about ten yards in front of his platoon giving orders to his men to dig in, when I saw him take a turn round and drop. I rushed out and picked him up. He told me to go on and never mind him. It was a dry day and there were quite a few bullets striking close to us, but at the time I did not seem to know, what they were so I got hold of Dalley and brought him back to a shell hole where our boys were digging in, and turned him over to their care. By this

time I saw that "D" Co., had started to dig in, so I took my guns along and placed them in a shell hole about 20 yards in front of where our boys were digging. It was now about six p.m. The aeroplanes were over our heads sounding their horns and we were burning our signals.

After placing my team I came back and found that Lieut. Dennis Stairs was wounded on the arm and leg. I bandaged him up, but he persisted in staying in and "carrying on" with his work altho the colonel wanted him to go out. He has the Military Cross and I must say he deserved it. I also found that Major Brooks had been killed and that Major Nutter was acting O.C. of "D" Co. I reported to the colonel who was in the front line, and he asked me to take out the prisoners. There were about thirty-five of them, and I was to turn them over to the 26th Battalion, which was supposed to be in close support. There were a couple of chaps who were slightly wounded, going out as escort. We went out right thru the village but no sign of the 26th.

We saw a couple of their scouts who told us that the battalion was a little in the rear of us, but as it was getting dark we decided to send them out in charge of the wounded runners. The Huns were so demoralized that they really did not need any escort. Just before they left I saw Lieut. Wetmore stick his head out of a shell hole. He had been badly wounded in the head, so he also went out with the prisoners. I then started on my way back to the front line. Going thru the village we came across two Huns carrying a wounded Hun. We took them prisoners and turned them over to Sergt. Anderson of "C" Co. I then saw Sergt. Laird of "B" Co. and got about 30 bombs from him and took them up to my front line gun and came back to visit my left flank gun, which was still with "C" Co. While I was talking to Sergt. Weir there was a message came to me from Major Nutter to get my left gun up and place it out in front. I went to the left flank to carry out my order, and found my gun and ammunition scattered around the sunken road not damaged. But my team was gone, so I hunted around and got another team together and placed them out in "No Man's Land." If Fritz had to counter attack us that night he would have got an awful reception, for we had quite a few machine guns out in front and everybody was in good spirits and keeping a good look out.

We found out by this time we had lost quite a few of our best officers; out of our company we had lost one of the finest men that ever went over. He was a man that no matter how hard the bombardment, he was always normal and would never get excited—that was John Stairs. The O.C. of "B" Company, Colonel Flowers was also missing. He was not with us very long, but everybody

thought a lot of him. It was splendid for a man of his age to come out and volunteer as a platoon commander as he did, and he deserves all the credit that can be given to him. We had a few others killed and missing, but taking everything into consideration and the objective that we had taken, we had come out very lucky.

Our boys were pretty well dug in by 12 that night. It was hard digging, about a foot of earth, then flint and underneath the flint was chalk.

decoration



## **Chapter Eight**[ToC](#)

The reaction had started to set in by this time. I cannot describe it to you properly, but there are a lot of people under the impression that a soldier gets a glass of rum before he "goes over." The reason I write about this is because people have often said the same thing about me. I'll tell you, the British soldier does not need rum to buck his courage up. I believe that it was given to the men before they went over in the beginning, and that after the effect wore off it left the man drowsy. Once you start "over," you do not give a curse for anything. All you think about is that there is an objective, and that there is nothing in this world to stop you and you keep that spirit up until you have everything securely in your hands, and then perhaps a couple of hours after a certain amount of reaction sets in. Then is the time for the rum. In France it is used, "never abused." The reaction generally works off after a few hours and then you are fit for anything.

During the night Fritz made several counter attacks on the 22nd. We were not

quite sure how they were making out, but a runner came up and told us that everything was O.K.

I do not remember anything eventful happening that night. We had a couple killed, and Sergeant Tickle of the Machine Gun Section, whilst reconnoitering, ran into a German strong point. He bombed them and got back safely. But when daylight came there was quite a few of our chaps getting nipped off from the right, so a message was sent out to Major MacAvity, who was brigade major. He came up, and that afternoon the Third Division made an attack and took the trench from which they were sniping, and also 100 prisoners. We knew that there were papers of importance in a house in the village which had been used as headquarters and Fritz was quite determined that we should not get them, for he put shell after shell into the village. But whenever there is information to be had, there is somebody who will get it and we got those papers and believe me they proved to be of great significance.

