

Canadian Military History

Volume 16 | Issue 2

Article 4

4-26-2012

A Forgotten Victory: Courcellette, 15 September 1916

David Campbell

Recommended Citation

Campbell, David (2007) "A Forgotten Victory: Courcellette, 15 September 1916," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 16: Iss. 2, Article 4.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol16/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian Military History by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

A Forgotten Victory

Courcelette, 15 September 1916

David Campbell

The 2nd Canadian Division, which landed in France on 15 September 1915, had established an uncertain operational record by the summer of 1916. As part of the Canadian Corps, the division had spent virtually all of its time in or near Belgium's notorious Ypres Salient, where it was embroiled in a grim campaign of trench warfare. Notable successes in trench raiding were offset by costly setbacks, such as the division's failure to hold a series of mine craters at St. Eloi in April 1916. This was followed in June by the withdrawal of one of its brigades in the face of heavy enemy attacks at Hooge, which were part of the Germans' ultimately unsuccessful effort to hold captured Canadian positions around Mount Sorrel.

Major-General Richard Turner, the commander of 2nd Canadian Division, was himself under a cloud. His earlier performance as a brigade commander in 1st Canadian Division during the 2nd Battle of Ypres in 1915 was questionable at best, and his division's inability to make sense of the bewildering topography at St. Eloi in 1916 raised serious questions about his suitability for high command. Turner retained command of the division largely through his personal connections with the Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence, Sir Sam Hughes.¹

Redemption for 2nd Canadian Division, and to some degree, for Turner himself, would finally come with the division's successful storming of the French village of Courcelette on 15 September 1916. This operation, which was part of the larger Somme offensive, was 2nd Canadian Division's first major victory of the First World War. Unfortunately, the glow of success would be obscured by heavy casualties

and limited gains during the division's frustrating second operational tour at the Somme in late September and early October. Nevertheless, the victory at Courcelette proved that the division could successfully organize and execute a major offensive operation. For Major-General Turner, the battle stood as a personal vindication, and, at least in his own mind, made up for past failures.

The Battle of the Somme

While the Canadians recovered from their ordeal at Hooge and Mount Sorrel, the British Fourth Army, under General Sir Henry Rawlinson, assumed the lion's share of the greatest offensive yet launched by the British Armies on the Western Front. This extended series of operations, known collectively as the Battle of the Somme, began on 1 July 1916 and would continue through to 18 November, when it finally bogged down in the autumn rain and mud.

Based upon the experiences of 1915, many British senior commanders, including the commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, believed that greater application of artillery power was the key to breaking the deadlock on the Western Front. After subjecting the German lines north of the Somme River to prolonged preliminary artillery bombardments, it was hoped that the attacking British infantry would be able to occupy the smoldering enemy positions with minimal fighting. Unfortunately, the frontage chosen for the offensive was too broad for the available artillery resources. The bombardment in support of the opening attack on 1 July was



Library and Archives Canada (LAC) PA 8006

Major-General Richard Turner was the commander of 2nd Canadian Division. His generalship at the Battles of 2nd Ypres and the St. Eloi Craters had called into question his battlefield command abilities, but he was to prove his critics wrong at Courcellette.

too dissipated to achieve the desired destructive effect in most of the British sectors. As a result, defending German forces inflicted a staggering 57,470 casualties on the British attackers. On the other hand, French divisions, cooperating with the British astride the Somme River, achieved greater success on 1 July, in part owing to heavier concentrations of artillery.²

In spite of Field Marshal Haig's ambitions, no breakthrough resulted during the first six weeks of fighting.³ On 19 August, Haig announced his intention "to deliver a strong attack about the middle of September using 'fresh forces and all available resources.'"⁴ Although still licking its wounds from Mount Sorrel, the Canadian Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Julian Byng, was relatively fresh in comparison with other formations. Consequently, its transfer from Belgium to the Somme battlefield in France began in late August.

Training for the Somme

On 28 August, the men of 2nd Canadian Division commenced training for the upcoming operations. The intensity and tempo of the fighting at the Somme would be unlike anything the Canadians had experienced. Training would help somewhat in preparing them, and the corps commander, Lieutenant-General Byng, ensured that personal initiative was fostered during infantry training exercises. Casualties were simulated among the officers and senior NCOs, forcing junior NCOs and even private soldiers to assume leadership roles during practice attacks. This cultivation of leadership and personal initiative was an important feature of Canadian training and tactical doctrine, which would increasingly stress the importance of devolving tactical command and control to platoon and section leaders.⁵

Despite the value placed upon decentralization during training, Canadian infantry tactics at the Somme were not completely flexible. This had less to do with the continuing use of successive linear wave formations (which critics of British infantry tactics at the Somme have often dwelled upon) and more to do with the fact that the various types of infantry weapons (rifles, bayonets, hand grenades, rifle grenades, and Lewis guns) were not effectively coordinated. Some of them, such as the rifle grenade and the Lewis gun (an automatic rifle), tended to be employed in separate specialist sections organized and often controlled by battalion headquarters. This arrangement precluded efficient coordination of a battalion's full range of firepower assets at platoon or section levels. Although many Canadians, in common with others among the Allied and German armies, already appreciated the value of small unit tactics during the fighting at the Somme, Canadian infantry platoons would not become truly effective fire-units in their own right until battalions were finally reorganized to incorporate all of the major infantry weapons within each platoon. This process would not begin until the end of 1916.⁶

Meanwhile, Major-General Turner's men took advantage of what relatively little time they had for training before they were thrust into action at the Somme in September.⁷ Units practiced on training grounds that were taped off to represent enemy trenches. Manoeuvres

were carried out on successive scales, first with sections, then platoons and companies, followed by entire battalions and brigades.⁸ These practice attacks also introduced the men to the concept of advancing behind an artillery barrage, which on the training fields was “represented by men carrying flags, who moved in bounds on timed programmes to indicate the area on which the shells would fall.” Many of these simulation techniques had been used by British and Canadian troops in their rehearsals for assaults or trench raids before the Somme offensive.⁹

The Canadians Arrive at the Somme

On 30 August, the Canadian Corps began relieving I Anzac Corps around Pozières, and Lieutenant-General Byng assumed command of the sector on 3 September.¹⁰ The Canadians now joined General Sir Hubert Gough’s Reserve Army, which had taken over the northern portion of the Somme battlefield from General Sir Henry Rawlinson’s Fourth Army on 3 July. While the 1st Canadian Division held the entire corps front, the 2nd Canadian Division prepared for its part in the upcoming attack, which would become known as the Battle of Flers-Courcellette. This battle was named for two villages which stood three miles

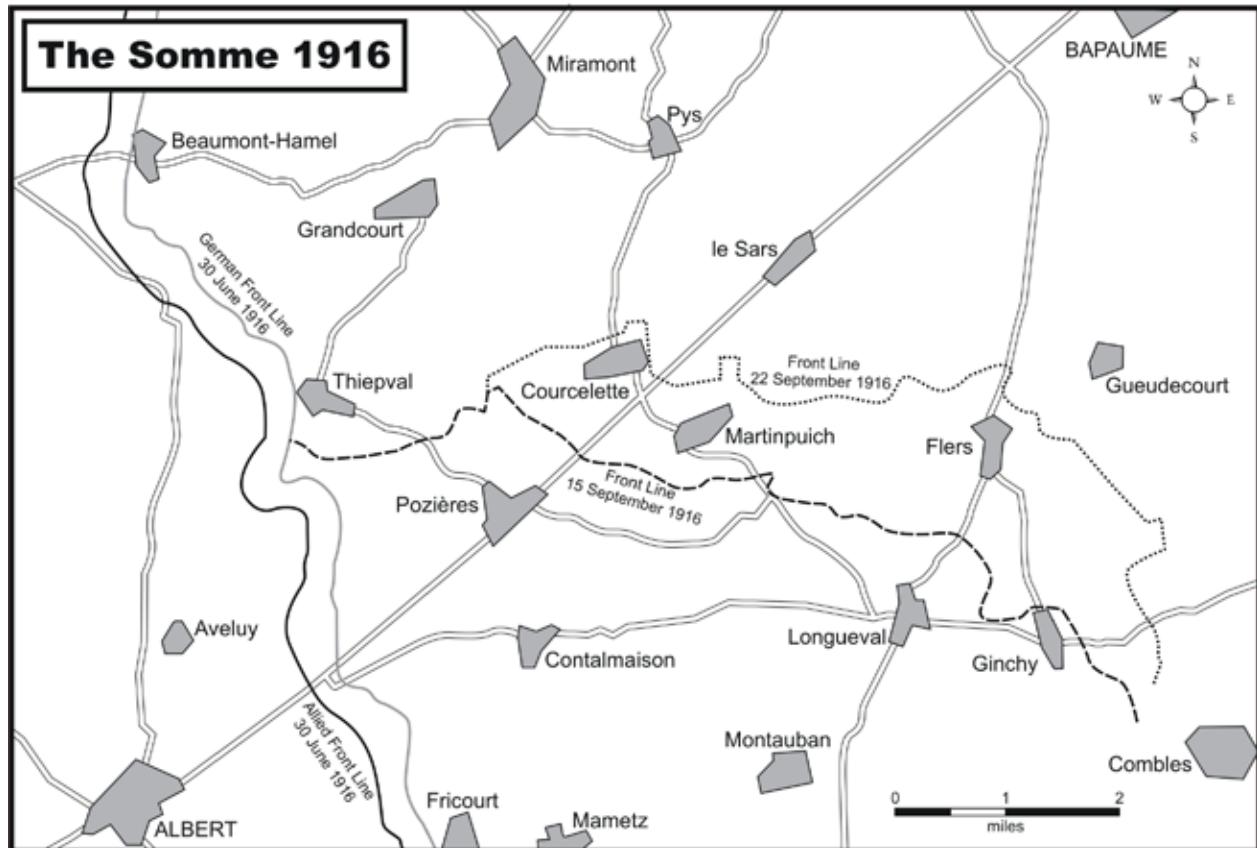
apart and lay between Thiepval to the west and Morval to the east.¹¹ The main thrust would be delivered by three corps of Rawlinson’s Fourth Army, whose objectives included the villages of Flers and Morval. To protect Rawlinson’s left flank, Gough’s Reserve Army would employ the Canadian Corps to attack the area around Courcellette and secure observation points over the strong German defences known as the Third Position. It was expected that the assault would be aided by two particular innovations: the use of a large-scale creeping artillery barrage, and the employment of an entirely new type of weapon – the tank.¹²

