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"Batty Mac"

Portrait of a Brigade Commander of the Great War, 1915-1917

Ian McCulloch

The Brigade has always been a source of pride and joy to me, and when sorrow came into my life, and my only son was killed in action, it was the Brigade that saved me – pulled me through and comforted me.... When we first mobilized at Mont de Cats, my job was to weld four of the finest battalions Canada sent to the war into a real Brigade – a military Machine that would run smoothly and well. Above all, I was anxious that the Brigade be a military family, we would all love and be proud of.¹

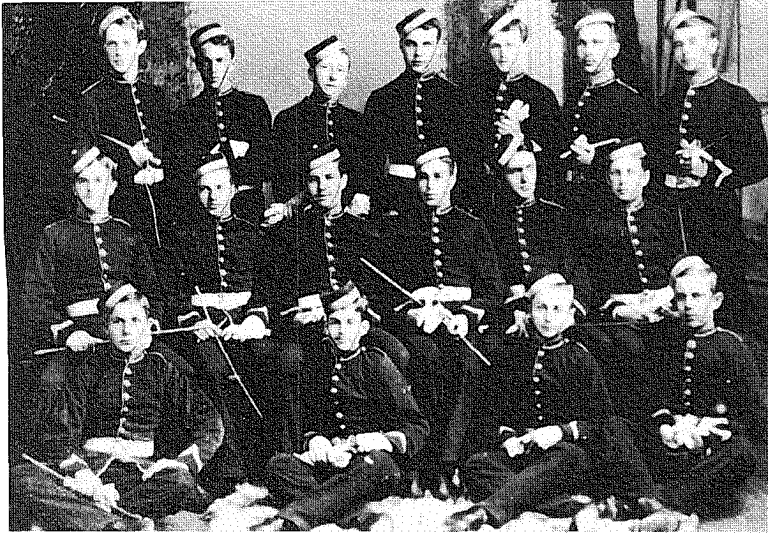
Major-General A.C. "Batty Mac" Macdonell's
undelivered Farewell Address to 7th CIB, 9 June 1917.

Sir Archibald Cameron Macdonell, KCB, CMG, DSO, the first commander of 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade [CIB] was unique, a throwback to the Highland chieftains of yore, known politely amongst his peers and the officer corps as "Fighting Mac." The rank and file simply referred to him as "Batty Mac." G.R. Stevens, who served as a private in the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry [PPCLI] and was eventually commissioned in the regiment during the First World War, remembered Macdonell's forward style of command from the outset.

"Batty Mac, our brigade commander, was crazy as a coot in many ways," he recalled. "I saw him actually get wounded one day. He was wearing...square-pushing jodphurs...bright white.... Somebody said 'Be careful, sir, there's a sniper' and he said 'Fuck the sniper,' climbed up to get a look and the sniper took him through the shoulder and he went ass over apples into his shellhole from which he had emerged.... My god, his language! You could hear him for miles around!"² The furious Macdonell got out of the shellhole and went back to retrieve his walking stick, whereupon another bullet passed through his left arm breaking the bone. Another officer who witnessed the episode recorded that "there is no doubt he would have been killed but for the fact the German sniper was so excited shooting at a General that he couldn't aim straight!"³

Brigadier-General Macdonell was perhaps one of the most eccentric, indomitable and beloved officers to have commanded troops in the First World War. Corporal Will Bird of the 42nd Battalion remembered his brigade commander riding up to say farewell at Chateau de la Haie: "Everyone had a good word for him and stories of his decisions and actions were legion." But when it came time for Macdonell to speak, "the old fire-eater seemed overcome with emotion...put his horse to the gallop and left without saying a word."⁴ Stevens described him in *A City Goes to War*, the Regimental history of the 49th Battalion, as an officer of "a breed whose passing has left this world a poorer place – colourful, fearless, flamboyant in language, canny in battle, unabashedly sentimental and emotional over his men, who in turn regarded him with joy and pride; they treasured his eccentricities, they boasted (yes, and lied) concerning his highly individual behaviour."⁵

Macdonell started his military career by attending Royal Military College [RMC] where he excelled at games. At the end of his course at the College, his report from the examiner in Civil Engineering was, contrary to many academic reports, an accurate prediction. It read: "A man of marked ability who ought to rise rapidly in his profession and be an acquisition to any staff, on account of his high personal qualities."⁶ On 29 June 1886, Macdonell graduated and was



Above left: RMC Class of 1886 – top, l. r.: Kirkpatrick, Worsey, Roe, Coutlee, Yorston, **Macdonell**, Newcombe; middle: Maxwell, Henseley, Perry, Sloggett, Kennedy, Carrington-Smith; front: Cartwright, McColl, Newman, Girouard.

Above: Enlargement of Cadet Macdonell.

Left: Major A.C. Macdonell, Canadian Mounted Rifles.
(Photos from A.C. Macdonell Papers, NAC C145101 & C145102)



awarded a commission in the Royal Artillery of the British Army. Due to financial difficulties in his family, he was unable to accept, but at once joined the Canadian Militia as a subaltern. Two years later, on 6 April 1888, he became a lieutenant in the Canadian Mounted Infantry of the Permanent Force (PF). The following year, however, saw him transfer into the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP) in which he had a distinguished career for the next 18 years, counting service time in South Africa.

Macdonell went to South Africa as a squadron commander in Lord Strathcona's Horse, winning a DSO and several mentions in dispatches before being severely wounded and subsequently evacuated back to Canada for a lengthy convalescence. Eager to get back, however, he was given command of the newly-formed 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles only to arrive in Cape Town a few days after hostilities had ceased. On return to Canada, Macdonell went

back to the RNWMP but later transferred to Lord Strathcona's Horse. He was the regiment's commanding officer at the outset of war.⁷

An intelligent and worldly-wise man, Macdonell predicted in a letter dated 5 August 1914 to his nephew, Hugh Wallis, that "the war is likely to be a long one and many contingents will likely go, at least so it looks to me, & I firmly believe we shall win in the end, but Germany will take a lot of beating indeed." Wallis would become his uncle's Orderly Officer [OO] in 7th CIB HQ in December 1916, but not before joining the 16th Battalion at Valcartier as a private, experiencing Second Ypres and serving as a platoon commander and scout officer with the 13th Battalion, CEF, Royal Highlanders of Canada. Macdonell's prescient letter to his nephew, although unsuccessful in getting his headstrong relative to wait before enlisting, offers some interesting insights on his immediate prospects as a Permanent Force [PF] cavalry officer:

They seem to be giving the cavalry the go bye altogether and I may have to accept an infantry command, a thing more or less incompatible to me. However in wartime, the unfortunate professional soldier must take what he is offered, one can't hang back, but I am much worried over the prospect. Colonel Steele considers that (as in the past) all plums will go to the eastern wirepullers.⁸

Macdonell went to the UK with the First Contingent, and later France, as the Commanding Officer of Lord Strathcona's Horse. After a brief stint as acting-commander of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, Macdonell's pocket diary records on 17 December 1915: "Told officially I am to command 7th Infantry Brigade. Gazette to follow shortly." More interesting, however, are the rough notes in the back of the same diary, however, which give his outline credo on how commanding officers are to command in his new brigade. They read in part:

Orders – When you receive an order:
Say what am I wanted to do? When am I intended to do it, then finish your appreciation.
1st eliminate self
Get ambition to do the best for [all]...
Read your orders carefully and say, Would I know what to do, etc.
Learn to check orders carefully with the map.

Points for COs Care of men,
think of them all the time
How can they be kept dry, fed & spared work, etc. shld be second nature

Discipline Nothing without march discipline [illegible] keeps their place.
Inspection of arms shld be 2nd nature
Duty of an officer ditto in Infantrymen's feet.

HQs, Men & Horses
In battle habit is everything
Position of an O.C.'s [sub] units...
Make more use of horses and men mtd, etc they will help
tremendously. CO should keep in close touch with General...officers
should never be glued to comd HQs
but try to anticipate events by being forward. Get the habit of frequent visits at regular intervals...⁹

The brigade commander refers to "habit" twice in his notes, stating that "in battle, habit is everything." What does he mean? Macdonell, a veteran soldier, knew that battle was a chaotic affair and that in order to retain some semblance of control in combat, "standard operating procedures" would provide the troops with a model of response to follow in times of extreme stress. Also of interest is his personal emphasis upon the importance of orders, his "directives" or operational decisions through which he would exercise command. He tells his COs he wants them to stop and analyze their mission first, do

a time appreciation, then to formulate a plan to execute it thoughtfully and intelligently. He also stresses the administrative aspects of his commanding officers' responsibilities towards their troops and weapons in order to maintain his brigade operationally effective.

Finally, he is concerned with the passage of information and maintaining communications with his battalions. A cavalryman himself, and aware of the importance of timely intelligence and constant contact, he reminds his COs that they have horses. While he is not thinking of horses being useful in trench warfare, he is considering them no doubt as a means to speed up face-to-face contact while out of the line or during training. His command philosophy is clear in his closing remarks. He wants his battalion commanders to be well forward and constantly visiting the men, anticipating their needs as well as the enemy's intentions and pending events.

While some of the above may have sounded like motherhood to the military man (two of his four COs were fellow regular officers, one Canadian, one British), Macdonell was impressing his personal style of command on his subordinates and setting in place his command arrangements. He wanted to be perfectly clear on how the command process was to work within 7th CIB so that his "military Machine would run smoothly and well." And while the units he would "weld" together were undoubtedly "four of the finest battalions Canada had sent to the war", only one was a veteran battalion while the other three had no field experience whatsoever.

