

SUMMARY OF BIG CANADIAN BATTLES---1915-18.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF OPERATIONS OF THE CORPS

Little Stories of Canada's Part in Great War from Ypres to Mons Compiled from Official Sources by Permission of Dept. of Militia.

[Continued from page 9.]

After the necessary reorganization, the Corps returned to the Lens front, and continued the envelopment of that city, until the great German offensive of March, 1918. The Second Canadian Division was attached to the VI Corps, and held the line near Neuville Vitasse through those critical days, but the main body of the Canadian Corps was not allowed to take a major part in the defensive operations.

AMIENS TO MONS.

As a fitting conclusion to the series of successes which marked the activities of the Canadian Corps in 1915, 1916 and 1917, the notable victories of the final three months' fighting will ever rank among the proudest achievements of British arms.

Acting as the spear-head of the allied thrust on the western front, commencing on August 8th and concluding at Mons on November 11th, the Canadian Corps effected captures which totalled over 32,000 prisoners, 750 field and heavy guns, and 3,500 machine guns; the advance attained a depth of 95 miles, representing 100 towns and villages, and 450 square miles of territory; and more than 300,000 French and Belgian civilians were liberated from German domination.

In this period the Canadian Corps sustained 46,100 casualties but encountered and defeated decisively approximately 50 German divisions, or nearly one quarter of the total German forces on the western front.

These brilliant exploits surrounded four outstanding engagements: Amiens, August 8th; Arras, August 26th; Cambrai, September 27th, and Valenciennes, November 1st, the corps being in the line continuously the entire 95 days, always with at least two divisions in the attack and two divisions in close support.

The really critical struggle—in fact, in the opinion of many of the highest military authorities the most fiercely contested battle of the war—was waged in front of Cambrai, German officers having freely admitted that when Cambrai fell their last ambition of Germany winning the war disappeared.

The Canadian Corps entered their final phase of the war from General Headquarters Reserve, on which duty our force was employed from early May until the end of July.

Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig in his despatch to the British War Office dealing with the enemy offensive launched on March 21st, thus refers to his action in detailing the Canadian Corps for this important purpose:

"I arranged a special force of Reserve division for action as occasion might demand. Measures were taken to permit of the employment of the Canadian Corps for counter-attack in the event of the enemy succeeding in piercing my front."

As is well known, from March to July, the Germans delivered several attacks against the allied front with some measure of success, resulting in an advance to within 40 kilometres of Paris by July 15th. At this time Marshal Foch found the enemy in the Soissons Sector with an exposed right flank. He threw in a force of British, French and American troops and exploited this opening to the utmost. That blow was delivered on July 18th, and that moment may be regarded as the time at which the tide of the war began to turn decisively in our favour.

Our communications were still badly impaired, however, by the fact that the enemy was within a few kilometres of Amiens. He menaced the Paris-Amiens railway sufficiently to prevent its use, and until this railway was free it was

not possible to make a material advance on any part of the front.

The Generalissimo then decided to attack on a 20-mile front from the Avre to the Ancre east of Amiens. He selected for this battle the Canadian Corps, the Australian Corps, the famous 31st French Corps and certain English troops.

AMIENS.

To the Canadian Corps was assigned the arrow-head of the thrust. The Battle of Amiens began at dawn on August 8th. By nightfall the Canadians had advanced 14,000 yards, the deepest advance that had previously marked any one day in the history of the war.

All four divisions were engaged and for the first time the Canadian Cavalry Brigade and the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade fought as part of the Canadian Corps.

The first phase of the battle ended on the fifth day, August 13th.

In the interval the Canadians had penetrated 22,000 yards, capturing over 150 guns, over 1,000 machine guns, 125 trench mortars, 10,000 prisoners, 20 towns and villages, identified and routed 16 German divisions, and held a front of 10,000 yards as compared with a 7,500-yard frontage at the commencement of the attack.

