

CHAPTER II

FORGING THE WEAPON

(See Sketches 1, 2 and 3)

Mobilization

As soon as British acceptance of the Canadian offer was received, the Cabinet authorized the “raising and equipment of such units” as might be determined by the Governor General in Council, “to be composed of officers and men who are willing to volunteer for Overseas service under the British Crown”.¹ An Order in Council of 10 August set the strength of the contingent at 25,000.

As we have seen, a scheme for mobilizing just such a force had been drawn up in 1911. In the summer of 1913, however, shortly after Colonel Hughes had given instructions for certain revisions to be made in the plan initiated by his predecessor, all action appears to have been abandoned. The Minister of Militia had other ideas about mobilization - what he later described as “really a call to arms, like the fiery cross passing through the Highlands of Scotland or the mountains of Ireland in former days”.² It will be recalled that the 1911 plan (referred to as Memorandum C.1209) had placed upon the commanders of divisional areas and districts the responsibility of raising the units required from their respective commands in the event of mobilization. On 31 July 1914, however, by direction of the Minister, these Officers Commanding received secret instructions to regard “as purely tentative” the scheme outlined in Memorandum C. 1209, and to “consider what procedure you would adopt on receiving orders that troops were to be raised in your command for service overseas”.³ This inquiry seems to have been only academic, for on 6 August, giving immediate effect to the Cabinet’s order, the Minister of Militia had the Adjutant General send a night Lettergram direct to 226 unit commanders of the Canadian Militia. Ignoring normal channels of communication Hughes by-passed the Officers Commanding Divisions and Districts, who received a copy of the message only for information. Units were instructed to prepare and forward direct to Militia Headquarters not later than 12 August “descriptive rolls” of volunteers, between the ages of 18 and 45, who could meet prescribed physical standards. A high standard in musketry and general proficiency was required, and in addition to members of the Active Militia, reserve officers and others with military experience who could meet the necessary requirements were eligible.

After the rolls had been examined in Ottawa each Commanding Officer would be told the number to be enlisted from his unit.

The impracticability of selecting 25,000 individuals by this cumbersome process was soon realized, and on 10 August Districts regained their normal position in the pattern of command when they were told the divisional formations and units that each must furnish. This enabled district headquarters to allot recruiting quotas to Militia unit commanders; but three days later, as though determined to keep matters confused, Ottawa modified its instructions. Since the exact allotment would “necessarily depend on the numbers volunteering”, the table showing the divisional composition and the areas from which units were to be drawn “should be looked upon in the light of a general guide only.”⁴ Instructions, often conflicting, continued to flow from Militia Headquarters not only to commanders of Divisions and Military Districts but direct to other levels of command down to units. When a divisional commander protested “that orders have so far been given out not only by wire, but also apparently through the telephone, by Heads of Departments at Headquarters to myself as well as to Heads of Departments of this Division”,⁵ he was voicing the concern of those who repeatedly found that military activities of which they had no knowledge were taking place within their commands on instructions from Ottawa.

“In a short time”, proudly declared the Minister of Militia, “we had the boys on the way for the first contingent, whereas it would have taken several weeks to have got the word around through the ordinary channels . . . The contingent was practically on the way to Europe before it could have been mobilized under the ordinary plan.”⁶ This disparagement of the “ordinary plan” was scarcely justified; normal military channels of communication properly used could have carried the warning in a matter of hours, not weeks. Indeed, once the confusion caused by the first dramatic but irregular “call to arms” subsided, most of the volunteers joined through existing militia units in virtually the manner prescribed by the pre-war scheme.

While the troops for the first contingent were being recruited, the British Government had “gratefully accepted” an offer of four additional Canadian units of a thousand men each.⁷ The proposal had been enthusiastically, if somewhat prematurely, relayed to London by the Governor General after attending a meeting of the Cabinet during which the Minister of Militia referred to offers received from three Provinces to provide battalions. These failed to materialize, Sir Robert Borden reporting to the Acting Canadian High Commissioner in London, Mr. George Perley: “New Brunswick entirely repudiates having made any such offer and Manitoba and Calgary find themselves financially unable to undertake what was suggested rather than offered.”⁸ The proposal that stood was that by Captain A. Hamilton Gault, a Montreal veteran of the South African War, to raise an infantry battalion of ex-soldiers and to contribute \$100,000 towards the cost. The battalion, named Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry after Her Royal Highness, the daughter of the Governor General, was speedily recruited in Ottawa, its ranks being filled by veterans from all parts of Canada.

Lt.-Col. F. D. Farquhar (Coldstream Guards), Military Secretary to the Governor General, was appointed Commanding Officer. As will be seen, this unique venture in mobilization was to pay high dividends. In three weeks from the date of its authorization the regiment was ready to sail, and it embarked at Montreal on 28 August. Admiralty convoy restrictions held the unit impatiently in Canada, and it crossed with the First Contingent late in September. The Patricias landed in France on 21 December and entered the line as part of the 80th Brigade, 27th Division, on the night of 6-7 January 1915 - eight weeks before the 1st Canadian Division was committed to action.

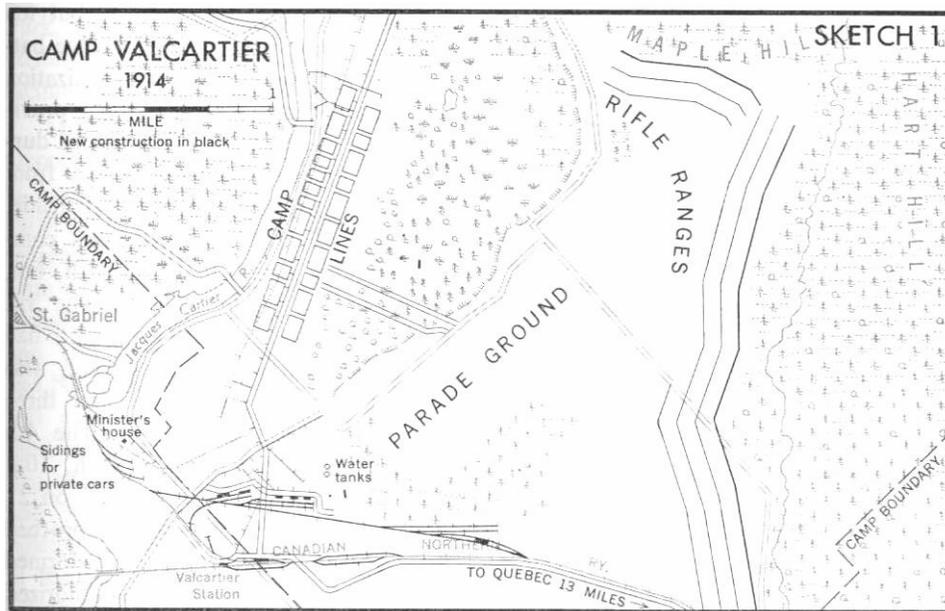
No further offers of formed units were entertained, for having learned that it cost a million dollars to equip and maintain a regiment of a thousand men for a year in active service, the Government (as pointed out by the Prime Minister to Mr. Perley) decided "absolutely to reject all such offers in the future unless the person, city or province making the offer is prepared not only to equip but maintain the proposed force."⁹ When the War Office ventured to inquire about the Governor General's offer, it was informed that two of the battalions "have been absorbed by the Division; and two have meantime been merged in The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, now in process of being formed."¹⁰

The First Contingent at Valcartier

The summons sent out on 6 August 1914 by the Minister of Militia had named the place of mobilization as Valcartier, sixteen miles north-west of Quebec City. The first group of volunteers reached the new camp on 18 August, and by 8 September the influx, carried in one hundred special trains, had raised the strength to its maximum of 32,665.

The new campsite lay along the east bank of the Jacques Cartier River. From a belt of woodland beside the stream sandy flats reached back some two miles to a tree-covered ridge rising abruptly a thousand feet above the valley. Occasional patches of swamp and timber intruded on the open fields of small farms, granted originally to British soldiers after the capture of Quebec. The transformation of this area in less than a month into an organized military establishment accommodating more than 30,000 men was a striking testimonial to the foresight and unbounded enthusiasm and driving power of the Minister of Militia - who having fathered the project personally saw it through to completion. In 1912 he had taken steps to acquire the site for a central training area for the Militia of the province; and his decision to concentrate the Canadian Expeditionary Force there necessitated the purchase of additional land after war broke out, the eventual area of the camp reaching 12,428 acres.

* Not quite within this category was the acceptance of \$150,000 subscribed by fifteen public-spirited Canadian citizens for the purchase in the United States of machines and vehicles to equip the automobile Machine Gun Brigade No. 1, a unit of nine officers and 114 other ranks.



Teams of lumberjacks at once began clearing the section by the river for the camp lines, and the central area for a parade ground. A contracting firm engaged in building the Connaught rifle range near Ottawa moved its full complement of men and equipment by special train to work on the new site. Progress was spectacular. Afterwards Colonel Hughes was able to point out with the pride of achievement:

On Saturday, the 8th [of August], Valcartier was taken over, and on Monday the 10th, ranges and waterworks were begun. By the 20th, three and a half miles of ranges were completed, and 1,500 targets were put in position. Up to the same date, 12 miles of water mains had been laid in, and 15 miles of drains, open and covered had been located. Army Service Corps and Ordnance buildings were constructed, railway sidings laid in, fences removed, crops harvested, ground cleared, streets made, upwards of 200 baths for the men put in, water chlorinated, electric light and telephones installed . . . and 35,000 men got under canvas in less than three weeks from the acceptance of the call.¹¹

During the second week in August militia detachments and units not slated for the Expeditionary Force began arriving at Valcartier to take over administrative and instructional duties in the camp. The Permanent Force supplied the R.C.H.A. Brigade, the Royal Canadian Dragoons and Lord Strathcona's Horse, together with ordnance personnel. From the Non-Permanent Active Militia a field company of Canadian Engineers, four companies of the Army Service Corps, three field ambulances of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, a veterinary section and a postal detachment were called out on active service to assist in these utilitarian tasks. A camp staff of 25 officers, and the necessary other ranks, was headed by the Adjutant General, Colonel V. A. S. Williams, whose transfer from the army's highest administrative post at so critical a time is hard to justify.

