

## AERIAL CONDITIONS ON THE WESTERN FRONT, 1916.

The battle of the Somme in the latter half of 1916 was the principal factor leading to the formation of the Royal Flying Corps, Canada. Aerial conditions on the Western Front were at this period of so tense a nature that they may well be noted before proceeding to the actual history of the Canadian brigade.

The following sketch makes no pretence of absolute accuracy. The data available at the moment are not official, but are compiled from the memories of several flying officers serving on the Western front at the time. They may, however, be taken as fairly presenting not only the development of the Royal Flying Corps, but also that of opposing enemy aircraft at the period under consideration.

The British Expeditionary Force commenced operations in 1914 with a flying arm of four squadrons or some fifty machines, of which no less than thirty were destroyed during a severe storm at Christmas time by the collapse of a large hangar at St. Omer, leaving on the following day approximately 14 serviceable machines. At this time all aeroplanes in both forces were unarmed.

It is difficult to say whether British or German made the first aerial attack on an opposing machine, but it is undoubted that this type of combat, coming how it may, found both sides unequipped with the exception of such offensive power as might be secured with rifle or revolver. British machines had been thus armed for months, probably in anticipation of forced landings behind the German lines and, without question, enemy aircraft were similarly provided. There ensued a series of sporting encounters out of which grew the necessity of arming aeroplanes with rapid-fire guns