

# HALIFAX, THE CENTRE OF CANADA'S WAR ZONE

By NAT OLDS



**H**ALF of the North American continent is at war, and we did not realize it until our steamer docked under the gray guns of British warships in Halifax harbor. She was the Red Cross liner Florizel, sister ship of the ill-fated Stephano, and even then rumors were afloat that both boats had been sold to the Russian government for ice-breakers in the Archangel Channel. This might be the last trip, the story had it. The Stephano was then bound north to St. John's, Newfoundland, on what was her last trip.

But even these smoking room wirelesses did not prepare our minds for what confronted us at Halifax. We found ourselves in a heavily fortified city that was packed to the ramparts with soldiers waiting to go over seas to the front. When the true state of affairs drove itself home the Americans who have been getting their war served up at breakfast via the censor had a distant shock. We felt rather annoyed by it, too, as representatives of the most wide-awake nation now doing business. To be surprised by our brothers over the border partook of the unkind, particularly before we had established our land legs.

But this slight touch of chagrin was nothing in comparison to the feelings that followed as soon as we began to get our military bearings. Our proper American sense of superiority was more than startled; it was bumped. Secretly we began to do some salutary wondering. Was this country so busily engaged in war the same sleepy Canada we used to know when we went black bass fishing in vacation time and couldn't understand why the Toronto storekeepers declined to open up until 9 o'clock?

### THE BUSINESS OF WAR WITHOUT THEATRICALISM OR EMOTION.

Here was a harbor full of warships. Huge transports were belching smoke at the docks and lean destroyers crouched alongside ready to leap at the word. Stevedores swarmed like ants over pyramids of munitions; above rose the city, an armed camp. And all this was passing before our eyes with no more uproar or emotion or theatricalism than you will find in a New England shoe factory. Then the truth dawned upon us. Here was a people engaged in the most tremendous of all human tasks—the waging of war—and they were going about it as a business matter, to be conducted on business principles. I figured

Men of the Highland Brigade.

has been restive in British harness. She boasts that she is as free as the winds in her maple trees, and a Halifax business man told me in so many words that if England should ever try to tax her "Halifax would stage in her own harbor a duplicate of the Boston Tea Party." At times, the Canadians hint, the English have failed to appreciate this state of mind, and with characteristic John Bull bluntness have jostled Canadian feelings. "I think it is because the English do not understand us," a Canadian explained to me. "You people in the States understand us much better. Your problems and ours are so much alike you do it instinctively. But the English are different." Consequently, Canada has had her own opinion about it, and like all young and full-blooded peoples she is very human in wanting to be understood. This feeling had been brooding in the Dominion for years, when suddenly, one August morning, England was plunged into war. In one year from that August morning Canada had put into the field an army fully equipped and had lost half of her first 30,000 on the front in Flanders.

"You tell me Canada does not like England," I said to a Canadian prominent in Dominion affairs. "This being so, how do you explain an army of 300,000 men and a war debt of \$500,000,000 and your dead and crippled?"

"I can answer that best in your Abraham Lincoln way, by speaking in a parable," he replied. "The old gentleman has his sons scattered all over the world. Our country is one of them. The boys have settled down and are doing well. The old gentleman stays at home for the most part, but occasionally he has strolled off and got into trouble, but the boys know his weaknesses and have not worried about the fist fights. He has taken care of himself in most of them. But this time it was different. Two big ruffians went after him unprovoked, and the old gentleman had his back against the wall. It wasn't his fault, and he was in bad trouble. So, seeing that it was a family matter, the boys jumped in to help the old man out, and there we are. Blood, your saying goes, is thicker than water."

This sketch of the situation was a homely way of describing something that goes deep into the very heart and nerves of the Canadian people. The boys are fighting for something more than the old gentleman's person. Their battle is for what the old man represents. This is the Empire.

My Canadian friend—a wealthy business man—continued: "England has been careless at times and tactless with us, but we are fighting for a stake so big that it eclipses everything else in sight. This may be hard for an American from the States to understand, but to the Canadian heart and mind the imperial idea is strong and vivid. We realized instinctively that once England became involved in a life and death struggle we could not stay out. Our fortunes in this fight are England's, and if England had been overwhelmed the Empire would have been crushed stone by stone. Then we should have had to fight for our existence perhaps on our own frontiers. Our problem was a simple one and the solution merely a matter of stern logic."