Incoming volunteers were assigned to provisional battalions according to their place of origin. A Camp Order of 22 August listed twelve such battalions

(each representing from four to as many as seventeen Militia units); but ten days later, when the enrolment far exceeded the war establishment of twelve battalions (plus ten per cent reinforcements), an entirely new infantry organization appeared. Camp Orders of 1 September gave the composition of sixteen provisional battalions in four provisional brigades. There were further reshufflings during the month, and the organization which finally emerged differed widely from the divisional allotments of 10 August. The 1st (Provisional) Infantry Brigade, comprising the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Battalions, all from Ontario, was commanded by Lt.-Col. MS. Mercer. The 2nd Brigade, from the west (5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Battalions), was commanded by Lt.-Col. A.W. Currie. The 3rd Brigade, commanded by Colonel R. E. W. Turner (above, page 8), who had served with the Royal Canadian Dragoons in the South African War, was composed of the 14th Battalion from Montreal and the Maritimes and three Highland battalions from across Canada (the 13th, 15th and 16th). The 4th Brigade, Lt.-Col. J.E. Cohoe, consisted of three Prairie battalions (9th, 10th and 11th) and one (the 12th) from the Maritimes. When it was decided on 21 September that regardless of numbers all who were medically fit should proceed to England (see below, page 29), the 17th Provisional Battalion was formed to handle the surplus infantry. The 18th Provisional Battalion was authorized for the same purpose, but was disbanded on 27 September without being filled.

Organization of other arms and services for the Expeditionary Force followed more closely the pattern presented in the preliminary mobilization instructions. Artillery units were mobilized at local headquarters in Eastern Canada under instructions issued by the Director of Artillery. Here they received most of their uniforms direct from the manufacturer and drew upon Militia stores for their equipment. Horses were purchased locally, so that organization was well advanced by the time the artillery reached Valcartier on 29 and 30 August. There were three field artillery brigades, each of three batteries of 18-pounders and an ammunition column; a heavy 60-pounder battery with its ammunition column; and a divisional ammunition column. (Because of a lack of howitzers, the 4.5 inch howitzer brigade normal to a divisional establishment was not formed.) Camp Orders of 1 September appointed Lt.-Col. H.E. Burstall to command the Divisional Artillery.

Detachments from each of eleven Militia engineer units sent enough volunteers to Valcartier to form the two field companies in the original divisional establishment as well as a third company which was added to conform with a new British establishment. The technical ability required in the Divisional Signal Company was met by enlisting skilled personnel from the Permanent Force and from Militia signal units, and from commercial telegraph and telephone companies. Organization of the Divisional Train-with its four companies drawn mainly from Ottawa, London, Montreal and Winnipeg-was interrupted by a request from the Army Council that the Canadian Expeditionary Force should include certain Line of Communication units. It became necessary to reassign personnel to fill the four Army Service Corps units required - a Divisional Ammunition Park, a Divisional Supply Column, a Reserve Park and a Railway

Supply Detachment. A small Postal Corps detachment was manned from N.P.A.M. detachments across Canada.

Mobilization of the medical services was carried out under the Director General of Medical Services, Colonel G. Carleton Jones. Volunteers concentrated at Toronto and Winnipeg as well as at Valcartier. When all had assembled at Valcartier Camp the British request for Line of Communication units made a general reorganization necessary. Sufficient medical personnel were found in camp to form the required units which, in addition to the three divisional field ambulances, included a casualty clearing station, two stationary hospitals (each of 400 beds), and two general hospitals (1040 beds each). The casualty clearing Station and No. 1 Stationary Hospital took over from N.P.A.M. units the operation of the two camp hospitals at Valcartier. Hospital admissions for the whole period until embarkation numbered only 856, for in general the health of the troops was excellent. An order to mobilize nursing sisters was issued on 16 September, and by the end of the month 98 had reported at Quebec, where they were billeted at the Immigration Hospital.* Provision of veterinary sections, called for at the last minute by the War Office, was not completed until after the First Contingent had sailed.

Early plans for the Contingent did not include any units of the Permanent Force. We have noted that the two regular cavalry regiments and the R.C.H.A. Brigade were employed at Valcartier in administration and training. The only cavalry authorized for the Expeditionary Force was the Divisional Cavalry Squadron, of 196 all ranks (furnished by the 19th Alberta Dragoons of the non-permanent Militia), which together with a cyclist company, drawn from all arms and services in the camp, formed the divisional mounted troops. When the War Office accepted a tentative offer made on 7 August of "one regular cavalry regiment and two regular horse artillery batteries", the Minister of Militia at first asked permission "to retain them for a short time for instructional and other purposes at Valcartier Camp".¹² On 26 August the Camp Commandant was ordered to mobilize the two R.C.H.A. batteries and a composite cavalry regiment from the two regular units. On 14 September, however, the Prime Minister approved a proposal by Hughes to mobilize and embark with the army troops two complete cavalry regiments, "one to be called Royal Canadian Dragoons and the other Lord Strathcona's Horse".

While Permanent Force units were thus unexpectedly finding overseas destinations, the only regular infantry battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment, was given a role which though carrying the honour of being the first Canadian unit to serve outside the Dominion in the First World War was nevertheless to keep it out of active operations for another year. On 6 September the regiment embarked at Quebec and sailed under escort of H.M.C.S. Niobe for guard duty in

* Details of the mobilizations of the medical forces are in Sir Andrew Macphail, *The Medical Service~ the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-19* (Ottawa, 1925).

Bermuda, where it relieved a British unit, the 2nd Battalion, The Lincolnshire Regiment. The following March and April saw No. 6 Company of the Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery (123 all ranks) off to St. Lucia, in the Windward Islands; there it was to man four 14-centimetre and two 6-inch guns, operate a 70-ton steamship on examination service, and sweep the entrance of Port Castries for mines.*

The Beginning of Training

Though most of the 1500 officers assembled at Valcartier had qualified for their ranks at military schools of instruction, there was a wide diversity in the men's standard of training. The requirements prescribed in the lettergram of 6 August had not been met; many were without military training or experience. Yet the Minister's desire to send the contingent to England as quickly as possible¹³ limited the time for training at Valcartier, and this was further shortened by frequent interruptions. Having arrived with no unit organization, the men had to be medically examined, inoculated and attested, and issued with clothing and equipment - the last a protracted affair dependent upon deliveries from the manufacturers. All these processes played havoc with training programmes, which were further disrupted by repeated changes in the composition, location and command of the units to which the troops were assigned. All arms and services engaged in elementary squad and foot drill and rifle exercises. Route marches and physical training began the necessary hardening process. With the instructional staff of eighty spread thinly throughout the entire force much depended upon the initiative of unit commanders in arranging their own training programme. They used as their basic manual a "Memorandum for Camps of Instruction, 1914".

By 22 August 1500 targets were in position on the new ranges, which stretched for more than two and a half miles* along the foot of the eastern ridge. Target practice using the Ross rifle began with seven battalions simultaneously on the ranges, and by 19 September practically all infantrymen had fired the prescribed classifications, which totalled 50 rounds at distances of up to 300 yards. Some repeated the course several times before qualifying. This range practice, carried out under the supervision of the Commandant of the School of Musketry, from Ottawa, and a staff of thirteen, was given priority in the training programme. "I want, first of all, men who can pink the enemy every time", Colonel Hughes told the troops at Valcartier.¹⁴ He was pleased with the standard which they attained, and he enthusiastically declared later that the men at Valcartier had been "trained to handle a rifle as no men had ever handled it before".¹⁵

There was little time for advanced or specialist training. Two barrel pier bridges thrown over the Jacques Cartier River by the engineers were put to

* This unit plus attached services remained in the West Indies for the duration of the war. The R.C.R was relieved in August 1915 by the 38th Battalion, which in turn handed over to the French speaking 163rd Battalion in May 1916. Relieved six months later by a British battalion, the 163rd went to England, where it provided reinforcements for French-Canadian Battalions in the field.

* The distance given by the Minister, 3½ miles (above p. 21), is incorrect

practical use when units crossed to take part in field manoeuvres in the rough wooded area beyond. On two occasions the Governor General was an interested observer of these tactical schemes. His Royal Highness reviewed the troops three times during September, the marching columns being led past the saluting base by the Minister of Militia in uniform.

