How the Canadians saved the situation at Ypres
The Acting High Commissioner for Canada has authorised the communication to the press of the following notes from the Canadian Record Officer now serving with the Canadian Division:

The recent fighting in Flanders, in which the Canadians played so glorious a part, cannot, of course, be described with precision of military detail until time has made possible the co-ordination of relevant diaries and the piecing together in a narrative both lucid and exact of much which so near the event is confused and blurred. But it is considered right that those mourning in Canada to-day for husbands, sons, or brothers who have given their lives for the Empire should have, with as little reserve as military considerations allow, the rare and precious consolation which in the agony of bereavement the record of the valour of their dead must bring. And, indeed, the mourning in Canada will be very widely spread, for the battle which raged for so many days in the neighbourhood of Ypres was bloody, even as men appraise battles in this callous and life-engulfing war.

But as long as brave deeds retain the power to fire the blood of Anglo-Saxons the stand
made by the Canadians in those desperate days will be told by fathers to their sons. In the military records of Canada this defence will shine as brightly in the records of the British Army as the stubborn valour with which Sir James Macdonnel and the Guards beat back from Hougomont the division of Foy and the army corps of Reille.

The Canadians have wrested from the trenches, over the bodies of the dead and maimed, the right to stand side by side with the superb troops who in the first battle of Ypres broke and drove before them the flower of the Prussian Guards.

Looked at from any point, the performance would be remarkable. It is amazing to soldiery when the genesis and composition of the Canadian division are considered. It contained, no doubt, a sprinkling of South African veterans, but it consisted in the main of men who were admirable raw material, but who at the outbreak of war were neither disciplined nor trained, as men count discipline and training in these days of scientific warfare. It was, it is true, commanded by a distinguished English General. Its staff was supplemented without being replaced by some brilliant British staff officers, but in its higher and regimental commands were to be found lawyers, College professors, business men, and real estate agents, ready, with cool self-confidence, to do battle against an organisation in which the study of military science is the exclusive pursuit of laborious lives. With what devotion, with a valour how desperate, with resourcefulness how cool and how fruitful, the amateur soldiers of Canada confronted overwhelming odds may perhaps be made clear even by a narrative so incomplete as the present.

The Salient of Ypres.

The salient of Ypres has become familiar to all students of the campaign in Flanders. Like all salients, it was and is known to be a source of weakness to the forces holding it, but the reasons which have led to its retention are apparent, and need not be explained.

On April 22 the Canadian Division held a line of, roughly, 5000 yards, extending in a northwesterly direction from the Ypres-Roulers railway to the Ypres-Poelcapelle road, and connecting at its terminus with the French troops. The division consisted of three infantry brigades, in
addition to the artillery brigades. Of the infantry brigades the first was in reserve, the second was on the right, and the third established contact with the Allies at the point indicated above.

The day was a peaceful one—warm and sunny, and, except that the previous day had witnessed a further bombardment of the stricken town of Ypres, everything seemed quiet in front of the Canadian line. At five o’clock in the afternoon a plan carefully prepared was put into execution against our French allies on the left. Asphyxiating gas of great intensity was projected into their trenches, probably by means of force pumps and pipes laid out under the parapets. The fumes, aided by a favourable wind, floated backwards, poisoning and disabling over an extended area those who fell under their effect. The result was that the French were compelled to give ground for a considerable distance. The glory which the French Army has won in this war would make it impertinent to labour the compelling nature of the poisonous discharges under which the trenches were lost. The French did as everyone knew they would do—
all that stout soldiers could do—and the Canadian Division, officers and men look forward to many occasions in the future in which they will stand side by side with the brave armies of France. The immediate consequences of this enforced withdrawal were, of course, extremely grave.

The 3d Brigade of the Canadian Division was without any left; or, in other words, its left was in the air.

It became imperatively necessary greatly to extend the Canadian lines to the left rear. It was not, of course, practicable to move the 1st Brigade from reserve at a moment’s notice, and the line, extended from 5000 to 9000 yards, was naturally not the line that had been held by the Allies at five o’clock, and a gap still existed on its left.

It became necessary for Brigadier-General Turner, commanding the 3d Brigade, to throw back his left flank southward to protect his rear. In the course of the confusion which followed upon the readjustments of the position the enemy, who had advanced rapidly after his initial successes, took four British 4.7 guns in a small wood to the west of the village of St Julien, two miles in the rear of the original French trenches.

Enormously Outnumbered.

The story of the second battle of Ypres is, then, the story of how the Canadian Division, enormously outnumbered, for they had in front of them at least four divisions, supported by immensely heavy artillery, with a gap still existing, though reduced, in their lines, and with dispositions made hurriedly under the stimulus of critical danger, fought through the day and through the night, and then through another day and night fought, fought under their officers until, as happened to so many, those perished gloriously, and then fought from the impulse of sheer valour, because they came from fighting stock.

The enemy, of course, was aware—whether fully or not may perhaps be doubted—of the advantage his breach in the line had given him, and immediately began to push a formidable series of attacks upon the whole of the newly-formed Canadian salient. If it is possible to distinguish when the attack was everywhere so fierce, it developed with particular intensity at this moment upon the apex of the newly-formed line running in the direction of St Julien.

It has already been stated that four British guns were taken in a wood comparatively early in the evening of the 22d. In the course of that night, and under the heaviest machine gun fire, this wood was assaulted by the Canadian Scottish, 16th Battalion of the 3d Brigade, and the 10th Battalion of the 2d Brigade, which was intercepted for this purpose on its way to a reserve trench. The battalions were respectively commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Leckie and Lieutenant-Colonel Boyle, and, after a most fierce struggle in the light of a misty moon, they took the position at the point of the bayonet.