In the succeeding days the Canadians made further advances until their total progress represented 15 miles, and the capture of an additional 35 guns and 2,000 prisoners, freeing the Amiens-Paris Railway, lifting the menace to Amiens, and rendering futile the enemy effort to divide the British and French forces.

The casualties suffered by the Canadian Corps in these operations were 7,763.

ARRAS.

From Amiens the corps returned to its old stamping ground near Arras, and on the morning of August 26th attacked on a 9,000-yard front from Neuville-Vitasse on the south to Tilloy and across the Scarpe River to the north. By September 1st an advance of 12,000 yards had been made over a shell-shattered territory literally fenced and laced with barbed wire, rolling up five elaborate and strongly fortified trench systems, and winding up on the threshold of the famous Drocourt-Queant line, the strongest part of the celebrated Hindenburg system, considered by the Germans to be impregnable. Every yard of this advance was bitterly contested.

On September 2nd the Canadian Corps broke through a wide stretch of the Drocourt-Queant line, an achievement of great significance to the whole future of the war, and three days later reached the western side of the Canal du Nord where the second phase of the Battle of Arras ended.

In this engagement the Canadian Corps captured 10,000 prisoners, 262 of whom were officers, 95 field and heavy guns, 1,016 machine guns and 75 trench mortars, and scored an even greater strategic victory than the one achieved at Amiens. Our casualties were approximately 11,500.

CAMBRAI.

September 27th marked the beginning of the operations now recognized as the Battle of Cambrai. The Canadian Corps attacked on a frontage of 4,000 yards, extending as a fan to 9,000 yards. Their objectives included the seizing of the high ground overlooking the Sensee Valley and the capturing of Bourlon village and the adjoining woods. By sunset of the first day these tasks were brilliantly completed with an advance of 7,000 yards. Among other assets of that day were 4,000 prisoners,

102 field and heavy guns, many hundreds of machine guns, and huge quantities of war material. This attack was made by the First and Fourth Divisions. The following day the Third Division came into the line, rapidly continuing the advance until October 1st when the Germans, realizing that Cambrai was menaced, decided to make a concentrated stand to save the city.

Ten enemy divisions of infantry with 13 machine gun companies, supported by the artillery of over ten divisions were launched against the First, Third and Fourth Divisions.

What is considered by the Higher Command to be the most bloody and bitterly contested battle of the war was fought on that day. The Canadians met and repulsed counter-attack after counter-attack. The Corps artillery fired over 7,000 tons of ammunition, while one 6-inch battery alone engaged over 200 moving targets of men. It was a day of appalling and awful slaughter in the enemy ranks. The supreme efforts of the Germans failed. At the end of the day the Canadians held practically all of the ground captured in the early stages of the attack at dawn. Two days later we were on the outskirts of Cambrai, and thus the second phase of the battle ended.

Our captures totalled 7,174 prisoners, of whom 230 were officers, 205 field and heavy guns, 30 trench mortars, and 950 machine guns. In five days the Canadian Corps had decimated and put out of action thirteen picked divisions of the enemy at a cost to us of approximately 18,000 casualties.

On October 9th came the crowning glory of this magnificent display of organization and valour, when our Second and Third Canadian Divisions captured Cambrai.

LE CATEAU.

On the day the Canadian Corps captured Cambrai the Canadian Cavalry Brigade made an 8-mile advance from Montigny to the southeast, captured several villages, made many dashing charges, and routed the enemy and entered Le Cateau, capturing 400 prisoners, 5 heavy guns, 5 trench mortars, and 102 machine guns. Our casualties were about 150.

DENAIN.

Following the capture of Cambrai the Canadian troops took up a line to the north and the east and initiated an advance towards Valenciennes. By this time the enemy forces were withdrawing, avoiding being badly routed by fighting stiff rear-guard actions, in which machine guns were the chief weapons of defence. The Canadians continued to advance rapidly, every day capturing villages and freeing the civilian populations. On the morning of October 20th the Fourth Canadian Division captured Denain, a large mining town in which there were 28,000 civilians. Here, as well as in all the other villages the Canadians had passed through since Cambrai, they were given the most demonstrative welcome by the French inhabitants. In the towns and villages occupied by civilians it was found that foodstuffs had been robbed by the Germans, and so the responsibility of feeding them was accepted by the Canadians. With the capture of Denain the Canadians had a family of civilians to feed and protect numbering 73,000.