We had everything consolidated and the artillery had wires right up to our front line for observation purposes. To make matters worse we had a little drizzly rain. The next afternoon Major Tupper was killed, and as "A" company was to make a small attack—Major Nutter took over "A" company, and Lieutenant Matheson, who was now acting officer commanding "C" company took charge of operations. I am sorry to say we had many casualties that day in "A" company. We were relieved on the coming morning by the First Division. There were some machine gun crews to be relieved and as all the other companies and details were relieved the colonel wanted to stay and see them relieved, but he finally decided to let me stay behind and take this matter in hand.

On the 9th of April, in my rank as officer, I reported for duty to Colonel Bauld and was glad to be once more with the glorious fighting boys of the grand old Twenty-Fifth. Some few days later we took part in the Arleux fighting; my company, "D," formed the flank. We were able to take all our objectives and consolidate them. It was in this scrap that I "got mine," for I was hit in the arm, leg, back and behind the ear. After twenty and a half months in France to have escaped death and even a serious injury, I consider it to have been most fortunate, and feel persuaded that someone at home must have been remembering me in their prayers. After my wound, I managed to crawl out and

was then sent to a clearing station, subsequently to England, and then home to Nova Scotia. Here I am at the present and to be candid I am not over anxious to return, but if I should be wanted—well, I am ready to go and strike another blow for King and Empire, Liberty and God.

After holding these trenches we were glad to get out and get a rest. The first day we got as far as The Reserve trenches. There we had plenty of rations issued to us and we rested here where there were some very large and comfortable dugouts which our most amiable friend Fritz had built for us. We enjoyed them and although we had lost quite a few of our best pals we knew that we all had gone through that same ordeal and those of us who were lucky enough to come out of the scrap never gave a thought to what we had gone through. A good thing, for if we did a few of us would be good patients for a lunatic asylum. We stayed here for the night and the next morning we got as far as the Brickfields near Albert where there were a lot of the old London Motor Buses waiting to take us back to a little village clear of the shell fire so that we could reorganize and get another go at Fritz. We were all as happy as larks, singing "Are we downhearted," "The Canadians took Courcellette, they can fight you just bet" and other trench songs. Some of the boys had on Fritz helmets and others had Fritzs' revolvers; we all had souvenirs of some description. We arrived at this town after a couple of hours ride. There was our Pipe Band with the Battalion Mascot, the goat, which we got in 1915. It is still with the battalion and always leads the band. When we reached this village the very first thing we had to do was to shave and clean up, for were we not the best unit in France? We always thought so and we used always to show an example to the others. That is "esprit de corp." We had a pretty good time in this village. Some of the boys sold their souvenirs as they said we were going back and could get lots more. Our old Colonel was still with us but his hand was now bandaged up. I forgot to tell you when he was coming through Albert the 22nd gave three cheers for "Col. Hilliam." He turned around and said, "If there is any credit give it to the boys, they deserve it." He quite forgot that we looked upon him as something more than a man, the way he would go around through a bombardment. Out here we had the usual parades and reorganization, but we only had the old battalion to reorganize as we got no reinforcements. However, we were still the "25th" and could show the Germans what we could do. It soon got spread around that we were going back to have another go at Fritz. So we got our guns fixed up and the afternoon before we went in Col. Hilliam made an inspection of the battalion. I had my Lewis Gun team formed up in rear of "C" Co. When the C.O. came

