

AN OPEN LETTER TO "JOHNNY CANUCK"

REGIMENTAL HAPPENINGS WHILE ON ACTIVE SERVICE

Somewhere in Flanders,
January 31, 1916.

John Canuck, Esq.,
Canada.

Dear Johnny:—

For some considerable period I have neglected sending you any news of "The Canadian Scottish", but now, with the approval of the military censor, I hope to keep you more fully informed of our doings at least once a month, and to try and give you some little idea of conditions at the front. Through the brief, but excellent reports of the Official Canadian Eye - Witness — you will have been kept fairly well informed of the principal items of interest covering the Canadian Corps, and I am sure you will only attempt to deal in a general way with the 16th Batt.

At the outset I might remind you that "The Canadian Scottish" was originally composed of units from the following kiltie regiments at home:

Deleted by Censor.

Few indeed of the original 16th, and for that matter the first draft, are now with us. But this is war. I mention the matter simply that you may realize that the 16th retains its identity as a composite Canadian Highland regiment of which we are all very proud.

WINTER IN FLANDERS

With this brief introduction I will proceed with my letter. Flanders—the battle-scarred—lies in the grip of mid-winter. Its rich, flat agricultural lands are seamed with straight furrows for the spring seeding; its

lush meadows and innumerable dykes and ditches are overflowing from the almost continuous rains and its roads, except those maintained by the military authorities, are for the most part almost impassable for the slimy mud. It is not cold or freezing as we understand that kind of winter at home, but the weather is raw with chilly rain storms and hard gales that beat over the flat lands.

I am writing this in one of the huts of our camp back in Division reserve, some miles behind the trenches. It is a gaunt, grey outlook between here and the front, especially before the early morning mists have disappeared. The camp lays in a hollow surrounded by low hills, topped here and there with a fringe of trees, stripped bare of foliage, and on the other side is "the front." The bleak aspect and wintry desolation is a fitting background for the great drama Armageddon, whose stage and players are on the far slope.

But winter, aided by Jupiter Fluvius, is no respecter of the terrible drama beyond. Human endurance seems to face with equanimity the daily deluge of high explosives, machine and rifle fire under the pitiful shelter of parapet, trench and dug-out—but with the elements also to combat, life at the front takes on a greater physical strain. For these temporary earthworks and shelters have indeed suffered more severely from the elements than the enemy's cannon. Due to the continuous rain, communication trenches, dug-outs and even massive parapets constructed of many thickness of sand-bags have collapsed, and for days on end miles of parallel and connecting subterranean passages have been temporarily rendered useless in places, through being undermined by the

running water. Happily the weather god plays no favorite and the Huns' earthworks have during this trying period, suffered equally as much as our own.

A RECORD FOR TRENCHES

With the exception of one brief absence towards the end of September, when "The Canadian Scottish" with the other three battalions of the Third Brigade moved out to assist in "breaking in" the Second Division of the Canadian Army Corps, the battalion has occupied almost the same frontage since early in mid-summer. This brigade, I believe, has created a record in holding down one sector for such a lengthy period without going back for a rest—but if the current rumour so often set afloat does materialize early in February will see us enjoying this long anticipated pleasure. During this period of almost seven months the 16th, in conjunction with all the other battalions, has been kept busy both when in and out of the trenches in supplying working parties who, under the guidance of the Canadian Engineers, have done a vast amount of hard manual labor. This consists in necessary construction work of a defensive character and there is no end to the strengthening and improving of our front. To this work is added, of course, the regular duty of the infantryman in the trenches. It has been a period of constant watchfulness—ever on the alert to frustrate a possible advance by our equally vigilant enemy. We pay a constant toll from the hidden sniper; the daily bombardment and periodic attempts at bombing our position, and have in these past months experienced a taste of every engine of warfare, except gas, that the Hun tries their enemies