6042 Rosewood Drive,
Appleton, Wisc., 54915,
Jan. 14, 1999.

Dear George:

Dad was always haunted by his wartime experiences and would often retell them to relieve his anxieties. Later on, as a result of a series of little strokes, he began experiencing difficulty with his speech and was embarrased by it. We convinced him to tape his wartime experiences to help improve his speech. He was very secretive about the tapes but he finally let me have them.

Dad's memory of the details I was familiar with was quite good but he did not record them in any sensible order nor, if he stopped recording for a moment, did he necessarily pick up the same tale again. So the stories had to be sorted. Thank goodness for computers! Fortunately, I had heard most of them many times and I was able get them in some sort of order. Luckily for me Florence would send me numerous details and new facts as fast as she could uncovered them. Do you have additions or comments?

I have read literature of the period in order to correlate their data with his experiences. Ann's daughter-in-law (she works in R.C.M.P. records, Ottawa) was able to get army papers confirming many details and dates. In addition, I found a useful summary of most wartime biographies and autobiographies by Samuel L. Hynes entitled "The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War" which helped me greatly. It reviews the styles and techniques of important authors such as Sassoon, Graves and even our own Mowatt. He then contrasts the differences in style of officers & other ranks and actual vs. made-up experiences.

I have not yet organized my other memories of Dad. The blank spot I am working on is the years from 1919 to 1933 before he married Florence. He never talked about my Mother and his relationship to her so I have to approach this story from the Bjerke's history (of which I have plenty) and from scant newspaper accounts and records of the Health Lab.

Another useful book (but use with care) by Bill Roorbach "Writing Life Stories" illustrates techniques for dummies like myself to develop short stories. This was not important for "Jim's Tale" as it is for recounting the experiences of my Norwegian relatives in Norway and North America as a series of separate adventures for my Grandchildren to read.

I hope this tale brings back happy memories for you as it does for me.

Norman

JIM'S TALE

PROLOGUE

Copied from the Personal Section (page 3) of the Fort William Daily Times Journal, August 5, 1919:

Sgt. W. J. Thompson, nephew of J. W. Thompson of east Francis St west Fort William, arrived home Saturday (Aug. 2) after almost 4 years overseas. He was wounded at Vimy Ridge on April 14, 1917 and later served on the hospital staff at #1 Canadian Hospital, Bramshot, England.

INTRODUCTION

I was born on Oct. 9, 1899 in Bruce County, Arran Township, Ontario, where my grandparents and great grandparents had settled long ago. My mother Annie died of TB when I was a year old; I was told she was beautiful and had red hair. My father on the other hand, was quite dark and had curly black hair which charmed women and probably helped him remarry within a year. I do not remember much of my stepmother Clara Morran, but things must have been difficult for her as she had to look after 3 active children besides producing two of her own. We lived in Invermay (close to Tara) on 4 acres of land where my father kept a stable and his mason's shop.

For some reason my father left Invermay for the west - perhaps the building opportunities in North Dakota were attractive, or the opening of Northern Manitoba to settlement (where Clara's relatives had already settled) seemed opportune. I remember none of this, my halfsister Olive was born in Backoo, North Dakota in 1903 but I do not know where I was at that time. I vaguely remember a farm out West and then moving back to Invermay, Ontario. My father died in Feb. 1906 and our Thompson clan suffered a major upheaval.

My step-mother Clara took her two girls to live near other Morrans around Dauphin, Manitoba and my mother's children were also sent to live with their close relatives in the west. Leslie went first to live with Uncle Ham in North Dakota, while Lavina and I (escorted by our Grandmother Ann Jane) arrived in Fort William on Christmas Day 1906, Lavina to live with our Aunt Sophie, and me with Uncle John.

I was not able to get along with my Uncle, he had lived a frugal and difficult life and had little understanding of children. My attitude to my Uncle and to my schoolmates at that time did not help much either. My sister Lavina had a more caring upbringing from Aunt Sophia and her husband Moses Stinson. My schooling was indifferent. Although I enjoyed poetry, I disliked all other subjects and as a result I never graduated from Public School. I got to know Cecil King who ran the Wayside House (like a Y.M.C.A.) for the Methodist Church. But mostly I worked at odd jobs that my Uncle was able to find for me such as messenger boy for the Grand

Trunk Elevator in Fort William.

Thus in the spring of 1915 when school was out, there was no movement of grain and I would not be hired again until fall. As much as possible I spent the summer with my canoe and a tent camping along the Kaministiqua River; I'd buy grub and cook my meals there and paddle my canoe up and down the river and out on Lake Superior. On some occasions I paddled down the river and along the lake as far as the other side of Current River in Port Arthur, where the 52nd battalion was training. I never came ashore but just watched them from about half a mile out in the lake. Another time there was an aviator taxiing a plane back and forth on the parade square but he never could get it into the air.

RUNNING AWAY

World War 1 changed my life completely and although I was underage, I determined to join the army. My first attempt was unsuccessful; I managed to enlist in the local regiment, but Uncle John and his brother-in-law Joe Crawford (an accountant and future mayor) quickly got me discharged. My next attempt was more successful and was the major influence on my life. My chance came in the fall of 1915 when trains were taking laborers out west to harvest grain. To confuse my guardians, I kicked my canoe out into the Kam River and let it float out into the lake. Then I spent $6.50 for a ticket to Winnipeg and left town. I stayed on longer than I should have and passed Winnipeg where I was supposed to go.