When the decision was made to form the 3rd CID towards the end of December 1915, it was decided that the new division should be formed in France rather than in Canada or the UK. For its senior ranking brigade, it absorbed the Canadian Corps Troops Infantry Brigade (a two-day wonder) which was renamed 7th CIB on 22 December 1915. Macdonell's new command comprised the RCR (commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel. A.H. Macdonell, his cousin), the PPCLI (Lieutenant-Colonel H.C. Buller, DSO), the 42nd Battalion, CEF, Royal Highlanders of Canada (Lieutenant-Colonel G.S. Cantlie) and the 49th Battalion, CEF, Edmonton Regiment (Lieutenant-Colonel W.A. Griesbach). Of the four battalions, only the PPCLI were experienced veterans, having come from a year's hard fighting and

distinguished service with the 80th Brigade in the 27th British Division. The RCR, at that time the only PF battalion, had arrived in France in November 1915 after 11 months garrison duty in Bermuda and had spent some time with 2nd CIB doing work-up training followed by a stint of work parties. The two remaining units, the 42nd and the 49th had both arrived in France one month earlier in October 1915, and had been placed under the aegis of 1st CID for trench warfare training. This consisted of no more than two 48 hour tours in the front line and the same period in reserve, followed by two months of relentless navy work as unofficial pioneer battalions.¹⁰

With the formation of 7th CIB, however, incessant labour behind the lines would cease and four very different infantry battalions would find themselves together for the duration of the war. When the PPCLI joined 7th CIB, they were equipped with short Lee-Enfields and Vickers machine guns, and, as the former "was universally coveted...all through the Canadian Corps, wise men of the Regiment did not leave their rifles lying about even in billets."¹¹ But the Regiment not only looked different outwardly, internally, it was used to a different command system – the standard operating procedures of its previous brigade. Major Agar Adamson, the battalion 2 i/c was under no illusions that they had traded a comfortable, well-understood billet in a veteran, professional brigade only to join an "amiture [sic] army." He wrote to his wife two weeks after joining 7th CIB:

I think both the division and brigade staffs are doing their best but they have had no experience and are in a shocking muddle. Orders are issued



Major-General A.C. Macdonell

one moment and cancelled the next. We are in a constant state of change and jump, and so are they. nothing runs smoothly and none of the staff are sure of themselves. Very unlike the brigade they took us from where every officer had been a staff officer for years. I should not be surprised if they put us into the trenches and forget to relieve us.¹²

At that time, it was obvious that the Princess Patricias were the most experienced trench fighters in 7th CIB, let alone their division. Yet, curiously, there is no evidence whatsoever that their Brigade and Divisional commanders (or their respective staffs) recognised this fact by insisting they share their hard-won experience in helping train their sister battalions in the brigade or division. The staffs were too busy training themselves. Instead, the other infantry battalions would have to learn by trial and error.

Macdonell's forward presence, observation and supervisory abilities during this time are commented upon repeatedly in his subordinates' memoirs and letters. Lieutenant Royal Ewing of the 42nd wrote: "our Brigadier... is a corker – quite an old boy, but very active. He used to be up in the trenches at all hours of the day and night."¹³ The 42nd War Diary (WD) was equally effusive: "During two months under the command of Brigadier-General Macdonell he had made himself respected for his tireless activity and much beloved for his interest in all of us."¹⁴ Even the highly critical Major Adamson of the PPCLI was grudgingly forced to admit, though somewhat pompously: "I am quite pleased with our Brigadier, General MacDonald [sic]. He is always on the job and seems to know his job, and is most considerate....He can be depended

upon to use good judgement and not rush into any sudden uncalled for move...."¹⁵

Whether Brigadier-General Macdonell's near fatal encounter with a German sniper illustrated good judgement is a matter for debate, but as a commander he was adamant that he would be well forward in the defence maintaining direct personal contact with his subordinates. This meant that his staff had to cope in his absence and there is some evidence that it struggled initially prior to Mt Sorrel. The Brigade Major (BM) does not appear to have been as dynamic or keen as his commander on the "standing-up" of the Brigade, for as Macdonell noted drily in his diary on 23 December 1915: "Major Foster, Royal Lances, reported as Brigade Major and left at once on leave."¹⁶ Lieutenant Hugh Wallis gives us a quick sketch of Foster's background when he wrote to his mother on 6 January 1916: "The Brigade Major has now arrived and seems a very decent and capable officer. He was at one time on the staff of the Lieut. Governor of India and was recently on the staff of one of Kitchener's divisions."¹⁷ Foster would be wounded before the Mt Sorrel battle and temporarily replaced by Captain Cecil Critchley, Staff Captain "I", who would subsequently be wounded shortly after and replaced by Captain Basil Wedd of Toronto from HQ 3rd Division.

If Macdonell had no say in his choice of BM, he certainly could handpick the rest of his staff, a personal priority on learning he would command an infantry brigade. Lieutenant Wallis wrote home that "Uncle Archie has asked me to go to his Brigade as Orderly Officer, or what it amounts to, as A.D.C. to himself." Wallis' initial perception of a brigade staff appointment was that it meant "a bed to sleep in, comparative safety, and many other advantages lucrative and otherwise," though this first impression would be rudely shattered as the year wore on. On 28 June 1916, the older and wiser OO would write: "The great objection I have to this place is that I get very little sleep whether there is a show on or not!"¹⁸

Captain Critchley, Brigadier-General Macdonell's PF adjutant from Lord Strathcona's Horse, would come over to fill in as the Staff Captain "I". That Critchley did not have any experience of intelligence work or how an infantry brigade operated was insignificant to Macdonell.

Critchley could learn on the job. Macdonell's attitude was one that prevailed throughout the BEF with regard to professional intelligence work. "It was continually held [pre-1914] that the best man to help a commander assess the capabilities of enemy infantry was an infantryman and the best man to judge the potential threat of cavalry was a cavalryman," wrote the British Intelligence Corps historian. For an officer to devote his career to Intelligence was "in most Generals' opinion, a short-sighted policy which would lead to an officer having a specialized and narrow outlook to problems which required a wide and practical background of military experience."¹⁹

Lieutenant Wallis, as a former infantry battalion Scout Officer, became an indispensable assistant to Capt Critchley. "I am going to attach myself to Capt [Tom] Rush on the 'Q' side of the staff for the next few weeks as far as possible," Wallis wrote home, but the arrangement was only allowed by Critchley on the condition that Wallis "still take a hand in the 'I' side, paying particular attention to Sniping, Observation and Maps."²⁰ Capt Rush was another Strathcona import, having served as Macdonell's regimental QM prior to his staff job. Critchley would be promoted Major after Sanctuary Wood and would act as BM at the Somme battles when Wedd went out with pneumonia.²¹

Numerous references in Macdonell's diary indicate his preoccupation with finding a good Brigade Machine Gun Officer (BGMO), visiting no less a personage than Brigadier-General Harington at Corps to discuss the matter. Eventually his cousin "Archie Angus" Macdonell commanding the RCR supplied him with the indomitable Captain H.T. Cock, (known in that Regiment during and after the war as "Hairy Tremendous"), the PF officer who had authored the CEF manual on the Colt HMG while serving in Bermuda. Lieutenant George Macdonald, PPCLI, whom Macdonell claimed as one of his own clan and affectionately called "Seorus Agraith" (Red George) in all correspondence, became the Brigade Grenade Officer (BGO), and later replaced Critchley as Staff Capt "I" when the latter was promoted and became BM.²²

One area in which Macdonell had no initial say was in his battalion commanders. "Archie Angus," his cousin commanding the RCR, he

knew intimately. Griesbach, a former CMR trooper in South Africa, was a cavalry officer acquaintance, as well as the son of a former RNWMP colleague. Lieutenant-Colonel Cantlie of the 42nd and Lieutenant-Colonel Buller of the 49th were respectable officers and gentlemen, but both were unknown factors.

Griesbach was a man after Macdonell's own heart. Six days after the latter's return to HQ 7th CIB from sick leave in the Spring, the Brigadier wrote to the CO of the Edmontonians and, in no uncertain terms, assessed his abilities.

