



GERMANS SHELLING THE LAST HOUSE LEFT STANDING IN COURCELETTE

## THE STORY OF COURCELETTE

**I**N happier times Courcellette was a peaceful village, a congregation of comfortable dwellings, of walled gardens, of dingy but cheery *estaminets*, very dear to the hearts of its modest inhabitants. But to Canada it was unknown. To Canada it was not even a name.

War turned the peaceful French village into a German stronghold, into one of hundreds of similar points of concentrated resisting and destructive force on the western front. Its outlying features became forts; its foundations were undermined by dug-outs and its walls and gables screened machine-gun emplacements. To Canadians in the field it became a name on the map among dozens of names of equal significance.

Now Courcellette, though it is no more a village, no more a German stronghold, is a name written in gold on a great page of Canadian history.

"Courcellette!" It is a Canadian word now. Like Ypres, St. Julien, Stony Mountain, Sanctuary Wood, the Orchard, and many more scenes of conflict, it has become, to sorrowing and exultant Canadian hearts, but another name for glory.

Like every other outstanding achievement of our great offensive on the Somme, the capture of Courcellette cannot be regarded as an incident absolutely detached from incidents of a similar nature of the day before and the day after. The way up to the point from which the attack on Courcellette was launched had been a way of many desperate encounters and captured positions. On that road many complicated systems of entrenchments had been churned by our shells, stormed and occupied by our infantry, then belaboured by German shells.

At twenty minutes past six on the morning of the Fifteenth of September the Canadians moved forward against the German positions which lay between them and Courcellette.

It was a fine, clear autumn morning—a good time for any strenuous form of activity. Our infantry advanced in skirmishing order from their assembling position in

rear of a screening ridge, in six waves of attack. Our artillery barrage moved before them, pounding the ground. The moment they topped the ridge they came into full view of the enemy, who opened upon them with rifle and machine-gun fire, and placed a barrage of shell fire in front of them.

The Canadians moved forward steadily. They passed through the German barrage, following their own barrage which continued to shift forward with their advance but the hostile screen of fire shifted also, thus forcing them to pass through it again.

The battalions crossed the open ground and swarmed into the fortified ruins of the Sugar Refinery. These ruins, strongly garrisoned, were a veritable nest of machine-gun emplacements. It was here that the units on the right of the attack did their heaviest fighting of the day, made their captures of men and stores, killed and were killed. But they took that vital position, garrisoned it, then moved forward and dug themselves in.

In the meantime, the battalions on the left had kept pace with the advance on the right. They crossed a German trench with but slight opposition; but encountered several fortified sunken roads in their path, which had to be cleared of the enemy with grenades and bayonets. They did their work swiftly and thoroughly, then continued onward through the hostile barrage. They came abreast of the Sugar Refinery, passed it and dug themselves in.

Thus the Canadians reached and took their formidable objectives and secured themselves in their new positions on the morning of the fifteenth. This splendid piece of work, though planned and carried out with mathematical precision, would, if written in detail, show hundreds of incidents of individual heroism, of splendid deaths, of amazing victories won in hand-to-hand conflicts.

The General Officer Commanding the Canadian Corps

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