I kept out of sight but when they came to take tickets at Brandon, the conductor caught me: "You have passed your station", he said, "Oh no," I said,"I haven't gone past." And he said: "Do you mean you want to go to British Columbia?" and I said: "Yes sir!" So he just passed on and did not pay much attention to me because we were packed tight and could not get about. There was just barely sitting room for the migrant laborers in those old C.P.R. colonial cars. So I got a free ride until we came to Medicine Hat and there two C.P.R. policemen came through the train looking for me. I slipped out of the train and hid under a bridge until the train had gone and everybody was out of sight. Then I started walking along the track to the west. I walked forever; and just past Redcliff, I bought a pound of cheese and a loaf of bread; I figured I could catch water along the way. Then I began dog-trotting and came to Suffield, then to Carlstad as evening came on. Although there were several rail sidings there, I was surprised there were no houses. It was quite dark by that time and I was at least 35 or 40 miles away from Medicine Hat but I kept on walking and in the dawn, just as the grey light was coming up, I had to rest. Just before the town of Brooks I ducked into a hay loft through the barn door and hid in the hay. I was awakened by somebody walking on top of the hay. He started pitchforking hay into the manger for the horses and cows in the barn. I was afraid he was going to stick that fork into me, but I kept my eye on him and never let him close enough to scare me and he finally went away. I waited nearly an hour or so and then slipped out of the loft down the hoist rope. I continued

on and finally sat down and slept alongside the track where there was a pond on the other side of Brooks. I was completely famished so I returned to a restaurant in a nearby town and had breakfast and relaxed. When I had recovered my cool I figured: "Now I can take the train into Calgary since it is only a hundred and a bit miles away". So I caught the evening local train into Calgary and hid overnight near the tracks. The first thing I saw when I awoke was those doggoned mountains! The country was as flat as a table top until it reached the mountains that stretched into the sky! They looked to be about ten miles away and was I amazed to learn they were more than 40 miles away.

BASIC TRAINING

I did not know what to do or where to go but luckily for me, the army had begun recruiting for the 82nd battalion. So I claimed to be 18 and with a number of other adolescents, enlisted again on September 16, 1915. My number was 160,064; the 64th person to enlist in the 82nd reserve battalion. We had no barracks at first so I lived in a rented room for a couple of weeks until they got the barracks ready for us at Victoria Park in Calgary. Once the camp was established, we were supplied with everything that we needed.

We slept in a sort-of cattle barn with beds 3 bunks high. Since I was the small guy, I had to go to the top bunk which would be 3 up. Coming down one time, I put my foot on a folded blanket on a lower bunk. You know how we had to roll them up when we were fixing up our beds, or we'd get hell from somebody. So the bunkee hit me, BANG! on the nose. It didn't bleed but it hurt like heck, and I,- well, ever since I had been a kid I had been practicing with a heavy bag and boxing and I was a pretty fair amateur boxer. I swung back and just happened to catch him at the right time; he was bending over when I swung and I put a 4 inch cut all along the rim of his eye. He had to go to the hospital to get stitches put in it. They had me up on charge, in fact they arrested the both of us, he got out of it by telling them that I wasn't such a bad guy and that the others put me up to it. And anyway the colonel only gave me 16 days CB- and although he talked stern, I didn't figure he was mad, and I figured it would be all right. They sent me over to the officers mess to wash dishes and to help with the officers' mess and in that way I served my time in confinement to barracks. Our colonel was a fine man who had been shot through the lungs at the second battle of Ypres and had returned to start up another battalion. He was usually very tough on defaulters but I think he was really looking out for me. It sure cost the officers a lot of money because you know they received our food and they also bought a lot of nice things for themselves. So by golly, any time I could get a handful of anything that went by I would grab it and eat it because I was always hungry.

In a very short time they started bringing other training battalions into camp. The 56th was one of them, we were the 82nd

and there were two others I forget. They had a lot of Americans in them who had come up to Canada for odd jobs but couldn't find any work and joined up. They planned to desert before long and return to the States before it got cold. They wanted me to go with them and they were surprised that I wanted to go to the silly war. I wouldn't go with them but they were very nice to me.

In the meantime the troops resorted to riotous behavior and on one occasion a mob of several hundred soldiers marched down 8th Avenue in Calgary and destroyed a restaurant thought to be owned by a German immigrant. The police couldn't do anything and none of us were very popular with the Calgary people. Then they had another riot in a local hotel. And all this was because these people were rumored to have employed a German. That was all bunk. I was Bugler of the Guard when some of the guys came back from that riot. They had a Military Police squad at the barracks gate searching the returnees - if they came back with liquor in their pockets they were for it. As Bugler of the Guard I went out and met a couple of the guys that I knew and I took their liquor and of course walked back through without being searched. And of course they got through the gate without getting pinched and getting a darned long sentence. But you know my friends were good to me so I tried to do the best for them. We helped one another that way.

Because of the unusually large harvest in Alberta that fall (about 60 bushels to the acre), we were allowed to have 2 weeks off to help. We could keep our Army pay as well as whatever we earned so I took my 14 days off and went out. We got our $1.10 a day from the army and they paid 35 cents an hour on the farm which means about $3.50 a day for stooking grain. I worked like a dog from a half hour before daybreak until a half hour after it got dark for two weeks. The farmer wanted to pay me $1.00 a day because I was not an adult. So when I told some of the my buddies about it - that I could do nothing about it - they crowded the farmhouse and told the farmer that it would be very nice if he would give me the same pay everybody else got - OR ELSE, GET IT! So he got it and did! And I came back quite rich. I had $42.00 for 12 days work. Oh boy, when you figure that I was getting $1.10 a day too, I was in the lap of luxury, I was among the rich people.

