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FROM THE CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM ARCHIVES

Sir Richard Turner and the Second Battle of Ypres, April and May 1915

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Abstract: The Second Battle of Ypres remains one of the most contentious Canadian actions of the First World War, thanks in large measure to the uneven performance of Brigadier-Generals Arthur Currie and Richard Turner. Turner in particular has been singled out for criticism over three key decisions he made during the fighting in late April 1915. The George Metcalf Archival Collection in the Canadian War Museum's Military History Research Centre holds Turner's papers, including his letters and a diary written soon after the battle. Here those primary sources are reprinted for the first time along with a brief analysis. They reveal a man struggling to come to terms with what happened at Second Ypres.

THE SECOND BATTLE of Ypres remains one of the most contentious Canadian actions of the First World War. On the one hand, there is the view that Canadian troops held firm when French soldiers ran from the gas attack on their left and persevered against difficult odds.¹ On the other is the argument that while Canadian soldiers ultimately helped stem the tide of the German advance, Canadian commanders made poor decisions during the fighting which threatened the whole

¹ Daniel Dancocks, *Welcome to Flanders Fields: The First Canadian Battle of the Great War – Ypres 1915* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988).

Ypres salient.² The consensus view lies somewhere in the middle with the main points of criticism directed at both Sir Arthur Currie and Sir Richard Turner, both brigadiers general in 1915 fighting in their first action of the war.

Over time, Richard Turner's reputation has probably fared worse than Currie's. He has his defenders, notably Andrew Iarocci and Bill Stewart,³ but it is difficult to avoid reaching Tim Cook's moderate conclusion that Turner was an uneven commander at best.⁴ Indeed, he was often flustered and sometimes confused as is clearly evident in his letters and pseudo-diary entries which survive from that period and which are held in the archives of the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. We re-print those letters here for the first time. What can they tell us about Turner's state of mind during and in the weeks immediately after Second Ypres?

Sir Richard Ernest Turner was born on 25 July 1871 in Quebec City to Emily and Richard Turner Sr., a prominent businessman and Tory Member of Parliament. Turner began his military career in 1892 when he joined the 10th Queen's Own Hussars as a Second Lieutenant rising through the ranks to Major by 1900. That same year, Turner married his fiancée Harriet Augusta Godday and after a brief honeymoon in Montreal, he departed for South Africa where he proved to be a capable, brave officer. In South Africa, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for swimming the Vet River under enemy fire, allowing the rest of the Royal Canadian Dragoons to cross the river resulting in a Boer retreat. At the Battle of Lilliefontein on 7 November 1900, while suffering from gunshot wounds to the neck and arm, Turner still managed to rally his troops during a Boer attack, holding the line and saving several guns. For his actions there, he was awarded the Empire's highest honour, the

² For a discussion of the controversy see Tim Travers, "Currie and the First Canadian Division at Second Ypres, April 1915: Controversy, Criticism and Official History," *Canadian Military History*, Vol 5 (1) Autumn 1996, 13.

³ Andrew Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The First Canadian Division at War, 1914-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) and Bill Stewart, "Every Inch a Fighting Man:" *A New Perspective on the Military Career of a Controversial Canadian, Sir Richard Turner* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation: University of Birmingham, 2012).

⁴ Tim Cook, 'The Blind Leading the Blind: the Battle of the St. Eloi Craters,' *Canadian Military History* 5, 2 (1996): 9-10.

Victoria Cross. After returning to Quebec as a hero, he continued to serve before retiring from the military in 1912.⁵

Retirement would be short-lived as Turner returned to active service in the spring of 1914 at the insistence of his friend, Sir Sam Hughes, the Minister of Militia and Defence, who believed war with Germany was imminent. Turner's experience in the field made him an obvious choice to command one of the three Canadian infantry brigades then being raised for overseas service. But while he had undeniably been a brave junior officer in South Africa, Turner's leadership was controversial from the start. At the Second Battle of Ypres as the Brigadier General in command of 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade, Turner made three critical decisions that some historians have argued constitute significant command errors. These are: his reaction to the initial German attack on 22 April, his hasty counter-attack at Kitchener's Wood that night, and his order to retreat to the GHQ line on 24 April.⁶

On 22 April, the Germans released chlorine gas at Ypres. In the ensuing panic, French units on the Canadian left fled leaving a gap in the line and exposing Turner's flank for 7,300 meters. As Divisional Headquarters tried to assess the situation, General Alderson received a series of telegrams from Turner and his Brigade Major, Garnet Hughes, which created the impression the 3rd Brigade was in an untenable and precarious position. Although historians debate Turner's and Hughes's real intent, their messages could be read as saying that their left flank had been overrun and driven back even though their line was, in fact, still intact. Some historians have suggested that the confusing and misleading information in these messages is proof that Turner was an inept leader who panicked under pressure and that on 22 April had already lost control of the situation.⁷ Not everyone agrees though. In his examination of Turner's actions that day, historian Andrew Iarocci argues, "while Turner and Hughes were obviously under great stress, their messages reflected the reality of the

⁵ Thomas P. Leppard, "The Dashing Subaltern: Sir Richard Turner in Retrospect," *Canadian Military History*, 6, 2 (1997): 21–8 and Stewart, "Every Inch a Fighting Man," 1–45.

⁶ Leppard, "The Dashing Subaltern."

⁷ George H. Cassar, *Hell in Flanders Fields: Canadians at the Second Battle of Ypres* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010), 321.



Brigadier-General Garnet Hughes in July 1916. [Library and Archives Canada PA 000356]

situation more faithfully than historians have hitherto allowed.”⁸ In his reassessment of the messages, Iarocci asserts that they were not, in fact, referring to 3rd Brigade’s left flank, but to the French unit on the “left of the Canadian left.”⁹ George Cassar, though, maintains that this is unlikely given that Turner had always differentiated between the French line and his own, and even admitted to General Alderson that he had been wrong the next day.¹⁰ At the same time, the situation was fluid and confusing and Turner might have been reacting to faulty intelligence rather than misreading the situation.¹¹

In an effort to close the gap created by the gas attack, Turner and Hughes ordered the men of the 10th and 16th Battalions to mount a counter-attack at Kitcheners Wood that night in conjunction with a French counterattack on their left. Capitalizing on the cover

⁸ Andrew Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The First Canadian Division at War, 1914–1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁰ George H. Cassar, *Hell in Flanders Fields: Canadians at the Second Battle of Ypres*, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010), 120.