Equipping the Force

We have already noted (above, p. 11) that in spite of recommendations by the Inspector General of the Overseas Forces, Canada had produced in peace time only sufficient war materials to maintain her Militia forces - indeed, members of the N.P.A.M. had been required to provide their own boots, shirts and underclothing. The outbreak of war thus found the country without the large stocks of equipment, clothing, or stores required for the mobilization of an overseas contingent. The tremendous task of clothing and equipping at short notice both the expeditionary force and the troops on home defence was undertaken with the utmost dispatch and vigour. Without waiting for Privy Council authority the Minister of Militia began approving requisitions for large orders; contracts to complete the clothing of 50,000 troops were let on 10 August for delivery in full by 21 September. Within this short space of time the wool for the garments had first to be woven into cloth, and the leather procured from which boots and harness could be manufactured. Subsequent orders covered every required item of equipment, the contracting firms being enjoined to meet the prescribed deadline "even though you have to work night and day until then".¹⁶ There were protests from the Auditor General at the independent action taken by the Militia Department, though such purchases made in August and September were subsequently authorized, the Quartermaster General and the Director of Contracts having vouched that the system had brought "good and satisfactory service in respect of deliveries, and at fair and reasonable prices throughout".¹⁷ Early in October the Cabinet appointed a sub-committee to advise the Minister of Militia in respect to contracts - a stricture which, according to Hughes, resulted in the Contract branch of his department being "very much hampered and practically blockaded . . . Indeed the most ardent agents of the German Government could scarcely have been more successful in holding up the proper equipment of our forces, had they been in control".¹⁸

With the Ross Rifle Company's factory producing at capacity, it was possible to arm with the Mark III rifle and bayonet all but one infantry unit (the 15th Battalion, which took the long Mark II to England). To equip the Automobile Machine Gun Brigade and provide the two machine-guns authorized for each infantry battalion fifty Colt .303-inch automatic guns were ordered from an American factory, but only twenty weapons arrived before sailing time. These were issued to the Machine Gun Brigade, the infantry taking with them four obsolescent Maxims that had been used for instruction at Valcartier. When the War Office was unable to supply light Vickers guns ordered by Canada for

delivery in the United Kingdom, 51 more Colts were shipped across the Atlantic in November and December and issued to the C.E.F. Artillery units had brought their full armament from the Districts -twelve 13-pounder guns for the two R.C.H.A batteries, fifty-four 18-pounders for the three field brigades, and four 60-pounders for the heavy battery.

Provision of vehicles for the force required extensive purchasing, for only a comparatively few horse-drawn vehicles were available from Militia sources. The Minister of Militia appointed special purchasing agents, giving them honorary commissions, so that "if I found any sharp work going on ... I could put them through Court Martial".¹⁹ To obtain sufficient horse transport meant buying farm wagons (455 heavy and 398 light) of eight different makes, a diversity of pattern which was later to bring serious maintenance problems. A similar difficulty was to arise with the mechanical transport which the War Office had asked should accompany the contingent to England, for which no detailed specifications appear to have been provided. The Minister's special agent had to depend on five separate makes of motor truck to meet the requirement of 133 vehicles for the 1st Division's Supply Column and Ammunition Park (infantry units used horse transport only).²⁰ Complete transport (including eight armoured cars) for the Automobile Machine Gun Brigade was bought in the United States on behalf of the donors by the commanding officer, Major R. Brutinel, a former French Army officer.

In order to acquire the more than 7000 riding, artillery and draught horses authorized for the Division and its added units, fifty Militia and five civilian purchasing agents were appointed by the Director of Veterinary Services, whose designation as Remount Officer cancelled an arrangement under the 1913 Mobilization Regulations which made procurement of horses a district responsibility. Only artillery units which had mobilized at local headquarters brought their horses with them. The promptness and zeal with which the purchasing agents went about their duties created accommodation problems at Valcartier, and on two nights horses broke out from temporary corrals and stampeded through the camp. Altogether 8150 horses were bought, at an average cost of \$172.45; some 480 which were found unfit for service were later auctioned off at Quebec for an average price of \$54.²¹

An item of personal equipment for the troops in which Colonel Hughes took a special interest was the "MacAdam" shovel, an implement modelled upon a pre-war Swiss invention and patented by the Minister's woman secretary, whose name it bore. Designed to serve as a combined shield and entrenching tool for the infantryman, it had a blade 8-1/2 by 9-3/4 inches made of three-sixteenths inch steel (said to be capable of stopping a bullet at 300 yards). When used as a shield, it was stuck into the ground on a four-inch handle which formed an extension of the blade, two loopholes being provided, a large one for shooting and a smaller for sighting through. Twenty-five thousand MacAdam shovels, purchased in Philadelphia at \$1.35 each, were taken to England, where even with the addition of a special folding handle they proved unsatisfactory. The

Commander of the 1st Canadian Division reported that they were not effective as shields, were too heavy for the men to carry and were awkward to dig with. The issue of entrenching tools of War Office pattern to the Division brought prompt instructions from Hughes to “hold a tight hand on all that improper work over there” and to cancel the order for the English implement, which he termed “absolutely useless for any purpose”.²² Nevertheless, the 1st Division proceeded to France without their MacAdam shovels, and when trials in the field by the 2nd Division brought more adverse reports,²³ all were withdrawn from use and eventually sold for \$1400 as scrap metal.

With so much determination and effort put into the tremendous task of equipping the First Contingent, it is distressing to have to record that much of it turned out to be lost labour. Many of the items issued to the Canadians were not of the pattern prescribed for the British army, and after strict scrutiny in England by War Office inspectors and selected officers of the 1st Division, certain articles were ordered to be replaced from British Ordnance Stores. The boots supplied to the force had been manufactured from a pattern that had been found satisfactory by Canadians in the South African War and with some improvements had been used by the Permanent Force ever since. As late as April 1914, when consideration was being given to strengthening the soles, about which there had been many complaints, the Director General of Clothing and Equipment had reported that “the British army boot appears much too heavy for wear in Canada”. But after the First Contingent moved to the United Kingdom it soon became apparent that the Canadian boots would not stand up to the hard marching on metalled roads and the continual soaking in the mud of an exceptionally bad English winter. It was the harshest kind of testing, for with only one pair available per man, there was no chance to dry them and waterproof them with dubbin, and stitching quickly rotted. The arrival in November of a shipment of 48,000 pairs of overshoes from Canada helped but little - some lasting only ten days. On the recommendation of the Commander of the Canadian Contingent British regulation boots were issued, and before the Division moved to France each unit commander was required to render a certificate “that every man is in possession of a service pair of Imperial pattern Army boots”.

Only five battalions took web equipment to England. The obsolescent Oliver pattern brought by the remainder had to be rejected because it carried only 50 to 80 rounds of ammunition instead of 150; it had no pack or any facilities for carrying the entrenching tool; and it cut the wearer under the arms. It became necessary for the War Office to issue web equipment to seven Canadian battalions. Canadian vehicles, both motor and horse-drawn, came under criticism from the War Office, the main objection being the difficulty of supplying spare parts in the field for so many different makes, particularly since these parts would in most instances have to come from North America. Two of the types of motor truck brought over by the First Contingent had developed serious defects, and it was decided to hold these in England for use by subsequent Canadian forces. They were replaced by 51 British lorries (somewhat surprisingly - in view of the

earlier strictures by the War Office-representing no less than six different makes!). Further shortcomings were found in the horse-drawn wagons. Their serviceability was questioned and they were not suited for ride-and-drive work with the British service pattern harness - a breast harness that was considered much better for military purposes than the Canadian type (which used a collar requiring individual fitting and had no means of quick release). New British general service wagons for the Division were shipped direct from factories in the United Kingdom, a change that necessitated the substitution of British harness for the Canadian pattern. Water carts and a number of other vehicles of special type were issued from British stocks to replace Canadian patterns or to complete establishment.

To the Minister of Militia the rejection of a considerable amount of the equipment in providing which he had expended so much personal energy and enthusiasm came as a bitter blow. He blamed the fact that Canada at that time "had practically no control of her forces Overseas", and he saw no justification for the British substitutions. "Our transport, our rifles, our trucks, our harness, our saddles, our equipment, our shovels, our boots, our clothing, our wagons", he told a Toronto audience late in 1916, "those were all set aside and in many cases ... they were supplanted by inferior articles."²⁴ The findings of a court of inquiry appointed by the Militia Department that the Canadian-made boot was of unsuitable style and shape for active service were modified by a special Parliamentary Committee, which while absolving Canadian manufacturers of any fraudulence or negligence, reported that the pattern could be improved in several particulars. The Committee's findings greatly pleased Hughes, and his special representative in England received a long cable "congratulating us all very heartily on the results of the boot investigation and muster parades"²⁵ Henceforth specifications issued to Canadian manufacturers conformed closely to the British standard and resulted in a much improved product, though Canadian forces overseas continued to draw the British boot on moving to France.

The Move Overseas

While the work of organizing the Canadian Expeditionary Force was proceeding at Valcartier Camp, the selection of a commander had been the subject of discussions between Ottawa and London - principally between Colonel Hughes and Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War. The possibility of a Canadian being chosen was not entertained for long, but it was the Canadian Government that made the final selection. On 14 August the Prime Minister told Perley, "Hughes has no intention of going in command but would probably do so if convinced that he would command Canadian division after arrival and be in fighting line." The Minister of Militia had under consideration for the appointment three senior British officers with whose services during the South African War he was familiar. On the 18th Perley replied to this trial balloon, "Have consulted highest authority. Thinks mistake change Minister of Militia at this juncture". In between these messages Lord Kitchener gave Mr. Perley, on

request, the names of three Canadian-born officers serving in the British Army (none over the rank of Brigadier General), pointing out that if the Canadian Government considered none of these sufficiently senior or suitable for high command there were many non-Canadian officers from whom a selection could be made. The three men whom Hughes had been considering were Lieut.-General the Earl of Dundonald (G.O.C. Canadian Militia from 1902 to 1904), Major General Sir Reginald Pole Carew, and Major-General E. A. H. Alderson.²⁶ Of these the Minister thought the last named “best qualified by far”.²⁷

On 5 September Lord Kitchener informed Mr. Perley that “as the Canadian Government show a preference for General Alderson to command the Canadian Division, I am glad to be able to designate him for that command”. Official notification of the new appointment was made on 25 September, and effective 14 October (the day the First Contingent arrived in the United Kingdom) Alderson was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General.²⁸

From the outset it was the intention of the Militia Department and the War Office that the Canadian Contingent should lose no time in moving to England, where preparations were being made for training on Salisbury Plain. Delay in completing the issue of clothing and equipment held the Force at Valcartier until the end of the third week in September, and embarkation for mounted units began at Quebec on the 23rd. At a conference held on the 21st in the Minister of Militia’s house at Valcartier Camp, attended by the Prime Minister and other members of the Cabinet, it had been decided to send all effective men overseas - a total of 31,200. The sudden increase by more than 6000 invalidated a plan which the Director of Supplies and Transport had produced on 17 September allocating troops and horses to the 25 vessels already chartered, and even with the necessary revisions it was rejected by the Minister. He placed in charge at Quebec as Director General of Embarkation Lt.-Col. William Price (who had been granted an honorary commission on undertaking responsibility for installing water and electrical services at Valcartier Camp). At the same time he instructed his Naval Transport Superintendent (obtained from the Department of Marine and Fisheries) to engage any additional ships required, utilizing transports already engaged to the “greatest extent possible consistent with health and safety of men and horses”. All this was to be accomplished “without reference to Headquarters or to previous schedule”.²⁹ The Director of Supplies and Transport thus passed out of the picture. No provision had been made for a staff to work with Colonel Price, and his efforts to draw sufficient experienced officers from Valcartier Camp failed. “Apparently”, he reported later, “the embarkation of this force was considered a matter of little importance and much ease.”