around I called them to attention and saluted. He said "What is your name my lad?" I replied "Lewis, Sir." "Oh, a very appropriate name to have charge of the Lewis Guns." I said, "Sir, I try to do my best." He says, "You have done wonderfully, my lad." I thought it the greatest honor that I have ever got. We started for the Brickfields next morning, Col. Bauld in command of the Battalion. Col. Hilliam had to go to hospital for a few days. We arrived at the Brickfields and there we were given our full instructions as to what we had to do and went through the usual performance of being fully equipped with all the necessary equipments of war before we went in. Capt. John D. MacNeil was now O.C. of "C" Co., and one night we got the order to move up to the reserve trenches. All this time the troops who were occupying the trenches were steadily advancing. We had taken quite a lot of their strongpoints, including —— and other villages. After a long tedious march we arrived at our reserve trenches and made ourselves as comfortable as possible, such as digging a hole in the side of a trench and perhaps a couple of sheets of corrugated iron, and finally we got settled away and went to sleep. It was very comfortable when you consider the circumstances. Certainly now and again one of Fritz large shells would burst somewhere near you but that was all in the game. If it was going to get you it would. But keeping awake would not save us. So Fritz's shells had no more effect than the vermin which we had got quite used to. The next night at 7 o'clock, runners came down from the 14th Battalion to guide us to the front line. We were very inquisitive and began asking those chaps about where they were, what sort of fighting they had and other questions too numerous to mention, for strange to say, no matter how long you are there, when you got into a new position you always want to know what it is like before you go in it, and if you are told that it is a lovely place and that you can have a good time you can depend that it is going to be worse than hell. That is what happened in this case. The guide told us that it was a nice, quiet little spot. We found out the difference before we got out. We toiled through the shell-torn ground for about six hours before we got to where Battalion Headquarters were. Sometimes, our guides lost themselves. At other times Fritz would put a barrage across. We would lie down then in a shell hole and start talking about old times, never giving a thought to the shells which would burst quite close to us. In fact they got a few of our boys on the way up. But one has to be there to realize how callous a person appears to shell fire. By that I do not mean to say that he holds it in contempt for he doesn't. He has a mighty regard for it. But you always want to show that you are as brave as your next door neighbour. Sometimes they came a little too close and one of the boys would sing out "Say let's make a move, for I don't mind getting Blightie but the way that one burst it will be France" or some other such remark. When

we arrived at Headquarters it was in a large sunken road which our boys had captured a few days before. We hear quite a lot of —— and here were quite a lot of wounded Germans who had been taken prisoners that day calling out for water, and although we were going in and we did not know when we were coming out, some of the boys gave them some of theirs. I hope they will do the same. We waited here for a while and then we started out for the trench. We had some night. We would go to one trench and then to another; our guides did not know where to take us. About 4 o'clock in the morning we started wandering around No Man's Land. At 7 o'clock, broad daylight, (we were laying down in the grass at the time), some of the boys saw somebody moving and as we saw that they were our own boys we made a rush and got into what was known as the Subsidiary trench. That is how "C" Co. relieved the 14th Battalion on the Somme. There was quite a chain-work of trenches here. What we held was named "Subsidiary Line." It really was not a trench but a system of outposts. In front of us were the famed "Kenora" and "Regina." Their names will always linger in the memory of the Canadians, for we did some very hard fighting around here. There were also a lot of trenches in rear of us held by some of our other companies. On our left were the 24th and C.M.R. I really do not know who were on our right. As I said what we were holding was only a system of strongpoints. There were five of them altogether and as I had three Lewis guns I put one on each flank and one in the centre. About 9 o'clock the same morning we saw somebody waving to us from out of No Man's Land. When we saw that he was one of our own lads, Lieut. Alexander, Corp. McEarley, (these two were both killed four days later) and myself, took a rubber sheet and doubled out and got him, expecting to be fired on at any time by Fritz. But he could not have seen us or else he did not want to give his position away. Anyway we got the chap in. He belonged to the 14th Battalion and had been out there for three days. His wounds had stiffened up so that he could not move. Poor chap, he said that he would have gone crazy that day if we had not brought him in.

Some very hard fighting took place here for there was an awful lot of dead Huns lying around. All that morning we made our positions as secure as possible. At about two that afternoon word came from Col. Bauld that we were to attack and that the Co. Commanders were all wanted at Battalion Headquarters. When Capt. MacNeil came back he gave us the outline of the scheme and told me that I was to stay in the Subsidiary trench until they had things consolidated, or if they had to fall back under a heavy counter attack I was to cover the retirement and hold the trench at all costs. All right! Our barrage

opens up; our fellows go over; up goes Fritz's S.O.S. signals, his artillery starts. It is maddening where we are. His artillery is playing all round us, knocking in our trenches in places but never getting any of my guns or men. Then there is a tremendous fire of machine guns from Fritz's trench no man could live through. The bullets are just singing through the air. But our men are quick to grasp the game and get into some shell holes and wait until it gets a little dark and then crawl back to our own line. We have quite a few wounded and some killed. Nothing though when you look at the resistance. One chap by the name of Porter came crawling into the trench with an ugly head wound and blood pouring all over his face. He started swearing at Fritz and ended up by asking for a chew of tobacco before he went out to the dressing station. We got settled away once more all prepared for the wily Hun if he should come over.