¹¹ Tim Cook, *At Sharp End Volume One: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914–1916*, (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 117.

of night and the element of surprise, the objective of the assault was to prevent the Germans from using their newly gained position at Kitcheners Wood to mount an attack on St. Julien. This hastily organized assault has been criticized for the lack of reconnaissance, the linear formations employed and the vague instructions 3rd Brigade Headquarters issued to the attacking troops. Specifically, on the last point, the Canadian battalions were not given any objectives outside of clearing the Germans out of the woods—an important point because there had not been enough time to for the reconnaissance necessary to determine where the German troops and artillery were located. Despite this lack of specific instructions as well as a complete lack of artillery support, the Canadians were able to advance about 1,000 metres to the enemy's line in the woods. But clearing the woods came at a high price: the two attacking battalions took 75 per cent casualties and later had to abandon the position.¹²

The third and most controversial decision Turner made was to order his units to fall back on the GHQ Line on 24 April. After receiving several orders from Divisional Headquarters to hold his position at all costs, Turner ordered two of his battalions, and two British battalions that had come up to reinforce his trenches, to fall back to the GHQ line. The GHQ line was a partially completed second line of defence several kilometres to the rear of the frontline trenches, non-existent aside from a line on the map in some places but strong and well-fortified in others. Turner's decision left a nearly three kilometre gap in the British frontline and exposed the left flank of Currie's 2nd Brigade at a crucial point in the battle. Had the Germans become aware of the gap, some historians have argued, they might have been able to advance and encircle the entire Canadian division.¹³

Turner later stated that he believed that the orders from Alderson to hold his position referred to the GHQ line and not the front line trenches. Historians remain divided on whether Turner misunderstood the order, or if he took matters into his own hands and deliberately misinterpreted or ignored their intent to save his brigade. Cassar maintains, "The most likely explanation was that Turner deliberately disobeyed orders, convinced that his battered

¹² Cook, *At Sharp End Volume One*, 65–66.

¹³ T.H.E. Travers, 'Allies in Conflict: The British and Canadian Official Historians and the Real Story of the Second Ypres,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, 2 (April 1989): 301–313.

forces were about to be annihilated.”¹⁴ Iarocci, on the other hand, believes Turner was reacting to a developing situation and that his orders merely gave official sanction to an organic collapse all along the line. “In hindsight,” he writes, “Turner’s decision to withdrawal was disastrous but disaster had already destroyed three-quarters of his brigade before the order was even issued.”¹⁵ Iarocci contends that individual soldiers had already decided to pull out given that “even the best-disciplined soldiers and officers could not withstand chlorine poisoning and relentless enemy attacks. According to the mythology of Second Ypres, the Canadians were impossibly brave. In reality, courage had its limits.”¹⁶ In this context, Turner’s orders had little real effect so his decision to issue them is less of an error than a reflection of the disaster itself.

These controversies have overshadowed Turner’s reputation as a leader and battlefield commander even though there is no clear consensus as to what happened and why. In part this is because the surviving evidence is incomplete and open to a number of interpretations. As the British official historian James Edmonds discovered in the 1920s, many of the official war diaries do not seem to have survived the battle if they were kept at all, replaced by typewritten narratives that contradicted some of the original British war diaries that were available.¹⁷ Using these sources, the official historian of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, A.F. Duguid, concluded that Hughes and Turner had made critical errors in the battle, though he ultimately chose to downplay them in his official history. After reading Duguid’s interpretation of what happened at the battle, both Turner and Hughes demanded he rewrite the section on Second Ypres to highlight the role of the 3rd Brigade which they seemed to believe had been misrepresented.¹⁸ After dealing with their repeated requests, Duguid told them that they should be grateful that he had glossed over their potential disastrous errors within the

¹⁴ George H. Cassar, *Trial by Gas: The British Army at Second Battle of Ypres* (Nebraska: Potomac Press, 2014), 62.

¹⁵ Andrew Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The First Canadian Division at War, 1914–1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 160.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁷ Tim Travers, “Currie and the First Canadian Division at Second Ypres, April 1915: Controversy, Criticism and Official History,” *Canadian Military History*, Vol 5 (1) Autumn 1996, 13.

¹⁸ Tim Cook, *Clio’s Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 84–85



Lt.-Gen. R.E.W. Turner, V.C. [Library and Archives Canada PA 008006]

official history and they made no further requests.¹⁹ Whether evidence was deliberately destroyed and later concealed remains another area of some debate.²⁰

Turner's letters and diary entries offer insight into his mindset and perspective during the battle and in the days immediately afterwards when the enormity of events slowly came into perspective. At first glance, they make for strange reading because the entries are repetitive and somewhat confused. On the one hand, these documents can be taken as evidence that Turner was suffering from exhaustion and perhaps even shell shock: Stewart has suggested that Turner's behaviour after the initial attack suggests that he had suffered a serious concussion in the bombardment and that could have led to memory loss helping to explain his decision-making during battle as well as his lack of recall after the event.²¹ On the other hand, though, each narrative is coherent and internally consistent with certain details omitted or added in each subsequent version. In either

¹⁹ Ibid., 84–85.

²⁰ Travers, "Allies in Conflict," 301–313.

²¹ Bill Stewart, "Every Inch a Fighting Man," 70–77; Tim Cook, *At Sharp End*, 152.

case, what comes through is a man struggling to make sense of what happened during the battle and to construct an acceptable narrative of events.

There are three groups of documents reprinted here: several versions of what appears to be the same letter from Turner to his wife, a narrative diary of events (which also contains aspects of these letters), and an official typewritten report which he submitted in place of the 3rd Brigade war diary.

The three letters from Turner to his wife Hetty, dated 3, 8, and 9 May 1915, may or may not have been actually sent.²² If they were mailed, they are good evidence that Turner was unwell: after writing a letter to his wife on 8 May, the next day he began a new letter saying: "I do not remember when I wrote you last." The other explanation is that Turner redrafted the same letter several times. This is more likely given the similarity of the wording between the 3 and 9 May letters and the fact that all three essentially recount the same events, seemingly for the first time. Clearly, though, Turner was struggling to make sense of what happened, aware that his own actions and those of his comrades were being scrutinized. As he wrote cryptically on 8 May: in addition to the heavy casualties at Second Ypres, "things happened to make matters worse, that I dare not write about."

These letters suggest that Turner really did believe that 3rd Brigade had been outflanked by the Germans on 22 April. In his first note, Turner writes: "It is hard to explain all that happened. When the French fell back on my left it uncovered my flank for 5,000 yards, and with a front of 2,300 yards, made my Bde responsible for 7,300 yard frontage. At 6:30pm on the 22nd, I really though all was lost; the enemy came sweeping down round our rear, and all that I had left were our servants, the Engineer Company, and about 50 of my grenade Co." This would suggest that when his Brigade Major, Garnet Hughes, told Arthur Currie that his left flank had been turned and was being driven in, he really was talking about 3rd Brigade rather than the larger allied front. When Turner wrote the next letter again a few days later, he left those details out. In the third letter, though, he returned to the narrative of 3 May, albeit in a slightly modified form: "On the 22nd April the Germans came sweeping down on our left flank, in the big gap left by the French.

