

2 THE STORY OF THE 13TH BATTALION.

For some little time the 13th was attached to the 16th (British) Brigade, doing the ordinary routine of trench work. It was not until the 16th of April, when they moved to the village of St. Jean, near St. Julien, that the men knew they were due to come into close contact with the enemy. Though the front in the vicinity of the battalion was quiet there was evidence of severe fighting all around. They were soon to experience the surprise and shock of the second Battle of Ypres.

Throughout the whole day of the 20th April both Canadian and German artillery were active over the entire area. On the evening of the 21st the battalion went into the trenches without casualties in spite of heavy cannonading, but the trenches were found to be in very poor shape, and many unburied dead lay between the lines. It was not until the evening of the 22nd that the German avalanche burst upon them.

The day had been comparatively quiet, but about five o'clock in the evening the enemy artillery began a terrific bombardment, sending over at the same time a great cloud of yellow gas on the front held by the French Turcos on the left of the 13th. This was the first gas attack of the war.

As the Canadians saw the yellow cloud rolling along the ground their first thought was that the Germans were using lyddite prodigally, but soon the real fact became known. The French Turcos were forced to retire, retreating through the village of St. Julien, where they mingled with other troops moving into and stationed in the village. The confusion was considerable, but the worst feature of the retirement was that it left the left flank of the 13th Battalion open to enemy attack. No. 3 Company was called out of reserve to reinforce the line, and one company of the Buffs was also sent in. Major Buchanan took command of the front line.

It became necessary for the left flank of the 3rd Canadian Brigade—of which the 13th Battalion was a unit—to withdraw southward so that the rear and the village of St. Julien were protected. This operation was carried out hurriedly but successfully.