

University of Windsor

Scholarship at UWindor

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Theses, Dissertations, and Major Papers

1-1-1997

Making their mark: Canadian snipers and the Great War, 1914-1918.

Leslie Parker Mephram
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd>

Recommended Citation

Mephram, Leslie Parker, "Making their mark: Canadian snipers and the Great War, 1914-1918." (1997).
Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 6918.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/6918>

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

·
·

NOTE TO USERS

The original manuscript received by UMI contains pages with light print. Pages were microfilmed as received.

This reproduction is the best copy available

UMI

**MAKING THEIR MARK: CANADIAN SNIPERS AND THE GREAT
WAR. 1914-1918**

**By
Leslie P. Mephram**

**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies & Research
through the Department of History
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor**

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1997

1997 Leslie P. Mephram



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

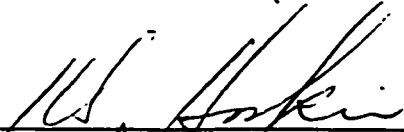
0-612-30969-X

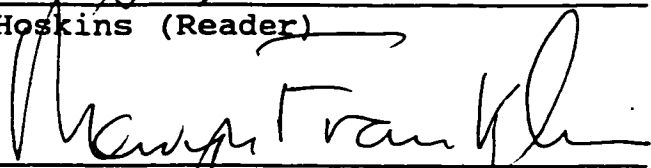
Canada

Approved by:


B. Owens (Chairperson)


I. Pemberton (Advisor)


R. Hoskins (Reader)


M. Franklin (Outside Reader)

ABSTRACT

The activities of the sniper on the Western Front have been disregarded by many military historians over the decades. The sniper, despite the lack of scholarly recognition, was as common to the trenches of the Western Front as artillery, no man's land and mud. Where the military elite found trench deadlock, the sniper found consistency. Drawn primarily from military documents at the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa, this thesis examines the tactical nature of sniping.

The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate two points: first, that sniping in the Great War was an evolutionary process; second, that the sniper was a critical component of the war effort on the Western Front. This work examines the early origins of sniping in the Great War, from the German initiation to the Allied response. The formation of sniper schools in France and England formally institutionalized sniping in the military establishment and marked a turning point in sniper doctrine. The sniper's activities in the trenches between 1915-1917 are examined because trench warfare, though amounting to deadlock for military engagements, was the ideal battle condition for well-aimed rifle-fire. Equally active in open warfare, the sniper quickly became an integral part of the offensive and pursuit to Mons in 1918. An examination of all the above factors will demonstrate that the sniper evolved from a random crackshot to full-fledged marksman, complete with the necessary equipment to conduct his work successfully. Moreover, this growth enabled the sniper to contribute substantially to the war effort and subsequent victory in 1918.

Dedicated to
Pte. Robert Mephram #193118
Sniper, 13th Battalion, CEF

*** * ***

Reported Missing in Action
8th October, 1916

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, special thanks to Tobi Leitch - my soul-mate - for taking the time to listen to me babble on about a topic she knew nothing about. Her revisions and support have been instrumental in seeing this project to completion. To her I owe the most.

Special consideration is given to Dr. I. Pemberton who agreed to be my advisor despite being so close to retirement. I am also indebted to the other members of my committee, Professor R. Hoskins and Dr. M. Franklin, for taking on this task amidst all of their other activities. Without their commitment, this work could never have been accomplished.

For guidance I would like to thank Dr. B. Millman who was very encouraging when I started pursuing this topic. His preliminary suggestions sent me in the right directions and although he could not be here to assist me in my research, he was more than willing to help from a distance. Also, to Bill Rawling at National Defence Headquarters whose expertise on the RG9 files was most helpful. He discussed this topic openly with me and offered a number of ideas with which to expand on. His book Surviving Trench Warfare was most useful and served as my "Great War Bible" through much of my study. Thanks to Tim Dube, at the National Archives for providing information on the Manuscript Division, for it was MG30 E2 that was the breakthrough file in my research. Tim, who answered many questions during my stay in Ottawa, also granted me access to a newly-arrived war diary that I used in this work.

I would also like to thank Maureen and the Inter-Library Loan Office staff in the Leddy Library for locating so many materials that I thought would be unavailable. Of all the requests I submitted, only two were denied. Much appreciation, in addition, to the staff in the Reading and Reference Rooms at the National Archives in Ottawa. They were patient and understanding with a student who knew little about the Archives and were more than accommodating to my requests.

Last, but certainly not least, thanks to my friends in Grad Studies for making the school year an enjoyable one. Special consideration to Andy Hall for revising chapters, showing interest in my topic, and discussing ideas with me, and to Renee Hillier for keeping me company and helping me with ideas during my research in Ottawa. Best of luck to all of you in the future.

For those of you I did not leave room for mention, you know who you are...thanks!

L.M.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Chapter:	
I. Introduction. Sniping Before the Great War	1
II. Setting the Stage	9
III. Sniper Training	28
IV. Sniping in Trench Warfare	53
V. Sniping in Open Warfare	84
VI. Conclusion. Afterthoughts	107
Bibliography	111
Vita Auctoris	117

LIST OF DIAGRAMS & ILLUSTRATIONS

British & German Trench Systems	15
Sniperscopes	24
Use of Camouflage. First Army Sniping School	46
Types of Telescopic Sight	58
Loophole-plate Construction	63
"Mouse Trap Loophole"	64
A Dead Hun Sniper in His Nest	67
Use of Dummy Heads	73
Sources and Course of Front Line Intelligence	76
Battalion Intelligence	77
Snipers in the Open. First Army Sniping School	88
"Beehive Sniper Post"	89
Battalion Formed Up in the Trenches Ready for the Assault	96

Introduction

Sniping Before the Great War

Any book on the Great War of 1914-1918, would provide a great deal of information about the important facets of the conflict. The great battles - the Marne, 1914, Verdun and the Somme, 1916, Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele, 1917, and Amiens, 1918 - tend to absorb the majority of the spotlight. Other factors - trench warfare, no man's land, artillery shelling, air and naval combat, gas warfare etc. - tend to be given a satisfying amount of attention, although their scope and detail vary by source. An historian can easily access these details by perusing the index at the back of a given work. Often neglected from the many indexes is the sniper; his function, importance, and methods. Granted, some historians have sought to document the activity of snipers but only in a reference or two, and very rarely are these specialists given any scrutiny. Of the official histories on the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), only that of F. Duguid makes any reference to the Canadian marksman; G.W.L. Nicholson's account neglects the subject entirely. Other Canadian historians - Desmond Morton, Pierre Berton, J.L. Granatstein and Daniel Dancocks to name a few - have provided only meagre consideration of the sniper. Of course, many of the above historians have taken a broader examination of the war, and details of minor engagements are bound to be omitted. Yet, so obscure are the references

that Paddy Griffith contends, "snipers appear to have been so successful in their undercover activities that they have left very few traces in the general literature of the war." ¹ Nevertheless, sniping has a history of its own, one that dates back before the Great War.

The origins of "sniping" - or at least the term "sniping" - appear to have come from eighteenth century India where British Army officials found enjoyment hunting the snipe, a long-billed game bird comparable to the woodcock. Small in size, the snipe was a challenging target for riflemen and required fine and precise shooting skill in order to hit one. In military terms, "sniping" was first documented in India in 1773 as "soldiers put their hats on the parapet for the enemy to shoot at, and humourously called it sniping." ² The term "sniper", however, did not come into widespread use until the early twentieth century. Confined to the Anglo-dominated sectors of the globe during the nineteenth century, "sniper" often paralleled the term "sharpshooter". In fact, history books of nineteenth century North America, particularly the United States, frequently refer to the latter. Regardless of the two terms' trends, they both imply one factor: accurate rifle fire.

Examples of precision shooting in military engagements date as far back as the origins of the term itself. During the eighteenth century, tactical theory and doctrine were greatly transformed by the Industrial Revolution. ³ The impact of the rifled musket added increased firepower to the individual on the battlefield and permanently changed tactical forms. The rifle companies of the Napoleonic Wars thus were the first to bring accurate musketry to the battleground. At the same time in the Western hemisphere, the rebelling Americans were busy refining their own rifle skills. British marksmanship was relatively poor in the American War of Independence, 1776-1783, since very little emphasis was placed on target practice. In light

¹ Paddy Griffith: Battle Tactics of the Western Front, (London, 1994). p.73.

² Adrian Gilbert: Sniper, (New York, 1994). p.xi.

³ Edward Hagerman: The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare, (Indianapolis, 1988). p.xi.

of this ineptitude, General John Burgoyne, by 1777, had "formed a body of sharpshooters by selecting a group of sober, active, robust men from each regiment." ⁴ The extent of their effectiveness remains undocumented. The Americans, meanwhile, had organized their own band of marksmen by the 1780's and fully integrated them in the attack. In the Battle of Cowpens, 1781, a semi-organized unit of sharpshooters from Georgia and North Carolina were put into the forward line of attack.

The sharpshooters in the front line in irregular formation were to take cover behind trees. They were to withhold their fire until the advance of the enemy was within fifty yards, and then to take careful aim at the men with the epaulets. After two volleys they were to retire slowly, firing at will, and fall into spaces in the second line of militia. ⁵

The British forces, under the direction of Lt. Col. Tartelton, attempted to counteract the marksmen's fire by clearing them out with cavalry. The rush was swift and ended abruptly when the American crackshots "emptied fifteen saddles." ⁶

Less than a hundred years later, sharpshooting was again present in an American conflict, namely the Civil War, 1861-65. The defensive breastworks and constant skirmishing between the Blue and Gray intensified sharpshooting on the open battlefields, particularly among the Southerners. Confederates with a "sporting frame of mind" were keenly attracted to long-range sniping as the distances between combatants expanded. ⁷ Confederate sharpshooters also found pleasure in sniping from buildings, a practice that usually resulted in the burning down of the structure. Maintaining discipline in the Union Army, particularly with the new recruits of 1863-64, was a problem for many officers and punishments usually resulted in being tied to a rack or dragged behind a battery wagon. The following alternative to these disciplinary measures was sometimes just as disheartening as the crime:

⁴ Edward E. Curtis: The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution, (New York, 1969). p.20.

⁵ Christopher Ward: The War of the Revolution, (New York, 1952). p.757.

⁶ Ibid., p.758.

⁷ Gerald F. Linderman: Embattled Courage, (New York, 1987). p.148.

Lyman described soldiers of the Ninth Corps who had fled battle made to wear "Coward" placards and to stand atop barrels placed on the Union fortifications at Petersburg, the decision whether theirs was a capital offense apparently left to enemy sharpshooters.
8

Perhaps the most interesting account of Confederate sniping came at Spotsylvania in 1864 when Major-General John Sedgwick chastized his men for cowering under enemy gunfire. Disgusted at this display of battle fright, Sedgwick stood up and shouted to his men. "Why, what are you dodging for? They could not hit an elephant at that dist-' - only to be shot through the head in that instant." ⁹

North of the border, the Canadian militia was forced to deal with well hidden Fenian sharpshooters in the raid of 1866. ¹⁰ The Fenians tended to be better trained when it came to firearms, and marksmanship was often limited to a range of 200 yards. ¹¹ In the Canadian Militia, targets exceeding 100 yards were left for sharpshooters since the rank and file could not be relied upon to make hits at greater distances.

As the Great War drew closer to reality, technology continued to have a profound effect on firearms development. Firepower, speed and firing distance were all improved in this age of mechanical development. The United States by the 1890's had developed a wealth of rifles; Springfields, Remingtons and Winchesters. The British were experimenting with prototypes of the Enfield at this time and in Canada. Sir Charles Ross had created the Ross Rifle by 1896. Rifles from around the world were displayed and tested at numerous shooting matches, the most well known being Bisley in England. Matches at the "Bisley School" typically determined the quality of a sporting rifle and it was there that the Ross earned its early reputation.

Before the nineteenth century could draw to a close, another war had

⁸ Ibid., p.173.

⁹ Ibid. p.141.

¹⁰ Robert McGee: The Fenian Raids on the Huntingdon Frontier, 1866 and 1870, (Canada, 1967). p.10.

¹¹ Hereward Senior: The Last Invasion of Canada, (Toronto, 1991). p.89.

disturbed the peace; this time in South Africa - the Boer War. By 1899, a fully entrenched style of warfare began: much like the American Civil War, the Boer War was a prelude to the conditions of the Great War. Sniping in the Boer War was more common among the Dutch Boers whose fortifications were set up for rifle rests. Some Boers even utilized smokeless powder in their rifles to lower the possibility to being detected by the British.¹² The Boers were often highly regarded for their marksmanship as one elderly fellow, known by the nickname "Grandfather", earned respect and admiration from the British for his musketry skills, so much respect, in fact, that soldiers who saw him in the open refused to fire at him.¹³ Rifles, at this stage of development, were considered lethal (if in proper hands) at distances up to 2000 yards and the Boers continually repelled British attacks at Spion Kop, Colenso and Modder River with such precision.¹⁴ Marksmanship among the Boers was not always at its best, however, as Col. Otter, commanding the Canadian contingent, was spared the fate of the American Sedgwick after a bullet struck only his chin.¹⁵ Canadian soldiers, who would first display their shooting potential in South Africa, were also skilled in accurate rifle fire. In the guerilla warfare that dominated the remaining years of the conflict, a small band of Canadian soldiers - marksmen among them - held approximately 600 Boers at bay with exceptional shooting skill at Rooival, 1901.¹⁶

Canadians, who had learned to settle the hinterland with some degree of hunter instinct, proved to be highly proficient in musketry by the time of war in 1914. Their response to the British plea for assistance in autumn, 1914, attracted many crack riflemen from the Canadian plains.¹⁷

¹² J. Castell Hopkins: South Africa and the Boer-British War Volume 2, (Toronto, n.d.). p.573.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.597.

¹⁴ Bill Rawling: Surviving Trench Warfare, (Toronto, 1992). p.9.

¹⁵ Desmond Morton: "Colonel Otter and the First Canadian Contingent in South Africa, 1899-1900". Policy by Other Means, Michael Cross & Robert Bothwell eds., (Toronto, 1972). p.110.

¹⁶ Hopkins: South Africa, p.795.

¹⁷ -----: "Canada in War Time". The Detroit Tribune, (Sunday, December 6, 1914). p.14.

Unfortunately for these Canadians, as members of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in the early going, greater emphasis was placed on the bayonet in army training. The Japanese victory over the Russians in 1905 had convinced the British high command that the bayonet was the "dominant weapon of war" despite the fact that the struggle with the Boers was characterized by musketry fire.¹⁸ Thus, as British and Canadian forces marched to the battlefields of France and Flanders, many were first-rate riflemen but were denied the opportunity to show their skill in light of basic training. If the bayonet charge was to be the first order of attack on the Western Front, sniping was going to have to wait for the opportunity to show its importance in a war of technology and entrenchment.

The purpose of this thesis is two-fold; first, it will demonstrate that sniping in the Canadian Corps, and on a general level, was an evolutionary process in the Great War. The conditions created by trench warfare enabled the sniper to emerge as a unique specialist on the Western Front - from a local Canadian crackshot to full-fledged marksman, complete with the necessary equipment to conduct his work invisibly and effectively. Just as the Canadian Corps learned from their previous campaigns and refined their tactics, so too did the sniper.

The second objective of this work is to reveal how much the sniper contributed to the overall war effort - despite the lack of scholarly recognition. Many a memoir and field message from the front will attest to the skill and effect of the sniper (on both sides) in the Great War. Where great guns, whole battalions and high command found trench warfare to be a deadlock, the sniper discovered consistency. In all facets of warfare, the Canadian sniper was present and effective, making him as essential to the war effort as 18-pound artillery cannons, armoured tanks, attritional combat and machine-guns.

¹⁸ Rawling: Surviving, p.11.

In the next chapter, the background and outbreak of war precedes the analysis of early sniping. What follows is a survey of German sniping, for it was the enemy that initiated the art of precision shooting in the Great War. Many British and Canadian soldiers' "baptism of fire" came at the hands of a skilled Bavarian or Prussian and it was not until 1915 that measures were taken to counteract these proficient marksmen. At this level, sniping by the Canadian contingent was in its infancy and it would require more formal training and knowledge of fundamentals to turn out an exceptional sniper. Such is the scope of Chapter III - Sniper Training. The British were the first to inaugurate this program, though convincing high command of such a measure was, at times, a difficult task. The expertise of Maj. H. Hesketh-Prichard, of the BEF, soon vaulted sniping into a semi-organized form. The subsequent establishment and growth of Corps Sniping Schools finally signalled the institutionalization of sniping within the military hierarchy.

Once trained, the Canadian sniper put his skills to work in the trenches of the Western Front. Chapter IV, Sniping in Trench Warfare, thus examines this activity, from the selection of arms and sniping posts to the effect the sniper had on the front. This section reveals the evolving maturity of the sniper, for it was in the mud-laden trenches of France and Flanders that the modern sniper found his roots. Although the majority of the Great War was fought across the scarred strips of no man's land, trench warfare was not the only battle feature on the Western Front. Fighting in the open did occur, though less consistently so. Nevertheless, the true marksman made effective use of open ground, whether alone in the vast reaches of no man's land, in the advance of an offensive or in pursuit of the retreating German Army in the last 100 days of the war.

Thus, the role of the sniper in the Great War, despite remaining undocumented until now, was an important one. From his early appearance in the trenches of 1914 and 1915 to complete fruition by 1918, sniping in the Canadian Corps was an evolutionary process. The ability of the sniper to find

a consistency in all facets of the Great War reveals his significant contribution to the war effort and, subsequently, to victory on 11 November, 1918.

Chapter II

Setting the Stage

With the outbreak of war in August, 1914, the nations of Europe set forth on a journey of power, technology and destruction. The desire for greater power fertilized technological progress but destruction was the end product. While there are horrors in any war, the trials and tribulations of the Great War exceed all others, for no other soldier would ever endure the harrowing experiences of trench warfare.

This chapter sets the stage for this destructive war. The war of movement, that was to be over by Christmas 1914, quickly ground to a steady halt and the "digging in" of the infantry ensued. In these first months of the trench deadlock, the Allies, it will be argued, underwent an evolution with regard to sniping. Because sniping was a private practice among a small number of skilled marksmen, it did not immediately arise from the depths of the trenches. The evolutionary process, however, did begin in this initial phase of war. First, a summary of the events - the build-up of hostilities, outbreak of the war, and pursuit to the sea - will precede the examination of sniping. This overview will further familiarize the reader with the extent of the trench conditions on the Western Front into the year 1915. The second focus of this chapter is an examination of German sniping in the conflict, for

it was from their skilled hands that sniping originated in trench warfare. The dominance of the German sniper served to teach the Allies of the dangers of carelessness in trench warfare. From the numerous casualties that mounted in 1915, it was a hard lesson learned. Finally, with some defensive measures in place, the Allied counteractivity will be assessed, for it was this reaction in 1915 that ignited the fuse for organized sniping in the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and the Canada Corps in years to come. In summation, this chapter will reveal that the first year and a half of the war was a learning process for the Allies, one that involved the first fetal stages in developing a critical sniping unit.

I

A review of a number of general histories on the Great War will reveal one of two common themes at their beginning: some emphasize German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's proclamation that "some damn foolish thing" in the Balkans would ignite a European war ¹; others tend to focus on the balmy condition of the weather in the summer of 1914. ² Regardless of which one is more important, both were critical factors in the Great War. The former point looks into the origins of the conflict, starting with Bismarck himself. Following the Prussian triumph over the French and unification of the German states in 1871, Bismarck created a network of alliances that kept the new balance of power in check.

Bismarck did not expect the French to like the new order of things, and he was right. Throughout the next several years he managed to keep France isolated; he secured an alliance with Austria, whom Germany had also recently defeated, and with Russia, who hated Austria. For more than a decade Bismarck successfully juggled Germany, Russia, and Austria in the Three Emperors' League. ³

The rise of Kaiser Wilhelm II eventually led to Bismarck's fall, and with the Chancellor went the system of alliances. This was compounded by the impact

¹ Daniel Dancocks: Welcome to Flanders Fields, (Toronto, 1988). p.7.

² Desmond Morton: When Your Number's Up, (Toronto, 1993). p.1, James L. Stokesbury: A Short History of World War One, ((New York, 1981). p.11.

³ Stokesbury: Short History, p.16-17.

of such ideologies as nationalism, political and social Darwinism and militarism which were rampant in the nations of Europe. The latter was particularly critical as the growing arms race coincided with a divorce between the military and democracy. That is, military command was taking diplomatic matters into their own hands. The passive Bismarck alliance system was replaced by an aggressive one that resulted in two armed camps: Britain, France and Russia in one, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy in the other. By the conclusion of the first decade of the twentieth century, Europe was a brewing powder keg waiting for a spark. And, just as the former German Chancellor had hinted, that spark came from the Balkans in June, 1914 with the assassination of Austrian heir-apparent, Franz Ferdinand. The diplomatic chaos that ensued prepared the Central and Allied powers for what was meant to be a "short war".

The summer of 1914 commands as much attention as Bismarck's nineteenth century prediction. At the same time people were enjoying the summer's heat, they were eagerly listening to the rumbling on the European frontier. The response to a coming war was an enthusiastic one in Canada. The violation of Belgian neutrality on August 4th, 1914 by the German Army led to a British (and consequently, Canadian) declaration of war. ⁴ The ill-fated "Schlieffen Plan" was designed to inflict a swift and decisive blow, so quick, in fact, that the Kaiser ensured his men they would be home "before the leaves fell from the trees." ⁵ The balmy, dreamy summer of '14 suddenly became a nightmare of war.

In the remaining four months of 1914, both Central and Allied powers conducted the only open warfare that existed on the Western Front until the spring of 1918. The Germans barged into Belgium with ease and the miniscule Belgian Army retreated to Antwerp. The French meanwhile, under the guise of Plan XVII, thrust into Alsace and Lorraine on August 14 making

⁴ Dancocks: Welcome, p.8.

⁵ Jay Winter & Blaine Baggett: The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century. (New York, 1996). p.59.

some measureable gains that were checked by a superior German artillery counter-attack. A second French attack in the Ardennes eight days later proved just as costly as the French Army, only three weeks into the conflict, was suddenly crippled.

In Belgium, the German advance was halted by the small British Expeditionary Force who held off the giant adversary at Mons with accurate musketry and rifle-fire.⁶ What ensued was a "race to the sea" where the French and British moved to the north, opposite the equally persistent Germans, trying to out-flank the opponent. The race came to an abrupt end at the Belgian town of Nieuport on the coast of the North Sea. One last effort by the German Army to break into France was again thwarted by the British and French at the Battle of the Marne on September 7th. Exhausted by the mobile rush through northern France and Flanders, both sides settled into their respective positions - giving birth to trench warfare.

Trench warfare had existed prior to the Great War, the most recent example being the Boer War in South Africa at the turn of the century. Prior to that, trenches had existed in the American Civil War though they were not as complex as those on the Western Front. Moreover, the military mindset was that instances like these were atypical and unlikely to recur.⁷ Nevertheless, trench warfare was a reality in France and Flanders and both sides were swift to establish a network of winding furrows from the North Sea to the Swiss border. Typical of the British line was the three-tiered trench system: front, support and reserve. At the fore was the front trench that was made up of a fire and command line. The fire trench fronted no man's land, protected by belts of barbed wire. Continuous in length, it zig-zagged along the front at intervals between 18 and 30 feet.⁸ Within each strip, or traverse, huddled a group of soldiers averaging a dozen. Built from sandbags, corrugated iron and any other debris that could be found, the forward trench

⁶ -----: "Rifles of the Great War", War Machine, no.86, n.d. p.1704-1705.

⁷ Tony Ashworth: Trench Warfare: The Live and Let Live System, (New York, 1980). p.1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.5.

went to a depth of approximately seven to ten feet. At the very bottom a trench mat or "duckboard" ran parallel to the slightly raised fire-step. From this latter position the soldiers "went over the top". At the top of the trench lay the "parapet", the most forward part of the line facing the enemy. It offered the soldier the last means of protection, though bullets very often penetrated the sandbags. Occasionally, sandbags were filled with broken rock to strengthen the line.⁹ Built into the parapet were many loopholes and periscopes for observation of the enemy line. The former became particularly useful for the sniper. The rear part of the trench was known as the "parados" and tended to be slightly higher; as a result it was often torn up by rifle and machine-gun fire. "Saps", or small artillery observation and listening posts stretched out into no man's land at odd angles.

Connected by narrower communication trenches, the command trench was situated roughly 20 yards to the rear. Following a similar pattern as the fire line, it was better fortified with dugouts, latrines and machine-gun posts. It was here that officers and specialists (including snipers) most often resided, though some preferred to improvise:

Humbler soldiers carved themselves "funkholes" in the trench wall and huddled under 3 foot-by-5 foot rubber sheets until driving rain sent viscous mud oozing out of the sandbags, and the walls gradually collapsed. By 1916, most trenches had enough dugouts to provide cramped, smelly shelter for everyone.¹⁰

The communication lines, meanwhile, were most frequently used for troop movement, supply trains and telephone cables.

The support trench, extending back some 70-100 yards, often housed relief troops, and served, at times, as a place of shelter after a heavy bombardment. It also worked to provide a base to re-group for counter-attacks following an enemy raid of the front line.¹¹ Medical officers and Company Headquarters were often situated at these locations as well.

⁹ Maj. H. Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping in France, (London, 1920). p.33.

¹⁰ Morton: Number's Up, p.122.

¹¹ Ashworth: Trench Warfare, p.6.

At the very back (400-600 yards) lay the reserve line where battalion Headquarters and higher ranking officers conducted their logistical work. Further, it contained whole battalions of support troops that relieved front line infantry after a given period. Just behind the reserve line, and well out of range of small arms fire was the artillery, which often pulverized the enemy lines at calculated distances. ¹²

The German lines, though similarly protected by rolls of barbed wire, were slightly different from Allied lines. The front line was fully garrisoned with support and reserve trenches extending back some 2000-3000 yards. ¹³ More sophisticated, fortified and considerably deeper, the Germans gradually perfected their trench system, a welcome prize for a conquering Allied force. ¹⁴ Anchoring their defences were several machine-gun posts, some housed in concrete shelters, spread approximately 800 yards apart. Situated about 1000 yards from the front line, they were the most deadly feature of the German trench system. The diagram on the following page outlines the two respective trench networks.

More importantly, the conditions created by these trenchlines along the Western Front were suitable for sniping. The terrain, from the open fields of Flanders to the rolling hillsides in eastern France, provided ample opportunity for a crackshot to test his skills.

Trench life was dangerous. Even in a quiet sector, a tour of the front seldom cost a battalion fewer than half a dozen dead and wounded. Signs warned soldiers about snipers, an important cause of death. ¹⁵

Rifle-fire was a mainstay on the Western Front and, as this and subsequent chapters will show, "sniping was important in the war, for the layout of the trenches gave snipers good chances to inflict material and moral loss upon the enemy." ¹⁶ Unfortunately for the British and Canadian forces, the value of

¹² Bill Rawling: Surviving Trench Warfare, (Toronto, 1992). p.27-28.

