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SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES

Story of Gallant Deeds of Canadian Corps in Ypres Salient.

Written for the Canadian Press. Six years ago today the outcome of the third battle of Ypres was decided. On June 2nd after concentrated artillery bombardment, the Germans attacked the allied line which bounded that blood-soaked triangle, the "salient", and for eleven days and nights, attack and counter-attack, interspersed with the most violent shelling to which Canadians were ever subject, raged from Hooge to Hill 60.

On that 3,000 odd yards of front, which represented the area of the fighting, it is estimated that over eleven German divisions were used in an effort to smash through the Canadian line. Opposed to these were actually only two Canadian divisions, for the Second Canadian division only contributed a few battalions. The Germans did advance; penetrating in one place to Zillebeke village, nearly 2,000 yards from the original front line trenches, but in their attack six years ago today, Canadians drove them from the occupied ground, consolidated the line where it had previously been and made good the saying of the Canadian Corps "that the men from the Dominion had never lost a trench."

Historians only make passing reference to this fight which has been variously termed "The Battle of Sanctuary Wood, of Maple Copse, or of Zillebeke," nevertheless the loss and the recovery of the position was fraught with some of the costliest and most desperate fighting of the war. Whole battalions were wiped out in the fury of the bombardments which preceded the attacks of the Wurttembergers and for miles behind the line the Boche guns shelled roads, dumps and bullets until the strip of Flanders soil bounded on the North by the Menin Road at Hooge, on the South by Hill 60 and on the East by the trenches, was a litter of dead men, animals and the welter of equipment smashed by high explosive. The First and Third Canadian Divisions in eleven days of fighting, lost more men at the Third Battle of Ypres than those same Divisions lost in six weeks at the Somme. The enemy's losses, though never definitely ascertained, were estimated at close to 20,000 or nearly double the casualties sustained by the Canadians. At least one German Corps commander was retired for failure to penetrate and retain the position.

Briefly, the story of the fight is this: On the morning of June 2nd, the Boche opened with guns of all calibre upon the positions held by the Canadian troops from Moors and Sorrel on the right to Hooge on the left. Armagh and Sanctuary Woods, where splinter-proof shelters for the reserve companies of battalions in the line were located, were deluged with shells and communication trenches, fire trenches, bombing and machine gun posts were obliterated by the terrific bombardment. When the enemy advanced only a few dazed and desperate survivors remained to resist.

The Third Canadian Division was in the line at the time of the enemy attack. The Second Division was occupying front line positions further south, and the First Canadian Division was in Corps Reserve. The latter received orders to march at once to the line to deliver the counter-blow necessary to restore the line. The first counter-attack was planned to take place before daylight, June 3rd, but the order was afterwards changed to 7 o'clock. Several hours before this time the battalions of the First Division which had marched the fifteen or twenty kilometres from the Corps rest camps appeared on the scene. Tired and hungry they were and their ranks depleted from the heavy shelling directed against the roads and overland trails they had traversed during the night.

The counter-attack on June 3rd, in which the 7th, 10th, 14th, 15th and 49th battalions took parts was jointly superintended by Generals Tuxford and Lipsitt of the 3rd and 2nd battalions respectively. Though those who have previously chronicled this attack, are unanimous on the gallantry of the troops engaged, the operation has been styled a failure.

Gen. Tuxford's Statement. General Tuxford, who is now a resident of Moose Jaw, Sask., declares that it was the first attack on June 3rd, 1916, which made possible the success of the attack of which today is the sixth anniversary. He cites the following reasons as to why he considers this is so:

1. "The June 3rd attack established the location of the Boche positions.

2. "It prevented the Wurttembergers from taking the initiative by taking the initiative from the Wurttembergers.

3. "It established a continuity of position as the Canadians' front line from which the 'jump off' on June 3rd was made possible."

General Tuxford blames the nature of the troops engaged on the June 3rd counter-attack upon these facts:

1. "Lack of definite information concerning the positions to be attacked.

2. Insufficient nature of artillery preparation.

3. "Alteration of orders concerning the time the blow was to be delivered.

4. "Poor communications as be-

tween battalions; both laterally and in depth, caused by incessant hostile machine gun and shrapnel fire."

In any event, troops attacking on June 3rd did occupy positions of some importance to which the enemy had previously penetrated. For example at Zillebeke village, the advance made totalled about 1,200 yards and carried the Canadians to the western extremity of Observatory Ridge, a high tongue of ground in the left centre of the position, running directly east and west. The gains therefore established a line of defense, established the position of the German troops and gave a good position to attack from. In view of the handicaps under which the troops labored including concentrated machine gun, rifle and shell fire to which they were subject; lack of knowledge of the position and the fact they had little instruction in the method they were to employ, the attack of June 3rd may be described as distinctly successful, but costly withal in the lives of soldiers.

For several days artillery and counter-artillery bombardments, attack and counter-attack, mostly of a local nature, raged back and forth along the line. The German front line on the right and right centre was from 500 to 750 yards east of the old advance positions of the Canadians. Hooge, however, that commanding eminence to the extreme left, was still Canadian ground and no effort put forth by the enemy up to this time had been successful in dislodging its stubborn defenders. On June 6th, the enemy blew mines under the front line Canadian trenches in the Hooge sub-sector and in the attack which developed immediately afterwards, penetrated as far as the Hooge support lines. Major A. G. Styles, now of Regina, a captain at that time with the 25th battalion, was the hero of the Hooge attack. He mobilized machine guns and prevented the attackers from rolling up on the right. As the horde of Wurttembergers poured through "The Gap" (a slight depression just south of Hooge where 700 of the Prussian Guard broke through in October, 1914 and were annihilated by the British) the machine guns of the 25th and of the British battalions further to the left, had a beautiful enfilade on them and mowed the oncoming Boche down like corn.