"A Good Commanding Officer makes a Good Regiment." Many have not the personality necessary at all to command men [underlining by Macdonell]. You have and I congratulate you on it. I should like to congratulate you also in the straight and fearless way in which you have reported on the Ross rifle. If only all COs would write or speak out as straight (not only about the rifle; also about all things concerning their commands) smooth working and officering would be largely increased.²³

Arriving back from his convalescence in hospital, Brigadier-General Macdonell must have also taken stock of the new CO of the RCR who had replaced his cousin in April when the latter left to take command of the 5th CIB. Lieutenant-Colonel Claude Hill, a PF officer of 15 years service prior to the War, came to the brigade with 18 months experience as Battalion 2 i/c of the 24th Battalion, Victoria Rifles of Canada (VRC), in 2nd Division. It was Hill who would earn the nickname "The Shino Boys" for the RCR the day after he took command when it came out of the line in the Salient on 21 April. The regiment was greeted with the new CO's orders "that all kit must be cleaned and all buttons kept shined when the unit was in billets behind the front line. Some grumbling resulted; but the Permanent Force officers, with a strong belief in the efficacy of smartness in enhancing morale, welcomed the orders and supported the Commanding Officer's stand with a firmness that soon ended all opposition."²⁴

Whenever Macdonell visited the battalions or higher HQs, he always took a staff officer with him, usually his nephew Hugh Wallis, and later in his tenure, his other nephew, Harold. Hugh's brother, Captain Harold Wallis of the 16th Battalion, came to 7th CIB in October to replace his brother as OO. Hugh Wallis had moved up to

Staff Captain "I" in September replacing George Macdonald who was wounded at the Somme. The flexibility of brigade staff officers is shown when he wrote his mother: "Capt [P.E.] Coleman has been away on leave so I have been looking after A&Q while Harold has been on "I" for me. I am OC Rear HQ consisting of the interpreter and myself; [the paymaster] is on leave and the veterinary officer at division, so I have my hands full." Two weeks later he wrote "this short tour in charge of A&Q of the Brigade has given me a great chance to learn things which I have not had an opportunity of doing before."²⁵

That Macdonell allowed his fledgling staff some latitude within the scope of their responsibilities is evidenced by remarks made by Wallis during the temporary command of 7th CIB by F.O.W. Loomis (14 March-5 May), standing in for Macdonell while he recovered from his wounds. After serving only 12 days under the newly-promoted Brigadier-General Loomis, Lieutenant Wallis was writing home: "I hope Uncle Archie will be back soon; otherwise I shall resign;...F.O.W.L. my old battalion O.C. is in command here now." Three weeks later, he was more emphatic about Macdonell's return:

Nothing will please me so much as Uncle Archie's return; everyone is just sort of standing by until he comes back. I don't seem able to do a thing under the present regime although the G.O.C. is very decent to me, everyone has difficulty carrying on because of his perpetual interfering and directing. I often feel like asking to go back to the regiment, but must wait and have all the information I can, to give to Uncle Archie.²⁶

The Loomis "regime" serves to highlight Macdonell's personal command style and philosophy. Loomis' apparent over-supervision trampled the trust and confidence that had been slowly building up within the HQ staff as they learned their trade, and it is not apparent from unit war dairies, regimental histories or letters that the stand-in brigadier ever visited the forward battalions, thus making his presence felt to the troops under his command. Hearing of his HQ's malaise via various visitors to his convalescent hospital, Macdonell reappeared on 6 May 1916, before his wounds had truly healed, the doughty warrior convinced his clansmen needed him. A relapse in the third week sent him back for several days, causing Lieutenant-Colonel Buller, PPCLI, the senior CO, to move across as

acting-brigade commander, but at least Loomis had moved on to 1st Division.

The three major engagements of the Canadian Corps in 1916 – the St. Eloi Craters fiasco, Mount Sorrel and the Somme battles – reflected the inexperience and the continuing amateur nature of the organization. "Deft coordination of all the components of the Corps, careful preparation prior to battle and skilled use of artillery resources that would characterize the Canadian performance in 1917 and 1918 were absent," notes William F. Stewart.²⁷ Some progress had been made towards a more professional and efficient force, but too many officers and men still had to learn their jobs. Not only was the staff of 7th CIB raw, its parent formation, 3rd Division had only been "stood up" in the winter of 1915-16 and declared operationally ready as a division in March 1916. Even more woefully unprepared was the 4th Division which would land in France in mid-August 1916, forego the careful acclimatization process and contact training previously enjoyed by the other three Canadian divisions, and be committed to battle the following month. Of the three "shows" of 1916, 7th CIB would find itself deeply involved in the latter two actions, the first one defensive, the second, offensive.

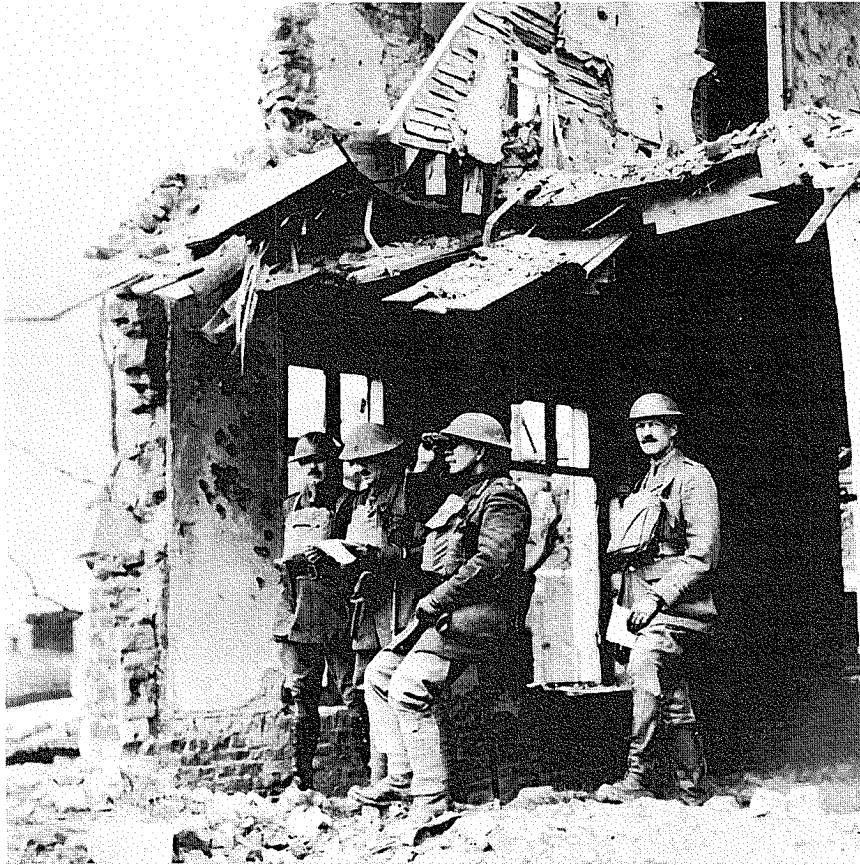
The defensive battle, Mount Sorrel, "constituted only a small, localized operation of little or no significance to the outcome of the war" according to historian D.J. Goodspeed, "...in comparison with the monstrous battles of Verdun, the Somme and Passchendaele..."²⁸ In the operational scheme of things, it was a German spoiling attack against the 3rd Canadian Division in the hopes of tying down Allied forces and preventing their transfer to Picardy for the pending Somme offensive. It can essentially be viewed as a fight of three rounds: the Germans winning the first two, but the Canadians winning the all-important third. Its three phases consisted of: the initial German attack on 2 June and the uncoordinated, overly hasty and abortive Canadian counterattacks on 3 June; the second German attack on the afternoon of 6 June; and, the successful, deliberate Canadian counterattack launched in the early morning of 13 June by the veteran 1st Division, which forced the Germans to relinquish most of their gains. The strategic aim of the German operation was not achieved and tactically the Germans could

claim little better than a draw, for the original front was established in most of the sector.²⁹

For Brigadier-General Macdonell and 7th CIB, Mount Sorrel would be their first defensive battle as a brigade. "The June Show", as it came to be called, occurred at the apex of the Ypres Salient, a comparatively flat piece of terrain, dominated in the south-easterly portion by a low wooded hill known as Mount Sorrel. Practically all the ground held by 3rd Division in the forward area was still wooded at this stage in the war, its frontage of 2,500 yards running from the Menin Road in the north, south to Mount Sorrel inclusive. As a control measure, this in turn was divided into two brigade frontages of which 7th CIB had responsibility for the left and the 8th CIB the right on the day of battle. Each brigade defensive scheme called for two battalions in the front line, one in support and one in brigade reserve. The 7th CIB's two front line battalion sub-sectors were known as the Hooge sector on the left, the line running through the ruins of the village of that name, and the Sanctuary Wood sector on the right. Both of these sectors were dominated by Mount Sorrel and two other hills to their south in the 8th CIB sector. Thus the PPCLI History notes: "It was early recognized that if the Germans made a determined attempt to reach Mount Sorrel, this front line would be quickly blown out of existence. The defence scheme for Sanctuary Wood and Hooge was therefore dependent upon resistance which might be provided by the second or R-line."³⁰

On the morning of 2 June 1916, German artillery fire on the 3rd Division's area developed into the heaviest bombardment endured by British troops up to that stage in the war. Trenches and their garrisons holding them vanished in clouds of dirt and dust, while whole trees in Sanctuary Wood were hurled skyward by the bursting shells. After exploding four large mines slightly forward of Mount Sorrel, the German infantry overwhelmed the 8th CIB front line trenches and captured the important high ground as well as Hills 61 and 62 by nightfall.

The PPCLI, as right forward battalion in the Sanctuary Wood sector, was on the northern flank of the main German assault. Its right forward rifle company was virtually annihilated at the outset by artillery fire but its left forward company shifted left to help the survivors and



Major-General A.C. Macdonell (seated) looking out over the German front line, February 1918.

Battalion the next day – took place largely on 8th CIB territory.

The RCR, the left forward battalion in the Hooge sector had minimal activity on its frontage but soon had to turn its right flank towards the enemy once the survivors of the PPCLI front line companies withdrew to the R-Line. Brigadier-General Macdonell liaised with the British formation on his left flank and arranged for British troops to take over the RCR's responsibilities beyond Hooge so they in turn could shift right. HQ 3rd Division was fighting its first defensive battle without the benefit of a commander. Major-General M.S. Mercer had been killed by German artillery while on

reconnaissance in the 8th CIB sector, and the latter formation's commander wounded and captured.