²² These are found in the Sir Richard Turner Papers, CWM No. 19710147-001, Archives of the Canadian War Museum.

For a time I thought it was all up; the enemy had got well down in rear of my Head Quarters”

The Turner ‘narrative’ is a more difficult document to interpret because at various times it takes the form of a report, a retrospective narrative, a diary, or (in some places) a letter to Hetty.²³ In its original form, it is written across 21 pages of 6x9 inch lined paper, hole-punched and inserted into a black binder with additional internal page numbers added to the top right corner. The 38 pages preceding the ‘narrative’ (which is the title given at the top of page 39 in the diary) read like a normal, past-tense series of diary entries. However it is clearly not contemporary. On page 43 (five of the narrative), Turner recounts the story of a Lieutenant Graham, 75th Battery, who fired his field gun over open sites, helping to protect Turner’s headquarters on 22 April. He then wrote in brackets “this officer was later sent to Gallipoli but I succeeded in getting the [Military Cross] for him.” Of course, this means that Turner must have written that passage long after the events—but how long after remains a mystery. The handwritten sheets are all identical in appearance and are written in the same ink with no breaks to indicate a change in continuity so the series of pages all appear to have been written at the same time. Three pages later, though, the narrative inexplicably returns to a first person, present-tense story with Turner recounting events as they unfold (‘One man just killed outside the front door’) before returning to language more consistent with a report (‘Col. F.S. Meighen was in Command of all troops in G.H.Q. 2nd line – This line was strengthened and improved towards the north’). Transcriptions of field messages are interspersed with more diary entries before, on page 51, we find a transcribed version of the letter Turner addressed to Hetty on 3 May 1915 with a similar entry for the letter of 8 May on subsequent sheets.

Turner’s inclusion of the letters raises questions about the purpose and timing of his ‘narrative’. When compared side by side, the transcriptions are similar but differ in some key respects. The 8 May transcription, for example, is notably different so that although both follow a similar pattern and some of the syntax is duplicated, in the transcribed version Turner left out the line ‘Things happened to make matters worse, that I dare not write about’ and added the

²³ Sir Richard Turner Papers, CWM No. 19710147-001, Archives of the Canadian War Museum.

statement ‘My head still feels as if it had been pounded.’ Instead of the line ‘We have had a heavy toll to pay, but I think Canada during those days absolutely saved the situation’ Turner’s transcribed version reads ‘General S-D called on me yesterday he said “I thank you for what you and your gallant men have done—you saved Ypres, and all our Army from a terrible disaster.”’ This raises several important questions: what was the purpose of the narrative? Why were changes made when some of the documents were transcribed?

In writing his ‘narrative,’ it is clear that at some point long after the battle Turner tried to reconstruct the events of April 1915 using documents in his possession including a personal diary, contemporary letters, field messages, and reports. The original diary—if that is what the diary-like entries are taken from—is no longer in the file. That Turner would try to make sense of the complex battle is neither surprising nor problematic, but there are also some strong similarities between Turner’s ‘narrative’ and the ‘Diary of Operations’ which is the third document included here.²⁴ This document took the place of the official 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade war diary for the period 22 April to 5 May in the official Canadian records and it has sometimes been assumed that it was written soon after the battle. In the 1920s there was a lengthy, secret debate about the authenticity of Turner’s report as well as that submitted by General Arthur Currie after the battle. As Tim Travers demonstrated, British official historian James Edmonds believed that the original diaries had been destroyed or removed from the records in order to protect reputations and Edmonds certainly distrusted the narratives that took their place.²⁵ While we will never know for certain what actually happened, these documents raise the possibility that Turner’s report was not only written after the fact but long after the fact. Not surprisingly, the ‘narrative’ follows the same general chronology as the diary of operations, but the latter is far more detailed even though some lines are virtually identical in the two documents. Of course it is also possible that Turner was using the ‘diary of operations’ as a source for the ‘narrative’ in the same way he used his letters and personal diary. However, if this were the case one would expect that the

²⁴ R.E.W. Turner, “Diary of Operations, 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 22nd April to 5th May 1915,” RG 9, Series III-D-3, Volume 4874, File 216 pt. 1, Library and Archives Canada.

²⁵ Travers, “Allies in Conflict,” 301–313.

‘narrative’ would employ the exact measurements cited in the ‘diary of operations’ rather than the less accurate estimates that actually appear in the text—in other words, the ‘diary of operations’ appears to be a more polished version of events. More perplexing, though, is the fact that both the third-person sections of the ‘narrative’ (22–23 April), which we know was written long after the fact, and the first-person section presented as a diary (24–25 April) have sections which are almost identical to aspects of the ‘diary of operations.’ This is difficult to explain if the ‘narrative’ was written from both contemporary sources and the ‘diary of operations.’ What is more likely is that the ‘narrative’ is actually the chief source for or a rough draft of the ‘diary of operations’—when they were written, though, cannot be determined from the available evidence.

DOCUMENT ONE: R.E.W. TURNER LETTERS

Letter 3 May 1915 written on “A” Form—Messages and Signals

To: My Darling Hetty

I have not had any letters for some time and I fear letters were lost, as part of our mail in Ypres was blown up.

The troops have all had a heavy strain put upon them, and our losses have been large.

It will be a long time before brigade will be found to equal our former Canadian Brigade. My highlanders died at their posts, and I knew before the end came that they could not withdraw, as it was absolutely necessary to delay the enemy as long as possible. My men have been continuously under fire now since the 18th April, but if everything goes well they are to be withdrawn at 2:15 tomorrow morning.

Our rest is essential, as the regiment have to be completely re-organized again.

I have not been able to get my head clear since a week.

At the present time we are living in a dug out which is large enough for four of us lying down, and the telephone which connects with the regiment—nearly 1 mile away, is alongside my bed.

It is hard to explain all that happened. When the French fell back on my left it uncovered my flank for 5000 yards, and with a front of 2300 yards, made my Bde responsible for 7300 yard frontage.

At 6:30pm on the 22nd, I really thought all was lost; the enemy came sweeping down round our rear, and all that I had left were our servants, the Engineer Company, and about 50 of my grenade Co. All the rest had been sent forward to fill the gap.

The engagement was mine until the 26th morning, when General Hull relieved me with his brigade.