The Canadian Corps would advance with two divisions along a 2,200-yard front. The 2nd Canadian Division, occupying the right sector of the Canadian front, would deliver the main attack astride the Albert-Bapaume road. Major-General Turner’s men would have to traverse a swathe of German-held territory ranging in depth from 1,000 yards on the right to around 400 yards on the left in order to gain their objectives south of the village of Courcellette. These included Candy Trench, the heavily fortified ruins of a sugar factory, and roughly 1,500 yards of Sugar Trench. Along the left sector, the 8th Infantry Brigade of Major-General Louis Lipsett’s 3rd Canadian

Canadian soldiers test a Vickers machine gun prior to the Battle for Courcellette.



Canadian War Museum EO-0771



Map drawn by Mike Bechthold ©2007

Division would advance some 400 yards and provide flank protection.¹³

On the night of 10 September, 2nd Canadian Division entered the front lines, relieving two brigades of 1st Canadian Division. The following day, Turner submitted his division's scheme of operations to Canadian Corps headquarters. Officers' conferences were hastily convened to discuss arrangements, and last minute practice attacks were held.¹⁴ The task of planning had not been easy, given the Canadians' relative inexperience in conducting large-scale offensive operations, and the formidable nature of the German positions. These consisted of a maze of trenches and earthworks integrating existing civilian structures, such as the Sugar Factory. This edifice, along with many of the intact buildings in Courcelette itself, was heavily fortified and bristled with machine guns. In addition, the village was honeycombed with cellars, dugouts, and galleries furnishing ample protection for large numbers of defending troops from the 45th Reserve Division of the Guard Reserve Corps.¹⁵

According to the plan, 2nd Canadian Division would attack on a two-brigade frontage, with Brigadier-General H.D.B. Ketchen's 6th Brigade on the left and Brigadier-General R. Rennie's 4th

Brigade on the right.¹⁶ Ketchen assigned the 28th Battalion to the left flank of his brigade's advance, while the 27th Battalion took the right flank. The 31st Battalion would be in support and the 29th in brigade reserve. In the 4th Brigade, Rennie directed the 21st, 20th, and 18th Battalions to take up the left, center, and right sub-sections, respectively, with the 19th Battalion in support. In addition, the 24th Battalion was detached from 5th Brigade, which was in divisional reserve, and temporarily placed under Rennie's command for use as brigade reserve.¹⁷

In support of 2nd Canadian Division's infantry would be an array of units and formations from within and outside the Canadian Corps. These included the 1st Canadian and 18th Divisional Artilleries, with one field brigade from the Lahore Divisional Artillery (for a total of 114 18-pounders and 28 4.5-inch howitzers). The 3rd Canadian Division had left its divisional artillery in Flanders, as it was "still too green for battle." Consequently, it was supported by the four field brigades of the 2nd Canadian Divisional Artillery, plus two brigades from the 48th Divisional Artillery (in all, 72 18-pounders and 20 4.5-inch howitzers). The artillery resources alone were unprecedented in Canadian operations. Supporting the two Canadian divisions were a

total of 64 heavy and 234 field pieces.¹⁸ Additional support would be rendered by the 1st Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade, along with machine guns from the 4th, 6th, and 9th Canadian Machine Gun Companies.¹⁹

The attacking infantry battalions would advance in successive waves following “the first large-scale rolling barrage ever to be fired by Canadian gunners.” At zero hour, the 18-pounders would open fire with shrapnel on a line 50 yards short of the German front line trench. At zero plus one minute, the barrage would lift to the enemy front line trench and hold there for three minutes. After that, the barrage would begin lifts of 100 yards every three minutes until settling upon the infantry’s final objective. There it would stay for six minutes before moving on in three more lifts of three minutes each to the final barrage line between the villages of Courcellette and Martinpuich – a total of 3,000 yards from the

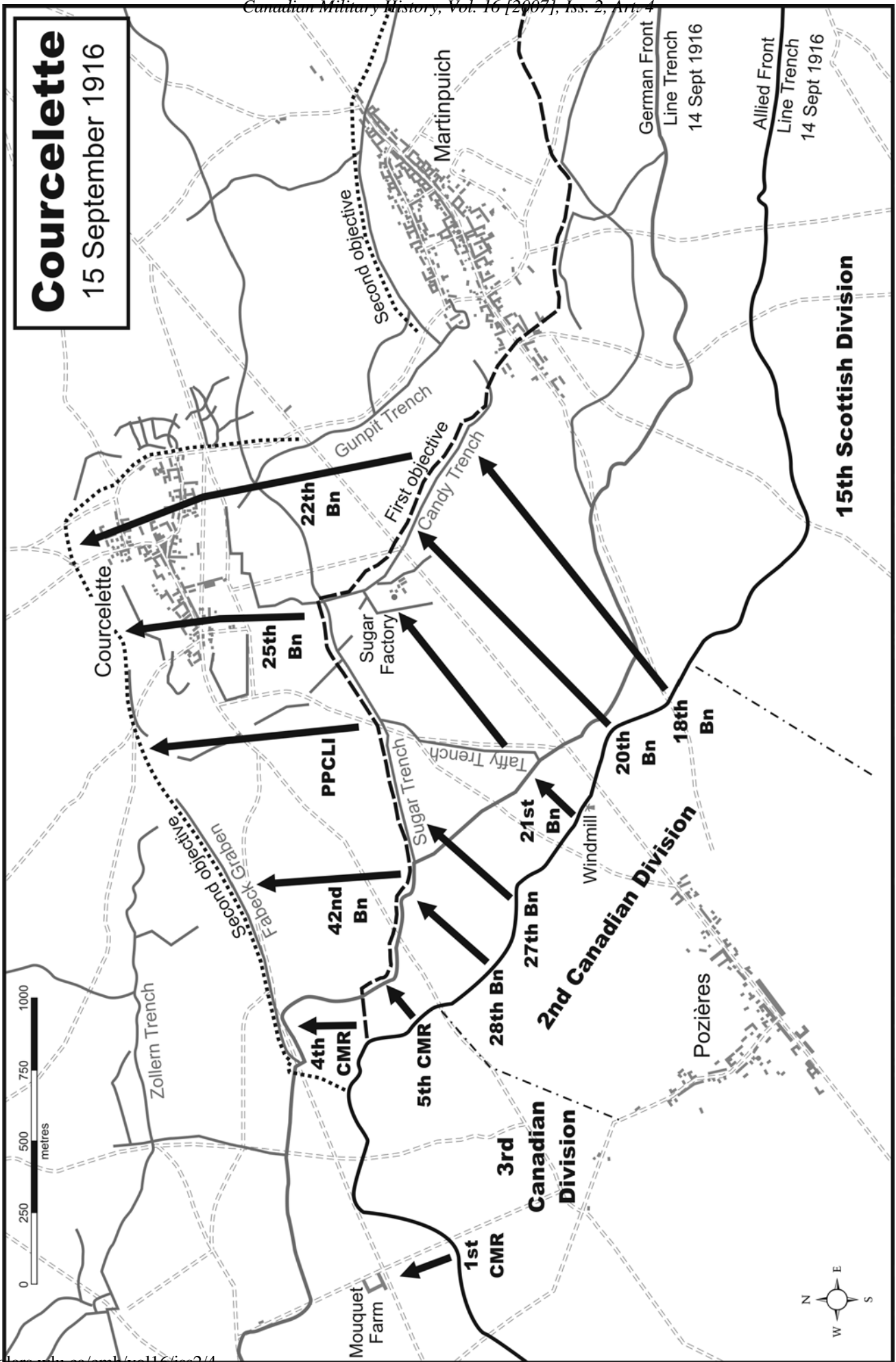
infantry’s jumping-off trenches. At the same time, the howitzers would unleash stationary barrages upon the enemy’s rear areas.²⁰

