INTERVIEW WITH MAJOR-GENERAL PEARKES

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"CANADA IN FLANDERS"

Q. Sir, I'm just going to ask you a couple of general questions before we start. I gather you were with the Northwest Mounted Police when the war began. Is that right?

P. A. I was with the Royal Northwest Mounted Police in the Yukon when war began.

Q. How long had you been in that

P. A. About two and a half years.

Q. That's somewhat when you were quite a young man at the time.

P. A. Well, I was in my twenties then. I was born in 1888 so you can calculate and see how old I was when war broke out. I was in my twenties,

Q. Where were you raised, Sir?

P. A. I was born in Watford in England, Hertfordshire, England, and I came out to this country in 1906. I came out straight from school.

Q. Did you come out to join the. . .?

P. A. No, I came out and farmed for a few years. When I say farmed, I worked on a farm and I took up a homestead and I proved up my homestead in Alberta.

Q. Well, I think there has always been for all of us a great romance about the old Royal Northwest Mounted Police.

P. A. Yes.

Q. Did you feel this as a young man, a sort of a stir to adventure in joining the force?

P. A. Yes, I think so. I didn't have sufficient capital

to make farming go and it just seemed to me that in the Force it would be an interesting experience; whether one stayed in there for good or not, it wouldn't matter. I was always fond of horses; I had ridden ever since I was a small boy and the idea of riding in a mounted unit appealed to me.

Q. Yes. Well, when war broke out where were you, Sir?

P. A. In the Yukon at Whitehorse and I purchased my discharge and went - came down to Victoria where I enlisted in the 2nd C.M.R.

Q. Now this is very interesting. You purchased your discharge?

P. A. I purchased my discharge because I hadn't completed my you see, and one had to if you got out before the period of service which you had assigned to - you purchased your discharge.

Q. Can I be rude and ask you how much it would have cost you?

P. A. Oh, I've forgotten. I really don't know what. . . It wasn't a great deal. I really have completely forgotten.

Q. That's remarkable. They didn't even make an allowance if you were joining the forces?

P. A. Well, now there's a story about that which is rather amusing because I applied first of all to purchase my discharge in order to go overseas to . . . in the war, and that was refused. So then I hit upon

the idea that I had urgent private affairs in connection with my homestead in Alberta and I was granted my discharge to do that, but I never saw the homestead again and I came down in to Victoria and I enlisted here.

Q. When was this, Sir?

P. A. It was in the beginning of 1915. I applied as soon as war broke out, you see, but it took some little time to get that adjusted and I came down here in January of 1915.

Q. There was never any thought of creating a unit from the R.N.W.T. was there?

P. A. Well, not at that time because they were considered required here for internal security here. And that was the reason why they discouraged anybody except reservists of the British army from going to the war.

Q. Did many of the lads in the Force join up at this stage of the game?

P. A. Well, there were quite a number who were reservists of the British army and they went out at the end of 1914. And then there were a large number tried to get out and did get out by one means or another and joined various units. Later in the war, of course, there was a detachment sent over.

Q. So you then joined up in Vancouver, was it?

P. A. In Victoria with the 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles.

Q. This was 2nd or 3rd Division, Sir, at that time? 3rd Division. . .

P. A. Well, they weren't formed into a dvisions at that time. They were really expecting to go to Egypt as a mounted unit and that was one reason why I again was anxious to join that particular unit, because they were mounted at that time and they were completing their training mounted here with their horses in Victoria, and high hopes were held that they would be going to Egypt in the very near future. In fact when I enlisted I was told that I would be very lucky to get in as they had their full establishment and they were going next week to Egypt and, of course, we never did go to Egypt and in, I think it was September, or in. . .

Q. I have a note here from Nicholson that it was September that you . . . No, no. I'm very sorry.

P. A. It was in the summer that we left Victoria and went over to England and then I think it was in September, 1915, we went to France.

Q. That's what I've got. The 7th of September of 1915. Now, did you go over from Canada with the 2nd C.M.R.?

P. A. With the 2nd C.M.R. I went over with the 2nd C.M.R. and I was with the 2nd C.M.R. until the summer of 1916. Then I was transferred to the 5th C.M.R. The 5th C.M.R. had had very heavy

casualties on the Somme and the Company Commanders and General Draper asked for me to go - then Col. Draper - asked for me to go as a Company Commander in the 5th C.M.R.

Q. When you joined up here what rank did you hold?

P. A. I joined as a private.

Q. And you were a private through Canada, or had you become an N.C.O. before the unit went overseas?

P. A. I got my lance-corporal stripes in Canada and I arrived in England as a lance-corporal.

Q. I suppose when you left you went right across the country by train?

P. A. We went right across the country by train and on the coaches, why everywhere we wrote up "Berlin or bust" - there was not very much security about that, you see, the whole name was chalked up on the sides of the coaches.

Q. This is interesting because you would be going all across the country at that time. Did you have any sense of the feeling of the country as you went across? I mean did people come down to see the troop trains go through and that sort of thing?

P. A. Yes, I have quite vivid memories of stopping at Salmon Arm. You see, half of the 2nd C.M.R. came from the Okanagan Valley. The others were drawn from Vancouver Island and all the people from the Okanagan Valley, somehow or another, had heard the

time the troop train was going through and they had all driven up from places like Kelowna, Vernon and even Penticton and Enderby and had gathered at Salmon Arm on the station. They went to see their boys off and they were very, very generous with baskets of fruit and all that sor t of thing. We had a great time. And then you asked me elsewhere; I remember stopping at Medicine Hat and again the people of Medicine Hat turned out and I think it was a Sunday afternoon when we got there, I won't be quite certain but they turned out in large numbers and had chocolate bars and that sort of thing for us and at one or two places - Chapeleau we got out and had a route march just to stretch our legs.

