

MONS STAR HEROES OF THE THIRTEENTH



ORIGINAL OFFICERS, 13th CANADIAN BATTALION, THE ROYAL HIGHLANDERS OF CANADA, IN AN ENGLISH CAMP, 1915
The Thirteenth Battalion was the first of three raised by the 5th Regiment of Royal Highlanders of Canada (the "Black Watch") for service overseas. They were part of the original First Division, and after achieving a glorious record are receiving a magnificent welcome home in Canada.
1st ROW—Capt. C. J. Smith, Lt. A. N. Worthington, Lt. I. M. R. Sinclair, Capt. G. E. McCuaig, Lt. W. S. M. MacTear, Capt. G. M. Drummond, Lt. E. M. Sellen, Capt. K. M. Perry, Lt. C. B. Pitblado, Lt. C. M. Horsesy, Capt. G. O. Lees.
2nd ROW—Lt. J. O. Hastings, Lt. F. S. Moleon, Lt. S. B. Lindsay, Capt. A. G. Cameron, Capt. L. W. Whitehead, Capt. C. N. McCuaig, Capt. H. F. Walker, Lt. J. G. Ross.
FRONT ROW—Major R. H. Jamieson, Major D. R. McCuaig, Major E. C. Norsworthy, Lt.-Col. F. O. W. Loomis, Major V. C. Buchanan, Capt. T. S. Morrissey, Capt. W. H. Clark-Kennedy, Lt. M. Greenfield, Lt. A. M. Fisher, Lt. F. C. Stephens.



1. Officers 13th Canadian Battalion, encamped on Salisbury Plain in 1915 before leaving for France.
2. Camouflaged Gun captured from the Germans by the 13th Battalion, R. H. C.
3. The Men "Over There."
4. Col. D. Ryherth McCuaig.
5. Brigadier-General (photo taken when he was Captain) G. E. McCuaig.
6. Lt.-Col. (now Major-General) F. O. W. Loomis, Capt. G. E. McCuaig, Capt. Guy Drummond, of the 13th, arriving at Valcartier in 1914.
7. One of the Field Pieces in Action in Flanders.
8. Group of 13th Battalion N. C. O.'s with the Regimental Mascot, "Billy."



THE THIRTEENTH ROYAL HIGHLANDERS OF CANADA

Regarded as the doyen of Canada's killed regiments and with the traditions of the Old Country's famous Black Watch linked up closely with their own, the Thirteenth Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada, were bound to make their mark and enhance their reputation in the war. They are now returning with their full share of honors, including the Victoria Cross, and a proud record won in every action from Second Ypres to Mons; but, alas, with very few of the originals, those splendid, keen warriors of the "Old Fifth" remaining. Some of their original officers have won distinction and one has gained promotion to command of a brigade. One commands a division. Many more, with names that are household words in Canada's commercial capital, have "gone West". Their places are filled by men who served under them, and I have been told that the Thirteenth has the largest percentage of men who gained commissions on the field of any Canadian battalion.

It was a very weak, though untamed unit that finally went out to refit and reinforce. Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan men sent over from England filled the gaps at that time. At Postobert, next month, the Thirteenth were again in the thick of fighting. They came up under heavy shell fire from Indian village, followed through the Sixteenth who had won the fringe of the orchard in the afternoon charge, cleaned out the remaining machine-gun nests of the Hun and all through the night beat off fierce counter-attacks by troops that were identified later as the Prussian Guards.

In August of 1918 then, the Battalion after several camouflaged moves took over from an Imperial battalion in front of the German positions on the River Luce. They swept through the surprised Hunns taking advantage of the low thick mist that enveloped the battleground. Hundreds of prisoners fell to the Montreal men and the battalion, with other units of its brigade had passed their objective long before the time set and were well on the way, through open country, towards Aubercourt. They rode forward in tanks and impetuously got ahead of the cavalry. It was fighting that suited the temperament of the Highlanders and their victory was complete. Twelve miles in depth had been gained. Other fresher battalions passed through them and the successful First Division was halted out as though going to rest.