Once HQ 3rd Division had confirmed that the 8th CIB frontage had been captured, it ordered 7th CIB at 1730 hours, 2 June, to restore the situation, giving Brigadier-General Macdonell, two battalions from its reserve brigade, 9th CIB. Corps intervention later revised the initial plan and set the time for a coordinated divisional counterattack, reinforced by 1st Division units, for 0200 hours the following day. An immediate counterattack by 7th CIB, however, was virtually impossible, whoever was ordering it. The brigade's reserve battalion, the 49th, which had stood to since 1000 hours, 2 June, was far to the rear in Ypres and had to come forward through smashed-in trenches and an unceasing hail of HE, shrapnel and tear gas shells, as did the two 9th CIB battalions which were still further to the rear.³²

Brigadier-General Macdonell ordered the 49th CO to physically coordinate and command the attack on the ground forward, but due to darkness, confusion wrought by the heavy bombardment and lack of communications, the

together they grimly fought back. Nicholson's Official History rightly states: "Credit for temporarily checking the enemy's right wing belongs to the [forward] Patricias....As the Germans surged eastwards, its rifles volleyed into the enemy's right rear. [They were] to hold out successfully for eighteen hours, isolated from the rest of the battalions and with all their officers killed or wounded."³¹ The PPCLI CO was killed leading the remnants of his two other rifle companies in repeated counterattacks up and down the support and communication trenches of 8th CIB during the afternoon, buying valuable time for the RCR support companies and two 42nd Battalion rifle companies trying to shore up the R-line 500 yards to the rear of the PPCLI. Two other 42nd rifle companies were sent over the brigade boundary into Maple Copse at the rear of 8th CIB's collapsed front line in order to prevent the brigade being flanked from that direction.

In essence, the first German success at Mount Sorrel had obliterated all brigade boundaries, and the most desperate and important fighting of 7th CIB – the defence of Warrington Avenue and Lover's Walk by the PPCLI on the afternoon of 2 June, and the counterattack of the 49th

0200 hours "Zero Hour" for the attack was repeatedly delayed until 0700 hours the following day. The 7th CIB attack did not go in with the others on their right flank as two 9th CIB battalions failed to show up at the assembly area on time. Finally, an exasperated Lieutenant-Colonel Griesbach ordered the only battalion in position, his beloved 49th, to attack alone in broad daylight at approximately 0900 hours. With virtually no artillery preparation, the Edmontonians suffered 358 casualties in the space of a few short minutes, achieving nothing.³³ The 42nd History described it as a "forlorn hope," as no other supporting attacks on the right from 1st Division accompanied it, thus allowing the Germans to concentrate maximum firepower on the lone battalion advancing in the open.³⁴ The 49th's losses on 3 June were only surpassed by the veteran PPCLI battalion who had suffered over 400 casualties, though these were sustained over a 24-hour period rather than in a mere 20 minute timespan.

With two battalions severely mauled, a CO killed and a failed counterattack to its credit, the battered 7th CIB was finally relieved on 5 June 1916. Less than two and half months later they would be sufficiently rested and reorganised, given some basic assault training, and sent to take their turn in the "meat grinder" battles further south, known collectively as the Somme.

During the first of the two major operations of 1916, the battle of Mount Sorrel, the picture that emerges of Macdonell is of a cool, calm, collected commander, working behind the scenes to ensure a coordinated effort and trying make sure his troops were in the right place at the right time with the right resources. In occupying the northern half of the Salient he had always been concerned about the high ground on his right flank to the south where even the most limited penetration could bring the enemy into his right forward battalion's rear. However, through his foresight and planning he had sought permission from 8th CIB when they had occupied their sector prior to the battle, to position No.3 Company PPCLI in that brigade's rear area in case of such an eventuality. He and Lieutenant-Colonel Buller had readily appreciated that if the enemy were to gain Warrington Avenue, a communications trench which angled back from the 1st CMR's front to his reserve line, his entire brigade position would be compromised.³⁵

In essence, his brigade "vital ground" (ground, which if lost, renders the commander's position untenable) was in another brigade's area of responsibility. By wisely anticipating the enemy's possible actions through a worst possible scenario approach, Macdonell ensured before the battle ever began that he had balance – a better chance of defending his sector than if he had slavishly adhered to brigade boundary lines on a map. One could readily agree with a brigadier commenting in 1917 that "the battle 'command' is today subordinated to the battle 'preparation.' Our fights are won or lost before we go into them."³⁶ Though Victor Odlum was referring to the set-piece assault, his comments certainly have some validity for the British trench defences of 1916, especially those in the Ypres Salient where the enemy was consistently blessed with the initiative and dominating ground. How the defensive battle was to be fought had to be well thought out beforehand and discussed and rehearsed from the battalion level of command right down to the platoon. Each battalion commander was responsible for having his own battalion defensive scheme.

During the 2-3 June battle, command and control at the brigade level of front line troops was, for all intents and purposes, completely lost as all communications were cut by shellfire except for the RCR on the extreme left. Lieutenant-Colonel Griesbach wrote after the battle that he "could not conceive how higher command can influence the defence of positions without some better means of communication than now exist. As it stands, an attack might engulf the whole of the frontline troops, and the fugitives' arrival at the Brigade HQ might be the first intimation of the fact."³⁷ But as most enemy assaults were accompanied by a massive barrage, defenders usually had more than adequate warning.

When it was obvious the German artillery barrage of 2 June was abnormally heavy and not abating, Brigadier-General Macdonell had ordered the 49th to "stand-to" at 1000 hours and be ready to go forward. He did not need orders from higher command to understand the essentials of his mission. It was a standing order to hold the front line at all costs, a task which his veteran Patricias, bearing the brunt of the attack that day, knew only too well. The regiment's steadfast performance and delaying

actions gave Macdonell the requisite time to shift his forces to consolidate the R-line and to move additional troops to the rear of 8th CIB. Forward of the R-line, the battle became very much a company and battalion commanders' "show," local initiatives and common sense dictating the defence.

The only failure in Macdonell's conduct of the brigade defensive battle could be said to have been the abortive counterattack of the 49th. Once the orders were issued for this attack, Macdonell had no control over the proceedings, having delegated authority for its ultimate conduct and launching to Lieutenant-Colonel Griesbach, his designated commander on the ground. However, like a true commander, he recognized that delegation of the task did not necessarily absolve him of the responsibility for its failure and that he must ultimately share some of the guilt as he had delegated a task to a subordinate without fully ensuring that subordinate had the requisite resources or time to accomplish the task, in this instance – adequate artillery fire support and the additional manpower of two 9th CIB battalions placed under his command for the operation. After the battle, Macdonell shielded Lieutenant-Colonel Griesbach's actions in ordering his sole counterattack battalion forward in the doomed assault (a decision which must have taken a great deal of soul-searching on Griesbach's part, as it was his own command) and took full blame for all mistakes upon himself in his official report to higher HQ stating:

In reviewing the work done by the 7th Brigade, perhaps the proudest thing I can say is 'the machine worked smoothly and well.' It follows that the mistakes – and what military operation takes place without them? – were my own. Let the splendidly gallant officers and men who carried out my orders faithfully unto death and held the single line trench at that time was our only bulwark against defeat, receive their measure of earned praise full to overflowing.³⁸

This propensity of Macdonell for downwards loyalty secured for him the love and respect of his subordinates. One battalion commander told Macdonell's biographer, A.E. Kennedy-Carefoot, that "in his early army history when he was "on the mat" before his superiors, Macdonell [had] stood by him splendidly. Such loyalty to one of his subordinates was unforgettably appreciated by the hapless victim." Griesbach, in an interview with Sir Arthur Currie's biographer, Hugh

Urquhart, after the war, acknowledged that the officers and men under Macdonell's command, "could only be attacked through him, which is alright up to a point, but which has its disadvantages. In short, I would say that with General Mac it was a religion to stand up for his subordinates on every occasion."³⁹

In retrospect, Brigadier-General Macdonell could have told higher HQs before his brigade counterattack went in, that their timing for an immediate counterattack had long since passed and that he had not been allocated nearly enough time for what was really the mounting of a deliberate counterattack. Currie commanding 1st Division certainly did, but it did not help. When the Corps order was issued at 2045 hours in the evening of 2 June several factors dictated that the latter form of assault was the type actually required: the Germans had already been consolidating their gains around Mount Sorrel for some six hours; the troops who would have to be used for the counterattack were several miles from their projected forming-up places and would have no time for reconnaissance; artillery fire plans would have to be prepared without accurate information on the new enemy positions; and nothing had been done to silence or neutralize the enemy artillery which was still in great preponderance around the Salient.