Q. Did you have your horses with you, or. . .?

P. A. Oh, no. The horses had been taken away from us here in Victoria and they had been sent over to England separately and we expected to - well, we weren't certain whether we were going to get horses or not again then because here in Victoria we had been asked would we volunteer to serve as infantry as infantry were needed and it was doubtful whether cavalry were needed; but our horses were being sent over to a re-mount station. We might or might not see then again and it depended on circumstances whether we went to France as

mounted or dismounted and of course, I think almost to a man we volunteered to go dismounted if required. We wore our spurs and we wore the bandolier rather than the web equipment of that day and we considered ourselves the elite and being cavalry why, we thought that we'd be able to - even smaller numbers than the battalion of infantry we'd be able to give just as good an account of ourselves.

Q. And where did you sail from, Sir?

P. A. We sailed from Quebec, I think.

Q. Was it a big convoy that you went on finally?

P. A. No. I think we sailed from Quebec. I won't be positive about it, but I think it was.

Q. Then you were only in England I presume for a few months before you went to France?

P. A. We were in England I should think, for about two months.

Q. Incidentally, the units that were coming over at that stage of the game, were you still going to Salisbury Plain?

P. A. No, we went to Shorncliffe.

Q. So you missed all that mud.

P. A. We missed the. . .

Q. The Battle of Salisbury Plain.

P. A. As a matter it was very pleasant. I recall happy times when we were at Shorncliffe. We did get our horses for a while and it was a pleasure going

on route marches mounted through those country lanes there and it was only just before we left for France that we lost the horses.

Q. Now, when did you shift to 5th C.M.R. - in France? or was this in England?

P. A. This was in France in '16 the summer of '16.

Q. Did you have anything at all to do with the fighting at Festubert and Givenchy, that. . .?

P. A. No, Festubert was over. We got over there just at the end of the Battle of Loos, you see. We went into trenches first of all at Ploegsteert It was a fairly easy initiation that we had there. It was a quiet sector. But we went in on cavalry establishment, the establishment of mounted rifles which were probably a couple of hundred men less than the establishment of an infantry battalion. So we had some difficulty in taking over the sector of an infantry battalion. First of all we went up with - we were sent up in small groups to stay with another unit and, if I recall correctly, I went up for that period of initiation. I was a corporal then and we were with the R.C.D.s and they were holding a sector of the line and then we came in later and took over the sector.

Q. This is something that I ask nearly everybody because of the second war type. When we came up from Italy in '45 we had about a month in Belgium because we were one of the first units of the corps that came up and we were waiting for the rest of the

come and we were being re-equipped and we used to drive the men up - take a truck and drive the men up to the Vimy Memorial which wasn't very far away from us, and we'd go and look at the Vimy trenches where they had been cemented and the cement sandbags and what have you, and I found myself every time I saw it really appalled at the horror there must have been in that war compared to the. . .

P. A. At the what?

Q. At the real horror, Sir, that there was in those trenches, you know, running for miles and then simply standing for four years in this kind of mud and constant engagement of one kind or another and it seems to have been so much worse in a way than the Second War from the point of view of the ordinary soldier. You know, I keep asking people, 'What was your reaction the first time you saw the trenches?' Had you heard so much about it that you simply accepted this, or was it a shock the first time you saw them?

P. A. No, I don't think it was a shock. I remember when we were marching up we were kept under strict discipline at first - I mean to say, we were still some considerable way away from the trenches. You could see the Very lights and the occasional shell but we weren't allowed to talk and there was

no smoking or anything and we were amazed at the contrast between the silence of our almost deathless army going up to the trenches and the hilarity of the men coming out of the estaminets. So we thought that it really wasn't going to be as bad after all as perhaps we had thought. But as I say, I had been one of those N.C.O.s selected to go in as sort of indoctrination, we'd call it now,(that horrible word wasn't invented in 1915). But we went there and well, it wasn't bad. I think you were more - you wondered how you would behave more than anything else and when you got there, why you found that there was quite a lot of work to do in the way of repairing the parapets and in keeping, draining the trenches - there was always something to do. Then you did your turn of sentry duty in which you were on the lookout on the parapet. The rest of the time why, you were either working, as I said, in the trenches or carrying up rations or barbed wire, or something of that sort and certainly at first, time didn't hang heavily at all. It was all new and as I say, plenty to keep you occupied. You didn't have too much sleep and so when you were off duty, you had a chance to sleep.

Q. About what would be your routine, Sir? How many days in the line and how many days out?

P. A. Oh, it varied, of course, but usually approximately

a week in the line and then you'd come back into support and then back into reserve. And that was about a three-week rotation really. It varied, though, according to different sectors.

Q. The first big action you would be in then would be Somme. Is that correct?

P. A. No, no, no. We had heavy engagements on the second of June, 1916, out at Maple Wood and the Germans put on a very heavy raid there and heavy casualties were suffered by the 3rd Division at that time. It was the second of June. In fact that was considered the heaviest German bombardment that there had been up to that day and we lost some trenches and then had to. . .

Q. Would the 1st Division have been in the line with you at that time? The reason I'm saying that is the Honourable J. M. McDonald's brother, Hugh McDonald was wounded and taken prisoner in a raid on the second of June, 1916. He was a P.P.C.L.I. type.

P. A. Yes. Well the P.P.C.L.I. were with the 3rd Division and they were next, I was 8th Brigade then, they were 7th Brigade and they were in the line at the time.

Q. I keep forgetting. Because they were one of the first units raised, I'm always thinking they were in the 1st Division. I had forgotten.

P. A. No, they were 3rd Division. Oh yes, we were very close to them.

Q. How did this raid actually develop, Sir? Did you think this was going to be a major offensive, or. . .?

P. A. Well, it seemed a major offensive to us. Remember I'm looking at this from the point of view of the regimental N.C.O. Now I had just got my commission at that time. I had just got my commission then. But we had had one or two raids earlier in the year, small raids, but this was something very much bigger and it seemed as though it was the big show.

Q. Can you actually remember what literally happened, Sir? I mean how the thing started, when you first got the alert and connected. . .