More novel and mobile fire support would come from the recently organized tank companies. In all, 49 operable tanks were available for the British operations on 15 September, and virtually all of them were allotted to the Fourth Army. Only seven tanks (from No.1 Section, Heavy Section, Machine Gun Corps) were assigned to the Reserve Army, all of which were slated to support 2nd Canadian Division. One of these seven tanks would be kept in reserve, leaving six to go into action – three tanks in support of each attacking infantry brigade.²¹ The left detachment of three tanks was ordered to proceed along 6th Brigade’s left flank in order to furnish cover and assist with mopping up. Once these tasks were accomplished, these three tanks were to swing east toward the rear of the Sugar Factory. The

Brigadier-General H.D.B. Ketchen (seated), commander of 6th Brigade, with members of his staff.



Canadian War Museum 19820109-009



right detachment would advance along the Albert-Bapaume Road and make straight for the Sugar Factory, providing close support for 4th Brigade's infantry. When the infantry gained their final objectives, the tanks would move back to their assembly areas where they could be rearmed and refueled.²²

Although the employment of tanks was the most innovative feature of the assault, the operational scheme did not revolve around them. Tanks were viewed mainly as adjuncts to the infantry. According to the operational orders, the tanks were to "conform to the infantry advance" by having them accompany the first waves of infantry. In fact, it was ordered that if the tanks proved unable to keep up with the infantry, then "the latter will not wait for them."²³ Moreover, the Canadian infantry did not have time to thoroughly train with the tanks that would be supporting them. The first tanks were shipped to France in mid-August, barely a month before their battlefield debut, and it was not until early September that a small training centre was set up near Abbeville for the newly-formed tank companies. This allowed tank crews little time to practice skills other than basic driving and gunnery. In short, before 15 September, there had been too little time available for tanks and infantry to train together.²⁴ Yet the sheer novelty of the technology presented potential advantages, for even if the machines and tactics had yet to be perfected, it was hoped that their shock value might prove decisive.

The Battle of Courcellette

On the morning of 14 September, the day before the attack, 2nd Canadian Division issued Operation Order No.78. This order outlined the final instructions for the advance, proclaiming that, "The attack will be pushed with the utmost vigour until the objective is reached and every opportunity of exploiting success will be seized."²⁵ In the hours before the assault, jumping off trenches were dug in advance of the Canadian front lines, which allowed the troops to form up roughly 150 yards closer to the German positions. In 6th Brigade's section, the German front line now lay between 100 and 200 yards away.²⁶ Based on previous operations at the Somme, it was felt that an attack should

consist of "a short rush of 200 to 300 yards at most." It was hoped that this would minimize casualties and decrease the risk of the attackers losing direction.²⁷

However, this initial short rush would carry the assaulting troops only to their first objective. Before the 4th and 6th Brigades could settle down to consolidate their gains, some battalions would have to advance their first waves roughly 1,000 yards in order to reach their final objectives along Sugar and Candy Trenches. Furthermore, the 5th Brigade, in divisional reserve, was ordered to prepare "to move forward to and beyond the final objective," if the opportunity arose, taking "every opportunity of exploiting the success."²⁸ The limited advances that had characterized British attacks between late July and early September were over. Field Marshal Haig now wanted a bold rush, through to the German Third Position at the outset of the September offensive. General Gough, the commander of the Reserve Army, and a cavalryman by training, was not favorably disposed to caution and was anxious to fulfill Haig's vision.²⁹

Many officers and other ranks remembered that 15 September marked the first anniversary of 2nd Canadian Division's arrival in France. For J.F. McKay of the 28th Battalion, the date also had a more personal and ironic significance. "I always remember that [date]," he said, "because back in Saskatchewan...all my life I'd been getting up early on the 15th of September to go out duck shooting. This time I was going out for something quite different. I was one of the ducks..."³⁰

In the pre-dawn hours of 15 September, units of the 4th and 6th Brigades moved into their jumping-off positions.³¹ Periodic traffic jams in the communication trenches were made worse on the right portion of the 4th Brigade's front around 0300 hours, when the Germans launched a sudden bombing attack supported by artillery. Through the determined efforts of detachments from the 18th, 19th, and 20th Battalions, the enemy assault parties were soon repulsed. Major-General Turner later remarked that if his men had failed to check this fierce attack, "the success of the whole planned advance might have been jeopardized."³² With the Canadian assembly secured from this last minute threat, the leading waves of infantry settled down to wait.



Left: A heavy howitzer fires in support of the Canadians at Courcellette. **Right:** Canadian artillerymen unload howitzer shells in anticipation of the upcoming battle, September 1916.

Over the previous three days, British and Canadian heavy howitzers and siege guns pounded enemy positions, softening them up for the assault. Then at zero hour, 0620 hours, the field guns,

standing almost wheel to wheel in the Sausage and Mash Valleys joined in a tremendous drum-fire that burst from the mile upon mile of batteries of all calibres massed behind the battlefield. The ground of No Man's Land trembled with the concussions and explosions of the rolling barrage.³³

Lance Cottermole of the 21st Battalion recalled that he never heard the officer's whistle when the moment came to go over the top, for,

The air over our heads was suddenly filled with the coughing and sighing, whining and screaming of thousands of shells of all calibres, making it impossible to hear anything. We stood up and I looked around behind me; as far as the eye could see, from left to right, there was a sheet of flame from the hundreds of guns...belching fire and smoke. It was an awe-inspiring sight.³⁴

Amid the din, the men of 4th and 6th Brigades clambered out of their jumping-off trenches and lurched forward toward the enemy front line, screened by a moving curtain of fire and shrapnel. Most of the assaulting battalions advanced in five waves, employing one, and sometimes even two, intermediate waves (supplied by the supporting battalions), which served to mop up and consolidate the objectives. In a mere seven minutes from zero hour, most of the attackers from both brigades secured the German front line. The 4th Brigade encountered little opposition, but the 6th Brigade faced stiffer resistance, particularly on its left, which was overcome with bombs and bayonets.³⁵

Brigadier-General Ketchen reported the creeping barrage as "excellent," with the "majority of the enemy dead" being "shot through the head." Lieutenant-Colonel Elmer Jones of the 21st Battalion concurred. According to Jones, the artillery barrage "had thoroughly demolished" the German front line trench "and killed most

of the occupants.”³⁶ Unusually large numbers of dead and wounded Germans were found in the front and support lines, confirming that they had planned to follow up their pre-dawn bombing attack on 4th Brigade’s front with a full-scale assault. The waiting enemy troops, crowded into their forward trenches, were caught in the Canadian barrage and suffered huge losses. Yet within three minutes of zero hour, the German artillery laid down its own barrage, which caused “considerable casualties” among the Canadians. Although Allied counter battery techniques continued to evolve throughout the Somme campaign, they had not yet matured. Consequently, enough enemy batteries survived to inflict terrible damage upon the exposed Canadian infantry each time they advanced.³⁷

In spite of the enemy barrage, both Canadian brigades moved onward through the German second line. Some units experienced little fighting and captured a number of dazed enemy survivors who were glad to escape the ordeal of the Allied bombardment. Other units encountered stubborn pockets of resistance that poured a galling enfilade fire into the attacking waves before being dispatched by the grenades and bayonets of the mopping-up parties.³⁸

By 0700 hours the 4th Brigade reported that its final objectives along Candy and Sugar

Trenches were taken, while the 6th Brigade reported likewise 40 minutes later.³⁹ As predicted, the battle for the fortified Sugar Factory had been deadly. In anticipation of stiff opposition at this strong point, arrangements were made to bring down a concentrated bombardment of heavy artillery, which, according to Brigadier-General Rennie, “assisted materially in checking the enemy machine gun fire.” Employing the kind of initiative that was drilled into them on the training grounds, Rennie’s infantry assaulted the factory from three sides simultaneously as soon as the artillery bombardment lifted. At 6:55 a.m., troops of the 21st Battalion forced their way into the Sugar Factory and captured around 125 survivors from its garrison.⁴⁰ The attack on the morning of 15 September may not have exhibited the finesse in small unit tactics that the Canadians would display in 1917 and 1918, but the makings of them already were evident.

