**HOW I REMEMBER**

**THE
FORTY-NINTH**

**By**

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**FOREWORD**

I was an "original" member of 12th Platoon, "C" Company, Forty-Ninth Battalion, Loyal Edmonton Regiment, 7th Brigade, 3rd Canadian Division, C.E.F., World War One.

Over a half century after being demobilized on February 15, 1919, I find myself with the time and the desire, coupled with the present ability, to reduce to writing many of the thoughts and memories that haver persisted over the years.

Since I did not even attempt to maintain any form of a diary, it would be useless to even try to relate the dates on which certain incidents took place. Rather, I will try to use the episodical form in near-chronological order.

As a student of history, I am always more concerned with what took place, and its effect upon current and future events, than the exact date upon which it occur.

I am indebted however, to the accurate researchers of the book "A City Goes To War" for the more important dates needed to at least keep myself in some form of logical continuity.

My categorical memory seems to divide my recollections into five natural parts:

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Since there is never a better place to start, the reader is invited to join me as I describe

# **THE BEGINNING**

For me it all began on Jan 11, 1915 at the old armory on Victoria Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, where we signed up and received our first physical examination. At age 15 I stood 5’ 9" tall and weight only 123 pounds. I brought five bananas with me as I had been told that they would weigh heavy when consumed. Just before being called for my turn at the weigh-in I gulped them down, drank all the water I could hold - and hung on. As soon as the man said 126 I dashed from the room to expel excess before it blew of its own accord. That was quite an opening experience - I was in.

Then came the matter of getting acquainted with my new-found companions and fellow-soldiers (?). Little did any of us realize that some of us would become life-long friends and many trying circumstances we would overcome in the process.

We had our first drills in an open field covered with snow. About the only thing we learned was to form fours and turn in a required direction. Still dressed in mufti we looked and acted like anything but soldiers. We lived at home and were given meal tickers at certain fry-cook earring joints. That meant a lot of hamburger and onions which we all fully enjoyed.

The worst of the winter passed and we found ourselves in proper barracks at Exhibition Grounds. They moved out the horses and we took over. Looking back it was not so much a bad set up. We had three tiered bunks and wooden floors that required no end of hand scrubbing to keep clean. It was during this period that we finally started to shape up as soldiers. Uniforms and rifles were issued and it began to take on the aspect of the real thing. Also, it developed into a proving period for the officers and NCO’s. Some came through with flying colours while others proved to be duds.

One of the points that stands out in my mind was the developing relationship between the Officers and the rear ranks. Because of the obvious preferential treatment accorded to commissioned rank the most of us were all suspicious of them and I am sure the feeling was mutual. It finally resolved into a condition whereby we repeated those who rated it and tolerated those we felt did not.

My platoon drew a very young, extremely handsome but immature Lieutenant who I will refer to as Mr. X. To pair off with him they obviously selected a Boer War veteran named George Richardson as platoon sergeant. They were complete opposites and complimented each other very well for the good of the men. I guess that was the reasoning behind the choice.

Mr. X developed an almost immediate dislike for me. I prefer to think that it was not so much a matter of personalities as it was a similarity in ages. He was just as young and green as an officer as I was a private. He picked on me from the start and in retaliation I quickly learned all the many little ways in which a rear rank can devil an officer. Out of step, a dropped rifle, a wrong turn etc., all done at the very moment when the officer was most anxious to impress an observing superior. Sure got him mad and it took all of Sergeant Richardson’s old-timer knowhow to keep matters in hand. It ended up with my being assigned to almost continuous fatigue duty in an effort to keep peace in the family.

I had the misfortune to contract typhoid and spent two weeks in the hospital. Upon my release I was paraded before our first Company Commander, Major H. E. Daniels who offered me a medical discharge. I protested that I wanted to go on. He relented and told me to accept light duty for a month and see how I shaped up. Wouldn’t you know it, my luck ran out again It seemed that I was not destined to remain with the 49th. Playing ball for exercise in order to build up strength I caught (?) a fly ball on the tip of the third finger of my right hand. It split the nail and infected. Blood poison set in and I was a mess with a wet compress up to my elbow. Again the question of getting rid of me, but they could not discharge me in that condition. At about this time the orders came to move out. I could not carry my pack or equipment so the other chaps pitched in and somehow or other got me on the train.

I’ll pass over the train ride and the trip to England aboard the old tub Metagama - the original slow boat to China. It was one of the happiest experiences of my life. Because of my sore hand, which was rapidly healing, I was excused from all duty and the trip became just one lark after another. Good thing that we thoroughly enjoyed this pleasant interlude for so many paid a bitter price for it later - so many never came back.

Our landing at Plymouth was quite an event. All the people came down to the quay to see the crazy Canadians arrive. They had been misinformed that we were a wild lot and fully expected to see us get off the ship in full war paint. Then we were introduced to those little side-door coaches drawn by a funny little engine with a pip-squeak whistle. We thought it was great fun until the calls of nature took place and we found there was no place to go except out the window. That was a rough ride down to Folkestone.

We joined several other Canadian Battalions in the St. Martin’s Plains area. THE book says Sir John Moore’s Plains but I do not recall any such designation. The air was filled with many bugle calls - we soon learned to distinguish ours by the distinctive notes preceding each call. Were we started our long-time love affair with the 42nd Highlanders. They were a great bunch of guys and the happy feeling between us grew in strength over the battle years.

It was at this point that the friction between Mr. X and myself reached a climax. In desperation, Sgt. Richardson put me on what turned out to be permanent kitchen and latrine fatigue. One day, Mr. X elected to take a hand in the bayonet training. He took over the padded pole used to sharper up our parrying skills and selected me as an opponent. He jabbed me a few good ones in the face. As it seemed to be deliberate I lost my temper. Biding my time I came up with a vicious butt stroke which thank the Lord had more steam than aim. It was too close for comfort and Sgt. Richardson who was observing the training decided that enough was enough. I was detailed to an armory outfit that was trying to modify the Ross rifle - a waste of time. It was back to the kitchen again and I stayed out of trouble until the battalion was being readied for France.

Upon returning I was informed that I would be left behind and transferred to a labour battalion. At the same time I learned that both Mr. X and Sgt. Richardson were not to remain with the battalion. The sergeant’s health had diminished due to the rigors of training and he never could have made the grade in France. The case of Mr. X was never explained - we were left to our own guesses. I never saw him again or heard what had happened to him. I bare him no illdill nor do I carry on a grudge with him or anyone else. I often wish that we could have met in later years. With the coming maturity I feel sure we could have had a lot of laughs over a couple of belts. I am certain he would have appreciated as I do that we were just a couple of puppy dogs chasing each others tails.

Anyway, I excessed a rear rank’s prerogative and demanded to be paraded before the Battalion Commander. With three others of the same ilk we lined up before Colonel Griesbach’s tent for our interview. I pled my case rather well I thought, promising to continue with fatigue duty until I gained more strength and maturity; and that I would make myself generally useful. Being young, tears came rather easy and I must admit that I called upon all my guile to make a strong appeal to his sympathy. I’ll never forget his face and posture. One foot a little advanced, shifting his weight with graceful ease and that slightly humorous smile beneath the close cropped moustache. He looked me up and down while listening to my plea then turned to the Adjutant and said, "hell, if he wants to go that badly take him along." As an afterthought, and without any questions to the others he added, "and them too." So I got my first experience as an advocate. I have pled many "lost causes" in my time and can not remember losing a single one. I found that a little moisture in the eyes always had a compelling effect.

The trip across the channel was a nightmare to behold. That little packet travelled two miles up and down to every one forward. Two little destroyers raced around and around creating a lot of din and unwanted excitement. The rumor was that we were under attack by enemy subs. By this time we were all so damn seasick that we couldn’t have cared less and death would have been a welcome release from our agony.

We hit land at Boulogne and after finally getting into some semblance of order started the famous (?) march up the hill to an unknown destination. Unknown was the word - what a snafu that turned out to be. After passing the same estaminet for the third time we knew that someone had goofed. We accepted the vin that was passed out to us by sympathetic townspeople who must have realized what took place and felt sorry for us.

When we reached some billets (not the ones intended for us I am sure) we just fell down and slept, back and all. It was the next morning before we even thought of comfort. Funny thing happened at this juncture of my life. I had carried my full load all the way across and up and down the hill without any problem. In fact, I found myself proudly carrying an extra rifle for one of the follows who took sick. From then on nobody even mentioned light duty or extra fatigue for me. I took my place as a full-time member of the platoon and found joy in being able at last to carry my full share of the load. Quite a step-up in the metamorphosis of a boy trying to be a man before his time.

The first matter of business was getting the feel of what was called being" in the field while on active service. "We were oriented as to how we should conduct ourselves in accordance with the provisions of K.R. & R. Field punishment "FP no 1" (strapped to a wheel) was described as the punishment for major offenders. I think I remember something about being shot, but they did not dwell on this too far. Of course, good old CB remained for any minor infractions.

Our new platoon sergeant was named Jack Wallace. We also got a new officer who proved to be just one more in a long line of faces whose names I have forgotten. They had to make an impression to be remembered. Sgt. Wallace did make a lasting impression to me. He turned my whole life around and I will never forget him or cease to be grateful for his disciplinary training and later his friendship. More about him anon.

After a further period of orientation we were told that the time had come, we were off to the front line. I need not relate the mixed feeling with which the news was received. There were those who had more or less believed in the loose talk that it would be over soon and it would all end in a safe and sane adventure - they were very obviously disappointed. Others started to think and talk about their loved ones at home - we had many family men in our platoon. Then there were us young punks who reacted to the anticipation of excitement with a mixture of exultation and fear. I am sure most of us felt fear for the reason that we were unsure of ourselves and did not want to fail under pressure with the possibility of making fools of ourselves. We each picked on an older man and placed ourselves under their guidance.

As it turned out we kids took it better than most of the older men. We lacked the mental development to appreciate the danger that lurked about. We were still at the youthful point in life where we referred to death, if at all, as "if I should die" rather than the mature acceptance of "when I die." No matter what tragedy was to take place it was certain to happen to somebody else - never me. The quite proper attitude for youth - who would have it otherwise.

We went into the line at a place called Ploegstert (it was always "Plugstreet" to the soldats). Our line was just bellow Messines Ridge. It was our first experience in having the enemy look down our throats and snipe at will. We soon learned that whenever we came around a bend in the trench and could see blue sky without looking up it was time to duck. We were constantly erecting sandbag protection for the locations the enemy snipes discovered to be fertile ground the their marksmanship. It would seem that our side always ended up with the low spots while the enemy enjoyed the high ground - we always wondered why.

The sector was na evil smelling place. Unburied bodies of English and highlander casualties of the Messines Battle still lay unburied out in "no-man’s" land - they made ventures into that area ghoulish to say the least.

It was an awesome moment when first assigned to a trench bay and told to get up on the firing step and keep a sharp lookout for movement to the front. Nobody thought to tell us that if you peered too long at an object in the dark it would appear to be in motion. Lots of false alarms, but we soon settled down and found out places in the routine. The front was a very quiet one with only a few bullets over head and an occasional shell sent over by either side. We were informed that we were facing the unwarlike Saxons who believed in live and let live. They said we would know when they were received by the Prussians because thing always livened up when they took over. We found this to be true and that the Prussians were their crack troops - almost as good as the Canadians - but not quite. It seemed that everyone was just marking time - a good thing as it gave us a chance to learn the ropes without serious trouble.

Next came our introduction to the "work parties" we were to get to know and expect throughout the war. We dug trenches, filled sand bags, built and rebuilt the same old trenches over and over again, replaced or repaired our barbed wire until it all became second nature. Of course the work needed to be done. However, if that had not been the case, someone would have had to invent something else in order to get the men out of the wet trenches at least during the night in order to get their circulation going. We grouched at first, but later we rather welcomed the call, especially when rewarded with a slug of rum at the end.

After a short tour we were relieved and went back to billets in the Kemmel Hill area. While no one had been killed or wounded, we sure were cocky now that we could call ourselves combat vets. There was much talk about battle clasps on service medals and how soon we would be granted "Blighty" leave as a reward for our stellar performance. We really were green, but we were to learn all too soon the hard facts of life and war.

We had our first experience with gas masks at this point. The first type issued was known as the "leg of Maggie’s drawers" since we were informed that the women of London had cut up their pettycoats as their contribution to the emergency. All they consisted of was two pieces of flannel sewn into a hoodlike head cover. They were dipped in some foul smelling chemical (so we were told). Having been informed that the Canadians had survived the first gas attack by breathing though rags soaked in urine, we suspected that the good London ladies had made a similar contribution added to the flannel.

Sticking your head into one of these contraptions took a lot of guts. Think of sitting in a trench completely blinded and wondering what might happen if a properly gas-masked enemy was to reach you. It took a strong will to overcome the fear and apprehension. Later they rushed in the same type with two glass eye-windows designed to permit the wearer to see out - no go, one breath and the glass was fogged up inside and you were back to blindness again. Next they put a one-way breathing valve inside the mask. By placing the rubber mouthpiece into your mouth you were able to breath the air inside the mask and expel through the valve (just a piece of rubber that expanded when you breathed out). There was great joy when the canister variant came along. Whoever thought up that type had something on the ball.- the design has hardly changed over the years and many succeeding wars.