In short, every basic principle for ensuring a successful deliberate counterattack would be ignored under the pretence that an immediate counterattack was being mounted and these oversights could therefore be excused. Goodspeed notes that "in light of all this it is difficult not to regard Byng's order as an emotional rather than a rational reaction. Whatever the reasons for the order were, it was, as always, the troops who had to pay for the mistake. In the event, and not surprisingly, almost everything that could go wrong did go wrong."⁴⁰

Whether Macdonell actually believed the ordered counterattack could succeed is not recorded, but at least the PPCLI and 49th Battalion Histories note his more immediate concern as being the PPCLI's precarious state, verging on breakdown. "Not to attack," recorded the 49th History, "meant leaving the Patricias to their fate." The death of the PPCLI's CO, the serious wounding of their 2 i/c, and heavy

casualties among the senior officers and senior NCOs, had left command and control in the hands of a few junior officers and NCOs, most of whom were also wounded. The PPCLI History confirms in a rather convoluted fashion that "the Patricias in the line had borne the strain of twenty-four hours of constant bombardment and fighting superbly; but though they were still 'perfectly cheerful' they were becoming physically and nervously exhausted."⁴¹

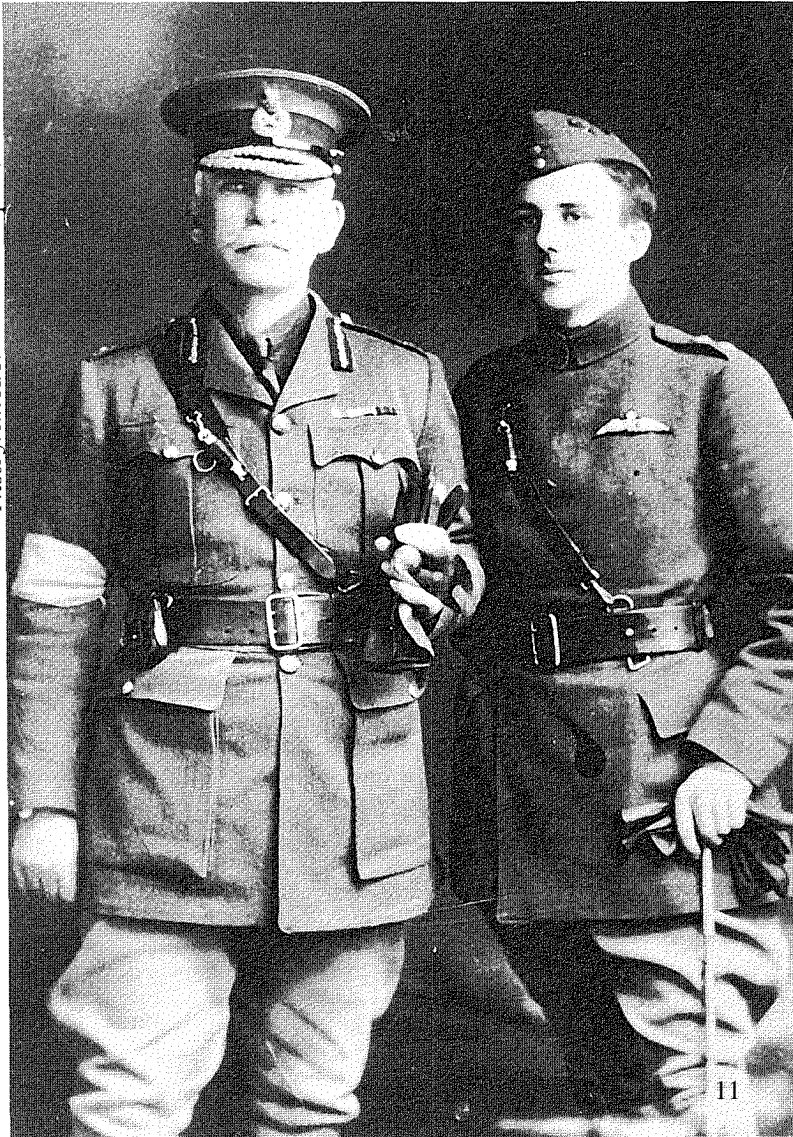
Because Macdonell stood by him, Griesbach survived, and his vindication as a good CO was reflected in his solid performance in future battles and subsequent promotion to Brigadier the following year. Griesbach knew whom to thank, telling Macdonell in a farewell letter that "Your treatment of those under you has had a result which you may not have foreseen – your Commanders have always been free men – free to serve you without fear of anything underhanded. Proud to have your commendation and too proud to merit your censure." Another letter after the war, (Griesbach having served yet a second time under Macdonell in 1st Division), would be even more frank, stating: "To you I owe more than I can say. Friendly and constructive criticism, sound advice, generous encouragement and appreciation – all these and more I have received at your hands. I have not only had justice from you but also mercy, and at times, was more in need of mercy than justice."⁴²

After Mount Sorrel, the Canadian Corps moved to the Somme, that archetypical First World War battle which saw long linear waves of heavily burdened infantrymen plodding forward shoulder to shoulder as Maxims mowed them down. It was already a killing ground when the Canadians arrived in September, while Macdonell was trying to cope with a deep dark depression brought on by the news of the death of his only son, Ian, a pilot with the Royal Flying Corps. Distraught and distracted, he felt he could not devote his full and proper attention to the pending attack. According to his biographer, he went to HQ 3rd Division and had a personal interview with Major-General Louis Lipsett. "He asked to be excused from the attack." Lipsett expressed sympathy but told him it was out of the question and that he must command the attack.⁴³

Brigadier-General A.C. Macdonell and his son, Lieutenant Ian Macdonell, Royal Flying Corps. Ian was shot down and killed over German lines during the Battle of the Somme, July 1916.

The 3rd Division, containing 7th CIB, was to be employed both in September and October on the narrow front bounded on the north by the winding Ancre River and on the south by the line of the Albert-Bapaume road which bisected the town of Courcellette. As the left forward division of the Canadian Corps, 3rd Division had the role of facing Ancre Heights to the north and securing a defensive left flank to the general Corps attack being pressed forward astride the Albert-Bapaume road. On 15 September, the Canadian Corps was ordered to attack on a two division frontage, 3rd Division left forward with one brigade up (8th CIB) to provide flank protection, and 2nd Division right forward to attack the forward defences in front of Courcellette. The 7th CIB was called up to exploit the success of 2nd Division in front of Courcellette pushing in between 8th CIB on its left and 5th CIB on its right. The 7th CIB secured the Fabeck Graben Trench with the 42nd Battalion and the PPCLI with minimal trouble and casualties thereby securing 5th CIB's left flank as it captured Courcellette with relative ease.⁴⁴

Photo from A.C. Macdonell Papers. NAC C145103



The 7th CIB's luck ran out the very next day, however, as German defenders rallied and stiffened their defences with a fresh brigade of battle-hardened Marines. The RCR and 42nd battalions going forward early the next morning with little artillery preparation, hoped to exploit to the next line of trenches, but suffered heavy casualties as a result of their unimaginative effort. Taken out of the line to refit, 7th CIB would be committed to battle the following month in 3rd Division's continuing futile attempts to take the infamous Regina trench. This time, the 49th Battalion and the still weakened RCR would make disastrous unsupported frontal attacks, and although the RCR would break into the trench system, it would be repulsed by repeated counterattacks and sustain over 70 per cent casualties.

The attacks that 7th CIB were called upon to mount at the Somme have been termed "deliberate" though in fact they were poorly coordinated "hasty" attacks. Major-General Lipsett himself recognised that Macdonell's men's achievements on the 15 September 1916 were essentially the combination of good luck and good reconnaissance work. He wrote afterwards:

The problem which faced the commander of the 7th Brigade was a hard one. Four and a half hours only were available to march five miles over difficult country devoid of landmarks, through enemy barrages, to deploy for attack in broad daylight in a captured and partially obliterated German trench, the whereabouts of which was not known, except from the map, to the battalion commanders, and to launch the attack, on a two-battalion front at 6 P.M. Nevertheless, owing to the previous excellent reconnaissance work of the regimental scout officers and scouts who had been sent ahead, and who met their battalions en route, all battalions were in their places on time, and the attack went forward punctually.⁴⁵

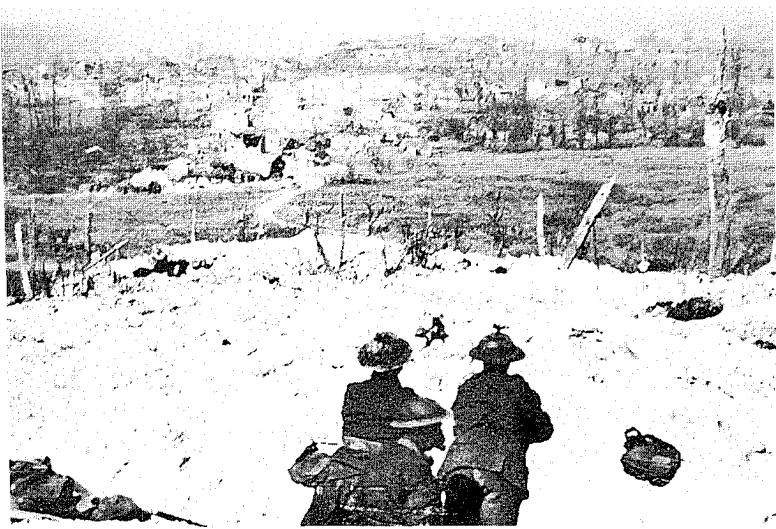
That luck played a part in the afternoon's proceedings is underlined by the following revelation in the 42nd's Regimental History: "No detailed Battalion operation order was issued owing to lack of time and so hurriedly was the whole undertaking carried out that it is doubtful whether anyone, except the officers and a few of the NCOs, had any definite understanding of the exact task and even these necessarily had but slender knowledge of it."⁴⁶ The Brigade was thus launched and Macdonell's command and

control capabilities with regards to the attacking battalions thus ended. The onus fell upon the battalion commanders to carry the attack forward.

Macdonell still retained command and control of his support and reserve battalions however, units which he could feed into the battle as he saw fit and thus still influence the outcome. He also controlled the reserve elements of the Brigade MG Coy and TM Battery. The battalion commanders, to a degree as well, became impotent as their assault companies went forward from their designated jumping off lines. The CO usually stayed back with the reserve company and HMGs or in a nearby dugout. The Battalion commander's role in battle was to act as a sort of advanced report centre for his forward companies to report back to so information could be relayed back to the Brigadier or laterally to flanking units. He too could manoeuvre his reserve and HMGs, request reinforcements or artillery support, liaise laterally with flanking units, or order withdrawals or realignments as required.