There were several of attacks on our left that night. It sort of got our wind up a little. Outside of that everything went well and we passed a very comfortable night, smoking and tell stories, for there was no such thing as sleep in the outposts. The next morning at daylight we took a good observation and everything seemed normal, so after giving out the rations of food, water and rum, we took turns and had a sleep until about 11 o'clock when for some reason Capt. MacNeil was ordered to take his company back to the sunken road in rear of the trenches so they could have a sleep I had to stay there with my three gun teams and hold the trench against all attacks. About 2 o'clock that afternoon when everything seemed very quiet and normal, Fritz started up with a bit of a bombardment and they were all landing around our trench. At times they would just cover us with mud. Luckily for us it never got anybody. He was also landing them between us and "A" Co., so I began to get a bit worried and decided that I should send a message back to Headquarters as they were shelling pretty bad. I did not think it fair to send one of my men so took a message across to "A" Co., and had them send it back to H.Q. I then went back to my own men, arrived there safely and cuddled up against the side of the trench expecting any minute to go up in the air, but we still kept on joking each other. Neither one of us would let on that we were scared. About 5 o'clock that afternoon I saw about twenty men leave "A" Co. trench and make a dash across No Man's Land. They were a reconnoitring patrol in charge of Lieut. Canning and they were going to find out if the Kenora trench was occupied. Well they did. Fritz stopped shelling us and turned his machine guns and artillery on to this small party. They had to fall back and I believe they had four or five killed, including Lieut. Houston. Shortly after that our own Company came back and I can tell you I was not sorry to see them



for it was no enviable position having responsibility for a couple of hundred yards of your front line. We got an issue of rum from the Captain when he came and we needed it bad. About eight that night a ration party came up with our rations and water. Say, you should have tasted it; full right up with the taste of petrol, but still it was good to us. You know we lose all fancy ideas about taste in the trenches.

Everything passed off as usual. Now and again we would think that the German was coming over so would have an extra good watch. He is such an uncanny devil he is always sending up fancy signals. The next morning as usual I visited my teams, issued their rations and rum. I had just finished doing this with my middle team and was sitting down talking to them. The little trench was more like a grave that could just hold us comfortable. All of a sudden there was an explosion overhead. I heard somebody singing out "stretcher-bearer" and I thought something had struck me in the back and had gone through me, but I looked around for my men. As far as I could see they had all been wounded and they were trying to get as fast as they could to the dressing station. Then I looked behind me and there was one of my team with his leg right off; three of his fingers were also off but as he was bleeding so much from his leg there was not a bit of blood left in his hand. I bandaged him up the best way I could and then we got a stretcher and carried him out. The wound that I had was only a little scratch and I found out later the shell that burst overhead was what we call a "wooly bear," instead of the shrapnel bursting forward it shot downwards. My gun was disabled so I thought I should have another. I went back to Howard Johnson who was Acting O.C. of operations in the front line. He was always optimistic (a good way to be) so told me about all the artillery that we had behind us and that we should not worry. Well, I did, and finally I got that gun fixed so that it worked alright. Everybody was telling me how lucky I was to escape when everybody else got hit, but I had a more miraculous one that afternoon.

About three Fritz started to shell us badly again. The shells were coming quite thick and as we could see that he did not intend coming over it was decided to evacuate the outposts and go back to the Sunken Road. The most of the Company had gone back and as I was all ready to leave with my team a big fellow burst. It got one of the men who was just behind me, tore off his leg and a big chunk went into his back, missed me, and the concussion took the chap that was in front of me and landed him about 5 yards away dead. I cannot explain it

but there are several of the boys back here who saw it. We got back to the sunken road, stayed there about an hour and then we manned our trenches again. About nine o'clock that night rations were brought up to us as usual, and they also sent the few men that they had left at the horse-line, for we were beginning to get them out a little. The advance is all right for the morale but it causes quite a few casualties. This night went past as the others—nothing happened.