Our next lesson in trench warfare had to do with bombs, their manufacture and throwing. Also ducking their return if the fuse was too long. Since none were factory made to this point we had perforce to put our own together on the spot, We were provided nitro waffers, mercury caps and a length of fuse to be cut to suit. For containers we relied on the empty jam tins readily available. The operation was relatively simple, but like all simple things of its kind, extremely dangerous to the maker, the thrower and to all standing about and, least of all, the enemy. First you put a waffer of nitro in the bottom of the can. Next you found a small round stick and inserted it into the hole in the waffer. Any loose bits of metal lying around were then put into the can. To hold it all into place, and to insure a smooth hole for the mercury cap, a gooey mud was tamped into place. Then came the moment of truth. You extracted the stick and, slowly and most carefully, inserted the mercury cap in the hole left by the stick. Of course you had previously crimped the fuse into the cap with your teeth as demonstrated to us by an old experienced dynamiter. When you contemplate what would happen if the cap scratched against a rough piece of metal on its way down you can understand why at this moment in time you were suddenly a very lonely person. Everyone found business elsewhere. When all was in readiness you (or your courageous chum) lite the fuss with a match and away she went. If you were close to a trench and used too long a fuss it came flying back. All good clean fun.

We fashioned another type called a "hair brush" after the shape of the wooden back on which we made them. It was strictly a two-man job and while not quite as risky as the "jam tin" it did nothing for the popularity of the makers or throwers. Strange how the "mills" bomb came into being in the finished form that has not changed much to this day. I looked over a recent American issue and found no striking difference - Mr. Mills, whoever he was, sure knew his stuff.

I recall that Mr. R.C. Arthurs, MC, was our first battalion bombing officer. He was a fine office and we later became good friends. I was sent with other representatives of their respective platoons to his school for instruction in the new bomb. We were shown how the mechanism worked and how to arm it with the combined cap and fire. A warning was issued to observe very closely the wall between the cap and the fuse wells. If there was the slightest break the fuse would short-circuit resulting in an instantaneous explosion. Naturally, we soon developed a throwing technique to guard against such occurrences, but there were some who either did not learn or just forgot to their regret. Later when they came to us as a finished project fully armed and with no time for inspection, the problem of premature explosions was always before us. That was the penalty of mass production, but we needed and wanted the bombs - so what.

After Mr. Arthurs thought we were ready, we had a few practice throws to become more acquainted with the strange device. As I demonstrated the best throwing arm (Deacon White always lamented that I could not play ball) I was selected to throw the first live bomb. We were out in an open field without any protection of any sort. Nobody knew how far the fragments would spread - we were soon to learn. I reared back and gave it all I had. By good luck, it landed behind one of those thick hedge rows that served as fences. It went off with a blast. Pieces landed too close for comfort. Only the enveloping effect of the hedge prevent catastrophe. It was back to the drawing board. Get out the shovels and sandbags and build a protective barricade for all future training or experimentation. I don’t believe this incident was fully reported as part of the record of the day’s training activities - in fact I am sure it was kept as a deep dark secret, all’s well that ends well.

So it went for a full winter with our battalion acting as a flying unit going in to relieve tired troops and, most importantly I am sure, to repair and rebuild blown down defences. If nothing else we proved to be good work horses. However, we were gaining the sense of cohesion and cooperation that distinguishes between an operating unit and a mob.

What I lacked in strength I more than made up in agility. No doubt this was the reason I found myself volunteering (?) to jump over the parapet to repair broken wire. We only had wooden stakes at first. The enemy allowed you only one good whack with the mallet. He then open up with his machine gun. You may be assured that the exact spot where you planned to land was carefully selected before each stroke with the mallet. It was a matter of hit and duck and that was where agility paid off. Later when the technology improved we got the metal screw stakes and the technique changed, but agility was still your best asset. More about wiring later.

Then it was time for us to get acquainted with dear old Ypres, the very dead city that was to be our home for a long time. While we were in close proximity to the enemy lines in most places it was usually a quiet sector. We balanced our time between the front line, rear trenches and a fairly comfortable spot with sandbag huts called Maple Copse. We like this place as the trees had not been destroyed and we could walk around under their cover in relative safety. It was to be completely levelled in later days.

We went in and out of this blown down, burned out city until we got to know it just about as well as the rats that competed with us for existence. We sifted through the broken buildings for souvenirs, but by this time it was nothing but rubble. The former beautiful cathedral and Cloth Hall stood in ruins. As the enemy did not seem disposed to make life too miserable for us it was not too bad a place to live, especially in the deep cellars. The trench lines were most primitive - we never did even try to duplicate the deep, safe and often luxurious dugouts the other side provided for their troops.

On one of our periods of rest in the back area an event took place that was to have a most salutary effect not only on my present task of growing up, but during all the days of my life. We were billeted in a fairly comfortable barn (the only drawback the ever present, foul smelling sanitary system always just outside all French barns). We had as neighbours an English ten-inch howitzer and crew. They brought it up to reduce a church tower that was being used by the enemy as an observation and sniping post. Rifle shells bounced off the thick walls so it was decided to go in over the top. They had one of the Lahore Battery range finding officers in charge. As he explained it to us they used a light gun as a check on their computed range and to their everlasting credit it took only three shots to do the trick. We stood to the rear of the gun as it fired and by looking up ahead quickly we could see those ten-inch babies on their way to do their job. However, our admiration for their skill did not deter us when it came to the matter of stealing their rum. We were attached to a British Army whose CO did not believe in rum for the soldats. Since nothing was said about his personal habits of abstinence we all hoped most sincerely that he would choke on his scotch or whatever he liked for booze.

We lived in apprehension of retaliation by the enemy artillery and were relieved when their job well done they dismantled the gun and removed both it and the camouflaged haystack used to disguise its position. A big gun was never a welcome neighbour. Before they moved, we had to good a chance to lift their rum to be passed by. I was not actually in on the snitch (it was culled off by Herbie L. from whom no one's booze was safe). I did accept my full share of the nectar, even at my tender age I had developed a likening for the stuff. The battery commander complained to our company commander. Captain G.Z. Pinder, a very fair and well-liked officer, but in the light of the beef put up by the "Limey" crew he had to demand that the culprits be found and punished.

This is where Sergeant Jack Wallace took his important place in my personal development. He lined us up and asked the big question, who did it? No one was about to plead guilty. He isolated me and questioned me at length. In exasperation at my silence and faced with the need to find a goat in order to close the incident, he asked me if I had drunk any of it. I had to plead guilty on this point as he could smell it on my breath - I had taken a full share. I was promptly paraded before my CO and pled guilty to having participated even if only after the fact as the law has it. He was obviously relieved to have some official means of closing the case and sentenced me to five days CB. Sounds kind of silly

under the circumstances, but it meant no estaminet for me during the period of the sentence - the others would have to bring a bottle of vin back to me.

Walking away from the CO's tent I realized that it had been a rather stupid thing to do and in that frame of mind started to turn toward Sgt. Wallace to apologize. (I learned right then never to apologize - explain yes, but apologize no, it always tends to confuse and seldom produces the desired results.) As I turned toward him my arm swung upward. Wallace must have thought that I was going to strike him. Nothing could have been further from my mind. What sixteen year old kid was going to take a swing at the divisional welterweight champion? Afterwards I concluded that he just lost his temper at my assumed nonchalance. Anyway, he let go with a beautiful left hook that caught me flush on the jaw. To his surprise, and mine, I did not go down. I saw all the stars in the firmament, but somehow I hung in there. I continued on to the barn followed by Wallace. Once inside I went to my knees and rolled over. Wallace stuck around for a while fully expecting the punk to go bellowing to the CO. That was another lesson I had learned earlier - you don’t snitch on the man who can pass out all the dirty fatigue duty.

The next day, when he was convinced that the incident was closed, Wallace came to me and said, "alright you so and so, if that is the way you are going to play it, that’s OK with me". As he started to turn away he stopped and said, "and while you are on CB you can take part of the time to sew a stripe onto your arm." Glory be, the totally unexpected had hardened. Me, Alfred H. A. Cantin, American, aged 16 had become a non-commissioned officer in His Majesty’s Army with the exalted rank of Acting Lance-corporal without pay. More over you generals - Cantin was on his way up. It drew a lot of laughs among the others, but I never took anything more serious in my life.

It was later in my life that I came to understand the psychology he used on me. He payed me a tribute for standing up under pain and humiliation, and at the same time passed on to me the job of keeping the other young punks in line. It also meant that from now on I would "pass out the shovels" and direct others in the digging. So it has been all my life. No matter what the job, my first interest was how to get the position of "passing out the shovel." It worked on the railroad, the police department and in all the various enterprises I either managed or directed from time to time.

While I now had the responsibility of curtailing the wild actions of four other youngsters only a little older than myself, it didn’t completely do away with our mischievous fun. You may be sure however, that I had learned the lessons of discretion.

# **INTRODUCTION TO HELL**

We were now engaged in what became accepted as the regular Ypres Salient routine in the front line for a while, back to support trenches and then out to the rest area. The latter at least gave us the opportunity of reducing the ranks of the army of lice that plagued us all during the war. Everyone was lousy, actually not literally. It had become pretty much a way of life until the enemy decided through us up with a box barrage type trench raid that left us with our first major platoon and company casualties. Many of us forever. The enemy found out what I think they were trying to determine- if we could take it. They quickly found out we were no soft touches- we found out that we could face up to what ever he had in mind.

While out in the rest area we were informed that the enemy had made a big push up in the Sanctuary Wood sector. Rumors flew like the wind. All was lost - we would be driven back to the sea, etc, etc. Was there ever a place more subject to wild rumors than the Amy - any Army. We soon knew that something serious had happened, as we were rushed up to the Rampart Dugouts just inside the Lille Gate. From the top of the embankment we could look out over the battlefield and watch the flares light up the sector where the enemy was still pouring it on. Again the confused emotions. What do they do in such cases? How will we try to retake the lost ground? Who would lead the bayonet charge? These were the sort of uncertain conjectures of soldiers facing the acid test for the first time. Very shortly we would prove that we were up to it.

Apparently the brass made these decisions for us for soon the order came to fall in. Rifles loaded, and bayonets fixed we went overland to our assigned jumping-off place. There was no time to use the communication trenches and a few casualties resulted. We arrived at an open field, just to the rear of the old support line which now was the front line. Looking backward it was an inspiring sight to see the companies lined, up in open battle formation just as they did in the Boer War no doubt. Who the hell knew any better? As an indication of the uncertainty that prevailed, the big flap was wether the N.C.O.s should, be in front or the rear of the troops, it was finally decided in favor of the front - where they belonged, of course. So now full LANCE CORPORAL, Alfred. H. Cantin aged 17 took his place at the head of his section and prepared to step off into whatever destiny had in store for him. Just at dawn the order came to advance. There was no artillery preparation. We had no clear understanding of what we could or would do. For sheer guts and determination to do the best they could with what they had, there has never been another demonstration to equal let alone surpass this heartbreaking but magnificent display of courage by brave men. In all future engagements we would at least have proper equipment and training to set forth with.

Those who survived the first sweep of those gawd-awful machine guns or were not blown to bits by the terrific barrage the enemy set down, dove for the nearest shell holes and started to filter into the trenches. To their undying credit, in this engagement as in others to follow, the Officers and the senior NCOS lived up to the highest traditions and suffered the largest percentage of casualties. 12th Platoon had gone in with one officer, a lance sergeant and several Corporals including dumb ole me. We came out only two corporals. With no organized command to give orders the action quickly resolved to every man for himself. It was then that all ranks showed the initiative that was later to distinguish the 49th and all Canadians. While we did not make any appreciable advance, quick action by the remaining Officers and NCOs in directing the efforts of those remaining prevented the enemy from exploiting what would have been advantage if he had only known the utter confusion the existed on our side.

Just inside the trench there was a badly wounded Officer being given First Aid. Even with his wound he grasped the situation and as I hove into view with what was left of my section he gave me what was my first battlefield order. He instructed me to penetrate a nearby communication trenches far as possible and establish a trench block. We bombed our way to a point where it would have been suicidal to try to cross a blown out section being swept by enemy machine gun fire. We ceased to be fighters and reverted to what we knew best- a work party. With lots of barbed wire around we made rosettes in the trench and threw them into the breach.

After surrounding ourselves in this fashion we tackled the sandbags and shovels, and soon had a defensible position. The wounded Officer, who was a stranger to me for I had never seen him before, came up, wounds and all to inspect the position. He complimented us on the job we had done and remarked that it had prevented a breakthrough that might have allowed the enemy to circle our rear. Not a bad recommendation for a bunch of kids. He left and I never saw him again. We all hoped that he recovered from his wounds as we were deeply impressed with his coolness and courage

The only " C " company Officer I saw during the engagement was Capt G.Z. Pinder, our CO. He was badly wounded in the chest and blood was coming out of his mouth. Nevertheless he continued to go throughout the area trying desperately to reorganize his company- all he had left was just raw courage. I liked him. It was no use however and the battle was fought out as a series of individual and group efforts.

When we were relieved and got out to the rest area to regroup and rebuild we were a sorry sight. Only a mere cadre of Officers and NCOs remained. We were all numb from the traumatic experience we had suffered. Corporal Sid Parsons (later to become Mayor of Edmonton) was the senior NCO and was promptly made Company Sergeant Major. There were no Sergeants available until Jack Wallace returned from leave in England. We were always sorry that Sid did not receive conformation in the rank before he was wounded and sent to England. He finished up as Corporal acting CSM and we always felt that he deserved better, but that was the way it went. No one could ever say that the Canadian Army was overly generous with promotion.