P. A. Well, there was a terrific bombardment.

Q. And then they came over the top after you. . .

P. A. Then they came over the top.

Q. Did you lose any of your trenches that day?

P. A. Yes, 8th Brigade lost their front line trenches and they were overrun.

Q. Did you regain these trenches eventually?

P. A. Not all of them.

Q. This was after your transfer to the 5th, or were you still in the 2nd at this period?

P. A. No, I was with the 2nd C.M.R. We were in support.

Q. I see. So it was after the raid?

P. A. Yes, it was after the raid. It was during the Somme fighting that I was transferred to the 2nd C.M.R.

I had become Battalion Bombing Officer about this time and then I went to be Brigade Bombing Officer and I was Brigade Bombing Officer when I was down on the Somme. And it was then that I was asked to go to the 5th C.M.R.

Q. Now, what was the roll of the Bombing Officer, Sir? What was his responsibility?

P. A. Well, he had what you might calla Bombing Platoon and it was necessary to allot men to the various companies or to keep them as a special group really for some particular bombing operation which might be required. The Bombing Officer, of course, had to allocate the men to the various companies or to lead if there was a patrol or a bombing raid; he was responsibile for leading that. Of course, he was responsible for general instruction in bombing to all ranks and maintenance of the supply of bombs, and care of them.

Q. That would mean then that sometimes your platoon would go in as a platoon and sometimes it would be broken up to other platoons or companies?

P. A. They were usually allotted to, when things were quiet they were allotted to various posts. There were certain bombing posts which were held and the bombers who were specially trained and selected men took over the bombing posts.

Q. Could you say something, Sir, about the purpose of trench raids; I mean what purpose did these continual raids serve?

P. A. Well, I think the main purpose was to keep the enemy alerted and they were always under a certain strain. There could be no relaxation, they never knew when a bombing raid was going to take place and so they, as I say, had to be alerted all the time and there was a war of nerves, as it might be called, and they were there expecting something to happen. Then, again, of course you had more elaborate small raids which were designed perhaps to catch a prisoner, either when you were patrolling in No Man's Land or when you had a raid worked up and you entered the enemy's trenches when you hoped to get a prisoner, and of course. . .

Q. Would this be for information to find out what the unit was against you, and that sort of thing?

P. A. Mainly for information, at least that's what we were told but I think as much as anything else it was just to keep the enemy alerted and under strain the whole time. And we took a pride in saying that we owned No Man's Land and we crawled about No Man's Land during the night and we would sometimes get up close enough to the enemy's trenches so that you could throw a bomb over into them and it was general harrassing of the enemy.

Q. Can you remember any raid in particular that you led, Sir, just as a typical example of a raid?

P. A. Well, there were numerous occasions. First of all

you had to go out and find a way through the enemy's barbed wire. That meant cutting the wire usually because you couldn't rely on the artillery to cut the wire unless it was a big show coming on and that was a hazardous operation really because the wire was close to the enemy's trenches. Usually two of you went out and one used the wire cutters while the other held the ends and tied them back so that they wouldn't go back with a ping and that sort of thing and then, it was a case of having got that a quick rush in going to an assigned distance, probably only a few yards, hoping to catch a sentry - sometimes you did and sometimes you came back empty-handed. But they were carefully arranged and you had blocks put out at the limits of your entry into the trench so that it gave you time to examine the dug-out, if there were dug-outs there, or perhaps it was the destruction of a mortar post or something of that sort. Or then again, you quite frequently met an enemy patrol in No Man's Land and then it was a question really of who got the first initiative, who heard the other side coming along and occasionally you were able to grab one of them but usually the patrols separated and nothing much happened.

Q. You say you put out a block, Sir, in the trench. Just what did that constitute?

P. A. Well, it would mean that there were a couple of men stationed there and they would, if possible, put some barbed wire in - they might have taken some barbed wire with them - but something just to throw in there. The thing was that they were there to block any enemy counter-attack coming in. Mind you, these were all very small operations.

Q. I was just going to ask you, Sir, about how many men would you take on the average raid?

P. A. Oh, I would say a raid could go anywhere from seven men to twenty or so, but usually it was quite small in numbers. That was my experience. Now other people may have had different, but that was my experience. I personally felt it was better to have a small raid than a big one. There was more chance in my opinion of getting in and getting results than if you had a bigger. You could have a covering force which remained in No Man's Land to help you get back if you ran into difficulties. But generally speaking, from the limited number of raids which I took part in and actually getting into the enemy's trenches, it went rather like clockwork because things were well arranged and you didn't run into any great

difficulty. You were out of the trenches before the counter-attack. Sometimes your people who were left in the front line trench received more trouble than those who were out in No Man's Land because the enemy's fire, artillery fire or mortar fire, would come in. The Bombing Officer wasn't always popular.

Q. If you did run into a German patrol in No Man's Land, did you ever really just sort of all get up and slug it out in No Man's Land or did you all stay down and throw bombs at each other?

P. A. No. I think that - I never experienced an occasion where you all stood up and sort of had a fist fight in the middle of No Man's Land. No. It was case of - one case I remember there were a few bombers in a shell hole, there were three of us, and a couple of Germans came practically along the top of the shell hole where it was a case of grabbing one of them and the other ran and we hurried him back to our lines just as quickly as we possibly could, you see. But there may have been cases where - but I never ran into one - where there was a sort of stand-up fight in No Man's Land.

Q. Could you tell us something about - compare the effectiveness of our bombs as compared with the German ones.

P. A. The German bomb was what we call the'potato masher'. That was the main one they had. They had other smaller ones. The German bombs were mainly for noise. It had a large explosion but very little woulding effect unless it was very close to. The covering was light and . .. oh, I've had splinters of the covering which really - which was really not very serious. Whereas our bomb was of a heavier nature. The Germans could, therefore, outthrow us and they had some lighter bombs which were called 'oyster bombs' or such name we gave them - they looked rather like an oyster shell - which they could throw a good deal further than we could. But I think our Mills bomb, when we eventually got the Mills bomb, was far superior to the Germans' but it was difficult to throw as far as the Germans could throw theirs. Now whether there was a great advantage by having thrown a great distance or not, I don't know, but I think that accuracy of throwing, our Mills bomb was the best. Of course, we started off with the jam-tin bombs which were a home-made affair which were not. . .