The morning was fine and we received word that we were to make an attack and take the Regina trench that afternoon at all costs. We got everything prepared for it that morning and that afternoon at three o'clock we went over again, but it was a futile attempt for they had all sorts of machine guns and barbed wire there waiting for us. But we kept on as far as the Regina, but could not capture it as our numbers were too depleted by this time. It was here I got the M.M. This makes a coincidence in our family, two brothers having the M.M. and one the D.C.M. We were relieved late that night by the 6th Brigade and we were not sorry to get out. We lost quite a few here, including Howard Johnson, who was in charge of operations. If ever a man deserved a V.C., he did. We marched from here to the Brickfield and from there back to a village behind the lines, out of the range of shell fire. We were still the same old battalion in name and those of us who were left intended to let the reinforcements know what sort of a battalion they had come to.

When our reinforcements at last arrived Col. Hilliam took them and gave them a good lecture and then the old boys got after them. It did not take them long to decide that we were the best battalion in France and that is how we got the "Esprit de Corp."

We stayed in this little village for about a week and then started on our march for the Bullez Grenaz front. After a few days marching, we arrived at our destination, a place where all Canadians have spent a happy time. The village itself was right close up to the communication trench and the French people carried on their work as usual, although now and again Fritz would put over an occasional shell, but they all seemed to think that was in the day's work. We went into a reserve trench called Mechanic's Dump. It is a spot that will always remain. Here were buried quite a lot of French and British soldiers who had lost their lives in the battle of Looz and there were also some of our own buried here.

Amongst them, Sergt. Jim Harris. He was the greatest all round dare-devil that we had in the battalion. In fact there was nothing too daring for him to do if he could get a joke off. It was he that took the chickens, skinned them and threw the skins beneath the officers' cookhouse so that they would have to pay for them. Sergt. Harris was appointed Wiring Sergt. He had charge of all the wiring in front of our trench and craters. There were two craters quite close to each other, one occupied by us, the other by Fritz. The Brigade Major asked Harris if he could wire this crater as it was a very risky job. Harris promptly replied that "if Kaizer Bill himself were there in the crater opposite, he would wire it." He did and had the job finished when he saw a couple of Huns stick their heads out of their crater. With that he threw a couple of bombs at them and got them, but a couple of their pals got Harris. We were sorry; for he was really the most talked of man in the Battalion. Anyway, I had the satisfaction of fixing his grave up.

#### [Aeroplane map Vimy Ridge](#)

Aeroplane map of the sector in which the "Fighting 25th" were engaged at "Vimy Ridge."

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Aeroplane map of the sector in which the "Fighting 25th" were engaged at "Vimy Ridge."

When we took over these trenches everything was quiet in this section, but it was not very long before the Canadians had livened things up. Some days we would "strafe" him with trench mortars; on others we would give him a touch of our artillery. Bill Cameron was aching to get a go at him so he picked out eighty men and four officers. It was decided to use the Bangalore torpedo to blow his wire up. The time appointed was Xmas morning. When they went to put the torpedoes underneath the wire they found it impossible as it was too bright, so there was a consultation and it was decided to crawl out, lay alongside of his wire and then make a dash into his trench as soon as the artillery started which they did with great success, bringing back about nine prisoners. Besides what they killed and the damage done, the moral effect on the Hun was good.

That night the battalion on our right were going to pull off a raid. They started

in and Fritz must have thought we were going to pull off another, so he just started in and shelled us like anything. He didn't get any of us, but sure kept us ducking. I would put a chew of tobacco in my mouth and go round and visit my men, shells landing all around us. When they were coming through the air you would swear that they were coming straight for you and that one had your number engraved on it. Well, I would be as shaky as anybody could be, but I would not let the others see it and the men were the same. We are all alike; we all get a little funky in a bombardment but we will not admit it.

During our stay here Fritz bombarded the village with gas shells, killing four or five civilians. He did not get one of the military. Well, I suppose that is his way of waging war.

We were to be relieved by the 1st Division so that we could go out for a rest and I was advised that on the 21st of February I was to go to a cadet school in France to qualify for a commission.

It was also understood that before we went out for this rest that we were to carry out a large daylight raid. The 4th Brigade who were on our right were to do this. A couple of nights before the raid was planned for, the Battalion Scout officer, with a couple of men, were scouting around No Man's Land when they encountered a strong German patrol. Our fellows had to drop back to our trench but the officer was hit and it was believed taken prisoner by the Germans. As he had some important papers the plans were all changed. So much in fact that we knew nothing about them ourselves. We got word at last that the raid was to take place at 4.30 this certain afternoon. Exactly on the second our artillery trench mortars and machine guns opened up. We just showered them with liquid fire shells and gas shells. Well, it was a wonderful night. The 26th Battalion on our left went over, entered his trench and bombed dugouts in the front line, for we were not taking any chances on Fritz having a surprise waiting for us. Our men all returned and we thought everything was over and that we would be relieved the next day. I guess Fritz thought the same. At seven the next morning I had a message handed me telling me that my men were not to stand down until I was notified later, as the Brigade on our left were going to carry out a raid. Again we pounded Cain out of him. Our men went over and our artillery formed a box barrage so that they could go in the trenches secure from a German counter attack. They had great success, brought back 100 prisoners besides what were

killed. We suffered very light.