Anyway, after licking our wounds and pondering our not too bright future, we started to put it all together again. 12th Platoon was fortunate to have Sgt. Wallace as our base for reorganization. I was given another stripe and began to think of myself as quite a man. We were to go into Sanctuary Wood again many times, but if men who had been there averted their faces at the places where the slaughter took place it was understandable. My friend Dave Barbour tells me of a battle marker lying flat on the ground which reads "Get down on your knees to read this - brave men died here". How bloody well true.

One thing for sure, we knew that this war would be no lark and that it would surely get worse before it got better. We hung around Ypres with various experiences including the tour that included "C" company occupying the centre of a hell called HOOGE. The lines were only a whisper apart as each side strove to hang on to their lip of a rise, we referred to it as the pimple. Sleep was impossible except in the face of utter exhaustion. Then what we feared would happen took place. Without warning several of the enemy swooped, down on our trench and took some prisoners. I was occupying the latrine at the time and, as it was located some yards to the rear, I just missed a free ride to Germany.

Much to late the troops on the flanks opened fire and while they killed one of the enemy we lost one of ours being taken across no-mans land. We learned the futilty of wild firing under such conditions and I am sure never did it again. It can be said without fear of contradiction that we were happier to get out of HOOGE than any other spot we were ever in. By the way, I note from the BOOK that the name given to the battle was Mount Sorrel. That may be alright, I have no wish to quarrel with the designation, but to those of us who were there it will always be the " Shambles at Sanctuary Wood "

Shortly after Sid Parsons was wounded, my friend and idol Jack Wallace became CSM. You may be sure that 12th platoon while happy for his promotion, hated to see him leave us. A new divisional school was established to spread the knowledge about new weapons and tactics. Each platoon was required to send an NCO as a representative. Wallace always assigned me to such jobs. He said I had an inquisitive mind and could depend on me bringing back the full info. I learned the importance of a note book and from then on I have always been a voluminous note taker. The habit proved most valuable in later life. It ended in my becoming a pretty good (or at least reliable) field instructor

We were introduced to the effectiveness of the new stokes mortar and Lewis machine gun. The Stokes became an excellent offensive weapon and was most effective as an answer to the enemy flying pigs and their lighter mortars that made our trench life painful. The light Lewis gun became the infantry's dream boat- how we grew to love that weapon. At long last we to had something with which to pour it on. All sorts of contests developed to see who could take it apart and put it together in the shortest time. When that became to easy we did it blindfolded. Who can ever forget " the boss on the feed arm actuating stud " that the instructors loved to intone. Then some one got the bright idea that it could be fired from the hip and played like a water hose. To prove the point I found myself strapped to one with an asbestos glove to hold down the hot end. It was terrific, but after the the first few round you were hitting the moon. with the installation of a compensator at the muzzle this deficiency was overcome. We soon had mobile fire power- and how. It was required that everyone become familiar with both guns so that if regular crews were lost, the other could at least load and fire the weapons.

At this same school a totally new method of attack for trench warfare was devised. We tried it out and it worked fine during practice and later equally as well in actual combat., Soon every member of the platoon was either a lead bayonet man, a bomb thrower, an outside defense man or in command. It was team work of the highest order, and when placed in general use it saved a lot of unnecessary casualties.

Coming back from the school I found my services in demand as an instructor and from then on, that became an important part of my way of life - during the war and after as a civilian. -

Then came the long trek to the Somme area. We didn't know just where we were going, but we were fully certain that something big was in store. We were transported in those funny little box cars with the legend 40-8 on the sides. Some optimist figured that they would hold either forty men or eight horses. They might have held eight horses alright but forty men???" no way. We hung out the side and some tried to ride up on the roof. We ignored the French rail workers who tried to get across to us that it was dangerous to ride up there. The first time we approached a tunnel without clearance we knew what they had been trying to to tell us. Fortunately the speed was very slow and we were able to dive over the side thereby averting what could have been very stupid casualties.

Later in life I was to join a branch of the American Legion called" "La Société des 40 hommes et 8 Chevaux" named after those silly little box cars that helped to win the war.

When we arrived at Albert we knew what the future held in store for us. Wild rumors flew about the huge losses suffered by the English troops who had proceeded us into what was to be an encore to our introduction to hell. We were assigned a bare chalk hill as a billet area and told to go to it. We scrounged any thing in sight and if it was not nailed down or someone sitting on it we brought it back to try to provide some protection from the elements. Then it rained. We were immediately covered with white wash from the chalk. Certainly nothing to build up morale, but nothing could stop us now-we were veteran combatants and could take anything in our stride.

Being natural tourists and always anxious to see what was going on in the other fellows yard, we set out for Albert to see the sights. We gaped at the hanging Virgin who myth had it would fall when Peace was declared. When we noticed that the Engineers had chained it up so that it would not fall on passing troops another wartime superstition fell.

Our attention was directed to some thing strange going on in a clump of trees. Whereupon we got our first view of the strangest looking device short of the dragons of old. They called them "TANKS" and being most curious we started to ask questions. They were started up and the fire and noise they made quite justified the analogy to the dragons. A very intelligent Officer took us in hand and showed us around. They took us inside and pointed out the good and bad points of their new war toy. All the crew members could have qualified as jockey. All were under five feet and could have not weighed more than one hundred pounds. It appeared that they all were one-pip subalterns. The head jockey showed us where he sat and pointed out his limited vision through a periscope and implored us to tell everyone to stay up close in order to ward off any JERRY who might sneak up on him. Noting that the extra petrol was stored in five gallon cans I commented rather stupidiy what might happen in the case of a direct hit. The silence and looks that followed told more than mere words their appreciation of the hazards of this new technological monster of war. They were sure a courages bunch, and it is too bad that Churchill had not been around to make his famous " owing so much to so few " speech- it would have described them so well. We promised our full support and that we would pass the word along. If we wondered why all were not briefed on the new weapon we put it down as another goof on the part of the brass. It had been kept a deep dark secret for sure. But the time had surely come to at least tell us about it. We accepted a tot of rum, shook hands all around and promised to see them again soon out on the battlefield. I don't think I was ever more impressed by a group of men. They were small in stature, but big where it counts in courage. They and their successors paved the way to ultimate victory.

The next afternoon we started up the Albert-Bapaume Road. We cut across an open field, past the last dressing station and we were on our way. The little tanks could be heard chugging away in the distance. The enemy suspected something but not knowing what it was reverted to habit and laid down a heavy barrage on the rear positions. It was big stuff and beginning ta have it's effect on that part of the line we could still see in the dusk ahead. Then IT happened. One struck almost under me. Fortunately the ground had been churned up by months of shelling and it vent far down before exploding. I went up in the air and the lights went out. When I came to, I was lying in a shell hole with an aching leg and my right ear hanging down my neck. My head was covered with blood and my first exploratory examination was that I had lost half my heads. Since it was now evident that there -was no imminent danger of my dying I started to look around to - see what had happened. In the confusion of the shelling nobody had even missed me and they carried on to their destination, I found a badly wounded man from some other company who had been hit earlier. I did what I could for him to make him comfortable -it was not much- I remembered the dressing station we had passed earlier to get some help. Before leaving I mounted, two rifles to mark the spot so it could be found again. I managed to get some bearers to come with me to pick him up. In the dark and with an increase in the shelling it was impossible to reach him. They promised to come back in the morning, but I never learned if they did or what happened to the man. In all likelihood he was just one of the men lying out there waiting and praying for help to arrive-one of the brutal features of war.

I joined the line of walking wounded and we wended our way back to Albert. There we entered a large tent guarded at the door by the provost. They checked us quickly for serious wounds and to separate the enemy from our own. We had all walked down the road together without incident. I saw men who had walked all that way drop dead as they entered the tent, demonstrating the courage and determination that makes a man go until he reaches his objective. I got into the lesser wounded line - suddenly a medic waved a big needle at me to give me my anti-tetanus shot. That was it- as he drove it home my knees caved in and I started to fall. He grabbed me by the shoulder and said "Thats all right sonny just keep moving"-where were there bedside manners. As I could walk I was directed to the area where the funny little box cars were waiting to transport us to the field hospital at Étaples.

After being de-loused and given a hot bath, I had the first good nights sleep between sheets in a long, long time. I was awakened by the call for breakfast followed by a check up by a team of Doctors. My leg wound, while painful, was not serious. They looked at my badly swollen ear and expressed the hope that I would not end up with a boxers cauliflower ear- so did I. They took me to the operating room and sewed up the ear doing an excellent job as only a couple of scars remain to this day. However when I sleep on my right side I wake up suffering a swollen ear lobe and a burning pain. There were so many particles of metal in the outer ear and my neck that they said to just leave them alone.- they would fester and come out by themselves . How true but it took thirty years for the last piece to come out.

Once more the subject of my age came up. I had told so many lies about it that I was confused myself. I stuck to eighteen but I could see that they did not believe me. A sympathetic doctor regretted that he could not order me to BLIGHTY. He instructed that I remain in Hospital for a month to recover from "shock". Real nice guy and I did appreciated the rest. However it was back to the kitchen again. (I hid my stripes because the job was cushy and the food good).

After the rest it was back to the Regiment to be met with a lot of bad news. Only a few left in my platoon. My dear friend and mentor CSM Jack Wallace MM had been killed. His body was not found until they cleaned up the old Somme battlefield. There was never to be another to take his place in ny estimation of the qualities that make a top NCO-he was a mans man-God be good to him.

With Ypres and the Somme behind us we could properly say that we had suffered a bloody baptism as our introduction to Hell. We were now convinced that if we had come a long way we had a long way to go.

# **PROLONGING THE AGONY**

With a couple of other "originals" I rejoined the battalion as it was making its way up toward the Vimy Ridge area. We were made welcome and brought up to date on all that had taken place during our absence. All the horror or Regina Trench and the other hot spots was related in great detail. They impressed us with our good luck in not having been killed. Some were even so kind as to say that it was too bad we old sweats had not made it to "Blighty". With this we agreed. A note of skepticism began to seep into the conversation of the veterans for the first time. They were not rebellious, bat the grumbling and criticism was starting to exceed the allowable levels of soldier's grouching. The consensus seemed to be that too big a price was being paid for the visible returns. Not having any idea or the overall strategy of the war they could only judge their opinions and what they saw and felt. The brass did not believe it necessary or desirable to confide in the rear ranks so we just beefed and went on with our "do or die" business. From this experience I learned that men perform better when they are at least informed of what is going on. At any rate, our Introduction to Hell was now complete and we knew we were in for a long, dragged-out war.

It was during this period of reorganization and reinforcement that the big change in the personnel of the battalion became strikingly evident. Most of the "originals" were gone. Not one original officer of "C" Company remained. The new faces quite naturally wanted to take over and build their own organization. There were those of us who felt that we had helped to build a solid foundation and should not be shoved aside. It came to a head shortly after my return. Three of us senior corporals were passed over for sergeant. The Company had a new Commander. Capt, A. W. "Wally" Owen. He was a stranger to me. He was reputed to be a great sportsman and boxer. Depending upon this reputation, the three of us decided to beard him in his den with our complaint. He listened to our explanation that it we were not considered to be qualified for promotion we should echelon for the balance of the war. It seemed like a sound argument (the others let me do the talking, it appeared that I was steadily improving as an advocate). He appeared a little embarrassed, as if he had been ill-advised that we would not register a complaint. When I added that any adverse decision would be appealed to the battalion commander he relented and made us Lance-Sergeants. Not all that we wanted, but at least it made us eligible for the sergeant's mess which was our main objective. My action did not endear me to Captain Owen and we were never to achieve good rapport. I do not say this to criticize him as a person. Many others were very fond of him and he had a good reputation as an officer. It was just another of those cases where nobody loves everybody.

We moved up to the Vimy Ridge sector and started a long series of in-and-out tours involving the many mine craters that were the greater part of the front line. We were on one lip with the enemy on the other, hanging on to our portion of the wet, mucky chalk.

It was a matter of tolerance (same as at Hooge). We were so close together that we unofficially adopted a policy of live and let live. Nobody wanted to start anything, preferring to wait until it would count for something. Of course it was another glaring example of our genius of accepting the low ground while the enemy occupied the high ground? looking down our throats ail the time. If we built a fairly comfortable trench he would allow us to complete the job and then blow it up. I sure would have been interested in hearing their conversation as they watched us work. I can hear them say. "OK. let's blow it up so they can get more exercise building it up again so we can blow it down again, and on and on ad nauseum." It was almost sadistic.

Much was said about a mysterious tunnel being built from the rear trench line. To control rumors we were told it was for the use of sappers who were going to blow the top off the ridge. We found out later what "Grange Tunnel" was really dug for.

During this period a new problem was raising its ugly head. It was to be expected that some of the veterans would become discouraged and that some of the new men would not be able to take it. No one anticipated the desperate means some would resort to in order to get out of it all. Soon the prevalence of self-inflicted woulds (SIW) was being talked about up and down the line. The problem grew so fast that the penalty that might have been expected (shot) could not be invoked as a deterring factor. The end was that they were court-mart tailed, stripped of all buttons and identifying insignia, the large letters SIW were sewn on their backs, and they were put to work on the roads alongside the enemy prisoners and Chinese laborers. Nothing could be more humiliating and I often wondered how they explained their dishonorable discharges to the folks back home.

Orders were issued to investigate every suspicious wound or injury. The 49th was completely free from this blight I am very proud to say. However, we had to comply with ail preventive instructions. The responsible NCO was required to check the feet of all men going up to the wet mine crater outposts at Vimy Ridge. Since the hip boots were passed on to each succeeding relief, they were always wet inside. To prevent the brutally disabling malady of "trench foot" each man's feet were dried, then smeared with "Dubbin" a grease used to waterproof boots. Two pairs or wool socks were put on before thrusting the feet into the wet hip boots. If the next morning we had to cat the boots off badly swollen feet, the incident had to be certified by the NCO who conducted the inspection in order to sustain the condition as a battle disability and not SIW. Once a man contracted this malady he never was any good in a wet spot again, it would constantly recur. Sounds rather grim but tacts are facts.