Canada decided without a moment's hesitation. Officers tell me that men came up to military headquarters in Toronto and Montreal begging to enlist and carrying in their hands the extras that had given them the news of England's going in. They hadn't even gone home to tell about it.

At first the flood of recruits was too sudden and tempestuous to be bridged or channelled. Training camps were hastily improvised, and, forming on the militia, the volunteers were hammered into soldiers and shipped overseas

to become the Empire's first line across Flanders when men were few and England's fortunes lay in the laps of the gods. Twenty thousand were promised to Kitchener by cable and 30,000 actually went. To-day the Dominion has enlisted, equipped and trained 350,000 men. Her quota is 500,000.

Nova Scotia's returns are typical of the devotion with which the provinces have rallied to the defence of the imperial idea. The total number of officers and men enlisted in the province from the beginning of the war to August 30 was 20,000. The Nova Scotians are now recruiting 10,000 more, which gives a grand total of 30,000 men out of 95,000 between the ages of eighteen and thirty years. To make an equivalent showing, proportionate to population, New York State would have to put into the field 570,000 men. In view of these figures National Guard officers will find Nova Scotia's experiences an interesting study in recruiting.

Again the staid Canadian has shown himself a master of resource. Stripped down to its bare chassis, the machine was run as a straight business operation, and Nova Scotia's contingent was recruited by being told the proposition to enlist was the only thing a decent man could do and hope to hold his head up. Getting such an idea across requires strict attention to detail and thorough organization. But inevitably in such crises a local Kitchener rises to the occasion, and Nova Scotia's was Major Allison P. Borden. He is a professional soldier, who has taken his business seriously.

### RECRUITING AFTER THE MANNER OF A SELLING CAMPAIGN.

When war broke out he left a sick bed to offer his services to the government. They red-taped his letter, and against the doctor's orders—he was stricken with rheumatic fever—Borden in one week enlisted and organized a battalion of 1,100 men. This was the famous 85th Battalion. Nova Scotia sat up and took notice. The next day a committee of prominent citizens, business men, lawyers and clergymen elected the major to the job of general manager of military business for Nova Scotia. He is the type of man Big Business insists it is always looking for, and his recruiting campaign was a triumph of executive sagacity. The province was districted into territories and officers were assigned to them, as salesmen are sent out on the road to market goods. Each one had his quota figured on the population of his district and was ordered to sign



Brigadier General A. P. Borden



Lieutenant Colonel E. H. Phinney.

them up on that basis. This was in January, 1915.

In the meantime an advertising campaign was started. Posters, billboards, window and streetcar cards, newspaper pages, the pulpit, the schools and the universities were called into action to Billy Sunday the reluctant. The fiery cross was rushed from one end of the province to the other, and Nova Scotia blazed with the torches of war. In six months 10,000 were enrolled and in camp at Aldershot, and 10,000 more are rapidly coming in. War posters are everywhere. One, posted the day we landed, is typical of the directness of the recruiting campaign. It reads:

"THERE ARE MEN IN HALIFAX WHO ARE GOING TO BE VERY UNHAPPY WHEN THE WAR IS OVER, AND THINGS HAPPEN EVERY DAY TO REMIND THEM THAT THEY DID NOT DO THEIR DUTY."

One stroke alone did wonders in bringing in the recruits. Nova Scotia, as the name implies, was settled in part by Highlanders, and Scotch names and Scotch burrs are as frequent in the province as English ones are in Virginia. So Major Borden called his 85th Battalion the "Highlanders." Halifax cheered the name, and the Nova Scotian contingent will go down in history as the Highland Brigade. Major Borden is now the brigadier general in

command of his Balmoral bonnets, 77,000 strong.

"These provincial figures have rather embarrassed the military experts at Ottawa," said a Halifax Liberal leader. "The facts are that headquarters predicted openly we could be depended upon to furnish only 11,000 men. Our first 10,000 set them guessing, and they had to hunt a bit to find quarters for them. The next 10,000 made things even worse, but we never stopped turning them in."

As a matter of fact, Halifax is to-day the centre of the military situation in the Dominion. Her recruiting station is so busy that officers have been drafted from as far west as Vancouver to keep pace with the work. Not only are the Highland ranks being filled, but Ottawa wants help for the college men's company of the Princess Pats. These will ultimately become officers. Then there is the new branch of the service to be organized, and the Imperial War Office is anxious for quick action. This is the 224th Forestry Battalion, to reinforce the first battalion now in active service on estates in England, Scotland and Wales. The work this branch of the service does sheds a light on the deadly thoroughness with which England is seeing things through. Their job is to cut down and saw up the forests of Great Britain, and lovers of romance and poetry will feel a thrill when they read that the ancestral oaks of Windsor and Kenilworth are being ruthlessly felled and fashioned by Nova Scotia lumberjacks to furnish planking and firewood for the men in the trenches.