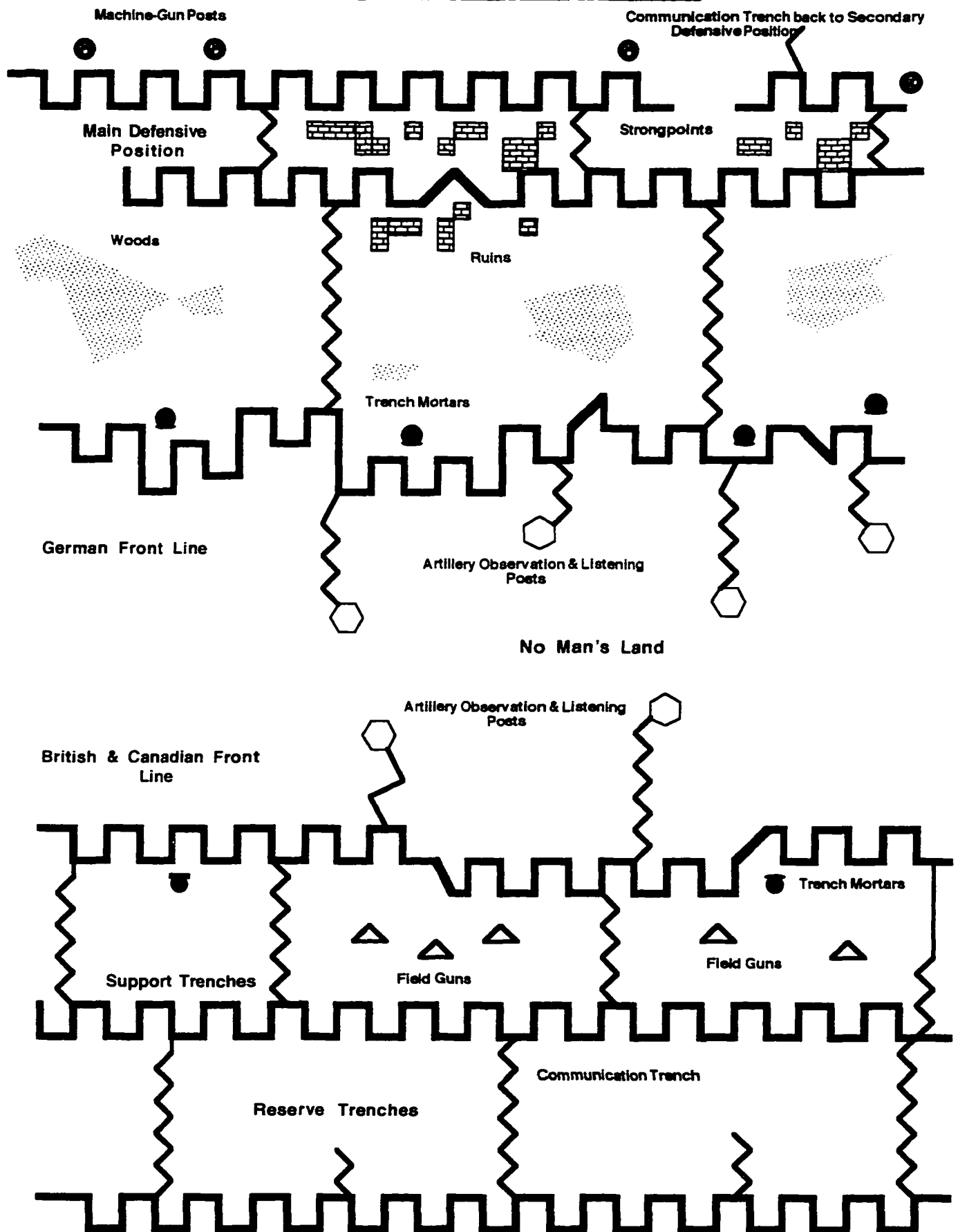
¹³ Ashworth: Trench Warfare, p.6.

¹⁴ Winter & Bagget: The Great War, p.91.

¹⁵ Morton: Number's Up, p.126.

¹⁶ Ashworth: Trench Warfare, p.57.

British & German Trench Systems



sniping in trench warfare would first have to be learned through the crosshairs of the German sniper's sights.

II

Once the zig-zag pattern of trenches scattered their way across the Western Front, the long process of "trench deadlock" began. Huddled in make-shift ditches and separated by a mangled belt of terrain referred to as no man's land, soldiers on both sides began to live a troglodytic lifestyle. On a minor scale, attempts to break the stalemate came in the form of shelling, trench mortars and grenades which were first initiated by the Germans. Snipers also made their appearance in the trenches of the Western Front, another initiative of the Allies' enemy - and "proved themselves to be masters of improvisation, and the speed with which they developed effective sniping in the autumn of 1914 was testimony to that talent." ¹⁷ In fact, the future-First Army Sniping Officer, Major H. Hesketh-Prichard attested that "it was the Germans, and not the British, who began sniping." ¹⁸ By the end of 1914, German marksmen were equipped with an estimated 20,000 telescopic sighted rifles and were using them with great efficiency. More of these firearms came before the year's end after the Duke of Ratibor collected a number of sporting rifles from across Germany and sent them to the front. These rifles, the Mauser Gewehr, or "Gew '98", were among the most accurate firearms on the Western Front - particularly when fitted with telescopic sights. ¹⁹ That the Germans were forerunners in the development of optical devices further enhanced the potential of these rifles. In capable hands, these firearms were deadly.

German snipers developed their sniping finesse quickly on the Western Front, surpassing the Allies instantly in this regard. Their incipient skills were masterful, for as one officer noted, "where they were our

¹⁷ Adrian Gilbert: Sniper, (New York, 1994). p.42.

¹⁸ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.28.

¹⁹ -----: "Rifles of the Great War", p.1702 In fact, Gew '98 sniper rifles were one of the first German rifles used to pierce armoured tanks at the Somme. This was done by using blunt-end bullets that were able to puncture the metal on impact.

superiors was in their hunter's instincts - they studied their prey." ²⁰ Many German marksmen were regular hunters or were recruited from the Forest Guards and Battle Police - individuals with exceptional shooting skills. ²¹ These latter recruits were also known to venture into no man's land, a place over which many a sniper sought complete domination. Others resorted to disguising themselves in stolen uniforms or Flemish civilian clothes, practising their art with Luger automatic pistols on lone British or Canadian soldiers. ²²

What made part of the Germans' superiority so high was their method of sniping. Although shooting from concealed positions was common in the early part of the war, German snipers were quick to use "loophole plates", a protective metal slate with an opening for rifles. By 1915, many of these plates decorated the German lines, some noticeable, others cleverly camouflaged. ²³ With as many as 30 plates in the line at one time, the Allies were often left puzzled as to the whereabouts of the deadly German crackshot. Another factor in their success was the linear nature of the first Allied trenchlines. Perfectly placed sandbags and flattened with shovels, Allied parapets invited a German sniper's bullet time and again. Movement behind these lines was easily detectable for the enemy because the contours of the human body and head stood out against the even parapet. Nevertheless, changes to these "textbook" style trenches did not come until early 1916.

Organized at company level, the German snipers had but one objective - kill the enemy. And this they did well, adding incessant numbers to the Allied casualty lists. Hesketh-Prichard noted "in early 1915 we lost eighteen men in a single battalion in a single day to enemy snipers." ²⁴ It did not take long for British, Canadian and French soldiers to learn of the

²⁰ NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/2, "Lecture Given at N.C.O.'s School of Instruction, 2nd Army". p.4.

²¹ Ian Skennerton: The British Sniper, (London, 1984). p.11.

²² Col. J.A. Currie: The Red Watch, (Toronto, 1916). p.163-164.

²³ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.108.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.2.

dangers of peering over the parapet. Pte. Will Bird of the 42nd Bn. recalls this perilous activity:

Larson...[was] thrilled with the front line [and] wanted to know how near the Germans were. I told him and he said it sounded unreal to him. It had become light as he talked, and when I put up the periscope it was shot away by a German sniper. "That fellow must be very near", said Larson. "I'll take a quick look".

"Don't!" I yelled and grabbed his coat. He stretched up in spite of my protest. The bullet entered his forehead and went out the back, breaking the strap of his helmet and carrying it to the rear of the post. I lowered the body to the trench floor and covered the face with a clean sandbag. ²⁵

The strike of a bullet had a devastating effect on every individual in the trench. Stray bullets - often from a distant enemy machine-gun - were common in the trenches and while many soldiers became used to it, only the foolhardy were victims. As Magnus Hood recalled, "When you hear the crack, the bullet has gone past you. It's the one you don't hear that hits you." ²⁶ The sniper's bullet, however, typically reached its target. The sight of a careless soldier, who remained exposed for a moment too long, falling in the throes of death had a cumulative effect of depleting troop morale. In the British trenches, a young Charles Carrington vividly recalled such a moment:

Almost as we approached the same sniper fired again from the village to our left, and a man called Pratt dropped like a stone just where the corporal had fallen. He, too, had a small round hole in his temple and the back of his skull blown away. Pratt was beyond hope. His head was shattered: splatterings of brain lay in a pool of blood under him; but, though he had never been conscious since the shot was fired, he refused to die. An old corporal looked after him, held his body and arms, which writhed and fought feebly as he lay. It was over two hours before he died, hours of July sunshine in a crowded space where perhaps a dozen men sat in a ditch ten yards long and five feet wide, reeking with the smell of blood, which all the time, above the soothing voice of the corporal, a gurgling and a moaning came from his lips, now high and liquid, now low and dry...²⁷

Instances like these created two very diverse effects; on one hand, it taught soldiers to keep their heads down, while on the other, it instilled a fear that

²⁵ Will R. Bird: Ghosts Have Warm Hands, (Toronto, 1968). p.17.

²⁶ Morton: Number's Up, p.123.

²⁷ Gilbert: Sniper, p.46.

some had difficulty overcoming. Companionship was one of the few things that held troops together. Many had enlisted together and many were in the same units. Thus, to see a friend fall at the mercy of a sniper's bullet was very unnerving to the individual. As Hesketh-Prichard noted, "if your trench is dominated by enemy snipers, life in it is really a very hard thing, and morale must inevitably suffer." ²⁸ For Herbert McBride, a sniper with the 21st Bn., losing comrades to an enemy marksmen brewed a vengeance within him. One of McBride's companions, Pte. Charlie Wendt, was struck by a sniper's bullet when on patrol. Though shrouded by bush and grass, Wendt, McBride and the just arrived stretcher bearers were continually shot at by the same crackshot behind the German lines. Though the rest of his shots failed to hit anyone, his determination made clearing the wounded soldier away a difficult task. Wendt only lived long enough to reach the reserve lines where he was later given a proper burial. For McBride, the persistence of the sniper stirred anger within him and from hence-forth, he vowed to avenge the death of his companion. ²⁹

Historians have identified a form of truce and fraternization among the combatants in the Great War. Modris Eksteins in The Rites of Spring and Brown and Seaton's Christmas Truce: The Western Front December, 1914 both reflect upon the undocumented cease-fire by both sides in light of the first Christmas holiday of the war. This system of "live and let live" was a cooperative venture that eased the already torrid life of the soldiers separated by a scarred no man's land. The deliberate restriction of hostile activity by one side was conditional upon the compliance by the other. ³⁰ In many memoirs one will find instances of spontaneous truce, either among large groups or between two individuals. Will Bird, an amateur sniper turned patrolman, engaged in such an incident when exploring an old sap that stretched into no man's land. After a struggle through a series of trip wires.

²⁸ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.2.

²⁹ Herbert McBride: A Rifleman Went to War, (Mt. Ida, AK, 1987). p.74-78.

³⁰ Ashworth: Trench Warfare, p.19.

Bird came face to face with a German sentry, likely a patrolman himself. There was a brief standoff and though the German knew he was covered by Bird's rifle, he proceeded to lower his handgun and slowly step away, smiling as he did so. ³¹ Though Bird intended to take him prisoner - or shoot him if he tried to flee - he let the sentry go after a slight wave and "half-salute" by the German. On a larger level, there are instances where numbers of soldiers communicated from a distance, exchanging stories over their limited truce. Truces such as these were usually unspoken and unofficial and varied in length of time. An understanding among infantrymen, "live and let live" was contrary to what the high command desired - the "kill or be killed" policy. ³² Fraternization with the enemy, after all, was illegal and with it came serious consequences.

Detrimental to this system of cooperative peace was the sniper, whose harrasing activities quickly dispelled all notions of fraternization, communication and cease-fire. As the "war of technology" developed into 1915, trench raids, hand grenades and trench mortars continued to shatter these unofficial truces. But it was well-aimed rifle-fire that remained consistent on the Western Front and served to remind soldiers, who spent much of their time huddled in dugouts under rubber groundsheets, that they were still at war. ³³ As the ferocity of the war increased, the German and Allied snipers began to disregard all humanity for the war effort. Some snipers, like Will Bird - who, after four successive kills, felt he had his share - were left with the mental anguish of taking down a soldier in cold blood. Likewise, the poet Robert Graves, who had a bathing German in his sights declined the opportunity which was subsequently taken up by his sergeant. ³⁴ Other marksmen, who had the ability to second-guess their conscience, found solace in claiming an "eye for an eye", as in the earlier example by McBride.

³¹ Bird: Ghosts, p.51.

³² Ashworth: Trench Warfare, p.19.

³³ Ibid. p.57.

³⁴ Gilbert: Sniper, p.61

German snipers were equally hostile with their rifle-fire. Charles Stevens recalled an incident where morality was discarded in favour of adding to Canadian casualty lists. After a shell struck a portion of their trench lines, Stevens and his companions fought aggressively in the open and went with the stretcher bearers to retrieve Gallagher, their cook who was injured in the blast. Hoping that the enemy sniper in the area would have remorse, given the Christmas holiday and the extent of injury to the man, the stretcher bearers began to move out in the open to remove Gallagher. Within a moment, the sniper put a bullet through one bearer, Red Taylor, which followed through and struck another. In an instant, the bearers, dropping the stretcher in the middle of the road, rolled off into a nearby ditch.

But the sniper continued to put another bullet into the wounded man on the stretcher and he was wounded by bullets as well as by shell. Well, Harry Boyer, a stretcher bearer who had shared my dugout with me....without any hesitation, [ran] away from the protection of the trench out into the road to dress the new casualties and as he bent over Taylor to dress [his] wounds, the sniper put a bullet through him.³⁵

Reinforcements soon arrived and were able to pull the stretcher in by tying wire to it. Miraculously, Gallagher survived the ordeal on the stretcher; Taylor and Boyer, however, did not.

During the early years of the war, there existed a myth that Germans were "bad shots", though this tale quickly dissipated in light of the increasing number of head wounds in Allied trenches.³⁶ Medical units at Canadian field hospitals were constantly occupied treating head wounds. At Loos, 1915, medical reports listed an unusually high number of head wounds. In the fighting at Hooze in April, 1916 there was a sector of the front that was considered a "snipers paradise...where the marksmanship was so deadly that it was hardly safe to move at all by day."³⁷ In this same sector, the No.1 Canadian General Hospital noted "many wounds of the head and on active

³⁵ NAC, RG41/v.10, CBC in Flanders Fields, "Interview with Charles Stevens, 20th Bn." p.12.

³⁶ Dancocks Welcome, p.87.

³⁷ Ralph Hodder-Williams: Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, 1914-1919, (Toronto, 1923), p.103.

days not infrequently eight skulls were opened to remove missiles.”³⁸ By war’s end, head and neck wounds were the third highest cause of casualties, wounds to the lower and upper extremities being higher.³⁹ Wounds of the head and neck were often so devastating that little could be done to revive individuals. Despite operations and anesthetic, many died shortly after being struck. Of course, for the true sniper at least, a carefully aimed bullet usually resulted in death for it was the intention to shoot to kill.

What made the German snipers’ effect so devastating was the ammunition they used. Nickel-pointed bullets at a high velocity tended to pierce the skin, penetrate the bone and exit the body as precisely as they entered. The same bullet, under lower velocity, had a different effect; it tended to enter cleanly but fractured the interior, tearing the flesh and splintering bone matter. German snipers eventually began using reversible ammunition, or “dum-dum” bullets. These projectiles had a destructive consequence in that they hit their target bluntly, fracturing bone matter, ripping flesh and leaving a gaping exit wound.⁴⁰ Pratt, the soldier mentioned earlier, was likely killed by a reversible bullet.

By the end of 1915, medical units continued to see “unusual” numbers of head wounds among the injured. The propensity of these wounds finally prompted the Canadian Corps to equip their men with steel helmets by January, 1916. They had had only cloth, soft-fitting caps previously. The issue of helmets soon “proved their value and their use was reflected in the marked decrease in the number of head injuries.”⁴¹ Thus, prevention became the first step in keeping casualty figures low and German snipers less successful. Alterations to the Allied parapets soon followed as the Canada

³⁸ Kenneth Cameron: No.1 Canadian General Hospital, 1914-1919, (Sackville, NB, 1938). p.205.

³⁹ Andrew McPhail: Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919 - The Medical Services, (Ottawa, 1925). p.396. These wound statistics account for all types of injury, thus a certain proportion were likely caused by shrapnel as well as gun-fire.

⁴⁰ J. George Adami: War Story of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, Volume I, (London, 1918). p.199.

⁴¹ Cameron: No.1, p.241.

Corps began to develop ways to counter the German sniping threat.

III

With the above mentioned defensive measures in place, the Allies realized the need to curb German sniper activity. While shelling a possible sniper post was always one way to deactivate enemy snipers, it could not be relied on completely. Many loophole plates existed in the German line and by 1915, shelling German snipers usually came prior to a local trench attack.⁴² A more effective means of countering the enemy crackshots was the use of rifle batteries and sniper scopes. The rifle battery consisted of a stationary rifle placed upon a metal frame which was often set up to the rear of the front lines. Left to an N.C.O. and two other ranks for operation, batteries ranged anywhere from three to six along a battalion frontage. For direct fire, pet targets for the rifle battery were "approach roads, assembly places, bridges, crossroads, Headquarters, ration rendezvous and dumps."⁴³ Indirect fire, usually conducted in the dark, tended to focus on weak points in the enemy line and communication trenches. Where the sloping terrain prevented a straight shot (parallel to the earth) a system of measuring the trajectory of the bullet with the contour of the ground allowed for more accurate fire.

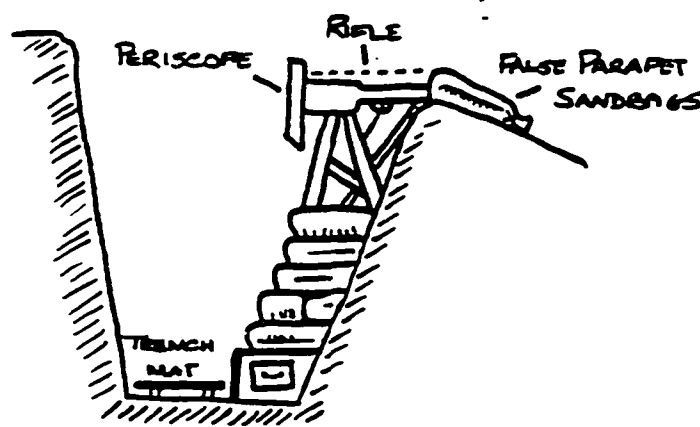
Sniperscopes were primarily used in the front lines to harass the enemy and test his morale.⁴⁴ A periscope was attached to the butt of the rifle and aligned with the sights on the barrel. Then it was placed on a metal frame built into the parapet, and concealed with dummy sandbags. At its best, the sniperscope had an accurate range of 200 yards, though as long as a target was visible, it had potential. The frame allowed the rifleman to spot a target and fire directly at it without ever looking over the top of the trench. While there were mechanisms that allowed for adjustment and elevation, many rifle batteries and sniperscopes were used for indirect fire, at irregular

⁴² Col. Fortescue Duguid: Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1918, (Ottawa, 1938). p.493.

⁴³ NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter XVI - Rifle Batteries, Sniperscopes, Rifle Rests". p.1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.4.

intervals, both night and day. Thus, they did not require a particularly skilled shot to use them. (See diagram)



Source: NAC MG30 E2 v.1 N.A.D. Armstrong Papers "Chapter XVI - Rifle Batteries, Sniperscopes and Rifle Rests" p.2

These batteries and sniperscopes appeared sporadically in the BEF as early as December, 1914, but by 1916 their presence was commonplace in many British and Canadian trenches. ⁴⁵ Snipers eventually took over this responsibility as the war dragged on.

When sniper fire was detected from a German loophole plate, Canadian and British soldiers took to firing upon it as a reminder to the sniper of his identified location. Hesketh-Prichard soon began testing rifles on steel plates, the Jeffreys high velocity .333 and elephant guns providing impressive results. ⁴⁶ Eventually, British and Canadian sharpshooters resorted to using armour piercing ammunition (A.P.A.), which had the effect of curbing German sniper activities. ⁴⁷ Availability of A.P.A. was moderate at this stage of the war, but by mid-1916 it was being used to great effect. In some instances, the impact of the bullet prompted the collapse of the loophole

⁴⁵ Ashworth, Trench Warfare, p.59.

⁴⁶ Hesketh-Prichard, Sniping, p.9

⁴⁷ NAC, MG30 E574, "War Diary of Cpl. J.A. Holland, 07/18/1916".

plate and subsequently, the sniper's post. ⁴⁸

The Allied response to sniping was fairly erratic in the first year of the war. The French Army, though having snipers in the field, failed to use them to any considerable extent because of their "low priority" in the military hierarchy. ⁴⁹ In the BEF, a few select snipers - one in each Company, or four per Battalion - made their first appearance as early as October, 1914. ⁵⁰ Their value at this stage of the war, however, remained unacknowledged. A few units in the BEF did make greater use of marksmen as the year drew to a close, using a mild, flexible form of organization. Regular infantrymen also contributed by honing their rifle skills and shooting at only the most presentable targets.

By early 1915, sniping in the 1st Canadian Division was part of a broader scheme that included aggressive patrols and minor raids to achieve superiority over the enemy. ⁵¹ In this stage of the war company crackshots found a useful role assisting raids and local attacks. Snipers were placed atop the parapet to target retreating Germans after the raiders left out of the trench. ⁵² Their victims were minimal, however. By the summer of 1915, a limited number of Ross Mark III and Lee-Enfield rifles (about 12 each) were fitted with telescopic sights. The relatively low number of telescopic-sighted rifles may be explained by the problem of finding the proper combination of sight and rifle. In December, 1915, eight scopes were returned to Ordnance Stores by the 2nd Brigade because they did not fit the Ross. ⁵³ A request to find the appropriate sights subsequently followed and more telescopic sighted rifles made their way to the Canadian trenches by 1916. Skilled marksmen in the BEF, particularly hunters, began sniping at their own pleasure since there was no formal organization in the military hierarchy. The keenest of hunters

⁴⁸ NAC, RG9 III C3/4104/15/2, "Summary of Intelligence - 4th Inf. Bde., 05/11/1916".

⁴⁹ Gilbert: Sniper, p.44.

⁵⁰ Ashworth: Trench Warfare, p.57.

⁵¹ Duguid: Official, p.183.

⁵² Bird: Ghosts, p.31.

⁵³ NAC, RG9 III C3/4166/19/9, "2nd Inf. Bde. C.M.R. to G.O.C. Canadian Corps, 12/15/1915".

soon realized that they could make their best scores when a new German battalion was entering the line. It did not take the enemy long to realize their carelessness, but many a sniper in British and Canadian trenches took advantage of the initial opportunities offered to them.

These early exploits by battalion marksmen eventually enabled a previously ignorant high command to see the value of sniping in trench warfare. Suddenly, orders were being issued to brigade Officers to deploy their snipers as quickly as possible.⁵⁴ Skilled shots were soon fitted with telescopic-sighted rifles, and their activity promoted down to Battalion level. It took the genius of Hesketh-Prichard to take the incipient steps toward standardized sniping.

If we organize sniping, we can get solid and tangible results by killing the enemy and saving the lives of our own men. Only those who have been in a trench opposite Hun snipers that had the mastery, know what a hell life can be made under these conditions.
55

Though the informal organization of sniping in the BEF offered some substantial results through 1915, the German marksman retained his superiority over the Allies. What was needed was a systematic organization that could be monitored and controlled. A form of education and training was required if the Allies were to match their skilled counterparts.

In sum, the outbreak of war in 1914 brought on a year of missed opportunities. The hope for a quick and decisive victory on both sides was immediately shattered by the events in the fall and winter of 1914. The few major campaigns - retreat to Mons, the battle of the Marne - ended in sudden standoffs that prompted a "race to the sea". With the shallow "S" shape of trenches slinking their way across the fields of France and Flanders, the phenomenon of trench warfare - exsistant in the American Civil War and the Boer War - was resurrected. "Indeed, the entire trench system was simply a

⁵⁴ NAC, RG9 III C3/4140/10/13, "2nd Division to 6th Inf. Bde., 11/15/1915".

⁵⁵ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.23.

response to the destruction of modern firearms.”⁵⁶ And so began a painful lesson for the Allies. They soon learned that sniping, by way of the German example, was a feature of trench warfare that could only be controlled if they surpassed it. It took some time to realize this fact, but by 1915 the British and Canadians had developed certain countermeasures in reaction to the German sniper. Unfortunately, these were not enough; defensive responses only solved half the problem. As amateur snipers took to the field, there was a sudden realization that they were essential to the war effort. By way of a hard lesson the process of sniper evolution was initiated; the modern sniper had been born on the Western Front by 1915.

⁵⁶ Gilbert: Sniper, p.42.

Chapter III

Sniper Training

After the high command realized the importance of sniping in the trenches, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) took necessary steps to make it part of the military agenda. It was clear in these early stages that Germany held the upper hand in sniping on the Western Front: surpassing them was the prime objective. However, such a measure required an organized system of sniping that would guarantee British and Canadian success. The BEF was the first military establishment to create an organized school for sniping and it was from this initial breakthrough that a number of smaller sniping schools - including those in the Canada Corps - came into being. This chapter will, therefore, deal with the complete training of the Canadian sniper. First will come an examination of the First Army Sniping School for the BEF and its founder, Major H. Hesketh-Prichard. It was from his brainchild that the concept of organized sniping grew, not only for the Canada Corps but for the entire Allied component. The remainder will examine the selection of individuals, the training program, the equipment used and the sniping competitions that kept these specialists' skills up to the mark. The consequences of this training were three-fold; first, training the individual sniper enabled him to surpass the enemy at a game which the Allies were

currently losing; second, sniper status went from sporadic crackshooting to full recognition as a component of the BEF (and, subsequently the CEF); and third, this organizing and institutionalizing eventually laid the groundwork for what has become the modern sniper.

I

Sniping on the Western Front in the early months of the war was rather sporadic for the British and Commonwealth forces. The irregular shooting by a battalion marksman was all that existed in any form of sniping. As the encouragement to use sniping more frequently increased, the number of special marksmen began to rise slowly. However, more were required and establishing a sniping school in the British Army was the first step in achieving success over the enemy in trench warfare. Major H. Hesketh-Prichard of the BEF ventured to France in May of 1915 to examine the conditions on the Western Front with an intent to show the high command the benefits of having an organized sniping unit in the field. Armed with telescopic-sighted rifles, Hesketh-Prichard discovered a consistent problem among battalion sharpshooters; many lacked sufficient knowledge to operate and maintain these specially sighted rifles that, in late-1914, were rare at the Front.¹ He was eager to point out to these men that the accuracy of a rifle's shot depended upon the user's ability to have it set properly.

For the benefit of the untechnical reader it will be well here to remark that if a telescopic sight set upon a 4-inch base is one-hundredth of an inch out of its true alignment, it will shoot incorrectly at the extent of 9 inches at 100 yards, and of course 18 inches at 200 yards, and 54 inches at 600 yards.²

This attention to detail was critical on the Western Front since the distance of

¹ Maj. H. Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping in France, (London, 1920). 4-5, 31-32, 148. Examples of problems abound. Upon questioning a soldier armed with a telescopically sighted rifle, Hesketh-Prichard was surprised to discover that the soldier had no idea of how to set the elevation drum. In this particular instance, the individual had the sight set for 100 yards while the German trenches were at a distance of 400 yards.

² Ibid., p.5.

the German trenches sometimes exceeded 600 yards, at times even 1000 yards. While it is clear that there were some telescopic-sighted rifles in the field as early as 1914, the effect which these weapons had was minimized by the operator's lack of knowledge on how to use it.