It is small wonder that, in the words of one of Price’s assistants, “chaos reigned supreme.”³⁰ The new Director General quickly improvised a working organization, and somehow the job was done in spite of many obstacles, which included a notable tendency on the part of some units (not of the Permanent Force) to disregard regulations. For instance, much unnecessary congestion on

the docks was caused by the failure of the 1st and 2nd Artillery Brigades to wait as instructed at a rendezvous camp set up at the Exhibition Grounds. In the absence of any loading plans units were brought successively into Quebec as vessels arrived with reputedly the appropriate space for them. Mounted units came from Valcartier Camp by march route to the rendezvous camp; all others moved by rail direct to shipside. An example of the method of "trial and error" employed was the loading on the Bermudian (one of the smallest transports) of the 1161 troops of the 8th Battalion with their wagons and baggage. Only when all were aboard was it realized that there was insufficient room, and all had to be transferred to a larger vessel-the Bermudian eventually sailing with but 562 on board.

Getting vehicles and baggage on board created special problems. The official in charge reported: "No one had any idea of what was to be loaded on the vessels." In some cases transports arrived from Montreal with their holds filled with non-military freight -including a large shipment of flour that Canada was giving to the Mother Country. It was discovered that hatchways were too small to take the Ammunition Park's crated motor-trucks, and an additional vessel, the Manhattan, had to be chartered from New York.³¹ Much space was unnecessarily wasted when guns and limbers were shipped without first removing their wheels, and as a result some vessels were forced to take on water ballast to complete their load. After half the transports had pulled out into the river, tugs had to ferry ammunition to them in order to comply with a belated order that each vessel should carry an allotted number of rounds. With these complications it is hardly surprising that few units embarked with their full complement of horses, vehicles and baggage in the same ship, and that little heed was paid to a War Office request for camp equipment (other than tents) to accompany each unit so as to avoid "serious inconvenience" on disembarking. Mounted units were dismayed to find that in many cases they were separated from their mounts, and because of limited passenger accommodation on the horse-boats attendants had to look after as many as sixteen animals instead of the four prescribed by military regulations.

By nightfall on 1 October thirty loaded transports had moved out into the St. Lawrence. There remained only the Manhattan, which took on board 90 motor vehicles, 863 horses and a considerable amount of miscellaneous cargo left out of the other vessels. When she sailed independently late on the 5th, Colonel Price's hardworking staff could report that "not a single package of any kind belonging to the Expeditionary Force was left on hand". The main body proceeded downstream and dropped anchor in Gaspé Harbour, to await rendezvous with escorting British warships. There it was joined by a troopship bearing the 2nd Lincolns, which the R.C.R. had relieved in Bermuda. The thirty-second and last vessel to join the convoy was to meet it outward bound off Cape Race, with the Newfoundland Contingent aboard.

Protection of the Canadian Contingent during its passage to England had been planned by the Admiralty originally for a convoy estimated to be fourteen

transports, and when this number was more than doubled the provision of additional escort strength caused a delay in sailing from Gaspé. The visible escort was the Royal Navy's 12th Cruiser Squadron of four light cruisers commanded by Rear-Admiral R.E. Wemyss, all of them nineteen or more years old; and on 2 October Colonel Hughes, who had come to Gaspé to see the Contingent on its way, wired the Prime Minister, "Escort altogether inadequate, should increase strength." This concern was relayed to the Admiralty by the Governor General, who was promptly reminded of an assurance given to the Minister of Militia two weeks earlier that the four cruisers would be reinforced en route by two battleships (H.M.S. *Glory* and *Majestic*), and that the whole of the Grand Fleet would cover the escort "from all attack by any large force of the enemy". Besides having the Grand Fleet block off intervention from the enemy's home ports, and the North American Squadron (which included H.M.C.S. *Niobe*) watch German armed liners in New York and Boston, the Admiralty had given orders for the 26,000-ton battle cruiser *Princess Royal* (launched in 1911) to join the convoy in mid-Atlantic. This detachment from the Grand Fleet of one of its best warships at such a time, observes the British official naval historian, "was dictated not so much by military considerations as to afford testimony of how highly the Canadian effort was appreciated by the Mother Country".³² Be that as it may, nothing of this was known to the Canadian Government. Concerned at the publication in the Canadian press and the cabling "in clear" of details of the convoy and the force it carried, the Admiralty exercised the most rigid security about the intended employment of H.M.S. *Princess Royal*, keeping the matter secret from even Admiral Wemyss.³³

On 2 October, while the convoy was still at anchor in Gaspé Harbour, the Minister of Militia passed through the lines of waiting transports in a launch distributing to the troops bundles of his 900-word valedictory, "Where Duty Leads". In stirring language the message reviewed the achievements of the past six weeks in producing an "army of free men" from "peaceful Canadian citizens", and praised their high motives in setting forth "to do duty on the historic fields of France, Belgium and Germany for the preservation of the British Empire and the rights and liberties of humanity." At 3:00 p.m. next day the flotilla sailed. It took three hours for the line of ships, more than twenty-one miles long, to steam through the harbour's narrow exit into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Once in the open the great armada reformed in fleet formation—three lines ahead, fifteen cables (3000 yards) apart, each led by a cruiser, the fourth cruiser bringing up the rear.

The crossing, which was uneventful, lasted twelve days. The sea was smooth, and there was little demand for 20,000 boxes of a secret *mal-de-mer* remedy in the medical stores.³⁴ The troops were kept occupied with routine cleaning tasks and such physical exercise and training as were possible on shipboard. Concerts in the evenings, a Saturday sports day and church parades on

* The Minister's valedictory is reproduced in full in Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919*, in Volume of Appendices, Appendix 149.

Sundays rounded out the programme. On 8 October the convoy said good-bye to the cruiser Lancaster, flagship of the North American Squadron, which with H.M.S. Glory had been guarding the southern flank, and daylight on the 10th disclosed the Princess Royal and the Majestic, which had been waiting at the rendezvous for two days. The troops gave the great Princess Royal a warm ovation on the 12th, when she dropped back to the convoy and steamed at 22 knots in full review past the cheering troopships. Reports of German submarines in the English Channel changed the intended destination at the last minute from Southampton to Plymouth. Ploughing through heavy seas on the final lap of the voyage, the first transports entered Plymouth Sound at 7:00 a.m. on 14 October, and thirty-six hours later the Admiralty reported all safe in harbour. Dock and rail facilities at Plymouth and adjacent Devonport fell far short of those at Southampton; but since the Channel was not yet free of danger Admiral Wemyss was ordered to proceed with disembarkation. Late on the 14th Colonel V.A.S. Williams, who had brought the Contingent across the Atlantic, handed over command to General Alderson, and next morning the force began landing.

It was an historic occasion, this arrival in Britain of the first large contingent from one of her overseas Dominions. "Canada sends her aid at a timely moment", cabled the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, to the Government in Ottawa. "The conflict moves forward and fiercer struggles lie before us than any which have yet been fought."³⁵ There were messages of welcome from Lord Kitchener and the Mayor of Plymouth. The people of Plymouth greeted the Canadians wholeheartedly with cheers, handshakes and kisses, plying them freely with cigarettes and drinks. A seven-hour train journey followed by a march of eight or ten miles brought them into camp on Salisbury Plain, their home for the next sixteen weeks.

Back at the docks the confusion which was an inevitable result of the unorthodox loading at Quebec had been aggravated by the last-minute switch in the port of debarkation. It took nine days to complete disembarkation, the last unit going ashore on 24 October. Few units managed to claim their equipment or stores at the quayside. In general it was found best to ship the great bulk of miscellaneous material by trainloads to be sorted out at railway stations near camp.

On Salisbury Plain

At the turn of the century the War Office had acquired an area of some ninety square miles on Salisbury Plain as a military training ground. Extensive artillery and rifle ranges were constructed, and permanent accommodation was provided in barracks begun during the South African War. The tented camps to which the Canadians now came were on sites where the Territorial Forces had done their summer training for many years.