I am reminded of a possible SIW incident that, took place just about the time we were getting rid of the Ross rifle. I am sure that it contributed to its well justified demise. One of my men was cleaning his rifle with the muzzle resting on his foot out of the mud. He ejected the cartridges. Mistakenly thinking the magazine empty ha released the trigger and had a bullet hole through his foot. SIW was immediately suspected as this was the spot in the anatomy for such attempts. I knew this man very well. He was definitely not the type, but how to prove it? I impounded the rifle and wrapped it in a blanket so it could not be tampered with. A group of us sat down and tried to figure it out. We finally came up with an experience wherein one of the men had a cartridge jam in the breech. (We were starting to get a lot of defective ammunition as the demand for mass production rose.) We took several of the rifles and went through the same identical procedure as in the case of the wounded man. After several tries we found a rifle that performed as we had hoped. The oversized cartridge even when NOT fired stuck in the breech and would NOT eject. Jubilant because we had been certain of our man's innocence, we took the specimen rifle and the still wrapped rifle before a board called to hear such cases prior to the ordering of a court-martial. Three reliable witnesses were available to testify.

Being the advocate again. I demonstrated the specimen rifle and asked the question, "If the suspect's rifle proved to be likewise defective would they believe his story?" It was agreed, whereupon I removed the blanket displaying the discharged round in the breech. The bolt action could not dislodge it. We drove it out and reloaded the magazine. We then operated the bolt until it appeared that the rifle was empty. Dramatically, I pointed to the unexploded cartridge still in the breech and that no number of bolt actions would dislodge it. The weak ejector spring on the Ross bolt was too long to retain its strength and it was unable to eject what was probably a defective cartridge. The ejector went back and forth over the rim of the cartridge leaving the shell behind. It was a convincing demonstration and our friend was adjudged a battle accident casualty. We never saw him again. I often wondered what his thoughts were about his buddies who proved to be good investigators and excellent defenders.

We were drawn out of the line and taken back to billets in the still lovely town of Bruay. This proved to be one of the interludes of the war. We were cleaned up, brought up to full strength and the training began for the taking of Vimy Ridge. This time we were told all about the plan. White tapes were laid out over which we practised until we knew the whereabouts of La Folie Farm, the Staubwasser Weg communications trench and all its branches by heart. While it was hard work we were compensated by having good food. lots of vin and the townspeople were most hospitable. I finally got a permanent third stripe and entered the sergeant's mess as a full blown platoon sergeant. I have a picture of our group which includes among others my dear and life-long friend. R. H. "Bob" Whyte. who was later to become my brother-in-law through the marriage of his sister to my brother. It was at this juncture that my world increased beyond the limits of 12th platoon. Prior to. association with the other sergeants it was pretty much a matter of what happened to your own little group. Now the discussion was related to the combined efforts and welfare of the entire company, a greater sense of belonging to a larger working team. Each NCO was given a supply of 8x10 battle maps of Vimy Ridge. They were to be used as a guide and also there was a provision on the back to make battle reports. I have retained one among my mementoes.

It was a tearful goodby to a lot of new-found friends among the townspeople who had been so good to us. Our mess had been billeted with a wonderful French family. I remember their young daughter so well. We were both young and innocent. she 15 and I 17. We had become dear friends and vowed we would meet again - we never did.

On our way to the Grange Tunnel we passed through the worst din I have ever heard. The guns were lined up wheel to wheel and firing like mad. As you passed one of the big howitzers when it fired the concussion would almost drive you to your knees. In no time at all we were numb and just plodded on like automatons. The wonder is that we retained our senses and our hearing. We poured down into the tunnel and awaited what the morrow would bring.

The din kept up all night, only a prelude to what was to follow - just at daybreak all hell broke loose. A mine exploded somewhere and it felt just like one of the earthquakes I was to get to know in California. There were two Stokes gun emplacements just above my head and I have never heard louder or a more varied vocabulary of blasphemy in my life. Every command was preceded and followed by a curse and the whole thing was blood curdling.

As we were in reserve we had to wait for the Pats and 42nd to clear the way before we could be useful. Then it was back to the well-known pack-horse routine. Our company was split up into two jobs. one for food and the other for ammunition, I drew the latter. One of our best officers. Captain George Hunt, who fought out his part in the war with the handicap of only one eye, was accompanied by two of our best sergeants, J. H. Kennedy and M. J. "Mickey" Dowdall. One shell took off part of Hunt's foot, killing Kennedy and wounding Dowdall. Mickey died a few days later. In one shake of the dice we lost three good men. Both Kennedy and Mickey are included in the Bruay sergeant's mess picture.

We did not go back down the Grange Tunnel but stayed out in the open wreck of what had once been excellent enemy trenches. We did not dare to go down into the dugouts until the sappers declared them safe. They had warned us of a new technique souvenir hunters. During the night it snowed, quickly turning the churned up earth into a gooey mess. Only an extra shot of rum saved the day - or guess it was night.

After Hill 145 to the left was reduced and the Ridge made safe to walk around on, there came the question of preparing for a possible counter-attack and to determine the enemy's strength on the plane below the ridge. A fine young officer, Mr. R. H. Louis, came up as a replacement for Captain Hunt and was assigned to my platoon. He was ordered to take us down the hill and occupy an empty trench line at the bottom. Seemed reasonable since hardly a shot had been fired for hours, but again the simple became tragic. I advised that we proceed down a still existing communication trench. Mr. Louis agreed and we reached the bottom without any casualties, although some enemy snipers did observe the movement and directed their fire to the top of the trench just to keep us honest.

When we got to the bottom of the hill we found a strange machine gun crew all set up in good trench housekeeping and in full control of the situation. They were amazed at our presence. We informed them we were going to occupy the trench about fifty feet in front. They said we were crazy in that the snipers would cut us down in large numbers before we were half way across. They advised that we stay put and await the darkness that would soon arrive to cover us. Mr. Louis was so brand new he could only think of his orders and determined to ignore the combined advice of myself and the gunners. I urged him to permit me to strip a couple of my fastest boys and see if they could make it without their battle loads. He said no and that he would go first. A very brave decision but not too wise. I was sure that if higher command had been present they would order otherwise. I quickly readied three men to accompany him and back him up. The trench ended at this point and as you made an exit it was like walking out an open door. All four ran like hell and by some miracle got through with the snipers doing their best to cut them down, we must have caught them napping. We were so close that I was able to keep up a shouting conversation with Mr. Louis. I begged him to remain where he was and that we would cover him. He told me he was coming back but would leave the men behind. Nothing I could say could change his mind and soon I heard him making a dash to the "open door" entrance of the trench. I am sure the snipers were fully aware of the situation and had their rifles trained on the entrance. They held their fire until Mr. Louis reached this spot and then opened up. I dragged him in by the hand thinking he had made it. He collapsed with a bullet through the stomach. We made him as comfortable as possible, but from experience we knew it was no go. His last instructions to me before lapsing into unconsciousness was to remain in the trench and await darkness before going on. I was glad he gave this order because that was just what I was going to do anyway. The order had been to occupy a supposedly undefended trench and did not include losing a lot of men in so doing. I had joined the rapidly growing school that was leaning to the need to conserve manpower and not waste it on useless even if gallant efforts.

With the coming of darkness the bearers came and took Mr. Louis out. We learned of his death shortly thereafter. It was roost regrettable as he appeared to have what it takes and would have proven a great asset to the battalion.

We took over the trench without further casualties and proceeded to bomb the snipers out of their nest and by morning the plane was safe to walk around on without danger. Mr. Emsley came down to take command and were soon relieved and it was back to the rest area. We had not lost the same proportionate number of men as at the Somme and Ypres, but the loss of only one was enough to bring on sadness.

We came back in for a short tour in the Avion area. We were assigned a new officer. Mr. G.D.K. Kinnaird came to us after service with the Fort Garry Horse where he had served in the ranks and been wounded. Everyone took to him at once. He had all the distinguishing trademarks of a good officer -willing to listen and then make up his own mind on the basis of evaluation and the use of his own good judgment. Our platoon was in support in front of a Fosse (mine) slag pile. It was mostly uneventful at first - then we had the agony of watching the enemy destroy a field-gun battery emplaced just in front of the Fosse. It seemed like a good place for it, but someone forgot that the enemy had enjoyed the same location for a long time and figured we would do the same. Not a gun was saved and a number of men "got it" in a courageous attempt to pull them out.

The night before we were to be relieved the enemy pulled his last gas surprise on us. Wonder why they always picked on the Canadians for this purpose. After our nightly work parties the men bedded down in their "funk" holes dug into the side of the trench. We had been bothered with some eye irritation and putting it down as tear gas went to sleep with our tear gas goggles on. During the night the enemy slipped over mustard gas shells mixed with the high explosives. If I remember correctly at least four men on the left flank nearest to the road leading down from Vimy died in their sleep. I was rouoed by Mr. Kinnaird who made the discovery while on an early morning check of the line. Needless to say it was a traumatic experience for us both. It was his first experience of this kind and naturally upset him deeply. I felt that as an old timer I should have anticipated something of the kind and never fully forgave myself for not investigating the new peculiar odor that followed the shelling. H.Q. was immediately notified and the order spread to pick up and destroy all goggles. It was too late for us, but no more suffered the same fate. From then on everyone used the cannister gas masks no matter what kind of gas was smelled. Again it was a demonstration of the enemy's uncertain application of a new technology that could have been most disastrous if vigorously exploited - they goofed again.

This was my only tour with Mr. Kinnaird and I left the battalion shortly after we were relieved. I was distressed to learn that he was badly wounded in the big "Brigade Raid" shoot out. He was a distinct loss to the battalion and I felt he was certain to rate higher command.

A decision by Divisional H.Q. to create a special barbwire unit to take the load off the troops gave Captain Owen what I am sure was a long-awaited chance to get rid of me. He considered me to be a "barracks" lawyer and a potential troublemaker (for him). He was all wrong. I just could not stomach injustice of any kind, then. or at any time in my life - just the smell of it stirred me to action. Anyway, I was sent to the wiring unit as sergeant in charge of the 7th Brigade section. Drawing on my instructional experience I immediately organized the men into groups of six, five men and an NCO. We took time out to learn to lay wire by the numbers. No more throwing things around and creating invitational noise to draw enemy fire. Everything was passed in complete silence, without command. Everyone was required to know the procedure step by step. It worked exceedingly well and soon we were a welcome sight wherever needed.

We received our assignments direct from H.Q. and were distinctive in appearance as we did not carry any equipment onto the job except the required gas mask.

We were dressed with leather jerkins and long leather gauntlet gloves as protection against the barbs. We did not wear our tin hats in fear of making noise in the more sensitive areas. We never lugged the stakes or wire - that was the job of the local troops - we just iayed it down. The experiment proved very successful. The brass that thought it up no doubt was quite happy over the excellent results. If nothing more, we saved a lot of casualties by the use of our techniques.

Again I was to learn an important lesson in life. I was told to report to a PPCLI major and to follow his instructions. It sounded rather cloak and dagger from the start, but up we went. The major showed me on his map where he wanted a line strung and we proceeded to the point indicated. Upon arrival we found all the necessary materials ready for us. Surveying the scene I noted that there were two unbroken lines, one on each side of the location where I was supposed to put in the new line. It was a little "hot" and as I figured that someone had goofed, I went back to the major and informed him of my findings. He looked me up and down, no doubt observing my youth, and asked ma one question, "had I been ordered to do something?" upon my answer to the affirmative he continued "then get the hell up there and do it". Needless to say I did so without further delay. Two hours and a couple of casualties later I requested that h.3 inspect the finished work and sign my work order. He did so and as he signed his name he remarked, "Watch this sector in the morning or the next few days and you'll see why we wanted this wire." How right he was. The very next morning the enemy put on a big shoot and blew the two old lines to bits. Since ours had been put in during darkness the night before he had no knowledge of its existence. It held and stopped the intended raid.

The nest night it was back up to repair the damage. I had about six hours' work before reporting back to the major. We had done a good job for him including the installation of a new line of wire we had dreamed up. It extended from front to rear between any two lines so that if the enemy could not get through the facing lines and tried to flank it he just ran into a lot more trouble. He complimented us on the job and then invited me into his dugout for a drink. I took a good swig. you may be sure. He then said, "Sonny, when you reported your findings to me last night you were quite right in arriving at your opinion, but you did not have all the facts known to us". He explained that the enemy had been range finding on the two old lines for several days and he felt they were up to something. He also felt that a surprise line would stop any attack - which it sure did. As I was about to leave he smiled at me and said, "So you see, Sonny, you had a damn good excuse but no reason for not carrying out your orders." That lesson sunk in right, there and it has been sustained all my life. I was always able to distinguish between the two words and be governed accordingly.

Like all good things, this project also came to an end. Due to the mounting casualties and difficulty in obtaining replacements, there was a great need to curtail all extra- curricular activities and get the men back to their battalions. So I said goodby to another fine bunch of fellows representing all units of the Third Division.

I rejoined the battalion as they were on their way to a little town called Villers au Bois. This was another of the several places where I was to undergo a heartbreaking experience that helped to shape my character. The village was a very quiet and restful place, lacking the "attractions" that a front line soldat needed while out on "rest" - food. booze, etc.