As the morning wore on, the mopping-up parties continued their grim work, often lobbing grenades down dugout shafts when their German occupants refused to vacate. By afternoon, both attacking brigades set many of their remaining able-bodied men to work assisting engineer and pioneer units in consolidating the captured



The artillery barrage which preceded the Canadian attack on 15 September caught a large number of German soldiers in their forward trenches as they prepared for an attack of their own.



Canadian War Museum EO-0772
35



The Capture of the Sugar Refinery at Courcellette by the Canadians on September 15, 1916 by Fortunio Matania

ground. Other troops formed offensive patrols and pushed forward to establish advance posts and strong points, relying heavily upon Lewis gun teams. Positions were occupied just south of Courcellette and along a sunken road (named “Gun Pit Road”) linking Courcellette with the neighboring village of Martinpuich. Around 0900 hours, members of the 31st Battalion managed to work their way into the outskirts of Courcellette itself, and sent word that the village was “fairly clear of the enemy.”⁴¹

Even though it had not achieved complete destruction, the supporting artillery had destroyed or suppressed the German defenders sufficiently that the Canadians were able to maintain their forward momentum. Brigadier-General Rennie reported that prisoners taken near the Sugar Factory declared that they were completely surprised by the Canadian attack, “and the Officers did not hesitate to express their admiration for the irresistible advance of our Infantry and their own helplessness in [the] face of our bombardment.” Despite heavy losses, especially among the first waves, many Canadian

junior officers and other ranks rose to the occasion and took charge of those around them. Rennie stated that although the 21st Battalion had suffered heavy losses among its officers, most of the companies carried on successfully under the command of subalterns, while many platoons continued to function under the leadership of the NCOs, and, in some instances, of private soldiers.⁴²

But for many historians, it is the action of the tanks on 15 September that remains a principal point of interest, for such weapons had never been used in combat before. The six tanks supporting 2nd Canadian Division’s attack at Courcellette had begun lumbering forward from their assembly positions at zero hour. Yet all but two soon were knocked out of action.⁴³ Of the two machines that did engage the enemy, some anecdotal accounts have made great claims for their impact. Gordon Scott of the 6th Brigade Scout Section went over the top and soon was forced to seek shelter in a shell hole, owing to the “terrific machine gun fire” along the left flank. Knowing that “it was sure death to expose one’s

head,” the situation appeared grim, until the only operable tank supporting the 6th Brigade arrived on the scene:

It was at about this time that the first tank appeared behind us, guided by a foot soldier who miraculously escaped a rain of fire now diverted from us toward the new arrival. In fact, all of us rose from the holes and stood, unharmed, watching in amazement. On it came, a dragon spouting fire in all directions. The ground was pitted with thousands of shell holes, but the dragon dipped and rose and just came on relentlessly until it stood astride the trench.

Some of the Germans fled but most of them stood rooted to the spot on which they stood, hands held high in surrender. We casually took over the trench and then proceeded on down the hill in the wake of our good friend. The tank then moved across to the sugar factory, which was resisting a very vigorous attack. Walls and emplacements were pushed aside or mounted and this redoubt was speedily reduced.⁴⁴

A similar tale was told by Magnus MacIntyre Hood of the 24th Battalion. Hood served in a carrying party bringing up ammunition to the 21st Battalion, and he witnessed the arrival of the single tank remaining in active support of the 4th Brigade. According to Hood, “As we reached them [the 21st Battalion] we saw a Landship, named the L.S. Crème de Menthe, pass ahead and go right up to the walls of the [sugar] refinery,

Top right: Canadian soldiers stand beside a destroyed tank on the Somme battlefield.

Centre right: A view of the Sugar Refinery after the battle looking from the north. The telegraph poles mark the position of the Albert-Baupaume road.

Right: Another view of the Sugar Refinery.

Below: This photo, taken from the Canadian start line, shows the Sugar Refinery under an artillery bombardment during the battle on 15 September 1916.

CWM 19750085-010 Destroyed Tank



CWM 19740155-044



CWM EO-0929



CWM EO-0927





Canadian War Museum 19940001-420 Sugar factory, south of Courcellette

This air photo, taken on 15 September 1916, shows the shell-scarred battlefield surround the Sugar Refinery (centre). The Albert-Bapaume road cuts across the bottom of the photo, Sugar Trench across the top, while Candy Trench passes behind the Sugar Refinery to link the main road to Sugar Trench.

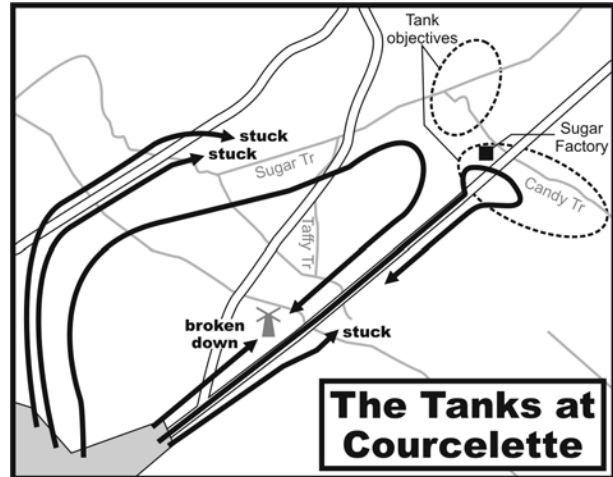
its guns blazing. It seemed to lean against one of the walls which collapsed and the monster tore into the fort, while we could see the Germans streaming out behind it offering an excellent target to the riflemen in the shell holes."⁴⁵

These accounts make it appear as though the two tanks were instrumental in the capture of the Sugar Factory. However, according to Brigadier-General Rennie's after-action report, the tank supporting his brigade arrived in the vicinity of the Sugar Factory around 0750 hours – almost a full hour after the 21st Battalion had captured the factory. Nor did Lieutenant-Colonel Elmer Jones of the 21st Battalion mention tank support in his report on the capture of the Sugar Factory. Instead, Jones ascribed the successful storming of the factory to the accuracy of the artillery bombardment and the "great vigor" of his infantrymen. Both Jones and Rennie also noted the valuable assistance rendered by the 27th Battalion in silencing enemy machine gunners in a trench situated half way between the jumping-off line and the Sugar Factory.⁴⁶

Even the tank crews themselves did not claim that they played a key role in the capture of the Sugar Factory. One of the tank officers, Captain A.M. Inglis (commanding Tank No.721, C.5) reported that at 0620 hours,

we commenced our advance and made for the Sugar Factory, which was my objective. Soon after crossing our front line trench a group of about 50 Germans came up towards the tank to surrender. Our infantry was well in advance of the tank, and were in the Sugar Factory by the time I arrived; but I was able to make use of my Hotchkiss Guns. I skirted the southern and eastern side of the factory and went up to the trench where our infantry were consolidating. Having found an officer who informed me that the position had been made good, I commenced my return journey...⁴⁷

In reconciling Magnus MacIntyre Hood's account with such reports, it is worth remembering that Hood's duties in a carrying party would have placed him on the scene at the Sugar Factory much later than the men of the 21st Battalion. Perhaps he misinterpreted some mopping-up work by the tank as being the actual capture of the factory. By way of contrast, it is worth noting the opinion of one 21st Battalion veteran, who argued that the tanks "were a fluke; they didn't amount to anything. They didn't go very far...they



bogged down. They got caught in the old trenches, you know, and they tipped over....they weren't a success."⁴⁸

Overall, the tanks played a limited part in 2nd Canadian Division's operations. They assisted some troops who were pinned down, such as Gordon Scott, by drawing enemy fire and intimidating groups of Germans who were still resisting. In the end, personal opinion of the tanks' effectiveness depended upon one's proximity to either of the two machines that did advance, and upon the circumstances that one was in at the time. Many Germans that found themselves in the tanks' paths were suitably impressed, and some were clearly terrified. Despite their slow speed, the tanks could still inflict damage with their guns. "Oh a lot got bogged down of course," said Sid Smith of the 18th Battalion, "but they still had their fire power and...one thing they did have was the matter of putting the wind up the enemy...Heinies ran like hell when they saw them coming."⁴⁹ Many accounts of the fighting at Courcelette repeated the opinion of some German prisoners that the use of tanks "was not war but bloody butchery."⁵⁰