Like the rest of Salisbury Plain the War Office's acquisition spread over a broad, undulating plateau, the expanse of upland pasture broken only by

occasional belts of trees planted as sheep shelters in days gone by. In the deep valley of the River Avon, which crossed from north to south, several hamlets of ivy-covered cottages clustering around a small stone church and the inevitable wayside tavern formed little civilian islands in the military area. British engineers had put the sites in readiness for the Canadians. The task of setting up thousands of bell tents, marquees, and kitchen shelters had been done by fatigue parties from the Territorial Force assisted by a group of New Zealand troops recently enlisted in England. In the hot dry weather which prevailed in the early autumn of 1914 the countryside was at its best. An officer in the small Canadian advance party reported from Salisbury at the beginning of October: "I must say that the camp sites are beautifully situated and the turf is excellent, and will be quite an agreeable change from the sand plains which our boys have been accustomed to."³⁶

Divisional Headquarters were established at "Ye Olde Bustard", an isolated inn three miles north-west of Stonehenge. The bulk of the Contingent was distributed in four camps extending for five miles near the west side of the military area. Bustard Camp, beside General Alderson's headquarters, was given over to the 1st Infantry Brigade, the Divisional Mounted Troops and Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry; two miles to the north-west the 2nd and 3rd Brigades were in West Down South Camp; a mile beyond in West Down North were all the artillery and the Divisional Supply Column; while two miles farther north the 4th Brigade, the cavalry, the 17th Battalion and the Newfoundland Contingent occupied Pond Farm Camp.

In common with British formations encamped on Salisbury Plain, the Canadian Division formed part of the Southern Command, Lieut.-General Alderson being directly responsible to its General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, and through him to the War Office. The War Office was the sole channel of communication with the "Colonial authorities". When Alderson by-passed this channel in replying directly to cables sent to him from Ottawa, he was expressly informed that "direct communication between the General Officer Commanding 1st Canadian Division and the Canadian Civil or Military Authorities in Canada is not permissible".³⁷ Yet Alderson's responsibilities were obviously wider than those of a British commander of one of the infantry divisions of the British Expeditionary Force, and the restrictions were relaxed pending the setting up of appropriate liaison between the Government of Canada and the Canadian forces in the field.

A preliminary, if informal, move in this direction had already been taken by the Minister of Militia, who was anxious to retain in England as much as possible of the personal control over the Canadian forces which he had exercised in Canada. While the Contingent was still on the Atlantic, he had crossed by fast ship from New York in order (as the Prime Minister signalled his High Commissioner in London) to brief General Alderson "respecting officer and other important matters". Sir Robert stipulated that Colonel Hughes would be going in an "unofficial capacity for a holiday"; he was "not to assume any military command or interfere in military matters".³⁸ Hughes visited the Secretary

of State for War, Lord Kitchener, and, according to his biographer, agreed with him that the war would last at least three years.³⁹ During his stay in England his promotion to the rank of Major General was announced.⁴⁰ When he returned to Canada at the end of October he left behind as his “special representative” Colonel J. W. Carson, who had led the small advance party which preceded the Contingent to England.

There is an account by a Canadian officer that while Hughes was in England he defied an order by Kitchener that the Canadian regiments were to be broken up and the men redistributed among British units.⁴¹ The story was recorded only in June 1934, almost twenty years later, and no evidence can be found in contemporary files or in the Borden or Perley Papers to corroborate it. Colonel Hughes himself, who in the course of Parliamentary debates was never reluctant to recount his exploits as a champion of Canadian rights, is not reported in Hansard as making any mention of the incident; nor did he mention the matter in a letter written to the Prime Minister regarding his visit to England.

On 7 January 1915, however, Colonel Carson reported to the Prime Minister that he had been asked by Lord Islington (Under Secretary of State for the Colonies) whether the Canadian Government would agree to having selected Canadian battalions or brigades sent to the front. The intention seems to have been no more than to place these temporarily with British units to get them indoctrinated into trench warfare - a plan that was eventually carried out. But when Carson brought the matter to Hughes' attention, the Minister firmly opposed the scheme, insisting that the Canadians should go into action as Canadian Divisions.⁴² Borden appears to have taken no action on Carson's letter, and on 14 January Perley informed Sir Robert that Lord Kitchener had advised him of his intention to send the Division across the Channel in the first week of February.⁴³

Before the last Canadian unit to disembark reached Salisbury Plain the weather had broken. A quarter of an inch of rain fell on 21 October, and a full inch in the next five days. It was the beginning of a period of abnormally heavy precipitation which brought rain on 89 out of 123 days; the fall of 23.9 inches between mid-October and mid-February almost doubled the 32-year average. There was no escape from the ever pervading dampness, and conditions steadily deteriorated. Temperatures were unusually low, on some nights dropping below the freezing point. High winds pierced the light fabric of the unheated tents, and twice in three weeks gales flattened much of the Division's canvas. Mud was everywhere. An impervious layer of chalk a few inches below ground-level held the rain water at the surface, and wherever wheels rolled or men marched the “excellent” turf quickly became a quagmire. All attempts at drainage were fruitless; scraping the mud from the roads only exposed the treacherously slippery chalk.

There were no permanent barracks available for the Canadians, and a programme of building huts begun in October 1914 was overtaken by the arrival of winter. The contractors had taken on more work than they could handle, so that commitments by Lord Kitchener to have all the Canadians in huts before the

end of November could not be met.⁴⁴ First to move under a roof were the units of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade, which on 9 November took over newly completed hutments at Sling Plantation, north-east of Bulford. To push the work forward the Canadian Contingent was called on to supply an increasing number of carpenters, bricklayers and unskilled labourers. At the beginning of January some 900 Canadians were under employment to a civilian contractor, drawing besides working pay an extra daily ration of a quarter of a pound of meat. But great as was the need for dry accommodation, the need for training was even greater, and after 8 January demands for labour were made only on the 4th Infantry Brigade, which furnished working parties of 250 men per battalion.

By 17 December the Engineers and the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Brigades had gone into huts at Larkhill, between Bulford and Bustard Camp; but Christmas found 11,000 Canadians still under canvas. From the beginning of the war, the War Office had sought to solve its accommodation problems by billeting a large part of the "New Armies" recruited by Lord Kitchener.* Now, as the continual exposure to the wretched weather threatened the health of the Canadians on the open plain, billets were requisitioned for as many as possible in the adjoining villages. Moves into private houses began at the turn of the year, and the names of numerous little Wiltshire communities entered the annals of Canadian regiments-villages between Wilton and Tilshead for the Royal Canadian Dragoons, between Upavon and Pewsey for Lord Strathcona's Horse; to the north the artillery were spread out between Market Lavington, Rushall and Devizes; farthest west, between Bratton and Erlestoke, were the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery. Only the 1st Infantry Brigade remained throughout the winter in tents. Of greater significance to the mounted units than their own move into billets was the fact that at the same time their horses were put under cover and on dry standings. During November and December the condition of the animals had deteriorated seriously through their being forced to stand outside in mud to their hocks, their rain-soaked blankets providing little protection from the elements. Grooming was impossible, nor could sodden leather be kept clean. The change of accommodation worked wonders, and before January ended horses, harness and saddlery were reported restored to their proper condition.

The general health of the troops was remarkably good, and only after the move into crowded huts were there serious outbreaks of respiratory and intestinal ailments. There were 39 cases of meningitis, 28 proving fatal. Of the four thousand admissions to hospital in the fourteen weeks on Salisbury Plain, 1249 were cases of venereal disease.

The training begun at Valcartier was resumed during the first week of November and continued for thirteen weeks under the direction of Southern Command. For the infantry a period of basic training, devoted principally to physical training (which included route marches of progressive length thrice

* On 7 August 1914 posters and notices in newspapers announced Lord Kitchener's immediate call to arms of 100,000 recruits to form the first New Army of six divisions. This contingent, "the First Hundred Thousand" was raised in a few days.⁴⁵

weekly), musketry instruction, foot and arms drill and entrenching, was followed by five weeks of company training, two of battalion and two of brigade training. Except for two officers and five N.C.Os. loaned by the War Office, all instructors were members of the Contingent. British regular divisions in France had amazed the enemy by the speed at which they could deliver their rifle fire, and with this standard before them Canadian infantrymen daily practised charger-loading and rapid fire with dummy cartridges. In comparison with the extensive array of targets at Valcartier, range facilities were limited, and cold weather hampered shooting, but each infantryman fired an allotment of 155 rounds. The artillery ranges also proved inadequate; with six British Divisions competing with the Canadians for their use, the Canadian batteries managed only one week of range practice, firing fifty rounds a battery. The Engineers found plenty to do, supplementing their technical training with practical work on construction projects about the various camps. Tactical exercises were held at all levels of command, but these were frequently interrupted by heavy storms of wind and rain.

Indeed the miserable weather turned training into a drudgery. There were no means of drying clothing, and men who ploughed through ankle-deep mud all day had to let their rain-soaked uniforms dry on their backs. Describing conditions of camp life as “simply appalling”, with the whole camp grounds from Salisbury to Pond Farm “just one sea of mud”, Colonel Carson reported to the Minister on 7 December that he had learned from a large number of medical officers that “the general consensus of opinion is that another two or three months of present conditions in England will have a serious effect on the general health and well-being of our troops”. He felt that “they would have been a thousand times better off in Canada than they are at Salisbury Plains”.⁴⁶ The plight of the Canadians had been studied with no little concern by the Australian authorities, and as a result of the conditions on Salisbury Plain the combined Australian and New Zealand contingents, 29,000 strong, on their way to train in English camps, had been halted at Suez and diverted to training grounds in Egypt.⁴⁷ Carson’s proposal to Lord Kitchener that the Canadian Contingent should also move to Egypt to train was turned down.