During my four days, at different days, I had in addition to my brigade the following under my command the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 10th Canadians 9th Royal Scots, 4th KOR, Buffs, East Yorks, Durham, Queen Victorias, Cornwall L.I., Northumberland, Batteries R F.A.

Letter 8 May 1915, Written on Plain Paper

My Darling Hetty,

Eerie wrote asking me to be godfather to her baby, and I have answered at once, how pleased I could be. Please buy the best you can get “silver mug” and anything else you think of.

Please thank the Mater and Pater for letters, also Effie. Effie has just sent me some more khaki handkerchiefs. Please write her and say how pleased I was to get them. It just happened that I was almost out, as a lot of our stuff was lost.

When our Headquarters at Ypres was bombarded, the place took fire, so a lot of our Officers kits were burnt. We had made our H.Q. also a dressing station, but fortunately I think most of the wounded were got out in time.

We have had a heavy toll to pay, but I think Canada during those days absolutely saved the situation. Things happened to make matters worse, that I dare not write about.

Please tell Eerie that I saw Jimmy Mills yesterday looking fit and well, also Canon Scott. Canon Scott has been invaluable, his pluck and good spirits have been of great help to everyone.

I hope we will have a few days rest here, as my head still feels as if it had been pounded. Am well otherwise.

Kendall is still with me and well, please try and see his wife, as I fear she is sick.

Yesterday I received your letters of the 11th and 21st April.

Please tell Pater my brigade is 3rd Bde, and it consists of
the 13th "Royal Highlanders of Canada"
14th "Royal Montreal Regt"
15th (48th Highlanders)
16th Canadian Scottish

Letter 9 May 1915, Written on Plain Paper

My Darling Hetty,

I do not remember when I wrote you last, so thought as this was Sunday, and a half hour to spare that the time was opportune. I don't know if I told you about the hot time we had at Ypres.

On the 22nd April the Germans came sweeping down on our left flank, in the big gap left by the French. For a time I thought it was all up; the enemy had got well down in rear of my Head Quarters, and with all my troops up forward, I only had with me our servants, the 1 Company Engineers and about 30 men from our Grenade Co: for about an hour this small force stayed them off, then we were re-inforced by the Royal Montreal Regt.

The fighting continued 23.24.25th: from the 20th April to 4 May, I never undressed, and only had my boots of [*sic*] twice. On the 25th, as our house had become dangerous, we moved into a corner of a cow stable early in the morning; the enemy found out where we were and about 4pm they dropped 70 high explosive shells about, and on our buildings within a radius of 30 yards. It was most nerve racking, and it drove 4 of the officers with us silly; in the end when we had to get out, we had to swim across the moat which was full of dirty water.

I hugged the bank for some time, before I could make up my mind to a wetting, but did it in the end. The two following nights, I spent with Hughes and Cameron, in a small dug out; not large enough for us to sit up in, just room to crawl in. Then 3 more nights in a large dug out, all this time the shell fire was something to remember. It certainly has been an experience, costly but honourable in every sense to Canada.

We are having a few days respite to re-organize.

I am well, and trying to make up the sleep that is coming to me.

I love your dear letters, and the brave spirit that keeps you up.

I say a prayer for you every night and my bairns, and hope I will not be very long before I am home with all I hold dear.

Good night sweetheart mine, dearest love from your Old Man,
Ernest

Document Two: R.E.W. Turner Narrative

On the 22-4-15 the 1st Canadian Div. was holding a Front Line of roughly 5500 yards between the Ypres-Poelcapelle roads, and the Ypres-Paschendal [*sic*] roads with 2 Brigades in Line.

The 3rd Brigade on the left joined up with the French Moroccan Div.

The 13th and 15th Battalions were in with a frontage between 3/3500 yards.

The 2nd Brigade with the 8th and 5th Battalions in line on a frontage between 2/2500 yards.

The Officer Com.dg the left-sector had his H.Q. in St. Julien with a small local reserve.

The 14th Battalion (less 1 Company) formed the Brigade Reserve in billet near St. Jean.

The 16th Battalion formed part of the Divisional reserve in billets in Ypres, across the Canal.

The 1st Brigade and 10th Battalions were also in the Divisional Reserve.

On the 22nd April at 5.30 pm a report was received by 3rd Bde H.Q. that the French on our left sub section were being subjected to a heavy artillery bombardment accompanied by the projection of green cloud of gas of a pungent odour. The Turcos completely broke—chiefly by the gas—but partly by superstition, and streamed in panic to the rear. The Germans poured through the gap which left the front open from the left of the 13th Battalion to the Yser Canal. Major Ruppert McCraig Commanding left Co of the 13th Battalion extended his line for about 150 yards in the French evacuated area. Our men were not definitely attacked at this time—and although affected by the drifting gas, and brought a heavy rifle fire to bear on the portions of the German attack within range.

The 3rd Artillery Brigade also co-operated.

That evening between 6–7 pm the company of the 14th Bn. in local reserve was moved to the left, and dug in along the Poelcapelle [sic] road.

Major W.B. King's battery continued in action - "our artillery formations were behind the French line" - in actions—although the Germans were within 200 yards guns over open sights—and ammunition had to be brought up by hand.

The 14th Bn (less 1 Co) was ordered up to Brigade H.Q., and posted in the G.H.Q. 2nd Line.

We also extended, and the 3rd Field Co Canadian Engineers dug a trench along a ditch extending east from our H.Q.

Also placed in the line the Brigade Grenade Co—Batmen and grooms.

About 8pm we were advised the 16th Bn and 10th Bn were being sent by Division to come under 3rd Brigade.

A counterattack with these 2 Bns was planned, and at 11.50pm the German positions in the wood called by the French “Bois des Cuisinieres” because they had their cooking done there—was attacked.

As the 10th was the first Bn it was given place, and when the 16th BN arrived it formed up in rear of the 10th Bn.

The 2 Bns attacked on a frontage of 2 companies—with distances of 30 yards between lines

10th Bn Lieut Col. Boyle Commanding

16th Bn Lieut Col. Leckie R.G.

Bombers of the 2nd and 3rd Brigade also formed with this attack. Bayonets were fixed—as it was to be taken by cold steel.

The German in the short time had already dug a shallow trench—strengthened by sand bags and 3 rows of wire.

The night was bright, and the enemy spotted the attack when about 500 yards away and poured in a terrific rifle fire.

Unfortunately Col. Boyle of the 10th Battalion was mortally wounded—so the complete defensive organization fell on Col. R.G.E. Leckie Commanding officer 16th Battalion.

It was in this wood the 4.7 guns were captured; erroneously stated to be Canadian.

While this attack was in progress the 2nd and 3rd Battalions under Cols. Watson and Rennie reported at 3rd Brigade Headquarters.