In the interval, June 6th to June 12th the Boche made several local attempts to bomb and blast his way further into the heart of the Canadian position. In every case he failed, but the Canadians, now trying in full view of the Germans who occupied the higher ground, passed an unpleasant time. The slightest movement was shelled and all day and night the ground was swept with shrapnel and machine gun bullets, with the less noisy but more deadly missiles from aimed rifle fire.

The Final Attack

The attack on the night of June 12-13th was well planned and well executed. The attackers were distributed in the front line along the western front of Armagh and Sanctuary woods and the eastern side of Maple Copse. The night was vile for the rain fell in torrents but the masses of mud which formed in every hollow and shell hole mercifully smothered the effect of the fast falling high explosive from the German guns. At a quarter to one in the morning the pandemonium of the Canadian batteries broke loose—the greatest concentration of guns ever behind the corps up to that time. Bombers formed the first wave of attack launched at 1.30 a.m. on June 13th, and though the enemy resisted with stubborn bravery in certain isolated places, he was finally overcome and the Canadian line established in its old position along the crest of the low hills which accentuate the outline of the Ypres Salient.

The principal units engaged were: 1st, 3rd, 7th and 8th battalions under Brigadier-General Lipsitt; 2nd, 4th, and 16th battalions under Brigadier-General Tuxford. General Garnett Hughes with the 5th, 10th, 14th, and 15th was in Divisional reserve.

There are many rumors and theories concerning the Sanctuary Wood, Maple Copse, Hooge fight. The Germans gave warning of their intention to attack late in April, by driving T saps toward the Canadian line afterwards linking up the saps into new front trenches. On the right where the 2nd brigade of the 1st Division were holding the line and on the extreme left where the Royal Canadian Regiment were in the trenches on June 2nd the Boche did not advance, it is true but at the same time the main force of the Wurttemberg attack was directed against the centre held by the troops of the Third Canadian Division, then making its debut in the trenches. Here the volume of shell fire was so intense that several battalions of this Division simply ceased to exist before the Germans even left their trenches. The enemy undoubtedly was fully informed as to the presence of the new troops in the line. His attack was launched accordingly.

Officers and men who were in the "June Show" (as it is called) of 1916, invariably express puzzlement. (Continued on Page 6.)

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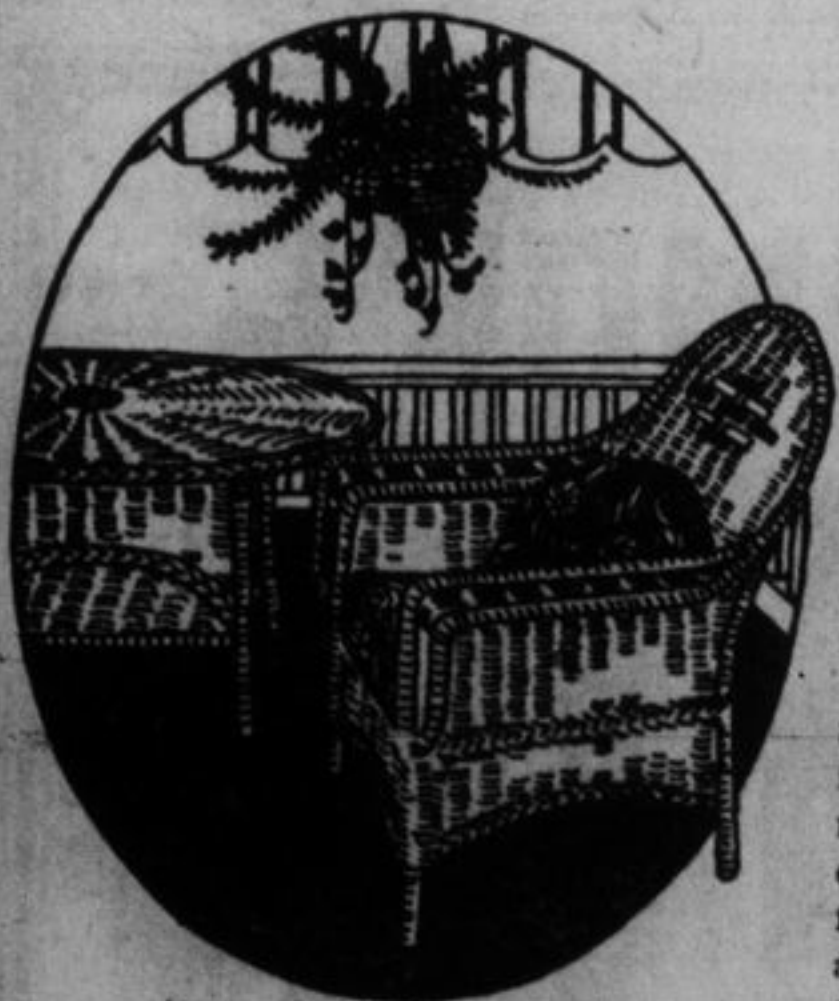
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