It is surprising that in such deplorable circumstances the Canadian troops maintained a good standard of morale. The enthusiasm with which they had flocked to Valcartier persisted, and in general they bore their adversities with admirable patience, regarding them as the inevitable consequences of war. Officers and men did their best to improve conditions. Welfare agencies helped to ameliorate the lot of the soldier in his off-duty hours. Welcome parcels of food, knitted goods and tobacco came from the Canadian War Contingent Association, an organization of Canadians in England and their friends. The Y.M.C.A. supplied reading material and stationery and operated refreshment centres. The Canadian Field Comforts Commission, organized from voluntary women workers by two Toronto ladies, who on the Minister of Militia’s authority had proceeded over seas with the First Contingent, looked after the distribution of gifts received from Canada.⁴⁸

Regulations for the Canadian Militia dating back to 1893 prohibited alcoholic liquor in camps, and Valcartier had been “dry”. But almost immediately upon taking over command of the Canadians General Alderson had seen the need for establishing wet canteens in the camps. He reported that the controlled sale of beer under military supervision would put a stop to troops going to the neighbouring villages where they “get bad liquor, become quarrelsome and then create disturbances”. In spite of protests from temperance organizations in Canada, the new arrangements proved wise. Nearby villages were placed out of bounds except to men with passes. A rebate of 7-1/2 per cent on sales of beer enriched unit funds by \$7,500 during November and December. Undoubtedly one of the most important factors contributing to the maintenance of morale was the allowance for all ranks of up to six days’ leave, with a free ticket to anywhere in the British Isles. While many flocked to London (where the disorderly conduct of some cut down the number granted leave), others found their way into English homes to form permanent friendships and to enjoy the warm hospitality extended to the visitors from overseas.

The Division Goes to France

As the troops trained on Salisbury Plain, the suitability of their Canadian equipment was being debated between London and Ottawa, and by the end of January the Force had embarked on the extensive programme of substitutions to which we have referred (above, page 27). By that time the Division had adopted the final establishment with which it was to proceed to France - with certain exceptions that of a regular division of the British Expeditionary Force. The question of whether the eight-company battalion of Colonial establishments should be retained instead of the Imperial four-company organization had produced considerable confusion. After the War Office had changed its mind several times - which had the effect of converting battalions from an eight to a four company basis and back again - it ruled that the British system would stand. As a result every Canadian battalion lost three officers from its headquarters, in addition to the eight subalterns that each had been carrying supernumerary to establishment.⁴⁹ While authority was given to augment brigade staffs by a staff captain and two orderly officers, the net increase in the number of surplus Canadian officers was to cause General Alderson considerable concern.

In the 18-pounder artillery brigade the three 6-gun batteries were reorganized into four 4-gun batteries, the surplus guns and personnel going to form brigade depot batteries for supplying reinforcements. The revised establishments brought increases in the Cyclist Company and the Divisional Column, added a sanitary section to the medical units, and produced a new Army Service Corps unit - the 1st Canadian Motor Ambulance Workshop. There had been one change in the infantry order of battle. On 15 December the 10th Battalion was transferred from the 4th to the 2nd Brigade, replacing the 6th Battalion (Fort Garry Horse), which became a reserve cavalry regiment (or

depot). The 4th Brigade was disbanded in mid-January. Its three remaining battalions and the 17th Battalion became reinforcing units forming part of the Canadian Training Depot, which was established in Tidworth Barracks on Salisbury Plain.⁵⁰ The Depot, together with artillery depot batteries in the Devizes area, furnished drafts of 1077 early in February to bring the Division up to strength.

On 2 February advance and billeting parties left for France, and two days later a review by His Majesty King George V and Lord Kitchener gave warning of approaching embarkation. An all-day rain on the 7th provided a fitting climax to the Canadian stay on Salisbury Plain as the first units boarded the troop trains which were to take them to Avonmouth on the Bristol Channel. This west country port had been chosen, with St. Nazaire in the Bay of Biscay as the port of disembarkation, when announcement of Germany's intention to establish around the British Isles a zone of unrestricted submarine attacks on shipping ruled out the usual Southampton-Havre route. For the majority of the troops, packed in the holds of small cargo vessels, it was a thoroughly unpleasant voyage. A rousing gale caused wholesale sea sickness, and tedious delays at either end of the journey meant that some were on board for five days. But there was little complaining, for present inconveniences were offset by the general feeling of relief at leaving the misery of Salisbury Plain. Two divisions of destroyers escorted the various groups of transports, and the whole movement was completed by the 16th without enemy interference.

There were few port facilities at St. Nazaire, and the vessels had to anchor in the outer harbour waiting their turn to berth. At the dock most of the unloading was done by work parties furnished by the units themselves. As the troops marched through the streets of St. Nazaire to the railway station, they were given a warm welcome by the French people. Unit by unit entrained in the small box-like cars, labelled "Hommes 40, Chevaux 8", and then commenced the long, circuitous 500-mile journey to the front.

When the Canadian Division sailed from England, it parted company (in some cases only temporarily) with the units which had come with it from Canada. It has been noted that the P.P.C.L.I. was already in France. The battalion had joined the 80th Brigade on 16 November 1914, and after completing training at Winchester had embarked at Southampton for Le Havre on 20 December. Early in December the Newfoundland Contingent went north to train at Fort George, in the Scottish Command; as a battalion of the 88th Brigade, 29th Division it was to serve with distinction in Gallipoli and later on the Western Front. The first day of February saw the formation of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade from the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, the Royal Canadian Dragoons, Lord Strathcona's Horse, and the 2nd King Edward's Horse - the second regiment of a unit of the British Special Reserve whose pre-war role had been to train officers and men from the Dominions. The Cavalry Brigade concentrated near Uckfield, Sussex, under a British officer, Colonel J.E.B. Seely - whose appointment by Lord Kitchener so displeased Sir Robert Borden (in whose

judgement there were Canadian officers more capable of filling the position) that he declared: "I shall see to it that the next Mounted Corps that goes from Canada is placed in command of one of our own men as Brigadier."⁵¹ The Automobile Machine Gun Brigade was attached to the South Eastern Mounted Brigade, and for the next five months was employed in a home defence role at Ashford, Kent.

Of the Line of Communication medical units which accompanied the Contingent to England, No. 2 Stationary Hospital landed at Boulogne on 8 November - the first Canadian unit to see service in France and the only one whose personnel were eligible* for the 1914 Star. No. 1 Stationary Hospital and No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station crossed the Channel on 2 February 1915, No.2 General Hospital on 13 March, and No. 1, which had been left in charge of the Division's sick, on 13 May. Most of the L. of C. supply units followed the Division to France in February.

Six months had passed since the Canadian Contingent had begun to assemble at Valcartier Camp. During that time much had been accomplished. The Division had been provisionally organized and equipped, and partially trained; it had crossed an ocean, it had to a considerable extent been re-equipped and had completed its organization and training. The fact should not pass unnoted that all this had been achieved in as little time as British pre-war planning had calculated would be required to place in the field the Territorial Divisions. The British divisions which preceded the Canadians across the Channel were all regular formations; the first British Territorial Division to go to France did not arrive until 24 February 1915, while the first of Kitchener's New Army divisions crossed early in May.

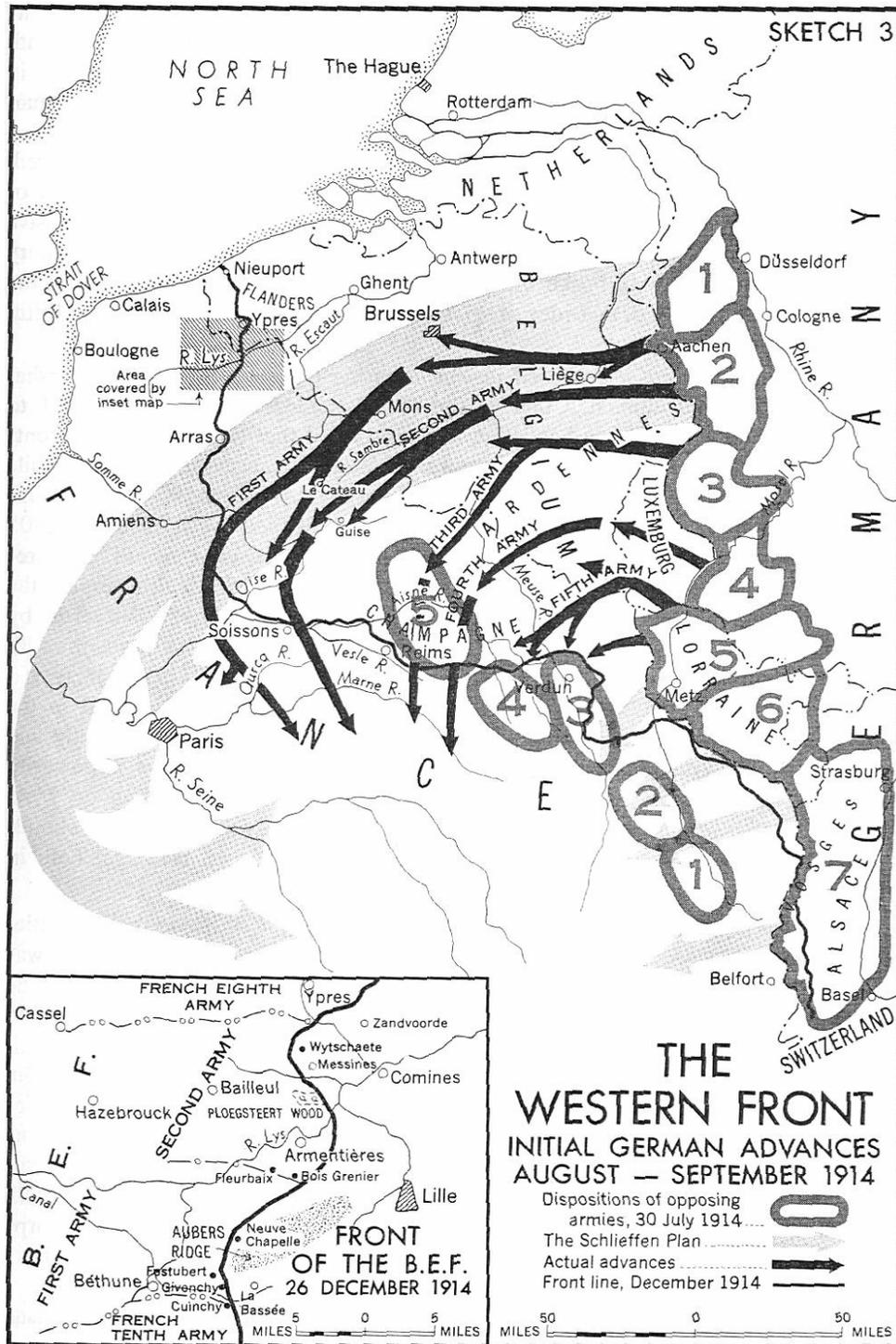
The Early Battles on the Western Front

The battle front to which the 1st Canadian Division came had stood virtually unchanged since mid-October, when the opposing sides had found themselves in deadlock along an entrenched line that stretched five hundred miles from Switzerland to the North Sea. Although Canadians had not fought in the opening battles on the Western Front, a brief account of those operations may be helpful as a background to what followed.[†]