Q. Did you actually have those when you were first in France?

P. A. Oh, yes. We made them up and. . .

Q. How would you actually make them, Sir?

P. A. Well, you had a tin can and a primus and a couple

of little rounds of - what was it - gun cotton and then packed it all round with any bits of stuff you could get - nails or anything of that sort.

Q. When did the big supply of Mills bombs come in so that you had plenty of them?

P. A. When did the big supply come . . .? Oh, we had lots of Mills bombs in '16. It was only at the end of '15 that we were still using the old jam-tin bombs.

Q. Well I gather, Your Honour, right up to early 1916, there was a short supply of a great many things, was there not, on the Allied side in terms of machine guns, shells. . .?

P. A. There was a short supply of everything. Artillery were limited, very few shells and you never seemed to be able to get retaliation; if the Germans were shelling you, why the number of our shells was very limited.

Q. Now then, Sir, I would like to talk now, if we may, about the Regina Trench story at the Somme.

P. A. Yes. When we first went down to the Somme I was Brigade Bombing Officer and as Brigade Bombing Officer I became involved in the Moquet Farm episodes. I fact, we got the 2nd C.M.R. who were there at the time and we organized an attack on Moquet Farm by getting the Brigade bombers as a group went round behind Moquet Farm and we came

in from the back. But the Regina Trench came a little later than that.

Q. I'd like to talk, Sir, first about Moquet Farm then. Could you tell me what the Brigade Bombing Officers did? Did you have a special group of bombers who were under Brigade?

P. A. About that time they organized the Brigade Bombing group as well as the Battalion Bombers, made up of battalion bombers; Brigade Bombing Officer really, he was able to call on battalion bombers at any special time for any special event, because his main job really was getting supplies of bombs up and taking them to where they were most required.

Q. And this is what you did in the Moquet Farm operation, then. Did you get the bombs up to the people going behind?

P. A. We took the bombs and then I think I went rather further than the Brigade Bombing Officer was expected to do. I got into the show.

Q. Well, now Nicholson says that on the first of October when the attack started on Regina Trench that they found that the artillery barrage had failed really to destroy the enemy's position and it hadn't cut the wire so that you came under very heavy machine gun fire almost at once and found the wire uncut. Can you tell us about this?

P. A. Well, that was typical of the Somme. The artillery never seemed to be able to cut the wire effectively. It would be broken in one or two places but I think it was lack of observation on the wire and lack of effective shells to destroy the wire, but the uncut wire and the machine guns were the two great obstacles to the fighting

2 in the Somme and one felt that the artillery weren't able to cope with either the machine gun, the enemy machine gun, or the wire. But so frequently the barrage would go ahead of you and you were following behind the barrage that nothing really happened. I mean to say, you couldn't. . . if you ran into barbed wire while the barrage had gone on and the enemy in the trenches were then able, if they hadn't been killed and most of them had taken shelter in their deep dug-outs, why they offered resistance to you and your casualties were heavy from flanking machine gun fire. It wasn't machine gun fire fired point blank at you, but it was from machine guns away to your flank which, of course, you all thought that the battalion on your right or left should have coped with, you see, and no doubt should. In your front, why the same thing was happening to them. But it was the machine gun fire from the flank which was so devastating. The result was that when you got into the trench, when

I got into the trench. . .

Q. In other words, you were with the company then that actually reached Regina Trench and you established blocks in it?

P. A. We got into Regina Trench and we made three bombing attacks, or mainly with bombing attacks, trying to extend our flanks out to the right and I thought eventually we had reached the boundary of our Battalion and we expected to find a post of another battalion at that road junction but there was nobody there and by that time we were pretty well out of bombs and we were driven back. We had nothing to fight with.

Q. Yes. Nicholson says it was the next day. It was the morning of October the second that you were driven out by counter-attacks. Did you hold that section during the night - Regina Trench all night?

P. A. Well, I think it was very early in the morning. It seems to me that it was. . . we made most of the attack in daytime and I remember that a tactic that I employed which was very successful then was to use the bombers on the outside of the trench rather than on the inside and they ran along ;the outside and threw their bombs down into the trench. It was fairly good going then. It wasn't too muddy and they were able to move along taking shelter from the earth which had been thrown up to protect . . .

running up onto the parapet and throwing the bombs into different bays. It was much quicker and much more accurate than doing it, working up through the trench itself which was a very slow process. But the difficulty was the supply of bombs and that was the whole thing, you couldn't get the bombs across the No Man's Land, you couldn't get the supply brought up on account of the heavy machine gun fire.

Q. And this would be where the flanking fire would be very important, wouldn't it?

P. A. That was where the flanking fire prevented further troops coming up.

Q. Did you run into a great deal of resistance in the trench itself? Was there much hand to hand fighting when you got in?

P. A. Yes, we went up three times. I mean to say, we went up and came back a bit and got some more bombs and went up again. Yes, that was the heaviest hand to hand fighting I think that I encountered.

Q. And when the counter-attacks came in on you, Your Honour, would they come from up the trench on both sides or would they come at you sort of frontally from. . .

P. A. My recollection of it was that they were coming up from the side. They were working up the trench and they were preceded by bombs and you just couldn't

face it. The bombs were falling in the trench and if one of these potato mashers actually in the bay, why your men got wounded and we had nothing to fight with. It was dark and you couldn't see. My recollection of it. . . you say Nicholson said. . .

Q. Well no, no. He said it would be three o'clock in the morning, you know.

P. A. My recollection is that it was early - very early in the morning.

Q. Were you the only company that actually got into Regina Trench that day.

P. A. I wouldn't say that. The conglomeration of men in there, they were not all from my company, they were not all from the one unit and I remember that night there were men from the 2nd and the 5th C.M.R.

Q. But they were mostly your company, I presume?

P. A. They were mostly, but there was quite a collection of men from different companies and units. Some

+ I think there were some of the 2nd and the 5th.

