

My Dear Kiddie: -

While guns belch forth the fires of death, I am sitting quietly by a comfortable fire in a trench not far from the new front line. This is the battlefield that will go down in history as the magnificent achievement of the Canadian Corps.

April 9th is a day to be marked 'evermore with white' – in Canadian annals. This famous ridge is the key of the Hindenburg Line and its capture marks a new forward movement that will result in the ultimate destruction of the Hun...

I have been over the field of Courcellette, I have seen the ruins of Ypres and shell torn fields of Belgium, but never have I seen such destruction as found here ...

8 AM 16-4-17

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I cannot but revert to the day – the 8th of April that our gallant lads – with Major De Lancey & RSM 'Dad' Hinchcliffe at their heads marched away from the camp to the skirl of the pipes and the cheers of those who were not permitted to accompany them.

During 18 mos of warfare I have become more or less deadened to feeling & emotion but I could not prevent the tears from rolling down my cheeks, and the choking in my throat for the cheery lads who were marching away, many of them never to return. At 5:28 AM on the morning of the ninth our lads were at their appointed places. At 5:30 thousands of guns of all calibres belched forth a fire such as was never before seen in all the war. Nothing human could stand it. As the guns spoke, over the bags they went – men of CB [Cape Breton], sons of NS [Nova Scotia] & NB [New Brunswick] – FC's [French Canadians] & westerners – all Canucks.

Within 14 minutes the first trench was captured, & within an hour & 15 minutes, the whole ridge, 4000 prisoners & many guns were in our possession. So far it was the most decisive, the most spectacular and the most ~~crushing~~ important victory on this front since the Marne and Canada may well be proud of the achievement.

Did our lads forget the crucifixions of Ypres and Hun teachings in the past. They didn't. Said an officer of the English Regiment, 'I had heard a lot about Canadian Fighters but never saw them in action before. They are splendid, but terrible butchers'. The phrase is significant.

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Letter excerpted from:

Percy Willmot: A Cape Bretoner at War 1914-1919
 Brian Douglas Tennyson
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