These inconsistencies, along with the mounting casualties inflicted by German snipers, were enough to earn the Major a promotion as "sniping expert" in the Third Army. His job required him to survey the various units in the BEF and instruct officers and other ranks how to shoot with precision. There were problems, however. Because there was no established sniping component in the Army, there began a long and arduous process of creating one.³ Often, Hesketh-Prichard's work was subject to the whims of a commanding officer as to whether such instruction would take place.⁴ Working with the VII Corps, Hesketh-Prichard's sniping unit made very effective gains in keeping the German snipers and general infantry from popping their heads over the parapet. His tour through the trenches kept him busy informing those equipped with special rifles and setting the telescopic sights at the proper points. The sniping movement spread rapidly thereafter⁵ and it was not long before the Major began searching for a permanent school where he could educate officers on the practicality of sniping. By the fall of 1915, British Army Headquarters began petitioning units in the BEF for their input on the value of a sniping school. The Canadian contingent was included and their response was more than favourable. In reply to a British Second Army memo, dated 13 November, 1915, the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade offered a variety of reasons as to why a sniping school should be established. Among them was a requirement for better trained sniping officers, the need to utilize N.C.O.s and men with

³ Hesketh-Prichard, in fact, had to take a demotion in order to see out his sniping dreams. His pay was cut as was his rank (to Captain) and it was not until November of 1916 that sniping was officially recognized as a "provisional establishment". See page 76.

⁴ Adrian Gilbert: Sniper, (New York, 1994). p.48.

⁵ Ibid., p.13. Hesketh-Prichard was moved to a variety of units in the BEF before returning to the Third Army. See pages 13-17 for further details of this rotation.

competitive shooting experience and an overall desire to continue the use, and maintenance of telescopic sights. ⁶ Another memo from the 1st Canadian Division, dated 27th November, 1915, was equally supportive, despite the presence of a number of skilled crackshots with telescopic-sighted rifles in the Division. ⁷

Toward the end of 1915, after establishing a sniping and observation course for officers in the Third Army, Hesketh-Prichard was attached to the First Army for the same purpose. The intention of these courses was to instruct potential sniping officers who would then take the acquired knowledge back to their units and educate the sharpshooters in their own battalion. Some units, like the XI Corps, continued Hesketh-Prichard's work with their own short courses consisting of five or more officers and up to 20 men. These "Corps Schools" eventually contributed to the creation of the First Army School of Scouting, Observation and Sniping (⁸) during the summer of 1916.

Located on a plateau in the Pas de Calais region, the First Army S.O.S. found its closest neighbour to be the village of Lingham. Hesketh-Prichard and his colleague Lieutenant Gray (from the Scottish Rifles) set up the school with a constantly changing staff of instructors. It was difficult to retain the same staff members on a routine basis as many instructors were forced to leave the school when their units were assigned to new areas. This activity, after all, was considered "unofficial" until 24th November, 1916 when the War Office finally acknowledged sniping as an established component in the British Army. Nevertheless, among these instructors at the First Army S.O.S. were two Canadians; the first a Scouting Officer from the 31st Bn. by the name of Lieut. W.B. Curtis and the second, a Sgt. Foster whose language skills were influential in the instruction of some Portuguese units attending

⁶ NAC, RG 9 III C3/4021/49/2, "2nd Army to 1st Canadian Division, 12/22/1915".

⁷ NAC, RG 9 III C3/4021/49/2, "1st Cdn. Div. School for Snipers 11/27/1915".

⁸ Noted hereafter as First Army S.O.S.

the school.⁹ At Second Army Sniping School, four of the five instructors were Canadian. Among them was Maj. N.A.D. Armstrong of the 16th Battalion whose expertise in precision shooting came from his hunting experiences in British Columbia. His knowledge of rifles and sniping made the Second Army Sniping School one of the most efficient schools in France and Flanders.¹⁰

The course at the First Army S.O.S. lasted 17 days and was intended to instruct officers and N.C.O.'s who would later instruct their own units. It was a requirement that these students already be good shots and those that lacked the ability were returned to their unit (though this was rarely the case).¹¹ Among the subjects addressed at the school were the care and maintenance of firearms, proper use of open and telescopic sights, shooting and target practice, trench activities, observation and scouting, movement, and camouflage.¹² The details of these aspects of training will be addressed later when discussing the training program. Another issue that factored into the First Army S.O.S. curriculum was physical exercise which the British solved by installing football fields. Also included were routine marches and ju-jitsu training.

In its incipience, the Canadian contingent was assigned to the British Army and thus, their instruction at the First Army S.O.S. came alongside their British counterparts. The Canadian response to sniping was immense and Hesketh-Prichard credited them for their skill and desire for this fine art:

There is no doubt that as a sniper, scout or intelligence officer, the Canadian shows the greatest initiative, and during the long period, well over a year, which they remained in the Army, our school was

⁹ For a brief time a Capt. T.B. Barrie of the Canadian Highlanders also assisted the staff while on loan from the 4th Canadian Division. He first visited the school as a student and later won two M.C.'s for his work. See Hesketh-Prichard, p.86.

¹⁰ NAC, RG24/1883A/26, Sniping & Marksmanship, "Correspondence: Sniping and Scouting Schools". Second Army Sniping School was formed shortly before First Army S.O.S. in December of 1915 at Mont-des-Cats. Based on Armstrong's papers (NAC, MG30 E2), Second Army S.O.S. followed a similar curriculum though the course lasted only five days. We will see more of Armstrong's papers in subsequent chapters since his recollections are about sniping in the field as opposed to Hesketh-Prichard's which focus a great deal upon the First Army S.O.S.

¹¹ Ibid., p.144.

¹² NAC, RG9 III C3/4021/49/2, Hesketh-Prichard: Chapter VII.

voluntarily visited by two Canadians for every one Britisher. ¹³

Several Canadian officers and N.C.O.s attended the First Army S.O.S. for instruction. As the war progressed and, as sniping became more important, schools were established throughout France and in England as well. ¹⁴ Corps Schools developed ubiquitously along the Western Front and built upon the knowledge gained from the First Army S.O.S. In the field, the Canadian Corps established its own sniper schools at Bernes-en-Artois, Mont des Cats etc.. Back in England, Canadian marksmen were trained at the School of Musketry in Hythe, and at Bramshott while in Canada, a school was established in Gagetown, New Brunswick. These institutions would eventually turn out some of the best Allied snipers.

One of the first Canadian sniping schools to develop was at the Canadian Corps School at Bernes-en-Artois in September, 1916. A sniping wing was added which was to be billeted and administered by the Infantry School but taught by sniping instructors. The staff consisted of a Chief Sniping Instructor (Captain) and an Assistant (Lieutenant), an Armourer Sergeant and two N.C.O.'s. ¹⁵ After obtaining a plot of land from the IV Imperial Corps who had occupied it previously, the Corps School built the sniping wing from the remnants left behind by the British forces. Though the surrounding terrain was appropriate for map reading, observation and tactical exercises, the condition of the target ranges was below standard: targets were poorly constructed and the butts caved in during wet weather. So faulty were the ranges that the first class of students was put to work rebuilding new emplacements due to a lack of Fatigue Men. This activity, however, came to an abrupt end when Corps Commander, General Sir Julian Byng, toured the area. Displeased by the fact that skilled marksmen were doing heavy labour

¹³ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping p.75.

¹⁴ Ian Skennerton: The British Sniper, (London, 1984). p.39.

¹⁵ NAC, RG24/1840/G.A.Q. 10-37, "Canadian Corps Scouting, Sniping and Observation School". As the school grew the staff was increased to two more officers, one Chief Sniping Instructor (Major), one C.Q.M.S., four Sergeants, an Armourer Staff Sergeant and two Fatigue Men.

intended for Fatigue Men, he ordered the workers to stop and continue with their training. After viewing a proposed plan to rebuild the ranges, Byng had a construction crew completing the renovations within ten days. All of the required fixtures and supplies were allocated and the number of targets increased from 10 to 25, each with proper and sturdy emplacements.¹⁶ A 100 yard range was groomed for short shooting while a 500 yard range was employed for distance practice. The course was four weeks long and open to only a handful of officers and other ranks, although as the war progressed, the number of attendants increased. It was clear from the start that the objective of this school was to further the skill of already exceptional marksmen. The selection of such individuals was the first step in the development of a new sniper.

II

Choosing the individuals for sniping school was rather elementary in the beginning. Many battalions were requested to send a given number of N.C.O.'s and other ranks based on their shooting ability and potential to become snipers. Often a memo arrived from Division Headquarters listing a restricted number of vacancies for officers and other ranks. Names were submitted by a given deadline and those selected were given the required leave. Students were instructed to bring with them their own sighted rifle and any other telescopic sighted rifles used in their battalion.¹⁷ The remainder of their kit included a notebook, ground sheet, blankets and an additional 100 rounds of small arms ammunition (S.A.A.) over and above their standard issue.¹⁸ Meeting at a certain checkpoint, students would be transported to a particular school (eg. Bernes-en-Artois) where instruction

¹⁶ Ibid. The butts on these ranges were constructed with the finest quality and despite being fired at regularly for two consecutive years, not once was it necessary to repair or rebuild them.

¹⁷ Specially sighted rifles were in demand at home and abroad at this time and sniping schools could not provide a standard supply of weapons to teach with. Moreover, due to the variety of not only rifles at the front but sights as well, it was important that the student bring the weapon that he knew and would use long after the course was over. See NAC, RG9 III C3/4057/35/3, "1st Division to 2nd Inf. Bde."

¹⁸ NAC, RG9 III C3/4031/8/26, "1st Division HQ to 1st, 2nd, 3rd Inf. Bde., 04/02/1918".

commenced.

The first few days of the school determined who lacked the ability and only the truly proficient continued on. Required skills for the prospective sniper included patience, a knowledge of the country, good marksmanship, self reliance, intelligence and cunning and good map reading skills. ¹⁹ Furthermore, educated marksmen were desirable, particularly those with an ability to read and write, though monitoring such skills was at times difficult. Nominal roles and scores from battalions reveal the true qualities of the sniper. A nominal role from the 3rd (Toronto) Bn., dated 10 October, 1915 indicates that those with exceptional shooting ability and adequate learning skills usually developed into proficient snipers. Those individuals interested in other aspects of intelligence (eg. running or patrolling) or those exhibiting nervousness or lacking confidence were often transferred out to another company. Of 39 students in the scout and sniping unit of the 3rd Bn., ¹¹ were dismissed as unsuitable for sniping duties. ²⁰ Shooting competitions during training also weeded out unworthy marksmen. The grading scale at sniping school ranged from "indifferent" to "fair" to "very fair" to "good" to "very good": those scoring "indifferent" in shooting were dismissed. For example, Pte. A. Folkard of the 5th Bn., attending the 19th class at 2nd Army School of Sniping, scored exceptionally high in the sniperscope category but ranked "indifferent" on shooting ability. His snap shooting skills, particularly at moving objects, were poor, and thus, it was concluded that he "would not make a good sniper." ²¹

One of the most important requirements for attending sniping school was experience from the front. It was not the intention to train the rank and file, thus new recruits and those just arriving from overseas were excluded from the selection process. Training was intended to test one's given ability

¹⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/2, "Notes on Sniping from the 3rd Cavalry Division".

²⁰ NAC, RG9 III C3/4041/17/8, "3rd (Toronto) Battalion Scouts and Snipers, 10/10/1915".

²¹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4057/35/3, "1st Division HQ to 1st, 2nd, 3rd Inf.Bde., 05/24/1915".

rather than train the inexperienced individual. ²² Those who were selected were typically taken from the battalion's Intelligence Section which handled matters of intelligence, sniping, scouting and observation. It was also preferred that officers selected for a course be interested in obtaining the title of Battalion Intelligence Officer or Battalion Scout Officer.

Knowledge on the use of telescopic-sighted rifles was also a necessity. As sniping schools came into being, the quality of registrants varied. In early 1916, memos from 1st Division Headquarters revealed a displeasure with some of the students enrolled at the school.

The Army Commander is anxious that more care should be taken in the selection of Officers and men detailed to attend the school. The present class contains many men who had never previously used telescopic sights and a number of these men were, in addition, indifferent shots. ²³

One of the reasons why Pte. Folkard scored so poorly on his shooting skills was because he was inexperienced with the telescopic sight. He "claimed to have been in possession of a telescopic sighted rifle for six months yet had no idea how to adjust it for elevation." ²⁴ Lacking sufficient knowledge to set the sight properly, his accuracy was thus altered. 1st Division HQ did make an effort to remedy this situation by requesting a list of snipers (those with formal training and those without), and a list of telescopic-sighted rifles belonging to that division. It should be noted, however, that problems such as these were not entirely commonplace in the Canadian Corps. The opportunity for sniping attracted some of Canada's big-game hunters who, with previous experience in telescopic sights and stalking, were practically self-trained snipers by the time they reached the front. ²⁵ In fact, many hunters,

²² NAC, RG24/1840/G.A.Q. 10-37, "Cdn. Corps Scouting, Sniping and Observation School".

²³ NAC, RG9 III C3/4057/35/3, "1st Division HQ to 2nd Inf. Bde., 12/01/1916".

²⁴ NAC, RG9 III C3/4057/35/3, "1st Division HQ to 1st, 2nd, 3rd Inf. Bde., 05/15/1916". Another example is cited in this document regarding a Pte. W.E. Rogers of the 4th Bn. He had been sent to the school with a Ross rifle fitted for a Winchester telescopic sight but with no sight attached to it. Due to the make-up of this particular telescopic sight, the open sight was removed and thus the rifle was rendered useless for any aspect of training.

²⁵ Gilbert: Sniper, p.59.

poachers and competitive riflemen were sought for sniping schools. Initially, it was difficult to find "quality marksmen" as they were often protected by their battalion officers. ²⁶ Crackshots were an asset to any unit and relinquishing them for school was not always easy. As sniping continued to take on a more organized form, "freeing up" sharpshooters for sniping school became less problematic. As later chapters will show, Canadian snipers were among the best marksmen on the Western Front.

III

The training program or syllabus of the schools is what ultimately refined the skills of the already proficient shooter. Lectures and practice work (ie. range firing) were the two basic components of sniping schools. During a four week course, lectures averaged one per weekday for the first two weeks, though occasionally one or two days were reserved exclusively for field practice. Classwork included all aspects of sniping and intelligence: map reading and drawing, using air photographs, signalling, night movement, information and reports, patrol formations etc. ²⁷ The time in which lectures took place varied by the days' activities and the routine physical exercises that came alongside the training. In most cases, a final exam would be taken at the end of the course. This measure was first adopted by Hesketh-Prichard at First Army S.O.S. to get an understanding of how much the students learned from the course. By his recollection the marks were impressive: "the least successful member...obtained seventy-five of a hundred marks". ²⁸ In the Canadian Corps, more specifically, 56 students out of 65 scored between "fair and "good" on the "General Knowledge" component of the course. ²⁹ Moreover, one student set a school record with his score in the "very good" ranking.

²⁶ Ibid., p.66.

²⁷ NAC, RG9 III C3/4206/9/3, "Divisional Scout and Sniper Training School - Syllabus of training for Battalion Sniper Scouts".

²⁸ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.78. These exams continued through the course of the war until the school closed down after the Armistice.

²⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4064/15/3, "1st Division to 2nd Inf. Bde., 08/12/17".

Field practice comprised the majority of the course work. Care and cleaning of the rifle was the first lesson students learned as a highly polished bore ensured the maximum potential of the weapon. Instructors addressed common problems with rifles that could be controlled by their users. An oily barrel, for example, put a certain degree of resistance on the bullet and its direction could be swayed. Likewise, an oily breech promoted "seizing" thereby contributing to a blow-back that resulted in a loss of power and accuracy. Also, after a series of tests at First Army S.O.S., the idea of fixing the bayonet to the rifle was discarded because the additional weight on the end of the barrel altered the shot.³⁰ Awareness of problems such as these ensured that the prospective sniper would make lasting use of his equipment. Other issues that students were made aware of were proper hold of the rifle, differences in the makes of ammunition, and the effect which warped woodwork had on a rifle's accuracy. Metallic deposits and erosion were two common unavoidable problems. Students were, nevertheless, made aware of these obstacles, particularly the latter since the life of the barrel depended on the degree of erosion.

While shooting continued to be the critical exercise in the making of a sniper, attention was paid to the care and use of optical sights, use of equipment, movement/stalking, and establishing sniper and observation posts. Most of the time spent at S.O.S. school was on the range but when awaiting their respective turns, students would be instructed on a variety of other features such as the use of armour-piercing ammunition (A.P.A.), sketching, taking bearings, and map-reading. It was required that all students bring with them an open-sighted and telescopic-sighted rifle. The former was used during the first eight days to prove that the individual could shoot accurately. This exercise was called "Grouping" whereby a man's accuracy was measured by the number of shots he put into a given group (eg. three inch group per 100 yds.). This process determined his capability at a

³⁰ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.223-224.

short distance and his accuracy would thus taper off with increased distance. By addressing the shooter's flaws (eg. point of aim, trigger release etc.) corrections could be made and accuracy improved.

Only after having impressed the trainers with his preliminary shooting would the student graduate to a telescopic-sighted rifle. The reasons for such a rule were two-fold: first, a rifle is apt to become less accurate the more it is fired, and its veracity could not be wasted; second, putting a specialized rifle in the hands of an incapable soldier was both a waste of time and resources. ³¹ On a miniature range (approx. 100 yds.) students would practice snapshooting and firing upon bullseye and loop-hole targets. Grouping would identify shooting errors and later, practice would continue on dummy heads and other applications. ³² At First Army S.O.S., Hesketh-Prichard and his staff made an effort to take students out on the range and show them their target scores rather than have them signalled back. Such a measure, it was believed, was the best way to make a sniper aware of his results. The larger, open ranges (approx. 200-600 yds.) were reserved for use of optical sights on targets and applications. Firing at the most distant targets (500-600 yds.) was eventually discontinued because the chances of hitting a German head at a distance of 600 yards with any degree of wind was highly unlikely. Moreover, continual practice at such a distance would only wear down the barrel and minimize the rifle's precision.

Since a sniper's best work was often done at times of dusk or dark, night firing became a part of the schools' curriculum. After all, the superstition that frowned upon lighting three cigarettes with the same match came from the trenches of the Great War. The strike of the match at night attracted the sniper's attention, the second cigarette allowed him to aim and the third culminated in the delivery of the bullet. This segment of training was often reserved for only the most skilled marksmen. At the Canadian

³¹ Ibid., p.145, 150.

³² Some schools resorted to using tins on a stick in place of proper applications due to a lack of resources during the war. See Hesketh-Prichard p.149.

Corps school in Aldershot, for example, only four snipers per class were eligible to practice night firing. The following is an excerpt from Lieut. J.S. Cameron's (44th Bn.) notes from the CEF's sniping school in April, 1916:

The firing took place from a trench at the 200 yards firing point. Lights were flashed in the E. trenches representing a man lighting a cigarette. A frame house with a door, windows and loop-holes was created behind the E. trench. A figure in the doorway with the lights on represented an officer coming in after making his rounds and flashing an electric torch. Figures represent men hammering posts and when fire is opened on them they run to either flank. Then figures of men appear above the E. parapet manning the trench, and machine guns at emplacements open fire, (represented in E. trench by tin can). At each stage of the firing Very lights are sent up and keep a steady light. By their aid it was quite easy to get a good sight, but one could get no indication of where a bullet struck and a man would have to know his rifle well to do good shooting at night with it. ³³

At the sniping wing of the Canadian Corps School, scores in night firing were impressive. In one instance, several bullseyes and inner rings were hit even when the target rings became invisible to the naked eye. ³⁴ Lieut. Harrison (26th Bn.) and Sgt. Morris (28th Bn.) showed exceptional skill in their shooting ability, the latter being considered the "best all round shot in the class". Night firing was also simulated in the daytime via the use of "night glasses". Designed by Major Crum of the King's Royal Rifles, these goggles had darkened lenses to imitate the effect of night. This procedure provided officers as well as other ranks with an understanding of the movements a sniper must make in the dark.

Educating students on the care and use of sights was equally important. Based on Hesketh-Prichard's experience, the limited number of rifles with telescopic sights was in the wrong hands at times and was rendered useless. Only those riflemen who possessed prior shooting skills could make good use of a telescopic-sighted rifle. For example, Pte. H.W. McBride of the 21st Bn., observed a pair of snipers shooting at German

³³ Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum (RWRM, hereafter), "Synopsis of Notes by Lieut. J. Scott Cameron, 44th Bn. CEF on Sniping Course Aldershot, March 21st to April 1st, 1916 and Report of Same". p.3.

³⁴ NAC, RG9 III C3/4114/46/2, "2nd Division to 4th, 5th, 6th Inf. Bde., 06/16/1917".

targets near Messines Ridge in September, 1915. Using Short-Magazine-Lee-Enfield rifles (SMLE) mounted with "Stanley-London" optic sights, the pair continued to fire upon targets 2000 yards away. When questioned on their actions, the two responded that they were under orders. McBride concluded, as would any other marksman, that firing at such a distance was both a waste of time and ammunition, not to mention the life of the barrel. ³⁵ Instructors were quick to identify that a telescopic sight would not turn a bad shot into a good one. A bullet's accuracy is just as equal whether the rifle has an optic sight or an open one; the lenses on an optic sight merely provide a clearer definition of the target. ³⁶ Students were given instruction on the different types of optical sights (eg. Warner & Swasey, Aldis, Periscopic Prism) and how to adjust and keep them clean. However, emphasis was placed on the optic sight which the individual brought with him to the school.

Instruction was, at times, difficult due to the placements of sights on the rifles. Whereas most rifles today have scopes mounted on the top center of the barrel, the majority of British and Canadian service rifles were mounted on the left. This was problematic for a variety of reasons, the first and foremost being that it was impossible to see through the loophole plate. ³⁷ Telescopic sights mounted top-center became more frequent as the war went on, but they were still outnumbered by the left-side scopes. Efforts to change them permanently to a top-center mount would have been too time consuming since many armouries were already equipped for left-side production. Snipers who preferred to use the left eye for viewing posed another problem for instructors and left-mounted telescopic sights. Handling of the rifle was

³⁵ Herbert W. McBride: A Rifleman Went To War, (Mt. Ida, AK, 1987). p.79-80. McBride was a US Army Captain who joined the CEF in 1914 when the war broke out. He was a skilled marksman in his native country, attending several shooting competitions, including Bisley. When the US entered the war in 1917, he left his Canadian outfit to join his fellow countrymen in battle.

³⁶ RWRM, "Synopsis of Notes...". p.1.

³⁷ The reasons for the left mount sights have never been fully clarified. Hesketh-Prichard discounts it as an error from an individual in the War Office who knew little about telescopic sights. See Hesketh-Prichard, p.145-147. Contrary to Hesketh-Prichard's opinion, it is possible that left-mounted sights were used to allow the rifleman to use his open sights as well.

therefore awkward and aiming made difficult. Nevertheless, the quality of instruction never wavered in light of these complications. The majority of students scored well on their targets. The 19th class at Second Army Sniping School (May 14-19, 1916), for instance, showed three out of four students ranked "Good" on their shooting ability, one step below the highest possible rank. ³⁸ At the 9th Sniping and Scouting Course at the Canadian Corps School (August, 1917) six out of 65 students ranked in the "very good" category - a school record. ³⁹ Instructors were impressed with this statistic because the musketry test was a difficult one that attempted to maintain a high standard in marksmanship. ⁴⁰ Students who excelled in this category were usually permanently fitted with a telescopic-sighted rifle before they returned to the Front. Scores from the Canadian Corps' Sniping Schools were generally impressive, the highest belonging to a Cpl. Roy of the 31st Bn. at 98.7% (233/236 targets). ⁴¹ Moreover, the overall combined average score of the top four marksmen from all 17 classes totaled 60.7%. On a general level, at First Army S.O.S., Hesketh-Prichard surmizes that for every 100 students attending the school, some 75 returned as "quite useful shots." ⁴²

Making an accurate shot was much more than simply aiming and pulling the trigger. Mother nature always tested a sniper's ability with a gust of wind. Even the slightest breeze could make a shot go awry. Thus, it was necessary to teach the sniper to adapt to wind conditions. Though a difficult lesson to teach, many instructors found the best method in letting the students shoot for themselves. A preliminary lesson would take place on the range where an instructor would fire a shot at a target with students looking on via telescopes. Dust would appear on the region struck and through the course of continued practice, students would adjust their aim to account for

³⁸ NAC, RG9 III C3/4057/35/3, "1st Division HQ to 1st, 2nd, 3rd Inf. Bde., 05/24/1916".

³⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4064/15/3, "1st Division to 2nd Inf. Bde., 08/12/1917". p.1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.1.

⁴¹ NAC, RG24/1883A/26, "Canadian Corps Observation, Scouting and Sniping School, Record of 4 Best Shots in Each Class, November 1916 to November 1918".

⁴² Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.150-151.

the wind. At First Army S.O.S., the staff allowed for six different strengths of wind: gentle, moderate, fresh, strong, very strong, and gale. ⁴³ Students were tested at all levels of strength for improving accuracy. Practical exercises such as these further enhanced the sniper's skills in the field.

IV

Once the basic skills were conveyed to students, other exercises in sniping commenced. The accessories a sniper used in his work included a soft, closefitting cap, a luminous compass and watch, field glasses or telescope, an entrenching tool, a 6" map of the area, a mask and a set of wire cutters. The soft caps were required as the firm, brimmed caps often gave a sniper's head away, particularly when sunlight would reflect off it. Moreover, many caps were adorned with cap badges, revealing the soldier's regiment; these also attracted the sun's rays. A later chapter will discuss the role of caps and badges in trench sniping and intelligence.

Special attention was given to the care of telescopes at sniping school. Telescopes were mainly used by scouts but a sniper's duties dually included observation. Known as a "stalking telescope", these vision enhancing tools were used by snipers on reconnaissance missions or for routine observation. They varied in shape and size but were critical to the Intelligence Unit of any battalion. Daily activities of the German line were observed this way and many a sniper used them when working with a companion. Care and cleaning was the first lesson in handling these instruments as any damage to the soft lens inside would render them useless. Lenses that collected debris, which frequently happened given the conditions on the Western Front, were to be cleaned carefully with a leather chamois or like material. Attention to detail was critical here because many of the telescopes' lenses were scratched from using a soiled cloth or the wrong material. ⁴⁴ The lenses could be removed for further cleaning but again, attention to detail would make the difference in

⁴³ Ibid., p.160.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.240. In Appendix C, Hesketh-Prichard estimates that over 50 per cent of the telescopes in use were damaged in this way.

the telescope's effectiveness. The lenses were not to be touched by fingertips or thumbs and there was an emphasis to keep them dry. With the often damp conditions in the trenches, it was easy for condensation to build up inside the telescope. To avoid excessive contact with dirty or moist conditions, snipers were required to carry telescopes in their cases and on their person. Following these instructions usually ensured the longevity of the equipment.

Learning how to use the telescope was the next lesson, for it was far more complex than simply looking through the view finder. Most telescopes came with a sun shade to cover the upper half of the cylinder. It was critical to employ this feature as the metal or glossy parts of the telescope attracted sunlight, and subsequently, an enemy sniper's bullet.⁴⁵ Extension sun shades were also recommended, especially for blocking the sun when it was above or rising behind enemy lines. Using a rest for the instrument was preferable as it avoided excessive movement or jerking by the operator, and it kept the field of view steady. Magnification was best used at a low power, due to the weather conditions in France; changing weather often led to a change in visibility. Furthermore, night viewing was much clearer on a low power. Instructors emphasized the use of peripheral vision when looking through the view finder since it was more apt to catch sudden movements in the enemy line. Lastly, the best times for using the stalking telescope were dusk and dawn and after rain showers. A fresh sprinkle of rain was particularly valuable because it revealed gaps in barbed wire and footpaths from enemy patrols.