With a lot of souvenir money in our pockets, several of the "C" Company sergeants joined me in a quest for pleasure and excitement. We found a larger town close by where all we sought was to be had in large amounts and variety. We had a lot of fun sipping on creme de menthe and champagne,, pretty heady stuff for men used to vin, beer and an occasional shot of rum. It soon had us feeling no pain and at complete peace with the world. In the fashion of soldiers everywhere we felt the urge to try our hand at close harmony. Unfortunately, our selection of a site for such vocalizing turned out to be in front of a British General's Mess. He did not enjoy the sound and ordered us all jugged. My cracked tenor is real bad I admit, but hardly justified the harsh steps taken to break it up - or the punishment to follow. We thought at first it would be another of the cases where upon sobering up in the morning we would be kicked out and told to go home. Not so - we were escorted back to the battalion under arrest with full escort - in later years I handled felons with less security. Did they think we were going to flee the country? This was humiliation enough, but the worst was yet to come.

We were taken before a British court-martial and charged with the heinous crime of "in the field, while on active service - drunk." Despite the best efforts of our CO. Captain S. J. Davis. MC-Bar, who related our long record of front line service, including wounds, we were adjudged guilty - sure we were. We naturally expected a severe reprimand. loss of a stipe and pay, but nothing less than reduction to private could satisfy that stupid, sadistic General.

That wasn't to be all. More humiliation was to be our reward for months of front line and battle service. We were paraded before the entire battalion for the sentence to be read. So help me, I fully expected that at any moment they would relent and call out the firing squad to end our misery. Our stripes had been loosened so they could be turn off easily after the sentence was read. What a farce? what an over-kill for a minor offense committed by otherwise faithful soldiers. I am sure that most of the officers and NCOS were embarrassed; I know that our men were furious. They had seen too many drunken higher ranks around and resented our being used as examples.

I stood there aghast at the proceedings. Then a habitual expression came over my fact that always appears when I am suffering from frustration or rage. The lower part of my face droops in a form of grimace. Some people learned to their regret that it was not a grin of pleasure or relief. As we started to march to our new places in the rear rank. Captain Davies called out, "Private Cantin, take that damn grin off your face." Later we were to explain the situation to our mutual satisfaction, but at the moment I had had it. All that was on my mind was trying to determine how to get out of it as quickly as possible. A bright idea came to me. I would ask for leave to Paris and turn myself in to the American Consul. Would have worked except that someone must have read my mind and the request was denied. Appeared that someone wanted their full pound of flesh. I stumbled around like a zombi just going through the motions. It was bad for morale. Thank heaven there were none in the platoon who took the opportunity to raze me - I don't think I could have taken it. Afterward I was told that if I had made Paris they would have welcomed me into the U.S. Army as they were badly in need of my type of instructor.

That good and dear man, Colonel C. Y. Weaver, DSO, was in command at the time. He realized the potentials of the situation and ordered two of us to the Divisional School at Ferfay to act as instructors. They made us welcome and immediately appointed us Acting Sergeants. That meant no pay, but it put us back in the sergeant's mess and gave our ego a lift.

So passed a very interesting and enjoyable period doing the things we liked to do - and at which we were proficient. The new crops of NCOS being made to replace casualties were trained by us and you may be sure we included the admonition to stay the hell away from the British. It was hoped that we would be able to stay and finish out the war in this cushy billet - but it was not to be.

We learned via the grapevine about the raging battle at a new place for us called Passchendaele. We had not reached this spot during our Ypres tours, but knowing the terrain we knew it would be a bloody, muddy mess - how right we were again. As the news got worse we started to pack up waiting the call we were sure would come. At the height of the battle, orders came to shut down the school and return all ranks to their respective battalions.

Several of us joined our battalion just as it struggled out to a mud hole called St. Julian. While it was out of the line it was still subject to long-range shelling. There were no dugouts for if you dug one foot you got two feet of water. We were camped in tents resting on wooden floors. The first night when all were asleep a shell landed right in the center of four tents. The ground was so soft that it penetrated to the maximum depth before exploding - thankfully, The tent boards of all four tents were raised about two feet in the air. Nobody moved - merely adjusted their sleeping positions to the new elevation. What else could you possibly do? Mud, mud, everywhere, so the best thing was to stay put.

Out in the rest area we went through the same old regroup and reinforcement bit. The battalion had been hard hit: all new faces, hardly anyone knew anyone else. Captain

Davies was still CO and Bob Whyte was CSM, that just about told the story. This time very little was said by the survivors; they seemed to be struck dumb by their horrid experience up there in the mud. They had my deepest sympathy and I determined to stick around and try to be helpful.

With the same spirit that characterized the "old originals" the new faces stood to and soon things took on a familiar hue with lots of drilling and polishing-up - the things that always build morale in an army. It was at this point in time that a man came into my lire who I was to remember with affection all my days. He was assigned to 12th Platoon which included among its luminaries one Private Alfred H.A. Cantin, aged 18 - I had reached recruitment age at last.

Mr. Hill was the personification of an army officer. Tall, spare, blonde, with a close cropped mustache, his erect bearing was at once the trademark of a soldier. He was very smart also - that helped everybody get acquainted. He observed in the drill sessions the results of my instructional training and asked my why I was a rear ranker. I explained the circumstances and, when he agreed it had been a lousy shame, he became my friend and as such we established complete rapport. He recommended me for a Lance Corporal stripe and here I was on my way up again. All the old resentment disappeared as a joyous younqster determined to "show them". Mr. Hill gave me the platoon to drill and instruct in the subjects I had learned and taught at Ferfay. In no time at all the platoon showed the results of our combined efforts. I do not remember the current platoon sergeant's name, but I do know that he was more than a little jealous of the relationship between myself and Mr. Hill. I was sorry about this as I realized he had not had the opportunity to gain the instructional experience that had been granted to me.

Mr. Hill was a first-class officer in every respect. At the beginning he would ask for advice. Soon it was a matter of announcing a decision and asking for comments. Then the orders came clear and loud - we had rull confidence in him and would back him to the limit.

We went back to Vimy and took over the line at Avion, this time right in the ruins of the village. The enemy started up his big push at the Somme. We watched the line on our right recede every day and heard ail sorts of rumors about the success the enemy was enjoying. Again the "all is lost" boys were at it with their blasted rumors. We knew it must be getting desperate as each day we were asked to spread our forces until there was not more than a hanful at any one point. It became a series of strong points rather than a continuous line. Our platoon was asked to defend a stretch usually occupied by a company - it was a scaring time to be sure. I recall one day when a sapper sergeant in a very highly emotional state came to our trench to pull out his men. We were doing the digging while they did the telling, but we all knew it was just a matter of exercise. In a loud voice he told his men to hurry as we were about to be sur- rounded. I grabbed him by the throat and choked him off, promising to blow his head of if he did not shut up. Panic we did not need, and I would have been fully justified in any action I took. Mr. Hill came up to see what was going on and we practically booted the sapper sergeant out of the trench.

Since we were so obviously spread too thin to make a fight or it the order came to take command of no-man's-land and claim ownership up to and including the enemy wire. Quite an objective, but we got away with it. Each night we went out and traveled up and down our front bombing and otherwise heckling the enemy outposts. They must have thought we were nuts. They were our old friends the Saxons and would have been content to make it a quiet tour. They pulled another trick out of their bag in an effort to deter us. They erected posts midway between the lines and painted their side with luminous paint. They then set a sniper's rifle on the post. At any time they could not see the paint they fired. Thereafter we went straight ahead to the wire and looked back to see where the traps were placed. Another instance of the move and counter-move of warfare.

It was a very nervous time and our apprehensions were riding high. Remembering what had happened before under such conditions, I anticipated an "identify enemy your front" order at any time. Wishing to have an ace in the hole, while on patrol we made a preliminary cut in the enemy wire, cutting obliquely so it wouldn't be detected by the use of glasses in the daytime. We left about four feet on their side as a blind. Sure enough, the order came. I told Mr. Hill what we had done and suggested that he recommend a sneak raid to accomplish the identification purpose.

He took the idea to company HQ and it was approved. Mr. Hill was to lead the raiders while Mr. J. Jarvis (another of the swell guys) was to complete the wire cutting. He assigned part of his men to the right flank to be ready to cut the wire to allow the raiding party to come out. He elected to go with me to cut the last few feet. Concurring with my suggestion, he took a few men up the line a ways and heckled the outpost we were going to go after. Each time they threw a bomb and the enemy fired I had a safe chance to cut another piece of the wire. It worked like a charm and soon I gave the signal to Mr. Jarvis that it was ready. He joined me and we all went in through the wire to set up a defense for the raiders if needed. They came through us and went on to clean out the outpost. All were killed, but the paybooks and other identification was sufficient. Watching the progress I pointed out to Mr. Jarvis that the quickest and safest way home was to follow the raiders. He agreed, and soon we were among those calling out the password "Bonnie Dundee" to insare not being shot by oar own men. A few moments later when the enemy weighed the situation and determined how we had gotten in he laid down a strong barrage in that area, but we were home free.

We had accomplished our objective with not a single casualty How different it was down the line where my brother, Joseph N. Cantin, formerly with the 51st, was serving with the 4th Battalion. First Division. They elected to put on a box barrage raid and while successful, resulted in a number of casualties, including my brother Joe. How they saved his arm I will never know. To the day he died he retained a wet scab at the elbow for which the doctors had no answer.

Oh, yes, I was recommended for and received a Military Medal for my part in the show - the good old "McConnicky Medal" named after the obnoxious tinned stew by the same (?) name.

We were greatly encouraged by the news that a labor unit had stopped the enemy drive just short of Albert. We figured that he had shot his bolt and soon there would be a biq counter-attack. We soldats were getting pretty wise concerning the expected moves by the brass - we instinctively knew more than they would give us credit for. Our calculations proved to be true and we would play a big part in their plans.

The 58 days we spent in the line at this time was the longest tour we ever made in combined front, support and rear lines, let alone doing it all up in a make-shift, undefendable series of connected shell holes dignified by the term "our front line."

We were congratulated for the fine way we stood up under the constant strain of the day to day uncertainty. Relief came and we went back to the training area to spruce up, reorganize, retrain and be equipped to start out on what was at long last to prove to be at least the end of the beginning.

# **THE ROAD TO VICTORY**

During the next few months, we were to undergo one of our most intensive training periods. Judging from the syllabus, we knew that once again something big was in the wind. We also seemed to sense that they were not going to waste what was proving to be their best combat divisions in any small-fry engagement. We were heading at long last toward the "big one," and we all smelled victory in the air.

The training routine concentrated on open warfare with at least some emphasis remaining on trench warfare tactics. The most disappointing part of the training was that it failed to include any close cooperation with the tanks. We felt that this was a big mistake because we appreciated the effectiveness of these new war machines and believed we should be trained to work with them. It appeared that the lesson of Cambrai had not made too much of an impression on either the brass to use the tanks or the home authorities to provide them. It was all very vague.

A good deal of enjoyment was had by all ranks during this period. The weather was delightful, and all the things a combat soldier finds important were close at hand—booze, food, etc. One of the highlights for me came when "Deacon" White, that grand old man of sports, asked me to join his track team and compete at the Dominion Day Sports at Tinques. He took a look at my long legs and thought he could make a half-miler out of me. I was willing to try—anything to break the monotony of drilling. To my surprise, it turned out that Deacon was a good judge of human flesh. I won the half-mile in excellent time and came back to help win the mile medley relay race with those fine athletes: R. Dancocks, Earl Hay, and Eddie Bell. Our picture taken with Deacon is included on the back page of the *Fortyniner*, Vol. 1, No. 6.

I later ran at the Corps Sports but ran afoul of some real talent who showed me how the half-mile should be run. Deacon consoled me by saying they were very close to being professionals and not front-line soldiers like us.

I had been going along doing my bit and not too unhappy since I now had two stripes back, but I still wanted that third one. My chance came when it was announced that there was one opening in the Battalion. I am sure that Colonel Weaver felt it would not be wise to just give it to me as others might think he was favoring an old "original." So they decided to open it up to competition to all eligibles. This suited me fine because I knew I was ready and that Mr. Hill had 12th Platoon in excellent shape.

The day of the competition came and with it more brass than I had ever seen in one spot before. They had been informed of the event and took the occasion to see how the Battalion's training had progressed. I got the guys together and explained the deal—that at last, I had a chance to get my old job back. They were all with me to a man. Even those who were not present at the time of my demotion were sympathetic and were pulling for me. Naturally, in a facetious tone, I promised what would happen to anyone who fouled it up.

The competition was elective—do what you wanted. I started out with close-order drill while they were still looking their best. The days at Ferfay and Mr. Hill's work showed up at once. I'll always remember the final maneuver. While still on the move, at a calculated point, I gave the order "Present Arms." It was halt, left turn, form two deep, and come down to the present without further command. I timed my movement to come down to the present in concert with them. We got a round of applause from the brass and a large group of the curious who had come out to observe.

Next, I took them through the new open-order drills we had been practicing so diligently. Then back to the good old trench raid tactics we knew so well. When it was over, Colonel Weaver, Captain Davies, and Mr. Hill congratulated the entire platoon for their superb performance. Then the circle came around full turn. Captain Davies, with a smile on his face, said, "Sergeant Cantin, you can put that damn grin back on your face again." I did not take the time to explain the wide difference in my case between a grin and a grimace. I just broke out in a good hearty laugh, and any tension between us disappeared for good.