Most of my money went for food, I was always starving at that stage in my life. I also bought a beautiful silver watch because in those days important men always wore them on a long watch chain. I tried to imitate the older men in other ways. I smoked and I chewed but I wasn't used to it. We were drilling on this very, very hot afternoon and I had a chew of tobacco in my mouth. Suddenly some sergeant came along behind me and gave me a slap on the back and said "Straighten up there!". I swallowed the tobacco and about an hour later I got so sick they sent me to the doctor's office. He took a look at me and he said "What did you eat?" and I said I was chewing tobacco and I swallowed it. So he said "Oh well, get back out in the parade ground, it will clean the worms out of you.". Hell of a lot of sympathy that was!

Boxing matches were encouraged - and I got into one boxing match with a chap called Sidney Roy Trinkall. He was a Bugler like me. They had just immigrated from England a few years before and his Dad had taught him how to box. Well he was good - he was just playing with me. Everytime he scored a good punch, he would turn his back on me and grin triumphantly at the audience. And I kept on slugging because I wasn't much of a boxer but I had a punch. He made the mistake of standing there gaping at the crowd when I gave him my Sunday punch. Say, they carried him off the ring unconscious. I was scared stiff, I thought I had killed him. He was just standing with his neck loose and if you are in that kind of condition you could get hurt in a boxing match. Anyway that was the end of that and we got to be good friends afterwards.

I even bought a motor bike from him. To start it, you had to turn the compression off, run with it, switch everything back on and sometimes it would start and it would go for a while. I could get possibly 35 to 40 mph out of it and if the hill wasn't too steep, it would climb a hill too. I finally broke the darned thing coming down a hill approaching Victoria Barracks. An automobile ahead of me had put its brakes on and I guess my brakes were not too good as I ran into the back of him and broke my front fork off. So I took the thing to a garage but we had gone overseas before they had fixed it. Maybe it is still waiting for me but that is unlikely as that was 64 years ago. It had a rubber belt drive and when you went into high gear you just squeezed the drive wheel to make the radius larger and when you wanted to go into low gear you just loosened things up.

TRAINING IN ENGLAND AND FRANCE

Shortly after this accident we left for England to finish our training. We went by rail along the northern route past Winnipeg through Ottawa, Montreal and on to Halifax. We embarked on the liner Empress of Canada which was pretty big and carried a 6" gun mounted in the stern. I slept beneath that gun as often as possible all the way over because when all the hammocks were hung up down below for troops to sleep in, you had to crawl underneath or squeeze between them and you could get lost and would be unable to find your own hammock for quite a while. So it was better to go up there and sleep if you could get away with it. We were not part of a convoy but we sailed with an escort for a couple of hundred miles. Then the escort left us and we were on our own. The ship would zig-zag at high speed to confuse any submarines that might be around.

After what seemed like eternity, we arrived at Southampton and docked. We unloaded, stood around forever, and were finally put on a train to take us up to Otterpool which was the Canadian Army Receiving Camp. It took us about 20 hours from debarkation to get to Otterpool which was near Folkstone even though they are so close that I could have run the distance in a couple of hours. The old English train coaches we rode in were amazing, those passenger

coaches were divided into separate compartments each containing two long benches and there is no communication between the compartments. You have to walk along a step on the outside of the car to change from one compartment to another and the conductor could not get at you except when you got on or off. We had no lavatory or latrine - there was nothing at all, you just had to sit there; nor did we even have food. We had to put down the window and hope the men in the compartment behind us were not looking out when we urinated through the open window. I guess many of them got their faces sprayed.

We eventually arrived at Otterpool where we got a hot meal and we went into our 8-man tents. The tents had been set up for us earlier but it had been raining, raining, raining all the time and they were thoroughly soaked. It rained continuously thereafter and it seemed like it never did anything else in England except rain. However we weren't there too long until they moved us to St. Martins' Plain which was right near Hythe and right beside Caesar's Camp. That was where Julius Caesar was supposed to have landed around 4 BC.

There were a lot of troops in training there. After we completed our route marches and various drills we went down to a place called Lydd (where they also had an artillery range) for target practice. All my life from the time I was 7 years old I had a gun. True I had to hide it under the sidewalk so that my Uncle didn't know- an old single shot 22. But I could stand up in a canoe coming down the river and pick off a snipe once in a while. And I was a pretty good snap shot too. At this target range at Lydd, we had one test for 10 rounds rapid fire at 200 yards. I was shooting with a Ross rifle, it had only five pounds in the magazine so I had to reload halfway through. I rested the end of the gun on a rock when no one was looking and I fired my ten rounds off very quickly. The first bullet hit at 5 o'clock on the bull and the amazing thing about it was that the other bullets clustered there in a compact mass that could be touched with a half-crown. It was pure luck because although the Ross was the most accurate rifle used in the war, it could not shoot that straight. The next day they had taken the target and cut out that piece showing the cluster of bullets and hung it up at Lydd.

I was chosen as a potential contestant for a marksmanship contest the following week. The next day, there was a whole mob of observers standing around me making bets when my turn came for the run-off. I could not rest the gun on a stone with everyone standing around. I was getting magpies, outers and some bulls but it was a hell of a mess and they no longer thought of entering me for the final rifle shoot - for a prize. The moral of the story is not to cheat, you'll get caught up eventually. Well I had already earned my crossed rifles, you had to have a certain skill in shooting and you are permitted to wear the crossed rifles patch if you wished. I suppose the crossed rifles badge is like the medals and pins they give the American soldiers now.