After our boys came back, Fritz, thinking that we still held it completed the work of knocking his trench to pieces which we had started. We were relieved the next day and marched to a large mining town called Bruay. I was there only about four days when I was sent down the line to qualify for a commission and arrived back on the morning of the ninth and went up the line to the front trenches that night, along with Lt. Col. Bauld.

After a month of rest at Bruay, the Battalion left for a training camp where for over a month the Battalion, in conjunction with the remainder of the 2nd Division, trained on ground marked out showing the different communication and main line trenches then held by the Huns and which were to be our objectives. This is made possible by the accurate photography from aeroplanes used for that purpose.

At last the time drew near. A week was all that was left before the great day was to arrive and by that time the Battalion was in a good condition for anything that might happen. On the night of the 5th Major Delancy, who was going to take the Battalion over the top, held a meeting of all officers and everything was explained. The officers were made to understand that even if only one man was left alive the objective must be taken and held and unless the position was serious no calls for help were to be sent to other units but that the "25th" must carry out the task allotted to them.

Easter Sunday came and we were ready and anxiously waiting to move. At 6.30 a.m., Lieut. F.G. Lawzanne left with a party of N.C.O's to take up, what the orders stated, to be a Camp but what was in reality all that was left of a small forest known as the Bois-Des Alleux. At 9.30 a.m., the Battalion, in fighting kit, without great-coats, left for this camp. After arriving bombs, ground flares, etc., were issued the Battalion and the remainder of the day was spent in trying to keep warm. During the course of the afternoon two men appeared in Camp with sand bags slung over their shoulders. They turned out to be Piper Brand and Piper Telford who did not want to be left behind and volunteered to play the Battalion "over the top." Permission for this was given by Lt. Col. D.S. Bauld, who, at that time, was in the Camp with his Battalion and who was feeling downhearted at not being able to lead his men on the following day.

At last orders were received to move forward to our jumping off trench. At

8.30 p.m., Easter Sunday, the 25th left their camp, a camp which, some of the finest sons of Nova Scotia would never see again, and moved forward slowly, passing through Mount St Eloi, where could be noticed a few remaining French families who had stayed by the home all through the months of war. A few hours march, and we arrived on the Muvelle St. Vacest Road where for some reason we stayed for almost two hours, during which time the Hun started shelling the road, and here our first casualties occurred. We were at last able to continue our march and at 3.30 a.m., Easter Monday we marched out to the jumping off trench which was already being shelled by the Huns. Zero hour had been set for 5.30 a.m., so we had two hours to wait, and a long two hours they were. Nobody can realize except those who have been through it the thoughts which pass through mens minds at such a time—thoughts of home and loved ones appear as a vision with a wonder as to whether you will ever see them again.

Operations orders were that the 24th and 26th Battalion would attack a trench known as Zwischen Stelling, while the 25th Battalion with the 22nd French-Canadians, as "moppers-up," would capture and consolidate a trench named Turco Graben which was in advance of Zwischen Stelling. On the left was a communication trench known as Dump Ave which was left to the capable hands of Major Wise and the remaining companies were spread to the right. We stayed in those trenches consolidating, etc., for a few days when two minutes before the time of advancing the word was passed from man to man to get ready and every man in those muddy trenches fixed his equipment, looked to the bombs and rifles and passed wishes of good luck to those nearest him, making a toe hold in the side of the trench to help himself up.

Zero hour (5.30 a.m., Easter Monday, 1917) had come! The Vimy Ridge attack was on! Whistles blew and over the top went the Canadians. The artillery started their work. Hundreds and hundreds of guns commenced drum fire simultaneously. Looking towards the Hun trenches it appeared as if the whole line was afire. It was a grand and impressive sight. The gallant pipers leading the 25th could be seen but it was impossible with the din to hear what they were playing. Gradually we advanced our ground—nothing but holes filled with mud and water to make the going very difficult. At last we reached the German line which had been taken by the 24th and 26th Battalion. We jumped into what was left of the trench and waited until the set time to move forward. Looking at the Hun trench one could easily see what good work the gunners were doing.