In a post-battle report to Lieutenant-General Byng on the efficacy of the tanks, Major-General Turner pronounced that "mopping up will, in future, be the chief role of these engines." Byng was even more skeptical of their value, declaring that, "No action of the infantry should ever be made subservient to that of the tanks. Tanks are a useful accessory to the infantry, but nothing more."⁵¹ While the tank experiment on 15 September did not result in a spectacular success, lessons were learned that influenced



This photo of Courcelette being shelled was taken from the northeast corner of the Sugar Refinery during the afternoon of 15 September 1916 and shows the ground that had to be covered by the 22nd and 25th Battalions during their attack on the village.

future technical and tactical developments. By 1917 and 1918, tanks would become an integral part of Allied offensive strategy.⁵²

Capturing the Village

Notwithstanding the lackluster performance of the tanks, 2nd Canadian Division had done well for itself. But there was no time for Major-General Turner to rest upon his newfound laurels. With reports streaming in from Canadian patrols regarding the relative disorganization of remaining German defences, Lieutenant-General Byng decided at 1110 hours that the situation looked favorable enough to permit the capture of Courcelette itself. After receiving assurances that all infantry and artillery units would be ready by early evening, Byng informed Turner at 1315 hours that zero hour for the next phase of the advance would be at 1800 hours. Anticipating this turn of events, Turner already had instructed Brigadier-General A.H. Macdonell's 5th Brigade, then in divisional reserve, to begin preparing for just such an endeavour.⁵³

Throughout the morning, Macdonell had kept his finger on the pulse of events, having situated himself at divisional headquarters where he

relayed intelligence forward to his own brigade headquarters. His staff and senior officers were well apprised of the situation when, at Turner's behest, Macdonell hurriedly convened a meeting of his four battalion commanders shortly after 1300 hours to plan the capture of Courcelette. The 22nd, 25th, and 26th Battalions were detailed to make the assault, while the 24th Battalion, which had functioned as the 4th Brigade's reserve unit, was again placed in this capacity upon reverting to Macdonell's command later that afternoon. Flank protection on the left would be provided by 3rd Canadian Division.⁵⁴

There was time for the battalion commanders and their officers to make only a quick visual reconnaissance of the ground they would have to cover, which was considerable. From their starting point they would have to cross approximately two miles in broad daylight before reaching their objectives along the northern and eastern outskirts of Courcelette.⁵⁵ Time did not permit the construction of jumping-off trenches, nor did it allow for more methodical planning. Brigadier-General Macdonell simply explained to his battalion commanders the exact dispositions for the attack and the duties of each battalion.⁵⁶

It was decided that the battalions would form up on the reverse side of a slight slope in order to screen their movements from the enemy for as long as possible. By 1700 hours, all units were ready and began their advance. The 22nd Battalion deployed on the right in three long waves, and the 25th Battalion formed up on the left in four waves. The 22nd Battalion would maintain this formation during the attack, while the 25th Battalion would reform into two longer waves upon reaching the barrage line just before zero hour. The 26th Battalion advanced 150 yards to the rear, with two companies deployed in support of each of the two leading battalions.⁵⁷ The troops moved off well before Byng's stated zero hour of 1800 hours because they had a great deal of ground to cover before reaching the forward positions of the 4th and 6th Brigades. After moving through these positions, Macdonell's men would form up behind a creeping barrage, scheduled to begin at zero hour, which would precede them through Courcellette and lead them to their objectives on the far side of the village.

Unfortunately, as soon as the 5th Brigade began its march toward the new Canadian front line, the Germans unleashed a creeping barrage of their own, which dogged them mercilessly throughout the entire advance.⁵⁸ Amid the din and confusion of the enemy barrage, battalion

scouts used compasses to help keep their comrades on track, while officers trudged on with maps in hand, carefully noting surviving landmarks. All ranks observed the position of the sun, which was over their left shoulders, and used it as a general guide along their northerly march route. Eventually, they passed through the foremost Canadian positions and reached their own barrage line in time for zero hour. The first lift was scheduled for 1815 hours giving all ranks a much-needed, albeit brief, rest before the final push into Courcellette. Units were halted as close to the barrage as possible, and officers used the few minutes remaining to reform their men.⁵⁹

When the barrage began rolling forward, the three battalions resumed their advance, with the central street running north through the center of Courcellette forming the boundary between the 22nd and 25th Battalions. As they proceeded through the blasted remains of the village, they at last came to grips with German troops from the 210th and 211th Reserve Regiments of the 45th Reserve Division. The fighting was swift and brutal. The 22nd Battalion managed to push through to its objective by 1845 hours, following "a sharp fight of ten minutes during which the bayonet was frequently used." To the left of the French Canadians, the Nova Scotians and other Maritimers in the 25th Battalion reached

A Canadian staff officer examines a smashed German field gun captured in Courcellette.



Canadian War Museum EO-0846



CWM EO-0849

The aftermath of the battle:— (from the top down)

The bodies of Canadian soldiers killed during the initial attack lay in no-man's-land in front of Canadian lines.

Wounded Canadian soldiers are taken care of by medical personnel in a forward trench.

German soldiers received medical attention before being sent behind the lines into captivity.

The war is over for this group of German soldiers captured during the fighting for Courcelette.



CWM EO-0756

their objective even earlier, at 1825 hours after crossing bayonets with the Germans in a deadly five-minute struggle.⁶⁰

However, not every member of the enemy garrison was so aggressive in defence. Gordon Silliker of "D" Company, 25th Battalion, was not impressed with the martial spirit of the German troops that he encountered as he fought his way through Courcelette:

We went into the village with one big rush which frightened all the Huns to death – the ones the artillery left. They nearly all surrendered, most of them meeting us with their hands up calling 'Mercy Kamerade'...Our company got about a hundred officers and men.

There is not much fight in the Germans. They are all right if they can get in some safe place where you cannot see them and they can snipe at you or put a machine gun on you...It's a different tune they have when you get them on the point of the bayonet and especially when they get up against a Canadian. Whenever they see the Canadians coming they as a rule meet them with their hands up.⁶¹



CWM EO-0816

Bayonet work was prominent in both the morning and evening attacks at Courcelette. Musketry was employed frequently as well,⁶² especially against groups of fleeing Germans. The 5th Brigade reported that upon entering Courcelette, "our troops saw many Bosches 'scuppering' away over the ridge, many of whom were killed by our deliberate rifle fire and in some cases, sections had a splendid opportunity of making effective use of section fire control, the whole section coming into action as a fire unit on the fleeing enemy."⁶³ Although the habits of trench warfare led troops on both sides to favor grenades over rifles and bayonets, the Canadians' use of musketry at Courcelette displayed their willingness to utilize rifles as weapons of opportunity.



CWM EO-0816

While the 22nd and 25th Battalions made good their new positions 300 yards to the north and northeast of Courcelette, the 26th Battalion began mopping up the village. Although the artillery had obliterated many of the buildings, there still were plenty of dugouts and cellars in which German troops could hold out. These had to be cleared one by one, and this arduous task took the best part of two days to complete. Mopping-up and securing prisoners were important tasks, for it was said that unguarded German stragglers sometimes picked up weapons and fired into the backs of the troops who had initially accepted their surrender.⁶⁴ The Germans reportedly employed other ruses as well. For instance, during the morning attack on 15 September, a party of Germans approached Captain B.M. Loghrin of the 18th Battalion with the apparent intention of surrendering. When Loghrin stepped forward to accept their surrender, one of the Germans hurled a grenade that killed the Captain instantly. According to Brigadier-General Rennie, "This foul act of treachery was observed by the men of his Company, with the result that none of the occupants of the trench were allowed to escape alive."⁶⁵

In some instances the Canadian troops were not angels either. Through a mixture of motives, including revenge, fears of German treachery, and possible official encouragement, some Canadians refused to take prisoners on 15 September. Many men in 2nd Canadian Division saw the attack as a chance to settle old scores with "Fritz" for the punishments inflicted upon them at St. Eloi, Hooge, and in other smaller deadly encounters. According to Brigadier-General Ketchen, "An officer of the 3rd Canadian Division, who was watching our advance from his position on our left, stated that the bayonet work of our Battalions was really magnificent. No wonder; these men had been cooped up in the Ypres Salient for many months and were getting a little of their own back."⁶⁶ When one member of the 28th Battalion was questioned about the scarcity of prisoners taken by his unit, he spat back the reply, "We're not taking any. They blew mines under us twice."⁶⁷ Many troops in the 4th Brigade were equally uncharitable. "On our advancing," Lieutenant-Colonel E.W. Jones admitted, "some of the enemy offered to surrender but in most cases these men were bayoneted by our advancing troops."⁶⁸ Major-General Turner was well aware

of the pent-up hostility in his division, admitting in his diary that, "The men were not looking for prisoners, and considered a dead German was the best."⁶⁹