The strengths of the Western belligerents at the outbreak of war, in terms of infantry divisions available or being formed, gave the enemy a slight advantage on paper. Against 87 German divisions France could put 62 in the field, and Belgium and Great Britain six each.⁵² Britain, being primarily a sea power, had no firm military plan other than to assist France or Belgium if needed. The Belgian plan was a defensive one. Both France and Germany, however, contemplated an immediate offensive.

* The only other Canadian troops to reach France in 1914, the Patricias, arrived a month too late to qualify for the Star, for which the closing date was midnight 22-23 November.

† For a more detailed treatment see The Historical Section, General Staff, A.H.Q., *The Western Front, 1914* (Ottawa, 1957).



The French preparations were in accordance with “Plan XVII”, adopted by the Chief of the French General Staff, General Joseph Jacques Joffre, the seventeenth of a series prepared between 1875 and 1907. It called for French attacks in Alsace-Lorraine and in the Ardennes. It recognized the probability of a German invasion of Belgium and an attack on the French left wing, but this appreciation was marred by an underestimation of the enemy’s capabilities - it was believed, for example, that for lack of troops the German front would not extend west of the Meuse. The whole plan suffered from an overemphasis on French offensive action (particularly to regain Alsace-Lorraine) at the expense of other military considerations. When war broke out five French armies were disposed along the German frontier, ranged in order from the First, opposite Alsace, to the Fifth, covering Reims.

German intentions were based on the doctrine formulated by Field-Marshal Count Alfred von Schlieffen, Chief of the Prussian General Staff from 1891 to 1905. In successive plans von Schlieffen had prescribed that in a war on two fronts Germany was to open hostilities by a powerful attack against one opponent while holding the other one at bay with a minimum of forces.⁵³ First to be dealt with was France; the blueprint for the operation was Schlieffen’s December 1905 memorandum, “War against France”.⁵⁴ Execution of this plan would have required 96 divisions, many more than were available in 1905. In this respect the plan was actually a programme for the expansion of the Army.⁵⁵ But even by 1914 the German forces available for the West did not amount to more than 87 divisions,⁵⁶ and in the meantime both France and Russia had significantly increased their military strengths. Yet while failing to provide the forces demanded in the 1905 plan, the Germans had retained the plan itself, though modified greatly and perhaps fatally. Von Schlieffen had intended the main effort to be a powerful attack through Belgium and the Netherlands by 79 divisions wheeling on Metz to envelop the French left wing.⁵⁷ But when his successor, General Helmuth von Moltke, launched the 1914 offensive, it was on a reduced frontage, both in order to conserve troops and to keep the Netherlands neutral.

Originally only nine German divisions had been assigned to guard the frontier from Metz to the Swiss border; for loss of some ground in Alsace-Lorraine was acceptable since a French offensive here would render the French left all the more vulnerable. Nevertheless, von Moltke increased the German left wing to 25 divisions at the expense of his right, where only 53 divisions remained available for the main offensive: The opening of hostilities found these grouped in five armies, numbered in order from north to south. The Sixth and Seventh Armies formed the German left wing on the Western Front; the Eighth Army, of nine infantry divisions under General von Prittwitz, held the Eastern Front. In pursuance of each side’s plans, the Germans began crossing the Belgian frontier with elements of three armies on 4 August, and three days later farther south a corps of the French First Army made a limited advance towards

* The German Official History places the strengths of the two deployment wings in the ratio 7:1 in COL 3:1 as a result of General von Moltke’s changes.⁵⁸

Mulhausen. Thus commenced the series of operations along the Western Front known collectively as the Battle of the Frontiers. A week after Joffre's opening move the First and Second French Armies set out to attack Lorraine. On the 21st, the Third and Fourth Armies were ordered to strike north-eastward into the Ardennes forests. All these French offensives failed.

In the meantime the Germans, despite unexpected delay at the Liege forts, had all but crushed active resistance by the Belgians; most of King Albert's army had withdrawn to Antwerp. General von Bulow's Second Army had already passed the Sambre; General von Hausen's Third Army was soon to cross the Meuse. Nevertheless, until he saw all his forces of the centre and right in retreat, General Joffre still had hopes of extending his offensive northward across the whole front. By 17 August the first four infantry divisions of the British Expeditionary Force, plus the Cavalry Division, had landed in France and were now preparing to advance on the left of the French Fifth Army (General Lanrezac). Only on the 22nd, as the British lined up along the Mons canal, did their C.-in-C., Field-Marshal Sir John French, realize from the strength of the forces opposing him that the coming battle would be a defensive one.

The Battle of Mons, fought on 23 August, imposed a 24-hour check on General von Kluck's First Army. On the same day farther east General Lanrezac's forces managed to hold up the German Second Army south of the Sambre and to recapture a bridgehead won by von Hausen's Third Army over the Meuse. But reverses in the centre, and the threat of a major German advance through a gap between the Fourth and Fifth French Armies, compelled the latter to begin retiring on the morning of the 24th. The B.E.F., with both its flanks already insecure and its right soon to be further exposed by Lanrezac's withdrawal, had to conform, and to begin its fighting "retreat from Mons" towards Paris. Now, with all his forces falling back, Joffre could abandon the near-disastrous Plan XVII in favour of a more realistic course of action.

Although the Schlieffen Plan seemed to be working remarkably well for the Germans, it had already undergone further modification, and other changes were about to come. Both from above and below, von Moltke had received protests against losses of territory in Alsace-Lorraine and East Prussia (where following a German withdrawal he had called the 68-year old General Paul von Hindenburg out of retirement to replace von Prittwitz).⁵⁹ Moltke had been compelled to sanction premature defensive battles and local counter-offensives. As a result, forces which might have been employed more effectively on the right wing were retained on the left - which was still not strong enough to break through Joffre's eastern fortress system - and two corps were soon to be transferred to the Eastern Front.

During the last week of August and the first few days of September, the French and British continued to retire, but in relatively good order, occasionally striking back and causing considerable delay and confusion. Such an action was the stand at Le Cateau on the 26th, when in Britain's biggest battle since Waterloo, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's 2nd Corps inflicted an estimated 9000 casualties on von Kluck's First Army, against nearly 8000 British losses.

Three days later at Guise on the River Oise Lanrezac struck von Bulow's flank a blow which though losing much of its effectiveness because of Sir John French's refusal to cooperate⁶⁰ nevertheless halted the enemy's Second Army for 36 hours. German hopes of outflanking the Allies steadily faded. The machine was losing some of its efficiency, as unforeseen problems of administration arose. Von Moltke was finding that seven armies were too many for one man to control effectively; but the day of the permanent army group had not yet arrived. From time to time he placed one army under command of another. But such arrangements often suffered from professional rivalry between the commanders concerned, the subordinate sometimes finding that the task originally assigned his force had been relegated to a secondary role. Furthermore, a system which permitted considerable freedom in staff circles led to cases in which a staff officer might make a major decision without referring to his own commander.

Eventually the German advance - scarcely ever a pursuit - became less orderly than the Allied withdrawal. On 31 August von Kluck, believing that the B.E.F. was retiring westward to the Channel and was out of his reach, on his own initiative turned south-eastward so as to catch the French Fifth Army in flank and rear. The movement took him across the front of the Sixth Army, which was guarding Paris. No longer were German operations in accordance with the Schlieffen Plan. On 4 September, after von Moltke and most of his army commanders had deviated from it at least once, it was finally discarded in favour of a frontal attack by the three central armies (Third, Fourth and Fifth) to drive the French south-eastward from Paris. The right flank, which originally was to have invested and passed beyond Paris, now became a mere protective force facing the French capital.

Throughout the Allied retreat General Joffre had been able to regroup and reinforce his armies as the situation required. The general distribution of the German forces, however, had been governed by the Schlieffen Plan until its abandonment, and only hasty, piecemeal adjustments were possible. Thus in the centre, where von Moltke now attempted to breakthrough, he had only 25 divisions against 21-1/2; while on the Allied left 43-1/2 French and British faced 25-1/2 German divisions.⁶¹ On 4 September, as German forces crossed the River Marne, Joffre gave the order for his armies to turn and attack.

