

THE CANADIAN CORPS READY FOR BATTLE 7

came, it was anticipated that the attack would develop north of Arras, and the sector became vitally important because if this pivot of our defense went, there might be no stopping short of the sea.

Behind this there was another vital consideration. This story may be apocryphal—it does not matter, for in essence it is true. Foch was asked to use the Canadian Corps to stem the tide of invasion. "No," came the reply—so the story goes—"I cannot afford to do that. By their valor the Canadian troops won back at Vimy the most valuable of our remaining coal fields. These are the nerve centre of France. We cannot afford to entrust their defense out of the hands of my Canadians."

In his despatch of July 8, 1918, Sir Douglas Haig wrote that behind Vimy Ridge "lay the northern collieries of France and certain tactical features which cover our lateral communications. Here . . . little or no ground could be given up." In the same connection the Canadian Corps Commander, Sir Arthur Currie, in his Interim Report on the operations of the Corps during 1918, writes: "A comparative shallow advance beyond the Vimy Ridge would have stopped the operation of the collieries, paralysing the production of war material in France. . . . On the other hand, a deep penetration at that point, by bringing the Amiens-Bethune railway and main road under fire, would have placed the British Army in a critical position by threatening to cut it in two and by depriving it of vital lateral communication. The tactical and strategical results to be gained by a moderate success at that point were so far reaching in effect that, notwithstanding the natural difficulties confronting an attack on that sector, it was fully expected (*i.e.*, before the March offensive developed) that the German offensive would be directed against this, the central part of the British front."

He goes on to tell of the great defensive works built up by the Canadian Corps on the Vimy front during the winter in anticipation of the 1918 enemy spring drive, a story of interest