

Fritz Abroad—The Departure—First Letter

By Bonnycastle Dale

"SOMEWHERE in the Empire"—After that long clinging hand-shake you saw our train speed out of the station, all I could see was a bank of dark figures and waving white hands; then everybody hustled for bunks, we had a separate one each. Everybody seemed to find boxes and packages. I ate so many sandwiches and demolished so much cake I had no thought of sleep; someone started, "We'll Never Let the Old Flag Fall," and we went to it with a relish. Then into "Good Luck to the Boys of the Allies," then into everything "singable" we could think of—a flash of lights beside us and a hollow roar meant a little station—off into the blackness; "clickity clack," went the wheels, each revolution taking us nearer to the big ocean, the transports and Old England. (I didn't think then that each revolution was also taking us farther away from those who loved us—but I do as I write this.) A long shrill whistle, a grinding of the brakes, a row of lights as we pass street ends and we are at the station of Belleville—a slim female figure runs along beside us and grasps a brother's hand—another screech, a waving light and off we go again with two hearts made sadder by the moment's joy. "Clickety-click," we speed along bravely and the brother gives a gulp and joins in the singing. "Keep the Home Fires Burning," seems so appropriate, and I finally climb into my bunk when there is only a quartette of voices left—just a dying log of the "home fire" as it were, and I fitfully fall asleep and momentarily dream of the dear old camp home; and open my eyes to the grey of dawn and the clear calm water of the St. Lawrence River.

Do you know! I saw a flock of ducks on the river and it brought all the old home scenes back with a rush, but I am away after bigger game now Old Friend—the calm water turns out to be ice, and the sparkle came from just a hole in the river ice where the ducks leaped from. It is cold this March morning but the train is well heated and all eyes are searching the new scenes—it's getting along towards breakfast time if my stomach is any truth teller—now straggling farms give place to houses—now we cross a great bridge—rumble! rumble! rumble! now the houses are closer together—and a head is poked into our Colonist car and something that sounded like — Tree — alllll — squealed out. I knew it for Montreal and food and, I hoped, a bit of time to stretch our legs. Alas! we got the food all right, but not the walk, for no sooner did one switch engine bang us about a bit and run us on another track, than another laid hold of us with a fearful bump, and smacked us on behind an east-bound train—and here we were, one lonely quota of fifty artillery Reserves, speeding east ahead of the big troop trains behind a full regiment of Calgary Infantry. I tell you there was a mighty procession of Belgium avengers speeding East that morning—just think, this one overseas contingent of young Canada was a mighty army compared with the legions of Imperial Rome in her days of glorious history, and I tell you if any of her Legionaries could whack a fellow harder

on the back by way of "good morning" than our boys do—count me out.

East of Montreal the country seems so odd to our eyes—the farms look like long narrow rows of fenced streets, so narrow are they. Then comes the village, just one big fine church, an equally as big fine manse and then a squatting crowd of small houses about them—just like a flock of sheep and the shepherd. Then the country all seems so flat, an occasional big hill shooting up unannounced as it were—all covered with silver birch, second growth. In one wooded section we ran past a tiny station slowly. A very old man and a boy of, say ten years of age, stood there, both figures simultaneously reached into their pockets and brought out a jimmy pipe, the old man divided the shag, they filled the pipes, lighted them with one match and were puffing away contentedly as we drew off. It seemed quite safe to wager they did not know there was a war on, so contented and peaceable did they look. At other places we saw the old family homes with all the long narrow farms cut up from the water's edge into strips not more than a hundred yards wide. In the old home lived many of the children of three generations, each generation cutting the strips narrower. "Lots of schools down here," called my friend at my elbow. "Schools," I yelled back above the train noises, "that's just one family."



Major General Sir Sam Hughes, K.C.B., Minister of Militia and Defense for Canada. He is here seen in a typical pose, presenting colors to an eastern Canadian battalion, a ceremony carried out shortly before the troops leave for overseas.

Beyond the Iron Horse (steam engine). The snow was piled high on each side of the tracks. Wherever we stopped the boys tried to chat with the good people at the stations, as a rule none replied in English—always "Parle-vous-Francais"; did I spell it right? and away we go—

car. You can faintly see the word "Cobourg" on the side of the car. We had it written in big letters, what we were and where from, but at the roll call picture you can see it clearly—guess most everybody knew where we were from. One old Irishwoman came along peddling apples. "Never a cent will I take from you redcoats" (a lingering remembrance in her mind of the old tunics) "if ye'll just take a prod at them same Germans for me." Nevertheless the boys saw she got good value for her big red-cheeked apples.