The four-day Battle of the Marne began on 6 September, as von Kluck, hurriedly turning to face west, and pulling back his left wing some twenty miles, was engaged by the French Sixth Army at the River Ourcq. But while von Kluck's move secured the German right flank, it opened a gap between the First and Second Armies through which the B.E.F. pushed forward across the Marne. Unfortunately the British did not receive expected support from the French Fifth Army, which became involved in the new Ninth Army's (General Foch) frontal attack on von Bulow's forces. With their supply lines over-extended and their communications disorganized, the German armies were unable to deal effectively with the crisis caused by the threat to their right wing. Von Moltke appears to have accepted defeat on the 8th, and from his remote headquarters in Luxembourg he sent his Chief of Intelligence on a strange and fateful mission to

sound out the various army headquarters. No one commander seems to have ordered a general withdrawal; it was largely arranged on a staff level. Some formations of the First and Second Armies began falling back on the afternoon of the 9th, and by night- fall the retirement was spreading to the armies of the centre. Operations in the Lorraine sector, where the German Sixth and Seventh Armies had launched an unsuccessful attack towards the Moselle, were suspended at about the same time.

The defeat at the Marne ended German hopes of quickly winning the war. General Erich von Falkenhayn, formerly Prussian Minister of War, who replaced von Moltke, declared the situation serious, though not to be looked upon with pessimism. The German forces withdrew to the general line Soissons-Reims- Verdun, with the First Army digging in north of the Aisne River, and the Second and Third behind the Vesle. A wide gap between Kluck's and Bülow's forces was filled by the Seventh Army, brought over from Alsace. On 13 September pursuing Allied forces gained bridgeheads over the Aisne, but enemy resistance in the next two days produced a deadlock. The Allies dug in, and the era of trench warfare descended upon the Western Front.

Then began the "race to the sea", as each side engaged in a series of left or right hooks in an attempt to cut around the other's seaward flank. Neither was successful, and by the second week of October the opposing trenches had been extended from the Oise northward to the Belgian coast at Nieuport. During the remainder of the year each side made repeated bids to break through the other's line. Each operation inevitably began as a frontal attack, and ended either in complete failure or in the capture of a pitifully small piece of ground at great cost. The lesson that mobile warfare could not be waged under conditions of trench warfare had yet to be learned. The B.E.F., which had moved north from the Aisne into Flanders early in October, was heavily engaged in the month-long series of operations known as the Battles of Ypres, 1914. The line fluctuated but remained unbroken. In mid-December a French offensive near Arras achieved only heavy casualties, as did the costly operations in Champagne, which dragged on fruitlessly into mid-March.

The line which existed at the beginning of 1915 was to stand for the next two years without varying as much as ten miles in either direction. At the coastal end, adjoining a French detachment holding Nieuport, was the Belgian Army, which had taken up a position on the Allied left flank when Antwerp fell on 10 October. In the Ypres sector was the French Eighth Army entrenched on a seventeen-mile front.⁶² On its right, British forces defended the Flemish plain as far south as Givenchy. French armies held the remainder of the line, which continued generally southward through Arras to the Aisne, thence turning eastward to Verdun and finally southward again through the Vosges mountains to the Swiss border. On the enemy side the northern sector of Flanders was guarded by the German Fourth Army (Colonel-General Duke Albrecht of Wurttemberg); in the southern sector was the Sixth Army (Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria).

As 1914 ended the B.E.F. had been reinforced to eleven regular infantry and five cavalry divisions; these were formed into two armies on 26 December.

By 18 February 1915 General Sir Douglas Haig's First Army (1st, 4th and Indian Corps) was holding a trench line eleven miles long which centred on Neuve Chapelle. On the left the Second Army (2nd, 3rd and 5th Corps), commanded by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, held a seventeen-mile front across the valleys of the Lys and the Douve, extending northward from Bois Grenier to just beyond the Ypres-Comines railway, where it joined the French Eighth Army defending the Ypres salient. Fifteen miles behind the Second Army's front was Hazebrouck. East of the town was the billeting area to which the 1st Canadian Division came in mid-February, to form a reserve to the British 3rd Corps.

Future Allied Strategy

The winter of 1914-15 gave the belligerents a breathing space in which to review the general situation and consider plans for the coming year.

In the fighting so far each side's carefully prepared schemes had miscarried. The German plan for quickly crushing France and then turning east to overwhelm Russia had not survived the Marne and the Aisne. The French design of attacking north and south of Metz had played into the enemy's hands. Austria's dream of easy subjugation of Serbia had been rudely dispelled. Although the Russians had had some success against Austria, they had accomplished nothing against Germany. An invasion of East Prussia, hastily improvised to take German pressure off France, had come to a bad end in late August at Tannenberg.

In the west the deadlock was complete by sea and land. The German fleet lay static in fortified harbours; and with no way of drawing it out the British Admiralty pinned its faith to the blockade. On land the 500-mile front from the North Sea to the Alps offered no flank which could be turned. If the Allies decided to adopt the "forlorn expedient of the frontal attack"⁶³ they would place themselves in the unfortunate position of losing ground before they had fully mastered the conditions, and then having to attempt its recapture after the defensive had been developed into a fine art.

The Eastern and South-Eastern Fronts presented a different picture. Here the Central Powers had to defend a line nearly 2000 miles long. While in summer the defenders could hold wide marshlands which were virtually impassable, the winter frosts rendered this ground traversable by an opponent, at the same time making it too hard for entrenching. Furthermore, to provide an adequate garrison for this extensive front would mean drawing on races hostile to Austria-Hungary. For the Allies the main weakness in the east was that the Russian armies, though possessing an overwhelming advantage in manpower, were short of arms and ammunition. To supply these deficiencies it would be necessary to establish "intimate and continuous contact" between Russia and the Western Allies.⁶⁴ There was need for prompt action. The transfer of large numbers of German troops late in 1914 from the Western to the Eastern Front brought the threat of a major Russian defeat which would leave the Central Powers free to resume the offensive in Flanders with great numerical superiority. Yet the deadlock in the

west gave the Allies little hope of assisting Russia by seeking a decision on that front. On 2 January Lord Kitchener expressed the belief that “the German lines in France may be looked on as a fortress that cannot be carried by assault and ... that the lines may be held by an investing force, whilst operations proceed elsewhere”.⁶⁵

In Britain the War Council (which had been formed in November 1914 as an augmented committee of the Cabinet) was already considering where such alternative operations might be most advantageously conducted. Unlike the Allied Commanders in France it recognized that, as a maritime power, Britain’s best strategy for 1915 lay not in throwing armies against the impregnable positions in the west but in turning a flank by sea so as to achieve union with Russia. The conflict between the “Easterners” and the “Westerners” had begun.

At the beginning of September the first Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. Winston Churchill, had directed that a plan be prepared for seizing the Gallipoli Peninsula and securing a passage through the Dardanelles in order to gain direct contact with Russia. Greece was ready to supply the ground forces for the enterprise; but since Turkey had not yet entered the war, and it was hoped to keep her neutral, the scheme was held in abeyance and the Greek offer was declined. While keeping the Gallipoli plan alive, Churchill propounded an alternative scheme to dominate the Baltic by a seaborne invasion of Schleswig-Holstein, to be followed by the seizure of the Kiel Canal. British naval control of the Baltic would enable Russian armies to land within ninety miles of Berlin. Implementation of this plan would require several months of the closest cooperation. Prospects seemed much brighter in South-East Europe, where the early restrictions had been removed late in October by Turkey’s entry into the war on Germany’s side.

Turning the Southern flank would not only be less hazardous than the Baltic enterprise, but the project held other inducements beside providing direct contact with Russia. There was less threat of formidable resistance from Germany, as Serbia lay across her communications with Turkey. Possession of the Gallipoli peninsula would eliminate Turkey from the war and pave the way for directing against Austria the combined efforts of four Balkan states (Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Rumania), mustering between them armies of more than a million men. On New Year’s Day, 1915, Mr. David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer (who as Prime Minister was to be the leading Easterner), proposed to the War Council two operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. The main one, a drive through Salonika or the Dalmatian coast against the Austrians, was intended to rally the Balkan armies to the Allies. The second, a subsidiary venture, was a landing on the Syrian coast to cut off Turkish forces advancing against Egypt.

Early in January, Turkish operations against Russia in the Caucasus brought a request from Grand Duke Nicholas to Lord Kitchener for “a demonstration of some kind against the Turks elsewhere, either naval or military” which would compel a withdrawal of some Turkish forces from the Caucasus.⁶⁶ Kitchener discussed this request with Churchill, who was opposed to a

demonstration in the Dardanelles that might jeopardize any subsequent attempt to force the Straits. In any event no troops were available, and Kitchener's reply to the Grand Duke, while assuring him that a demonstration would be made, held out little hope that it would seriously influence the strength of the Turks in the Caucasus.⁶⁷ The Admiralty reached the opinion that the Straits could be forced by naval action alone, though a large number of ships in "extended operations" would be required. Sir John Jellicoe, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, was opposed to the Baltic venture, and on 28 January the War Council, having consulted Russia and France, decided in favour of the naval attack on the Dardanelles. On 16 February a decision was taken to make available military forces to support the naval operation if needed.⁶⁸ Thus was born the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign.

In contrast to the strategy approved by their governments, both the British and French Commanders-in-Chief in France held the view that the Allied effort should be made in the west. They argued that the demands of the Russian front had weakened the western German armies in manpower and material. Sir John French felt that breaking through the German lines was largely a question of having more ammunition, particularly high explosive. General Joffre agreed, welcoming the opportunity of liberating French territory by reducing the great German salient between Reims and Amiens, which at one point reached within 55 miles of Paris. Thus it happened that while the War Councils in London and Paris were exploring the possibilities of campaigning in some new theatre, their General Staffs at St. Omer and Chantilly were actively planning an early offensive on the Western Front. This divergence of aims violated one of the basic principles of warfare. Events were to prove that in 1915 Allied resources in men and munitions were insufficient to sustain with any hope of success large-scale offensives in two widely-separated theatres.⁶⁹