

the enemy machine gun fire, the regiment was virtually annihilated.

Of the 801 men who went into battle only 68 survived unwounded to answer roll call next morning. 'It was a magnificent display of trained and disciplined valour,' is how one observer described the Newfoundlanders' efforts, 'and its assault failed of success because dead men can advance no further.'

Towards the end of 1916, the three Canadian divisions which had borne the brunt of the battle at the Somme were relieved by the newly arrived 4th Division. On November 11, the Division captured Regina trench, and a week later, in the final attack at the Somme, it advanced to Desire Trench displaying remarkable courage and endurance.

Although there were more than 24 000 Canadian battle casualties at the Somme, they had enhanced their reputation as hard-hitting storm troopers. 'For the remainder of the war, they were brought along to head the assault in one great battle after another,' wrote Lloyd George. 'Whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into the line, they prepared for the worst.'

#### Canadians victorious at Vimy Ridge

The Allies launched another massive attack in 1917. The Canadians were assigned the task of seizing a key position in the German defence system, Vimy Ridge. This was a formidable task since the Ridge was well fortified and all previous attempts to seize the position had failed.

The Canadian commanders realised that elaborate preparation was needed if the assault was to be a success, and this included tunnelling and simulation exercises. A preliminary bombardment began on March 20 and was intensified from April 2.

On Easter Monday, April 9, the attack began in earnest. All four divisions of the Canadian Corps

swept up the snow-covered ridge. By mid-afternoon the Divisions had taken control of most of the ridge, and three days later they controlled the whole area.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge was not only a major Canadian victory, it was also the first significant victory for 'British' arms so far in the entire war. The Canadian leader – Major-General Currie, who had been a businessman in British Columbia before the War – was knighted and later promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General on the recommendation of the Corps Commander Sir Julian Byng. Four other Canadians were awarded Victoria Crosses.

#### The final year from Passchendaele to Mons

In October 1917, the Canadian Corps was ordered to relieve the decimated Anzac forces and prepare for the capture of Passchendaele. The actual assault on Passchendaele – mounted with two British Divisions on the flank – proved a costly operation. By the time reinforcements arrived on November 10 total casualties, killed, wounded and missing, amounted to 15 654.

There were, however, a few bright moments that November. The first effective tank attack in history took Cambrai for the Allies – and among the forces responsible for this success were the Canadian Cavalry Brigade and the Newfoundland Regiment.

In the last 100 days of battle General Haig's great final offensive of the war brought the German Army to its knees. The Canadians and Australians, together with British tanks, shattered the enemy lines in front of Amiens. From there the Canadians, attacking from Arras, broke through the successive barriers of the Hindenburg defences to capture Cambrai and Valenciennes. They entered Mons on the day the armistice was signed – November 11, 1918.

Canadians at  
Plymouth Hoe,  
20 October, 1914.

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