Everything was smashed in; dugouts were gone and many of the enemy with them. Our next objective was the Tu Rop Graben trench. By this time the Boche realized that he had no small attack to deal with and his artillery, helped with many machine guns, started, causing us many casualties. Just about this stage of the advance Major Delancy was killed and also R.S.M. Hinchcliffe. We could see our boys for miles advancing with confidence and determination. The Hun shells and bullets were coming swift but that did not stay the Canadians. Parties of the enemy were trying to put up a fight but they were soon settled. Major A.O. Blois, though wounded, took command of the Battalion and for this and other good work he was awarded the D.S.O.

Finally we reached our last objective and commenced to consolidate. This trench, like the others, was in an awful condition. We found a large dugout named Craemer House which was a Battalion headquarters. By this time we had lost not only Major Delancy, but Lieuts. Hallesy, Sheriff, Feindel, Barber, as well as other officers wounded, and a good number of men both killed and wounded.

Then came the long hours of waiting. It had rained during the morning and everybody was more or less wet and as the evening drew on it became very cold and by the time the morning came again, the Battalion having no overcoats, or shelter were in a sorry plight, with but little food or water except what the Hun had left behind.

On the evening of the attack Col. S. Bauld came with Lieuts. Lewis and Fisher and Capt. and Q.M. Ingraham, who having heard of the casualties amongst the officers volunteered to come and help out. The following night water was sent up and altho it tasted more like petrol we were glad to get it.

That night we moved back to the rear trench and everyone felt a lot happier when a rumour went around that the Battalion was going to be relieved. After holding the position for less than two days we were sent for two days rest, prior to being relieved, into a larger German tunnel known as Folker Tunnel.

Lieut. Dryden was detailed to take charge of the burial party and the sad work it was, collecting friend and foe from all over the battlefield.

After a night in the tunnel the order came that instead of going out to be relieved we were again to go forward. The people at home will never realize what this order meant to our men. After four days without sleep, wet clothing and mud right next to the skin, with very little food or water, our men were not anxious to move forward, but did they grumble? Not they. When the word came to move forward they were ready once more for another go at the Hun.

We came out of the trenches for a short rest. We had to travel about two miles over shell-torn ground and we were about all in having been in the line for quite a few days doing our duty regardless of shells, snow and rain. After what seemed to us to be a long time we arrived out at our resting place not so very far from the front line. We bivouacked here in tents and had one beautiful rest. Rain and mud the entire four days that we were out here. Col. Bauld was in charge of the Battalion and Major Blois was acting as second in command. But we were quite happy despite the rain and mud. One night the German aeroplanes came overhead. The order came to put out the lights and just to show you how little the boys thought of Fritz's bombs, a crowd of men in a few of the tents who had just came back from a working party and were turning in when the signal went to put out lights ignored it saying: "Just wait a few minutes as we have to turn in." I wonder if Fritz's planes would wait? I guess not. Anyway he did not get us that night. Now and again Fritz would drop an occasional shell over quite close to us but he never did us any damage.

We had come through one of the heaviest engagements that had taken place up until this time and though very muddy, we were as happy as anyone could be. Well, as I said, we stayed here for a few days and then we went up the line and stayed in supports for a few days. Col. Bauld was in command and I must say that he has done good work for the whole time that he was out there. He was such that no matter who the man was he would do all in his power to assist him. We stayed in supports for a few days and then we got the order to move up into the front line trench—trench in name only as it really could only be called a ditch. On the way up Fritz shelled us pretty badly. I tell you, whilst we were up on top of the ridge, Fritz just peppered us. But strange to say, although he got our wind up and made us feel a little shaky he never inflicted any casualties and that is the main thing. Well, after a long march we arrived at our destination.