### STEEL SUBMARINE NETS CLOSE HALIFAX HARBOR AT NIGHTFALL.

In addition to the business of recruiting, upon Halifax falls the responsibility of transporting 95 per cent of the Canadian contingents overseas to the front. The city has been for centuries an outpost of the Empire, one of the bulldogs with which England pickets her possessions. A gloomy citadel has crowned the heights since the French wars, and its bastions were considered in their day the strongest in the world. At sundown a gun is fired from a grass-grown emplacement, and the echoes roar from hill to hill and among the ships in the mined harbor.

This means that the steel submarine net that bars the harbor has been shut to for the night and inbound ships must anchor outside until morning. Halifax has taken no chances with submarines since the Deutschland slipped through, for her deep harbor is the spout through which the Dominion pours her stream of men and guns and munitions overseas to the front. Here they gather by the thousands, and the bold "burr" of Cape Breton answers the broad u's of Ontario, and the ranchers from Calgary make friends with the lumberjacks of New Brunswick.

The Canadian soldier is a likable lad, and thoroughly chummy and conversational. He makes friends quickly and loves to stroll in clumps of three and four. You never see him alone, unless on duty bent. Each one hugs his swagger stick as if a fairy godmother had pressed it on him, and the hard set spiral puttees trim their figures into a sharp-cut smartness that our own men lack. The uniforms are all khaki—an old-gold, greenish hue of it; and the only marks of distinction are the bronze battalion badges and numbers on shoulder and cap. The tunic is essential, and to promenade in flannel shirt sleeves as our men do would mean guardhouse and police duty for a Canadian.

Besides the badges and emblems are the service ribbons, and to learn their meaning must

require a special training. Regimental feeling and battalion tradition run high in Canada, and insignia often have a pedigree that goes back to the Heights of Abraham. The most picturesque of the uniforms is that of the Highland brigade, and the plumed Balmoral bonnets fill the eye. The eagle feathers magnify the tiniest private, and to walk the streets on a Saturday leave day is to visualize the Glasgow of Sir Walter's time. The town is full of chieftains, and occasionally a kilt sways by as proud as a gamecock. When one of these salutes an officer the pipes seem to shrill in the air.

The Canadian officer is essentially the gentleman. I mean this both in the English and American connotation. He bears himself with a dignity and self-possession that nothing seems to ditch, and his personal turn-out is immaculate. From the downiest provisional "leftenant" to the rosiest-gilled major, each looks as if he had emerged from razor and tub immediately previous, no matter if the hour be morning, noon or night. We had ample opportunity to study them, and shall carry away pleasant memories of kindness, courtesy and service. And we envied them their tailors, for every tunic fitted without a flaw, and the breeches flared above tight knees with the meticulous correctness of an international horse show.

### GOOD MEN WITH "OFFICERS FOR MASCOTS" IS NO LONGER THE CASE.

The question of officering the troops has been a hard one for Canada to handle. For some reason the English staff conceived a prejudice against the Dominion C. O.'s early in the war, and with characteristic bluntness showed their distrust openly. Sir Max Aitken, the "eye-witness" with the Canadian corps, refers to this frankly in his book, "Canada in Flanders," and quotes a saying in the English army that the Canadian troops looked like good men and "had officers for mascots." This galled, because there was a bit of truth in it. Politics had played its usual tricks at the outset. But the remedy was at hand, and the trenches pounced upon the unfit and the slackers with the pitiless publicity of a movie film, and the political colonels faded away. Then came Ypres and the Flanders fighting, and the Canadians and their officers died, one man



Service Uniform, Front View.

tively (and actually) took off my hat to Canada.

For Americans to understand the full significance of it all we must sketch in the background for them to focus on. Once you get that before your eyes the whole story will follow through in all its dramatic intensity. In the first place, we must remember that Canada



Service Uniform, Rear View.

out of every two in the lines, and saved Calais. Since that time England has stood at attention when a soldier's tunic shows a Canadian badge.

The original intention was to find the commission material in the ranks of the veterans, but the frightful losses of the first two di-

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