The 2nd Bn was sent to fill the gap from the troops immediately north of St. Julien towards wood in C I. I. And the 3rd Bn was held in reserve.

At first the 10th and 16th Bns entrenched north of the captured wood; but it was found due to heavy loss of officers and other ranks. The position involved such a salient with the increased length of line that this could not be consolidated and touch maintained.

The line was therefore withdrawn to the former German trench south of the wood before daylight. During the night the 2nd Buffs reported to 3rd Bde H.Q. and were ordered forward to support the left flank of the 13th Battalion—after they moved off counter orders were received to return the Bn to Col Geddes for his defence force. This we did less 1 Company which had been committed to the line.

The 2nd Brigade on request placed 3 Companies of the 7th Battalion in the vicinity of Kerselare.

At 5A.M. 23rd April 2 companies of the 3rd Battalion under Major Kirkpatrick were sent to the line south edge of wood to get in touch with the 2nd Battalion—2 companies were placed in G.H.Q. 2nd line to replace 2 companies of the 14th Bn sent to St. Julien.

During the night 22/23 April our artillery had to be withdrawn from their exposed positions (our guns were really in rear of the now open French line) for a period that night the only gun under my orders belonged to the 75th Battery (British) under Lt. Graham. This gun was in the workshops at St Jean—the officer hearing the firing came up to see if he could be of any use.

His gun was manhandled up and went in to action between my Brigade H.Q. buildings—he had only 60 rounds—as 40 rounds were expended during dark, and 20 rounds held for daylight. (This officer was later sent to Gallipoli but I succeeded in getting the M.C. for him)

Minor attacks occurred during the night 22/23 April along the Poelcapelle road but did not seriously affect the situation; although the Germans had actually reached the outskirts of St. Jean to our rear, and burnt the 3rd Co Field Engineers billets.

On the A.M. 23rd the original line of French from Poelcapelle Road to Kerselare was held passing south of wood, and in contact with Col. Geddes Force on our west flank.

At 9.15 AM. an attack was ordered; but was not made (under orders of G.O.C. 1st Can Div) until 3.45pm.

It was to have been made by 2 Bns from Col. Geddes force

2 “[blank]” 27th Division
Bns of the 13th Brigade
1st and 4th Bns Canadians
3rd Bde to assist as much as possible

I said we would assist if the attack reached Pilkem—but it failed to reach there—sustained very heavy losses—and dug in a long way short of the objective—the old front-line. The G.O.C. 1st Can. Div. in their official diary claims to have advised throwing back our left flank to reduce the salient. Actually the order was due to the O/C 13th Bn and I confirmed his suggestion.

After Geddes Force dug in between the Yser Canal, we extended our left with part of the 14th Bn to connect up.

On the A.M. orders were given the O/C St. Julien to form a left defensive flank to Kerselare; the 3 Companies 7th Bn, and 1 Co 5th Bn to conform.

This change was carried out night 23/24th without casualties by the 13th Bn, part of 7th Bn, and 1 Co Buffs. It was realized the retirement and change of position would place the new trenches on the forward slope in a position exposed to a direct artillery fire.

23rd April. On this date the D.C.L.I. and 9th Royal Scots also 4th Bn Rifle Brigade were ordered report to me—but before arriving—they were diverted by other orders to fill the gap on my left towards the canal.

I had intended using these troops for another “counter attack”

French report “enemy running short of ammunition”

24th at 5.30 AM the enemy opened a heavy artillery fire on the whole of our original front line trenches, also over a short stretch of the front of the 2nd Brigade.

The shelling was followed, by a discharge of noxious gas.

23 April 1915 Ypres

If we live for a couple of days longer our Canadian Troops will have added a spended [sic] page to history. Our casualties have been very heavy—but the Canadians positively saved the day. The 10th and 16th Battalions made a counter attack at mid night on the “Bois des Cuisinieres” - under a hail of bullets—and drove the Germans clear through the wood.

We had to leave our wounded on the ground for 24 hours as it was impossible to remove them. The first was so intense.

Have had congratulatory messages from the Army and Corps.

The fight is still on—it is hardly safe to step outside the door—we have knocked a hole in the wall of the house so as to get to the signal and telephone dugout.

Every room here is filled with wounded men, and the windows are all sand bagged—Our house was hit for the first time by three shells. I have been up now for 40 hours without sleep, and will be up tonight also.

One man just killed outside the front door—although the North side is where the attack is coming from.

23 April

We turned all our horses except one, loose with the hope they would get away—but they stopped to graze and were killed in the fields.

When the Germans broke through the French Line “Turcos” - The 3rd Can Artillery Brigade co-operated with the 13th Battalion in the flank fire.

2 Companies of the 3rd Battalion were sent to edge of wood to connect with the 2nd Battalion.

At 9pm 23rd 2 Companies 14th Bn under Col Burland were sent to re-enforce 16th Battalion near edge of wood. These companies took with them attached 3 M.G.'s with crews from the 3rd Bn. When the 16th Bn position was consolidated these 2 companies under Col. Burland were ordered at dusk 24rd up to St. Julien where they joined up with No. 2 Co also of the 14th Bn—all under orders of Col. Loomis who was actg. Comd. of St. Julien Defences.

Col. F.S. Meighen was in Command of all troops in G.H.Q. 2nd line—This line was strengthened and improved towards the north—No traverses.

After a stern resistance the fumes and shells compelled our troops to retire, including 7th Bn.

As a gap was created between the 2nd and 3rd Brigade—two Bns were sent from the 28 Division, and partly filled the gap.

During the day was informed two Bns of the York and Durham Bde would report north of Wieltje—but also not to use them if possible; as they were to be used to relieve the 3rd Bde that night—this had become necessary as it had been impossible to get up food and water for 2 days—casualties very heavy combined with lack of sleep and strain.

On the A.M. of the 24th the 8th Bn was faced with a situation somewhat similar to ours on the 22nd—as our front had been driven in—and left theirs in the air—they repulsed the German attack made with gas, but in the end had also to throw back their left flank.

During the day Col. Kemmis-Betty BM 2nd Bde called on me for some battalions but I had only one Co. in reserve.

About 1pm 24th after discussion with the GSO 1st Div. it was ordered that troops should fall back to G.H.Q. 2nd line—but that garrison in St. Julien was to hold out as long as possible—it was this gallant detachment that was told to hold until the last.

Following message received from the 5th Corps:

“Army commander desires me to express to the Canadians his appreciation of all they have done.”