In my opinion—and it was shared by many—Captain S.J. Davis, MC-Bar, was one of the finest Company Commanders we ever had. The brass was also very impressed. The commanding general came over personally to congratulate Mr. Hill, the men, and me. He declared us the divisional champions and ordered that we wear the divisional emblem (a dumbbell) on our battle patches as evidence. Never was there a prouder moment for us all. The other competitors were also congratulated. They did fine, but this was our day, and we were not to be denied.

That night I was back in the Sergeant's Mess again. If I seem to stress this point, it is because it was just that important in my life. The chow was better since we augmented regular rations with our own funds. But most important was the close comradeship that exists between soldiers of this rank. We were just as exclusive as any officers' club, and most of the important affairs of the Company were discussed and decisions made in this friendly atmosphere. If you have to be a soldier, my advice is to do it as a sergeant—it's a good job.

It appeared that all good things were happening to me at this point. There was to be a big parade in Paris to celebrate Bastille Day on July 14, 1918. I rather think it was also designed to give the Parisians a lift in morale due to the shelling of the city by the enemy "Big Bertha" from a distance of nearly fifty miles. The shells came over at fifteen-minute intervals, disturbing an otherwise peaceful scene.

The Allies were invited to send representative contingents to take part. They made up a British Battalion consisting of one Company of the Guards Regiments, one of Highland Regiments, one of the senior British Regiments, and one of Colonials. Our Company was made up of one platoon each of the Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, and Canadians. Our platoon comprised men from the various Canadian Battalions. Of all things, I was selected to represent the 49th. The specifications called for a sergeant with battle decorations, a red 1914-15 service stripe, and at least six feet tall. Since I qualified on all counts and was a pretty good drill soldier, the good luck fell to me.

What a parade! Included in the line of march were units from all the Allies. The colorful uniforms of the French, our bagpipes, drum and bugle corps, and bands—bands, bands, bands! It was the greatest I have ever seen or marched in. In later years, I was to lead a championship foot drill team in American Legion parades that took all day to pass a given point, but none ever surpassed this one. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

When I got back from this enjoyment, it was time to put the toys away and face the facts of war. We were briefed on what to expect, but nobody told us where we were going. Our movement toward Amiens was one of the best-kept secrets of the war. Everything was very hush-hush and had all the aspects of a good old mystery drama. For once, the rumor boys found no one willing to listen to them. It developed that a place called Sains-en-Amienois was to be our destination.

Never had I seen the morale of the Battalion in better shape. We were well drilled, prepared for what was to come, and confident that we could do it. (My new status as platoon sergeant no doubt contributed greatly to my personal morale.) One of the orders of the day was that no one was to fall out during the long route marches. If anyone faltered, others took over their packs and rifles so they could stay in ranks. It was an odd-looking army marching along with some men carrying nothing while others had double loads. The officers and NCOs got into the act and all carried double. It was a proud moment when, just before reaching the point where we knew the Battalion C.O. would be waiting to observe our condition, every man would take back his equipment, and we came to route march attention with rifles slung. As we approached the C.O., each platoon commander, officer, or NCO saluted, gave eyes right, and proudly reported all present and correct. The returned salute and the smile of appreciation was our finest reward for our efforts.

On our way to our destination, several humorous incidents took place that emphasized the place of scrounging and pilfering in a soldier's way of life. Every army from the beginning of time knew and accepted the skill and ingenuity of soldiers in helping themselves to whatever they needed—usually when no one in authority was observing. While we have advanced beyond the booty days of old when slaves (usually female) were the rewards of war, we are not adverse to lifting a desired object left carelessly unguarded by its owner. However, we were pikers when compared to what happened in World War II. I am told by the Americans that they referred to their scrounging as "liberation." Maybe so, but how do you stretch this innocent-sounding phrase to include the entire contents of a castle? When you learn of the loss of a complete field hospital in the present unpleasantness in Vietnam—wherein the tents, equipment, medical supplies, and the trucks transporting the lot to a supposed destination disappeared without a trace after leaving the unloading dock—you realize how far it can go.

Anyway, at the end of each day's tiresome march, having been fed a good hot meal from the field kitchen that had preceded us, we settled down to another night under the stars. All you did was select a spot under a tree, if possible, to keep off the dew, dig a small hole for your hip bone, huddle together as close as possible to take full advantage of mutual body heat, and then drop into the sleep of exhaustion.

This one night, we were awoken by the Provost sniffing around for evidence of some sort. We did not relish the interruption as it was hard to get back to sleep. We needed the rest for the next day's grind. Nothing was said, and it remained a mystery to me until late in the following day when a nearly empty bottle of crème de menthe was passed along the line and reached me. Since there was only one drink left, I helped myself and threw the empty away. Then it dawned on me that it was common knowledge that one of our senior officers enjoyed a nightcap of this particular liqueur. Funny how a combat soldier can ease his conscience under such circumstances.

I met the officer the night of the wild Prince of Wales banquet at the old Macdonald Hotel and told him about it. I did not reveal the name of the culprit (Herbie L.). He laughed and, being a very smart old guy, he said, "Hell, I knew it was in your platoon, but after getting over being mad I had to laugh at and admire the audacity with which the snatch was made."

When a soldier has a strong urge for something, he is a hard man to stop. One of our best trading materials for the elusive and almost non-existent cognac was our wonderful Stanfield woollen underwear. Anyone who could get his hands on an extra suit was a cinch for a bottle of fairly good cognac—the "nectar of the gods"—at least it was to us. It was an odd and funny sight to see the old grandmas working in the fields, bent over and unashamedly displaying their Stanfield underwear. They would not cut off one precious inch of the material—just wrap it around and let it hang. Tins of bully beef had their value for plain vin, but it took Stanfields to get the hard stuff.

Dave Barbour and I enjoy laughing about my beloved chicken thief, Mickey Lynch, who was killed in the final days at Cambrai. Mickey just could not exist on plain army rations. In the dark of night, he would invade the nearest farmyard and purloin a couple of fat hens. Then started the ritual he called "Peory" (I never did learn why). It consisted of borrowing a dixie from the cook kitchen, lifting some salt and whatever vegetables were available, and off to the nearest woods or other cover to boil it up. The next morning, we filled our small dixies with the cold stew, and later in the day, it sure beat bully and hardtack. The fact that the officers' mess had to come up with the money to repay the farmer was lost to us. They were good sports about it, and while there was some grumbling from a few, most accepted it as part of the fortunes of war.

To digress a moment, I must relate that it was heart-rending when we marched through dear old Ferfay for the last time. What happy memories that little town had for so many of us. Helping ourselves to the wine barrel taken from the church (for which we later paid); shooting the enormous wild Belgian hares with our .303 rifles and scaring hell out of the villagers with the many stray shots; the enjoyment gained from our association with other school instructors and the French families with whom we were billeted. My family had a beautiful young daughter about my age named Marie. We had a regular high school romance going. There was much talk about whether I would like France after the war or if she would like Canada. The last day we marched through Ferfay, heading south to Amiens, the whole family walked alongside me until we reached the edge of town. They stopped, I kissed Marie without breaking step, and marched out of her life—I never looked back.

Back to the facts of war. At around midnight on the 7th of August, we moved up to our staging area from which we would shove off at daybreak. Only desultory shelling took place during the night as evidence that our hush-hush had worked and the enemy was fooled for once at least. In a short time, the barrage opened up. Nothing to match Vimy, of course, but with the presence of the tanks and with the element of surprise in our favor, it did the trick. When we arrived at the trench mats that had been stretched over the marsh we had to cross, we were met by that stalwart of all stalwarts, Lt. Colonel C.Y. Weaver, DSO. Here was a man we knew would be right up there where the action was going on. He did more front-line time than any other officer to my knowledge. He was wounded more times. He knew many members of his command by their first names. He was a combat soldier's idea of the real thing—we were all determined not to let him down.

As each platoon came along, he had a personal word of encouragement for each commander, officer, or NCO, and a cheery word to all the men. As we passed with Mr. Hill leading, I was at my proper place bringing up the rear. He said a few words to Mr. Hill and as I approached, we came to a stop. The Colonel put his arm on my shoulder and said, "Alfred, you know what to do when you get to the other side. Assist Mr. Hill to regroup, pick up any stragglers, and get into that open formation you showed us and keep going. Everything will come out all right." How right he was. A few hours later, we had gone about fifteen kilometers and reached our objective with only a few casualties. What a different kind of war this was. We thought it was goodbye to trenches forever. It would be only a couple of days before we were to learn that it was not so.

Then came the most spectacular sight of the whole war. I looked back and to my utter surprise—no one had warned us of their presence—there came a whole brigade of British Cavalry. What a sight! We were thrilled to our very bones—it was magnificent. They came on at a trot in perfect drill formation. Horses as well as men knew this was what they had trained for, and they were ready. A Major approached me and in that voice that only an old-time British Cavalry Officer could muster, called out, "Sergeant, where the hell are they?" I pointed out a ridge just ahead where an RAF plane was strafing a sunken road. I advised that they flank the hill and take them from the flank and rear. My words fell on deaf ears. He had come this far to lead a proper cavalry charge, and by God, sir, that was just what he was going to do.

We raised a lot of drooping communication wires so they could pass through. At that moment, he cast off his tin hat, reached down, and got his parade hat, drew out an old "Excalibur" that looked to be five feet long, stood up in his stirrups, and bellowed, "Charge!" They were off, leaving us foot sloggers cheering like mad. I wish I could say that it was a resounding success. I was right in my estimation of the problem, but he elected to try it head-on, and while it was brave, thrilling, and magnificent beyond words, it did not do the job. Riderless horses and walking wounded soon told the cost of gallantry in the face of heavy machine gun firepower.

We were relieved by the 32nd British Division to give us a rest and be ready for the next move. As they went through us in the only formation they apparently knew—column of fours with no intervals—our hearts sank for them. We noted the absence of any of the tools of war that we knew were needed. They were either very young or very old. With their long Enfield rifles and leather equipment, they looked like something left over from the Boer War. They were a cheerful lot and called out, "Good show, Canada, we'll give you a bloody rest." I think they knew they were being called on for the role of sacrificial goats.

We knew we would get only one night's rest at the best. Sure enough, they went ahead as far as they could go and piled up on the barbed wire of the old Somme battlefield at a place called Parvillers—a spot we were soon to get well acquainted with. The next day came a call to conference with Lt. I. Mooney, who had taken over the Company. At this point, due to the excessive officer casualties, we went in with either an officer or senior NCO, seldom both. Mr. Mooney had four platoon sergeants at his command. He told us what had happened to the unfortunate 32nd Division and instructed us to go forward and prepare for an orderly relief. This is a battle art in itself. Too much noise or exposure to sight, and the enemy knows what is going on and, being aware of the crowds and confusion, just lobs them over knowing that he is almost certain to double up the casualties. From long practice, we had learned to get in and out almost like snakes.

We took to the old communication trenches and very carefully made our way up to the point where the 32nd had met its Waterloo. It was a gory sight—bodies lying everywhere. The wounded were mostly unattended, suffering their pain in the stoical manner of the soldier. There was no panic; those remaining were just struck dumb by the impact of their experience. I found a very young one-pip subaltern who was apparently all the officer there was left. I explained the situation to him and told him we would relieve his unit at dark. Knowing their inexperience, I impressed upon him the importance of being quiet so as not to alert the enemy. We went from man to man telling them what was going to happen. We complimented them for their excellent showing under such terrible odds and begged them to follow instructions in order to protect their lives as well as those of our men.

Going into this scrap, I still carried a deep grudge against anything British. I was still outraged at the cavalier treatment I had received at their hands. But it all left me that night. These men had lived up to all that could have been expected of them, and they had to be admired. What they lacked in training and equipment, they more than made up for in plain old guts. The Lieutenant was the last to leave. He stood there encouraging his men and cautioning them to be quiet, admonishing them that the first man to light a fag would no doubt be shot on the spot. It worked, and the relief was carried out without incident.

A last word about this officer (under these conditions nobody ever got to learn names)—he was even younger than my now nineteen years. He did not come up to my chest. Obviously, he had little, if any, training for his job. As the last man out, he stopped to say goodbye and thank me. I saluted, he returned it, and then in a moment of relaxation from military protocol, we embraced. Good thing it was dark, for it never would have done for an observer to see tears in the eyes of two combat vets. I often wondered how he related the details of his first battle experience and how he described the big tall kid of a sergeant who tried to be helpful to him. In my opinion, if anyone ever deserved a medal, it was this brave little boy-man.

The next day, we had another Company conference. Each platoon was given a certain trench to take. Good thing someone had thought to retain the aerial photographs of the old battle line—they were life savers. My platoon (12th) was assigned the battered communication trench on the right flank paralleling the Roye Road. The Pats were to be on the other side of the road. I was cautioned to watch for them and make sure they were keeping up; otherwise, we would be easily flanked and destroyed.

As the light started to fail, we just opened up with our bombs and away we went. No barrage—no artillery preparation of any kind—no tanks, just us and our long training for trench warfare. At the moment of takeoff, we heard the strangest noise overhead. Something was about to hit. We were sure it was some newfangled contraption the enemy had dreamed up to try out on us. "It" landed just in front of the parapet, and we waited for the explosion. None came, and we were on our way. Later we learned that it was the engine of an RAF observer plane that we had been watching lazily circling up there for quite a while. Apparently, the enemy had also observed his actions, for they plotted it well and brought him down with only one group of shells. His body landed up ahead nearly alongside that of an enemy field gunner who had died at his piece while firing point-blank right out in the open. All the brave men were not on our side.