Then came Ploegsteert and its comparative quiet, although the Thirteenth did some splendid work in occupying and consolidating four mine craters which straightened out the line. Christmas, their first in the war, came and the Germans shouted over greetings to the Highlanders who were now in the Stoenbeek sector. There was no fraternizing on the Canadian side. In the evening a party of the Thirteenth crept out close to the German lines to find out what was happening. They could hear the German singing Christmas hymns to the accompaniment of a wailing corset which some homesick Hun was playing. Another party crept along the ditch of the Messines-Walverghem road but was not so lucky. They fought a hard fight with a German patrol and were finally driven in by heavy machine gun fire. The Hun was not stopping the war to celebrate Christmas.

Next day, in Farnus Wood the Highlanders slew round the captured German howitzers and had a merry picnic firing at night against the fleeing Germans on the Douai plains. From Farnus they could see into Lens and Artois, where the battalion later spent many months in quiet rest. The Canadians kept against the harassed German garrison.

But there was to be no rest for the Division. Quietly and swiftly they were shifted back to their old positions on the Arras sector and again they were the spearhead. The Thirteenth were again in action in that September 1st attack that gained trenches almost in the famous Drocourt-Quaestun line. They plunged forward with a spirit that was undimmed and took their full share of the brigade fighting. On October 1st the Thirteenth were the centre of the attack on Blecourt and the railway line which ran towards Valenciennes, Cuvillers and Banigny were taken with their comrades of Strathairn; then came the terrific encounter at Abancourt where the Highlanders found the enemy massed ready for counter-attack. The Canadians gained the southern end of the town but finally were forced out. The operation was, however, extremely useful as it enabled the gains made by the first brigade to the right to be consolidated. Late in the afternoon the Thirteenth repulsed a determined attack and followed up their success by driving the enemy from Abancourt, capturing many machine guns. The battalion marched to Viesse and Avois on October 6th, and gained a British Columbia battalion. October 11th saw the Thirteenth taking their full share of a heavy attack across the Senese River which ended in the capture of its high ground south of the Senese. Then came the plunse through that brought the victorious Canadians to Hamel and Passes by nightfall. On October 19th the Killers from Montreal took the famous Bois Amant, meeting with little opposition, although they overwhelmed an isolated German battery which was firing with open sights. The Corps record in these actions had been the capture of 25 villages and the release of 31,000 French civilians. Then came the actual breakthrough of the Hindenburg line and the attack on Cambrai. It was the first time of another division to gain the city but the Thirteenth drove through just to the North of the town and in a series of fights in the outskirts killed many of the enemy who had been thrown against them as a last resource. They were a good second in the race for the centre of the city. In those shows the Highlanders suffered somewhat severely, but they knew that at last they had the Hun on the run and they were not to be stayed. They followed up in this less fierce fighting that gained Valenciennes and when on the day the armistice was signed, Mons fell to the Canadians. The Thirteenth were still in the fray, thrusting forward on the left of the First Division.



On the night of April 21st the Thirteenth took over from the Fourteenth the Sector at Ypres immediately adjoining the right flank of the French line held by Algerian troops. As the Germans showed little sign of activity, the morning of the 22nd (a bright, sunny day), was spent in repairing the trenches. Suddenly at about 2 o'clock, a terrific German shell fire drenched the French and Canadian lines. A greenish yellow cloud floated along the ground towards the former, followed by German infantry in dense masses. The yellow cloud proved to be chlorine gas, hitherto known from civilized warfare, and under this new and terrible scourge the Algerian line broke, leaving the Thirteenth flank exposed. The position was in any case difficult to hold as it was traversed by the Poelcapelle Road, and the Germans actually penetrated to their rear. Ammunition ran short, but fortunately reinforcements arrived by dawn, when a skillful retirement was effected towards the right under heavy fire, so as to form a defensive flank between the village of St. Julien and the original front. A day of terrible shell fire followed, notable for deeds of magnificent heroism, including that of Lance-Corporal Fred Fisher, which won the first Victoria Cross recorded to a Canadian during this war. Three days of fighting had passed before British reinforcements passed through the sadly thinned but still indomitable lines of the gallant Thirteenth.

After a few days' rest in divisional reserve the battalion again went into the line, suffering very heavy casualties from the terrific shelling, and

On the third day their division went into the line to relieve the tired and battered Third Division. At wellmarket and Valor Farm the Highlanders held on grimly against fresh German counter-attacks and repulsed several of those terrible cement forts that were holding out. But the two other brigades of the First Division shared the bulk of the hard fighting and the Highlanders came out of that costly battle with considerable casualties.

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