

OUR
VOLUNTEERS
IN KHAKI
4,465

Civil Servants Under Arms

OUR
DEAD - - 386
WOUNDED 580
PRISONERS 24

"FOR VALOUR"

AT the head of the long, proud roll of decorations and honours won by employees of the Dominion of Canada in this war may now be placed the *Victoria Cross*, that highest reward of valour in a British soldier having been won by the late Lieut. James Edward Tait of Winnipeg, in civil life an engineer on the staff of the Hudson's Bay Railway. Natural pleasure that a Canadian civil servant has won this supreme honour is damped by regret that he did not live to wear it, for Lieut. Tait was mortally wounded at the close of the operations in which his brilliant services had won him the Cross.

James Edward Tait was born in Scotland in 1888, and came to Canada from Dumfries in 1911. His military ambition had already had evidence in five years' service in the Yeomanry. After a short period of private employment, he joined the engineering staff of the Hudson's Bay Railway, with which he was connected until he joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

He received a commission in the 100th Regiment, Winnipeg Grenadiers, and was attached to the 100th Battalion, C.E.F., on February 4, 1916.

During the months of training, both in Canada and in England, Lieut. Tait won a high reputation, not only for devotion to his work as an officer, but also for his personal efficiency. He was an athlete of parts and at Seaford Camp carried off the revolver championship.

It was with the 78th Battalion that Lieut. Tait made his magnificent record in France and Flanders. No consecutive story of this stage of his career is available. It is known that he was wounded at St. Eloi, at Ypres, at the Somme and elsewhere,—five times in all,—but he was never off duty for an hour longer than was absolutely necessary.

From picked men of the 78th he organized and trained a section of specialists in sniping, bomb and bayonet work, and scouting. These were dubbed "Tait's Toughs" and

were famous for their daring successes.

At Vimy Ridge Lieut. Tait won his first decoration,—the Military Cross.

He was wounded at 6 a.m., one hour after going "over the top." All the other officers were either killed or wounded, and Tait, in spite of his wound and the fact that he was still troubled somewhat by a previous wound, rallied the men and by his splendid example eventually succeeded in getting the captured position consolidated. He was not relieved until noon, and then refused to go back with a stretcher party, staying with the relieving officer until two hours later, when he crawled back to the rear, arriving there at 3 o'clock next morning after painful work through mud, water and shell holes.

This heroic self-sacrifice was fully recognized in the award of the Military Cross, the order in the *London Gazette* of August 16, 1917, reading as follows:—

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. Early in assault he was wounded and all the other officers killed or wounded, but he led his company with great fearlessness and determination through intense fire to the objective, and although unable to walk, supervised its consolidation, finally crawling back alone to leave for others the four bearers.

Lieut. Tait wrote a vivid story of the morning of Vimy Ridge, which was published in an English magazine.

At Passchendaele he was again in the front of the assault, and his superior officers recommended him for a Bar to his Military Cross, and also for a captaincy.

In the great Allied drive during the past summer, Lieut. Tait shared all the tasks of the Canadian corps, up to the morning of August 11, when he fell, gloriously, in the fore-front of battle while repelling an enemy counter-attack. For his splendid conduct and leadership in his last battle, the supreme honour of the *Victoria Cross* was awarded. The cables quote from the order in the *London Gazette* of September 28, as follows:—

For conspicuous bravery and initiative in attack. An advance having been checked in intense machine-gun

fire, Tait rallied his company and led it forward with consummate skill and dash under a hail of bullets. A concealed machine gun, however, continued to cause many casualties. Taking a rifle and bayonet, Tait dashed forward alone and killed the enemy gunner. Inspired by his example, his men rushed the position, capturing twelve machine guns and twenty prisoners. His valorous action cleared the way for his battalion to advance. Later, when the enemy counter-attacked under intense artillery bombardment, this gallant officer displayed outstanding courage and leadership, and, though mortally wounded by shell fire, continued to direct and aid his men until death intervened.

Tributes from officers and men are no less eloquent than the official orders. Writing to the bereaved widow, Lieut. Col. James Kirkcaldy, officer commanding the 78th Battalion, says: "His courage and daring got to be taken for granted by all who knew him and he never seemed satisfied unless he was into something."

Lieut. Christie, 27th Battalion, writing to his sister, says: "I suppose you will have heard of Tait's death. He was widely known as the idol of the 78th and was said to be one of the bravest men over here."

Sergt. D. Milne of the 78th writes to Mrs. Tait:—

"He rushed practically straight from hospital so as to get back to his Battalion without loitering around with the Reserve Battalion. The manner in which he died was certainly worthy of the brave man that he was. He had reached farthest on with his company and was saying to one of his gunners, 'That's the stuff to give 'em boys,' when a shell fell near and got him."

Lieut. Tait's widow resides in Winnipeg. His only surviving child died after he went to France. Three brothers are in the army in France. One has been twice mentioned in despatches.

The Canadian Public Service will hold in highest honour the memory of this soldier, whose life was crowded with heroic service and who in death was crowned with the supreme award "For Valour."