

WINTER CAMPAIGNING IN CANADA FROM A CLIMATIC VIEWPOINT

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FROM this point of view the primary factors to be considered in this country are cold and snow. Both are important, but possibly the latter is even more so. The natural highways of Canada during the open season are her waterways, the rivers and lakes of the country. When winter arrives and these are frozen over and deeply covered with drifting snow they are closed to all except the snowshoer and his light toboggan. For the transport of heavy material such as would accompany an army there would be no ready passage. In these days of railways and parlor cars we are apt to forget how soon the exigencies of a war might disorganize and render useless these artificial highways, and throw us back once more on the natural traffic channels of the country as our only available means of communication and transport. A knowledge of these channels and of the use made of them by former generations in the carrying on of war is a matter of moment to the Canadian soldier of to-day. It is true that our country has progressed since the days when Benedict Arnold led his famished troops down the Chaudiere, or since Bradstreet paddled up the Mohawk to capture Frontenac. The pathless forests of those days have in many cases been thinned by the lumberman, and cleared by the pioneer. Roads now thread what once were impassable forest wildernesses. But these changes while decreasing the difficulties, would not materially alter the problems that would face us to-morrow in the event of war extending into the winter, even as they faced our predecessors in the past. Why did not de Levis besiege Quebec during the winter of 1759-1760? Was it that the winter cold was too intense for his veteran troops, or did the deep-lying snow give rise to unsurmountable problems? Did he fear snow-bound transport and the consequent lack of proper provisions inducing scurvy and its companion evils? Even if these or other sanitary considerations did not influence him, yet they were present then as they would be under similar circumstances in the future, and would call for a just appreciation of the conditions based on all the knowledge and experience a medical officer could summon to his aid.

In looking back over the history of warfare in Canada we find that hostilities were carried on not only by armies great and small, but also by bands of raiders swift and stealthy, destroying their enemy by sudden and unlooked for attack. The Canadians called this species of warfare "La Petite Guerre," to distinguish it from "La Guerre" of armies. The winter was the favorite season for "La Petite Guerre." Expert in the use of the snowshoe and fearless of cold, the Canadians would wind their way through the silent forests, looking, with their capuchins over their heads, like a procession of friars. Behind them on the light toboggan they dragged their blankets and provisions. At night they used their snowshoes to shovel a wide circular pit in the snow; and, building their camp fire in the centre, would sleep around it on piles of spruce boughs, secure from the winter wind. Such bands as these would cover immense distances and our annals are full of their deeds. But it was not war, at least not the war of armies; and if we are to understand by the word "campaigning"