Q. Nicholson mentions that the company on your right of your own unit, I mean the company of the 5th C.M.R. on your right, were held up by very heavy machine gun fire and by the wire and that all but fifteen of them were killed or taken prisoner that day. Did you see of that business from your position, Sir?

P. A. If I remember correctly, we did not go over with the first wave; we came over with the second wave and a few men had got in and we came over with the second wave and were able to get through where those men . . .The casualties were very heavy. There were men - oh, I can recall seeing men lying in the shell holes in No Man's Land along the wire and couldn't do anything about it. I remember vividly one man pleading for assistance but we had the job to do, we had to go on, we had get into the Trench, you couldn't stop and render him help. Poor devil had to be left there and it was not easy but you just had to do it. So we got in to find a few pockets of men here and there so when I say there was a conglomeration of men, there were from the two previous companies and some from another C.M.R. unit and I think it was the 2nd, it might have been the 4th, who all came together and I think I was the only officer in the Trench at the time, or that night.

Q. I am told also that the tremendous bombardment on the Somme before the offensive began, the bombardment that went on for days and days, had churned up the ground so tremendously that it made the ground very difficult to get over and very difficult for our own troops to move across it. Do you remember that aspect of it?

P. A. Well, I think that that was far more pronounced later on. My recollection of the ground there is that it was much firmer and not nearly so broken up as it was at Vimy or at Passchendaele and, as I say, from my own personal experience, why I remember running on the Somme. You did no running at Vimy or at Passchendaele.

Q. That was very interesting, Sir, you could run across that ground?

P. A. You could run and you could run along the side of the trenches. As I say we ran down and threw our bombs into the trench. I remember running at Moquet Farm and as we went down there was a valley and we were taking supplies up and I got a group of 2nd C.M.R. men. We were carrying up these boxes of supplies. There was heavy machine gun fire and we ran and there was no question about it. We ran and ran as hard as we could.

Q. This was Moquet Farm, was it?

P. A. This was at Moquet Farm.

Q. Now another thing which is alleged about the Sommme it's been a certain criticism that has been made - this was when the British troops first went in at the beginning of the Somme operation, they went in loaded down with full equipment, with full pack on and they marched forward practically, you know, in

line and were just mowed down by the machine guns. Now, had that sort of formation changed by the time you went in? Were you broken up or did you go in in a straight line?

P. A. No. We went pretty well in lines then. It was always a question as to how much you should carry. We were loaded down but then you wanted tools to work with when you got into the trench so as I've repeated several times, we were all short of bombs They had to be carried in. I mean to say, this was not a question of they weren't driven in, they had to be carried in, they had to be carried across No Man's Land.

Q. So that in other words, you weren't carrying unnecessary equipment. The stuff that you were carrying was all stuff that was going to be used for. . .

P. A. Oh no, no, no. I don't think there was any thought of carrying unnecessary equipment. One expected to stay the night. The nights weren't always warm and it was wet and they were all. . . there was always the problem of what you should take and how much you could dispense with, what was required in order to keep you in fighting trim and give you supplies which were necessary. You wanted tools to repair the trenches. There was nothing there; you didn't get anything from the German trenches. And I know they criticize you for doing this and that but I was never one for criticizing the higher

authorities because I think they had great difficulty and it was very difficult to arrange exactly what should be carried. You couldn't rely on water coming up, you couldn't rely on any food coming up. It had to be carried so you naturally took your emergency rations and you could take something for. .. you weren't supposed to eat your emergency rations except in an emergency and so you were apt to have a day's rations carried. . .

Q. No, these are all very good points, Sir. Now, after the Somme operation, were the 5th C.M.R. in the Vimy show?

P. A. Yes.

Q. Could you tell me about your memories of Vimy?

P. A. Vimy.

Q. To begin with, Sir, could I ask you this question? I have a feeling from talking to people about the Vimy show, that this was an enormously carefully planned show, very detailed training for the particular job beforehand. Could you talk about that aspect?

P. A. Vimy was planned months before and we spent the whole winter of '16-'17 in the Vimy area. We knew the trenches intimately. We watched the construction of underground assembly positions, the great tunnels at Vimy. We were close to the enemy, we

were very close to the enemy so there wasn't a great deal of opportunity of patrolling in No Man's Land but a certain amount was done. But we knew the territory, we knew we could look up and see that low ridge all the time and we were taken out of the line and tapes were laid down representing the trenches and we were rehearsed over and over again for the taking of the Ridge. And I think everybody knew exactly what they were supposed to do but when you got there the shelling had obliterated the trenches and it was darned hard to know where you were although you had been over the ground time and time again. There were very few land marks left, once you had got out of our front line trenches. The German support trenches had been obliterated. That was the once - I suppose it was the first time during the war where the infantry were satisfied with what the artillery had done. On the Somme, why we had no great respect for the artillery where we always blamed them for firing short and not cutting the wire and not putting out the machine guns - all that sort of thing. But at Vimy, and I remember coming back with my company, they even burst into song when we marched down the plank road and passed some artillery batteries, I remember hearing them singing out 'Good old artillery'. Now that was the first time

it had happened in the war and perhaps the only time as far as I know.

Q. Well, there seems to be a great feeling about this that in '16 the artillery finally got the guns and they got the shells, but it was '17 that they really began to learn how to use everything. . .

P. A. We had no confidence in the artillery and I speak as an infantry soldier and I was a regimental soldier and officer all through the war. I had nothing to do with the staff or artillery or anything else like that. And we had no high regard for the artillery. . .

Q. But they did a good job at Vimy.

P. A. Until Vimy.

Q. And the wire was cut and the Germans were knocked out of their trenches?

P. A. Yes. The 5th C.M.R. were in support at Vimy and we weren't in the first wave. We went up in the mid-morning and then moved up onto the top of the Ridge.

Q. Would you actually, Sir, from the position you were in, when the first wave went in, would you in the support trenches be able to see the attack going in?

P. A. No, no. We were in the tunnel - at least I was in the tunnel and I think that the whole of the company were in the tunnel. We came out at the end of the tunnel and as far as I can recollect, and then went on up after the first two battalions had gone through.

Q. Well these tunnels were quite unique, weren't they? They must have been a tremendous advantage in being able to assemble and bring supplies up.

P. A. Yes. You see, you had Brigade Headquarters in there; you had dressing stations in the tunnels and you had the troops in there. Theywere immune from any fire or anything and we came out the eastern end of the tunnel and there was the debris of battle going up the slope through which we worked our way.

Q. Did you eventually go through another unit or did you remain in support going up?

P. A. No, we went up through the front line and filled the gap which had been caused on account of casualties.

Q.. This was another way to the new front line, the front line which was. . .?

P. A. This was the captured front line on top of the Ridge and we got right up on top of the Ridge and there was a little mopping up operation to be done in the little copse on the other side, but on top of the Ridge, why you could look right over the Douai Plains and you would see all the German positions there.

Q. This must have been quite an experience to finally get on this. . .

P. A. Oh, yes. This was simply wonderful. You got up there and you saw the promised land and you thought

that everything was going to break out. Why, we even saw some of the cavalry, The Scotch Greys Patrol, working down in the valley.

Q. Was this the first day, Sir, actually or was it the second day?

P. A. I think it was the first day. I won't be positive; I think it was the first day. But I remember definitely seeing some mounted men coming in from the right.

Q. In view of the fact that the French and everybody had tried to take this Ridge for years, it must have been an enormous lift to the Canadian morale that you had got. . .

P. A. Oh, a tremendous lift and I think it had been a lift for the whole of Canada talking, I mean to say, after the war, but it was a tremendous lift. The Canadian corps were very proud of their achievement and I think there it was carefully laid plans, the overwhelming weight of the attack which enabled us to do this.

Q. Brigadier Leach in Ottawa told me quite a wonderful story. Some of the Canadian heavy artillery were left on the Ridge when the Corps had moved off and it was during the beginning of the big German offensive in 1918 and the General whom they had come under wanted to pull them back for fear that they might be overrun if there was a major German attack

and this battery refused to move and they claimed the Canadian Corps took this ridge and we're not moving off it, you know - we'll fight our guns to the last gun and we'll spike them if the Germans overrun us - I thought that was quite a remarkable story about the Canadian feeling about the Ridge.

P. A. Well, there was a lot of feeling and as I say, the infantry were pleased with the work which the gunners had done that time. But there was a feeling in a way that we would like to have gone on but I suppose there wasn't the support behind us to enable us to, but as far as the troops themselves, we were impatient to go on and down over the other side of the hill. A few days later a British division attacked on our left at Bois d'Hirondelles and, I think that was the place, they ran into the usual uncut barbed wire and we had watched the attack. It was life having a grandstand view of it, because we were on the Ridge and we could see these poor devils going on and come up to the uncut barbed wire, back again, try again and gradually it all seemed to die down. I don't know whether we could have gone on or not but. . .

Q. Well, I suppose it was the old story that you can't go on unless the units on the side can go

along with you.

P. A. Yes. We've always said the Germans had the high ground all through till 1918.

Q. Then it was unique that we had at last gotten the high ground?

P. A. We got the high ground then.

Q. Well now, Sir, could we talk about Passchendaele.

P. A. Yes.

Q. I gather Passchendaele really was the ultimate piece of horror in the war in the sense of the worst, the most terrible battle. Is this how you feel about it as you look back?

P. A. Yes. Passchendaele - the conditions in Passchendaele were never equalled anywhere else during the war. The war had been interesting - I'm not going to go so far as to say I had enjoyed the war - but the war had been interesting up to then and I hadn't minded it. I had been interested. I was happy and it was a thrill to be with men and that sort of thing. You lamented the casualties but you were playing on a team and the team was - you had a fair break. Passchendaele, of course we went there and again the mud and the conditions at Passchendaele were so appalling. It's very hard to describe. Nobody unless they had been at Passchendaele could realize the handicap of the mud. It

was all a quagmire; the only approaches were the duckboard walks which there were going up to the front line and when you got to the front line there was no front line, it was just little bits of less wet land where a person could stay in. Here and there there was a captured German "pill-box" which you clustered round and thereby suffered casualties because the Germans had the range of them and the front line was just. . . it wasn't line at all, it was just a series of little groups of one or two men who had found a place where it was a little - well, it wasn't dry, nothing was dry but you could sit there or lie there without sinking down. This is really what it amounted to.

Q. I suppose they spread their ground sheets in some places, did they, to make a kind of a little. . .?

P. A. Oh, yes, you had to put something down - your ground sheet was put down or your great-coat if you had a great-coat, or anthing you could find. I mean to say, there was no trench, not from where we started from. There was no trench. I went round before and one almost became exhausted walking round because it was struggling through mud. I went round to see that my Company were all more or less in place or that I knew that they were all there and ready to go and when the time came, why we got out and struggled forward.

Q. Now, Nicholson says the attack went in, zero hour was 5:50 a.m. - was it light, I mean had the first light come?

P. A. Hardly, hardly. I had been up all that night before I had liaised with the battalion on my left and they were the Royal Naval Divisions. They hadn't had very much experience in trench warfare and they were - I know the young lad who came over wanted to know what a barrage was like and all that sort of thing, although I don't think I helped them very much because a barrage didn't exist when we started out. Well, the guns had fired but there was no gunfire as we had known it on the Somme or at Vimy and a few shells came over and went off in the mud but there was no real artillery fire. On the other hand, the mud saved a lot of our casualties because the German shells - they just buried themselves in the mud and you got splattered with mud. So the mud was a blessing. And again it was the machine gun fire which played all the havoc with us.

Q. Now, there is a story about this, Sir, that that morning when the attack went in there was a delay, I mean one or, I suppose a semi-barrage or whatever it was went in, there was an eight minute delay before the Germans started their counter-fire with machine guns and artillery. Do you remember that aspect of it? Would our troops have got forward

quite a considerable amount during that eight minutes?

P. A. It was hard to tell what was German fire and what was our own fire. There was not heavy artillery fire on our front at any time, be it German or Canadian. In fact, the absence of the fire and the difficulty of being able to tell where the barrage was. The barrage moved very slowly but you couldn't see the barrage. It was quite different to the Somme - quite different to anything else. You couldn't tell where the barrage was. I think the guns had perhaps sunk into the mud and were not aiming accurately; the shell-fire was ineffective when it went into the mud and my recollection was that there was very little fire. There seemed to have been a burst of fire as we started and I was hit by that burst of fire.

Q. Was it machine gun, Sir?

P. A. No, it must have been shrapnel and whether it was our own or whether it was German I don't know.

Q. Was this a serious wound or was it just a. . .

P. A. Well, I got a wound through the buttock that time and it wasn't too bad. I didn't stop but I had to go to hospital afterwards.

Q. Did somebody bandage you up or did you just trot along without. . .?

P. A. No, no. It took some of my shirt into my buttock and the annoying thing was afterwards when I got to

hospital the sisters were all very inquisitive and I'd tell them that everything was all right and they'd come and pry and I hate the word "pry". We did get away to a fairly good start but my recollection is that we went down a slight dip in the ground first of all and then when we started to struggle up the other side, that's when the machine gun fire. . . and I say struggle because it was a question of struggling with, getting your feet out of the mud and going on. I mean to say, there was no. . .

Q. How deep actually would you be? Would you be sort of half way up to the top of your leg? You know what I mean, Sir - when you were stepping into the mud would it be ankle deep? would it be, you know, calf deep? or how deep would it be?

P. A. Well, there were a series of hole all through there. If you went, the holes were two-thirds filled with water. If you got into them, why you had to get help to get out, if you weren't able to go round the top and that's where thedifficulty and the time was lost. Why, your boots were covered with mud; you had to draw your foot out of the mud. It was a sticky mud; it wasn't a loose, liquid mud and you couldn't slosh through it.

Q. It was a gumbo, in other words?

P. A. It was a gumbo and it made going very, very slow.

Q. Was this in the - Nicholson mentions that you had trouble getting across the swampy ground in Woodland Plantation just north of the

P. A. Woodland Plantation was juston our right. We didn't attempt to go into it. It was on our front but it was no good. I had had patrols out the night before and they reported it all under water and it was hopeless to attempt to go through there so we went round on the north side of the wood.

Q. Now, also there was a mention of the fact that you were finding it very difficult to contact the British troops on your left.

P. A. The British troops were unable to advance at all.

Q. This was the Naval battalion?

P. A. Yes. I don't think they ever got more than a few yards out of their front line trench because we saw no movement of them coming forward at all. Now they may have been caught in a counter-attack far from the enemy but they were unable . . . So our flank was completely exposed and that's why I had to detail a platoon to go across to the little ravine that there was - oh, not a ravine, it was a little dip in the ground - and take source from which was a rather commanding position on a little bit of high and dry ground where the enemy were, or a few enemy were, and they were beinging their machine gun fire on us and it was

only by getting that farm which enabled the rest of us to go forward.

Q. Could you describe getting the farm, actually? Did you take your Company around/ . .?

P. A. I instructed Lieut., I think the name was Otty, to to there and take his platoon round, and they got down in the valley and just came in behind this, which youmight call, fortified though lightly held - there were only a few Germans there - and they surrendered when our people came in from the back. That's how that was done. But they had been firing, it was just the machine gun crew, really, and they'd been firing across and sweeping the slope of the hill we were endeavouring to get up. Well, then he was able to (Otty, I think it was - he was from Nova Scotia; he was killed later that day) he was able to go on up on the north side of this little draw that there was.

Q. Now what about Vapour Farm, Sir? Was that your main objective that you were heading for?

P. A. Vapour Farm was practically our main objective. There were Vienna Cottage and Vapour Farm, if I remember correctly. When we got there of course there wasn't a farm other than perhaps the midden was left there. That was about all there was; I mean to say, it seemed just like. . . there may have been an old hay-stack or something

I think I had fifteen men or something like that - it was not any more and that was all that there was of the 5th C.M.R. who were there and so we just couldn't go on any further. We tried to go on. A corporal went ahead and tried to get to the top but he was shot by snipers and you could see the snipers on a little bit higher ground over to the right of us.

Q. I gather a tremendous number of the casualties that day were caused by snipers.

P. A. By snipers. The Germans were in shell holes. We didn't know where they were and it was. . . we had great difficulty in moving about there at all because as soon as anybody showed their head these snipers on the right were very effective and as I say, I only had about a dozen men there and it was a question of holding on the best we could.

Q. Well, Sir, I gather that the fact that you held Vapour Farm and Sources Farm through this period was really the key thing in this whole operation.

P. A. Yes, I think it was Vapour Farm because Sources Farm was a little bit back. We had moved on beyond Sources Farm and as far as I can recollect there was no indication of an attack. I've referred to this little draw several times which stands out in my mind rather vividly because that was sort of hard to carry on the left boundary.

There was nothing happening on the left side of it. As I say, Otty got on up there and went, oh, beyond where we were. He was killed after having gone on beyond Vapour Farm. But he only had a couple of men with him, you know, and I had no means of communicating with him but I remember seeing him going on up there. But as far as Vapour Farm was concerned, we had got there, we'd struggled up there. We really hadn't had any hand to hand fighting to speak of on the way up, but it had been again machine gun and sniper fire which had caused the very, very heavy casualties.

Q. In other words, the fact that there were only twelve of you there and only two or three on the others had been wounded or killed on the way up?

P. A. They had been wounded or killed or something had happened to them on the way.

Q. How many men would you have gone in with that morning, Sir?

P. A. Well, we had half the battalion, half of the 5th C.M.R., do you see. Two companies went up on the right and they never got on at all and I had two companies - well, that would have been, what, three hundred men - something like that.

