

The Somme Trenches

By Captain Wilson Herald, M.C.



Captain Wilson Herald, M.C., was born in Dundas, Ontario, studied medicine at Queens University, Toronto, came west to Vancouver in 1891 and practised medicine in British Columbia until 1915, when he joined the 72nd Seaforth's as Medical Officer.

He went overseas with his unit in April, 1916, and followed the fortunes of the Battalion through Belgium, the Somme battles, Vimy Ridge and the succeeding battles around the outskirts of Lens, where he received his decoration, which embraced Avion, the Power House, and other sectors.

Captain Herald is the author of a War Book to be published shortly, which deals with the actual experiences of the men of the Canadian forces, not as individuals, but as a body, and which will be of extreme interest to those who have had sons, husbands and sweethearts "Over There."

His son Ralph enlisted with the 72nd at the outbreak of the war, and was killed in action at the Second Battle of Ypres, while serving with the famous 16th Battalion, of which he was one of the original members.

Our battalion got a dreadful initiation to the trenches on the Somme front, and on our first tour we had eight days and eight nights duty, four in Sugar trench support line and four in the firing line. There was not much choice between the two, each was equally dreadful, without shelter and practically impossible.

I have never in my life seen such mud or such spectacles as our men were after they had got into these horrible lines. The weather was cold and wet, there was positively no chance to get dry or warm and how it was possible for them to stick it out I have never been able to understand.

Men got mired in the mud and had to be pulled out by their comrades. One of my men, young Roy Herne, went down over the waistband of his trousers, the mud trickled down his legs and he was pulled out still smiling. Three

of our men wallowed into the mud, lost their rubber hip boots, and walked in their stocking feet to my dressing station.

The officers had to constantly watch that the men did not get out on the parapet and walk overland. But they did sometimes get on top, taking a chance on the Hun shells in preference to the awful mud. The Hun shells were not by any means the greatest of their troubles, but they were bad enough.

These men, when nearly crazy for want of sleep, chilled to the marrow of their bones, physically completely worn out and worried by the Hun shelling, slept in these dreadful trenches with the rain and sleet falling on their faces. They would sit in the mud with their legs sunk to the knees, and their backs resting on the sides of the muddy trench and sleep, or they would lie right down in the mud and sleep.

They stuck it and did not complain, but patiently waited for the day when they would get at the wretched Hun and beat him as they knew they would.

All you old ladies and young ladies and children in Canada; all you men and boys who are too old or too young or physically unfit to fight in this war, please never forget what our Canadian men have endured and suffered for your sakes. The agony of these trenches was worse than the wounds and almost, I think, worse than death.

They were young and strong and blessed with great powers to recuperate, otherwise they could never have gone on with the game. A few days rest in billets and most of them were again bright and smiling, ready for any fun they could get and when "trench time" came once more they went in cheerfully, ready to re-undergo the ordeal and take a whack at the Hun.

The exhausting carrying parties under these awful circumstances were heartbreaking. Fancy wallowing through the mud with rations, ammunition and water and taking from four to eight hours to make a distance of less than two miles. It was certainly awful and never will the Somme be forgotten by any of our boys as long as they live. Many of the men will never recover from the exposure they suffered and the tasks they were necessarily given to do while on this front.

The men were sublime in their courage and