There is some suggestion that it may have been official policy to take few prisoners on 15 September, and that this policy resulted directly from fears of German deceit. Lance Cottermole of the 21st Battalion claimed that he and his comrades,

were given strict instructions to take NO prisoners until our objectives had been gained. The reason for this was that so often in British advances, when the Germans had thrown down their arms in surrender and our men had moved through them, at the same time indicating to them to go to our rear where they would be collected as prisoners, the Germans had picked up their rifles again and shot our men in the back, thereby bringing the advance to a halt. No such risks could or would be taken in this important attack, and orders were reluctantly carried out.⁷⁰

During the battle, as Cottermole and his comrades in the battalion's third wave busied themselves mopping up some enemy positions, he observed,

One young German, scruffy, bareheaded, cropped hair, and wearing steel-rimmed spectacles, [who] ran, screaming with fear, dodging in and out amongst us to avoid being shot, crying out 'Nein! Nein!' He pulled out from his breast pocket a handful of photographs and tried to show them to us (I suppose they were of his wife and children) in an effort to gain our sympathy. It was all of no avail. As the bullets smacked into him he fell to the ground motionless, the pathetic little photographs fluttering down to the earth around him.⁷¹

So far, evidence of instructions to take no prisoners has not been found in official orders. But the exhortation in the divisional operation orders on 14 September to push the attack "with the utmost vigour until the objective is reached," may have provided some subordinate commanders with justification for encouraging, or even ordering, their men to act ruthlessly.

Nevertheless, 2nd Canadian Division did collect significant numbers of German prisoners between 15 and 17 September. Brigadier-General Macdonell reported approximately

1,055 prisoners captured by 5th Brigade, and Brigadier-General Ketchen reported that 6th Brigade took around 350 prisoners. Brigadier-General Rennie did not supply an exact figure, but 4th Brigade's captures likely were comparable to 6th Brigade's.⁷² Prisoners were sent to brigade headquarters, and parties of Canadian Corps Cyclists escorted them farther back to the Corps Cage in Albert.⁷³

By 1935 hours on 15 September, Major-General Turner received confirmation through verbal reports and aerial contact patrols⁷⁴ that the "whole of Courcelette had been taken." At 1950 hours he sent "his heartiest congratulations" to all ranks for the day's accomplishments.⁷⁵ The division also received accolades from General Gough and Field Marshal Haig. Gough was especially impressed with the 5th Brigade's performance, pointing out that their attack "across the open without any jumping-off place in the nature of trenches is without parallel in the history of the present campaign." He requested that Brigadier-General Macdonell submit a report on the brigade's advance, including details on the formations employed by his battalions.⁷⁶

Haig also was quite pleased with the day's achievements. "The result of the fighting of the 15th of September and following days," he enthusiastically declared, "was a gain more considerable than any which had attended our arms in the course of a single operation since the commencement of the offensive."⁷⁷ In his personal diary he noted also that, "The two Canadian [Brigades] which took the Sugar Factory and joining trenches were those which were said to have failed at St. Eloi in the spring. Sent a word of thanks and congratulation to them."⁷⁸

This shows that Haig had not forgotten the debacle at St. Eloi, and Turner and his brigadiers must have been acutely aware of the scrutiny they were under. The effect this had on the behavior of numerous senior officers was readily apparent to subordinates like Captain Andrew Macphail, who observed that, "many officers commanding are like children at school. They wish to avoid a 'black mark' or a 'rap over the knuckles'; these are their favourite words."⁷⁹

At last the spectre of failure at St. Eloi departed from Turner and 2nd Canadian Division, and the "black mark" that had lain

upon their reputations was largely, if not totally, erased. They had proved to their superiors, to their peers in other formations, and to the enemy that they were capable of planning and executing a successful large-scale offensive operation. In his personal diary on 17 September, Turner revealed his deep personal satisfaction. "We have had a great success," he concluded,

the greatest of any Division since these operations started...For 12 months I have waited with the Division for this opportunity. God knows they acted in a magnificent way – nothing, "losses" or anything else could stop them – they were out to even old scores of the Ypres Salient. From the Commander-in-Chief down – all are pleased."⁸⁰

As the days passed, Turner grew even bolder in trumpeting the achievements of his division, as shown by a letter that he sent to Sir Max Aitken, complete with laudatory newspaper clippings about the success at Courcelette. "The attached clippings," Turner advised Aitken, "have further reference to the success of this division."⁸¹ Turner's emphasis of the word *this* in his letter reveals how sensitive he was about his division's reputation – a reputation that, by extension, reflected upon his own. He also refused to share much credit for the capture of Courcelette with the British tanks that had supported his infantry and garnered a great deal of publicity, despite their limited role. On 22 September, he declared that, "Too much credit must not be placed on the tanks yet – Courcelette was won by my infantry."⁸² Turner was correct in downplaying the role of the tanks, but he did insufficient justice to the artillery's role. Without overwhelming artillery support, his infantry would have sustained heavier losses than they did, and would not have captured their objectives as quickly as they did – if they captured them at all.

Even with heavy artillery support, the operation still cost 2nd Canadian Division dearly. In taking Courcelette, its infantry battalions suffered 1,283 casualties (79 officers and 1,204 other ranks) on 15 September alone. Of these, 36 officers and 678 other ranks were killed.⁸³ The carnage of the fighting and the heavy losses on both sides left many men shaken. Lieutenant-Colonel T.L. Tremblay of the 22nd Battalion remarked that, "If hell is as bad as what I have seen at Courcelette, I would not wish my worst enemy to go there."⁸⁴ Yet discipline in the division's units remained substantially intact in the weeks



Canadian troops return victorious from the Battle of Courcelette.

immediately following the village's capture. On 1 October, the divisional Assistant Provost Marshal, Major A.M. Jarvis, declared that, "the general standard of conduct and discipline was never higher. The men though lively and sober are exceptionally well behaved and are bearing unusual hardships and fatigue with marvelous spirit. To lead such men is a glory – an honour without price."⁸⁵

If 2nd Canadian Division's time at the Somme was limited to its hard-fought victory on 15 September, then the division's experience in this campaign, although costly in terms of lives, might have had a more positive and lasting impact on the formation's collective self-image. Certainly, personnel at all levels, from Major-General Turner and his staff down to the ordinary rank and file, had proved their capacity to mount a successful attack on a divisional scale.

However, the fighting that continued during the rest of September and early October quickly sapped whatever positive energy Turner and his men derived from their initial advance. 2nd Canadian Division managed to beat off heavy German counterattacks at Courcelette, and although it performed no worse than other divisions during successive operations at Thiepval Ridge and the Ancre Heights, it was too worn out to capture such formidable objectives as Regina

Trench. By the time it departed the Somme on 10 October, 2nd Canadian Division would suffer a total of 6,817 casualties (286 officers and 6,531 other ranks) in two bloody tours of duty.⁸⁶ The capture of Courcelette was overshadowed by less conclusive subsequent battles, and by the overall dismal reputation that the Somme campaign gained. As a result, the battle remains largely forgotten in popular memory. Yet, when viewed in hindsight, the operation is an impressive achievement despite its horrors, and serves as a harbinger of greater victories to come in 1917 and 1918.

