



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BRITISH COLUMBIA REGIMENT (DCO)

CHURCH PARADE COMMEMORATES DUKES' BLOODING

The First Time -- GAS!

VETERAN OF OLD 7TH TELLS OF ST. JULIEN

By Major Douglas Harker, Historian of the Regiment

On April 22, 1915, a new, hitherto unused and horrible weapon of war was launched against Canadian troops -- poison gas. This is the story of one isolated company that held a key point on that day against heavy odds. Luckily they were expert shots and were able to subject the enemy to continual and accurate rifle fire. Luckily they were brave men, and very durable as this story will show.

Doings of the Dukes

MAY 5 PARADE MARKS ST. JULIEN

There was a weekend conference of B.C.'s militia public relations officers recently and during a smoke-break bull session, a Regular Army man said that one thing that kept a soldier active and keen was the tradition of the unit. "I wonder how many young members know anything about their regimental history?" he asked.

The B.C. Regiment has an ancient, honorable and colorful history behind it -- three wars, artillery, rifle, infantry and armoured affiliation. Thanks to those printed short histories, everyone who joins should know the background.

The annual Church Parade each year points up the battle of St. Julien when the Dukes, as components of the 7th Bn, B.C. Regiment, ran into overwhelming odds and gas. They were blooded in that battle, returned, some of them, to fight on to victory just as the Dukes, as the 28th Armoured, tasted defeat and victory 29 years later.

To bring back that era of the 7th Bn, with their Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles component, and the name B.C. Regiment, Major Harker, ex-officer, continuing booster, member of the CO's committee and historian, interviewed a one-time L/Cpl who is too modest to allow his name to be printed.

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We heard it from a section commander, a L/Cpl with No. 1 Coy, 7th Battalion, (B.C. Regiment) CEF. He was an outstanding shot and more than once had won the silver dessert spoon, the "century" prize which went to any BCR scoring 100 out of 105.

The battalion which had recently changed over to the four-company formation and was using the recently adopted and not too dependable Ross rifle, was part of the Brigade reserve at Ypres, a spot soon to be famous in history.

The afternoon of the 22nd, shelling increased. The Germans had brought in their big howitzers. Apparently a severe attack had opened on the French front. There was a wall of smoke. French gunners appeared riding bareback; a horse ambulance bumped its way over a plowed field; a crowd of Zouaves followed. The French were withdrawing in a hurry.

On the way to the front our men heard from walking wounded that they had been surprised by Germans in French uniforms. The enemy, too, was using a light Maxim machine gun carried by extending the legs; and it looked like a stretcher even at a short distance.

They crossed the fields in extended order and before daylight were in shallow trenches on the forward slope of the Gravenstafel Ridge, to the left of St. Julien. Men who have been in battle know

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Duke Doings (contd from page 1 col 1)

His story, of an isolated company that faced odds and the strange and terrifying new gas, is a gripping bit out of the regimental history for this anniversary of St. Julien.

Three stories from the veteran's description are worthy of telling here. In Major Harker's interview it tells of how the penned-in company at last retreated, only to meet engineers who had been sent to hold the line. "We gave three cheers for the Sappers, fixed bayonets and returned to the trenches."

And when they did pull out after that long session and met up with other remnants and prepared to fight again, General Currie came along and someone reported "Ninety of the 1st B.C. reporting, sir."

Finally, after many more days in the salient, they moved back to reserve for ten days' rest. It was a remnant of what the 7th had been three weeks before, tired, fed up, low in spirits. It was midnight and they were passing through woods. And along came the band of the Sherwood Foresters playing "Hold Out Your Hand You Naughty Boy" and played them down the road.

But let the Lance Jack tell it. "We passed cheering troops who came out of their huts. In a moment everything had changed. We were swinging along at a good pace now and looking forward ..."

All examples of the spirit of the Regiment, the stuff from which tradition is made.

YOU ARE A DUKE -- BE PROUD OF IT!

While thinking of the struggle that was World War I, it would be apt to record a remark attributed to General Foch at a time when his gallant French forces were being severely tried

"My right has been rolled up. My left has been driven back. My center has been smashed. I have ordered an advance from all directions."

Here, truly, was a soldier!

St. Julien (contd from page 1 col 2)

that its recollection comes in pictures rather than in the continuity of a narrative. It seemed they stayed here for 1½ days, subjected to severe shelling.

On Saturday morning at dawn when things were quieter, they moved to a hedge where they spread their blankets, filled water bottles from a pump and prepared for some sleep.

As they settled down a greenish-yellow cloud seemed to obscure the sun. Long fingers of gas poured over the ground. No one knew what it was but it set them coughing. Our L/Cpl passed around a packet of cough tablets. Cough drops for chlorine gas! As it got worse men soaked handkerchiefs in water and covered their mouths.

Capt. Warden was the Coy Cmdr of No. 1 Coy of the 7th and he decided to consolidate. He called in his men and they came running over fields knee deep in gas. When they got back, many were frothing at the mouth and vomiting, others lay still and black as coal. Meanwhile, German shells, spotted by smoke bombs dropped by a plane, poured over them; but they were too sick to bother.

They dug in. They actually could see the German Schmieden Brigade move in. They had detrained at Langemark Station and were played down the roads by bands!

"We knew we were in for it," said the L/Cpl, now a Vancouver citizen. "I had a fine view of them. The Germans kept massing and we started to deploy. They kept getting together for a rush. It gave us lots of time to shoot them. We all did well. It was like shooting clay pigeons."

We retired for the first time at 1 p.m. of the 24th, the story goes on. Capt. Warden was hit. They ran into some engineers who had been turned into infantrymen by General Currie and told to help hold the position. So our group fixed bayonets, turned around and went back to the trenches. The platoon commander was killed and the CSM took over.

That day was worse. The Lance Jack recalls he used three rifles that day, firing them in turn. Casualties were heavy but sniping was good "for the 7th had done a lot of rifle shooting".

Our little band fell back a couple of hundred yards and discovered a fine sight -- two companies of the 1st Suffolks, using packs on their heads for they had no helmets to protect them against shrapnel.

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St Julien (contd from page 2 col 2)

In turn they found a Canadian 18-pounder battery firing in two directions! They joined it and helped to fill sand bags.

Their commander told them that every man would be needed in the line that night, never mind finding their own unit. But going back they ran into the 7th HQ. Stragglers arrived and some 300 men were mustered. Our group marched all night and it was tough for that isolated group that had had no food or sleep for several days.

Completely surrounded, as it turned out, the "remnants", thanks to a ground mist the next morning, rejoined their comrades at Wieltje where the second brigade was being formed.

Without doubt No. 1 Company, 7th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Forces, played a part in stopping the German drive to the channel ports; for we are told that there was nothing on either flank if the Schmieden Brigade had got in from the rear.

Forty-two years later, we salute this band of gallant men.

C H U R C H P A R A D E

THE REGIMENT'S ANNUAL CHURCH PARADE
WILL BE HELD THIS SUNDAY, MAY 5th.

THE REGIMENT, INCLUDING 'C' SQUADRON,
WILL PARADE AT THE ARMOURIES AT
1000 HOURS, AND WILL MARCH TO CHRIST
CHURCH CATHEDRAL, WHERE THE SERVICE
WILL BE HELD.

THIS IS ONE OF OUR MOST IMPORTANT
PARADES OF THE YEAR, AND A FULL
ATTENDANCE IS EXPECTED.

If you find you will be unable to
attend this parade, contact your
Squadron Sergeant-Major or one of
your Squadron officers immediately.