

TWO YEARS OF CHANGE : By BRIG.-GEN. V. W. ODLUM. C.M.G., D.S.O.

WHEN Major Philpot, now Editor of the "Listening Post," asked me to write a short article for the second anniversary number of the paper, it made me think at once of the striking changes which have occurred during the life of this unique little trench journal. The "Listening Post" was established to help create the "British Columbia spirit," of which we are all so proud, and which is such a notable feature of the life of the old battalion. Incidentally, however, it gave scope for the play of a pen which has since become somewhat famous as the author of "Maple Leaves in Flanders Fields." The first editor was Capt. Geo. Gibson, then battalion M.O., now assistant to the D.D.M.S. at Corps Headquarters. It was Capt. Gibson's genius which stamped on the paper the character which has since endured. He made it a journal of broad interest instead of restricting it to purely local news. The fun of the "Listening Post" has always been so true to the realities of trench life that it has appealed with almost equal force to those outside of its parent battalion as to those inside. Its one time circulation of nearly 20,000 copies (a circulation disturbed by the little troubles on the Somme) is indicative of the truth of this statement. It is a fact that I had to use certain restraining influences at the beginning, for, had I not, I fear that the tone would have been too emphatically Scotch.

Captain Gibson was aided and abetted in his Gaelic leanings by the then Q.M., Captain J. M. McMillan, now a Lieut.-Colonel charged with responsible transport duties in England. In those days Lieut. W. F. Gilson was Adjutant, having succeeded Captain S. D. Gardner, who had been seriously wounded at Festubert. The then Lieut. Gilson is now Lieut.-Colonel Gilson. He succeeded Lieut.-Col. Gardner in command of the battalion just as he had previously succeeded him as Adjutant. The change came when Col. Gardner went to England to command a training centre because his wounds would not let him stay in France through another winter's campaign. Lieut.-Col. Gilson came to the front with the original Canadian Expeditionary Force, being then a C.S.M. in the battalion which he now leads.

About the time the paper saw its birth, Major R. C. Cooper, who had been acting as second-in-command, was invalided to England, and was replaced by Major L. E. Haines, who had, like Captain Gardner, been wounded at Festubert. Major Haines was with the battalion until a year later, when he went to assume the instructional duties under the Second Army, which he is still continuing. He, too, had won the rank of Lieut.-Colonel.

Captain J. V. N. Spencer was battalion transport officer in the summer of 1915, having taken over from Captain O. F. Brothers, who had gone to Brigade as bombing officer. To-day Captain Spencer is Lieut.-Col. Spencer, A.Q.M.G. at Canadian Headquarters in London, while Captain Brothers is also a Lieut.-Colonel, and is on the General Staff at the same place. Captain B. M. Humble commanded a company then; he has since passed through Staff work in France and is to-day a Lieut.-Colonel commanding the Canadian Railway Troops Depot.

One could run along in this way indefinitely, for every name referred to brings memories of a hundred connected incidents and of many more linked names. But this is no

place for a history of the battalion. There are, however, one or two other points to which I wish to refer.

During the summer that saw the initial issue of the "Listening Post" the first British Columbia battalion was still composed of its original elements. Only a few small drafts had been received from its reinforcing battalion. The Fall, however, saw the first big drafts arrive. Since then many new names have appeared on the nominal roll of the battalion. But I believe there are some of the originals left, and I have asked the editor to secure and publish a list of those who are still serving in France. It should be of very great interest. Major W. L. Ford is the only one of the original officers now with the unit; but even he was away for a considerable period, having been wounded at Ypres. Amongst the present officers, it is true, are many like the present C.O. and second-in-command, who were with the battalion when it first came to France, but they did not then have commissions.

I remember that "Brigadier-General" A. W. Currie commanded the Brigade at that time. Later he went to the First Division, and was succeeded by Brig.-Gen. L. J. Lipsett. General Currie now commands the Corps, and is "Sir Arthur" Currie, while General Lipsett commands a division of his own. Both have earned a string of honours. Brigadier-General F. O. W. Loomis, the centre figure of the fight around St. Julien in the spring of 1915, is the present Brigadier.

A glance at the commanders of the other three battalions shows what great changes time makes. The "Western Cavalry" was then led by Lieut.-Colonel, now Brigadier-General, G. S. Tuxford, who, on promotion, gave place to that veteran, Lieut.-Colonel H. Dyer. Lieut.-Colonel L. J. Lipsett had the "Little Black Devils"; he went on to a brigade, and later to a division, handing over his authority to Lieut.-Colonel H. H. Mathews (wounded on Mt. Sorrel stirring memories), who was succeeded in turn by Lieut.-Colonel Prower. Lieut.-Colonel J. G. Rattray had the remaining battalion. He is now commanding a Brigade in England, while his place has been taken by Lieut.-Colonel D. Ormond, a Ypres fighter, who still bears marks of the struggle out in the salient.

While men have thus been changing, the situation has been changing, too. In those days the enemy dominated us in almost every way. He looked down on us for a long period, from commanding and well-organised heights. Had he been more enterprising, he could have caused us more casualties than he did. But the Hun is a stupid fighter in many ways—and he did not take advantage of his opportunities. He had the weight in artillery, in munitions, in men. And he had position. All we had was determination. To-day we have the same determination, but we have added to it numbers, guns, munitions, aeroplanes, experience and a leadership that is unquestioned. And we have taken Vimy, and the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge (that old bugbear that faced us so long as we sat on 63 and Kemmel); and we took them when and how we wished.

This far-reaching change may be summed up in a terse expression: Then we were *hanging on*; now we are *driving on*.

But with changes all around, there is one thing I notice which does not change. Men may come and men may go, but the spirit of the 1st B.C.'s is the same. I see it everywhere, in little things and in big. And it is a source of immense pride and keen gratification to me. I am seconded from the battalion for other duties; but I count myself still a 1st B.C., and I wish to continue so to the end.

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