Notes

1. For assessments of Turner and of the fighting at St. Eloi, see Thomas P. Leppard, "Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi," MA Thesis, University of Calgary, 1994; Tim Cook, "The Blind Leading the Blind: The Battle of the St. Eloi Craters," *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1996; Thomas P. Leppard, "The Dashing Subaltern: Sir Richard Turner in Retrospect," *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1997; David Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," PhD Thesis, University of Calgary, 2003, Chapters 3-6.
2. Hew Strachan, "The Battle of the Somme and British Strategy," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1998, pp. 84-85; Tim Travers, "July 1, 1916: The Reason

- Why," *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1995, pp.62, 67-70.
3. For critical reassessments of the offensive's conception, commencement, and subsequent stages through August 1916, see Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918* (London: Routledge, 1993; orig. pub., 1987), Chapters 6, 7; Elizabeth Greenhalgh, "Why the British Were on the Somme in 1916," *War in History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1999, pp. 147-173; Gary Sheffield, *The Somme* (London: Cassell, 2003), chapters 1-4; Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The Somme* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), chapters 1-19.
 4. Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: The Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962), p.165.
 5. David Campbell, "Schooling for War: Canadian Infantry Training, 1914-1917," in *Perspectives on War: Essays on Security, Society and the State*, eds. Chris Bullock and Jillian Dowding (Calgary: Society for Military and Strategic Studies, 2001), pp.20-21, 23-24.
 6. Bill Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), chapters 3-4; Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993), pp.160-161, 163-164; Mark Osborne Humphries, "The Myth of the Learning Curve: Tactics and Training in the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1916-1918," *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2005, pp.18-22; Campbell, "Schooling for War," pp.21, 23-24.
 7. Most battalions conducted between four and seven days of concentrated training before going into action. Much of this training took place during the period from 29 August to 3 September. Library and Archives Canada [LAC], RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 4844, War Diary, 2nd Canadian Division General Staff (hereafter, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff), August, September 1916, diary text, 29 August – 3 September 1916.
 8. R.C. Fetherstonhaugh, *The 24th Battalion, C.E.F., Victoria Rifles of Canada 1914-1919* (Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1930), pp.80-81.
 9. Major D.J. Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment), Canadian Expeditionary Force, in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Stone and Cox, 1935), p.76; Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare*, p.98.
 10. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, p.165; C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Volume III, the A.I.F. in France: 1916* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1929), p.877.
 11. The Battle of Flers-Courcelette was only one of a number of engagements that collectively made up the Battle of the Somme in 1916. The battle lasted from 15 to 22 September but this study concerns itself with events on the opening day. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, pp.167, 554.
 12. LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, Appendix (hereafter, App) 400, 2nd Cdn Div G.S. 1166, 8 September 1916; Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, p.167. Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904-1945* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982), pp.83-84; Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare*, p.27; Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp.142-143.
 13. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, pp.168-169.
 14. LAC, MG 30, E 46, Sir Richard Turner Papers (hereafter, Turner Papers), Vol. 2, File 14, 2nd Cdn Div, G.S.1166, 8 September 1916; *ibid.*, Canadian Corps, G.688, 9 September 1916; LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, diary text, 10 September 1916; LAC, RG 9, III-C-3, Vol. 4098, Folder 43-2, 2nd Cdn Div G.S. 1174, 11 September 1916; Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, p.78.
 15. LAC, RG 9, III-D-1, Vol. 4679, Folder 15, File 3, "The Capture of Courcelette," by Major Frederick Davy, p.5.
 16. LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, App 400, 2nd Cdn Div G.S. 1166, 8 September 1916.
 17. This was done likely because the conformation of the enemy's trenches required the 4th Brigade to advance farther than the 6th Brigade in order to reach its final objectives. LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, "Summary of Operations of 2nd Canadian Division, September 15th and 16th."
 18. LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, Canadian Corps, G.688, 9 September 1916; Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Gunners of Canada: The History of the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery, Vol. I: 1534-1919* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), pp.261-262; LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, App 408, 2nd Cdn Div Operation Order No. 78, 14 September 1916 (hereafter, Op Order No. 78).
 19. The machine gunners were to furnish additional cover for the advance with barrages of indirect fire, along with occasional concentrations of fire upon selected enemy strong points as needed. Other machine gun detachments would move forward with the infantry, garrison hastily-constructed strong points, and offer protection against the expected enemy counter attacks. LAC, RG 9, III-C-3, Vol. 4098, Folder 44-1, 1st Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade, Operation Order No. 82, 14 September 1916; LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, App 408, 2nd Cdn Div Op Order No. 78; Lieutenant-Colonel C.S. Grafton, *The Canadian 'Emma Gees': A History of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps* (London, Ont.: The Canadian Machine Gun Corps Association, 1938), p.50.
 20. In addition, one 18-pounder battery would be placed at the disposal of each battalion in the front line, in order to deal with any special targets as needed. LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 4957, War Diary, GOCRA, Canadian Corps, September 1916, Appendices, Operation Order No. 26, 13 September 1916; Nicholson, *The Gunners of Canada*, p.264.
 21. David Fletcher, *Landships: British Tanks in the First World War* (London: HMSO, 1984), p.16; Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, p.169. Three of these six tanks were Mark I "male" types (with two 6-pounder and four Hotchkiss guns each), and bore the names "Champagne," "Chartreuse," and "Crème de Menthe." The other three were Mark I "female" tanks (armed with six Hotchkiss guns), and were christened "Cordon Bleu," "Chablis," and "Cognac." LAC, MG 30, E 241, D.E. Macintyre Papers (hereafter, Macintyre Papers), Vol. 2, "Men of Valour," p.100. In his history of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps, C.S. Grafton provided a different name, "Cordon Rouge," for one of the tanks. Grafton, *The Canadian 'Emma Gees'*, p.50. One male and two

- females were to accompany the 6th Brigade, while the other two males and one female would go over with the 4th Brigade. LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, App 408, 2nd Cdn Div Op Order No. 78.
22. LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, App 408, 2nd Cdn Div Op Order No. 78.
 23. LAC, RG 9, III-C-3, Vol. 4098, Folder 43-2, 2nd Cdn Div, G.S.1174, 11 September, 1916; LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, App 408, 2nd Cdn Div Op Order No. 78.
 24. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, p.168.
 25. LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, App 408, 2nd Cdn Div Op Order No. 78.
 26. LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, untitled report by Brigadier-General Ketchen, dated 9 October 1916, regarding 6th Brigade operations on 15 September (hereafter, untitled report by Ketchen).
 27. LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, 2nd Cdn Div, "Notes Drawn from the Fighting on the Somme," 21 August 1916. The recommended distance for such short rushes, as noted in the British Official History, was 200-250 yards. Captain Wilfrid Miles, *History of the Great War: Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916, 2nd July 1916 to the End of the Battles of the Somme* (London: Macmillan, 1938), p.573.
 28. LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 4884, War Diary, 5th Infantry Brigade (hereafter, War Diary, 5th Bde), September 1916, App 11, 5th Bde Operation Order No. 81, 14 September 1916.
 29. Travers, *The Killing Ground*, p.178.
 30. LAC, RG 41, B-III-1, Records of the CBC, Flanders Fields (hereafter, CBC, Flanders Fields), Vol. 12, 28th Battalion, Transcript of interview with Captain J.F. McKay, Tape 2, pp.4-5.
 31. Roy, ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser*, p.202; Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, p.80.
 32. LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 4880, War Diary, 4th Infantry Brigade (hereafter, War Diary, 4th Bde), September 1916, "Operations of 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade at the Somme, September 10-17, 1916" (hereafter, "Ops of 4th Bde, September 10-17"); Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, p.80; Turner quoted in Canadian War Museum (hereafter, CWM), 19740071-017 58C 1 1.8, untitled file of letters, questionnaires, responses, and notes regarding 19th Battalion history, typewritten notes from a member of No. 4 Platoon, name unknown.
 33. Nicholson, *The Gunners of Canada*, pp.264-265.
 34. Imperial War Museum (hereafter, IWM), 92/26/1, "Attack on the Somme," by Lance Cottermole, p.3.
 35. During the First World War, "bomb" was a frequent synonym for "grenade." LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, "Diary of Operations, 15th, 16th and 17th September, 1916," 4th Bde; *Ibid.*, "Report on Operations September 15-16," by Brigadier-General Ketchen, dated 20 September 1916 (hereafter, Ketchen report, 20 September 1916); *Ibid.*, untitled report by Ketchen; *Ibid.*, Annotated diagrams of 4th and 6th Bde formations.
 36. LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, Ketchen report, 20 September 1916; LAC, MG 30, E 50, Elmer W. Jones Papers (hereafter, Jones Papers), Folder 2, report on operations, 15-16 September 1916.
 37. LAC, War Diary, 4th Bde, September 1916, "Ops of 4th Bde, September 10-17;" Prior and Wilson, *The Somme*, p.234; LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, Ketchen report, 20 September 1916; LAC, RG 9, III-D-1, Vol. 4679, Folder 15, File 3, "The Capture of Courcellette," By Major Frederick Davy, p.9; Albert P. Palazzo, "The British Army's Counter-Battery Staff Office and Control of the Enemy in World War I," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 63, January 1999, pp.57-63.
 38. LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, Ketchen report, 20 September 1916; LAC, Jones Papers, Folder 2, report on operations, 15-16 September 1916; LAC, War Diary, 4th Bde, September 1916, "Ops of 4th Bde, September 10-17."
 39. LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, "Diary of Operations, 15th, 16th and 17th September 1916," 4th Bde; *Ibid.*, Ketchen report, 20 September 1916.
 40. LAC, War Diary, 4th Bde, September 1916, "Ops of 4th Bde, September 10-17."
 41. LAC, War Diary, 4th Bde, September 1916, "Ops of 4th Bde, September 10-17;" LAC, Turner Papers, untitled report by Ketchen; *Ibid.*, Ketchen report, 20 September 1916.
 42. LAC, War Diary, 4th Bde, September 1916, "Ops of 4th Bde, September 10-17."
 43. Of the four initial tank casualties, one belied down in the muddy terrain before getting very far. Another was abandoned after one of its tracks had come loose, and the other two suffered from damaged steering gears (one from enemy shell fire), which resulted in the vehicles becoming stuck – one lodging itself sideways in a communication trench and the other fetching up in a large shell hole. LAC, RG 9, III-B-1, Series 28, Vol. 2226, File O-4-28, "Report of Operations of the Tanks of No. 1 Section, 'C' Company, H.S.M.G.C. 16-9-16."
 44. H.R.N. Clyne, *Vancouver's 29th: A Chronicle of the 29th In Flanders Fields* (Vancouver: Tobin's Tigers Association, 1964), pp.20-21.
 45. IWM, 76/169/1, Transcript of interview with Magnus MacIntyre Hood, Part III, p.4.
 46. LAC, War Diary, 4th Bde, September 1916, "Ops of 4th Bde, September 10-17;" LAC, Jones Papers, Folder 2, "Operations, 21st Canadian Battalion."
 47. LAC, RG 9, III-B-1, Series 28, Vol. 2226, File O-4-28, "Report of Operations of the Tanks of No. 1 Section, 'C' Company, H.S.M.G.C. 16-9-16."
 48. LAC, CBC, Flanders Fields, Vol. 10, 21st Battalion, Transcript of interview with Collupy [first name unknown], Tape 1, p.11. Martin Marix Evans, *The Battles of the Somme* (Toronto: Little, Brown, 1996), p.47. LAC, Macintyre Papers, Vol. 2, "Men of Valour," p.103.
 49. LAC, CBC, Flanders Fields, Vol. 10, 18th Battalion, Transcript of interview with Sid Smith, Tape 1, pp.7-8.
 50. LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, diary text, 15 September 1916. The reference to this quote in the divisional war diary, is one of the earliest, if not the earliest instance. The quote was repeated in various personal diaries, such as D.E. Macintyre's and even Sir Douglas Haig's, and has been employed subsequently in both British and Canadian official histories and in many other historical works.
 51. LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 4813, War Diary, Canadian Corps General Staff (hereafter, War Diary, Cdn Corps Gen Staff), September 1916, App VII, 2nd Cdn Div G.345, 19 September 1916; *ibid.*, Cdn Corps G.167, 21 September 1916.