How easy to write this back here, but what a feeling whilst going up. An



occasional shell bursting close to you. Now and again a machine gun opening up. You are marching along very quietly when a battery of our own guns open up alongside of you and I tell you honestly there are times when the bravest of us get the creeps. We were in our new home, and had to see about some shelters. We would dig into the side of the parapet just enough for a man to crouch up into. I can tell you that although it was clammy and wet it seemed like heaven to us at times. Well, there was an attack planned for the 28th of April. The night of the 28th we dug a jumping off trench and it was understood that "D" Co. should form the left flank of the attack. "C" Co. digging in No Man's Land and connecting with the 26th Battalion. My platoon of "D" Co. formed the left flank of the "C" Co. Lieut. Bell was in charge of "D" Co. that day. We were notified that the hour would be at 4.45 p.m. All right. Just before the attack Fritz sent a few shells over on us and we shelled the best way that we could. It is getting quite close to the appointed time. I look at my watch. My men are all ready. I have nothing to worry about. I wonder whether I have been out here too long and that I am going to get mine. But I don't worry for we get to be fatalists and say if it is going to be well it has to be, so what's the odds. I look at my watch, it wants a minute to go. By the time I put my watch back there is one terrific noise. All around the horizon in the rear there is one mass of flame. You can hear the shells whizzing over your head. We start over—walking, not running. It is a creeping barrage. It will play on his wire and front line trenches for a while and then creep forward. We are following up close behind it. It is a wonderful sight and nobody will ever be able to do justice to it. Shells bursting in front of us. Fritz sending up his S.O.S. signals; our men with their rifles at the "High Port," not giving a damn for anybody living, with one fixed idea that is to get into Fritz' trench and take all of our objectives and take them prisoner, but if they show any fight to do them in. We get to his wire it is not cut as well as it should have been, but we belong to the "25th." We have to get through regardless of what happens to ourselves. We get through the wire but most of the boys are a little too much to the right. There is a machine gun playing on us but not doing any damage.

One of Fritz's bombs burst right close by us and some of it gets me behind the ear. But they are only flesh wounds and we have got to get to the objective, which is a sunken road. He is using a trench mortar on us. But with our usual luck he is firing wild and, therefore doing no damage. I jump into the sunken road. I am too far ahead of my men. The Fritz's who are firing the Trench Mortar see me and think that we are all there. So they start to beat it. I fire at them with my revolver. I hear some squealing behind me and look around. Three Germans!

What can I do. I cannot take them prisoners nor can I take any chances. So I have no other alternative but to shoot them. It may seem cold blooded to a lot but the only thing I am sorry for is that I did not kill a few more. About the same time my men came along and we started bombing the dugouts. It was great sport. You throw a bomb down then stand clear. A burst of flame comes up and then you hear a lot of squealing.

At the end of the sunken road Fritz started to counter-attack us, so there is nothing for me to do but lead a couple of men over the open to a trench and place a block in so that Fritz cannot get behind us. On the way over I get hit in the ankle and the wrist with a couple of Fritz's bullets. We get into the trench and start bombing up the trench. There we have a bit of a fight and I get a bayonet wound in the back. By this time I had lost a considerable amount of blood so have to try to get out the best way I can for at the time we did not know how things were going to go. But I found out later that we held on to all of our objectives. I started to crawl out, but Fritz also started sniping at me. I got to the wire and it looked as if I would not be able to get through as Fritz's bullets were flying around. Anyway I decided to go through the best way I could even if I did get killed. As soon as I started to walk through the wire Fritz stopped firing, for why I do not know and another thing I did not care so long as I got out of the wire and could get into a shell hole. By this time, through loss of blood I was feeling pretty weak. Whilst taking a breath in this shell hole I saw a Boche coming towards me. I was not taking any chances so covered him with my revolver. He surrendered and helped me to get out.

It is impossible in this short space to tell all the glorious achievements of the Twenty-fifth. Suffice to say that the empire bore no braver sons and history will chronicle no greater sacrifices than those of the men of Nova Scotia.

**FINIS**



Typographical errors corrected in text:

Page 12: Kimmell replaced with Kimmel  
Page 14: Kimmil replaced with Kimmel  
Page 14: becaue replaced with because  
Page 15: Christman replaced with Christmas  
Page 29: "we we called the tank" replaced with "as we called the tank"  
Page 29: terriffc replaced with terrific  
Page 44: "until they they had" replaced with "until they had"  
Page 47: yeards replaced with yards  
Page 51: areoplanes replaced with aeroplanes  
Page 52: Battallion replaced with Battalion  
Page 53: Zxischen replaced with Zwischen  
Page 54: simultanously replaced with simultaneously  
Page 57: quitely replaced with quietly  
Page 58: dimage replaced with damage

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