In the spring of 1916, when we completed our training in England, the 82 reserve battalion was prepared for embarkation across the Channel. They took the Ross rifles from us because mud jammed them too easily and gave us Lee-Enfields instead. Two of us, my pal (a Jewish boy from New York) and I were omitted from the list because we were under age. However we did manage to slip into our battalion ranks after roll call and made our way on the ferry to France with our friends. The battalion sergeant-major was completely dumbfounded when he found he had two extra soldiers on the French side of the Channel. After 3 roll calls, he caught us and we were detained for shipment back to England. But because of the slaughter of soldiers at the Somme, those orders were cancelled and we were sent along with the others as replacements for the 10th Battalion, First Canadian Division (originally from Calgary).

MORE TRAINING

Our first weeks in France were spent in secondary trenches back from the front line in order to let us get used to the routine and the noise. Then we were moved into support trenches in a relative quiet part of the Somme front. They were so elegant, not like the real front line trenches we encountered later; very deep with a board walk along the bottom to keep your feet out of the mud. We had some shelling and the trench had "funk holes" on the sheltered side into which you could duck if the shells started hitting the trench. I had found a dandy one, I was almost out of sight underground on the front side and you could walk right past without even touching me. Paddy M'Laughlin, a tough old veteran about twice my size who had survived the second battle of Ypres and the gas attack there said, "Billy, the sergeant is looking for you. You better get hold of that sergeant real quick". When I found him, the sergeant said, "You go back down in your funk hole and we'll tell you what to do." So I came back... and Paddy had settled in my funk hole - with a grin on his face and he looked ever so kindly and he sounded so surprised when I objected. He was so big that I realized I could not get him out so I took my trenching tool and started to dig my own hole. I got about half way done when Paddy said, "Hell you don't know how to do it" and then helped me make a better one than the one he had.

Ammunition for the front line was often brought up to this rear position on narrow gauge tracks and was stored for use between support trenches. We had a projectile called the "Flying Pig" stored in one of those dumps. I don't know how much it weighed but certainly 2 men could barely lift it. It was torpedo shaped with a long metal stem and was fired from a hole dug in the ground. It went wiggling up at about 45 degrees and when it reached the peak it turned and dropped straight down and would penetrate the earth at least 40 feet unless it hit rock or something very solid, certainly something more solid than chalk and then explode. It was meant to collapse dugouts and especially old mine shafts and tunnels. We were fighting in a coal mining region of France and those tunnels ran 40 to 60 feet under the ground for miles in all

directions. It was quite possible for a series of tunnels running around under our lines to come out miles behind our lines. The purpose of the Flying Pig was to collapse those dugouts and tunnels.

During the shelling one night they hit our dump with a 5.9, which is about the same as our 6 inch shell and started an explosion. We had about a hundred Pigs in that dump. Well when the first one went, it started a chain reaction among the rest and they went also. The metal stems took off like a hundred scythes, each singing like a swarm of bees. BANG! BANG! BANG! went the Pigs to beat two of a kind! WHIZZ! ZZIP! ZOOM! BUZZZ! went the stems all over the place! You would think that we were in the thick of a battle with the Pigs exploding and buzzing all around. I never put up my head while all that was going on. We were relieved at dawn long after the explosions and fire had died down.

Then we moved to a trench near a little town called Senlus, very close to the Albert Cathedral- we could see the Virgin hanging down from the tower from where we camped. Then we moved up and occupied some houses that were all broken up in Albert. Then we had several trips up the line just as reserves, not coming into contact very much and finally we were moved into a front line position. We had some scattered shelling and after one big barrage, they found the Jewish boy from New York and myself missing. An officer came stomping down the line looking for us just as we crawled back from under the wire because the shelling had ceased. Well he came up and he looked at us as if he was going to eat us and he asked, "Where were you?" and we said, "We thought the Germans were coming to attack us and the shelling got so heavy that we crawled out under the wire where we could see because we were short and could not see over the trench and thought they would be right on top of us before we could start shooting. So we thought we would be better out there and could do some harm to the enemy." The lieutenant blew his top at first, then he laughed and thought that it was a good joke. So we got out of that all right but I never stuck my head up again though. The CO decided that my friend and I should be separated as far as possible from each other. I was transferred and made Runner for A Company (messenger boy) and I never saw my friend again.

When I was sent to A Company I met Paddy M'Laughlen again and got along real good with him as we were both Irish amongst a lot of Scots and Englishmen. He was an older man who had worked for the Hudson Bay Co. in the north and had many Eskimo friends. He taught me how to survive and find my way on a battlefield and how to squeeze the most benefit out of the army routines. I was still very small at that stage of my life and the army webbing (heavy belts for cartridges, food, bayonet, canteen, and shovels) hung down almost to my knees making it awkward to walk. Paddy trimmed it, in fact altered it, down to my size and things became more comfortable. In return, I read Paddy's mail for him, gave him my rum which I could not stand and warned him of any trouble for us that might come out of headquarters. He even found an old short Lee-Enfield bayonet for me, the longer bayonet (used with the short

L.-E. rifle) almost dragged on the ground when I marched. None of the officers or NCO's ever offered any criticism of this strange rig during inspections!

THE SOMME AND MOQUET FARM

Then on 20 September, 1916, the 10th battalion was marched up to the Sugar Refinery on the Somme Front - in fact a little in advance of the Sugar Refinery to a trench called the Sugar Trench. Then we moved along the trench (which was a river of mud) until we got to a position just to one side of Moquet Farm - a strongly fortified German position on a hill that had resisted earlier British and Australian attacks. The shelling was terrible and everything got mixed up in my mind as this was the first battle I had been in. We were scared and shaking like the dickens but we didn't run away and the officers came down the line checking to see who was wounded and if everybody was all right. Very shortly after this, all hell broke loose because our left our Division was fighting very desperately to take Moquet Farm and we were ordered to attack to one side to protect them. The Germans had a very strong fortification there reinforced with men, machine guns and trench mortars from which they could launch a counterattack. We had to attack them with our flank exposed and we came in for a terrible whomping! In fact everything became so bad that it got all mixed up for me. I don't remember throwing my grenades and I followed the rest of the company up the slope. I remember the guys would be falling down and some would be dead and some just wounded. I kept on going because there would be stretcher bearers and mopping up coming behind us to pick up the wounded.

Finally we occupied a muddy shell hole to the right of the main Canadian attack which captured Moquet Farm and we hoped we could hold off a counter attack from the flank. Along the way we had some men from an English regiment join us for a time. Because of my new skills (thanks to Paddy), I redirected them toward their own front and I guess they joined their own outfit again. By that time A Company was reduced to 7 men of which I was one -- actually 6 men and a messenger boy.

Really we had a tough fight there. We had one chap in our company - you would ordinarily think he was a Sunday School teacher but he was a mean S.O.B. We had 3 German prisoners in that shell hole with us and he kept asking, "Now what do you want? That fellow has a pretty fair pair set of shoes, I don't think we could wear that uniform though,"and he went on and on in such a threatening manner that the Germans were nearly hysterical.

As Company Runner, I had to report our progress and take the prisoners back through the battlefield to the rear. When it had quietened down considerably I went to our field headquarters with the prisoners and was immediately made the Sergeant in charge of all Runners left in the battalion. I had become a "King's Sergeant" (a temporary battlefield appointment) because no one was left! By

then we were consolidating our positions and as a result of my new duties I saw all kinds of frightening things but this was my first fight and I don't remember anything too distinctly.

I remember on the way back to a rest area that I was sound asleep walking. You wouldn't believe it but I was. I was asleep and when I got to Albert which was a long distance away, it seemed like hundreds of miles away, I woke up. We had a small amount of rum issued to Canadian soldiers each day and this was waiting for us. But when you have 600 men's rations and divide it among 82 men, you have lots for everybody. So I drank a whole Players cigarette tin full, the tin that holds 100 cigarettes - that would be about a cup full. I drank pretty near all and it burned all the way down. The next thing I knew I was vomiting, I was- I was- any opening I had, had something coming out of it. I hadn't had enough to eat so that it wasn't too bad. But water was coming out of me every place it could- eyes, mouth, every place and then I passed out. The next thing I knew when I woke up was that the boys had thrown me in the corner of the house where we were resting. It must have been 10 o'clock the next morning and OH! what a headache! Furthermore, these things that happened still remain so unclear to me, they are a fantasy almost; it seems like a dream and it was not until I got to Vimy Ridge six months later that I got some of my brains chucked together again. Even now, 64 years later, I don't think I ever really recovered from that battle.

We had 2 or 3 more trips to the front as support troops while replacements were coming in. Mostly we would wallow in mud and try to kill rats until relieved. A few of our less seriously wounded began coming back but we were still under strength. After one tour we marched back to Worlay, no it was Val de Maison. We stopped there for the night but during the night we were called back to the front. We were given 220 rounds of ammunition, 2 mills bombs, a can of beef and our iron rations. We were told we were going to force march back over our old route and back up the line again without rest. Well my friend Paddy M'Lauchlan told me " Hell don't carry your great coat, don't carry your ground sheet, they are too heavy and we have a long way to go - 42 kilometers." We were told we had to get back as quickly as possible, if we dropped out we were to sit on the side of the road and just stay there. Someone would come along and pick us up. When I got too tired Paddy took my rifle so I carried my ammunition, and my bombs, my iron rations and my special short Lee-Enfield bayonet and I made it allright. Our platoon of Japanese soldiers (observers from the Imperial Japanese Army) all dropped out along the way! I was half asleep and my feet hurt quite a bit but I made it and that's where we set up defences.

It was a strange business, we were not going up to relieve troops, but to fill a vacuum. Apparently the 6th Scottish and some German Marines (at least they had "Gibraltar" on their badges) met in front of their lines and wiped each other out! It must have been spontaneous, there had been no artillery involved, just a spontaneous bayonet fight. It was the darndest sight, the only bayonet fight I had ever seen. There were Jocks upside down dead in

the wire and Germans dead in the wire and no living person was around. When we got there the dead were so thick you couldn't help standing on some of them. We moved ahead in case another attack came, but we met only light shelling. We were taken out as soon as they could get fresh reserves up. Apparently the generals on both sides were caught unawares. We didn't do any fighting, we just got a little shelling and an awfully, awfully long walk.

It took us 3 days of easy marching to get back where we had been at Val de Maison. Along the way we met a detatchment of the Coldstream Guards marching to the front. Their Regimental Sergeant-Major was leading and he shouted "Make way for the Guards! make way for the Guards". Our Colonel said "To hell with them!" and we staggered right through their ranks. We kept on going until we got to Estercooshay where we rested for a few days. Then unexpectedly we were told that Canadian soldiers would no longer be added piecemeal to the British Army.

The waste of British, Canadian and Australian troops at the Battle of the Somme by General Haig was covered up in England, but in Canada and Australia it ignited a political bombshell. The Colonial Governments demanded and got more responsible and separate leadership for their forces under generals acceptable to the Colonial Governments. An attack on Vimy Ridge was planned to be the first undertaking by Canadian troops as an independent force and General Byng was put in charge. Vimy was a highly fortified ridge which dominated the Channel ports (Calais, Dunkerque, etc.) as well as the approaches to Paris from the west.

We were to be trained in new methods of attack and aggression. We started at a little village called Corencey almost at the end of Souchay valley. We had to go a few hundreds of yards up until we were in Suchay valley and then we went in and occupied a pimple which was maybe 50 feet above the valley floor, and only 20 feet higher than the surrounding land. Souchay valley itself wasn't occupied by the Germans as it was too wet but they had Sochay village and we were told it was out of bounds. Also in the valley was a little village called Maraque. I spent a sunny afternoon shooting out their windows, since the Germans were using the buildings. We were on a forward slope and we had camouflaged the approaches to our latrine with sacks and stuff so the Germans couldn't see it and shoot at us. But they put some machine guns on the towers of a nearby coal mine and when I went to use the latrine there was a burst of machine gun bullets as I sat down. I took one dive for the trench and headed for the dug out while my friends laughed like hell to see me coming out of there with my pants down. We hadn't realized that they could reach us from the tower. It was unexpected because until then everything had been so quiet.

When we first arrived, Jerry would send 5 shells over at 5 oclock, they weren't aimed particularly at anybody, it was just a reminder that there was a war on. (I learned later they were ranging shots to pinpoint future artillery action). At first we could hear them talking, and it was said that people would often shout across the

lines because it had been used as a rest site by both sides. Soon after we moved in, our training patrols would find their trenches empty. Next when they fired shells at us we got the Lahore Division of Artillery to send over 6" as well as whiz bangs. That got Jerry mad, and over the next few days we could see troop movements on their side. The next time we went over on a raid, I wasn't on it, our boys came back with fresh experienced Bavarian troops as prisoners. Our raids were to gather information, give us new combat experiences and to help us discover how to destroy their deep bunkers that escaped damage from the artillery. Gosh, nobody was there at first but that soon changed! Both sides sent out aggressive patrols. Even so, all agreed there is a time for battle and a time not to start anything until we get into a position we want. For example, when we went out on patrol, we'd sometimes see a patrol of Germans coming down our wire and they'd see us. We could start a war then because we both carried bombs at the ready but then both patrols would be destroyed. So we would sneak past each other like wary dogs.

I disliked our rest area at Quernoy about a mile from Mont St. Heloi. There is an old cemetery beside the Church there right in the center of town that had been bombarded and practically all the graves were scattered all over the place. I didn't like staying there because seeing a lot of fallen soldiers is different than a bunch of dead people who are getting blown out of their coffins.

I had a close call on my last raid on the German trenches. By that time, our new aggressive tactics involved raiding at night on a more ambitious scale, platoon to company size groups of specially armed and trained men, not only to capture prisoners for interrogation but mostly to estimate the extent of German defences in greater detail than we had ever done before. In order to get started we had to cut holes and secret pathways through our barbed wire and go as far as possible into the German wire without them knowing it. Then we could burst upon them. Of course they would send patrols up and down the wire entanglements to discover these rabbit holes and thus presume a raid was coming. If one was found, it could be booby trapped or ambushed.

Anyway, things were not quite normal on this raid. We looked around, bombed a few dugouts, found no prisoners because the Germans must have been warned and on the way back only the odd sniper was firing at us. But just as we got back to the edge of our wire, a couple of machine guns- one from each side about 100 or 200 yards away cut loose on our area. Well boy, you wouldn't believe it but nobody got hit. I was at the rear coming back and I missed the hole we had cut in our wire. So I took a running dive, turned a somersault over the wire and landed in our trench with a hole in my pants but I ripped my hand on the barbed wire. The gang was laughing at me for flying into the trench with the seat of my pants torn. The cut on my hand became infected, swelled up and I got feverish. Eventually the battalion doctor lanced it but he made a such mess that my left little finger has never behaved properly ever since. Instead of sending me back to the hospital for a nice

easy Blighty, they left me in the Division Dressing Station for 2 weeks. They thought they could take care of me there since my fever had gone down and my hand was starting to heal.

Anyway, when I got back to the battalion, they had moved to Bulley Grenay and to the coal mines there. It was fairly quiet until March when we came back to the other side of Mont St. Heloi to a little town called Aqui. There was a cinema there but no houses that I could see were still standing. One of our inevitable narrow gauge railroads went up past there, past the church at Mont St. Heloi and so on to the line. The Germans had never fired at Mont St. Heloi because there must have had some kind of agreement. We never let a soldier get into the grounds, it was closed tight to us. Parts of the old church were chipped in the war of 1870 and hadn't been repaired. It was a fine old church high up from that area and we kept away from it and we didn't fire from it or anything. The cinema we were in when we rested was in its shadow. When we moved out to take our positions on the line the Germans hit it with a 9.2" howitzer shell. I think it killed 60 men in the very place where we had been the night before. We were lucky we had moved out.

Vimy Ridge

As chief messenger boy for the 10th Battalion, my duties took me behind the massive preparations for Vimy to a greater extent than even many of our officers. During the evening before Vimy Ridge, about 7:30 pm, I was going back down to Adrien Dump to check on some supplies when I met George Frederick Canon Scott- THE beloved Rev. Canon - again. I met him first on the Somme where he had just buried his son and when I heard he was the Rev. Canon Scott, I had asked: "Were you the guy that wrote the "Unnamed Lake" that was in our school-book reader?" "Yes", he said, " I wrote it, but", he said, "You know, soldier, I'll tell you this, we'd been out all day walking through the mountains, the mosquitos were just black, the sun was hot and we stopped at this lake. We just had to have a rest and that lake was so beautiful". He was at Vimy to help with the wounded and dying.

When the bombardment started, you couldn't hear any individual cannon, there was just an increasing tempo of noise so loud that you could hardly think. The ground shook like you wouldn't believe and at 5:30 the attack started and the troops went over the top. I was waiting just outside Headquarters dugout, I had to help establish communications between Headquarters and the various command centers set up by the company commanders of the 10th battalion. The new Canadian Army tactics worked and we captured Germans by the thousands! The men swarmed over the Ridge and caught the enemy in their bombproofs before they could get out. The ground was literally covered with prisoners and I could count 50 Germans for 1 Canadian within a couple of hundred yards of me. There were rifles lying all over then place and if the Germans had recovered from the shock of the bombardment and picked up those weapons, we would have been in trouble. I hope some of our generals had

arranged for machine guns to cover them, but I don't know. I heard later that some Germans did just that to the C.M.R. Regiment from Montreal.

There were many dead and wounded at the German H.Q. at Nine Elms when we arrived with telephone wire so we had gotten there just as the invading troops passed through. That was a rapid advance - only a couple of hours after the attack started! Their breakfast was laid out and I tried the food. Those German staff officers lived pretty good, better than we did in fact, but they had the lousiest bread I ever ate. Oh, it was sour!- but they had good cigars and they had coffee. They lived pretty good, but I did not have much time to enjoy the food because one of the first orders to come over the field telephone called me back to battalion headquarters.

On my way back from the front, I saw my friend Paddy limping back to an Aid Station with blood spurting from his legs. I could not stop and help. Further on I saw a Red Cross man - a stretcher bearer with a bayonet in his hand - surrounded by wounded troops and German soldiers. There were literally hundreds of German prisoners about who had surrendered and were standing around. They were in little groups of 4 or 5 men. I suppose they had been warned not to collect in any larger groups or they would be machine gunned. Well our advance men had moved so far ahead by then, that there were few troops back here. The Medic was pointing to a stretcher on the ground that he wanted the German to help carry to the rear. When the German wouldn't do it, the medic saw me and recognized the stripes, he signalled me to come over. Well I thought there must be trouble so I unslung my rifle that I had had over my shoulder when I was running and came up to him. I motioned him to lift the stretcher. He said, "no", the Red Cross man said "Kill the bastard!". The German prisoners were standing around watching us. So like a darned fool I pulled back the bolt and put a fresh bullet in the magazine and told him "Take up the stretcher or I'll shoot". He didn't even answer me. I pulled the trigger and I shot him. He must have been dead when he hit the ground. He just stiffened up and dropped down before we could reach him. I got his identity disk which was an aluminum oval serrated in the center so that you could bend it up and break off and the other part would remain on the German body. I'll remember that name as long as I live:

Walter Hoffbein
161 K.I.R. Horde
Bietress Strasse,13
Bucklemberg

I was afraid that his show of resistance would give the others standing around the courage to pick up rifles and start shooting. The minute I shot the German, the others picked up their stretchers and started going back. The man that we wanted picked up was in pretty bad shape, so we got another German to take up the load and help carry him off. I will never forget that tragedy. Lots of strange stories come out of the war, some of them are almost

unbelievable, this one is almost so, but I don't give a damn if anybody believes it or not.

THE AFTERMATH

As soon as I got back to our H.Q., I was shown a map and ordered to locate the headquarters of the Highland infantry on our flank. It was a beautiful sunny afternoon in Picardy as I started out. The next thing I saw was a hospital room, but most clearly I remember it was a dull gray day and it was snowing outside! For a while I did not know who I was or where I was. The staff at the hospital did not know who I was either as my identification tags had been lost. Since I had been found partially buried in the mud by a Scottish patrol in their sector of the front, they must have assumed I was a Scot, and I was shipped off to the Scofield Military Hospital in Edinburgh. Perhaps my unusual webbing and short Lee-Enfield bayonet gave that impression on the battlefield. I still do not know how long I had been unconscious. Once my memory came back, and I could be identified, arrangements were made to send me to a Canadian Hospital. In the meantime I had no records in Scotland - and until bureaucratic problems were solved, no pay, and no amenities. I wired my Uncle John in Fort William for money which he kindly sent me despite my earlier behavior.

In the meantime because of the manpower shortage, the British assigned me (as a walking wounded) to assist some Nuns running a small temporary hospital for very badly wounded located under the Firth of Forth bridge. I must have been helpful because the Nuns had me sent part time to the University of Edinburgh to learn the rudiments of first aid and hospital care. Some time after I had finished this preliminary training, I was transferred to the new Canadian Hospital system in England. I remember a kindly old lady giving me a religious tract and a couple of coins for cigarets as I left Edinburgh Station for England. I could not refuse because she was so earnest.

I was first sent to the Canadian Red Cross Hospital at Ramsgate for preliminary examination. While there, I stopped off at a Y.M.C.A. Canteen in the Hospital and heard someone call out "Jimmy Thompson!". What a surprise! It was Cecil King from Fort William, the first person from that city I had met since running away from home! Cecil King was a pacifist, ran a Canteen during the war, became a Methodist preacher and often preached sermons in Fort William after the war. It was strange to hear that name again; the Calgary men I was with called me Billy. I'll bet Cecil used his influence as a YMCA worker to notify higher authorities in the Army that I was a minor, because in October when I was discharged from that hospital all my military records were tagged "MINOR". I'll bet Uncle John had a hand in those events also!