The ability to master movement and stalking was critical for a successful sniper. Students learned quickly that failure to be patient and precise could have deadly consequences. Sudden movements, either by the sniper or by something in his surroundings, could nullify hours of work and

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.242.

instantly result in death. ⁴⁶ Successful stalking involved a series of procedures that required the individual to locate the object, judge its distance and study the ground to be covered. Spotting a distinctive feature, sometimes two, was encouraged for maintaining direction. The study of winds and light conditions was critical due to constantly changing weather patterns. Fortunately, a sniper could find some protective comfort in the use of camouflage which continued to increase in importance after 1916. ⁴⁷ Though the French had mastered camouflage, it was used on a large scale by the British at the Special Works Park. The key function of this department was to produce protective covering for guns and trench posts but also to assist the sniper by making canvas greatcoats painted in earth tones for concealment. Hoods and /or protective colouring would assist in disguising the head and specially painted gloves would hide the hands. Hesketh-Prichard indicates that demonstrations in camouflage interested many a student. The following is an incident that occurred during training at First Army S.O.S.:

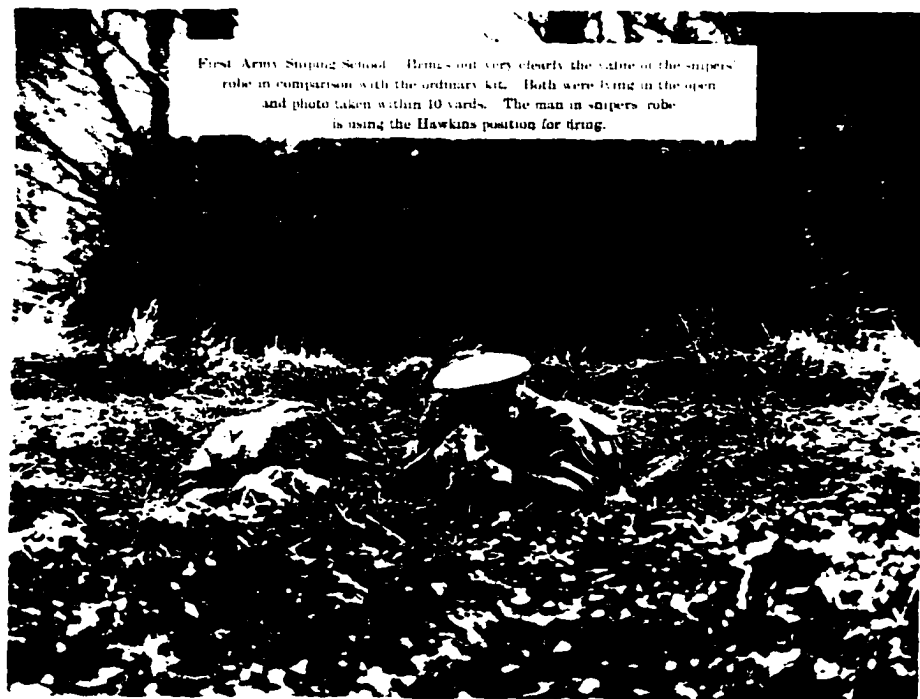
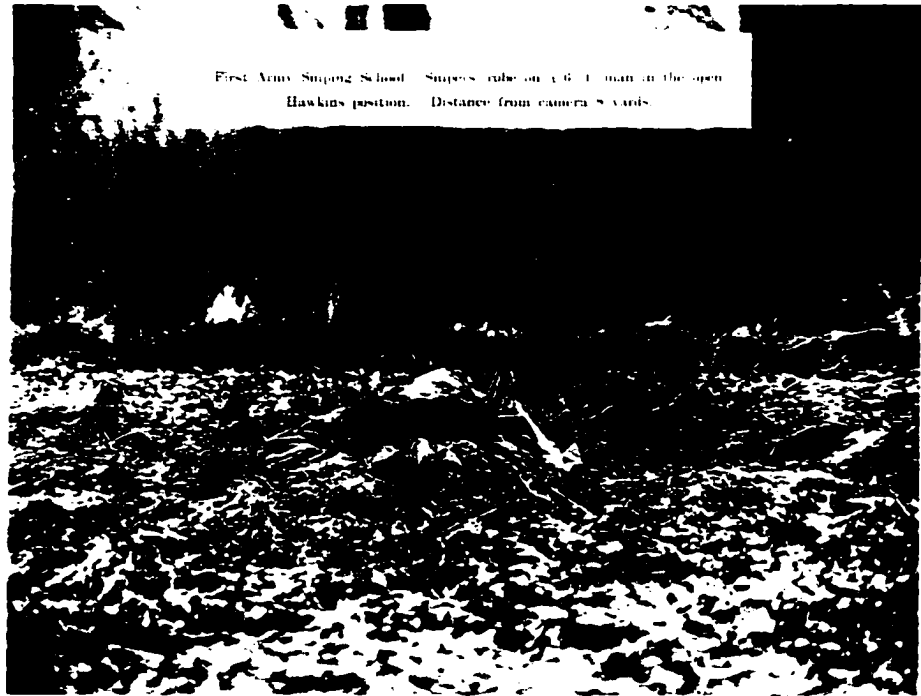
Often the whole class arrived within twenty yards of a man lying within full view without being able to spot him. On one occasion during a big demonstration, one of the staff was lying out in a coat of the colour and contour of sandbags on a top of a trench, and the whole party of staff officers [was] all round him without having spotted his whereabouts. When I pointed him out a foreign officer who was present, and who evidently did not understand me, thought I was referring to an object a little further on, and in order to see it better he actually leaped on to the camouflaged man! ⁴⁸

However, camouflage had its limits as it was always susceptible to changing conditions at the front. Applying surrounding vegetation to the camouflaged body and head could temporarily solve this problem. (The pictures on the following page will give the reader an idea of the effectiveness of camouflage in vegetation.) To move forward a sniper was given two options; first, hands stretched out and moving in a snake-like fashion; the second, by pulling the

⁴⁶ RWRM, "Synopsis of Notes..." p.2-3.

⁴⁷ Gilbert: Sniper, p.76.

⁴⁸ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.157.



Photos Courtesy of National Archives of Canada. Negative No C144068 & C144070

body forward with the elbows in a "grasshopper style."⁴⁹ At all times snipers were to avoid sudden jerks and should they slip, lying motionless was the safest reaction. Tall grass and vegetation was parted from the roots and the best movement was made when cloud cover drifted overhead.⁵⁰ Stalking and movement were practiced in flag stealing competitions, stalking through the sentry lines and pitting sections of stalkers against each other.⁵¹ Movement did have some set-backs as the war progressed. The threat of gas following the incident at Ypres in 1915 required that all soldiers be prepared to wear gas masks and respirators. Cumbersome accessories such as these obviously interfered with the smooth movement of the hidden sniper. In fact, even those snipers who remained behind trench lines avoided exercising their practice when on gas alert because the goggles on the masks interfered with precise vision.

In addition to the classrooms and firing ranges at sniper schools, there were training grounds that mimicked the general conditions on the Western Front. This apparatus served a three-fold purpose of training for sniping, observation, and scouting. Generally speaking, many snipers performed all three tasks but the first two were paramount as many battalions carried with them a unit of snipers and a larger unit of scouts.⁵² Nevertheless, attendants of the school usually received a well-rounded education in all three areas. The training grounds were made up of two opposing trenches with a replica no man's land in between. First Army S.O.S. continually updated the latter feature, employing artificial German bodies, for instance, to make the terrain more realistic and to encourage students to extract information from

⁴⁹ RWRM, "Synopsis of Notes..." p.3.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.3.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.3.

⁵² The number of snipers and scout per battalion varied. For instance, in August of 1916, the 20th Bn. carried four snipers in their unit while the 21st Bn. had four fully trained and 60 partially trained snipers. See NAC, RG9 III C3/4111/39/3, (any battalion correspondence to the 4th Inf. Bde.).

them.⁵³ Craters, barbed wire and debris was also added to the region. The differences in the trenches were immediately striking. Some of the trenches were identical to the earlier constructions the Allies utilized. These were perfectly lined with levelled sandbags that revealed loopholes and the everyday activities of the occupants. Movement behind these lines was easily detectable for the enemy because the contours of the human body and head stood out against the even parapet. The opposing trench, representing that of a German line, was entirely different. Sandbags were at odd angles, painted a variety of colours and strewn about them was wire, scrap metal, corrugated iron, empty barrels, and any other debris that could be spared. This erratic formation concealed the occupiers as well as the loop-holes and sniper posts that saturated the German lines.⁵⁴

Events played out behind the German trench were identical to the routine happenings at the front. Students tested their observation skills while staff members imitated Germans behind the line, digging trench mortar stands, or opening loop-holes. Any action behind the line was recorded and students were graded on their results. Snipers also joined in the exercise by putting their shooting ability to work from behind the German trench. The sniper(s) would have a selection of loop-holes to shoot from and after having done so, the observers were left to determine from which loop-hole it originated.⁵⁵ Firing from loop-holes and sniper posts was also an essential part of the training program but because it was so commonplace in the trench warfare between 1914-1917, its explanation comes in the next chapter on trench warfare. Training in patrolling was also executed in these model trenches. Students learned quickly the proper and improper ways of leaving and returning to trenches. This exercise was equally critical to sniping as

⁵³ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.152-153. Scouts were encouraged to search bodies in No Man's Land as some might contain valuable documents, personal papers, unit identification etc. that would assist in intelligence.

⁵⁴ The Allies would take a page from the Germans in this regard as many Allied trenches began to resemble those of the enemy.

⁵⁵ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.156.

many snipers would leave the trenches to search out sniper posts. Patrols would practice in the day (via night glasses) and at night, competing with each other for the amount of information gained and distance covered.⁵⁶ Training snipers in areas such as these would give them the adequate knowledge to contribute to the Intelligence Unit in their battalion. As a further chapter will show, sniping went hand-in-hand with intelligence.

V

Beyond all the practical training, the sniper's final test lay in the sniping competitions that occurred regularly in the BEF and CEF. The competitions varied in nature depending on the school but usually combined shooting with observation. Because sniping schools were also training grounds for scouts, observation and reconnaissance became part of the competitions as well.⁵⁷ Scouts were required to sketch a certain feature (eg. a village) and attach corresponding reports. During a test of daytime reconnaissance skills, snipers would have the pleasure of playing the enemy behind trench lines when a patrol was out. If the latter offered any opportune target, the snipers (two to four in number) would fire blanks at the exposed scouts.⁵⁸ A similar procedure would be carried out at night under the cover of darkness since it was at this time that patrols were most active. In these "movement exercises", snipers could also be tested for establishing sniping and observation posts and, like observers, they did so in daylight and at night. At the Canadian Corps Sniping School in Pernes (1917), snipers were required to do reconnaissance reports and sketches of their observations as well as conceal themselves from the judges.

Though the shooting competitions were open to all students at the schools, there were other contests that were specific to the marksman. Students would be divided into two classes and units at the school could

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.153.

⁵⁷ For a complete list of shooting competitions at Canadian Corps schools consult NAC, RG9 III C3/4064/15/3 and NAC, RG9 III D3/5048-5049, "War Diary of Canadian School of Musketry".

⁵⁸ NAC, RG9 III C3/4128/16/10, "6th Canadian Infantry Brigade. Brigade Scouting and Sniping Competition, 20/06/1916".

enter four competitors from each class. In three of the first four matches, students practiced snaphooting from the lying position. The fourth match, also in the lying position, was for rapid firing. The first two matches were conducted at a distance of 200 yards, shooting first at a target of a kneeling figure (six seconds exposure), then at a covered figure (four seconds exposure). ⁵⁹ Match three would come from a distance of 300 yards with a six second exposure for the target. In match four, rapid fire was tested at 300 yards as students began with a loaded rifle and four rounds in the magazine before the target appeared. ⁶⁰ Reloading continued in five round increments until a total of 15 rounds was fired. All of this was done over a one minute time span. The best aggregate scores from each class in the four matches would make up a fifth round that would ultimately decide the winner. Prizes came in the form of 100 francs divided among the winners from each match.

Match six was typically reserved for the best marksmen. Shooting from a distance of 200 yards any rifle, with or without a sight, could be used. Open to all ranks and limited to two individuals per unit, the competition had two practice rounds. The first target came in the form of a head that repeatedly appeared anywhere along a 40 yard front at a three second interval; exposure of the target was four seconds per interval. A total of five rounds was fired, each hit scoring four points for a possible total of 20. In the second practice, the target was a walking man, exposed for a 12 yard walk at a pace of 2 1/2 mph. Six rounds were fired in sets of two when the target appeared, each hit equalling four points out of a possible 24. ⁶¹ The highest in a total score of 44 would determine the winner who would win a cup and a cash prize. L/Cpl. H. Norwest, an exceptional Native Canadian sniper from the 50th Bn., was a finalist in this competition in August, 1917

⁵⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/105/2, "Canadian Corps Rifle Meeting, Matches & Sniping Competition". p.3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.3.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.3

though the outcome against his competitor remains undocumented.⁶² There is a record of Battalion scores from the 1st Division in 1918: out of a possible 800 points, the 1st Bn. scored 608, the 2nd Bn. had 598, the 3rd Bn. gathered 562 and the 4th Bn. totalled 548.⁶³

Beyond the spirit of competition, these shooting contests served to improve the sniper's speed in his firing. Hesketh-Prichard noticed a significant improvement in the speed of his men's shooting ability after continual practice.⁶⁴ He also encouraged the competitions at sniping school, at times pitting officers against other ranks or "Canadians and Colonials...against...the Imperials."⁶⁵ The competitions had the tremendous effect of building confidence in the student before he returned to his regular unit. When the four week courses came to a close, a firm majority possessed the necessary skills to establish themselves among the best snipers on the Western Front.

In sum, establishing a sniper training school appeared to be the answer to ending the German dominance of sniping. It was not until 1915 that the Allies finally acknowledged the German superiority and it was over the course of the following year that preparations were made to match them. Sniping at this stage of the war was sporadic, unorganized and usually the job of a skilled shot in the battalion. Hesketh-Prichard changed that with the First Army S.O.S. His first sniping establishment symbolized a nucleus that made sniping an organized feature of warfare in the British and Canadian forces. From First Army S.O.S. came numerous organized "Corps Schools" that continued the teachings of Hesketh-Prichard and his staff. Putting the

⁶² NAC, RG9 III C3/4217/7/15, "10th Inf. Bde. to 44th, 46th, 47th, 50th Bn. & Capt. G.A. Speer, MC, 08/11/17".

⁶³ NAC, RG9 III C3/4031/25/3, "Results of Sniping Competition, July 9, 1918 From Capt. Montgomery, 1st Cdn. Inf. Bde.". The points scored, however, only represent 1/8 of the entire competition scores.

⁶⁴ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.149.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.149.

specially sighted rifles in the proper hands was the first priority and the schools' curriculum ensured that most, if not all, students could operate and maintain a telescopic-sighted rifle. Shooting was practiced to an endless degree and the fundamentals of sniping (ie. use of equipment, movement/stalking etc.) followed. All of these skills culminated in the routine rifle and sniping competitions that measured a sniper's enhanced skill before he returned to the field.

Beyond mastering terrain, timing, movement and technology, the sniper officially became an organized unit in the army. The truly modern sniper found his seeds planted in the Great War. ⁶⁶ While sniping did occur on a semi-organized level in the American Civil War, the Great War saw his skills refined and officially established in the military hierarchy. Since 1918, sniping has seen little change in terms of practice. A perusal through the Canadian Army's Sniper Training Manual will show that the fundamentals have remained and only the technology has changed. ⁶⁷ Regardless, the modern sniper had found his origins in the fields of France and Flanders, 1914-1918. Back on the battlefield, these trained snipers were finally put to work in the trenches where their importance would reach a record high.

⁶⁶ Gilbert: Sniper, p.83.

⁶⁷ See the Canadian Army's Sniper Training Manual, CFP 309 [5]. Ministry of National Defence.

Chapter IV

Sniping in Trench Warfare, 1915-1917

Upon completion of his training, a sniper returned to his unit in the field where he put his refined skills to work. Before discussing the complexities of sniping in trench warfare, however, the difference between snipers must first be clarified. Though there were no "sniping units" per se, there was a distinction between the battalion and company sniper.

Prior to sniping becoming an official part of the military hierarchy, the organization of scouts and snipers varied by individual battalion. Sniping schools began to appear in numbers by 1916, and Canadian Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) was very interested in the organization of scouts and snipers in particular units. By the spring of 1916, their composition was loosely scattered, some battalions employing four per unit, others using eight or more.¹ As previously discussed in Chapter III, a number of crackshots attended sniping schools to improve their shooting ability. However, scores and improvements varied with each soldier, thus putting them to use in the

¹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4057/35/3, "Headquarters, 2nd Inf. Bde. to O.C. 5th, 7th, 8th, 10th Bn.'s, 03/06/1916". Also, NAC, RG 9 III C3/4069/11/6, "O.C. 19th Bn. to Staff Capt., 4th Inf. Bde., 07/24/1916".

trenches depended on their degree of skill. Those scoring exceptionally high at S.O.S. schools were generally fitted with telescopic-sighted rifles immediately and the others were equipped as these rifles became more available. By early 1917, those highly skilled snipers with telescopic-sighted rifles were shifted from their unit to Battalion Headquarters where they were employed under the Scout Officer. ² Labelled as a "specialist section", these elite snipers, usually four per battalion, joined the scout section, which monitored enemy lines and conducted reconnaissance patrols when in the line. Given the title "Battalion Snipers", they typically worked along the entire battalion frontage with special observation duties (ie. specific strongpoints, rearward lines, troop movement etc.) and eventually returned to their unit when it was removed from the line. The remaining snipers, usually less skilled, stayed with their unit as "Company Snipers" working in pairs. Though the numbers of company snipers varied per battalion, an average figure was 16: eight snipers and eight observers who could exchange their duties to give each other adequate rest. ³ These snipers worked from dusk until dawn from the confines of the section of trench their Company occupied.

At last, with trained snipers in the field, these marksmen began their ascendancy over the enemy snipers that had harassed them for the previous year and one half. However, sniping was more than simply sighting a target and pulling the trigger: sniping was a science unto itself that required a variety of tasks to ensure success. While in the trenches of the Western Front the sniper fulfilled a number of duties to achieve this end. First and foremost, the sniper had to select carefully his firearm and telescopic sight. Among the other procedures was the set-up of sniper and observation posts where he would perform his skill. In addition, the sniper was also needed for

² NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "2nd Division HQ to 4th, 5th, 6th Inf. Bde & 2nd Cdn. Pioneers, 02/20/1917".

³ NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, "Notes of a Conference of Scout and Sniper Officers, 06/02/1917", pg.3-4 See also NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, O.C. 19th Bn. to Staff Captain, 4th Inf. Bde., 07/24/1916". The Scout Section often consisted of one Lance Sergeant, one Corporal, two Lance Corporals (aka Patrol Leaders), 18 Privates and four Bn. Snipers with t/s rifles.

locating and deactivating enemy snipers via observation and use of props. Beyond these responsibilities was a sniper's commitment to Battalion Intelligence, not only as a marksman but as an observer who obtained valuable information about the enemy. Further, an examination of the facets of sniping in trench warfare will yield the conclusion that this activity required much more than simply pointing a rifle and firing upon a target.

I

Selecting an accurate firearm was one of the first procedures for a sniper before entering the trenches. Since all rifles handled and fired differently, it was critical that a sniper choose one that suited his needs. A variety of rifles appeared on the battlefields of the Great War: the French were known for the Lebel, the Germans were equipped with the Gewher, the British with the Short Magazine Lee Enfield (SMLE) and the Canadians with the Ross Mark III. ⁴ The Ross, while considered a capable target rifle, was not fit for service in the conditions on the Western Front. In comparison with the SMLE, it was much longer in length: where the SMLE measured 44.6 inches, the Ross totalled 50.6 - the barrel alone amounting to 2/3 of the measurement. This comparatively long firearm was cumbersome in the narrow trenches and its tip and bayonet were often exposed over the parapet when the rifle was carried upright. It weighed slightly more (9.875 lbs., over a pound more than the SMLE) and its magazine capacity was limited to five rounds (there were 10 in the Enfield). ⁵ That the Ross only held five rounds per magazine meant that the operator was required to reload much more quickly and under intense battle conditions - the difference between life and death.

Despite its peculiarities, the Ross was known most for the problem of jamming. Issued to the First and Second Divisions at Valcartier, preliminary tests with the Ross revealed that it was susceptible to heating up, jamming

⁴ -----: "Rifles of the Great War", War Machine, No. 86, n.d. p.1702-1703, 1707,1712.

⁵ Ibid., p.1703, 1707.

and, in some cases, propelling the bullet casing back into the firer's face (a.k.a. "blowback").⁶ On the Western Front the trench conditions intensified the jamming problem, particularly the mud and dirt that characterized the battlefield. As one Canadian soldier recalls,

The Ross [was] a straight push and pull, the head of the bolt is on a spring and when it is home it turns half way and the lugs on the side of the head turn in to grooves which are in the breech. If you don't have that clean and the lugs don't go in properly, well then if it's only half closed...and you fire it, well the shell swells. The base of the shell will swell and you can't get it out. That's where the jams come in.⁷

Reports began filtering in to Canadian Corps Headquarters that the Ross was seizing up under rapid fire conditions by May 1916.⁸ In one report, members of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry were using the pressure of their boots to try and open the bolt. As the number of instances mounted, members of the Second and Third Divisions began to re-arm themselves with SMLE's found on the battlefield. Following brigade, battalion and company level investigations of the issue, the Ross was considered unfit as a service rifle since it lacked the men's confidence.⁹ By July, 1916, the Canadian Corps was being re-armed with SMLE's.

Despite these complications, the Ross was never fully withdrawn from active service. Sir Charles Ross, founder of the Ross Rifle Company, had crafted a highly accurate firearm that was just not suitable for the "ruggedness" of trench warfare. Accuracy was his key motive in designing the rifle - the first prototype appearing in 1896 - as "he concentrated on items such as barrels and sighting systems."¹⁰ The Ross Mark III's predecessors earned admiration at the Bisley shooting competitions prior to the war. On the

⁶ Bill Rawling: Surviving Trench Warfare, (Toronto, 1992) p.13. The Ross was nevertheless retained as a service weapon because the War Office stressed the importance of using the bayonet in combat.

⁷ NAC, RG41/11/CBC In Flanders Fields, "Interview with L.R. Fennel, 27th Bn.", p.8.

⁸ NAC, RG9 III C3/4197/1/3, "Canadian Corps HQ to 3rd Division, 05/02/1916".

⁹ NAC, RG24/1883A/Ross Rifle, 1916, "D. Haig, Commander-in-Chief, British Armies in France to War Office, 05/28/1916", "War Office to the High Commissioner for the Dominion of Canada, 06/03/1916".

¹⁰ -----: "Rifles of the Great War", p.1702

battlefield, and when fitted with a telescopic sight, the Ross emerged as an efficient sniping rifle. Since keeping it clean was a necessity, snipers - whose trigger-pulling was intermittent - could afford the necessary time and care the Ross required. Moreover, since snipers worked independently, they did not have to rely on it as much as the regular infantryman and instances of rapid fire were few and far between. Although the Canadians were being re-armed with SMLE's, marksmen in the Corps preferred the Ross over the Lee-Enfield, one individual noting that he "couldn't hit the inside of a barn" with the latter.¹¹ The Ross, on the other hand, found a great deal of admiration. Herbert McBride said of its accuracy, "up to 600 yards...it equalled or excelled any rifle I had or have since fired - the Springfield not excepted."¹²

The telescopic sight eventually made it to the trench lines of France by 1916. As a previous chapter has already shown, the use of these accessories was often minimized by the users' lack of knowledge about the scopes' operation. Moreover, it was held that some snipers simply did not appreciate the value of a telescopic sight, thereby leading to their misuse.¹³ Sniper schools, however, provided official instruction on how to use these devices and their value increased dramatically, so well, in fact, that C.O.'s gave strong support for their use, emphasizing that they were essential to gaining superiority over the enemy.¹⁴ Telescopic sights were not valued so much for improving accuracy but for enhancing potential targets that were normally missed when using open sights.¹⁵ Three lenses, the ocular, inverting and objective, had the culminative effect of sharpening the image in one focal point known as the reticule. The reticule, or "crosshairs", enabled the sniper to aim at his target precisely within the lenses. The diagram below lists the various

¹¹ NAC, "Interview L.R. Fennel". p.9. The SMLE muzzle sometimes had a habit of "whipping" to one side, sending the bullet off course. The SMLE's predecessor, the P.14, shared similar problems as the Ross but also found praise among British snipers. See "Rifles of the Great War", p.1703.

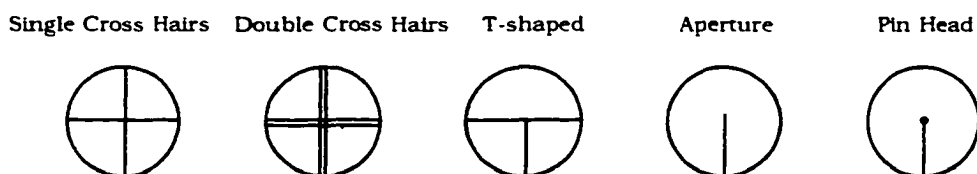
¹² Herbert McBride: A Rifleman Went to War, (Mt. Ida, AK, 1987). p.214.

¹³ NAC, RG24/1883A/26, Sniping and Marksmanship, "Telescopic Sights, 1st Division to Canadian Corps HQ. 03/29/1916".

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ NAC, MG30 E2/v. 1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter XIII - Telescopic Sights". p.1

types of reticules: the first, third and fifth were used by snipers at the front.



Source: NAC, MG30 E2, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter XIII - Telescopic Sights"

The magnification of these instruments varied, but they all shared the same effect of providing a clearer object, especially in the early morning or at dusk. Thus, in trench warfare they were essential to a sniper's work.

Due to their fragility, telescopic sights were never issued as Trench Stores: many were issued from Ordnance and went directly to sniper schools for issue. Other marksmen purchased their scopes privately. The following were the four most common telescopic sights issued to Canadian and British troops: Warner & Swasey, Periscopic Prism, Aldis and Winchester. For Canadian troops, the Warner & Swasey was the first scope issued alongside the ill-fated Ross Mark III. Much like the firearm it accompanied, the Warner & Swasey had its fair share of problems and, like the Ross by the general infantry, was condemned by snipers later in the war. The main problem with this telescopic sight was that it could never be kept properly adjusted, or, in sniper terminology, it never "held its zero". The recoil of the shot consistently set the elevation off, thus making it "practically impossible for two shots to be fired at exactly the same point."¹⁶ Moreover, the lateral adjustment had to be reset every time the scope was remounted to the rifle, thus requiring it to be regularly "re-zeroed."¹⁷ Like other left-mounted telescopic sights, the Warner and Swasey's habit of unbalancing the rifle to the left was corrected by securing a rubber band around the sight and the stock of the rifle. However,

¹⁶ NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Report on Warner & Swasey Sights, Scout Officer 31st Bn. to O.C. 31st Bn., 06/13/1917". See also, NAC, RG9 III C3/4104/16/2, "4th Inf. Bde. to 2nd Division, 06/14/1917".

¹⁷ NAC, Armstrong Papers, "Telescopic Sights", p.2-3

this was more for keeping an even distribution of weight and only minimally helped keep the scope properly adjusted. By 1917, the Warner & Swasey had been replaced by one of the other three common telescopic sights.

The Periscopic Prism frequented the Western Front for a great portion of the war, though less so for the Canadian Corps. Like the Warner & Swasey, it was left mounted and was balanced in the same manner. It too had imperfections, namely the mountings. The consistent recoil of the rifle tended to loosen the screws holding the scope in place, thereby contributing to inaccuracy.¹⁸ In addition, the capstan screws that controlled the lateral adjustment were prone to stripping, rendering the adjustment useless. Proper care and handling, however, usually resulted in an extended shelf life.

The Aldis, on the other hand, did frequent the ranks of the Canadian Corps. Generally speaking, the Aldis won higher praise over the latter two telescopic sights both for accuracy and maintenance.¹⁹ The uniqueness of the Aldis was that it could be mounted centrally or to the left, thus it was adaptable to a number of rifles and a number of mountings. Though the central mount did not allow the marksman to use his open sights, it was nevertheless one of the preferred choice of snipers.²⁰

The Winchester sight won the highest acclaim among Canadian snipers primarily because it worked well with the Ross Mark III. The Winchester first made its appearance on the front in 1916, initially mounted (to the left) on SMLE's.²¹ Its inaugural performance provided good results particularly with regard to accuracy. The lateral adjustment - a loosening or tightening of a screw for shots straying left or right - was easy to operate and snipers favoured this simplicity.²² Shortly thereafter, armourers in the Canadian Corps began mounting them centrally on the Ross, making this

¹⁸ Ibid. p.3.