52. Byng himself would eventually modify his opinion of the tanks' usefulness. After rising to command Third Army he would make great use of massed tanks during the Battle of Cambrai in November 1917.
53. LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, diary text, 15 September 1916; LAC, War Diary, Cdn Corps Gen Staff, September 1916, App VI, "Summary of Operations, 15th to 22nd September, 1916." LAC, War Diary, Cdn Corps Gen Staff, September 1916, diary text, 15 September 1916. Turner's left flank also was well covered throughout the day by the efforts of Major-General Lipsett's 3rd Canadian Division.
54. LAC, War Diary, 5th Bde, September 1916, diary text, 15 September 1916. "B" Company of the 24th Battalion would remain with the 4th Brigade, being used as a carrying party until the following day. Fetherstonhaugh, *The 24th Battalion*, p.84.
55. LAC, War Diary, 5th Bde, September 1916, App 25, 5th Bde B.M.L. 216, 20 September 1916.
56. LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, 5th Bde, B.M.L. 288, 24 September 1916. "Formations Adopted by the Battalions of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade in the Attack on Courcellette on the Afternoon of September 15th, 1916."
57. LAC, War Diary, 5th Bde, September 1916, diary text, 15 September 1916; LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, 5th Bde, B.M.L. 288, 24 September 1916; LAC, RG 9, III-C-3, Vol. 4089, Folder 20, File 11, "Sketch Plan Showing Formation Adopted for the Attack and Capture of Courcellette on 15th September 1916 by 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade."
58. LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, 5th Bde, B.M.L. 288, 24 September 1916.
59. LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, 5th Bde, B.M.L. 288, 24 September 1916; LAC, War Diary, 5th Bde, September 1916, diary text, 15 September 1916.
60. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, pp.170-171; LAC, War Diary, 5th Bde, September 1916, App 25, 5th Bde, B.M.L. 216, 20 September 1916.
61. Quoted in J. Clinton Morrison, Jr., *Hell Upon Earth: A Personal Account of Prince Edward Island Soldiers in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Summerside, PEI: Privately published, 1995), p.93.
62. Brigadier-General Rennie reported that "On the way to the sugar Factory, small detached posts of the enemy were encountered and these caused some casualties. The occupants were in almost every case shot or bayoneted." LAC, War Diary, 4th Bde, September 1916, "Ops of 4th Bde, September 10-17."
63. LAC, War Diary, 5th Bde, September 1916, diary text, 15 September 1916.
64. LAC, RG 24, C-6-e, Vol. 1812, File GAQ 4-1, 2nd Canadian Division, summary of operations and organization; LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, 5th Infantry Brigade, B.M.L. 288, 24 September 1916; LAC, CBC, Flanders Fields, Vol. 6, Transcript of broadcast Episode 8, "The Somme," p.14.
65. LAC, War Diary, 4th Bde, September 1916, "Ops of 4th Bde, September 10-17."
66. LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, untitled report by Ketchen.
67. LAC, Macintyre Papers, Vol. 2, "Men of Valour," p.112. The soldier was referring to two instances, one in the Ypres Salient on 8 October 1915, and the other at Hooge on 6 June 1916, in which mines were blown under positions occupied by the 28th Battalion.
68. LAC, Jones Papers, Folder 2, report on operations, 15-16 September 1916.
69. CWM, 58, A1, 9.1, 1971, 0147-001, personal diary of Sir Richard Turner (hereafter, Turner diary), p.102, 18 September 1916.
70. IWM, 92/26/1, "Attack on the Somme," by Lance Cottermole, p.2.
71. IWM, 92/26/1, "Attack on the Somme," by Lance Cottermole, pp.4-5.
72. In his report, Rennie accounted for at least 325 prisoners, but in some instances he simply mentioned that a "steady stream" of prisoners was on the move toward the Canadian rear areas. LAC, War Diary, 5th Bde, September 1916, App 25, 5th Bde B.M.L. 216, 20 September 1916; LAC, Turner Papers, Vol. 2, File 14, Ketchen report, 20 September 1916; LAC, War Diary, 4th Bde, September 1916, "Ops of 4th Bde, September 10-17." According to G.W.L. Nicholson, the German 211th Reserve Regiment, "which carried the main burden at Courcellette itself, grimly recorded in its History casualties for the period 8-17 September of 59 officers (out of 75) and 1820 other ranks," while the 2nd Battalion of the 210th Reserve Regiment was virtually "annihilated" on September 15. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, p.171.
73. LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, App 408, 2nd Cdn Div Op Order No. 78.
74. LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, App 408, 2nd Cdn Div Op Order No. 78.
75. LAC, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div Gen Staff, September 1916, diary text, 15 September 1916.
76. LAC, War Diary, 5th Bde, September 1916, App 28A, 22 September 1916.
77. Haig, quoted in Daniel G. Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography* (Toronto: Methuen, 1985), p.77.
78. National Library of Scotland, Acc. 3155, Ms. 97, Part 7, Diary of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, 15 September 1916.
79. LAC, MG 30, D 150, Sir Andrew Macphail Papers, Vol. 4, personal diary, Vol. II, 1916, 18 October 1916.
80. CWM, Turner diary, p.102, 17 September 1916.
81. LAC, RG 9, III-D-1, Vol. 4679, Folder 15, File 3, Major-General Turner to Sir Max Aitken, 21 September 1916.
82. CWM, Turner diary, p.103, 22 September 1916.
83. LAC, RG 150, vol 496, "Casualties By Days - France and Belgium," September 1916.
84. Tremblay quoted in Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, p.171.
85. LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5050, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div APM, diary text, 1 October 1916.
86. These numbers refer to those who were killed, wounded, and missing from 10 September to 10 October 1916. LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 4848, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div, AA & QMG, September 1916, App 59, "Casualties, Month of September 1916;" *ibid.*, Vol. 4849, War Diary, 2nd Cdn Div AA & QMG, October 1916, App 64, "Casualties, Month of October 1916."

David Campbell completed his graduate studies in history at the University of Calgary where he specialized in military history. His major area of research is the social and operational history of the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War. He currently resides and teaches in Halifax, Nova Scotia.