

HISTORICAL NOTE ON THE 219th



IN THE GLOOMY DAYS that closed the year 1915 it was felt that the resources of the British Empire must be more severely taxed, if the war were to be brought to a successful issue. Nova Scotia had already raised the 17th, the 25th, the 40th, and the 64th battalions, chiefly, though not exclusively, within its own borders. It had sent also the 17th Field Battery from Sydney as well as several drafts from the 63rd, the 66th Canadian Militia, the R.C.R., and 1st Composite Battalion. These all had crossed the seas. The 85th was in training. The 106th and 112th had been authorized and were recruiting. Generous though these contributions had been, far beyond the dreams of the most ardent patriot in the early days of the war, Nova Scotia had not yet done her full duty. It had 95,000 men of military age; and if Canada were to reach the half million mark, further effort was necessary in the province by the sea.

The suggestion of a Highland Brigade was mooted early in 1916 and became universally popular. To the 85th Battalion, already raised, were added the 185th, the 193rd, and the 219th, "three battalions in three weeks." No recruiting movement had been more successful or more dramatic.

The methods employed are of historic interest. In the end of February a publicity campaign prepared for the "great drive." Pulpit, press, and schoolroom were commandeered into service. Military uniforms were seen everywhere on the platform; and even the bagpipes were heard in sacred precincts. A letter was addressed by Colonel Borden to the school children of Nova Scotia. Men of the 85th dispersed themselves through every town and village, and rendered invaluable help.

The territory allotted to the 219th included Halifax and the western counties. A notable feature of the campaign was a tour through this section of the province in the first week of March by Colonel Borden, assisted by Capt. Cutten, President of Acadia University, and accompanied by the band of the 85th.

The citizens of Halifax threw themselves enthusiastically into the project. Graphic placards were posted in every public place; motors and even street cars were engaged to carry volunteers to the recruiting stations; cheering was constant in the streets. Never in the history of the province has it known a moment so intense. Young men from all occupations flocked to the colours; class rooms and colleges were emptied; the staffs in banks and telegraph companies were depleted; business men were in despair to fill the places their clerks had left. Even the pulpit stood vacant; the 219th has fourteen ordained preachers within its ranks. Scenes of a dramatic character attended nearly every meeting. In country places no little hardship was bravely faced, as old people bade "Godspeed" to the only lad when he left the farm.

Headquarters were fixed at Halifax, and the first battalion orders were issued on March 6th. "A" company was also stationed there with one platoon in Dartmouth. Detachments were formed at Mahone Bay, Lunenburg, Bridgewater, Lockeport, Clark's Harbor, Caledonia, Barrington, Yarmouth, Weymouth, Digby, Tiverton, Bear River, Annapolis, Bridgetown, Berwick, Wolfville, and Kentville. Halls, exhibition buildings, schoolrooms, sand beaches, and even fish lofts were used for drilling purposes. Nothing could exceed the kindness of the citizens in those places; the churches provided a continuous round of socials and entertainments; and moving picture galleries were thrown open, free to the lads in khaki. In the middle of May, Lieut.-Colonel W. H. Muirhead took over the command of the battalion. He is a native of New Brunswick, has been attached to the Canadian Militia Forces since 1898, was Brigade Major in the 16th Infantry Brigade, and when the war broke out, joined the Royal Canadian Dragoons at Valcartier. He fought at Festubert and Givenchy. For nine months he lived in the trenches. In addition to his natural gift of the soldier and his business capacity, he brought with him invaluable lessons, which could only be learned in the actual field of battle, and which were indispensable to the thorough training of the troops. On June 1st, the headquarters removed to Aldershot, N.S., and the mobilization of the battalion began. A special train left Yarmouth that morning gathering up the various western detachments as it came along. These were as follows: