

Canadians In The Imperial Forces

CHAPTER VIII

SCARCITY OF OFFICERS IN THE BRITISH ARMY — CANADIANS TAKE OUT COMMISSIONS — CANADIANS IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE — CANADIAN ACES — CANADIANS SECONDED TO THE IMPERIALS — ON THE LINE OF COMMUNICATIONS — SPECIAL POSITIONS — THE NEWFOUNDLAND REGIMENT — CANADIANS IN THE BRITISH NAVY.

Canada's war effort has not been limited to the troops that wear the maple leaf badge. She has contributed in addition thousands of the best and bravest of her sons to the military, naval, and air forces of Great Britain. Complete figures with regard to Canadian enlistments in the British forces will probably never be available. But the fact that at one time approximately one-third of the British airmen were Canadian born, serves as an index to the considerable numbers of Canadians who fought with the Imperials.

As early as 1915, owing to the way in which the British War Office had used up much of its best material in the first battles of the war, there was already a need for suitable candidates for commissions in the British army. The need was partly supplied by numbers of Canadians. Not only were many young Canadian officers, mostly university undergraduates, sent over to England; but many Canadians who had enlisted in the ranks, both in the British Army and in the Canadian Contingents, were able to obtain commissions with the Imperials.

From an early date, a remarkable number of these expressed a preference for the aerial side of warfare. There were at this period two air services in England, the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service; and into both of these the Canadians flocked. Their dash, their self-reliance, their willingness to take chances, rendered them as a rule excellent

air-fighters. It was not long before they had won a reputation in the air, and further Canadian enlistments were frankly welcomed by Adastral House. From 1915 to the end of the war a constant stream of Canadians, therefore, poured into the air service of the Empire. Some squadrons in France, indeed, came to be composed almost wholly of Canadians.

The achievements of the Canadian airmen were indeed brilliant. It is only necessary to mention the names of Bishop, Collishaw, Barker, and a host of other Canadian "aces" to bring home the part that Canadian airmen played in the war. Bishop held the record for the number of machines brought down on the British front, having destroyed more than seventy enemy machines, apart from many driven down out of control. So far as is known, only one French airman and one German airman exceeded his record. He won nearly every military honour which it was possible for a flying officer to win, including the Victoria Cross. The *London Gazette* notice of the award of the Victoria Cross to him contains such a thrilling story that it is worth reprinting in full:

"V. C. August 10, 1917: Capt. Wm. Avery Bishop.

"For most conspicuous bravery, determination, and skill. Captain Bishop, who had been sent out to work independently, flew first of all to an enemy aerodrome; finding no machine about, he flew to an-

other aerodrome about three miles south-east, which was at least twelve miles the other side of the line. Seven machines, some with their engines running, were on the ground. He attacked these from about fifty feet, and a mechanic, who was starting one of the engines, was seen to fall. One of the machines got off the ground, but at a height of sixty feet Captain Bishop fired fifteen rounds into it at very close range, and it crashed to the ground. A second machine got off the ground, into which he fired thirty rounds at 150 yards range, and it fell into a tree.

for one of the deeds of derring-do performed by a paladin of the Crusades. Nor did mediaeval knight ever encounter adventures half so many or half so thrilling as this modern knight errant of the air. During his first five months' fighting in the air, Bishop fought no less than one hundred and ten single combats with the enemy, with a total of no less than seventy machines destroyed or driven down out of control. On one occasion he fell 4,000 feet with his machine in flames, and escaped unhurt.

Scarcely less remarkable than the rec-



A row of the Aeroplanes operated by Canadian officers of a R. A. F. squadron in France. Many Canadian flyers made a special record in the Imperial air forces, their skill and daring winning the admiration of the army and aiding materially in driving the Hun from the air at critical stages of the war.

Two more machines then rose from the aerodrome. One of these he engaged at the height of 1,000 feet, emptying the rest of his drum of ammunition. This machine crashed 300 yards from the aerodrome, after which Captain Bishop emptied a whole drum into the fourth hostile machine, and then flew back to his station. Four hostile scouts were about 1000 feet above him for about a mile of his return journey, but they would not attack. His machine was very badly shot about by machine-gun fire from the ground."

If the necessary substitutions were made—if the desert were substituted for the air, and the battle-horse for the battle-plane—this adventure might well stand

ord of Bishop was that of Collishaw on the Western front and Barker on the Italian front. Collishaw, who was awarded the D. S. O. for "great gallantry and skill in all his combats", had a total of machines to his credit only a few less than that of Bishop; and the decorations won by Barker in his air-fighting actually exceeded in number and variety those won by Bishop. Nor should mention be omitted of the marvellous achievements of many less famous Canadian airmen. Hervey, a Canadian in the Royal Naval Air Service, won the D. S. C. "for tackling ten Gothas single-handed in a German raid and bringing down two of them". Hobbs, another Canadian in the Royal Naval Air Service, won the D. S.

O. and the D. S. C. for bringing down a Zeppelin and for demolishing three submarines. And so one might go on with an enumeration of Canadian exploits in the air. Nowhere did Canadian pluck and valour shine more brilliantly than in the achievements of the boys from Canada who fought in both branches of the Royal Air Force.

In addition to the thousands of Canadians who enlisted with the Imperials, there were many Canadian officers who

training school for cadets in the Royal Air Force. Major-Gen. Lipsett, who commanded for a long time the Third Canadian Division at the front, was selected for a higher position on the staff of one of the British armies. Canadian officers who had a knowledge of French and German were seconded to the Imperials as intelligence officers; and Canadian officers unfit for service in the front line were employed in such formations as the Salvage Corps. In other cases the



Hidden mysteries of the famous "Q" ship of the British Navy, H. M. S. Suffolk Coast, used as a decoy to capture or destroy submarines. View of the dummy deckhouse, showing the gun which was concealed until the iron doors fell at a signal from the bridge

were seconded from the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the Imperial army. In some cases these officers were asked for by the War Office on account of special qualifications. Many Canadians with a knowledge of chemistry were told off for duty with the Ministry of Munitions. The commandant of the Canadian Training School for officers and cadets at Bexhill-on-Sea was so successful that he was borrowed by the British to command the

Imperials made places for Canadians who were surplus to the establishment of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada. Owing to the method of recruiting in Canada, under which battalions were for long recruited instead of drafts, many battalions had to be broken up on arrival in England; and many senior officers in the Canadian forces consequently became surplus. Numbers of these officers reverted to the rank of lieutenant, and went

to the front as reinforcements. Others were not able or were not willing to do this; and for many of these places were found by the War Office on the lines of communication. The variety of work performed by these officers had in it something of the amusing. Some became town majors or area commandants; others became burial officers or railway transport officers. Some commanded laundries or bath-houses behind the lines; others com-

One of the most remarkable romances of the war was the career of a Canadian financier, Sir Max Aitken, afterwards Lord Beaverbrook. From being first the Canadian eye-witness at the front, and then Canadian War Records officer, he became a member of the British Cabinet, and head of the Ministry of Information; and the propaganda conducted in the last year of the war by his department had, in the opinion of shrewd observers, no in-



Lieut.-Com. Harold Autor, V. C., D. S. C., captain of the "Q" ship, Suffolk Coast, appearing up the hidden hatchway to the bridge, on board the famous submarine decoy ship.

manded Chinese labour battalions or English works companies. One Canadian officer, who was in peace time a professor of botany at an American university, did such good work in promoting agricultural production behind the lines that he was given oversight of all agricultural operations on the British front.

The part that some Canadians came to play in the prosecution of the war had in it; indeed, elements of the spectacular.

considerable influence in weakening the morale of the enemy peoples. Another Canadian, who went overseas as the adjutant of a Montreal battalion, became secretary of the British War Mission to the United States, and was knighted by the king. A Canadian contractor from Toronto rose to have charge of road construction behind the British lines in France. Canadian scientific men did splendid work on the Inventions Board

appointed by the British government, especially in developing devices used in the anti-submarine warfare. In the wider sphere of Imperial war effort, many individual Canadians were not found wanting when weighed in the balance:

Something should be said also about Canada's part in the Great War on its naval side. Unfortunately, when the war broke out, Canada had a navy composed of only two training ships, one of which was dismantled. Immediately on the outbreak of war, the Canadian government purchased two submarines, for the purpose of defending the coast of British Columbia from the attack of German raiders, which seemed imminent at that time. And at a later stage of the war, the Canadian government organized a fleet of small coastal patrol vessels of the trawler and drifter type, for the purpose of defending the Atlantic seaboard from submarine attack. But at no period was Canada able to play the glorious part in the war on the high seas played, for instance, by the naval forces of Australia. Her chief contribution to the naval side of the war was in the recruits she furnished to the British navy. The fact that Canada had no navy of her own worthy of the name, meant that those Canadians who preferred sea-fighting to land-fighting had to take service with the Royal Navy or the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. In all nearly 2,000 Canadians were enrolled in the naval services of the Empire. A large number of these had commissions in the British Auxiliary Patrol Service; and scores of the little motor launches or "seoters" which did such yeoman service in coping with the German submarine menace were commanded by young Canadian naval officers. In the operations off Zeebrugge and Ostend in the spring of 1918, in which the old *Vindictive* figured so gloriously, some of the most hazardous details were in the hands of these motor launch commanders. Other Canadians were found on submarines, torpedo-boat destroyers, and—to a less extent—on larger warships, all

over the Seven Seas. And in the merchant marine, that splendid body of fearless civilian sailors who daily braved the nerve-racking menace of the German submarine torpedo, Canadian sailormen did their bit with no less of fortitude and heroism than the sailors of any other part of the British Empire. Canada's naval effort was, it is true, small and inadequate; but what there was of it was splendid and worthy.

Lastly, mention should be made of the part played by Newfoundland in the war. Newfoundland is not a partner in the Canadian Confederation, but it is so closely connected with Canada both historically and actually that a reference to its war effort may fittingly be included here. On the outbreak of war, Newfoundland, which is England's oldest colony, promptly offered a regiment for service at the front. The Royal Newfoundland Regiment, as it was named, joined the First Canadian contingent on its way across the Atlantic in October, 1914. It was not, however, included in the Canadian forces, but was made part of a British division which went to Gallipoli. At Gallipoli it won for itself a high reputation; it reached a point nearer Constantinople than any other, and it had the honour of being the last unit to leave the peninsula. From Gallipoli the Newfoundlanders were sent to France, and in the Battle of the Somme, both during the first assault and during the later stages, they fought with a gallantry that called forth universal comment. The following year they did good work at Monehy, near Arras, and in the third battle of Ypres; and in 1918 they played their part in repelling the German offensive, and in driving home the allied counter-offensive. Each year their casualties were pathetic; yet in comparison with their numbers, no troops gained a more justly famous reputation than the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.