Despite 7th CIB's problems on the Somme (most not of its own making), the second year of the brigade's existence under Macdonell was one marked by a higher level of competence and professionalism, higher standards of training, reorganization of its fighting components at the brigade, battalion, company and platoon levels and the development of a distinctly Canadian attack doctrine. New applications of technology and tactics included the massive HMG barrages and interdiction introduced on a grand scale at Vimy, counter bombardment and sound-ranging techniques, counter-electronic warfare, the introduction of new gases, aerial photography, increased use of wireless, the wide spread use of the grid communications system, and fire and movement at the platoon and company level. In the course of the year, 7th CIB would participate in two major operations, Vimy and Passchendaele, and a brigade-sized raid conducted at Avion in June 1917. After Vimy, Macdonell would be earmarked for higher command.

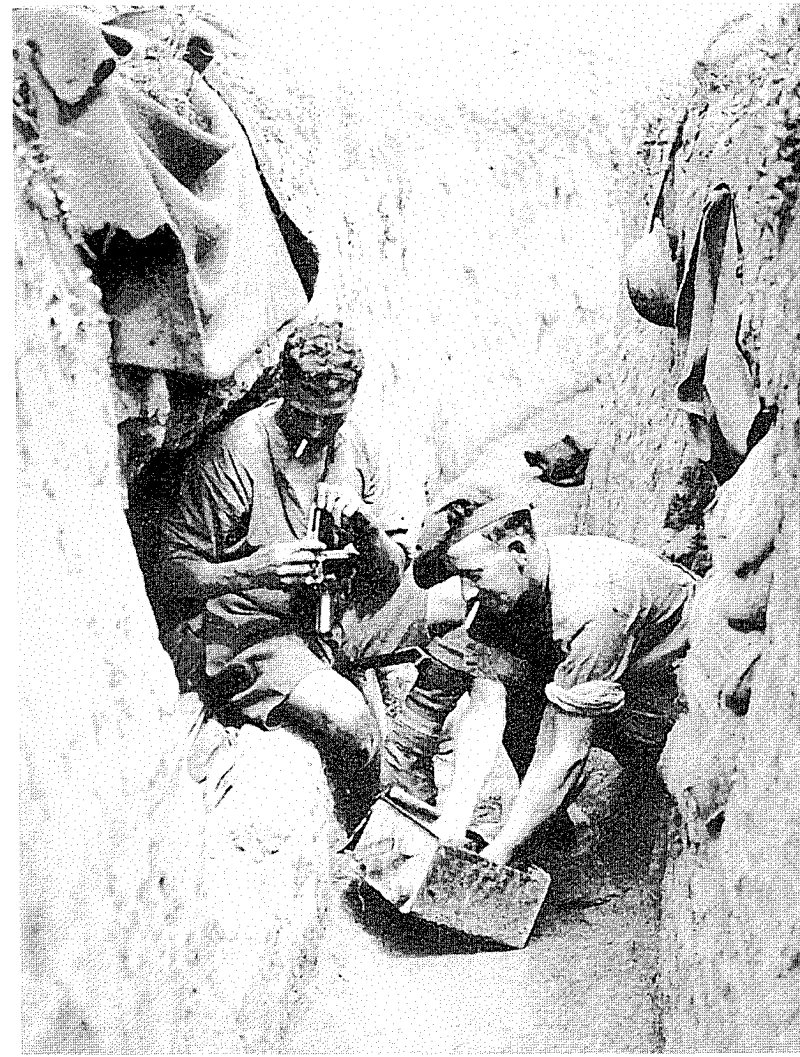
The story of the Canadian Corps' 9-12 April assaults on Vimy Ridge is perhaps the most well-documented in Canadian military history and will not be explored in any great detail in this article



Top: "The Shino Boys": Non-commissioned officers of the Royal Canadian Regiment. (NAC PA 3238)

Above: Vimy Ridge, 1917. Looking out over the Douai Plain and coalfields. (DHH)

Right: Jocks of the 42nd Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada from Montreal in a fairly pristine-looking trench. (DHH)



other than to outline those salient points required to provide some historical context for the operations of 7th CIB before, during and after this seminal battle. Lieutenant-General Byng's plan called for a frontal attack by all four divisions of the Corps in numerical order from the right to left. The 3rd Division, facing La Folie Wood, was ordered to attack on a two brigade front. The 8th CIB would be on the right and the 7th CIB on the left, the latter brigade advancing in the shadow of Hill 145.⁴⁷ In 7th CIB, three battalions would take part in the assault, each advancing with two companies up and two in support ready to pass through on the first objective line: the RCR right forward; PPCLI centre; and 42nd Battalion left forward. The 49th Battalion would

provide mopping-up and carrying parties for the assault battalions.⁴⁸

As a whole, the attack of the Corps was to be carried out in four stages, each dictated by the German zones of defence. On 3rd Division's frontage, the operation would only entail

participation in the first two stages: an advance at 0530 hours, scheduled to reach the first objective 35 minutes later. After a 40-minute pause to reorganize, a subsequent advance would be made at 0645 hours to a line drawn through La Folie Wood, along the reverse slope of the Ridge and bending back on the left to conform with the objectives of 4th Division. The 7th CIB was allocated 20 minutes for this second phase. The 1st and 2nd Divisions had objectives at a maximum distance of 4,000 yards from their jumping off positions while the 4th Division had the shortest distance of all but was faced with the prospect of seizing Hill 145, the strongest natural defensive position on the whole front.⁴⁹

It should be noted here that, German defensive lines and tactics had changed significantly everywhere, except on the Ridge allocated as the Canadians' objective. After the Somme, the German army had gone to a more "elastic" defence-in-depth by zones, but on the Ridge their dispositions were a hold-over from the past, "designed for Falkenhayn's stonewall tactics, which proved so disastrous on the Somme," notes Byng's biographer, Jeffery Williams. "A more elastic system was planned but work on it had not begun. In the face of increasing destruction caused by the British and Canadian guns and frequent alarms caused by infantry raids, the garrison could do little more than maintain their existing defences."⁵⁰

At 0530 hours on the morning of 9 April 1917 the rolling barrages opened, and the attacking waves of the Canadian divisions went forward. Waves, in the case of 7th CIB, however, is not quite an accurate description. All of its assault battalions had to cross a series of large craters to their front before seizing their first objective line. It took the 42nd on the left five minutes to "scramble across the muddy craters as best they could, then re-form with great steadiness just as though they were rehearsing over the tapes at Bruay."⁵¹

By 0730 hours, all three assault battalions were on their final objectives mopping up, but the morning was just beginning for the brigade's left forward battalion. The 42nd Royal Highlanders from Montreal had to re-group in the shadow of Hill 145, the highest and most important feature of the Ridge. The defences of

this hill were particularly strong, ringed with well-wired trenches and a series of deep dug-outs on its rear slopes.

The 42nd got to its final objective line initially unhindered because these German defences were being heavily shelled. Once the Canadian artillery lifted, Hill 145's defenders were too preoccupied in bloodily repulsing 11th CIB's attempts to seize it. When 11th CIB went to ground short of its crucial objective however, its defenders had more time to take stock of their situation and see that they could enfilade 7th CIB's position with relative ease in La Folie Wood on their left. The majority of the 42nd Battalion's casualties sustained at Vimy were thus incurred by sniper, MG and observed artillery fire being brought to bear from Hill 145 on their positions in and around their consolidated position on the final objective.⁵²

The major problem of command and control during the battle for Brigadier-General Macdonell would therefore be one of liaison over divisional boundaries with a flanking brigade. His immediate concern was to consolidate his own defence and to provide what assistance he could the following day for the capture of the troublesome hill on his left flank. Two days after the capture of Hill 145, 10th CIB would successfully storm The Pimple, by which time, the enemy accepting the loss of Vimy Ridge as permanent, had pulled back two miles to their Third line in the new Hindenburg system running southeast from Lens across the open plain.

"The great lesson to be learned from these operations," read one divisional after-action report, "is this: If the lessons of the war have been thoroughly mastered; if the artillery preparations and the support are good; if our Intelligence is properly appreciated; there is no position that cannot be wrested from the enemy by well-disciplined, well-trained and well-led troops attacking on a sound plan."⁵³ After Vimy, Brigadier-General Macdonell, in his familiar role as keeper of "The Fighting Seventh's" *esprit de corps*, noted in his congratulatory address to the troops that the key factor in their success had been time. "Never before," he rightly stated, "had we the chance to work up to an attack in detail...Our training was done with thoroughness and proved of incalculable value."⁵⁴

Comprehensive, progressional and realistic unit and formation collective training was backed up with an extensive training system featuring individual, specialist and reinforcement training behind the lines. The move to the Vimy Front had been accompanied by the establishment of the Canadian Corps Training School [CCTS] under the command of Major A.C. Critchley, former BM of 7th CIB. The CCTS was divided into an Officers' Wing and an NCO Wing to provide instructors for the Divisional Schools. With its own training establishment in place, the Corps was well on the way to ensuring its own particular doctrine was well-disseminated and understood by all ranks. But as 7th CIB would learn at Avion in early July, the tactics required to take German defences at Vimy, based to a large extent on the old pre-Somme model, were not necessarily applicable to the elastic defence system of pillboxes they would encounter at Passchendaele or the next year in their assaults to break the Hindenburg Line.