Message to 15th Bn (48th Highlanders) Reported impression exists in your right that they are to retire on G.H.Q. line stop. This must be corrected at once. You are to hold your front line. If driven out—collection your men and organize counter attack, and regain it. You are on NO account to return to G.H.Q. line sent at 7.15AM. 24-4-15

24-4-15: Message from O/C 13th Bn. All men available now in firing line holding with difficult around St. Julien. Col. Burland is in Com.dg of left sub sector. Reported they have returned in bad shape. Everything possible being done to hold St. Julien.

24-4-15 (11.20pm) To 1st Division:

My Battalions held position after position today in falling back under shell fire—until now it appears the 15th Bn is practically gone - 13th Bn about 100. 14th Bn about 400. 16th Bn about 250. Total strength about 750 plus stragglers.

We have had an awful day but are still holding the enemy down—Good bye my darling for Today—love to the bairns.

Pope has just done a gallant thing he has gone forward to St. Julien to guide two gun limbers loaded with S.A. Ammunition.

26/27-4-15—Arrived about 3.30 AM in a field near Brielen—immediately went round the remnants of my battalion—now only a handful—all that remained of my gallant Brigade—they had not had time yet to lie down—

27th April - 14th Battalion was only withdrawn from the trenches night of the 27th, and marched to the transport lines.

In the midst of all our fighting I received an enquiry from Divisional H.Q. asking how many Jews' harps were wanted for the brigade—entire absence of humour on some people.

We did not receive any advice from any source that gas was to be used.

25th—Lt. Col Vandeleur came in to our pigsty wounded AM sent him with Billy Pope to my room in the house—just as they arrived there—a shell came through the roof—fortunately it was a dud—but they got out in a hurry, and we did not see them again.

25th April 5.30AM A strong counter attack was carried out by Br.Gen. Hull with his brigade, and other Bns. His attack covering about 3 days used up 15 Battalions.

No enemy attacks during the day, but the trenches were subjected to heavy shelling, and my Bde H.Q. destroyed by shell fire—when we moved Bde H.Q. to 16th BnH.Q. Near the G.H.Q. line—The enemy poured 70 5.9 shells into my Bde H. in 50/60 minutes—set all on fire!

The 3rd Brigade was relieved night of 25/26th and marched across the canal to Brielen, but the operations were continued on the new line. Up to 6/7 May—On the 8th May the storm burst—on the P.P.C.L.I., north of Bellewaerde Lake—they held on all day, but at night what was left had to be withdrawn as the 28th Div had failed to regain their former line due to the gas and artillery fire—but the German infantry attack failed under the stout resistance they encountered.

If it is not invidious I would like to pay credit for the Canadian success 22/25th to the “counter attack” and to the skilful [sic] manner in which Col. Loomis of the 13th BN handled the St. Julien mixed force.

My Bde H.Q. was turned in to an Advanced Dressing station and each A.M. when floors were flushed—walls ran out as a red stream.

Field Message

26-4-15 - 3rd Can. Brigade following message received from General Plumer begins “Will you please express to Br. Com.dg officers and all ranks my appreciation of the splendid service they have rendered from Canadian Division.”

Actual present conditions and what we have undergone during the last 10 days prevent me from writing you at length. Under a merciful providence am still alive and in the game, and well—Love to you dear, and the bairns.

Men in the trenches for days almost without food and water—blown up—buried by shell fire—but fighting—fighting always—hemmed in by enemies on all sides—with German air in control.

At our H.Q. we had men wounded actually in the house—bullets going through the door—or through the sand bags with which the windows were protected.

A big shell 5.9 went through the end of our signal dug out but fortunately it did not explode—but it made the dug out rock like a boat.

The wounded as collected by night only were brought to my H.Q. which was turned in to an Advanced Dressing Station, then carried outside, and laid in rows close up to the side of the house. No ambulance could clear after day. Walking cases were started across the fields to Wieltje and St. Jean but many never reached there.

3 May 1915—Near Vlamertigne

I fear some of your letter may have been lost; as part of our mail in Ypres was blown up. The troops have had a heavy strain put upon them, and our losses have been very heavy.

It will be a long time before the re-constituted brigade can equal our originals.

My highlanders died at their posts; I knew before the end came that they could not withdraw, as it was absolutely necessary to delay the enemy as long as possible. A rest is essential, as the Bns have to be completely re-organized again—we are to be withdrawn at 2.15A.M. tomorrow.

I have not been able to get my head clear since a week—At the present time we are living in a dug out which is large enough for four of us lying down; the telephone that connects my Bns nearly a mile away is at my head. It is hard to explain all that happened when the trench fell back it uncovered my left flank for 5000 yards as far as the Yser Canal. My frontage was 2300 yards.

At 6.30pm on the 22nd April I really thought all was lost, as the enemy came sweeping down round our rear—all that I had in hand at my Brigade H.Q. were our servants—the 3rd Engineer Co—which was holding an extension from the H.Q. - and about 50 of the 3rd Brigade grenade company—all the rest had been sent forward to fill the gap.

It was my responsibility until 25th/26th when Br.Genl Hull relieved me with his Brigade. In addition to my Brigade I had the 2nd,3rd,7th,10th Canadian battalions—one Co. of 1st Buffs—R.F.A. - etc.

We are all very tired from days and nights of endless strain—with no sleep. I had men killed by enemy fire actually at the door of the house where my H.Q.'s was—to get to the Signal Dug Out—we knocked a hole in one side of the house, as it was too dangerous to pass outside.

A 5.9" German shell came in to the dug out signals—but fortunately it did not explode and is under our feet now when telephoning.

The Brigade was relieved night of the 3/4 May, and moved to West side of Yser Canal to bivouac near Brielen.

8th May 1915 Steenwerck

Welcome letters received from the Pater-Mater Effie and Eerie. When our H.Q. at Ypres was bombarded—the place took fire and a lot of our officers kits were burnt.

We had made the H.Q. also an advanced dressing station, but I think fortunately most of the wounded were got out.

My head still feels as if it had been pounded.

Just received your letter of the 21st April.

At present we are in the 3rd Army Corps - 2nd Army under General Sir H.L. Smith-Dorrien.

General S-D called on me yesterday he said "I thank you for what you and your gallant men have done—you saved Ypres, and all our Army from a terrible disaster."

At one time I had to give the order “that there was no falling back”

The guns in the wood of which you hear so much; when found by our Battalions in the mid-night counter attack—are a side issue.

They had been abandoned by the Britishh—Canon Scott’s pluck and good spirits have been invaluable to everyone.

Head Quarters 2nd Army, 6-5-15

Letter from Gen. H.L. Smith-Dorrien to Major General Alderson,

Congratulating Canadians on the gallant deeds on the night of the 22nd of April 1915 and following days. The more details I learn the greater to me does their resourcefulness and bravery appear.