¹⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4104/16/2, "4th Inf. Bde. to 2nd Division, 06/14/1917".

²⁰ NAC, Armstrong Papers, "Telescopic Sights", p.3-4.

²¹ Ibid., p.4.

²² NAC, RG9 III C3/4152/1/3, "Notes on Telescopic Sights and Rifles, 04/25/1916".

combination the most popular among Canadian sharpshooters. Unique to this scope was its appearance for it was much longer and slimmer than the other three telescopic sights. Where the length of the Aldis and Periscopic Prism ranged from 10.8 to 12.25 inches respectively, the Winchester measured 16 inches.²³ Moreover, its weight was considerably lighter and its magnification higher. Set-backs included loosened mounting screws and a habit of sliding forward after the recoil (which was subsequently pulled back after the shot). Nevertheless, Canadian marksmen, who retained a Ross for their sniping duties, held the Winchester in the highest regard claiming that it was most suitable for "practical work."²⁴ In open warfare, it remained as the most serviceable sight in the field, particularly for its quick and easy adjustment.

Using German telescopic sights on the Ross or SMLE was a rarity since these scopes were infrequently captured intact. Those that were salvaged were quickly sent to the Corps Sniping School for repair. As the Allies soon learned, the Germans made a variety of mountings for their sights making it difficult to interchange them. Moreover, many German sights were incompatible with Allied arms and were only used when sight and rifle were acquired together.²⁵

Many snipers in the Canada Corps, particularly Company snipers, went for some time without a telescopic sight on their rifle, due to their limited availability. As the war progressed, however, more snipers were able to utilize them. After being fitted with rifle and sight, the crackshot was ready to perform his deadly art.

II

Once the Divisional Commanders realized the effect that sniping in the trenches had, they were eager to put them to work. As early as November, 1915 the General Officers of Command (G.O.C.) were issuing orders to

²³ Ian Skennerton: The British Sniper, (London, 1984). p.57.

²⁴ NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Report on Warner & Swasey Sights, Scout Officer 31st Bn. to O.C. 31st Bn., 06/13/1917".

²⁵ NAC, Armstrong Papers, "Telescopic Sights". p.5.

Brigade and Battalion Headquarters to employ them immediately. ²⁶ The orders were then channelled on to individual units encouraging them to take advantage of German error:

If your snipers are not already doing so, will you please turn them out at dawn, as opportunities for sniping at that time of day are very good. The enemy often exposes himself more carelessly in the half light than he would later in the day. Good results were obtained by some of the Battalions in the other Brigades by following this practice. ²⁷

Thus it is clear that sniping was essential to trench warfare. Employing the sniper, however, had yet to be resolved. While every soldier found some form of protection and concealment behind the parapet, it was the sniper who had to make concealment go the distance. Obviously, looking over the parapet invited a German sniper's bullet so the Canadian marksman had to find other alternatives for sniping from the trenches. Thus, the front line observation and sniper post emerged as a feared feature of the trench line.

As the earlier chapter on training indicated, the first set of Allied trench lines was very uniform with poorly concealed loopholes and sniping posts. By late 1916, the Allies were working hard to change the look of the parapet and better hide these strategic locations. Adopting the same methods used by the enemy, Allied parapets soon became decorated with various forms of metal and rubbish to better disguise the trenches' inhabitants as well as sniping and observation posts. Front line posts carried the advantage of being closest to the enemy's lines; however, due to this closeness, the field of view was often limited. Moreover, front line posts carried the added risk of being discovered since the enemy usually had the front lines well observed. ²⁸ These posts, due to their limits, were often used for harassing the enemy; rearward posts carried the greater effect of causing casualties.

The first step in establishing sniper and observation posts was

²⁶ NAC, RG9 III C3/4140/10/13, "2nd Division to 6th Inf. Bde., 11/15/1915".

²⁷ NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, "6th Inf. Bde. to 27th, 28th, 29th, 31st Bn.'s, 05/05/1916".

²⁸ NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter XV - Snipers' Posts, Observation Posts, Loopholes and Hides". p.1.

location. In the front line there were three common places to erect a post: the parapet (including the area directly in front of the trench) , the parados and a traverse (a smaller, angled trench, sometimes used for communication). The first two of these were most frequently used, the latter typically in emergency situations (eg. a enemy raid). Posts in the parados were more favourable because they offered a wider field of view and were not so easily detected. Moreover, the smoke or "gas" discharge that a rifle let off was masked by the rising smoke and mist that typically permeated the inside of the trenches. In any of these positions, it was important to consider first the field of view, the cover from fire and the cover from view. ²⁹ To avoid being discovered, sniping posts were always placed at an angle so fire came from the flank and not from the center. Choosing the latter courted disaster, usually in the form of machine-gun fire or "whiz-bang's". Posts were scattered throughout the trenchline, some active, others for attracting enemy snipers' bullets. Always constructed at night, sniper and observation posts were usually built by engineer working parties though some snipers preferred to make their own. ³⁰ These front line positions, as with any sniping posts, were "out of bounds" for all other infantry and the reason for this was clear - the more secretive the position, the better concealed it remained. However, as new units entered forward trench lines, a list of sniping posts was sent to Battalion and Brigade Headquarters for the fresh snipers to occupy. ³¹

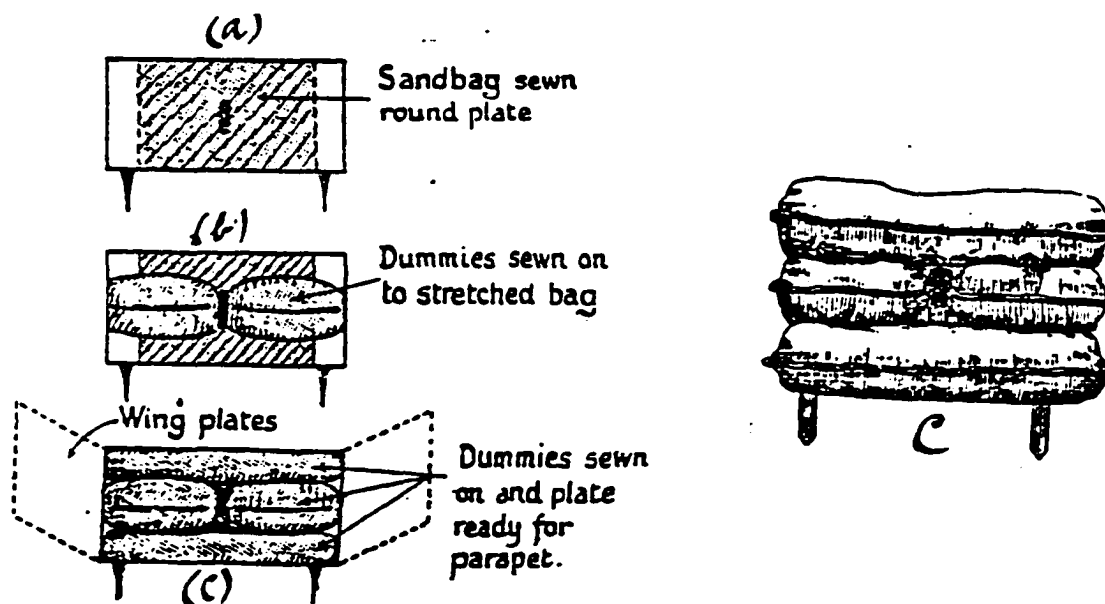
The standard feature of front line posts was the "loophole plate". Made of iron, the loophole plate was often bullet proof if set at an angle. Though rifles from the Great War were not as high-powered as today's firearms, a bullet still had the devastating effect of penetrating 9-14 inches into brickwork (cement and lime mortar), 18 inches into sandbags and 4 1/2

²⁹ Ibid., p.1.

³⁰ Ibid., p.4. McBride preferred to build his own posts simply because he knew it would be done right. See McBride, A Rifleman, p.301.

³¹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, 6th Inf. Bde. to 27th, 28th, 29th, 31st Bn.'s, 05/03/1916", and NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "6th Inf. Bde. to 4th Inf. Bde., 04/21/1916".

feet into the earth. ³² Thus, it was essential that loophole plates be as sturdy as possible. Once sniping commanded a stronger role in the war, loophole plates were issued regularly from Trench Stores. Unfortunately, they were usually cut with an oval opening in the center that hindered viewing from a telescopic-sighted rifle. In 1916, a Canadian officer at Second Army Sniping School created a "kidney" loophole plate which accounted for left-mounted telescopic sights though the standard plate continued to be the main one issued. Elsewhere, modifications were made, when necessary, at the front. Another complication with plates was their colour: most were black and therefore more easily detectable in daylight. ³³ This was averted, however, by encasing the loophole plate in a sandbag and cutting out the firing hole. To conceal the plate, "dummy sandbags" were sewn onto the plate before it was wedged into the parapet. (See diagram)



Source: NAC MG30 E2 v.1 N.A.D. Armstrong Papers "Chapter XV - Snipers' Posts, Observation Posts, Loopholes and Hides." p.4

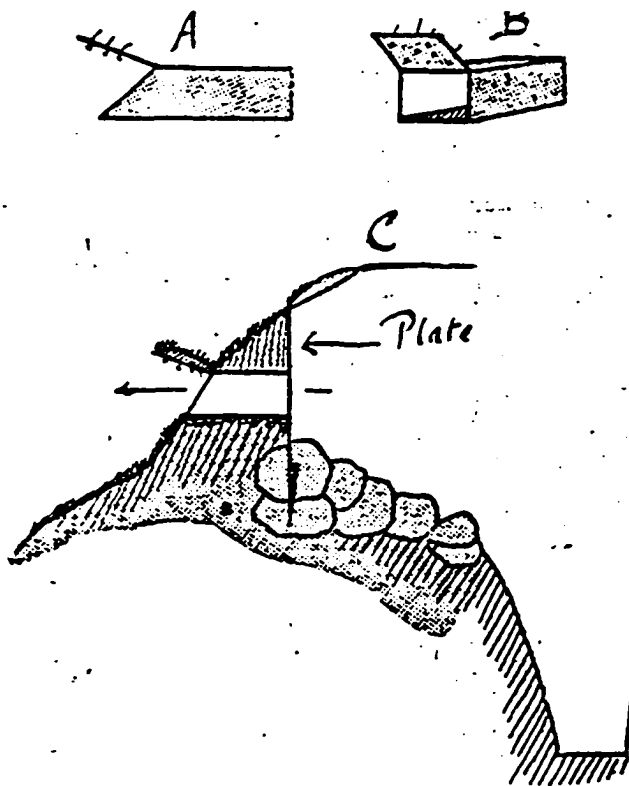
Additional plates, known as "wing plates" were sometimes added to expand

³² NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Lecture Given at N.C.O.'s School of Instruction, 2nd Army" p.2-3

³³ Ibid., p.4.

the field of view. After proper placement and a day's worth of weathering, the plate was usually fit for service.

Placing the plate in the line came in a variety of forms, some created by the Allies, others taken from the Germans. Some were placed along the top line of sandbags, others utilized common objects such as an old boot, hat or tin can from which to shoot from. Firing from pipes inserted in the tops of sand bags or from the openings in rum jars were other ways of using loopholes. Perhaps one of the more interesting posts in the front line was the "mouse trap loophole" which had a wooden lid that opened and closed via a string. Disguising the lid was done by driving nails through the bottom so that the exposed spikes would drive into the earth and lift with it when the lid opened. ³⁴ Posts like this one were dug directly into the earth underneath the trench wall with the loophole situated amidst the clutter of the forward parapet and surrounding terrain. (See diagram.)



Source: NAC MG30 E2 v.1, N A D. Armstrong Papers. "Chapter XV - Snipers' Posts, Observation Posts, Loopholes and Hides" p.7

³⁴ NAC MG30 E2v.1, N A D. Armstrong Papers. "Chapter XV - Snipers' Posts, Observation Posts, Loopholes and Hides" p.7 Details of these various posts are described in this chapter

Posts such as these had two distinctive features: a curtain and a double plate. The curtain was important for keeping rearward light from exposing the hole in the plate and was placed at the entrance of the post. The double plate was an added feature that could be opened and closed at will. It offered the sniper a wider field of fire but was cumbersome and, if not placed properly, tended to shift and minimize the view. ³⁵

The best sniping opportunities came from the rear lines which offered a view of the entire Battalion frontage. Sniping and observation posts were often in the open, such as a field, though concealed posts (eg. in buildings, wooded areas etc.) were just as common. Just as in the front lines, rearward posts were numerous and were occupied at varying intervals to avoid being discovered by enemy observers. The advantage of being in the rear, however, was that it was far more difficult for a German to detect a rear post because of its distance. ³⁶

Once posts were established, keeping them hidden was next on the agenda. Since the Allied lines were just as frequently observed as the German line, posts were occupied and emptied at night. Furthermore, when not in use, a rolled up sandbag or piece of stuffing (also known as a "gag") was inserted in the loophole itself to block out any light. There were also many factors to consider when firing from sniper and observation posts. The gas discharge from rifles, mentioned earlier, could often give a sniper's location away. This gas was most often visible in cold or damp weather and usually when the muzzle was close to the ground, so it was advised that snipers be aware of conditions before firing. Letting off a shot also tended to stir up dust and surrounding vegetation which often revealed a sniper's location. To solve this, snipers were instructed to wet down the area and part the vegetation appropriately. ³⁷ Disguising the flash of the muzzle.

³⁵ Ibid., p.15.

³⁶ McBride: A Rifleman, p.311.

³⁷ NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Lecture Given At N.C.O.'s School of Instruction, Second Army". p.5.

particularly at night, was best done by shooting from a wooden box or through a pipe placed inside the post or simply by exposing less than half the barrel through the loophole. ³⁸ Another factor that had to be considered was the glare or flash of a telescope's lens by the sun. Snipers and observers had to be aware constantly of the sun's position to avoid being discovered this way. Likewise, polished barrels were shrouded and shiny ornamentation, like brass buttons or cap badges, were removed from uniforms. The enemy had a habit of randomly firing at the front line to uncover Allied loophole plates: a metallic "ringing" when the bullet struck typically gave it away. The Allies solved this problem by attaching wooden boards to the front of the iron plate, thereby absorbing the bullet and downplaying the sound. ³⁹ Posts that were discovered were abandoned and/or dismantled altogether. German observers were just as scrutinous and on many an occasion, German snipers bounced bullets off loophole plates as a reminder to the Allies that they were being watched. ⁴⁰

Based on the available documentation, certain areas were considered unsuitable for establishing a post. Instructors from sniping schools, including Hesketh-Prichard, did not always advise their students to occupy buildings or trees. Removing a brick from any structure provided a quick and effortless sniping post, but there was always the danger of it being already occupied by the enemy, not to mention that such structures were frequent targets for shelling. Houses were suitable for the occasional shot but consistent firing from such a place also attracted trench mortar or artillery shells. ⁴¹ Trees, on the other hand, did offer snipers a heightened field of view but more often left them vulnerable to enemy observers particularly under changing light and weather conditions. German snipers were known to have occupied trees and the photo on the following page reveals the dangers of this practice.

³⁸ NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/2, "Notes on Sniping Collected by the 3rd Cavalry Division". p.4.

³⁹ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.66.

⁴⁰ NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Lecture Given", p.3.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.3. Also, Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.95.



A DEAD HUN SNIPER — IN HIS NEST B.4.

Source: Private Collection

Once the post was established and secured, it was occupied by a sniper and an observer. These two types of soldier were generally grouped together because they tended to work in pairs when in the front or reserve lines, though the latter was more frequently the case. Sniping and observation was then carried out from these positions, the sniper and observer - trained in each other's skill already - exchanged duties at regular intervals, usually every 20 minutes. ⁴² Working in pairs carried the advantages of confidence, more thorough observation and the ability of one to help the other if he was wounded. For others still, there were added benefits:

The great benefit to the pair, to my mind, is that it breaks the monotony of long hours spent away from other troops and gives two kindred spirits the constant opportunity to talk about their common interests - in addition to other topics. ⁴³

In addition, working in pairs kept eye-strain at a minimum. However, working alone was favoured by some snipers since movement and concealment, in no man's land for example, was more deceptive alone than with two. This aspect of sniping will be discussed in the next chapter. Generally speaking, the two man system was most commonly used in the Canadian Corps. At battalion level, four pairs of sniper/observer teams were assigned to the battalion frontage, occupying posts anywhere from 200-800 yards of the front line. ⁴⁴ Company snipers and observers made use of their own posts in the front lines, sometimes working in pairs, sometimes alone. During the preliminary observation - that period of time when the post was first occupied - both the sniper and his mate would chart out distinctive features along the enemy front and place them on a map. ⁴⁵ Frequent study of the map and constant study of the enemy line enabled the team to memorize the parapet and note any changes and any potential targets. To ensure consistent reporting, the sniper and observer team were regularly

⁴² NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/2, "Hints and Tips for Snipers". p.4.

⁴³ McBride: A Rifleman, p.305.

⁴⁴ NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "Memorandum Relating to the Establishment, Organization and Duties of Scout Sections, 4th Canadian Infantry Bde., 07/24/1916". p.2.

⁴⁵ Ian Skennerton: The British Sniper, (London, 1984). p.84.

posted in the same area, either at "Stand To" or "Stand Down" - depending.. of course, on their shift. ⁴⁶

Nevertheless, when working in pairs the observer scanned the enemy line with a pair of field glasses or telescope searching for targets. At the same time the sniper, with his telescopic-sighted rifle, followed the same viewing path as his counterpart and fired upon a specified target when identified by the observer. ⁴⁷ When the observer spotted a potential target he gave the sniper a land/parapet feature (eg. a blue coloured sandbag or piece of corrugated iron) to aim at and then a measured distance (eg. three feet to the left or six inches above). Once the sniper had his sight fixed, he pulled the trigger if he thought the hit was moderately possible. Of course, the exposure of a target usually lasted only a few seconds. If a hit was made, it was documented in the daily sniping and observation report. ⁴⁸ Confirming kills was not always an easy task since the sniper lost sight of the fallen soldier behind the parapet. However, one sniper in the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), Pte. E.A. Clarke of the 1st and 2nd Northants Regiment, offered some solace for unconfirmed hits: "Never be bluffed if a sniper swanks how many he has killed. We knew it was almost impossible to miss but unless the enemy is shot in the open and lies for quite a while you would not be certain." ⁴⁹ McBride, on the other hand, figured that the observer was the last voice on the matter: that he had a large telescope or field glasses and thus a magnified view, enabled him to confirm the hit. ⁵⁰ An intelligence summary from the 3rd Division. (January 1st to June 30th, 1917), indicates that Canadian marksmen accounted for 307 of the enemy in observed hits. ⁵¹ It should be noted that this summary contained a large proportion of "claimed

⁴⁶ NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "Memorandum". p.1.

⁴⁷ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.114-115.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁹ Imperial War Museum (IWM hereafter). Sniper on the Western Front, E.A. Clarke, Sniper, 1st & 2nd Northants Regiment. p.7.

⁵⁰ McBride: A Rifleman, p.310.

⁵¹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4146/7/1, "3rd Division Summaries of Intelligence, 01/01/1917 to 06/30/1917".

hits" that were never assigned a number. Thus, the number of hits exceeds the total listed above.

A skilled sniper could easily gain notoriety based on the number of kills for which he was credited. Native Canadians, who enlisted in the CEF voluntarily, were among the most feared snipers on the Western Front:

Many of the Indian soldiers were hunters in civil life and in consequence were expert marksmen. As a result of this experience they were able to render excellent service as snipers at the front and in this branch of fighting they were unexcelled. It is claimed that the Indians did much toward demoralizing the entire enemy system of sniping. They displayed extraordinary patience and self-control when engaged in this work and would sit hour after hour at a vantage point waiting the appearance of the enemy at his sniping post. The Indian snipers recorded their prowess by the picturesque method of notching their rifles for every observed hit. Three famous Indian snipers of the 8th Battalion, McDonald, an Iroquois; Riel, a grandson of the famous rebel, Louis Riel; and Ballantyne, a Western Indian, had 40, 38, and 58 notches respectively, on their guns. ⁵²

Names of many Native Canadian snipers fill the nominal roles in the CEF: Pte. Rod Cameron, Pte. Joseph Delaronde and Cpl. Thomas Godchere were all excellent marksmen from the 52nd Bn.. ⁵³ Another sniper, killed in action in April, 1915, was Lt. Cameron Brant, descendant of the great Chief Joseph Brant, from Brantford, ON. ⁵⁴ Those snipers with exceptionally high scores included Cpl. Johnson Paudash, who worked alongside McBride in the 21st Bn., with 88 kills and L/Cpl. Henry Louis Norwest (50th Bn.) who tallied 115 observed hits. Cpl. Francis Pegahmagabow, arguably the best sniper in the field, was credited with 376 kills during his tour. ⁵⁵ Pegahmagabow's shooting skill and heroism earned him the Military Medal and two bars for bravery - an honour shared by only 39 others in the CEF. ⁵⁶ In total, more

⁵² CANADA, Department of Indian Affairs, Annual Report - for the year ending March 31, 1919. Sessional Paper No.27, (Ottawa, 1920). p.27.

⁵³-----: "Canadian Indians and World War One", The Tomorrow File, (vol.1, no.3, November 30/1983). p.22.

⁵⁴ NAC, MG30 E43, "Cameron Brant Testimonial, 08/01/1915" and NAC, Military Service Record - Cameron D. Brant.

⁵⁵ CANADA, Dept. of Indian Affairs, p.15 and NAC, Military Service Record - Francis Pegahmagabow.

⁵⁶ CANADA, Veterans Affairs: Native Soldiers, Foreign Battlefields, (Ottawa, 1993). p.10-11

than 4000 Native Canadians served in the CEF many of whom found their best roles as snipers.

III

While a careless individual was the more common victim of a crackshot, their most important prey was the German sniper. As already indicated, Germans were superior snipers in the early years of the war. However, by 1917, the Allies were quickly out-performing the enemy in sharpshooting, and subduing the German sniper was the critical factor in this turn-around. However, deactivating the enemy sniper required locating him and this was done by attracting his fire. The three methods by which Canadians located enemy snipers were: from the direction of the enemy's shot, inviting fire upon a loophole plate, and using "dummy heads".

At first, crackshots resorted to following the line of the bullet from where it originated. German snipers would sometimes shoot at an active area of a trench or perhaps at an object to test the accuracy of their sights. Hesketh-Prichard noticed a number of bulletholes in a tree stump, immediately indicating the direction of fire. Following that path, he found a set of bushes that were immediately marked for observation. When movement occurred in the bush, four snipers opened fire and silenced the enemy sniper's activity.⁵⁷ Low or weak points in the trenchline were also common areas used for target practice. Unfortunately for the German, evidence such as this gave them away. Spotting the line of fire, usually with the help of a periscope, snipers in the CEF usually travelled back to a reserve line or communication trench to deactivate the enemy.⁵⁸ Another way of finding the pathway of a bullet was to hold up an object, a turnip or painted biscuit tin for example, invite the shot, and see the angle from which the bullet passed through.⁵⁹ Though this method worked initially, German

⁵⁷ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.52-53. To observe the direction of the bullet's path, Hesketh-Prichard wore a sandbag over his head and slowly peeked over the parapet.

⁵⁸ NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Lecture Given", p.5-6. In the event that an angle of view was altered, snipers were encouraged, if the opportunity lent itself, to ricochet bullets off of concrete walls.

⁵⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Additional Notes by an Officer of the 1st Canadian Division".

snipers soon learned to avoid such petty targets. The "textbook" method required exposing a target at two flanking points and pinpointing the sniper at the apex of the "triangle". However, like many orders issued from High Command, this style did not always work, particularly when the opposing trenchlines were relatively close to each other. For, "when it comes to close range sniping, the sniper is pretty apt to be very restricted as to the 'arc of fire' over which he can deliver his shots." ⁶⁰

Since live targets were the preferred prey of the German marksman, Canadian and British snipers began to invite bullets by exposing the loopholes in their sniper posts. As already indicated, some German marksmen bounced bullets off a plate purposely, to make the occupant aware of his exposed location. Eventually, the Allies saw this act as tool for identifying the vicinity of the enemy sniper. Since there were a number of loophole plates in the line at one time, a team of snipers occupied flanking positions while a single crackshot or observer would open a loophole to entice a bullet. Sometimes the latter would even let off a number of shots to attract some attention. ⁶¹ Doing this on a few occasions provided the flanking snipers enough time to spot, aim and shoot the enemy. As an alternative to sniping from the flank, some marksmen used "sniper hides" to deliver the fatal shot. The hide consisted of a camouflaged dugout placed beyond the parapet and behind the barbed wire. While it was useful for subduing enemy patrols, it was ideal for locating and downing a German sniper. ⁶² Once the decoy was set and the enemy's shots fired, the sniper in the hide located his man and eliminated him.

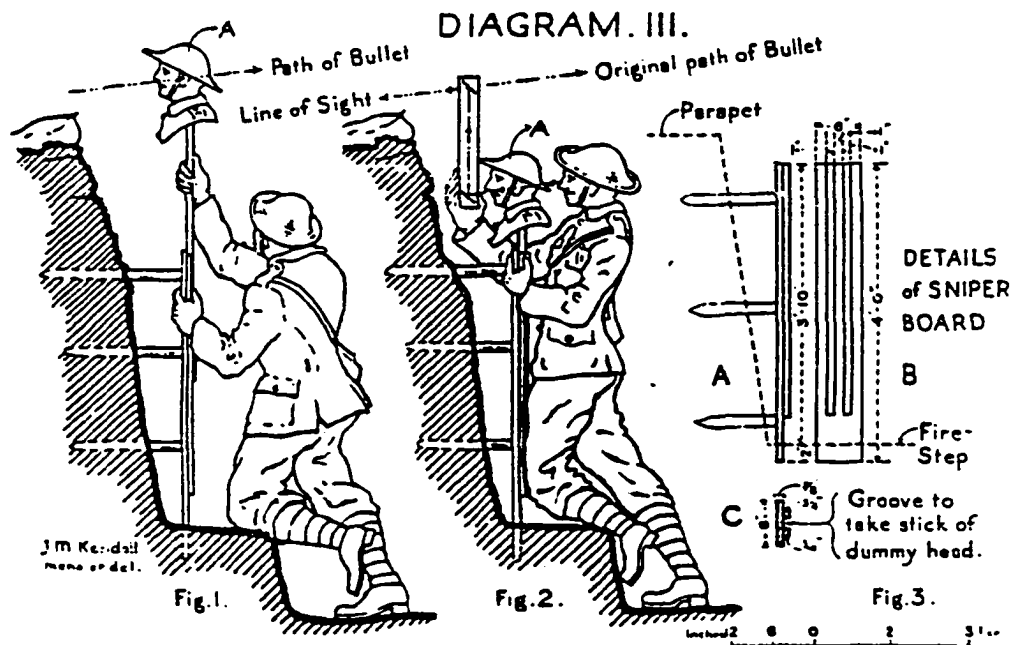
Perhaps the most effective technique of identifying the location of an enemy sharpshooter was through the use of "dummy heads". Another product of Special Works Park, these were paper mache globes fashioned into the shape of the average soldier's head. The idea came from theatrical props

⁶⁰ McBride: A Rifleman, p.325.

⁶¹ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.44-45.

⁶² NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter XV - Sniper Posts...", p.14.

in London but by 1916 they were steadily becoming a part of trench life in France and Belgium.⁶³ Placed on a stick and frame built into the trench wall, the heads were slowly raised over the parapet, inviting a sniper's bullet. If the desired result was obtained and a clean hit made, the operator let the head fall back - to imitate that of a fallen soldier. Moments after, the operator placed a periscope either behind the head and over the parapet, or placed it in front of the head below the parapet and aligned it with the bullet holes. See the diagrams below.