The Parvillers scrap is accurately described in THE book, and hardly anything more could be said about it other than to re-emphasize that it was strictly a small unit and personal fight. Every officer, NCO, and a lot of the rear rankers showed the leadership everyone felt sure they possessed in large quantities. We had proven once again that we had what it took to cope with any situation.

A mention of Lt. "Ike" Mooney, MC, is particularly in order at this point. He was a stranger to all of us as he had come over from another Company. His coolness, matter-of-fact manner, team leadership, and courage made an instant hit with everyone. As far as we were concerned, he was tops—up to a certain point, that is. The poor fellow contracted a crippling attack of diarrhea right in the middle of the fight. In no time at all, he was strictly persona non grata. Nobody wanted to get downwind from him. As his face got more and more ashen from the weakening effects of this offensive malady, we thought we were going to lose him for sure. Not "Ike" Mooney—he had come to stay, and stay he did. What a man!

This was one engagement in which the records told a fair story of what took place and who did it. However, as always seems the case, many of the little but important things got left out. As an example, when we cleared the first forward section of our trench assignment, I checked to see how the Pats were doing. Since they were nowhere in sight, I detailed two men to remain at the point where the trench intersected the road—the old cross-over had long been filled in. The enemy was on one side with us on the other. The two men were in startling contrast as individuals. One was at least 40 years old (I forget his name); the other was Dan Driscoll, a youngster of my own age. Both are included in the Ferfay platoon picture. They stayed put while we proceeded ahead. Soon I heard a pretty fair bomb fight going on, and with a couple of men, went back to check—we just could not permit the enemy to come over that road.

As I arrived, the enemy landed a "potato masher" bomb right under Dan and his pal. Afterwards, he told me that after a lot of throwing and ducking, they had run out of poop and, while they saw the bomb coming, they lacked the strength to get out of the way. If these two men had backed away from the fight, there might well have been a totally different story to tell about the success at Parvillers. In a short time, the Pats came up, and the fight went on to our objective.

Dan Driscoll never came back to us. Years later, when I arrived in Los Angeles in search of a new home base, I walked up to the traffic officer on the corner and asked for directions. I was very tired from a long bus ride and did not even look up into his face. His first words in answer to my question were, "Well, you old so-and-so, aren’t you even going to say hello?" It was Dan himself. Later, we were to spend twenty years together on the Los Angeles Police Department. He retired and died at a comparatively young age. He was always bothered by the many pieces of the bomb still embedded in the place where he sat down. It is strange how people become reunited after such mutually indelible experiences.

When we got out to rest, they started to pass out the compliments. If we thought they were slightly lavish, that did not make them any the less welcome. Mr. Mooney, now recovered from his "stinking" malady, did something I thought was long overdue. When it comes to battle decorations, you are on touchy ground. So many men do heroic deeds and never get noticed. Others do likewise at a time and place where the action is observed by a superior officer. The former is overlooked, and the latter picks up the accolades. Mr. Mooney decided upon a plan to at least try to overcome this inequity. He called all ranks together and asked them to indicate who, in their opinion, deserved special mention or a decoration. It worked beautifully. There were few gripes about the awards for this fight. Everyone was satisfied. If nothing else, they had had a say in the matter—something we all like to have happen to us.

In the discussion, my name was put forth by several, and in conjunction with Mr. Mooney’s recommendation, I was awarded the DCM. I was very proud, but very humble. How could you be otherwise with such a great bunch to back you up? I carried a small wrench that I took off the enemy trench mortar mentioned in the records in my tool chest for years. A five-mark note taken from one of the crew remains in my possession to this day as a grim reminder of the perils of war.

Then came THE day. I was called to Battalion headquarters to report to Colonel Weaver. He complimented me and my platoon for their work and was happy to learn of my new decoration. Then he nearly floored me. He said I was to be sent to Bexhill, England, for officer training. I protested, relating my age, lack of education, and other desirable background for commissioned rank. Again it was that friendly hand on the shoulder as he said, "Alfred, you have been here just too long. I fear that your luck is about to run out." This from a man who had done more front-line hours than any of us. I continued to protest that I did not want to leave for this purpose. Then it ceased to be first names, and it was, "Sergeant, you will report to the Brigadier as ordered." I gave him one of my best salutes, turned, and left the dear old Battalion for the last time. He gave the same treatment to CSM "Bob" Whyte, and he joined me at Bexhill. Afterwards, we both paid tribute to the Colonel and agreed that but for his kindness and consideration, we would both have ended up in lonely French graves. We were both deeply fond of this wonderful man.

On reaching the Brigadier’s HQ in an enemy field gun position we had overrun a few days back, I was told to report to his quarters. He was a stranger to me, which was not unusual as changes were always taking place. He put a bottle of Scotch on the table and invited me to have a drink. This I did not think either proper or wise, so I declined with thanks. He then looked me up and down—observing my full nineteen years, 1914-15 service stripe, gold wound stripe, and medal ribbons—and asked me just one question: "Why the hell do you want to give up the best job in the army to become an officer?" Since this was my own estimate of the rank, I nearly told him I did not want to go. However, with a vision of Colonel Weaver’s displeasure, I came up with, "Because my Colonel told me to." The answer got a chuckle out of him, and he told me to hurry and catch a lorry about to leave for the railhead. I threw him my best parade salute and made for the lorry. With that simple operation, my association with the fighting war came to an end.

In the company of several others from the Battalion, I finally reported in to the Alberta Regimental Depot, 21st Reserve Battalion, at Bramshott, England. There we were reunited with all the "old originals" who had made it to Blighty and were awaiting return to Canada. What a night that was in the Sergeants' Mess. My brother Joe came over to see me, and we put a sergeant's tunic on him (and several others) so they could join in the fun. Nobody checked credentials that night. We had a lot we wanted to get out of our systems, and this was the proper place. We were loud in our praise of those we thought had proven themselves and equally critical of those we felt to be foul balls. There must have been a lot of red ears in this world that night.

The next morning, big heads and all, we entrained for Bexhill and the start of a whole new approach to army life. Getting off the train, still with the hangovers, we were met by a snappy Highlander sergeant who promptly introduced himself as one of our future instructors. We were laden with all our personal possessions and thought we would have a lorry waiting or at least be permitted a casual stroll into town. Yikes! We had only gone a few paces when the command came to a halt. Says our friendly (?) instructor (no doubt noticing our unsoldierly physical condition), "Gentlemen" (the first time we were so addressed), "we don’t walk like that around here. Let’s start out right, and right now." Quick march! With him bellowing cadence and our heads splitting, we finally made our destination, which proved to be in a row of old apartments facing the beach. Pretty cushy for a bunch of old trench rats.

We were assigned to cadet companies, with Bob Whyte and I drawing the same unit. Then started a hard-working, hard-studying period, learning to be officers as well as soldiers. I had thought I was pretty good on the parade ground, but these fellows showed me quickly that I had not learned it all.

One of the lessons taught remained with me all my life and greatly to my benefit. An officer instructor pointed out that up to now, all we had had to do was obey orders and pass them on. From now on, we would be responsible for originating orders on our own and providing information for the guidance of higher command in making their decisions. He then proceeded to show that an officer not only has to do the work, he must also be prepared to write lucid, legible reports on what he had done and include intelligent recommendations based on his estimate of a given situation. The emphasis on report writing was of inestimable value to me in my future work, especially in the police department.

Dire reports were seeping through about what was going on in France. If anyone thinks that the rumor boys are restricted to the ranks, he has another think coming. The officers around us were even better at the art. The casualties were mounting. Sergeant Carver, who took over my platoon, was killed, as was his successor. It made a deep impression on me as I realized that Colonel Weaver’s conclusions about my luck running out were probably true. I learned of Mr. Hill’s finest day when he stood out in the open and shot it out with an enemy officer. How I wished I could have been there. I know I would not have moved a finger to interfere—it was his show, and he got a well-deserved MC for his courage. I never saw Mr. Hill again after the war. That was my loss to be sure, and I hope that he looked at it in the same light. He was always tops in my book, and for the many helping hands he extended to me in my hours of need, I shall be eternally grateful.

Open warfare was proving to be extremely hazardous to officers and senior NCOs. It went back to that first disastrous effort at Sanctuary Wood when the command was not "forward" but "follow me." Leaders of this caliber will always suffer the highest proportion of the total casualties. Simple analysis of the records proves this point. They are the inspirational examples around which confident men will always rally—they will always pay the stiffest price. The 49th Battalion was exceptionally endowed with the highest character of leadership—the Battalion’s record of success remains their finest monument.

The news of the successful pursuit of the war was tempered by an emergency call for officer replacements. Not waiting for the completion of the full course, they selected a group of us that they felt were a little better done on both sides than the others. I was included. My commission is dated November 5, 1918—only six days before Armistice. Our last night at Bexhill was one more to be remembered. There was a big banquet, and we all let our hair down together. There were many a toast to those who did not come back and to us as we started out on our new roles as officers and gentlemen.

As customary, we were given five days’ graduation leave and told to report to Canadian HQ at Argyle House, London, on November 11th to obtain our transportation orders for France. I was in Scotland visiting some of my mother’s relatives in Glasgow (the place I had given as my birthplace on enlistment). I grabbed the Royal Scot for London when it was reported that an Armistice was imminent. Arriving in London on the morning of the 11th, I found a city gone stark mad. Everyone developed a mania to wear someone else’s headgear. I arrived at Argyle House with a silk top hat in place of my own military hat. They laughed when I got inside and told me to forget about it and go on indefinite leave until I went broke. I protested that I would prefer to rejoin my Battalion as previously stated in my orders. I was told that all personnel movement to the front had been suspended. This was not quite true, and I learned of several who used political pull to do the trick. They wanted service in France to appear on their records so they would not be restricted to telling their grandchildren about the battle of London, Bramshott, etc.

So it was back to the London streets and about a full week of fun and games before my funds ran out. Then it was back to HQ to brace the good old paymaster. Using all my old ranker guile, I tried to wheedle some cash out of him, but in my new exalted position, everything was put to my bank account, and I was already overdrawn. He noted the DCM ribbon and asked if I had received the 20 quid that went with it. First I had ever heard about it, so he gave me the money, and I was back on the street again with walking-around money in my pocket. After spending all the money, I had to surrender the battle of London and retreat to the reserve battalion at Bramshott.

The denial of my earnest request to be permitted to rejoin the 49th in France brought the whole war to a crashing halt as far as I was concerned. Everything that happened to me thereafter was strictly anti-climactic. Anything I did, or anything that happened to me, should not in any way be compared to the sense of loyalty and devotion I felt toward MY Battalion that now seemed to be lost to me forever.

# **AFTERMATH**

The following two months at the 21st Reserve were anything but pleasant. The newly commissioned "rankers" found that a severe schism existed between them and the "bombproofers" who had never seen service at the front. They had sat out the war in a pretty cushy billet. I wonder how they explained their "war" experiences to their grandchildren. We heard ourselves being referred to as impudent upstarts. In return, we cast insulting aspersions upon their service records, none of which helped to create good feelings.

Anyway, they kept to their side of the table, and we to ours. It got a little sticky when it became obvious that if there were any unpleasant duty assignments, we got them—never them. It came to the breaking point at the height of the influenza epidemic. This was worse than combat. Men would go to sleep and never wake up. Each morning, an officer and a working party had to go into the barracks with the medical officer and supervise the removal of the dead. Naturally, it was not a pleasant task, but it had to be done. It was the new officers who drew the duty; the others clung to their quarters on some flimsy pretense or other. The thought of contracting the deadly disease again separated the men from the mice. Looking back, I do not remember any of the officers dying from the flu—it seemed to be the men who suffered. I often wondered why.

Somebody said that booze was a good preventative. Nobody knew for sure, but any excuse was better than none to indulge our appetites. We went to the mess each morning and signed for two bottles of Scotch apiece. Tucking a bottle in each pocket of our trench coats, we faced the day. We plastered ourselves and each of the men who accompanied us into the barracks. We soaked our face masks (crude substitutes for the real thing, as usual) with the precious liquid—and prayed. It turned out to be a pretty drunken detail, but we got the job done. We were asked if we would not like to take our meals in our quarters, a suggestion we repulsed with dignity and took our flu bugs right into the mess where we were given a wide berth.

When it was over, we were billed for the booze. None of us had anywhere near the amount of money needed to cover it. We refused, standing on the grounds that if we did the dirty work, the least the others could do was provide the preventative medicine. The argument went on and was finally settled by a very astute colonel who figured he'd better do something before it got out of hand. He suggested that the others "volunteer" their share and declared the matter closed. Closed it might have been, but it did not enhance our popularity, and we were practically ostracized socially.

My brother Joe and my uncle were returning to Canada, and I wanted to have a last visit with them before they left. I requested leave, and it was denied. Furious, because there was no evident reason for the action, and since everyone else was going in and out like flies, I promptly told them to go to hell and took off. I suspected the presence of retaliation for the booze incident. Upon my return, I was informed that I had been booked to return to Canada aboard the *Empress of Asia*. This fine ship from the Vancouver-Hong Kong run was returning after service as a troop ship. Sounded good to me, and I was just as anxious to see the last of them as they were to get rid of me.

It was certainly the long way around to get home. We sailed from Liverpool and proceeded across the Atlantic, through the Panama Canal, and up the Pacific to Vancouver. We were aboard about thirty days in all. At the canal, the American officers took us in charge and showed us the works. They took us across the Isthmus and back by train, and then we went through on the ship. A real tourist's delight. The Americans were determined to show us a good time. It was all first-class travel, of course. I went over steerage on the old *Metagama* but sure came back in style. Funny how quickly one can adjust to luxury. Nothing could have possibly been more pleasurable. It was a fitting end as a fillip to a long, arduous, and dangerous wartime experience.