I would like you to communicate to the whole Division my thanks and admiration as Army Commander for the services rendered to the 2nd Army during the critical period following the German’s successful attack on our Allies on the night of the 22nd April

Sgd. H.L. Smith-Dorrien

9th May 1915. Sunday Steenwerck

I don’t know if I told you about the hot time we had at Ypres—when the Germans came sweeping round our left-flank after the French rout.

On the 25th April our house had become too dangerous, and we moved in to a pig pen at the end of the stable—the enemy found out where we were, and dropped 70 high explosive shells about and on our buildings within a radius of 30 yards—It was most nerve racking, and broke Pope—Cameron and Lyne-Evans. In the end we had to go through the moat with filthy water up to our necks. The next two nights I spent with Gamel-Hughes and Cameron in a small dug-out only covered with boards and earth—just room to crawl in and lie down—the following 3 nights in a larger dug-out—but all the time the shell fire was some thing to remember.

From the 20th April to 4 May, I never undressed, and only had my boots off twice.

12 May 1915–Steenwerck

Your welcome letters of the 26 and 28th April have just arrived. I fear some of your letters have done down with the “Lusitania.” Thank little Evie for thinking and praying for her “Daddy” - There certainly has been a merciful providence watching over me. We have had six days welcome rest here. The brigade is billeted in farms and having a good rest.

Process of re-organizing is a lengthy job–Pope is down with nerves and McDonald was wounded.

Capt. T.S. Morrissey from the 13th Bn and Capt. Chas. Porteous from the 14th Bn have been appointed to the Brigade Staff.

Kilty was wounded at Ypres on the flank by shrapnel, and was laid up for nearly two weeks–I rode her again yesterday for the first time to see the Officers of the R.C.D.

They have come over temporarily as Infantry, from England with the Strathconas & King Edward Horse. I am sending you a copy of our Official Report on the Ypres fighting–but Not for the newspapers.

Pleased to hear you are President of the Ladies Rifle Club.

A long list of Officers and men have been recommended for honours, etc–some will be left out–*c'est la fortune de la guerre*.

Take good care of yourself; you are always in my thoughts dear.

**DOCUMENT THREE: R.E.W. DIARY OF OPERATIONS, 3RD
CANADIAN INFANTRY BRIGADE, 22 APRIL TO 5 MAY 1915**

Reference sheets 20 and 28.

The trench position of the 3rd Canadian Inf. Bde. North of St. Julien on the Ypres salient was taken over from French troops of the 11th Division on the night of the 16th/17th April. The left of the position rested on the Polcappelle—St. Julien Road in V25.a.05 and extended through V25.e, V25.d. and D1.b. to road in D2.b. The 2nd Canadian Inf. Bde. held the trench line to the right and French troops to the left. A Zouave Regt. was in immediate touch on the left. On the 22nd April, the 15th Canadian Bn, 48th Highlanders, Lt-Col Currie, were occupying the right sub-section having taken it over on the night of 20th/21st and the 13th Canadian Bn, the Royal Highlanders. Lt-Col Loomis were in the left sub-section having relieved on the night of the 21st/22nd. At St. Julien under command of O.C. left sub-section were three platoons from each of the trench battalions and a company of the 14th Canadian Bn, Royal Montreal Regiment, forming a local reserve. Three companies of the R.M.R. under Lt- Col Meighen were in Brigade reserve billets in the vicinity of St. Jean, and the 16th Canadian Battalion. The Canadian Scottish Lt-Col Leckie, formed part of the Divisional reserve billeted in the northern part of Ypres.

On the 22nd at 5.30 p.m. a report was received from the left sub-section that the French on our left were being subjected to a Heavy artillery bombardment, accompanied by the projection of a pale green cloud of gas of a peculiarly pungent odour. There was at the time some doubt as to whether the gas emanated from the Germans or from the French trenches, but it was shortly determined that it was being used by the enemy to overcome resistance. Our troops were not attacked definitely at this time and although to some extent affected by the gas, they brought a heavy fire to bear on the portion of the enemy's attack within their reach. The Third Artillery Bde. also co-operated.

The 14th and 16th Bns, in reserve were ordered to stand to arms and the three companies of the 14th were at once ordered to move to Brigade Headquarters in C22.b for orders. The 16th Bn. Being in Divisional reserve was not available.

By 6.30 p.m. great numbers of French were retiring toward Ypres passing in disorganized bodies through St. Julien and the country westward. Bodies of the enemy were following in close pursuit. Three companies of the 14th Bn. No 3 Field Co, C.E. and Brigade Grenade Coy. which were by this time available, were placed in the G.H.Q second

line C16.a to North C22.b to stay the enemy's pursuit and attempt to rally the retreating French. Some 500 of these stopped in the G.H.Q. line, prolonging our line to the N.E. and their conduct was most gallant. The German attack in C16, C17 reached within 300 yards of our line and as darkness approached they entrenched on a line C10.a south of Wood C5.c.

At about 8 p.m. advice was received that the 16th Bn, which had been in Divisional reserve as well as the 10th Bn of the 2nd Canadian Bde, were placed under orders of the 3rd Canadian Bde. A counter attack with this force was planned and at 11.50 p.m. the German position in the Wood in C10, C11 was attacked. The Battalions were formed on a front of two companies and with distances of 30 yards between lines. The 10th Bn. Lt-Col Boyle, led this attack. Thirty bombers of the 2nd Bde and 70 of the 3rd Bde companies worked in this attack and did very commendable service. The German trenches had been strengthened by three tiers of sand bags as well as wire. The night was bright and the attack became known to the enemy when our troops were 500 yards away so that the advance was carried out under terrific rifle and machine gun fire from that distance, but the greatest steadiness prevailed. The trenches were carried with the bayonet and the wood cleared except for a small redoubt with machine guns at the S.W. corner. Lt-Col Boyle was seriously wounded during the attack and reorganization fell entirely upon Lt-Col Leckie. In reporting the driving out of the enemy this officer stated that he had encountered 4 guns which he believed to be English 4.7's in the wood. A message was sent to the Third C.F.A. Bde to send horses to remove these but unfortunately the motor cyclist was unable to locate his H.Q. and the message came back the following day undelivered.

While this counter attack was in progress the 2nd and 3rd Bns of the 1st Canadian Bde under Lt-Col Watson and Lt-Col Rennie respectively, reported to assist. The 2nd Canadian Battalion was ordered to fill the gap from the troops immediately north of St. Julien towards Wood in C11 and the 3rd Canadian Bn. was placed in reserve in C22.c. The 10th and 16th Bns took up a position some distance north of the wood C10, C11, and entrenched, but it was found that owing to the darkness which had fallen, and the great loss of officers and N.C.O.'s as well as the increased length of line involved in such a salient the position could not be consolidated and touch maintained. The line was withdrawn to

the former German trench line south of the wood, and established there before daylight.