Before the end of October the Canadian Corps was on the northern outskirts of Valenciennes. On the morning of November 1st the Fourth Division attacked just south of Valenciennes and captured 1,400 prisoners, 7 artillery guns and many machine guns. Over 800 enemy dead were counted after the attack. Early the next day Valenciennes was completely cleared of the enemy.

The Canadians then began to press on towards Mons, and four days later had crossed the border into Belgium. By November 10th we were at the outskirts of Mons. Thus in one week we had advanced about 25 miles, in spite of enemy opposition. This advance meant the release from German domination of scores of towns and villages on each side of the Mons road, all of which

were filled with Belgian civilians, who, like the French, had been robbed of everything by the Germans. MONS.

At 4 o'clock on November the 11th, the day the armistice came into effect, the Canadians entered Mons, and after a short, sharp fight captured the city and pressed on to the open country beyond. At 11 o'clock, the time the armistice came into effect, the Canadian line was five kilometres east of the city. The first troops to enter Mons were the 42nd Canadian Highlanders, of Montreal, and the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the Royal Canadian Regiment. On the right, Ontario regiments of the 4th Brigade took the village of Hyon and advanced and linked with the troops of the 7th Brigade. Thus the war ended where the British began fighting, and it is an interesting fact that the last troops to leave Mons on August 23rd, 1914, were the original 42nd Highlanders, the Black Watch, whose counterpart of the Canadian Corps were actually the first troops to enter the city on the last day of the war, together with the first unit of the Canadian Forces to appear in France, the P.P.C.L.I.

The depth of the advance since November 2nd measured 30 miles. The Canadians suffered slight casualties in entering Mons, but accounted for every German in the place at the time.

These many magnificent successes were achieved through the efficient administrative and organizing staff work, coupled with supreme devotion, courage and initiative on the part of all ranks, the product of good discipline, good training and good leadership.

Supporting the Canadian Corps and other forces on the entire British front were the Canadian Railway troops, who were responsible for the whole of the construction of light railways in the zone occupied by the British armies and 60 per cent of the standard-gauge railways. There were 14 complete brigades of Canadian Railway troops in the field, and four companies of these were performing work of a special nature. Also a factor in the successes were the Canadian Forestry troops, of which there were 63 companies in France. They were responsible for supplying the bulk of the timber required by the British and French armies, and for the construction of all aerodromes for the Independent Air Force and the Royal Air Force.

Tender Wanted.

Sealed tenders addressed to the undersigned, and endorsed "Tender for Retaining Wall at Bayfield, Ont.," will be received at this office until 12 o'clock noon, Tuesday, May 20, 1919, for the construction of a retaining wall in lieu of present superstructure on part of North Pier at Bayfield, Huron county, Ont.

Plans and forms of contract can be seen and specification and forms of tender obtained at this Department, at the office of the District Engineer, Equity Building, Toronto, Ont., and at the Post Office, Bayfield, Ont.

Tenders will not be considered unless made on printed forms supplied by the Department and in accordance with the conditions contained therein.

Each tender must be accompanied by an accepted cheque on a chartered bank payable to the order of the Minister of Public Works, equal to 10 per cent of the amount of the tender. War Loan Bonds of the Dominion will also be accepted as security, or War Bonds and cheques if required to make up an odd amount.

NOTE.—Blue prints can be obtained at this Department by depositing an accepted cheque for the sum of \$10, payable to the order of the Minister of Public Works, which will be returned if the intending bidder submit a regular bid.

By order,

R. C. DESROCHERS,
Secretary.

Department of Public Works,

Ottawa, April 28, 1919.