

THE TERRIBLE BATTLE OF PASSCHENDAELE

CROWNING TRIUMPH OF A GLORIOUS CANADIAN YEAR ON THE WESTERN FRONT

By F. A. MCKENZIE

THE year 1917 was for the Canadians a year of glory. Vimy, Arleux, Fresnoy, Avion, Lens, and Hill 70 have made a splendid list of continuous triumphs. Passchendaele crowned all.

The Canadian forces were called from the South in October to help in the culminating effort in the battle for the Flanders ridges. Their objective was the commanding heights and spurs around the village of Passchendaele.

Time after time during the preceding weeks attacks had been made upon this point without success. The Canadians found on their arrival a big problem ahead.

Heine. This was swept at point after point by enfilading machine-gun fire from concrete "pill-boxes."

Here was a position where, whatever preparations were made ahead, everything must finally depend on the dash, enthusiasm, and powers of endurance of the men. Realising this, Sir Arthur Currie, after inspecting the different Divisions, spoke to the men, told them what they were up against, and what they had to do. "The positions have got to be taken," he said. "I rely upon you to take them." In some cases senior officers, recognising the desperate nature of the task, themselves resolved to lead their men in person.



A group of Canadian wounded sheltering under the lee of a battered pill-box taken from the Germans near Passchendaele.

Between our old lines immediately outside Ypres and our new front there lay five miles of devastated country, flanked and exposed to very heavy enemy shell fire. The rains—worse in the autumn of 1917 than ever known before in the history even of Flanders—had reduced this long stretch of shell-holes to a quagmire.

The first task before Sir Arthur Currie's men was to build roads to enable troops and supplies to get forward. There were only a few days available, but the work proceeded with lightning speed.

The Germans had centred on this point a very large force of artillery, superior in numbers to our own. They were very strong in aircraft, with which they systematically, day and night, raided behind our lines. Their infantry positions were not only on commanding sites, but were strengthened by a large number of enormously strong concrete emplacements, some being shelters for troops and some machine-gun emplacements.

It was a full-sized man's job for the Canadians. The country between our own advanced trenches and the German front was in parts so muddy as to be almost impenetrable. A big zone of fire had to be crossed by advancing troops before they could come in touch with

The main advance was divided into three parts, each undertaken by different troops on different days. The objective of the first day was Dad trench, Bellevue Spur, and Wolf Copse. The village of Passchendaele, on the farther side of the Passchendaele Ridge, was only about a mile from our foremost lines, but it was a mile of the most difficult country, from a military point of view, that could be conceived.

The first advance was made on the morning of Friday, October 26th, shortly before daybreak. Our troops moved forward in three main bodies, our right having for its objective the Dad trench, the centre moving right against Bellevue Spur, and the left working around Wolf Copse. The right, after struggling forward close to the trench, suffered so heavily that the main part of it was pressed back to its original position, despite most gallant efforts, in which badly wounded men fought on indifferent to their wounds. The centre, moving against Bellevue Spur, found itself met by a little group of German "pill-boxes." One of these had been knocked out by our artillery fire; the second had been slightly damaged; but the third was practically

(Continued on page 26.)