We were given a rousing welcome by the people of Vancouver and stayed overnight at the old Vancouver Hotel, which I was to watch being torn down during a return visit after World War II. It was a shame to see it go, for it represented a lot of history of the city. It died hard because of its solid construction; the blasters and bulldozers had their work cut out for them.

We took the CPR to Edmonton, and after a last night of revelry in the dining car, we arrived home to face the cold facts of peace and the bitter weather. Walking jauntily from the comfort of the heated car, with no protection against the January cold, I quickly froze both ears and my nose. I do not think I was ever any madder in my life. My wounded ear started to act up and burn like fire. My first thought was how to get the hell out of there. It dawned on me that one of the most important reasons for joining up was to get out of the cold. I had no affinity for it and little or no bodily resistance against its effects on my person. In plain words, I hated it. If my family had not been waiting for me, I am sure I would never have left the comfortable heat inside the station. Happily for my later life, I somehow survived the first shock and decided to play the hand out before making any radical decisions.

I enjoyed the reunion with my mother, brothers, and sister, but soon my restless spirit started to plague me. The full impact of where I stood in civilian life hit me right in the face. I was suddenly a highly trained and skilled combat officer out of a job, due to the fact that there was no call for such workers anymore. No formal education, no civilian training of any kind, no job or prospect of one—I became another piece of the wreckage of the post-war period. The Battalion was still overseas, and I had none of the old reliable friends to turn to for advice and guidance. At nineteen, I still was in need of some.

The government was most helpful to a point. They gave me six months on full pay, and after a medical examination that declared me 100% fit, they took out all the lead field fittings in my mouth and replaced them with silver. They had used lead in the field for the simple reason that it was considered temporary—either the patient would be killed sooner, or they could patch it up after the war. Not too unsound reasoning at that.

With many of the others, I hung around town indulging in the fun and games that always follow the end of a war, soldiers and civilians alike trying to adjust to the new outlook on life. Then came the day when the Battalion came home. We all donned our uniforms and formed a unit to march in the rear. It was nothing like the thrill we would have felt marching in the ranks of our old platoons.

Things were getting a little hectic for me about this time. It was the old story of the devil and idle hands, and the bootleg booze was filthy. My first company commander, Major H.E. Daniel—the same officer who had suggested my medical discharge at the very beginning—learned of my presence in town and invited me to visit him at his office. He recalled our earlier experience and expressed his pleasure that I had gone all the way and done so well. We had an almost father-and-son discussion as I related my work problem and lack of education. He arranged a meeting with an official of the CPR who was a close friend of his. The outcome was that I accepted a job with the promising title of Assistant Agent. I was assigned to the little town of Strome to break in. I quickly discovered that I had been "passed a shovel" again; this time, it was a broom. Again, I started to look for a way out.

Fortunately, at this point, some wise and sympathetic official in government (they are hard to find, I might add) declared all of us underage kids to be totally disabled for the purposes of rehabilitation. I left Strome and returned to Edmonton to attend Alberta College North (on 101 Street south of Jasper). I elected to take a railroad telegraphy and office course. We were given a subsistence as well as having our tuition paid. The ten-month course had the desired effect. My first job back with the CPR, I was the operator and agent, and I passed the broom to the next guy. The experience gained through the course and my time with the railroad stood me in good stead all my life. While it took many years of night school and correspondence courses to make up for the lost educational years while in the army, it at least was a start, and that was what I needed.

Railroading proved to be a good job, except for two drawbacks. First, it was out of town, and I never was a village boy. Secondly, it was highly seasonal. When the grain ran out in December each year, we youngsters without seniority were out of a job until spring. My eyes remained raised to other horizons.

My last winter in Edmonton found me broke and without a job. Things looked bleak indeed. Then I got my first leg-up from that dear man Colonel Weaver. My mother called and said there was a job waiting for me at the City Clerk’s office. It saved the day and held me up until I was recalled to the CPR that spring. For all the fine things he did for me, I have never been able to adequately (or in any other way) repay the Colonel. When I learned of his early death, I was deeply shocked. I was always in hopes of having the opportunity of a heart-to-heart chat during which I might have been able to express in some small way at least part of the feelings I held for him. I knew I had lost a true friend, the kind that is always there when needed—he was one of a kind.

Speaking of my mother, I think everyone will understand the pride with which I remember her. Many people may love their mother and not be particularly proud of her—I had both, love and pride. To identify her as Mrs. Mary A. Cantin, who lived at 13135 West 65th Street, Edmonton, might recall her to some, although I fear that all who knew her have gone. I do not know if any such records were kept, but I think Mother deserves recognition for being a British subject of Irish stock who gave three American sons to the service. The tender age at which we enlisted makes the record more outstanding: Joseph N. Cantin, 17, 51st Battalion; Phillip O. Cantin, 16, 138th Battalion; and myself, 15, 49th Battalion. Joe saw service and was severely wounded while with the 4th Battalion, and Phil served in an ambulance unit and was badly gassed. My sister Esther, who also lives in Los Angeles, and I are the last of the family. All the others are gone.

With the coming of winter in 1922 and with no more work on the CPR and no other prospects, I requested and was given transportation to Portland, Oregon. The chief dispatcher advised me to go there for more experience, and he would wire me when to return. From Portland, I made my way down the coast and finally reached Los Angeles. It was warm and beautiful. I reacted in the manner of the word "EUREKA," which is included in the State of California’s official seal—it means "I have found it." I wish I could say that the city has remained as I first found it, but the huge population growth and change to an industrial area have taken their full toll. I stayed and gave up all thoughts of railroading for good.

My brother Joe had been forced by doctor's orders to leave the Police Department in Edmonton, and he joined my old pal Dan Driscoll on the Los Angeles Department. They both worked on me, and while I did not exactly enjoy the prospect of going back into a uniform again as a private, I finally decided to take a chance. That it was a fortunate decision for me can be seen when one considers the handsome pension on which I am able to enjoy most of the good things in life today.

I had no problem with the examination, but I did have to go before a Federal Court to have my citizenship restored. When the judge checked my birth certificate and my Officer's Certificate of Service, he noted what he thought to be a discrepancy in the ages. I informed him that they were correct and that I had indeed been only 15 when I enlisted. Whereupon he completed the official forms, but he instructed that it be entered into the records that I had never lost my citizenship, as a boy of 15 was not competent to swear allegiance to or from anyone. It would appear that for a time I enjoyed dual citizenship, but when I raised my hand to swear allegiance to the United States and to forgo any such to any foreign power, and especially to King George V of England, it seemed that I was truly back home at last. I was always proud to be an American. If I talk and act like one, it is with the objective of reflecting pride in my country and myself.

After three months of cadet training, I received my first police assignment. Holy Cow—I got a "shovel" again in the form of a raised box in the middle of the street from which I directed traffic as a human semaphore. After a few days of this, it was back to reevaluation again. What was I doing out in the middle of the street? Where had my ambition gone? How do you get the hell out of this? The answer was soon forthcoming. As a part of the enrollment procedure, I had put an "X" after everything I could do, and some that I thought I could do, just in case. It paid off at once. I was called to the Chief's office, and on the basis of my army and railroad experience, plus the fact that I had picked up Gregg shorthand, I was assigned as private secretary to the Chief Jailer. Goodbye shovels forever. I stayed with him four years, and following my first permanent promotion, became Jailer in Charge of the main jail.

It was in this position that I had my last contact with an old Forty-Niner. Walking through the jail one morning on an inspection tour, the cell trusty approached me and said there was a man in the holding tank who knew me and wanted to speak to me. I asked his name, and the trusty in a sheepish voice said, "He told me to tell that so-and-so that he had the Curly Wolf in his lousy trap." That was identification enough. I had him brought to my office. He was the same old con-man of yore. He convinced the cell officer that the invitation included his three chums. They had come down to Los Angeles on a lumber schooner and, like many men of the sea following a night on the town, they had the misfortune to run afoul of the law. We had quite a reunion. They were cleaned up and given a bath. Some good hot coffee, laced with a little of the creature that was always around despite Prohibition, helped to cure the shakes. We laughed about old times and, as always, toasted those who did not come back.

I straightened up the matter of their cases with a sympathetic judge who was also an American Legion pal of mine. I did not dare to let them go, for I was certain they would get right back into trouble again. They enjoyed the full benefits of my quarters until I got off duty and could take them back to their ship. Giving Barron a few bucks for ship canteen purposes (and I slipped a pint aboard for sociability's sake), I saw them off with the old Curly Wolf yelling from the stern that he would be back. Unfortunately (?) he never made it. Even under his terms, he was always welcome.

I nearly made the U.S. Army during World War II. In fact, I was still within the draft age and had to sign up. As the local police were most important to civil defense, we were quickly deferred. However, due to my police command and staff experience, I was deemed needed during the first rush of organization of the military police, and arrangements were made for me to enter as a staff major. It would have been an interesting experience and made me eligible for the lavish veterans' benefits they dish out down here, but a burst appendix knocked out that dream.

After completing twenty-five years of service with the department, I retired in 1949 when a post-operational blood clot forced me out of field command. I never could be happy in strictly staff work—I liked to get out in the field and see how the planning worked out.

For twenty years after retirement, I engaged in the public relations business as an independent contractor in the fields of show business, charity fund-raising, and politics. With my handsome pension, I could pick and choose and work when the spirit moved me. It was a wonderfully independent period in my life, and as I was working with people all the time, it was right down my line. Frankie worked with me, and we both earned our Social Security pensions. I mention these things only to reassure any of my friends who might be interested that no one will ever have to take up a collection for us.

Last June (1972), I made an overnight visit to Edmonton. Frankie and I had been touring the Canadian Rockies by car. She was deeply impressed. I had spent a whole summer at Banff and Lake Louise while working for the CPR and remembered it all so well, but for her, it was all new, and she agrees with me that there is nothing in all the world to equal the beauty and grandeur of the Canadian Rockies. Being so close, I could not resist the urge to detour north to Edmonton in the hope that I might run into some of the old boys.

My luck was in, as I found my dear friend Bob Whyte still around. Unfortunately, he had lost his only son just a few days before our arrival and was not in the spirit of reunion that might otherwise have been the case. We did have a chance to meet and kick the gong around for a while. We drank a toast in good old rum to all our memories and dear friends—here and beyond.

I took the liberty of calling Major W. F. Wakefield, C.D., who I had been informed was the President of the Battalion Association. He received us most cordially and arranged for Frankie and me to have lunch with him and his lovely wife the following day. He also called Col. G.H.K. Kinnaird, one of my old platoon officers, to join us. What a happy moment that was to be reunited after 55 years with a man I had so many reasons to admire and respect—one of the best.

After the Major excused himself due to the pressure of business, the Colonel and I sat down and stirred up old memories. My minor wounds shrank into insignificance as I observed the severity of his wounded arm. As in the case of my brother Joe, it was almost a miracle that the doctors were able to save it. He reminded me of an incident that took place when he first came to the platoon. Many new officers arrived with revolvers and field glasses—a deficiency we were always able to overcome. We old scroungers always knew who had the needed article and how to pry it loose. The then Mr. Kinnaird informed me of his problem, and I promptly produced the needed revolver. He expressed his thanks and, in order to make conversation, I am sure, asked me where I got it. He was treated immediately to combat lesson number one as I replied, "Sir, around here nobody asks anybody where they got anything." We sure had a few good laughs.

Since I had been 18 days on the road and was starting to become somewhat fatigued, I had to get on my way home. I will always be grateful to Major Wakefield for his thoughtfulness in getting us together. It added so much to the pleasure of our Canadian vacation. In the words of the show business lingo, I sincerely hope that we can do it again at least "one more time."

At age 73, I am in comparatively good health—"weight for age," as the horse people say. We keep moving and enjoying life. Our final objective is to keep one jump ahead of the devil while keeping in step with the Lord. When He calls, we will be ready. At that moment, if I can be met at the Gates by Herbie and Mickey, each with a purloined bottle or chicken in one hand and reaching the other out to greet me, I shall feel completely at home. If, as I reach the Bar, I can have as my advocates those beautiful spirits who while on this earth answered to the names of Weaver, Davies, Hill, Mooney, and Wallace, I know my case will be in good hands.

A piece such as this should end in a proper conclusion: I choose to summarize.

Everything I have written and the opinions expressed are mine alone. I did not consult with anyone beforehand. I did check with the book *A City Goes to War* for chronological guidance.

If I have offended in any way the sensitivity of anyone, I am sorry; such was not my intention. I purposely omitted the names of my fellow victims of the incident at Villers au Bois for fear they might have suffered embarrassment—I never did. Admittedly, it was a dubious honor to have been the subject of the only full-dress parade ground court-martial I knew of in the Battalion's history. All it ever did was make me mad and determined to put it all back together again—I hope it is considered that I succeeded.

If I have been critical in part, it was only because the remainder was so praiseworthy.

Finally, at last, I wish to take this opportunity to publicly thank all the Officers, NCOs, and Men of the Original Battalion and their equally worthy successors, living or dead, for their kindness, sympathy, and patience in permitting an underaged, uneducated, and often very obstreperous Yankee boy to join with them in their venture and to grow into manhood within the shadow of their greatness.

Saying farewell has always aroused unhappy emotions for me. I have never been able to fashion an adequate defense against their devastating effects. So let it be in the words of the London music hall ditty of those dear dead days of yore:

"NAP-ooo, TOODLE-ooo, GOODBY-eee."