Source: NAC RG9 III C3 3867 107 2 "Hints and Tips For Snipers"

Aligning the bullet holes indicated the line of fire and, if at an approximate distance of 250 yards or less, it accurately located the enemy.⁶⁴ When the hostile sniper did not engage the raised head, operators resorted to "walking the dummy" along the trenchline, imitating that of a soldier on his rounds. To

⁶³ NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "Second Army to Canadian Corps, 2nd Division and 4th Inf. Bde 05/18/1916". Also, Hesketh-Prichard, *Sniping*, p.10-11.

⁶⁴ NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter XIX - Miscellaneous", p.5. Also, NAC RG9 III C3/3867/107/2, "Hints and Tips", p.4-5. When necessary, a second shot was encouraged this usually resulted in locating the sniper. See NAC, RG9/4135/22/4, "6th Inf. Bde to 27th, 28th 31st Bn's, 05/30/1916"

further enhance the effect, some soldiers resorted to placing a cigarette in the mouth of the prop, smoking it through a tube attached from inside the head. Used primarily to pinpoint German marksmen, dummy heads could also be used for fooling the enemy into thinking there were troop movements in the area. Using Sikh or Ghurka dummy heads along the parapet indicated new troops in the line and thus distorted German intelligence systems. ⁶⁵

Another popular target for snipers and observers was periscopes. Once both warring parties realized that popping their heads over the parapet was an invitation for a sniper's bullet, each side began using a variety of periscopes to an incredible degree. ⁶⁶ Despite this being a more clever and safer way of peering over the parapet, they still attracted a sniper's attention. While it was the initial goal of Battalion Intelligence to observe the enemy lines thoroughly, it was equally important to keep the enemy from observing them. ⁶⁷ Many sniping reports included the number of periscopes smashed by snipers. Some Canadian crackshots sought a "double hit" when spotting a periscope: by lowering the barrel six inches from the periscope the bullet often penetrated the sandbag and hit the user. ⁶⁸ Another popular target for snipers, particularly at night, was German working parties who attempted to reconstruct blown out trenches, build new pillboxes, or dig new trenchlines. That these individuals were often exposed in the open when doing their work made them worthy candidates for a sniper's bullet. ⁶⁹ This practice was often demoralizing for the workers while keeping their activity at a minimum. Lastly, the movement of new enemy troops into the line provided ample opportunity for the sniper to increase his score. As one sniper in the 42nd Bn. noted, "we got two of them this week and they'll be careful, but a fresh battalion will soon relieve them and one unit never seems to warn the other

⁶⁵ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.10-11.

⁶⁶ NAC, RG9 III C3/4039/11/4, "Types of Periscope Observed in Use by the Enemy". Periscopes were built into leaning duckboards, old buckets or placed on sticks and raised over the parapet.

⁶⁷ NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "Trench Orders", p.3.

⁶⁸ Col. J.A. Currie: The Red Watch, ((Toronto, 1916). p.149.

⁶⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, "6th Inf. Bde. to 27th, 28th, 29th, 31st Bn.'s, 06/06/1916".

about danger spots.” 70

IV

Since observation was such an integral part of sniping, the sniper was able to contribute a wealth of information to the Intelligence Unit of their battalion. The intelligence system in the Canada Corps was rather intricate and effective in obtaining information about the enemy and their defences. Intelligence material usually came in the form of observation, either from the ground or the air, but much could also be learned from patrols, raids and reconnaissance or from captured soldiers and documents. Like the roots of a tree, the majority of information stemmed from company level in each battalion. From Battalion Headquarters the material would be filtered through Brigade Headquarters, then to Division Headquarters and lastly to the Canadian Corps Headquarters. 71 In addition, sources of information came from the Royal Air Force and its Balloon Section as well as field and heavy artillery. The chart on the following page summarizes this process.

At Brigade level the intelligence section was headed by a Staff Captain of Intelligence. Among his duties were training, administration and discipline of the Brigade Intelligence Section, obtaining, collating and forwarding information, and the supply and issue of maps and aeroplane photos. Conducting reconnaissance missions, training when in rest, and construction of observation and sniping posts were also his responsibility. Working for him were 12 elite observers, an aeroplane photo expert, two draughtsmen and a clerk. 72 This section of intelligence staff oversaw the surveillance of the entire brigade frontage, consolidating material from battalion level.

The most critical source of intelligence came from the front line units which engaged enemy activity, thus, Battalion Intelligence was most thorough.

73 At Battalion Headquarters the Intelligence Officer oversaw all matters of

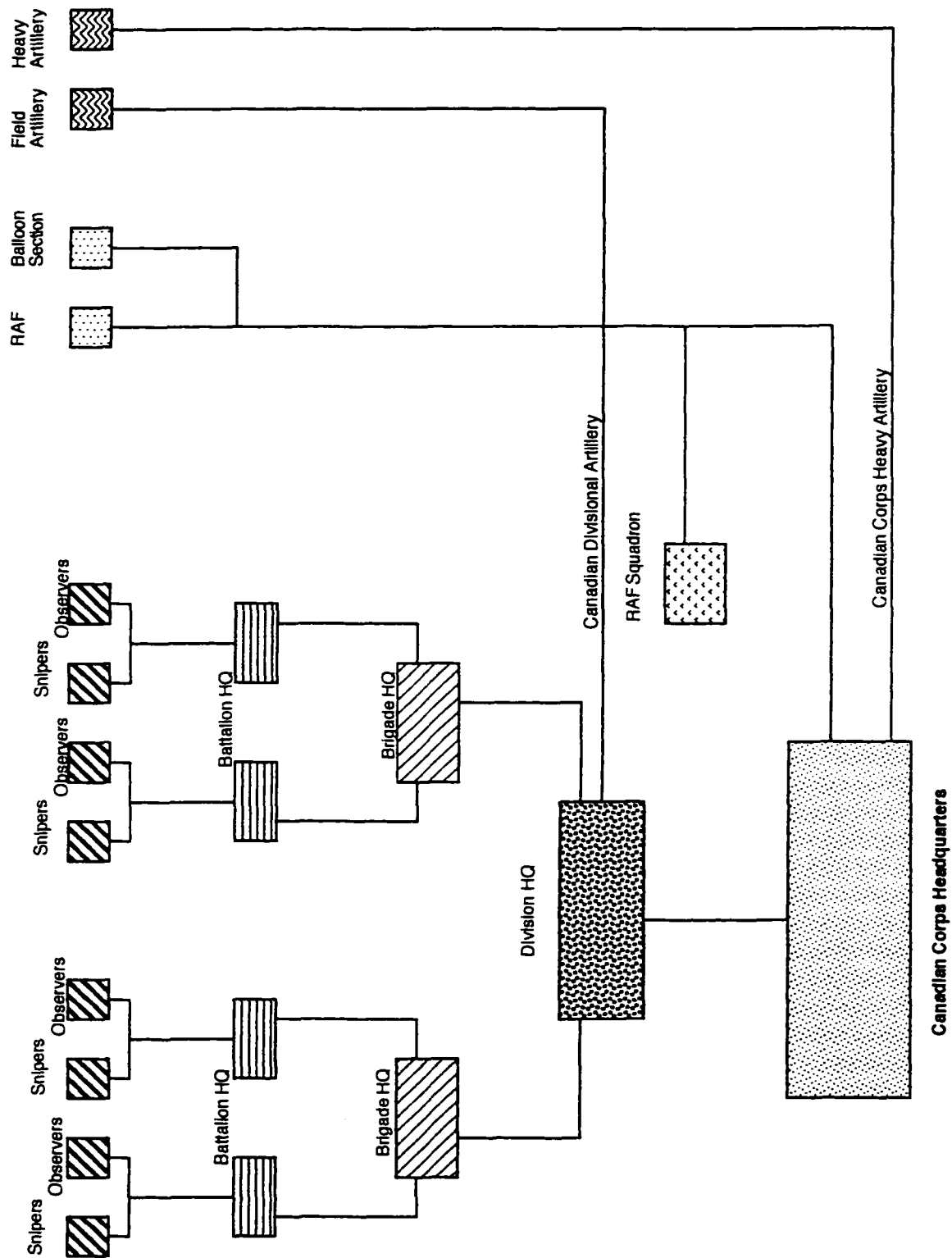
70 Will R. Bird: Ghosts Have Warm Hands, (Toronto, 1968). p.29.

71 NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter 2 - Front Line Intelligence". p.1-3.

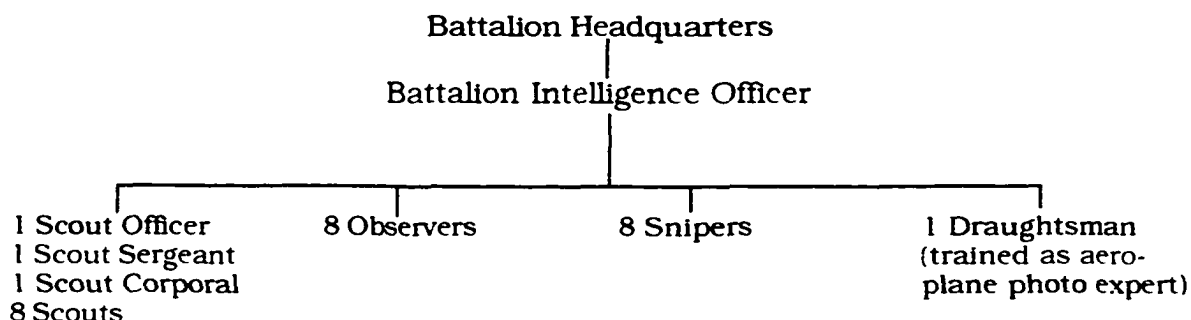
72 Major J.E. Hahn: The Intelligence Service Within the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918, (Toronto, 1930). p.86.

73 NAC, MG30 E2/v.1: *ibid.*, p.2.

Sources And Course of Front Line Intelligence **Canada Corps**



surveillance and observation. Under his jurisdiction was a scouting wing of 11 men, observation and sniping wings consisting of eight men each and a draughtsman with aeroplane photo experience. The total staff of 28 can be summed up as follows:



Source: NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter II - Front Line Intelligence" p.2

When arriving at a new sector in the line, an Intelligence Section received most of its orders from the Battalion Commander. Once these orders were delivered, the Intelligence Officer detailed his men who then commenced set-up and execution of ground level observation. At the same time he established contact with the artillery for any possible shelling needs. Complete observation of the enemy line was thus the objective of the Intelligence Officer and his staff. ⁷⁴ The Scout Section was responsible for nightly patrols, often approaching within 10-20 yards of the enemy's parapet. Armed with grenades and a revolver, scouts studied the ground conditions in no man's land and later sketched them on paper from memory. ⁷⁵ They gathered information about enemy wire, listened in on enemy conversations and to capture a sentry or two was never out of the question. Their hand-written and drawn information was then issued to the Intelligence Officer for consolidation with other forms of intelligence. Battalion snipers and observers, on the other hand, performed their work both night and day

⁷⁴ Hahn: Intelligence, p.71.

⁷⁵ NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "Report on the Organization and Duties of the Scout Section Employed by the 20th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 05/23/1916". p.3.

though the latter was more often the case. From their daily observation and sharpshooting, snipers and observers also documented their findings and added them to the intelligence summary. The draughtsman, meanwhile, prepared a large-scale trench map that listed the information obtained from the Intelligence Unit.

The intelligence summary was compiled from a series of small reports and indicated a variety of factors along the battalion frontage. Included in these reports were artillery activity, trench mortar activity, machine-guns and sniping, patrols, movements and the nature of enemy defences.⁷⁶ This was updated on a daily basis and sent, with the intelligence summary, to Battalion Headquarters for further scrutiny.

Once Battalion Headquarters had surveyed the summary and extracted the necessary details to further assist them in the line it was sent on to Brigade Headquarters. There it was consolidated with the other battalion intelligence summaries and compiled into one divisional summary. Commanding and Intelligence Officers at Division Headquarters, after reviewing it themselves, finally sent the documents to Canadian Corps Headquarters where a larger synopsis was developed. Added to these files were the larger intelligence summaries from the RAF and artillery units as a whole.

Since the sniper and his partner spent hours at a time studying the enemy line, their knowledge of the front exceeded that of any other soldier. In the early years of the war, sniping was not a part of the Intelligence Unit simply because it did not yet exist. Early intelligence reports from 1914 and 1915 give no indication of sniping activity, nor do they include any information that may have been gained from snipers.⁷⁷ Before sniping became a regular part of the military machine, snipers' observations were

⁷⁶ Hahn: Intelligence, p.127-156.

⁷⁷ NAC, RG9 III D3/4912/War Diary - 1st Battalion, "1st Battalion Narrative of Operations, 26-27 April, 1915 to 1st Cdn. Inf. Bde., 04/28/1915". A perusal of any of the earlier war diaries, after action reports and summaries will show that there was little or no documented information from sniping.

rarely considered important. Part of the reason for this was a lack of understanding from higher authorities, according to Herbert McBride:

Many a time I have turned in a report to my own Section or Battalion officers - one regarding which they fully recognized the accuracy and great value. But when forwarded to the rear for consideration or action by higher command, the report was poohooed as being merely "some soldier's imagination". ⁷⁸

When it was finally realized that the notes kept by an observer and sniper were invaluable, sniping teams began to contribute significantly to the Intelligence Section and, by late-1916, Battalion snipers took their place in the intelligence hierarchy. Gradually, references to sniping activity and observation of enemy line filtered their way into intelligence summaries: first, just general notations (eg. "enemy sniping activity quiet, ours active"). Eventually sniping reports listed the activities of the enemy, recorded patrol movements and cited numbers of kills by individual snipers. ⁷⁹

While the sniper continually watched for his enemy counterpart, he learned all the details of the enemy line and was able to spot any alteration in sandbags, loopholes, saps, etc. Changes in houses, trees or any other similar structures within 1200 yards were also noted. Any activity, no matter how miniscule was dealt with. At close ranges, snipers typically handled matters themselves; at more distant location, they often called upon the artillery to finish the job. Take for instance this example for Hesketh-Prichard in the Somme region in 1916. After constantly observing a ruined structure to the rear of the enemy line, an officer noticed a set of five bricks on a broken beam.

Natural enough - but not quite so natural when the next day the five bricks had changed their position. On the first day four had been lying along the beam at full length and one was set upon its end. On the second day a second had adopted the erect position. Late in the afternoon...the officer who had observed...the five bricks saw through his 30-power telescope a German hand moving the bricks and the light glint of a pair of German field-glasses levelled amongst them. The second shell from our gunners removed forever that

⁷⁸ McBride: A Rifleman, p.317.

⁷⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4104/15/1, "Intelligence Summaries (various), 4th Inf. Bde. to 2nd Division, late-1915-Jan. 1916".

post at Beaumont Hamel. ⁸⁰

The breaking up of the German observation post thus had a cumulative effect of keeping Allied activities secretive. One of the more important contributions to intelligence made by snipers was locating and documenting enemy machine-gun posts. While snipers and patrols often fought for control of no man's land, it was the machine-gun that dominated it. A German pillbox, besides menacing the trenches, remained one of the biggest obstacles in the offensive - in fact, the machine-gun contributed substantively to the enormous casualty rates from the Great War. Nevertheless, a sniper who located a German machine-gun emplacement had it documented and eventually eliminated, if not by himself then by an artillery shell. A German map of 80 machine-gun posts was found on a body in no man's land in 1916 and of those 80, 42 had already been identified and dealt with by snipers in the line.

81

For snipers, constant observation of enemy lines brought the added value of monitoring troop movements in and out of the forward lines. All enemy movement was followed and common in many intelligence summaries were descriptions like this:

Identification. Three men seen, two of whom were wearing round grey caps with blue bands, the other had the appearance of an officer, he wore a heavy square cut blue tunic and round peaked cap of the style worn by the French. It was of bright black material with gold trimmings. ⁸²

By consistently observing the characteristics of the enemy, the sniper - and thus, higher command - knew when fresh troops were brought into the line, either for relief or for a build up in the event of a coming offensive. As German troops rotated in and out of the line, snipers, observers and intelligence began to identify certain infantry units by the colours worn by the men. Cap badges, for instance, typically identified the unit; thus, "a Hun

⁸⁰ Hesketh-Prichard. Sniping, p.121-122.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.119.

⁸² NAC, RG9 III C3/4104/15/2, "Summary of Intelligence - 4th Brigade, 02/03/1916".

wearing a Prussian cockade or...a helmet with No.119 on the cover...were [matters] of importance and soon sniper-observers...realized the value of the all-important game of identification.”⁸³ Further, each cap badge usually had a colour on it (eg. blue and white for Bavarians, black and white for Prussians) that helped in the identification process. But, as Hesketh-Prichard noted, these fine coloured lines on a cap badge were indistinguishable at more than 150 yards.⁸⁴

Since artillery shelling was always a hazard on the Western Front, snipers were put to work surveying artillery activity. A shelling of enemy lines was watched thoroughly, both for results and for an indication of troop withdrawal.⁸⁵ In the event of an enemy shelling, snipers performed a duty known as “blinding”. Immediately after an enemy bombardment, German observers were active with their periscopes, surveying the damage. It was the sniper’s responsibility to destroy the periscopes and their operators if the opportunity presented itself. This “blinding” of enemy observation minimized the enemy from seeing the extent of the damage and often forced German observers to take more risks and expose themselves for a clearer view.

Thus, the sniper’s commitment to Battalion Intelligence was very crucial to operations in trench warfare. Through their front and rear line activity, they were able to render invaluable information about the enemy.

As the war went on the snipers provided a mass of detail, much of which was confirmed by raids and identifications taken from prisoners or from the dead, and very little could happen near the enemy’s front lines without our Intelligence being at once aware of it.⁸⁶

In sum, the role of the sniper in trench warfare took on expanded proportions after training had provided him with the necessary tools to

⁸³ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.115.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.101.

⁸⁵ NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, “Memorandum Relating to the Establishment, Organization and Duties of Scout Sections, 4th Canadian Infantry Bde.”, p.1.

⁸⁶ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.116.

surpass the enemy in sharpshooting. In the trench deadlock that characterized the Great War between 1915 and 1918, sniping emerged on a consistent level that was matched only by patrols and random artillery shelling. Yet, sniping was much more than having good rifle skills; to quote Herbert McBride, "it is a common but erroneous belief that the only necessary qualification for a sniper is to be able to shoot accurately. As a matter of fact that is only half of it - perhaps less than half." ⁸⁷ Indeed, sniping required following a number of procedures to be effective. Selecting the proper equipment was the first essential step since the quality of the firearm could make a difference in a sniper's effectiveness. Proper construction and location of sniper and observation posts was the next critical measure for it was here that the sniper did his work. The ability to locate and subdue the German sniper enabled the Canadian marksman to surpass the enemy in sniping. Finally, through steady and effective observation of the enemy line, the sniper provided a wealth of information to Battalion Intelligence.

To what end did the sniper work in trench warfare? Just as random artillery shelling produced mental "shell shock", sniping had the cumulative effect of diminishing enemy morale. Armstrong even considered it to be one of the primary tasks of the sniper:

If the enemy is allowed a quiet time he will utilize it for work of attack and defence - a few well trained snipers can keep him busy by their domination with accurate fire and produce an effect that is not measured by the numbers of rounds fired. ⁸⁸

This constant testing of the enemy's mindset eventually contributed to the Allies' ascendancy over German sniping. When Hesketh-Prichard looked back on the Great War, he saw four stages in the evolution of sniping on the Western Front. In the first, the Germans had dominated; the second, the Allies attempted to out-duel the superior German marksmen; in the third, the Germans had descended deeper into their trenches, offering few if any

⁸⁷ McBride: A Rifleman, p.299.

⁸⁸ NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter VIII - Sniping and the Organization of Snipers in Open Warfare", p.1.

targets; and finally when the sniper was fully trained and integrated into the military unit, he was able to adapt to changing situations and thus surpass the enemy at the game of precision shooting.⁸⁹ Following several stages of evolution, the Canadians and British had eventually reached this fourth level by late-1916, early-1917. As Cpl. J.A. Holland reported in his diary, July 12th, 1916:

Sniping was again very brisk and our men hidden away in carefully concealed positions picked off nineteen careless Huns and 21 periscopes. At this game our chaps are immeasurably superior and duals between sharpshooters which happen frequently and sometimes last for hours, always end in our favour.⁹⁰

A perusal of Holland's diary will reveal that his Battalion, the 24th, accounted for 113 enemy fatalities between July 1st and August 2nd, 1916. Moreover, intelligence reports from January, 1917 reveal that the enemy was "reported to be more careful in exposing himself owing to the vigilance of [Canadian] snipers."⁹¹ Sniping continued to be a consistent tactic in trench warfare, both day and night. Though night sniping offered fewer targets, its morale effect had always been considerable.⁹²

As the war embarked on its fourth year, tactics changed and the deadlock of trench warfare was broken. As the opposing forces prepared for 1918, covered ground would be measured in miles rather than yards. Open warfare was a whole new realm for the marksman, whether it be alone in no man's land, assisting in the offensive or pursuing the enemy in the summer of 1918. The sniper had already proven his value in the trenches; he would do the same in the open.

⁸⁹ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.55.

⁹⁰ NAC, MG30 E574, "War Diary of Cpl. J.A. Holland, 06/01/1916-10/03/1916". p.21.

⁹¹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4146/7/1, "3rd Division Summary of Intelligence, 01/10/1917".

⁹² NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/2, "Notes from 3rd Cavalry Division", p.1.

Chapter V

Sniping in Open Warfare

It was in the trenches of the Great War that the sniper's art was refined and from concealed posts, he regularly tested the enemy's mind-set with his precision shooting. And, though the most common image of the Great War is that of trench warfare, there was a stage of this conflict which occurred over open ground. Open warfare can take on a number of meanings and for the sake of this chapter, it will refer to military activities taking place outside of the trenches and does not necessarily reflect the later stages of the war (late-1917 and 1918) exclusively.

Sniping, despite finding resounding success in the trenches of the Western Front, still had a role to play in open warfare. In the BEF and Canada Corps, some of the upper echelons of the military hierarchy believed that the sniper was a product of trench warfare. In fact, "the officers who believed this prophesied that when warfare became once more open, he would be useless." ¹ This chapter aims to dispel that myth and show that the sniper was highly active in open operations throughout the war. Under the trench conditions of 1915-1917, the lone sniper, at times, moved out into the openness of no man's land to conduct his work. Though this practice required considerable skill, it

¹ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping in France, (London, 1920). p.26.

was executed by a number of highly proficient snipers. Secondly, the offensive, a regular venture used to break the stagnation of trench warfare, also made use of the sharpshooter. His activities were continuously put to work, from before zero-hour to consolidation of the newly-won line. Lastly, the mobile warfare that characterized the summer of 1918 also made room for the sniper, ensuring that the faltering enemy was put down by a well aimed rifle. The sniper's art was very active in open warfare and his contribution was as much a part of victory as the men who surrendered their lives for it.

I

The art of sniping demanded a certain amount of skill from the soldier. When alone, particularly in no man's land, the successful sniper needed to know the necessary procedures of camouflage, movement, and shooting. Finally, establishing sniping posts in no man's land, albeit infrequent, was another feature of open warfare sniping that enabled snipers to gain ascendancy over the enemy.

Sniping in the open was something exclusively for the individual sniper who preferred to work alone. It is true that many a sniper worked with a fellow observer in open territory, but only under the concealment of surrounding trees, slopes or rock. Venturing into no man's land as a party of two invited enemy gunfire and, more than likely, death. Thus, the lone sniper who sought complete dominance of the neutral territory, found his niche in the craters of no man's land.² This practice, however, was often rare because of the danger involved and the intense short range of rifle fire. Furthermore, "apart from the nerve-sapping qualities, sniping between the lines was rarely that effective."³

However, before ascending into this danger zone, a sniper needed to follow a set of procedures to ensure his safety. Camouflage was the first

² Bill Rawling: Surviving Trench Warfare, (Toronto, 1992). p.50.

³ Adrian Gilbert: Sniper, (New York, 1994). p.71.

critical exercise as concealment made the difference between a successful sniper and a dead one. Animals in the wild often possess some form of natural colour to disguise them from their stalkers. Likewise, camouflage in trench warfare followed the same principles. With the use of painted suits and hoods, snipers used camouflage to cover the outline of the human body and make them blend with the surrounding terrain. ⁴ As photos from the previous chapter have shown, khaki uniforms in green brush do not blend well, not to mention the flat-top cap that always reflected the sunlight. Two of the most common outfits were the "Symien Snipers Suit" and the "Boiler Sniper's Suit". The Symien, made of painted scrim, was a loose fitting greatcoat with attached hood and accompanying pants. Made of linen, the Boiler resembled a pair of bulky overalls and carried with it a removable hood. Hoods were often fitted with mesh screens for viewing. Where a hood was not possible, the face and hands were usually darkened and the head covered with the appropriate coloured cloth (eg. handkerchief or balaclava). ⁵ The ears, however, remained exposed so as to not interfere with hearing and were darkened in the same manner as the hands and face. Where complete sniper suits were unavailable, marksmen made use of "sniper veils" in both dark and light colours. A limited number of these veils was allocated to battalions and could be made more effective by attaching some surrounding vegetation or like material to the head and bodywear. ⁶ Likewise, in winter, white cap covers were utilized for movement in the snow. Dark clothing was emphasized for use at night and, in one instance, a sniper approached the enemy's wire with the use of a lady's night dress! ⁷ However, camouflage did have its limits. Changing weather patterns or light conditions could instantly

⁴ NAC, MG30 E2v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter XIV - Camouflage". p.3.

⁵ NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/2, "Notes on Sniping Collected by the 3rd Cavalry Division". p.3.

⁶ NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Lecture Given at N.C.O.'s School of Instruction, 2nd Army". p.2. For sniper veils see NAC, RG9 III C3/4185/41/3, "6th Inf. Bde. to 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th C.M.R. Bn.s, 03/04/1918".

⁷ *ibid.*, p.2.

alter the effect of a sniper's concealment.⁸ Thus, it was imperative for a sniper to be aware of his surroundings and be prepared to change his plans in the event of wavering concealment. Nevertheless, proper use of background and camouflage enabled a sniper to venture into the pits and craters of no man's land without detection. The photos on the following page indicate the necessity of disguise in open warfare sniping.

Of equal importance to the shrouded sniper was proper movement. Slowness and caution were the two keys to successful movement. Trained to crawl no faster than a yard per minute and with only the most gradual movements of the body, the trained sniper followed a chosen path that he marked visually with particular features and landmarks.⁹ The process of moving to a position in no man's land further required minimal noise and, again, a great deal of patience. Sudden jerks or hasty movements could dispel hours of work and should such an instance happen, the best solution was to lie completely still.¹⁰ Other critical fundamentals included moving faster during periods of overcast and parting vegetation at the roots while moving.

