

Strong fighting had taken place there. The parapets were low, and many a German was piled up in these parapets and in the mud under foot, and almost every inch of the ground behind us was covered with the graves of the brave French defenders of that section and the Germans killed in trying to take the ground. Honourable members sitting here, I think, have little idea of the conditions under which our troops are fighting. Death is in the air every moment. Night or day, if a man raises his head above the parapet, he is liable to receive a rifle bullet. Every five minutes a shell will hit the parapet or the trenches. Of course, everybody is placed so as to avoid danger as much as possible, but not a day passes when there are not one or two casualties, sometimes three or four, in every Canadian battalion, as you will see by the lists in the newspapers. And we were giving it back with interest to the Germans across the hundred yards of space in the same way. Four days after we had taken over the French trenches, on the 19th of April, between five and six o'clock in the afternoon, we noticed a tremendous rifle fire breaking out along the line occupied by the Turcos. Then we observed a huge cloud of greenish-yellow smoke, like the smoke of burning straw. The rifle fire increased in intensity, and the shell fire became something terrible. The German guns gave what the newspapers call "a curtain of flame" on the forward lines of the Turcos' trenches. One of my companies was in the garrison of one of the villages behind that sector, St. Julien. When I first saw that the attack was coming, I was at the front line in company with Adjutant Dansereau, who is a native of Quebec, and one of the bravest men that ever stood in shoe leather. When we noticed the smoke and the intense firing, we immediately came to the conclusion that a tremendous thrust was being made against the French line at that point. We hurried back into the village of St. Julien and ordered our troops there to stand to. Shortly afterwards we noticed the figures of the French Turcos coming across the fields towards the village. Adjutant Dansereau, with a number of other young officers—Guy Drummond and Major Noseworthy among them—ran out to meet and to stop the Turcos. Dansereau rallied about two hundred of them into my trenches; the others were rallied into the trenches in front of the village. Drummond and Noseworthy fell gallantly, stemming the retreat. The Turcos told us that the Germans had suddenly

turned a stream of gas on their lines, which, with the wind blowing about four miles an hour, quickly crossed the intervening space of 100 or 150 yards which intervened between the trenches. The opposing trenches are never more than 400 yards apart; indeed, the intervening distance is seldom more than 100 yards. When the gas first came the Turcos stuck to their trenches, and fully twenty per cent of their men died in their tracks. You can easily realize why so many of these poor, ignorant, coloured troops were so panic-stricken that they ran. Those who did not run were shot by machine guns or struck by shrapnel as they tried to make their way out of the trenches, so that only a remnant of their brigades reached the village. I desire to bear testimony to the courage of these men, even though they did retire. Out of the 200 men who were put in the forward trench at St. Julien, not more than sixteen remained alive after the battle; and the sixteen became prisoners of the Germans. You will see, therefore, that it was not lack of courage that caused the Turcos to retire. Well, the Germans were coming on, and it was up to the Canadians to fight a rearguard action. I am speaking now not as a soldier, but in my civilian capacity; so I can give praise where it is due. I am sure, therefore, that a word of praise for General Turner will not be out of place. He is an officer in whom we Canadians all have confidence; and he is one of the bravest men in the British Army to-day. He is a Victoria Cross man, and a true soldier from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. General Turner immediately grasped the situation. The 10th and 16th battalions, which were in what they call brigade reserve at Ypres, formed up in the dusk of the evening west of the village of St. Julien, fixed bayonets, ported arms, and started to drive the Germans back. They drove the Germans back nearly a mile, many men falling in the engagement. No braver deed is recorded in the annals of the British Army than the charge of the 16th and 10th at St. Julien wood. Many of the Germans, who threw up their hands, were cowardly enough, after the troops had passed over, to shoot our men in the back. Between 60 and 70 per cent of the charging battalions were wiped out; that is, were killed or wounded. I have not time to mention the bravery of the officers who fell during that fight. The regiments dug in at the edge of the wood, and then the 7th hurried up to form a link between the villages

[Mr. Currie.]