

SNIPER FROM 26TH D.C.M. TELLS STORY OF SIX MONTHS' FIGHTING

Pte. J. W. Roberts, of Chipman, Lost Count of Germans He Accounted for

New Brunswick Battalion Holds Hot Corner but Gives as Good as it Gets—Lieut. Winter's Nightly Amusement in Bombing German Trenches—Fighting at Close Quarters.

Monday, May 23
"I got twenty-five maybe, I might a got thirty, for it was pretty fine shooting at times, but I lost track of them altogether at last," said Pte. J. W. Roberts, D. C. M., of the 26th New Brunswick Battalion, last night when talking of his experiences at the front.

Pte. Roberts was a sniper with the 26th and one of the finest snipers in the whole Canadian army. Before enlisting Roberts, D. C. M., was a resident of Chipman and a member of the New Brunswick Guides Association. He had often seen a deer tunnel before the snoring aim of his Savage and being a splendid shot, when the call for recruits came, he joined the Fighting 26th and how well he played his part may be known by the fact that he is today the proud possessor of the Distinguished Conduct Medal for bravery.

How He Won It

Pte. Roberts won the D. C. M., when he killed a German sniper who was carrying an arm full of bombs which had accomplished his purpose would have killed many of the men in the 26th Battalion. The Roberts was out about 8 o'clock the morning hunting for a target when he might take up his post when daylight broke to get a "little good shooting" as he expressed it. Suddenly he came face to face with a German loaded with bombs and a rifle. Both men fired their rifles simultaneously. Roberts got the German sniper through the head and the German sniper's bullet went through the Chipman man's right arm, across into his left and traveling up the arm made a very bad wound, which ruined the use of the left arm. For this reason Roberts was returned to Canada.

Roberts was one of the best shots in the 26th and for this reason he was picked as one of the snipers, there being two to a platoon.

Sniping Dangerous Business

"It's a pretty dangerous business, this sniping," said Roberts. "You go out at night and find a place where you can shoot to good advantage the next day. Just before you go out you snipe all day. If the Germans find you why then you'll have a hot time of it. If they don't find you, you'll have some pretty good shooting."

"It's always had policy to get behind a stump or bunch of trees for these things where the Germans can't see you. When you find you'll turn a machine gun loose on you and if that don't settle you then they'll drop a big shell over and there's the end of the line."

"I had one or two narrow escapes," he said, after being pressed to tell of his experiences. Painfully he managed to open his kit bag and drew out his old cap, which had been with him through thick and thin on the western front. "That's one of my narrow escapes," he said, "I was in a trench with a bullet hole in the top where a bullet had ploughed its way through. At the same time it explained that the bullet through the top of my head and a little bit of my hair with it, and he agreed that it was as near a squeak as he wished to have."

"Telling about the 'good shooting,'" he said, "You know if you can get over in front of the German trenches where you can see a view of the mouth of a communication trench you have particularly 'good shooting'."

Grim Humor in Trenches

"One day another fellow and I got a good position and we could see the Germans coming in. We kept firing away and at last they built up a sand bag parapet to shield them, and guess you was an artist in the crowd for we saw they were building a big mound out of them and when they had him finished they placed a pack on his back and we didn't expect their joke at all for it spoiled our shooting then."

"The safest place to go sniping," he said, "is out in the tall grass. You can roll about and get some mighty good shots. I don't know how many I killed. Some fellows keep coming by noticing the butt of their rifles. I had a penny I kept out of mine on. Every one I got I fled another notch in it, but finally I lost count of them, and a lot of them you never know whether you kill or not. One morning I got a great shot. It was just breaking day and what did I see over and over and over a big bed tick on his back. He must have been changing his coat all right but I got him before he traveled further. He had a soft place to die on, anyway, on that bed tick."

Ross Rifle Too Noisy

"The Ross rifle is no good for sniping, though; you might as well take a snip out with you, it makes such a noise and a little smoke, too. The German rifles are superior to ours; you never hear a report, only the smack of the bullet when it lands. And they're good shots, too, those Germans. If you fire long from one loophole in the parapet it's not long before a bullet will come sailing through the hole. I've seen that happen more than once."

"I remember one morning, it was 'stand to,' you know, from 'stand to' till about 10 o'clock there is never much fighting going on. Well, a fellow named Bettle from Hampton was standing near me and he said that he could see a German through a loophole, crawling round in the grass in No Man's Land. Well, he picked up his rifle and, placing it through the loophole, fired at what he thought was the German. One single shot came from the other side, and the bullet, which was an explosive, came through the hole and entered Bettle's arm, traveling clear to the shoulder, making a terrible wound. The man will likely lose his arm."