Q. Well now, you were counter-attacked, were you not, Sir, at Vapour Farm?

P. A. Well, there were three distinct counter-attacks. How we stopped them, I don't know. They never came right to grips but, I mean to say, there was no bayonet fighting, but we attributed it largely to the effective fire of our own machine guns who were in rear and in position; and that's what we attributed the success to. We fired, we were all firing. I remember vividly taking a rifle from one man who had become a casualty there and firing myself at the Germans as they were coming over the rise which was about a few yards in front of us. Their attack sort of was petering out. A few men came on and our rifle fire was able, just the same as the snipers had been effective on us, our rifle fire was effective on the remnants of their attack. But the men were obviously in the same exhausted condition as our men had been and there was no spiritual drive to their counter-attack.

Q. They would be coming through mud too?

P. A. They would be coming through mud and they'd probably been rushed up from the rear somewhere and they probably didn't know where they were going very definitely and as I say, they never. . . the three attacks although they came within a few yards of us, no man was actually bayonetted by our men. They had wilted before they got there.

Q. And now, this machine gun fire, Sir, in support of

you, was this from your own unit, your own machine guns, Sir?

P. A. Well, there were machine gun unit of the Brigade. Now, that's what we gave the credit to and we felt that they had been effective. But the situation appeared very desperate to us. I mean to say, we were just a mere handful of men likely, and I'm sure there weren't more than a dozen. I know I haven't got it here. I've got it in my own house. It's the count of the messages that I sent through at the time. There were only very, very few men there and it seemed a hopeless situation to us. We had no means of getting word back.

Q. Now, I heard a story that you used carrier pigeons.

P. A. Now that is rather interesting. There was a young lad who had come from actually a home in . . . it was a young lad who was a runner and he was charged with the responsibility of taking the pigeons up with us. The pigeons had a little capsule which was attached to the cage in which they were carried which contained the message which you could put in. He thought that in order to keep this dry that he would remove it from the cage and put it into his pocket. Unfortunately that was a serious mistake because he was a casualty on the way up and another man had picked up the cage and carried it on and had brought it up. Well, there was no

message capsule so I did the best I could in taking it out of the field message. I scribbled a note on it and tied this on to the pigeon's leg, you see, and. . .

Q. Did you use string, Sir, or what did you use to tie it on?

P. A. Oh, I've forgotten. It must have been a bit of string or something, that's all. It was a little bit of something, where I got it. . . a little bit of thread or something like that and I tied it round the pigeon's leg and we threw the pigeon up and we hoped she'd be able to go. This bit of flapping at the end of the pigeon's leg. I remember it very vividly. But he got through and reported the situation to us, or reported the the two Division; you see, pigeon loft was a division. And then it went through to Division and came up through Brigade and back to the Battalion reporting the situation and it was rather an urgent plea for help because we were practically out of ammunition and we were out of. . . we had no cooking . . . well we were out of everything then .

Q. Did you just have the one pigeon?

P. A. We had two pigeons and I think only one got through. We had two pigeons which we sent at different times but only one got through.

Q. That's a remarkable story. Is this the only time

you used pigeons, or did you use them at other times?

P. A. It was the only time that I actually used a pigeons but we had pigeons in the attack. In many attacks we took pigeons. But the pigeon got through. Of course, it was pouring with rain and I gather that they were able to decipher my urgent plea for help because later on the Company of the 2nd C.M.R. came up in the late afternoon or early evening and took over the front from us.

Q. Well, that's an amazing story. Sir. Just before we leave Passchendaele, I suppose there's no action or battle in the war which has been more controversial or more critized and I think now there's a great deal of understanding that there was a tremendous need and pressure on the British Army at this stage of the game to put a great deal of pressure on the Germans in order to relieve the French who were undergoing a very bad period right then. But the argument always comes back that everybody to, well we understand that, but why this particular spot? Why Passchendaele where the ground was so terrible? Has this made sense to you in the years that followed or, do you think this was a mistake?

P. A. Well, now this is talking about after the war. At the time as far as I was concerned, and I think there was a feeling, well we're going to do some-

thing which other people have not been able to do. We were going to get to the top of Passchendaele ridge and we did it and other people had failed to do it so we were very proud of ourselves. I don't know whether I was different to other people but the war was interesting to me and I liked working with the men, I liked being among men. Leave never appealed very much to me. I was always anxious to get back. It seemed to me that I was captain of the team whether it was a bombing section at first or whether it was the Battalion at the end and I wanted to be with my team. And that's rather the way I looked at it personally. And we had this job to do and it was a pretty bloody job. The mud was terrible and conditions were bad and we lost a lot of good men but we did the job.

Q. Again there was the pride that the Canadians had taken the ridge.

P. A. Yes. We had felt that we had got almost to the top - the top was only a few yards away from us and we felt quite confident that somebody else would come along and take that top. There was nothing beyond that. You could see the skyline and to all intents and purposes we'd got to the top. Now that was a feeling of achievement; I don't mean personal achievement, the team had achieved something and the team was a good team.

I never questioned whether it was the right place for us to be put in or not. I didn't question.

Q. Everybody tells me the same thing. You're not unique in this, Sir. This is the reaction I get from all the veterans. If they questioned it, it was after the whole thing was over. They didn't question at the time.

P. A. I don't know why you read comments of various people, various writers; I've got a book "In Flanders Fields" or something, now it's written. . . but it never occurred to us. I think we had confidence in our commanders and it was only after the war that people began to criticize British commands and the hard political sphere I know nothing about.

Q. Well, I gather Curry had some dubiousness about. . .

P. A. He may have done but it didn't come down to the Company Commander. I don't know at all but we thought Curry was a good Commander. We were tremendously proud of Lipsett, our Divisional Commander. We thought that he was the very best Commander. We knew the Army Commanders by name and as far as I was concerned, why Haig was a hero. And I looked upon him as a personification of what a General should be. Now, I'm trying to put my mind back fifty years ago and not be influenced by what other people have written. After the war I had

honour of meeting Haig when he came out in connection with the organization of the Canadian Legion, I was at Winnipeg at the time and I was two days with him, and Haig is still my hero. I don't mind what other people say; they can write all the like about it but I just don't believe it.