When I first arrived at the hospital I met the only member of the 10th Battalion I ever encountered after leaving France. He was a member of the platoon of soldiers from the Japanese Army attached

to the 10th Battalion to observe the fighting in France. He was proud of Japanese warriors and told me his uncle had fought at the siege of Port Arthur in Manchuria in 1904. We got on famously and I have a large portrait of us I brought back from England with me. We'd come walking up dead-pan in the streets of Ramsgate on intersecting courses and as soon as we got even with each other, but pretending not to know each other, he'd grab me by the arm, do a side step and flip me over his shoulder and I'd be facing in the opposite direction to where he was coming from. I'd go right on walking without missing a step and he'd go on also. When we pulled that stunt you should have seen the people look at us cock-eyed. They'd wonder what had happened and they couldn't be sure what occurred. I wish I could remember his name.

I was transferred to the Bramshot hospital and trained in laboratory work, mixing solutions and cultures and growing bacteria. I did not have to attend most of the customary pipes and drums of military ceremonies. The Doctors were very helpful and encouraged me to learn as much as possible about my new trade. One day the commanding officer came to me with a sore on his face and asked me to identify the organism responsible. Luckily, I had just finished studying anthrax bacteria, recognized it immediately on his slide and hoped I was not correct when I announced my result. I was not believed so they sent for a real expert - Dr. French of Guy's Hospital, London - who confirmed my opinion. The source was identified as being from a shipment of shaving brushes the Hospital had received from India made of animal bristle. The CO died a few days later and if the brushes had been distributed to the troops a serious epidemic would have resulted.

I had a wonderful time during the spring of 1918. At long last I got a real furlough from the army and spent some of it in London. I nearly got arrested there and put in jail. I had been watching Queen Mary (she was King George V's wife) riding by in her horse and carriage when someone grabbed me by the shoulder. It was a big London Bobby who growled:

"Don't you know enough to stand at attention and salute when your Queen passes by? I ought to put you on charge."

My Queen? I guess he saw that I was a stupid Colonial and didn't know better.

I also spent a lot of time sight seeing around London and would rent punts and canoes to paddle around the ponds in St. James Park. The boats reminded me of home and the enjoyment I found on the Kaministiqua River. I showed off to the Londoners by doing all sorts of tricks in the canoes that I had learned in Fort William. Because of that skill, my black hair and very dark complexion I was able to convince many onlookers that I was a bone-fide Indian.

By the middle of summer, the flu epidemic caused the death of untold millions of people in Europe and my duties were altered. We had so many deaths at the hospital that some of us were trained to perform preliminary autopsies - separate the flu deaths from those due to other causes - in order to lighten the doctors' work. I

would sometimes lie on a slab in the mortuary and rise up with a moan (like Lazarus must have done) when the other orderlies entered with a fresh body. They finally got used to it though. I recorded 80 deaths in my Army Note Book that I alone did by Armistice Day when the war ended. I stopped recording that data when I was given other duties.

After armistice was declared in 1918, riots broke out between Canadian troops waiting to be shipped home and civilians in neighboring towns. I was made Corporal and put in charge of a platoon patrolling the streets and pubs of Ramsgate to maintain order. We would march around town and visit the pubs where I would take 2 men from the platoon inside to check for drunks. I would then remove the 2 men that I had dropped off on the previous circuit and the most recent pair could drink beer and watch out for trouble until I returned. There were a number of pubs on my route so my platoon was obviously shorthanded but nobody noticed. That technique made the men manageable and everybody got rewarded for presenting a public soldierly appearance.

One time we encountered an English General (with red tabs and swagger stick no less) on a prowling expedition to check out our military effectiveness. Luckily we spotted him first and the men shaped up with a snappy "long-arm swing" and "eyes right!" as we marched past. Luckily he did not question our size but I'll bet he knew what was going on. It must have made a favorable impression on him because a week later I was a Sergeant again (this time with pay) in charge of all NCO's at the hospital. I collected supplies, directed all police patrols and oversaw the orders of the commissioned officers until I was shipped back to Canada.

Finally, when I was arranging to return to Canada in 1919, some of the English Doctors asked if I would remain and work as a technician in England. I decided not to do so because I was a Colonial, I was Irish and I was uneducated. That was not a winning combination in England in those days. I was discharged in Canada on August 1, 1919, about 7 weeks before my 20th birthday. The opinions of the English Doctors were helpful to me because when I successfully applied for a job in Canada I used Dr. French of Guy's Hospital London as my principal reference.

EPILOGUE

From page 3; Nov. 29, 1920; Fort William Daily Times Journal:

"Returned Soldier gets Important Job at Local Laboratory".

An order-in-council has been passed by the provincial government appointing Wm. J. Thompson on the permanent list of the civil service as assistant to Dr. N. O. Thomas in the provincial laboratory here. The position filled by Mr. Thompson will be that of laboratory technician, an important post, as he has charge of the preparation of of all the media that are used in the course of

the pathological work carried out by Dr. Thomas. Mr. Thompson is an overseas man, having enlisted at the age of 17 in 1914, going to Calgary to do so, as he had been turned down by his local recruiting office as underage. After serving in France for two years, he was wounded and returned to England, where, during his convalescence, he was employed at laboratory work, for which he displayed such an aptitude that he was soon made sergeant in charge of this department at Bramshot hospital, where he stayed until the end of the war. This gave him 2 years experience overseas and he has since been working with Dr. Thomas for fourteen months, it having been necessary for him to serve for a full year before getting his permanent appointment under the government. Dr. Thomas is very much gratified with the appointment, as he says that Mr. Thompson is one man in a hundred, in his aptitude for this class of work, which is extremely technical and demands really a higher type of skill than does the work of the ordinary laboratory chemist. The assistance he is rendering in the local laboratory, Dr. Thomas describes as invaluable.