Greetings Exchanged

"The Germans seem to be pretty good fighters," he said in answer to a question. "The trenches are very close together and they yell across now and again and get very noisy. I guess the English regiment told them we were coming in at Ramsgate when he was there the Germans made four air raids in one week. He said that they hit the hospital, but did not do much damage and were trying to get into the camp works. They, however, killed many civilians, and he said he went out with others and helped to gather up the dead. A Zeppelin bomb fell on one occasion in an automobile that was passing along and he said that parts of the driver's body were found at least one hundred yards behind me."

Spreading again of the trenches, he said: "I never believed that human beings could stand the hardships that the men at the front stand, when rain, rain, night and day, I was you got to stay out in it and you're numb with the cold and wish to God something would happen to warm you up."

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German Places the Strongest

"The German flares they use at night are fine," he added. "You can see the country for two or three miles around where they go up; but over well, they are scarcely any good at all. You might just as well throw a white beam up into the dark. However, the German flares do for both sides. The Germans use white flares. They are very bad guns and to a great deal of damage. I remember one afternoon about 8 o'clock they started to shell our line with whistles. Well, for a time they were taking the place all up, and Major Belyen went over to the telephone and told our artillery that if they didn't open up he would give them a chance to fight for their lives and when they didn't open up he would open up and I'll tell you it was hell turned loose all right."

"For our part the Germans got it one steady roar of shells like thunder and I wondered why the German and Canadian shells didn't collide in the air, they were so close together."

"When it was over I said to myself, 'Well, Roberts, there's no more German artillery opposite you now. It couldn't be over there, there were trees, ground, trenches, men and everything else mixed up together in front of us from the firing line back for several miles. Soon I saw the Mad Major going over to the telephone and I said, 'Major! Why didn't you ever hear of me? Well, I'll tell you about him in a minute.' As I was saying the Mad Major he was talking over and over and over he came back he reported that two of the big German guns had been smashed. 'I rested easy then until about 8 o'clock the Germans started to place a steady roar of shells like thunder and I was terrified the way the shells lighted on us.'

"The Mad Major's a Canadian."

"Now you want to hear about our Mad Major. Well there's a Canadian of our Mad Major. They call him the Mad Major. I forget what his right name is; anyway, his new name suits him better. He is an officer in the artillery and he is a good man, and after the bombardment he goes over and does his own observation work. He has flown into the jaws of death hundreds of times but the Germans can't get him and they've offered a big sum of money and a stack of Iron Crosses to get him dead or alive, but he bears a charmed life and goes through the shells as though they were rain drops. But they get him yet, they always do; a fellow takes one chance too many and there's no time to go back when you've once started."

"The Germans, many of them, speak English very well indeed, and we captured one fellow who had been out west and had bunked with a fellow who was in the 26th. They recognized each other immediately and had worked together for a long time."

"A funny thing happened one day. We captured a German and his face was painted green. We afterwards learned that he was taken out of a German penitentiary and put on the firing line, and in order that he might not desert he was run away they painted his face green with some kind of mixture that wouldn't come off. He said that all the convicts being used by the Germans in the front line trenches are thus painted so that they cannot escape."

"He said that one of the most daring officers in the 26th battalion is Lieut. Winter. That man, every night, would take an arm full of bombs and go out into the darkness and after crawling over to the German trenches he would throw them in and then come back the same way. He never got hit and seemed to bear a charmed life."

Roberts was in five different hospitals in England when air raids were made,

and at Ramsgate when he was there the Germans made four air raids in one week. He said that they hit the hospital, but did not do much damage and were trying to get into the camp works. They, however, killed many civilians, and he said he went out with others and helped to gather up the dead. A Zeppelin bomb fell on one occasion in an automobile that was passing along and he said that parts of the driver's body were found at least one hundred yards behind me."

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Sergeant Rigby is the son of Howard Rigby of St. Andrews, and was over with the 26th Battalion. He went as a private and won his stripes on the field over the Loopholes and when the bullets went into the sand bags they were dug out and these proved conclusively that the Germans used explosive bullets.

and at Ramsgate when he was there the Germans made four air raids in one week. He said that they hit the hospital, but did not do much damage and were trying to get into the camp works. They, however, killed many civilians, and he said he went out with others and helped to gather up the dead. A Zeppelin bomb fell on one occasion in an automobile that was passing along and he said that parts of the driver's body were found at least one hundred yards behind me."

Spreading again of the trenches, he said: "I never believed that human beings could stand the hardships that the men at the front stand, when rain, rain, night and day, I was you got to stay out in it and you're numb with the cold and wish to God something would happen to warm you up."

Vernon Morse Than Germans.

"The rats and the lice are worse than the Germans, to tell the truth. The lice, there are those from France, some from Belgium, a few from Canada, more from England and an occasional German louse, and they make a soldier's life miserable. They get down your legs till they come to the putres straps and they can get no farther. There they stay still gnaw away. The rats are worse, they are twice as big as our rats, and I've often been trying to get a wink of sleep when I was wakened by a rat nibbling at my foot. There are no pocket books are sure to be eaten up if you are a heavy sleeper."

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