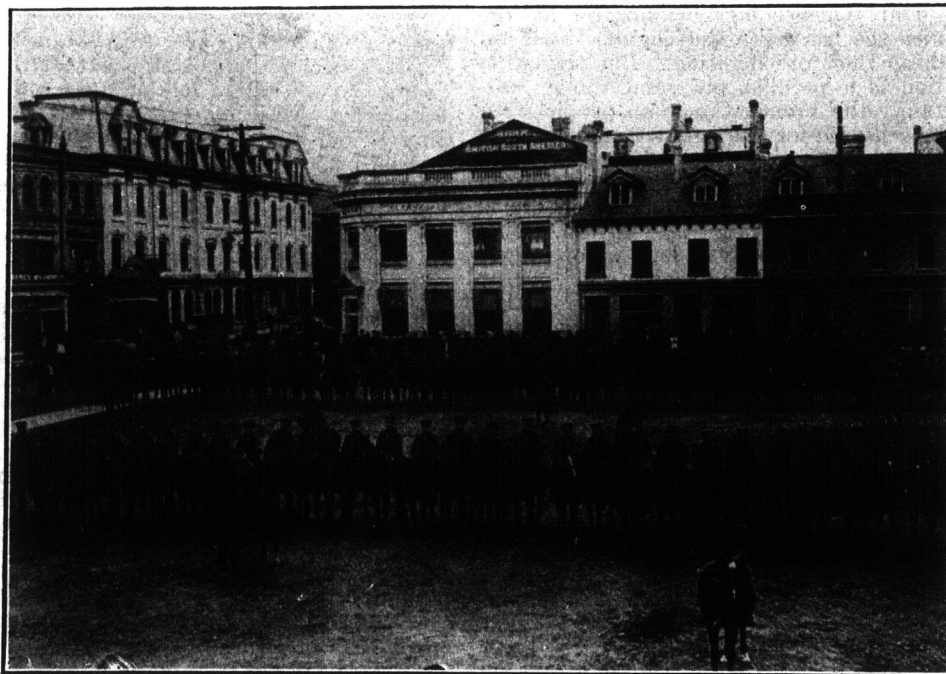
We had a leg-stretcher at Moncton, Que. Here I took a snap of a solitary ancient gun in front of the station. What a contrast to conditions on the date of publication of this. One returned soldier told us of passing through the Artillery lines in France. "They were sixteen miles deep and just full of cannon." "All aboard," and off we go—when next we awoke we were in the closely guarded train yards at Halifax. I had a friend snap me with my kit bag in hand, haversack and blanket on as I left the train. I also shinned up on top of the car and got a picture of the train yard with the big transports at anchor else outside.

I say! these yards are just alive with soldiers, almost eight thousand of us in this contingent, going on four great liners. (I could give my readers the names, but all my letters will be so written as to pass the Censor and give no information to the enemy—except that when we get good and ready we will be a pretty big lusty force.)

Now came that intensely interesting moment when we all lined up and marched aboard. I wish you could have seen us, every man eager-eyed. The grand old "Jack," whipping in the breeze from the parade ground mast and the Admiral's flag taking the wind aboard one of our mighty escorts. Here I must touch lightly; but the names of both the Admiral and the ship have rung worldwide in one of the great sea battles in which he was the victor (at date of publication I know that this great battleship fought victoriously in the late great sea fight off Jutland).

The troops poured out of the yard in never ending streams. It seemed as if our huge liner could never be filled, but the time came—(whisper) crew and all we muster over four thousandsouls. No wonder, with three other great liners filled, we need a mighty protecting force to guard us on the way across. There was a hard struggle up gang-planks and along passages and companionways but at last I found my cabin and was lucky to have another Cobourg Battery boy for mate. We now had time to look over the harbor of this capital city of Nova Scotia. The proud boast is that the whole Navy could ride in safety and manoeuvre here. Above us rose the military post with the great "Jack" on the mast and we could hear a band playing some martial air. The bulwarks were lined with khaki-clad figures. Just think how some three thousand and odd soldiers fill even a liner as huge as this one, and there are not many longer keels than

(Continued on page 17)



Canadian Cavalry on parade. Canada has given by now 60,000 horses for war purposes.

All morning and afternoon we passed through the flat country, all pulpwoods, many clearings piled with the four-foot sticks ready for shipment. The farmers here use oxen yet, it did seem odd to be gliding along in a first-class train to the great World War and to see our real Canadians (for they are—we have the hyphen, British Canadian, if any should be used) using beasts of burden that I thought existed only in pictures of primitive times, or far back on the prairie

"toot, toot, clickity click"—from the big church and the wee whitewashed wooden homes of the people.

"Ch—ee —rrr" said the man with the unpronounceable name at the door. I never would have guessed it! but the name at the station said "Chaudiere," and the sergeant said, "All out here" so we were very happy. Alas! The captain got a good look at the dirty streets—mud, snow and slush, "so never a walk did we get at all," as one of the boys said—guess he came from Paris. Just then that magical word "supper" was announced and each and every one dropped just what he held and went—I tell you, in the light of present experiences in barrack and train and billet; it's only the one who is well able to take good physical care of himself who will get all that is coming to him. Well, I got there and got my share. Thanks to your advice never to drink, never to inhale smoke, and to eat slowly, I am able to thoroughly look after myself—and say, I don't mean to seem selfish, but do remember that all the other chaps are pretty husky, too, so we don't really have any "lame ducks" to look after.

Newcastle and supper came together, so I did not see much of the former, but the country is just the same—mile after mile of second-growth silver birch. Now the St. Lawrence is our close neighbor again, all smiles with its rippled coat of snow—a couple of sleighs were coming across and I thought of you now homeward bound across another dearer patch of ice to the good old home camp.

I took the first picture for you at Chaudiere Junction, Que., a snap of our



Typical machine gun battery practising with a "Lewis" machine gun at Camp Borden. The Canadian people bought an extra thousand of these by public subscription.