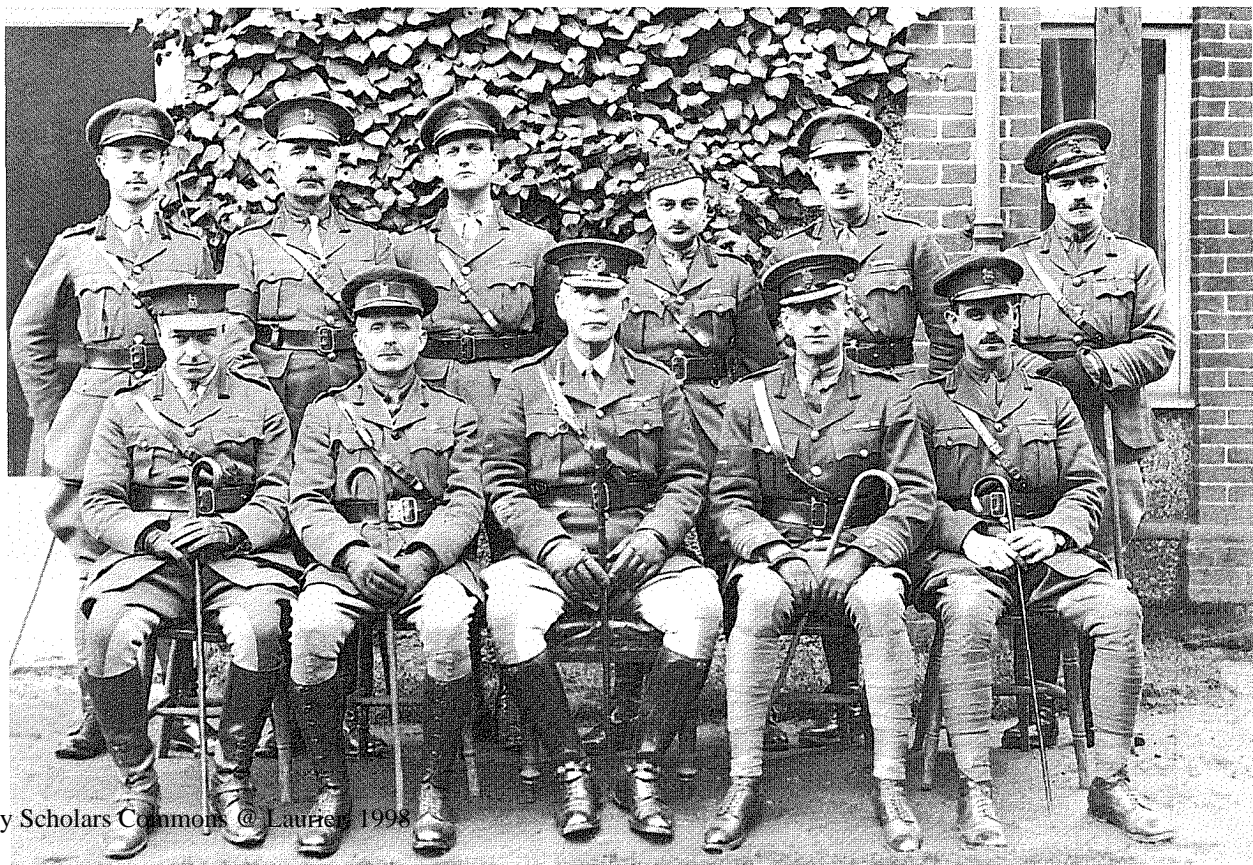
Initially, the Avion Raid was to have been part of an limited offensive to "inch up" on the city of Lens. Currie, short of supporting guns in early June and thus unable to prevent the enemy from concentrating overwhelming fire on any trenches he might seize, convinced Haig that trying to hold captured ground at great cost would be unproductive at that time.

Orders called for six battalions to attack on the night of 8/9 June at midnight: three from the 11th CIB attacking to the north in the La Coulotte sector (out of contact with 7th CIB), and three from 7th CIB in the Avion sector with 49th Battalion left, 42nd Battalion centre and the RCR right. Each battalion of 7th CIB would go in on a four-company front, each with three platoons in successive waves, the fourth platoons of each company staying to constitute the garrison of the jumping-off trench. The 7th CIB battalions were to attack on approximately 1,200 yards of the German front in the Avion area, penetrate into enemy lines to a maximum depth of 800 yards, hold the ground captured for an hour and a half, then begin a covered withdrawal, completing the evacuation in a 30 minute timespan.⁵⁵

Preparations for the raid, which would take place at night, were conducted with Vimy-like thoroughness behind the lines. Rehearsals were conducted by day and night over taped ground and troops instructed to memorize the exact locations of all known enemy MG posts, trench mortar posts, and dugouts. The composition and duties of trench raiding parties received particular attention.⁵⁶

In the aftermath of the raid, the newly-promoted Major-General Macdonell, of course, regarded it as a huge success. "Batty Mac" wrote

Major-General A.C. Macdonell with his staff, 1st Canadian Division HQ.



NAC PA 6210

to a subordinate officer two days later: "The Brigade put on a good show the other night and we are beginning to consider that we are 'Sturm Truppen' for fair. It was a good 'Show,' well carried out and successful in every respect."⁵⁷ By contrast, the view from the ranks was considerably different, especially in the 49th Battalion which sustained the highest casualties going in on the left flank of the raid. From Sergeant A. Fowlie's perspective, whose platoon was virtually wiped out, "it was a very fierce affair and it lacked the luck. We held the trench and the Germans infiltrated my company....I lost three very good friends of mine in that raid. I don't think it was a very good planned affair after all."⁵⁸ On withdrawing after two hours in the enemy's trenches, the three battalions forsook the cover of the German trenches to move back across no-man's-land and were caught in a heavy German counter-bombardment. In the words of Lieutenant G.D. Kinnaird, 49th Battalion, who was severely wounded, "the moppers-up were mopped up."⁵⁹

The 42nd Battalion History deemed the raid to be "the most thoroughly organized and brilliantly carried out minor operation in which the Brigade ever participated as a unit." As a battalion, the 42nd went in with its flanks secured by the other two battalions, though it had the second highest rate of casualties. It went on to claim, somewhat correctly, that the raid was out of the ordinary in that "it was carried out on a very much larger scale than had ever been attempted" with the added difficulty of having been conducted at night. However, ex-Corporal Will Bird of the 42nd Battalion scathingly defused much of the credibility of this particular regimental history when he wrote in 1933, "the latter is a very finely-bound book and only lacks a slight insertion at the beginning "For Officers Only."⁶⁰

The 7th CIB reported that it had sustained 335 casualties in the raid, 38 of them fatal, but a quick tally of the battalion counts show the actual killed total to have been 44 all ranks.⁶¹ Quick to justify the raid in terms of its value, 7th CIB claimed an inordinately high body count of 560 enemy killed, an entire battalion's worth. This figure is not realistic as the Germans only manned a regimental sector with one battalion in the first two lines of trenches and many of the frontline and second line defenders retreated to

their third line during the attack. Many of the dugouts destroyed by the 7th CIB raiding force would thus have been empty. The 49th Regimental historian asks a valid question and leaves the answer unstated, but obvious: "Did this operation yield a credit balance?...In the 49th records one account declares that the attack went in perfect alignment; another, that it was all confusion....The menace of the counter-barrage perhaps had been over-discounted. In the darkness the man who sits tight with his weapon is certain to enjoy an advantage over his adversary who stumbles across open ground to seek and destroy him."⁶²

The planning and training for the Avion Raid was Batty Mac's last "show" as brigade commander, the actual raid taking place after he had left to take up command of 1st Division. At home in Canada, his promotion to Major-General had been questioned by Borden who tried to block it on the instigation of Major-General Sam Steele, the latter feeling that the command should go to Sam Hughes' son, Garnet. The new corps commander adamantly refused to have Hughes in lieu of Batty Mac. George Perley, the Minister responsible for Canada's military forces overseas supported Currie's decision and told the prime minister bluntly that Hughes was not wanted at the front. Major-General Steele was sent home for his indiscretion in circumventing Perley and going straight to Borden.⁶³

The stories of Batty Mac as GOC of the "Old Red Patch" are told elsewhere. After the war he served as the Commandant of the Royal Military College from 1919 to 1925, his first tenure of office followed by an unprecedented second including a one year extension. He would also serve as the Honorary Colonel of four different regiments: Lord Strathcona's Horse (RC), The British Columbia Horse, The Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry Highlanders, and the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada.