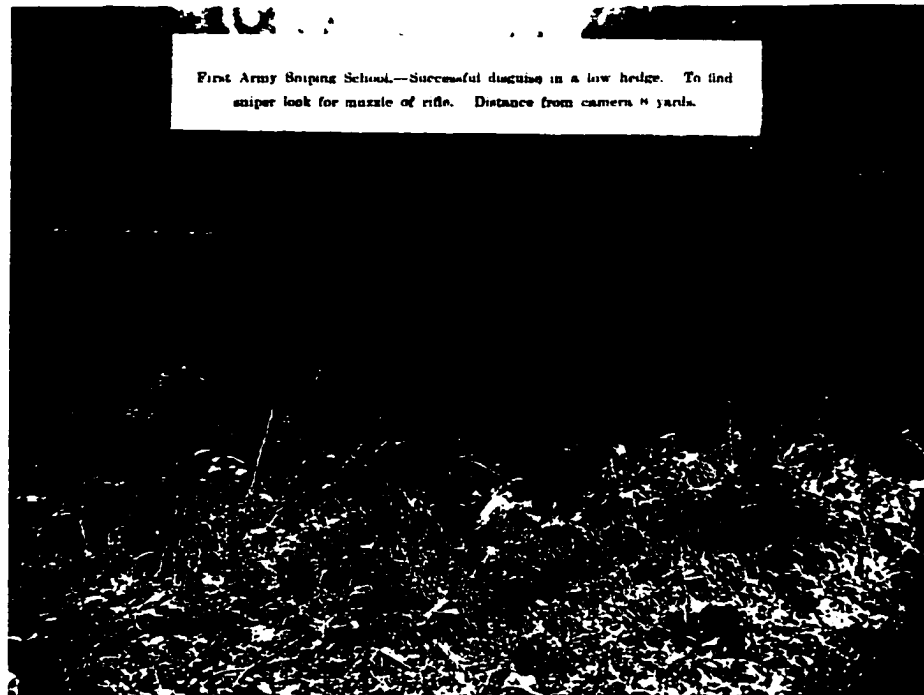
Besides vegetation (conditions permitting, of course), one of the more common hiding places for the sniper was the shell crater. The depths of these colossal gaps in the earth kept him well hidden and allowed him to establish temporary sniping posts. A mobile sniping post for no man's land came in the form of the "beehive post."¹¹ Driven by spikes into the lip of a shell crater, this iron-cased shroud was camouflaged in the appropriate colours and features of a given zone (eg. turned up earth, debris or brick). With a gauze covered opening at the front and a curtain hanging from the rear, a sniper crawled under the beehive to observe and, if possible, shoot

⁸ Maj. H. Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping in France, (London, 1920). p.157.

⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/2, "Notes on Sniping Collected from the 3rd Cavalry Division". p.1.

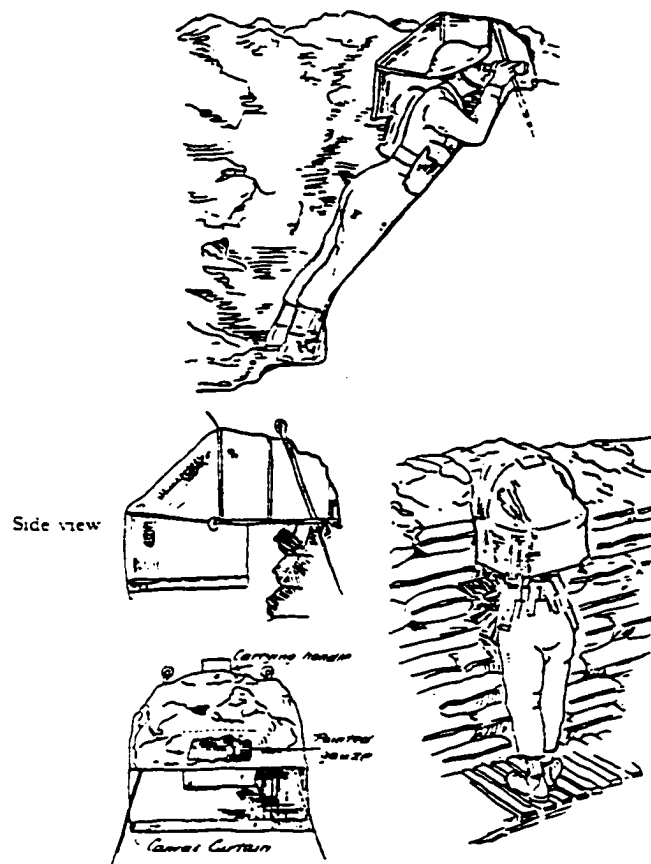
¹⁰ Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum (RWRM hereafter), "Synopsis of Notes by Lieut. J. Scott Cameron, 44th Battalion C.E.F. on Sniping Course at Aldershot, March 21st to April 1st, 1916 and Report of Same. p.2-3.

¹¹ NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, Armstrong Papers, "Camouflage", p.11-15.



Photos Courtesy of National Archives of Canada. Negative No C 144067 & C 144069

from it. Though the beehive post was highly useful in no man's land, it was equally productive in the trenches. See diagram below.



Source N A D Armstrong Fieldcraft Sniping and Intelligence (Aldershot 1940) p 114

Another apparatus for snipers in no man's land came from camouflage experts at the Special Works Park in the form of an artificial German body, or "dummy corpse". Hesketh-Prichard made one of the first indications of these:

In another case, a huge dead, yellow-bearded Prussian lay, on a point of vantage, staring at the sky. He, too, was photographed and copied, and from the hollow shell, clothed in his uniform, another observer fulfilled his duty. A dead horse likewise was replaced and used. ¹²

While these "dummy corpses" could only be occupied on one or two

¹² Hesketh-Prichard Sniping p.124.

occasions, they were used successfully by units in the Canada Corps. ¹³ Stories of many camouflaged observation and sniper-posts abound. In another instance, the French Army photographed and replicated a milestone indicating the kilometric distance to Paris. This post replaced the original in the middle of night and a connecting tunnel was dug to allow access. Viewing of the German lines was subsequently done through a gauze opening in the rock. ¹⁴

Movement in and out of no man's land was often done in the darkness which, at times, required a sniper to remain in the neutral ground for much of the daytime. Hesketh-Prichard did not always agree with this method since the hours from dawn to dark were long and the sniper was frequently vulnerable to changing conditions. ¹⁵ Finding the way back to the trenches was a feat in itself. Those snipers most comfortable and familiar with the terrain relied on raw instinct to return to the safety of the trenches. Others, meanwhile, made use of a fishing reel that drew the line from a sentry's post where the sniper left the trenches; a tug on the line indicated the sniper's pending return and he followed it back to his destination. ¹⁶

Although movement in no man's land at night was reserved for scouts on patrol, it was not uncommon to find a sniper joining a patrol or setting up a post for future use. H.W. McBride offered a more amusing tale of his experience in neutral territory. After constant observation of a sector of German trench and a rising suspicion that it was a site under construction for a machine-gun post, McBride ventured into no man's land - with the assistance of three shots of rum - to mark it. He quietly crawled across the open ground in the dark, found an opening in the German wire and placed a white piece of paper on the parapet where the construction was being done.

¹³ NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, "27th Bn. to 6th Inf. Bde., 12/30/1916". Placement of these corpses has to be careful as suspicious Germans would occasionally strafe the post with machine-gun bullets.

¹⁴ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping p.124.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.125.

¹⁶ NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/2. "Notes...", p.3.

(In daylight, this bright marker gave the position away and, it was later shelled out of action.) Before his return, however, McBride was enticed by another feature in the German line: the flag.

Flag stealing was a common game in the trenches of the Great War that meant nothing more than some competitive antagonism as each side lured the other into stealing the trophy. On this occasion, McBride was only 100 yards away from the flag and proceeded to claim it.

There were a lot of tin cans and rubbish to be avoided but in a short time I came up to their flag; it was planted right in the midst of an area of what we called "trip wire"; the flagstaff was firmly embedded in the ground and was further braced by several guy-wires which were anchored in the ground. I managed to unfasten these guy-wires and then pulled the staff out of the ground. Guess I must have overlooked something - some wire connected with an alarm in their trench, or possibly a "set" rifle or two. At any rate, a couple of shots rang out and the bullets came uncomfortably close. Someone in the German trench sent up a flare and a machine-gun chattered for a while, but I lay still, and, in a few minutes the excitement died down and I started for home. ¹⁷

McBride did return safely, though in his mild drunkenness he opted to stand up and cross no man's land carelessly on foot.

After fitting themselves with proper camouflage and moving carefully into position, pulling the trigger was the final step in the sniping process. Snipers often spent hours at a time watching the enemy line, waiting for a target to present itself. Once a target was exposed, (the average exposure time was three to four seconds) aim had to be precise and the shot guaranteed. ¹⁸ The marksman's goal in sniping was to shoot to kill and taking a shot that was not guaranteed was generally frowned upon. Holding the rifle firmly, the sniper exhaled as he pulled the trigger and then remained motionless for a moment before lowering the barrel out of sight. ¹⁹ Regardless of how effective the position or concealment of an area of no man's land, snipers were advised to avoid using the same places day after day.

¹⁷ Herbert W. McBride: A Rifleman Went to War, (Mt. Ida, AK, 1987). p.115-117.

¹⁸ RWRM, "Synopsis of Notes...", p.4. Also, NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Lecture Given...", p.5.

¹⁹ RWRM, "Synopsis of Notes...", p.4.

Thus, whenever a marksman ventured into the neutral ground, he usually rotated from a variety of different posts and/or created new ones each time.

L/Cpl. Henry Norwest, of the 50th Bn., was one sniper who was able to master his trade in the craters of no man's land. A saddler by trade, this Cree native of Alberta has often been regarded as one of the best snipers on the Western Front.²⁰ Credited with 115 observed kills, Norwest often spent days in no man's land waiting for one shot. His supreme skill, mastery of camouflage and incredible patience were highly regarded by his fellow infantrymen.

Sniper Norwest, M.M., today accounted for his 100th German and before night had added another to the score, a record enjoyed by few, if any other snipers in the British Army. Norwest's methods are peculiarly his own. "Wait until not a single Hun has a chance of seeing your rifle flash, then get your man", is his motto. On one occasion he waited two days for two enemy snipers who had heard his rifle, as he accounted for another of their friends, knowing they were suspicious of his post. At last he caught them off their guard and one went down followed by the other in fifteen minutes. Very few men could display the patience employed by Norwest. His indifference to danger and his ability to negotiate practically open ground, makes it possible for him to use No Man's Land as a sniping ground to the fullest advantage.²¹

Cpl. Norwest continued to menace enemy lines until 18 August, 1918 when he was struck down by an enemy sniper. Norwest's skill earned him the Military Medal in August, 1917 and, posthumously, a Bar for gallantry in the field in November, 1918.²² Despite the loss of Norwest and other Canadian snipers, those who excelled in this fine art were often masters of camouflage, movement and terrain. Consistency and concentration were critical in these fundamentals of sniping; a sudden error, as in the case of Norwest who had been caught hunting out an enemy sniper, could instantly spell disaster.

²⁰John Holman: "Indian Veteran: Canada's forgotten heroes", Windspeaker (Vol.7 No.36, November 10, 1989). p.4, -----: "First World War Indian hero almost forgotten", Leader-Post Regina, (Sat. Nov. 11, 1989), p.C9, Desmond Morton: When Your Number's Up, (Toronto, 1993). p.78.

²¹NAC, RG 9 III D3/4941/War Diary of the 50th Battalion, "April 28th, 1918".

²²NAC, Military Service Record - Cpl. H. Norwest. For the recommendations on the M.M. see NAC, RG9 III C3/4217/7/9, "50th Bn. to G.O.C. 10th Inf. Bde., 01/15/1917".

II

While most snipers found their most congenial role in the trenches, they did have a place in offensive operations. Much like all other branches in the Canada Corps, snipers had preparatory work to do before the attack. Moreover, while many first-rate snipers rarely joined the "over the top" rush, they still provided assistance during the assault. Lastly, once an objective was gained, skilled marksmen assisted in the consolidation of newly-gained territory. While it would be difficult - and unnecessary - to describe sniper activities in all the major campaigns involving the Canada Corps, this section will correlate the before, during and after stages of the attack while reflecting on certain examples from some of Canada's major triumphs (ie. the Somme, Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele). ²³

In preparing for a major offensive, the Canada Corps had a great deal of preparations to make. In fact, preparation became one of the key ingredients in ensuring success. Following the Somme campaign, the Canada Corps began to learn regularly from their mishaps and refine their methods. ²⁴ Preparation eventually amounted to playing out the attack on a model battlefield behind the forward line, as they did for the Vimy Ridge effort. Nevertheless, while mule trains and boxcars brought supplies to the front, and artillery formed up along the rearward lines, the infantry prepared for the assault by grouping into respective Company Sections. Reliefs took place over an eight to 12 day period, moving new troops in small parties over the course of the day. The attacking units typically remained in the rear lines until

²³ Some historians may consider the Somme and Passchendaele campaigns to be more disasterous than triumphant. The Canada Corps, however, did succeed in achieving their objectives at Coucelette in September, 1916. This can still be considered a victory in light of the appalling casualties incurred by the French and British from July to November, 1916. Passchendaele, on the other hand, was even more disasterous for the BEF - not to mention horrific. By the fall of 1917, the Canada Corps had established themselves as an elite force following victories at Vimy Ridge, Lens and Hill 70. Despite 16,000 casualties, the Canadians succeeded in capturing Passchedaele in two weeks; something the British could not do in two months. For more information see the official history by G.W.L. Nicholson's Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919. (Ottawa, 1964). Canada's military successes are also addressed by Bill Rawling's Surviving Trench Warfare, and Daniel Dancock's Legacy of Valour.

²⁴ Bill Rawling: Surviving, p.81-86.

shortly before the assault. Specialists, including snipers, went into the line approximately 12 hours before the rest of the battalion.²⁵ Observers, meanwhile, continued to monitor the enemy line, reporting their findings every 24 hours. Battalion Scout Officers put their men to work checking up on positions in their own line as well as those of the enemy. Snipers usually took up flanking positions in the forward trenches, sniping from posts hidden in the parapet. Sniping before the assault was critical as it kept the enemy's observation in check.²⁶ Moreover, it had the combined effect of lowering enemy morale (as indicated in Chapter IV) while increasing their casualty rates. For instance, in the three months preceding the attack on Vimy Ridge April 9th, 1917, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Divisions combined to eliminate 406 of the enemy - the 3rd Division with 262 kills alone.²⁷ In some sectors of the Vimy front, no man's land extended 500-1000 yards and thus, sniping opportunities in these areas were not as plentiful.

When sniping opportunities were not quite as active, Canadian marksmen practiced behind the lines on rifle ranges, continually refining their shooting finesse.²⁸ Distance of the ranges was usually 100-150 yards where grouping and snapshooting took place. Practice on dummy heads, or "Bosche heads" as they were sometimes called, was also carried out.²⁹ Where available, 200 yard ranges provided the sniper with greater skills testing on the same targets. Much like a miniature course from a Sniper and Observation School, these practice sessions also familiarized the sniper with concealment via use of natural cover (eg. houses, hedges, ditches etc.) in open warfare.

As zero-hour quickly approached, and while the artillery prepared for

²⁵ NAC, MG30 E300/19, Army Summaries - the Somme, Jan-Dec. 1916, "Short Notes Obtained from Units in the Somme Area". p.1.

²⁶ NAC, RG9 III C3/4146/8/9, "2nd Division Notes From Fighting on the Somme".

²⁷ NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter VII - Sniping and the Organization of Sniping in Open Warfare". p.4.

²⁸ Rawling: Surviving, p.98.

²⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/3, "Notes and Suggestions - Training of Snipers in Rest, 05/24/1916". p.1.

the preliminary bombardment. Battalion snipers moved into place in the early morning hours before the assault. In an attack on 31 October, 1916, snipers

[positioned] themselves before dawn within fifty to sixty yards of the enemy front line, to snuff out any troublesome machine guns during the crucial moments of the attack itself. Others [occupied] positions overwatching more distant flanks, with the same purpose.³⁰

Shortly before the attack, the artillery shelling began in an effort to break up German lines, wire, and communications. Even in this early stage of the attack, the snipers provided assistance via their accurate rifle fire. In one of the first raids featuring the Canadians - Douve River, 16-17 November, 1915 - "the bombardment was augmented by sniper fire, the Battalion's rifle fire and rifle-grenades."³¹ The added rifle fire ensured that casualties would be inflicted and that movement of reserves retarded.

Once the shelling had done its damage, the large guns would launch the "rolling barrage". The barrage - from the French term "barrier" - was first used at the battle of Neuve Chapelle, 10-12 March, 1915. Basically, the rolling barrage was a moving wall of exploding shells that hit an aimed objective, lifted and moved on to the next one.³² It provided the moving infantry with some degree of cover, and that it moved forward at timed intervals allowed the men to proceed to their objectives with moderate safety.

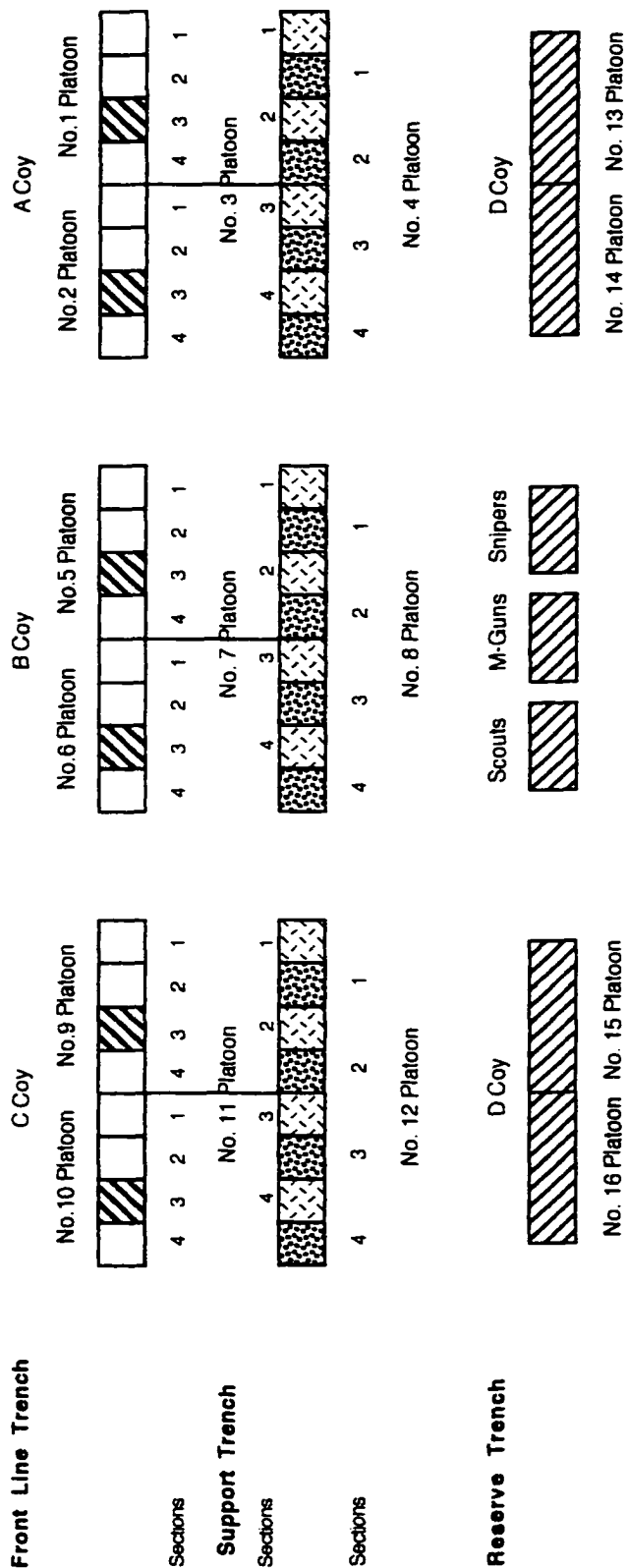
Slightly before the infantry went "over the top", all attacking units formed up in their respective trenches. The front and support lines housed two waves of attacking infantry, a total of six platoons. The former followed the moving barrage and made initial contact while the latter followed for consolidation purposes. In the reserve trench, two adjoining platoons and a specialist section of scouts, machine-gunners and snipers made up the third wave. The diagram on the following page provides an illustration up how these units formed up prior to action on the Somme, 1916.




³⁰ Paddy Griffith: Battle Tactics of the Western Front, (New Haven, 1994). p.73.


³¹ Rawling: Surviving, p.48.

³² Ibid., p.27.

Battalion Formed Up in the Trenches Ready for the Assault



First Wave:	Normally do mopping-up.	Units include Lewis Guns and are pushed on to form outposts.
		

Second Wave:  Consolidating party. If an extra mopping-up party is required, one or more platoons from another Battalion should be allocated to each Company in the front line, formed up in the support trench and go over with the second wave.

Company Commanders Reserve.

 Battalion Commanders Reserve.

Note: No positions laid down for Battalion or Company Bombers; they must be distributed as required.

In the aftermath of the Somme campaign, military strategists realized the importance of snipers in open warfare, hence they were given freedom of movement, or a "roving commission", when crossing no man's land and beyond. ³³ The reason for this situation is clear. Moving in packs presented more favourable targets for enemy machine gunners and since quality snipers were few and far between, it was better that they be on their own. Company snipers, usually of lesser skill than Battalion snipers, often joined the rush across no man's land with their platoon, taking advantage of targets that presented themselves. ³⁴ Once they reached their first objective, they remained in the open, watching for enemy retaliation or machine-guns while the ordinary infantry went about the trench clearing process. ³⁵ Battalion snipers, in the second or third wave, usually adopted flanking positions during the advance, attempting to cover the moving infantry. ³⁶

Once the latter had reached the first objective, Battalion snipers, like Company marksmen, worked through the battlefield searching for posts to conceal themselves. In no man's land, makeshift sniping posts were a rarity, and snipers were forced to improvise. Those most abundant were shell holes which irregularly decorated the open battlefield. In advances of 500 yards or more, snipers sometimes "dug in" at the back of a crater, sometimes carrying with them a metal loophole plate. ³⁷ The plate, placed overhead, offered protection from stray bullets and shrapnel. From this point, the sharpshooter could carefully watch for and fire upon targets in the enemy line. Another alternative to the dug out was to lie upon the front lip of the crater and snipe from there. In one instance, a small group of snipers moved from shell hole to shell hole, sniping at targets as they moved closer to enemy lines.

³³ NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, "Notes on a Conference of Scout and Sniper Officers, 06/02/1917". p.3 and NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers - "Chapter VIII", p.3.

³⁴ NAC, RG9 III C3/4015/29/4, "1st Division Operations: Passchendaele, Section I, 1917". p.6.

³⁵ Griffith: Battle Tactics, p.73.

³⁶ NAC, RG41/v.11, "CBC Interview - In Flanders Fields with L.R. Fennel, 27th Bn., p.7. Also, NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers - "Chapter IX - Sniping in Trench Warfare". p.1.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.1.

However, as Herbert McBride notes, in a constantly changing battlefield, it was critical for the sniper to adapt and take advantage of natural cover. He continues:

In any sort of advance, the type of country and surroundings may undergo a decided change. One moves from the flattened out country of shell holes and blown down buildings over into comparatively open ground, with growing vegetation and standing buildings - plenty of cover of an entirely different colour and type. He must be able to adapt himself to all sorts of restricted positions and still deliver accurate fire. ³⁸

When mop-up crews, that is, the first wave, moved through a town or village, snipers took advantage of buildings and ruins to conceal themselves. Rooms in houses, roofs and chimney pots were common areas to conduct precision shooting. ³⁹ The expanded field of view offered better sniping opportunities and protection, though there was always the hazard of artillery shells. When doors or windows were too revealing, snipers improvised by removing a brick from an unscathed wall to do their work. In small towns and villages the sniper was essential to the further advancement of the infantry. Enemy snipers often occupied cellars of buildings, at Courcellette for instance, shooting at troops as they passed by. ⁴⁰ In this scenario, one would often see sniper versus sniper as company marksmen were often sent in to eliminate the enemy crackshot.

There were three main targets at which the sniper aimed most. The machine-gun, perhaps the fiercest enemy on the battlefield, was the primary target. ⁴¹ Machine-guns often held up moving parties for long periods of time or otherwise cut them down with heavy fire before they could get anywhere. Thus, it was the sniper's task to put the gun, and its operator, out of action. Machine-guns were often concealed and rarely in the open for shooting; in such a case, the sharpshooter consistently aimed for the gunner since they were "hard to replace and fire directed by untrained machine-gunners [was]

³⁸ McBride: A Rifleman, p.333.

³⁹ N.A.D. Armstrong: Fieldcraft, Sniping and Intelligence, (Aldershot, 1940). p.28-29.

⁴⁰ G.W.L. Nicholson: Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919, (Ottawa, 1964). p.170-171.

⁴¹ Ian Skennerton: The British Sniper, (London, 1984). p.67.

not very formidable to tackle.”⁴² As the war carried on, snipers began to opt for the gun itself - trying to lodge a bullet in the breech or mechanism with armour piercing ammunition.⁴³ Sniping from prepared positions in no man's land offered some protection for the advancing infantry.

This method was very successfully adopted by a sniper of the 29th Bn. during the fighting on the Somme. He dug in during the night within 60 yards of the German parapet and in the early morning when a Company of the 29th advanced it was held up by M.G. fire. L/Cpl. Pumphrey spotted the M.G. and aiming carefully through the aperture, he fired a shot and the M.G. stopped, again it opened up, and after the 2nd shot it stopped. Again it opened up and with the 3rd shot it stopped altogether, the Company carried on with the advance, and later, on entering the trench and examining the M.G. post they found two dead Machine Gunners and a bullet through the mechanism of the gun which put it out of action.⁴⁴

Canadian snipers were exceptional in this category, and Hesketh-Prichard credited them for their skill.

In the last advance of the Canadian Corps, their very skilled sniping officer, Major Armstrong, told me that a single sniper put out of action a battery of 5.9 guns, shooting down one after another the German officer and the men who served it - a great piece of work, and one thoroughly worthy of General Currie's splendid Corps.⁴⁵

The other two targets favoured by marksmen were officers and supply trains. After any bombardment, officers and N.C.O.'s emerged to gather the remainder of the unit and conduct operations first-hand. These targets were favourites of many sharpshooters as many German officers began removing their epaulets when touring the trenches. In regards to the supply trains, loads carried to the front lines were broken up by sniper fire, anything to hinder the defence of enemy lines.⁴⁶ Beyond these favoured targets, snipers usually sought after their enemy counterparts, preferring to leave the masses to the masses. Though in some instances - like the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry attack at the Battle of the Scarpe, August, 1918 -

⁴² NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter VIII". p.3.

⁴³ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.27.

⁴⁴ NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers - "Chapter XV - Snipers' Posts, Observation Posts, Loopholes and Hides", p.15.

⁴⁵ Hesketh-Prichard: Sniping, p.110.

⁴⁶ NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers - "Chapter IX". p.1.

"snipers were posted in a position where they could enfilade the trench." ⁴⁷

Using telescopic sights in the field was difficult during the offensive. Conditions on the battlefield often rendered them useless. After preliminary shelling or the barrage, visibility was often minimal and dirt and clutter abounded over the terrain. In the more drastic conditions, such as Passchendaele, October-November, 1917, snipers were ordered to leave their telescopic sighted rifles behind. ⁴⁸ When conditions were slightly more favourable, many snipers chose to take an ordinary rifle with iron sights since a telescopic sight could be mis-aligned when crossing the battlefield. Some, like McBride, preferred to use both, choosing one over the other depending on the situation. ⁴⁹ The open or iron sight was useful for practical shooting and clear targets; more distant prey typically required visual assistance. Here, McBride accounts for the conditions on the battlefield:

The battlefield soon takes on a weird and grotesque appearance, and ordinary objects such as trees, bushes, stone walls building and such become so disrupted and twisted out of shape that they look like such things as one sees in a mad dream. ⁵⁰

McBride noted that seeing through a telescopic sight in these conditions was often difficult, but on certain occasions, it made the difference between a hit and a miss. Only the most highly-skilled marksmen routinely brought telescopic sights with them and they commonly took up flanking positions, well away from the chaos.

Once the first objective had been stormed, and provided the assault was successful, the consolidation process began. As the infantry secured the first ground, the second wave "leap-frogged" over them and pushed on to farther objectives. In this instance, snipers moved with the "leap-froggers" to more forward positions in an effort to "cut off any Germans who might be retreating overland." ⁵¹ At times, snipers combined their work with Lewis

⁴⁷ NAC, RG9 III D3/4912/War Diary of PPCLI, "Narrative of Operations - August 25-29, 1918". p.2.

⁴⁸ NAC, RG9 III C3/4015/29/4, "1st Division Operations: Passchendaele, Section I, 1917". p.6.

⁴⁹ McBride: A Rifleman, p.338-339.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.340.