During the night 22nd/23rd one company of the 2nd Buffs was detached by Col Geddes from his command, and was sent forward to support the left flank of the Royal Highlanders about V25. The 2nd Canadian Bde, in response to a request for assistance placed three companies of the 7th British Columbia regiment in the vicinity of Keerselare. At 5 a.m. two companies of the 3rd Bn, were sent to the line south edge of wood to get in touch with the 2nd Bn, and two companies to occupy G.H.Q. second line in C16.a which was vacated by two companies 14th Bn, sent forward to St. Julien.

Minor attacks had occurred during the night on the line along Polcappelle road but these did not seriously affect the situation.

On the morning of the 23rd the position held was: original French line—line of Polcappelle road to Keerselaere—passing south edge of wood in C10 to contact with Col Geddes' command C10.n.

On our front the enemy was not aggressive during the morning of the 23rd. A counter attack by troops on our left apparently diverted his action until late in the afternoon, when two assaults with gas and artillery were made on the right of our position. These attacks were both repulsed by the 48th Highlanders with great loss to the enemy from rifle fire. About mid-day two battalions of the 27th Division reported, and two companies of one [sic] the 4th Rifle Bde, were sent to St. Julien, but before their arrival there instructions were received to send the battalions back to the canal, and these companies were withdrawn at once leaving no troops in reserve.

It was found that the enemy had, during the previous night worked eastward of the Polcapelle Road, and established a strong position with machine guns about U30.D. This rendered the left flank of the former trench line untenable and it was determined to draw it back to the line D1.a. Keerselaere. This change of position was carried out by the Royal Highlanders, the company of 2nd Buffs and the three companies of the 7th B.C. Regt, without a casualty during the night 23rd/24th. The new position was organized and completely occupied before daylight.

The new position was necessarily on the forward slope of the western extremity of Gravenstafel ridge, and later proved difficult to hold.

At 5.30 a.m. 24th, the enemy opened a heavy artillery fire on the whole of our original front line trenches. This fire appeared to cover also a short stretch of the parapet of the adjoining troops of the 2nd Canadian Brigade. The shelling was followed by an assault with noxious gas, and after a stern resistance the fumes and shells compelled our troops to retire. A succession of new positions was taken up and each in succession was made untenable by the terrific shell fire of the enemy's artillery. The retirement could have been more orderly or harder fought, but the enemy was using his field gun fire direct, and the men of the 48th the Royal Highlanders, the Buffs and the 7th were literally blown out of position after position. The enemy's rifles and machine guns did little of the work, and his infantry advanced after ours had been thrown back. As the troops occupying the original front line trenches were gradually driven southward by this fire, the enemy's attack developed also from his new positions and N. and E. of St. Julien, and the troops holding this line were subjected to a similar fire. The casualties were heavy—it was on this morning that virtually all except those in the 10th and 16th battalions occurred.

When the need for troops became apparent at about 5 a.m. the 16th and 10th Bns were withdrawn from their position south of C10, C11 and the adjoining battalions were thinned out so as to occupy their trenches. This difficult operation was carried out in daylight with very few casualties. The 10th Bn, was returned to the 2nd Canadian Brigade and the 16th Battalion held in reserve in C23.c. At about 8 a.m. 200 men of the 16th went forward under Major Leckie to support the troops retiring on St. Julien.

Information was received during the morning of the 24th that two battalions of the York and Durham Brigade would be available and would report north of Wieltje. Instructions were also received that these battalions should not be used unless absolutely necessary. Consequently, when these battalions, the 5th Durhams and the 4th Yorks reported they were ordered to prolong the unoccupied G.H.Q. line east of the St. Julien—Ypres Road [sic]. Large bodies (estimated at 2,500) of the enemy were seen collecting in the direction of Langemarck and the roads in the

neighborhood of Polcappelle [sic] were occupied by considerable bodies of cavalry. Our artillery was directed on these targets.

After a discussion of the general situation with the G.S.O. 1, 1st Canadian division at about 1p.m. 24th, it was ordered that troops should fall back on G.H.Q. 2nd line. Later in the day it was found that troops in St. Julien had not retired. The village was surrounded by the enemy and communication impossible. It is probable that 100 men held out in St. Julien.

At 4 p.m. a message was received from the O.C. 27th division stating that two battalions under O.C. Suffolks and one battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers had been directed, the former against Fortuin, and the later to Cross Roads C23.c. and instructing G.O.C. 3rd Canadian Brigade to take command in that part of the field. No previous information of these troops had been received but shortly after receipt of this message the Royal Irish Fusiliers reported himself [sic] between St. Julien and Fortuin. Personal Communication was at once established with him, but he was not in touch with the Suffolk command.

Late in the afternoon of the 24th the 4th Yorks and one and one half companies of the Queen Victoria Rifles reported and were held in support behind the line.

The O.C. Royal Irish Fusiliers was instructed that unless he received orders before 7 p.m. he should withdraw his battalion as he was unsupported.

Under instruction of G.O.C. 27th Division at 3 a.m. 25th, the 4th Yorks and 4th Durhams were ordered to move to a position facing north west in D8.a. to C18.c.

At 5.30 a.m. on 25th a counter attack under General Hull with five battalions was directed against the enemy from wood C10.c. to St. Julien. No enemy counter attacks were directed against our position during the day, but the trenches were subjected to very heavy shelling and the Brigade Headquarters in C22.b. was destroyed by shell fire, and was moved to C22.d.

The 3rd Brigade was relieved by the 10th Brigade, and moved to bivouac in H5.c. on the night of 25th/26th.

At 10 a.m. 26th the Brigade was ordered into reserve at La Broque behind an attack of French and Indian troops. Shelter trenches were dug at La Brique when orders were received to move south of Wieltje. Troops were moved at 3 p.m. 26th and dug in between St. Jean and Wieltje east of road.

On night of 27th/28th Brigade moved to bivouac in H5.c.

On night 28th/29th the 14th and 16th battalions occupied trenches on west bank of Yser canal for defense of bridges with 13th and 15th battalions in reserve in B29.d.

On night 29th/30th all battalions moved into reserve trenches in C19.c—C20.d.

On night 3rd/4th May moved to bivouac in B26.

On night of 4th/5th May moved to billeting area south of Bailleul.

Signed. R.E.W. Turner
Brigadier General
Commanding 3rd Infantry Brigade.
P.F Villiers Capt
a/-Brig Maj. 3 Can. Inf. Bgde

The authors would like to thank Brook Durham and Michael Tepper for transcribing Turners reports and letter.