But it was on taking leave of the Fighting Seventh that the flamboyant and, normally, garrulous commander found himself, for the first time in his career, at a loss for words. The brigade, out of the line after the Avion Raid, formed in hollow square on a sunny June day to say goodbye to him and his "unconventional but always vivid behaviour, his foolhardiness and his gift of terse exposition."⁶⁴ The 42nd regimental

padre leaves the best account and summary of "Batty Mac" as brigade commander:

Not many of us will forget that day at Chateau de la Haie when our Brigadier – afterwards Major-General Sir Archibald Cameron Macdonell, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. – bade us farewell as he went to assume command of the First Division. In silence we waited for his coming, in silence we listened for the words that somehow would not come, and then as he put his horse to the gallop and left us, the Brigade burst into cheers, and there was more love, more honour in those cheers than words could have ever told. Thus the 7th Canadian Inf. Brigade said goodbye to him who had lived with us and for us, alternately raged upon us and praised us, and in all things led us through fair and foul for over eighteen months. It is not sentiment, but simple fact, to say that he was loved and honoured – the grey old chieftain of the clans, a bonny fighter and a born leader.⁶⁵



Notes

1. McGill University Archives, *Wallis Scrapbooks Collection*, Vol. 1, [hereafter WC], MG 2039 (Acc. No. 2627). All letters cited from WC are addressed to his mother unless cited otherwise. Undated transcript of Macdonell's Address. Various portions of it can be found in the various brigade unit's regimental histories and another copy is in National Archives of Canada [NAC], Manuscript Group [MG] 30 E 20, A.C. Macdonell Papers, annotated in the general's own hand, "This address was not delivered. I simply couldn't. So galloped off."
2. NAC RG 41, CBC Radio Transcripts of *Flanders Fields* [hereafter CBC], PPCLI, G.R. Stevens.
3. NAC MG 30 E 241, *Lieutenant-Colonel D.E. McIntyre War Diary*, p.130.
4. Will R. Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin & Co., 1968), p.56.
5. G.R. Stevens, *A City Goes to War* [hereafter *49th Hist*] (Brampton, Ont: Charters Publishing Co., 1964) p.33.
6. R.G.C. Smith, ed., *As You Were! Ex-Cadets Remember*, Vol. 1, (Kingston: The RMC Club of Canada, 1984), pp.115-21.
7. *Ibid.*, pp.115-21; see also unpublished *Biography of Sir A.C. Macdonell* by A.E. Kennedy-Carefoot in NAC MG 30 E 20.
8. WC, Vol. I, Macdonell Letter to nephew Hugh Wallis dated 5 August 1914.
9. NAC MG 30 E 20, *Macdonell Pocket Diary*, 1915.
10. G.W.F. Nicholson, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War: Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* [hereafter referred to as *CEF*], p.134; Ralph Hodder-Williams, *Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, 1914-1919*, Vol I, [hereafter *PPCLI Hist*] (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), pp.91-92; R.C. Fetherstonagh, *The Royal Canadian Regiment, 1883-1933* [hereafter referred to as *RCR Hist*] (Montreal: The Royal Canadian Regiment, 1936), p.218; C.B. Topp, *The 42nd Battalion (CEF) Royal Highlanders of Canada in the Great War* [hereafter the *42nd Hist*], (Montreal: Gazette Printing Co. [1931]) p.20; *49th Hist*, pp.32-33.
11. *PPCLI Hist.*, p.94.
12. NAC MG 30 E 149 *Agar Adamson Papers*, [hereafter *Adamson*] Letter to wife dated 5 January 1916. Unless otherwise stated, all letters are addressed to his wife.
13. Black Watch Archives, *Royal Ewing Letter Collection*, p.28. Ewing was the Lieutenant-Colonel commanding the 42nd by the end of the war and his letters covering the four years he served at the front, as platoon commander, Adjutant, company commander, battalion second-in-command and finally CO, are a valuable insight into this Montreal battalion.
14. NAC RG 9 III D 3, Vol. 4938, *42nd War Diary* [hereafter *42nd WD*], 22 February 1916.
15. *Adamson*, Letter dated 20 January 1916.
16. NAC MG 30 E 20, *Macdonell Pocket Diary* 1915, 23 December 1915.
17. WC, Vol. I, Letter dated 6 January 1916.
18. WC, Vol. I, Letters dated 25 December 1915 and 28 June 1916.
19. B.A.H. Parritt, *The Intelligencers: The History of British Military Intelligence up to 1914*, (Ashford, Kent: Int Corps Assoc., 1983) p.1.
20. WC, Vol. I, Letter dated 30 May 1916.
21. As a matter of interest, Cecil Critchley's father, Oswald, and brother, Jack, were both Strathcona officers as well, his 66-year old father signing up as the Regimental MGO at the outbreak of war with Colonel A.C. Macdonell's approbation. His younger brother Jack, a regular officer and senior subaltern served while Cecil himself was serving as Adjutant. Jack rose to the rank

- of Lieutenant-Colonel and command of the Strathconas, but was mortally wounded in March 1917. A second brother, Walter, served as a popular, hard-drinking major in Calgary's 10th Battalion and later transferred to the RFC. Cecil would make a name for himself as an exemplary trainer as will be seen later and finish the war as a brigadier-general. A.C. Critchley, *Critch! The Memoirs of Brigadier-General A.C. Critchley*, (London: Hutchison, 1961) *in passim*.
22. NAC MG 30 E 20, *Macdonell Pocket Diary-1915*, entries for 23 and 28 December 1915.
 23. NAC MG 30 E 15, *Griesbach Papers*, [hereafter referred to as *Griesbach*], File 11, Letter dated 12 May 1916.
 24. *RCR Hist.*, p.225.
 25. *WC*, Vol. I, Letters dated 9 and 29 October 1916.
 26. *WC*, Vol. I, Letters to Harold Wallis dated 7 March 1916 and 16 April 1916 respectively.
 27. William F. Stewart, "Attack Doctrine in the Canadian Corps, 1916-1918," (unpublished MA thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1982), p.42.
 28. D.J. Goodspeed, "Prelude to the Somme: Mount Sorrel, June 1916," in Michael Cross and Robert Bothwell, eds., *Policy By Other Means* (Toronto: Clarke & Irwin, 1972) p.147.
 29. *CEF*, pp.148-149.
 30. *PPCLI Hist.*, Vol.I, p. 99.
 31. *CEF*, p.150.
 32. *49th Hist.*, p.44.
 33. *Ibid.*, pp.44-45.
 34. *42nd Hist.*, p.52.
 35. *PPCLI Hist.*, pp.107-110.
 36. NAC MG 30 E 300, *Victor Odlum Papers*, Vol.21, Letter to John Nelson dated 4 November 1917.
 37. *49th WD*, "Rpt on Counterattack Mt Sorrel" dated 8th June 1916."
 38. Macdonell cited in *42nd Hist.*, p.58.
 39. NAC MG 30 E 20, A.E. Kennedy-Carefoot unpublished *Biography of Sir A.C. Macdonell*, p.157; McGill University Archives, *Col Hugh M. Urquhart Papers* [hereafter referred to as *UP*], Acc. No. 393, Griesbach Interview.
 40. Goodspeed, p.153.
 41. *49th Hist.*, p.45; *PPCLI Hist.*, p.133.
 42. NAC MG 30 E 20, *A.C. Macdonell Papers*, Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel W.A. Griesbach dated 11 February 1917 and Letter from Brigadier-General Griesbach dated 21 February 1919.
 43. *Ibid.*, A.E. Carefoot-Kennedy unpublished "Biography of Sir A.C. Macdonell", p.155.
 44. *CEF*, p.171.
 45. Major-General Lipsett cited in *PPCLI Hist.*, pp.165-166.
 46. *42nd Hist.*, pp.77-78.
 47. *CEF*, pp.247-249.
 48. *PPCLI Hist.*, pp.213-214.
 49. *CEF*, pp.247-249; *PPCLI Hist.*, pp.213-214.
 50. Jeffery Williams, *Byng of Vimy, General & Governor General* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), p.149; for excellent discussions on the new German defensive systems and tactics see John A. English, *On Infantry, Forward Into Battle* (Ramsbury, Wilts: Crowood, 1990), pp.77-81; and *CEF*, pp.239-242.
 51. *RCR Hist.*, pp.278-280; *PPCLI Hist.*, pp.216-221; *42nd Hist.*, pp.123-124.
 52. Black Watch Archives, *42nd WD*, "Summary of Operations" dated 13 April 1916.
 53. NAC RG 9 III, Vol. 2526, *1st Division WD*, Folder 52, File 7, "Rpt of 1st Division."
 54. "Congratulatory Order on the Capture of Vimy Ridge" in G.G.D. Kilpatrick, *Odds & Ends from a Regimental Diary*, (Montreal: [privately printed] n.d.), p.26.
 55. *49th Hist.*, pp.89-90.
 56. *RCR Hist.*, pp.287-292.
 57. *WC*, Vol. I, Letter to Captain George Macdonald, *PPCLI*, dated 11 June 1916.
 58. *CBC*, 49th Bn. A.E. Fowlie.
 59. *49th Hist.*, p.90.
 60. *42nd Hist.*, p.137; Will R. Bird, *The Communication Trench*, (Amherst: [privately printed], 1933), p.131.
 61. *RCR WD*, 10 June 1917; *42nd WD*, "Summary of Casualties, June 1916"; *49th WD*, 11 June 1917.
 62. *49th Hist.*, p.91; see also Nicholson's comments in *CEF*, p.281 who terms the body count "excessive."
 63. S.J. Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), p.126.
 64. *49th Hist.*, p.91.
 65. Kilpatrick, *Odds & Ends*, p.24.

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Winter Speaker Series 1999

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Wednesday, January 27, 1999 7-9 pm
Professor Jonathan Vance,
"Death So Noble: Canada's Memory of the First World War"
University of Waterloo, Engineering Lecture Hall, Rm.211

Wednesday, February 24, 1999 7-9 pm
Professor Terry Copp
Topic: The Canadians in the Battle of the Normandy
Conestoga College, Doon Campus, Student Client Services
Building, Room 214-215

Wednesday, March 24, 1999 7-9 pm (tentative)
Lieutenant-Colonel David Patterson,
Commandant, Militia Land Forces College
Topic: The Future of the Militia Command and Staff Course
and the Impact of Multimedia
Cambridge Armouries

Friday, May 7, 1999
Professor J.L. Granatstein
Director, Canadian War Museum
Topic: TBA
(Held in conjunction with the Laurier Centre's
10th Annual Colloquium)
Wilfrid Laurier University

Attendance is free* and all are welcome.
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