⁵¹ NAC, RG9 III D3/4912, War Diary of PPCLI, p.2.

gunners, who also moved forward, to keep German movement limited and their efforts for a counter attack quelled. Quite often, a sniping patrol was sent out after consolidation to oversee the enemy's movement. In the Battle of the Scarpe, the PPCLI did so and spotted the enemy regrouping for a potential counter-attack. Between the snipers and the Lewis gun crew that was subsequently brought up, the German efforts were thwarted.⁵² After the taking of Vimy Ridge in April 1917, L/Cpl. Norwest, mentioned earlier, was instrumental in sniping at the enemy from the "Pimple".⁵³ It was here that he first earned the Military Medal.

Acting as a communication line was another duty for the sniper after the campaign. Communications were very often slipshod after an assault: telephone lines were usually broken by shells and shrapnel, pigeons were not always reliable, and signallers were constantly obscured by smoke. The runner, it seemed, continued to be the most reliable form of communication. Nevertheless, snipers recorded their observations when in forward positions and sent them back to runners behind the line. After all, the sniper was to observe as well as kill. At the Somme, 1916, snipers provided important information about the enemy's lines that later helped the infantry in the capture of Courcelette.⁵⁴ In another example, L/Cpl. Paudash (21st Bn.), won the Military Medal for informing Brigade Headquarters of a pending German counter attack at Hill 70.⁵⁵ The counter-attack took place within 25 minutes, but the Battalion, already well informed of the coming action, was ready for the assault. As the battle died down, and as new troops rushed in, snipers went about their usual business, seeking out new posts to conduct their work. At Vimy Ridge the Canadian Corps gained higher ground which almost always offered quality sniping opportunities. That snipers assisted in

⁵² Ibid., p.3.

⁵³ CANADA, Veterans Affairs: Native Soldiers, Foreign Battlefields, (Ottawa, 1993). p.12.

⁵⁴ NAC, MG30 E2v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers - "Chapter IX - Sniping in Trench Warfare". p.2.

⁵⁵ CANADA, Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1918, Sessional Paper No.27, (Ottawa, 1918). p.14. Paudash was also recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal for saving an officer's life at the Somme, 1916.

the consolidation process made securing newly-gained territory all the more effective. In general, Division, Brigade and Battalion C.O.'s were impressed with the sniper's activities in the offensive, both in their own work and their assistance to the other men in the unit. ⁵⁶

III

After the horrors of Passchendaele in November, 1917 had subsided, the Canadian Corps continued to refine their tactics and prepare for the coming year. While the military and political elite argued over the need for another offensive, the tank was finally used in a successful assault at Cambrai, 20 November, 1917. ⁵⁷ Generals now believed that truly open warfare could occur in 1918 and all forces, including the Canadian Corps, prepared for a campaign of manoeuvre. Training programs in the CEF emphasized movement and consolidation.

Should the enemy retreat, the Canadians were expected to advance from one tactical point to the next, units leap-frogging at pre-arranged boundaries. Scouts would lead, followed by advance platoons, themselves followed by the remainder of the company. As usual, troops were to advance under cover of rifle and Lewis-gun fire, and when the pursuit slowed to a crawl, they could consolidate their positions by digging in. ⁵⁸

The German offensive of March 1918 thwarted any short-term plans for a large campaign, and fortunately for the Canadians, the British bore the brunt of the German attack. Although the Germans pushed their way back into regions of Belgium and France, the effort eventually withered away through the summer, weakened by reduced manpower and resources. By August, 1918, the Allies - with new, fresh support from American forces - prepared for the coming offensive.

With regard to sniping, there is some disagreement over its employment in mobile warfare. As early as the summer of 1917, sniping was taking a back seat to scouting and observation in the military hierarchy. Orders from the

⁵⁶ NAC, RG9 III C3/4052/21/2, "10th Bn. to HQ 2nd Inf. Bde., 11/20/1917.

⁵⁷ Nicholson: CEF, p.333-338.

⁵⁸ Rawling: Surviving, p.169.

BEF's First Army show that the syllabi at Sniper, Observation and Scouting Schools was to be changed due to a decreasing role in open warfare. ⁵⁹ "In view of the more open nature of fighting which is now taking place, scouting and observation have become of increased importance as opposed to sniping and the use of telescopic sights of trench warfare." ⁶⁰ Despite the sniper having creditable roles in the offensive, higher authorities felt that sniping was of decreased value and, in some instances, their claim was supported by officers in the field. In response to a post-war memo on the value of snipers in mobile warfare, some battalions provided a negative reply. Without specific instances to draw from, these few units felt that there was "never time or opportunity to practice [their] art" and that their value was comparatively nil. ⁶¹ Others still felt that regular infantry, provided with good musketry training, could deal with targets just as well. ⁶² A select few remained indifferent, noting that snipers could not always use their telescopic sights as effectively as in the trenches. ⁶³

There was, however, resounding support for the sniper in open warfare from the majority of the Canada Corps. Many units concurred that sniping opportunities were fewer in the open, but their value in the pursuit over open territory remained high. ⁶⁴ In one instance, Brigadier-General T.L. Tremblay (5th Inf. Bde.) praised the snipers for they could often "do the work of several riflemen who [were] not accustomed to making use of ground." ⁶⁵ Following upon this remark was the C.O. of the 31st Bn. who believed, contrary to the earlier remark about good musketry skills for the infantry, that snipers could

⁵⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, "First Army to Canadian Corps, 2nd Division & 6th Inf. Bde., 06/10/1917".

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "8th Bn. to 2nd Division HQ, 01/14/1919".

⁶² NAC, RG9 III C3/4192/15/3, "43rd Bn. Cameron Highlanders of Canada to 6th Inf. Bde., 01/16/1919".

⁶³ NAC, RG9 III C3/4095/3/36, "27th Bn. to 6th Inf. Bde., 01/11/1919".

⁶⁴ NAC, RG9 III C3/4095/3/36, "4th Inf. Bde. to 2nd Division, 01/15/1919". A perusal of this file will show a number of positive responses to the use of snipers in open warfare, from Battalion to Brigade level.

⁶⁵ NAC, RG9 III C3/4095/3/36, "5th Inf. Bde. to 2nd Division HQ, 01/13/1919".

engage targets that regular infantry could not.⁶⁶ By and large, the fact that the sniper was instrumental in taking out machine-guns and their operators still made him essential to open warfare. Though trench conditions had declined by the summer of 1918, the machine-gun was still a threat to the advance. Thus, the sniper was equally important in the assault in 1918 as he was at the Somme, Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele. One Brigadier-General, D.M. Ormond, even suggested that a Corps of snipers be formed and "distributed amongst infantry battalions during active operations."⁶⁷

Indeed, specific instances show that the sniper was invaluable to operations during the last 100 days of the war. In the assault on Mericourt, 9 August, 1918, members of the 22nd Bn. were covered by their snipers while they consolidated the captured line.⁶⁸ On August 28th, 1918 near Boiry and Artillery Hill, two 58th Bn. snipers took position on the roof of a house knocking out 20 German machine-gunners and four machine-guns at a range of 300-600 yards.⁶⁹ Several other reports indicate snipers' activity with resounding success against machine-guns, German officers and N.C.O.'s and enemy snipers.

It is interesting to note in these positive responses to sniping in open warfare, that a number of battalions used their snipers on a regular basis. Those not in favour had no instances to draw from, implying that snipers may not have been used to the best degree. Moreover, some of those in favour were units from Western Canada where hunters and good riflemen were more abundant. Native Canadians, who were among the best snipers in the Canada Corps, were typically from the west, including L/Cpl. Norwest. Perhaps it was this added skill by western marksmen that helped to promote the sniper in open warfare.

The remaining days of the war showed even greater success for the

⁶⁶ NAC, RG9 III C3/4095/3/36, "31st Bn. to 6th Inf. Bde., 01/10/1919".

⁶⁷ NAC, RG9 III C3/4192/15/3, "9th Inf. Bde. to 3rd Division, 01/18/1919".

⁶⁸ NAC, MG30 E2v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Open Warfare", p.5.

⁶⁹ NAC, RG9 III C3/4192/15/3, "9th Inf. Bde. to 3rd Division, 01/18/1919".

Canada Corps. This elite force, hardly an army prior to 1914, had evolved into one of the best armies on the Western Front. An efficient use of infantry and artillery finally brought the Canadians to the Belgian border by November, 1918. By the time of the armistice, 11 November, 1918, the Corps was over four miles beyond the town of Mons.⁷⁰ The Canadians' adaptability to open warfare, and the German capitulation in face of declining resources, ensured victory in the late fall of 1918. Though the sniper found fewer targets in the "pursuit to Mons", he nevertheless played an essential role in the advancement of the infantry. He is as much to be praised as the soldiers who contributed to the defeat of Germany in the Great War.

In conclusion, the sniper was of great value in open warfare. Though some believed that his art would vanish with the trenches, the sniper's ability to use precision shooting in the open proved otherwise. Under the horrible conditions of trench warfare, snipers took their art beyond the trenches into no man's land, using the "dead ground" to conceal themselves from the enemy. Moreover, through the course of the war the sniper proved his value in all stages of the offensive. Even as the "over the top" trench battles gave way to the mobile fighting of 1918, the sniper still found a place in the rolling campaigns into Belgium. His ability to cause casualties and inhibit enemy gunfire, though only a small piece of the puzzle, contributed to the larger picture and victory on the Western Front.

Sniping, however, was as much a casualty as the many soldiers who lost their lives on the fields of France and Flanders. According to N.A.D. Armstrong, "there appeared to be a tendency among Army musketry to scorn the sniper - they held that sniping was only a 'phenomenon' of trench warfare and would not likely occur again."⁷¹ Armstrong later stated that sniping was forgotten and the Battalion Intelligence Section was removed from the Army's

⁷⁰ Rawling: Surviving, p.215.

⁷¹ N.A.D. Armstrong: Fieldcraft, p.v.

establishment.⁷² As this chapter has shown, sniping was not a product of trench warfare, and the sniper's ability to practice his art in the open proves this proposition clearly. As the war drew to a close in the first days of November, the sniper had outlived the prediction that sniping would die in the trenches.

⁷² Ibid., p.v.

Conclusion

Afterthoughts

The Great War has been a reminder to us all that war can have devastating consequences. In an age where nineteenth century military tactics surrendered hundreds of thousands of lives to military technology, an entire generation of children was left fatherless in the smouldering ashes of this destructive conflict. Those that outlived the gun and shell fire and horrors of trench warfare were permanently scarred, mentally, physically or both.

The soldier of the Great War was forced to endure many hardships in his tour of the trenches. Many who joined the ranks of the Canada Corps had never been involved in heavy combat and their baptism of fire was often a harrowing experience. Those soldiers arriving at the front quickly lost the appeal and fervour of action that the war spawned in the summer of 1914. The many trenchlines that scattered their way across the terrain of France and Flanders were the dominant feature of the Great War. It was under these conditions that the sniper appeared on a routine basis.

Sniping, however, was not new to the world by August, 1914. The art of precision shooting had a history of its own dating back to the eighteenth century. Though not in any organized form, marksmanship increasingly developed as weapons technology continued to bloom. In the American

Revolution, American Civil War and other military engagements, the crackshot continued to make his presence known. By the turn of the twentieth century, with further developments in rifle technology, the marksman was a common feature of the hunting lifestyle and in the military his presence was only a semi-organized one.

With the outbreak of war in 1914, sniping started on its evolutionary road and significance within the military machine. This thesis has maintained that sniping in the Canada Corps was both an evolutionary process and critical to the war effort. In regard to the former contention, sniping, though appearing on a semi-organized level in the American Civil War and Boer conflict, was formally institutionalized in the Great War. Sniping schools in France and England established a curriculum that survived the war and continued to train proficient marksmen in the art of sniping. The fundamentals of shooting, movement and camouflage have become universal and have reappeared on the battlefronts of the Second World War, Korea and Vietnam. Though rifle technology has changed substantially, a sniper like Hesketh-Prichard or Herbert McBride would have little difficulty sniping in this day and age.¹ Although German sniping was dominant up to 1916, the fact that the Allies were able to refine sniping skills and surpass the enemy at this game is evidence of further evolution. After all, Allied sniping in 1914 was erratic and dependent upon a small number of skilled riflemen. By 1918 Canadian snipers, many of whom already possessed a hunter instinct, had emerged as a force to reckon with on the Western Front. Among those most feared snipers were Native Canadians. With some of the highest tallies on the Allied front, Canadian snipers had reached their peak by war's end.

Sniping's contribution to the war effort was equally important for it was present in every aspect of the conflict. Trench warfare was largely responsible for the development of sniper doctrine and the marksman's presence in the trenches of the Western Front was standard on both sides.

¹ Adrian Gilbert: Sniper, (New York, 1994). p.83.

As trench warfare was stagnant, little could be done to break the deadlock. Where all other forms of military activity dropped into periodic lulls, the sniper was able to conduct his work on a regular basis. Sniping in trench warfare was a complex process and had a profound effect on breaking enemy morale and inflicting material loss. ²

It was believed by many in the military establishment that sniping would long be forgotten after the trench system had broken down. This was not the case as there were many instances of sniping in open warfare throughout the war. While in the open, snipers made effective use of no man's land and they were equally instrumental on the offensive. Thus, when mobile warfare reappeared in the summer of 1918 the sniper continued to justify his existence in all facets of combat.

The value of sniping in the Great War appears to have attracted the attention of some members within the military hierarchy. In December, 1918, Brigade level officers began responding to memos requesting that a permanent history of sniping in the Canada Corps be made. ³ This was to come in the form of a museum, depicting names and equipment of exceptional snipers in the Canada Corps. There was, however, no evidence of this exhibit found in the course of this research.

Sniping, though valuable to the war effort, did eventually decline as a specific skill in the years following the Great War. The sniper had suddenly fallen into disfavour among the military elite and his formal presence was removed from the military machine. Perhaps there was a moral issue involved, though striking a man down in cold blood is really no morally different than subjecting him to attritional battle tactics and the conditions of trench warfare. Throughout the war, snipers made few friends with the exception of their observation partner. ⁴ The common soldier's attitude toward the sniper remains to be documented and there is little information

² Tony Ashworth: Trench Warfare: The Live and Let Live System, (New York, 1980). p.59.

³ NAC, RG9 III C3/4063/14/6, "2nd Inf. Bde. to 5th, 7th, 8th and 10th Bn., 12/27/1918".

⁴ Daniel Dancocks: Welcome to Flanders Fields, (Toronto, 1988). p.87.

regarding it. In trench warfare, snipers were at times shunned by their compatriots because their activities would often invite an artillery shelling. Moreover, the science of sniping required a certain degree of independence and working alone. This left little time for fraternization. Furthermore, there may have been some resentment from other ranks since snipers were spared fatigue duties and usually resided in comfortable bunkers when in the line.⁵ Whatever the reasons for their fate, sniping survived the premature lynching from the military establishment and appeared once again in the Second World War. Today, special forces units (ie. Green Berets, Navy Seals etc.) continue to be a part of the military machine.

The costs of war are always extraordinary and for some reason, military leaders must resort to sacrificing military personnel to achieve material gain. This has been a long-standing feature of war and it has never really changed. How to achieve that gain has varied over the centuries but the goal remains the same: victory. In the Great War the sniper proved that he was essential to victory in November, 1918. His story, however, has largely remained untold - until now. Though cleverly camouflaged for decades, the Canadian sniper has made and found his mark in the annals of Canadian history.

⁵ Desmond Morton: When Your Number's Up, (Toronto, 1993). p.178.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

DOCUMENTS

National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, ON

Record Group Nine, (Volume/Folder/File, "Title")

NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/105/2, "Canadian Corps Rifle Meeting, Matches & Sniping Competition".
NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/2, "Notes on Sniping Collected by the 3rd Cavalry Division".
NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/2, "Hints and Tips for Snipers".
NAC, RG9 III C3/3867/107/3, "Notes and Suggestions - Training of Snipers in Rest.
05/24/1916".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4015/29/4, "1st Division Operations: Passchendaele, Section I, 1917".
NAC, RG 9 III C3/4021/49/2, "2nd Army to 1st Canadian Division, 12/22/1915".
NAC, RG 9 III C3/4021/49/2, "1st Cdn. Div. School for Snipers 11/27/1915".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4031/8/26, "1st Division HQ to 1st, 2nd, 3rd Inf. Bde., 04/02/1918".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4031/25/3, "Results of Sniping Competition, July 9, 1918 From Capt.
Montgomery, 1st Cdn. Inf. Bde.".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4041/17/8, "3rd (Toronto) Battalion Scouts and Snipers, 10/10/1915".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4052/21/2, "10th Bn. to HQ 2nd Inf. Bde., 11/20/1917".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4057/35/3, "Headquarters, 2nd Inf. Bde. to O.C. 5th, 7th, 8th, 10th Bn.'s,
03/06/1916".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4057/35/3, "1st Division HQ to 1st, 2nd, 3rd Inf. Bde., 05/24/1915".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4057/35/3, "1st Division HQ to 1st, 2nd, 3rd Inf. Bde., 05/15/1916".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4057/35/3, "1st Division HQ to 1st, 2nd, 3rd Inf. Bde., 05/24/1916".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4057/35/3, "1st Division HQ to 2nd Inf. Bde., 12/01/1916".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4064/15/3, "1st Division to 2nd Inf. Bde., 08/12/17".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "6th Inf. Bde. to 4th Inf. Bde., 04/21/1916".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "Report on the Organization and Duties of the Scout Section
Employed by the 20th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 05/23/1916".
NAC, RG 9 III C3/4069/11/6, "O.C. 19th Bn. to Staff Capt., 4th Inf. Bde., 07/24/1916".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "O.C. 19th Bn. to Staff Captain, 4th Inf. Bde., 07/24/1916".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "Memorandum Relating to the Establishment, Organization and
Duties of Scout Sections, 4th Canadian Infantry Bde., 07/24/1916".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "Second Army to Canadian Corps, 2nd Division and 4th Inf. Bde.,
05/18/1916".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "Trench Orders".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "Memorandum Relating to the Establishment, Organization and
Duties of Scout Sections, 4th Canadian Infantry Bde.".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "2nd Division HQ to 4th, 5th, 6th Inf. Bde & 2nd Cdn. Pioneers.
02/20/1917".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4069/11/6, "8th Bn. to 2nd Division HQ, 01/14/1919".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4095/3/36, "31st Bn. to 6th Inf. Bde., 01/10/1919".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4095/3/36, "27th Bn. to 6th Inf. Bde., 01/11/1919".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4095/3/36, "5th Inf. Bde. to 2nd Division HQ, 01/13/1919".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4095/3/36, "4th Inf. Bde. to 2nd Division, 01/15/1919".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4104/15/1, "Intelligence Summaries (various), 4th Inf. Bde. to 2nd Division, late-
1915-Jan. 1916".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4104/15/2, "Summary of Intelligence - 4th Brigade, 02/03/1916".
NAC, RG9 III C3/4104/16/2, "4th Inf. Bde. to 2nd Division, 06/14/1917".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4114/46/2, "2nd Division to 4th, 5th, 6th Inf. Bde., 06/16/1917".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4128/16/10, "6th Canadian Infantry Brigade. Brigade Scouting and Sniping Competition, 20/06/1916".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, 6th Inf. Bde. to 27th, 28th, 29th, 31st Bn.'s, 05/03/1916".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, "6th Inf. Bde. to 27th, 28th, 29th, 31st Bn.'s, 05/05/1916".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, "Notes of a Conference of Scout and Sniper Officers, 06/02/1917".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, "6th Inf. Bde. to 27th, 28th, 29th, 31st Bn.'s, 06/06/1916".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, "Notes of a Conference of Scout and Sniper Officers, 06/02/1917".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4135/22/4, "27th Bn. to 6th Inf. Bde., 12/30/1916".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4140/10/13, "2nd Division to 6th Inf. Bde., 11/15/1915".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Report on Warner & Swasey Sights, Scout Officer 31st Bn. to O.C. 31st Bn., 06/13/1917".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Lecture Given at N.C.O.'s School of Instruction, 2nd Army".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4143/8/1, "Additional Notes by an Officer of the 1st Canadian Division".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4146/8/9, "2nd Division Notes From Fighting on the Somme".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4146/7/1, "3rd Division Summaries of Intelligence, 01/01/1917 to 06/30/1917".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4152/1/3, "Notes on Telescopic Sights and Rifles, 04/25/1916".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4166/19/9, "2nd Inf. Bde. C.M.R. to G.O.C. Canadian Corps, 12/15/1915".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4185/41/3, "6th Inf. Bde. to 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th C.M.R. Bn.s, 03/04/1918".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4192/15/3, "43rd Bn. Cameron Highlanders of Canada to 6th Inf. Bde., 01/16/1919".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4192/15/3, "9th Inf. Bde. to 3rd Division, 01/18/1919".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4197/1/3, "Canadian Corps HQ to 3rd Division, 05/02/1916".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4206/9/3, "Divisional Scout and Sniper Training School - Syllabus of training for Battalion Sniper Scouts".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4217/7/9, "50th Bn. to G.O.C. 10th Inf. Bde., 01/15/1917".

NAC, RG9 III C3/4217/7/15, "10th Inf. Bde. to 44th, 46th, 47th, 50th Bn. & Capt. G.A. Speer. MC, 08/11/17".

NAC, RG9 III D3/4912/War Diary - 1st Battalion, "1st Battalion Narrative of Operations, 26-27 April, 1915 to 1st Cdn. Inf. Bde., 04/28/1915".

NAC, RG9 III D3/4912/War Diary of PPCLI, "Narrative of Operations - August 25-29, 1918".

NAC, RG9 III D3/4941/War Diary of the 50th Battalion, "April 28th, 1918".

NAC, RG9 III D3/5048-5049, "War Diary of Canadian School of Musketry".

Record Group 24

NAC, RG24/1840/G.A.Q. 10-37, "Canadian Corps Scouting, Sniping and Observation School".

NAC, RG24/1883A/26, Sniping and Marksmanship, "Telescopic Sights, 1st Division to Canadian Corps HQ, 03/29/1916".

NAC, RG24/1883A/26, Sniping & Marksmanship, "Correspondence: Sniping and Scouting Schools".

NAC, RG24/1883A/26, "Canadian Corps Observation, Scouting and Sniping School, Record of 4 Best Shots in Each Class, November 1916 to November 1918".

NAC, RG24/1883A/Ross Rifle, 1916, "D. Haig, Commander-in-Chief, British Armies in France to War Office, 05/28/1916".

NAC, RG24/1883A/Ross Rifle, 1916, "War Office to the High Commissioner for the Dominion of Canada, 06/03/1916".

Record Group 41

NAC, RG41/v.10, CBC In Flanders Fields, "Interview with Charles Stevens, 20th Bn."
NAC, RG41/v.11, "CBC Interview - In Flanders Fields with L.R. Fennel, 27th Bn."

Manuscript Division

NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter II - Front Line Intelligence".
NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter VII - Sniping and the Organization of Sniping in Open Warfare".
NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers - "Chapter IX - Sniping in Trench Warfare".
NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter XIII - Telescopic Sights"
NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter XV - Snipers' Posts, Observation Posts, Loopholes and Hides".
NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter XIV - Camouflage".
NAC, MG30 E2/v.1, N.A.D. Armstrong Papers, "Chapter XVI - Rifle Batteries, Sniperscopes, Rifle Rests".

NAC, MG30 E43, "Cameron Brant Testimonial, 08/01/1915"

NAC, MG30 E300/19, Army Summaries - the Somme, Jan-Dec. 1916. "Short Notes Obtained from Units in the Somme Area".

NAC, MG30 E574, "War Diary of Cpl. J.A. Holland, July-August, 1916"

Miscellaneous

NAC, Military Service Record - Cameron D. Brant.
NAC, Military Service Record - Cpl. H. Norwest.
NAC, Military Service Record - Francis Pegahmagabow.

Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum, "Synopsis of Notes by Lieut. J. Scott Cameron, 44th Battalion C.E.F. on Sniping Course at Aldershot, March 21st to April 1st, 1916 and Report of Same".

CANADA, Department of Indian Affairs, Annual Report - for the year ending March 31, 1919. Sessional Paper No.27. (Ottawa, 1920).

CANADA, Veterans Affairs: Native Soldiers, Foreign Battlefields, (Ottawa, 1993).

Canadian Army's Sniper Training Manual, CFP 309 [5]. Ministry of National Defence.

Imperial War Museum

Imperial War Museum, Sniper on the Western Front, E.A. Clarke, Sniper, 1st & 2nd Northants Regiment.

BOOKS

- Adami, J. George: War Story of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, Volume I, (London: Rolls House Publishing Co. Ltd., 1918).
- Armstrong, N.A.D.: Fieldcraft, Sniping and Intelligence, (Aldershot: Gale & Polden Ltd., 1940).
- Ashworth, Tony: Trench Warfare: The Live and Let Live System, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers Inc., 1980).
- Bird, Will R.: Ghosts Have Warm Hands, (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Ltd., 1968).
- Cameron, Kenneth: No.1 Canadian General Hospital, 1914-1919, (Sackville, NB: Tribune Press, 1938).
- Currie, Col. J.A.: The Red Watch, ((Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart Ltd., 1916).
- Curtis, Edward E.: The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution, (New York: AMS Press, 1969).
- Dancocks, Daniel: Welcome to Flanders Fields, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988).
- Duguid, Col. Fortescue: Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1918, (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, 1938).
- Gilbert, Adrian: Sniper, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).
- Griffith, Paddy: Battle Tactics of the Western Front, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).
- Hagerman, Edward: The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).
- Hahn, Maj. J.E.: The Intelligence Service Within the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918, (Toronto: Macmillan Publishers of Canada Ltd., 1930).
- Hesketh-Prichard, Maj. H.: Sniping in France, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1920).
- Hodder-Williams, Ralph: Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, 1914-1919, (Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 1923).
- Hopkins, J. Castell: South Africa and the Boer-British War Volume 2, (Toronto: War Book Publishing Co., n.d.).
- Linderman, Gerald F.: Embattled Courage, (New York: Free Press, 1987).
- McBride, Herbert W.: A Rifleman Went to War, (Mt. Ida, AK: Lancer Militaria, 1987).
- McGee, Robert: The Fenian Raids on the Huntingdon Frontier, 1866 and 1870, (Canada: n.p., 1967).
- McPhail, Andrew: Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919 - The Medical Services, (Ottawa: F.A. Acland, 1925).

- Morton, Desmond: When Your Number's Up, (Toronto: Random House, 1993).
- Nicholson, G.W.L.: Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1964).
- Rawling, Bill: Surviving Trench Warfare, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).
- Senior, Hereward: The Last Invasion of Canada, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991).
- Skennerton, Ian: The British Sniper, (London: Arms & Armour Press, 1984).
- Stokesbury, James L.: A Short History of World War One, (New York: William Morrow & Company Inc., 1981).
- Ward, Christopher: The War of the Revolution, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1952).
- Winter, Jay & Baggett, Blaine: The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century, (New York: Penguin Studio, 1996).

ARTICLES

- : "Canada in War Time", The Detroit Tribune, (Sunday, December 6, 1914). p.14.
- : "Canadian Indians and World War One", The Tomorrow File, (vol.1, no.3, November 30/1983). p.12-22.
- : "First World War Indian hero almost forgotten", Leader-Post Regina, (Sat. Nov 11, 1989), p.C9
- : "Rifles of the Great War", War Machine, No. 86, n.d. p.1701-1720.
- John Holman: "Indian Veteran: Canada's forgotten heroes", Windspeaker (Vol.7 No.36, November 10, 1989). p.4.
- Desmond Morton: "Colonel Otter and the First Canadian Contingent in South Africa, 1899-1900", Policy by Other Means, Michael Cross & Robert Bothwell eds., (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Ltd., 1972). p.95-120.

VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Leslie Parker Mephram

PLACE OF BIRTH: Brampton, Ontario

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1971

EDUCATION: Mayfield Secondary School, Brampton, Ontario
1985-1986

Chinguacousy Secondary School, Brampton, Ontario
1986-1988

West Hill Secondary School, Owen Sound, Ontario
1988-1991

University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario
1991-1995 B.A. Honours History

University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario
1996-1997 M.A. History