

On Active Service with a Canadian Field Ambulance in Flanders

Recounted for The Western Home Monthly By "A Winnipeg Scots-Canadian."

To the ordinary layman the part played by a Field Ambulance in that important branch of His Majesty's Forces, the Royal Army Medical Corps, may be a little obscure. Therefore some account of one's experiences in a Canadian Field Ambulance might at this time prove of general interest.

Non-combatant, the activities of a Field Ambulance are naturally carried out just behind the firing line, forming the link between the trenches and the clearing hospitals, which are always situated at a safe distance out of ordinary shell fire.

The three essential requirements of a field ambulance are proficiency in handling wounded, mobility of transport and easy access to the trenches.

It has three divisions—Tent, Bearer and Transport (motor and horse), these being all subdivided into three smaller sections, each complete in itself and ready to handle any emergency even when separated from the other sections.

The bearer sections, under a captain, open up an advanced dressing station as close to the firing line as possible, usually in some convenient farm building or its remains. The bearer's duties consist of collecting the wounded from the regimental aid posts, rendering first aid as required, and despatching the horse or motor ambulances with their loads of suffering victims to the safety and comfort of the various clearing hospitals on

the line of communication, first the field ambulance tent hospital, where the tent divisions and chief surgical staff remain, redressing the wounds, performing necessary operations and doing all in their power to assist the brave men who have been so sorely broken in the awful



strife. From the field hospital the wounded are transferred by motor conveyance to the clearing hospital. Thence they are evacuated by ambulance train to the general hospitals at the base, or to the great hospital ships which carry the sufferers over to "Blighty" to be distributed among the many hospitals of

the old land. The wonderful canal and river systems of Flanders and Belgium have proved of immense value in the peaceful transport of severe cases in hospital barges towed slowly along, giving the serious cases just that chance of victory over their wounds so vital in the early days of weakness and exhaustion.

Enough dry detail has now been given to let the uninitiated understand somewhat of the workings of that great service, which by its devotion to duty and proficiency of performance has won so large a mead of praise in this world war.

One feels proud to be even a humble member of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, which has, in common with the whole First Canadian Division, rendered services so signal as to call forth from the director-general of the Army Medical Service the very warmest encomiums. Satisfied we are to feel that we have in some measure lived up to the motto of our Corps:

"In arduis fidelis."

In the trench mode of warfare on the Western front a field ambulance does not get the opportunity to develop its full usefulness, as operations may remain almost stationary on some sectors of the line and, as a rule, the casualties on such portions of the line are few and easily handled.

Our first experience of the realities of war and of our part in it came at Ypres, where the unexpected happened, and our First Division was called upon in a crisis as acute as any in the war. The casualties of that terrible battle tested to the limit our efficiency as a medical unit, and had there been a weak point in our arrangements that grave emergency would assuredly have found it out. Our

commanding officer had secured for his hospital in the small town just a mile and a half from Ypres a small school-house in whose limited space many a wounded man was laid. Ere the battle was over thousands of broken men, Canadians, Scottish, English and Indian, as well as many French Zouaves, were to pass through our hands. It was work with a vengeance then, officers and men alike unwearied in their efforts to help the dreadful rush of wounded. For many of us it was our first insight into the human havoc of war, yet it was wonderful how quickly our nerves became inured to the awful injuries of those we tended. It was sore on the sympathies of our hearts, for we had no time to give those individual attentions our hearts dictated, so constant was the stream.

The story of Ypres has been told and retold, but the memory of these days will live in the minds of all who were called upon at that time with a vividness beyond description.

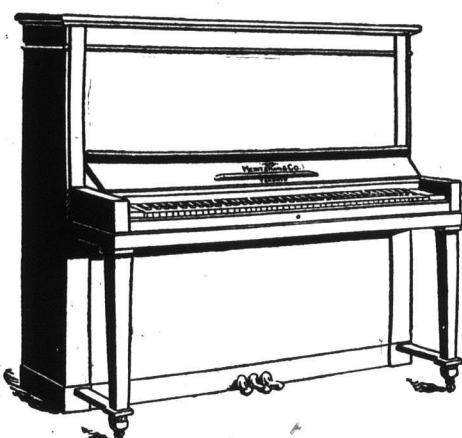
Canada's sons laid down their lives like heroes, and in the aftermath of peace the Maple Leafs will grow in honor over the graves of her beloved dead a lasting token to the willing sacrifice of brave men and true.

After Ypres the shattered Canadian Division moved back for a well-earned and absolutely necessary rest, for there was hardly a unit in the Division but had suffered losses while the infantry battalions were dreadfully cut up.

As soon as reinforcements came, the Division, with a new cavalry brigade, acting as infantry, made up of the Lord Strathcona Horse, Royal Canadian Dragoons, and the King Edward Horse,

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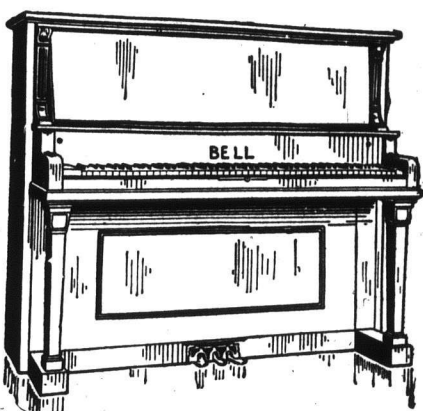
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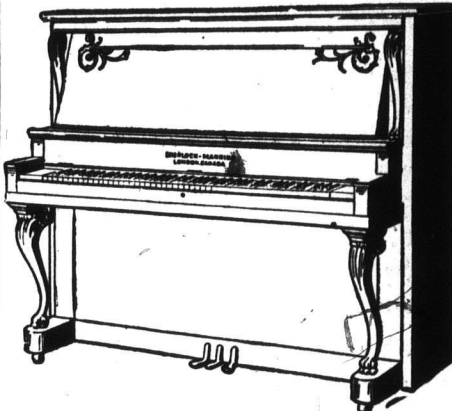


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