

# CANADA IN WAR PAINT

By CAPT. RALPH W. BELL

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HE was a tall well-built chap, with big, blue eyes, set far apart, and dark wavy hair, which he kept too closely cropped to allow it to curl, as was meant by nature. He had a cheery smile and a joke for every one, and his men loved him. More than that, they respected him thoroughly, for he never tolerated slackness or lack of discipline for an instant, and the lips under the little bronze moustache could pull themselves into an uncompromisingly straight line when he was justly angry.

When he strafed the men, he did it directly, without sparing them or their failings, but he never sneered at them, and his direct hits were so patently honest that they realized it at once, and felt and looked rather like penitent little boys.

He never asked an N.C.O. or man to do anything he would not do himself,



"His revolver in one hand, a little cane in the other, a cigarette between his lips."

and he usually did it first. If there was a dangerous patrol, he led. If there was trying work to do, under fire, he stayed in the most dangerous position, and helped. He exacted instant obedience to orders, but never an order that the men could not understand without explaining the reason for it. He showed his N.C.O.'s that he had confidence in them, and did not need to ask for their confidence in him. He had it.

In the trenches he saw to his men's comfort first—his own was a secondary consideration. If a man was killed or wounded, he was generally on the spot before the stretcher-bearers, and, not once, but many times, he took a dying man's last messages, and faithfully wrote to his relations. A sacred duty, but one that wrung his withers. He went into action not only with his men, but at their head, and he fought like a young lion until the objective was attained. Then, he was one of the first to bind up a prisoner's wounds, and to check any severity towards unwounded prisoners. He went into a show with his revolver in one hand, a little cane in the other, a cigarette between his lips.

"You see," he would explain, "it comforts a fellow to smoke, and the stick is useful, and a good tonic for the men. Besides, it helps me try to kid myself I'm not scared—and I am, you know! As much as any one could be."

On parade he was undoubtedly the smartest officer in the regiment, and he worked like a Trojan to make his men smart also. At the same time he would devote three-quarters of any leisure he had to training his men in the essentials of modern warfare, his spare time being willingly sacrificed for their benefit.

No man was ever paraded before him with a genuine grievance that he did not endeavour to rectify. In some manner he would, nine times out of ten, turn a "hard case" into a good soldier. One of his greatest powers was his particularly winning smile. When his honest eyes were on you, when his lips curved and two faint dimples showed in his cheeks, it was impossible not to like him. Even those who envied him—and among his brother officers there were not a few—could not bring themselves to say anything against him.

If he had a failing it was a weakness for pretty women, but his manner towards an old peasant woman, even though she was dirty and hideous, was, if anything, more courteous than towards a woman of his own class. He could not bear to see them doing work for which he considered they were unfit. One day he carried a huge washing-basket full of clothes down the main street of a little village in Picardy, through a throng of soldiers, rather than see the poor old dame he had met staggering under her burden go a step farther unaided.

The Colonel happened to see him, and spoke to him rather sharply about it. His answer was characteristic: "I'm very sorry, sir. I forgot about what the men might think when I saw the poor old creature. In fact, sir, if you'll pardon my saying so, I would not mind much if they did make fun of it."

He loved children. He never had any loose coppers or small change

long, and two of his comrades surprised him on one occasion slipping a five-franc note into the crinkled rosy palm of a very, very new baby. "He looked so jolly cute asleep," he explained simply.

Almost all his fellow-officers owed him money. He was a poor financier, and when he had a cent it belonged to whoever was in need of it at the time.

One morning at dawn, he led a little patrol to examine some new work in the German front line. He encountered an unsuspected enemy listening post, and he shot two of the three Germans, but the remaining German killed him before his men could prevent it. They brought his body back and he was given a soldier's grave between the trenches. There he lies with many another warrior, taking his rest, while his comrades mourn the loss of a fine soldier and gallant gentleman.

## Martha of Dranvoorde

MARTHA BEDUYS, in Belgium, was considered pretty, even handsome. Of that sturdy Flemish build so characteristic of Belgian women, in whom the soil seems to induce embonpoint, she was plump to stoutness. She was no mere girl; twenty-seven years had passed over her head when the war broke out, and she saw for the first time English soldiers in the little village that had always been her home. There was a great deal of excitement. As the oldest of seven sisters, Martha was the least excited, but the most calculating.

The little baker's shop behind the dull old church had always been a source of income, but never a means to the attainment of wealth. Martha had the soul of a shop-keeper, a thing which, in her father's eyes, made her

the pride of his household.

Old Hans Beduys was a man of some strength of mind. His features were sharp and keen, his small, blue eyes had a glitter in them which seemed to accentuate their closeness to each other, and his hands—lean, knotted, claw-like—betokened his chief desire in life. Born of a German mother and a Belgian father, he had no particular love for the English.

When the first British Tommy entered his shop and asked for bread, old Beduys looked him over as a butcher eyes a lamb led to the slaughter. He was calculating the weight in sous and francs.

That night Beduys laid down the law to his family.

"The girls will all buy new clothes," he said, "for which I shall pay. They will make themselves agreeable to the English mercenaries, but"—with a snap of his blue eyes—"nothing more. The good God has sent us a harvest to reap; I say we shall reap it."

During the six months that followed the little shop behind the church teemed with life. The Beduys girls were glad enough to find men to talk to for the linguistic difficulty was soon overcome—to flirt with mildly, and in front of whom to show off their newly-acquired finery. From morn till dewy eve the shop was crowded, and occasionally an officer or two would dine in the back parlour, kiss Martha if they felt like it, and not worry much over a few sous change.

In the meantime old Hans waxed financially fat, bought a new Sunday suit, worked the life out of the girls, and prayed nightly that the Canadians would arrive in the vicinity of his particular "Somewhere in Belgium."

In a little while they came.

Blossoming forth like a vine well fertilized at the roots, the little shop became more and more pretentious as the weekly turnover increased. Any day that the receipts fell below a certain level old Beduys raised such a storm that his bevy of daughters redoubled their efforts.

Martha had become an enthusias-

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