At midnight the 2d Battalion, under Colonel Watson, and the Toronto Regiment, Queen’s Own, 3d Battalion, under Lieutenant-Colonel Rennie, both of the 1st Brigade, brought up much-needed reinforcements, and, though not actually engaged in the assault, were in reserve.

All through the following days and nights these battalions shared the fortunes and misfortunes of the 3d Brigade. An officer who took part in the attack describes how men about him fell under the fire of the machine guns, which, in his phrase, played upon them “like a watering-pot.” He added quite simply “I wrote my own life off,” but the line never wavered.
fell another took his place, and, with a final shout, the survivors of the two battalions flung themselves into the wood.

The German garrison was completely demoralised, and the impetuous advance of the Canadians did not cease until they reached the far side of the wood and entrenched themselves there in the position so dearly gained.

They had, however, the disappointment of finding that the guns had been blown up by the enemy, and later on, in the same night, a most formidable concentration of artillery fire, sweeping the wood as a tropical storm sweeps the leaves from a forest, made it impossible for them to hold the position for which they had sacrificed so much.

The fighting continued without intermission all through the night, and to those who observed the indications that the attack was being pushed with ever-growing strength, it hardly seemed possible that the Canadians, fighting in positions so difficult to defend and so little the subject of deliberate choice, could maintain their resistance for any long period.

The Great Counter-Attack.

At 6 a.m. on Friday it became apparent that the left was becoming more and more involved, and a powerful German attempt to outflank it developed rapidly. The consequences if it had been broken or outflanked need not be insisted upon. They were not merely local. It was, therefore, decided, formidable as the attempt undoubtedly was, to try and give relief by a counter attack upon the first line of German trenches now so far advanced from those originally occupied by the French.

This was carried out by the Ontario 1st and 4th Battalions of the 1st Brigade under Brigadier-General Mercer, acting in combination with a British brigade. It is safe to say that the youngest private in the ranks as he set his teeth for the advance knew the task in front of him, and the youngest subaltern knew all that rested upon its success. It did not seem that any human being could live in the shower of shot and shell which began to play upon the advancing troops. They suffered terrible casualties; for a short time every other man seemed
to fall, but the attack was pressed ever closer and closer. The 4th Canadian Battalion at one moment came under a particularly withering fire. For a moment, not more, it wavered. Its most gallant Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Burchill, carrying a light cane only, coolly and cheerfully rallied his men, and at the very moment when his example had infected them fell dead at the head of his battalion. With a hoarse cry of anger they sprang forward (for, indeed, they loved him) as if to avenge his death. The astonishing attack which followed, pushed home in the face of direct frontal fire, made in broad daylight by battalions whose names should live for ever in the memories of soldiers, was carried to the first line of the German trenches.

After a hand-to-hand struggle the last German who resisted was bayoneted, and the trench was won.

The measure of this success may be taken when it is pointed out that this trench represented in the German advance the apex in the breach which the enemy had made in the original line of the Allies, and that it was two-and-a-half miles south of that line.

This charge, made by men who looked death indifferently in the face, for no man who took part in it could think that he was likely to live, saved, and that was much, the Canadian left—but it did more. Up to the point where the assailants conquered or died it secured and maintained during the most critical moment of all the integrity of the Allied line. For the trench was not only taken; it was held thereafter against all comers, and in the teeth of every conceivable projectile, until the night of Sunday, the 25th, when all that remained of the war-broken but victorious battalions was relieved by fresh troops.

The Fortunes of the 3d Brigade.

It is necessary now to return to the fortunes of the 3d Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General Turner, which, as we have seen, at five o'clock on Thursday was holding the Canadian left, and after the first attack assumed the defence of the new Canadian salient, at the same time sparing all the men it could to form an extemporised line between the wood and St Julien. This
Brigade also was, at the first moment of the German offensive, made the object of an attack by the discharge of poisonous gas. The discharge was followed by two enemy assaults. Although the fumes were extremely poisonous, they were not perhaps, having regard to the wind, so disabling as on the French lines (which ran almost east to west), and the Brigade, though affected by the fumes, stoutly beat back the two German assaults.

Encouraged by this success, it rose to the supreme effort required by the assault on the wood, which has already been described.

At 4 a.m. on the morning of Friday, the 23d, a fresh emission of gas was made, both upon the 2d Brigade, which held the line running north-east, and upon the 3d Brigade, which, as has been fully explained, had continued the line up to the pivotal point as defined above, and had then spread down in a south-easterly direction. It is perhaps worth mentioning that two privates of the 48th Highlanders, who found their way into the trenches commanded by Colonel Lipsett, 90th Winnipeg Rifles, 8th Battalion, perished in the fumes, and it was noticed that their faces became blue immediately after dissolution.

The Royal Highlanders, of Montreal, 13th Battalion, and the 41st Highlanders, 15th Battalion, were more especially affected by the discharge. The Royal Highlanders, though considerably shaken, remained immovable upon their ground. The 48th Highlanders, who no doubt received a more poisonous discharge, were for the moment dismayed, and, indeed, their trench, according to the testimony of very hardened soldiers, became intolerable.

The battalion retired from the trench, but for a very short distance, and for an equally short time. In a few moments they were again there. They advanced upon and occupied the trenches which they had momentarily abandoned.

In the course of the same night the 3d Brigade, which had already displayed a resource, a gallantry, and a tenacity for which no eulogy could be excessive, was exposed (and with it the whole Allied case) to a peril still more formidable. It has been explained—and, indeed, the fundamental situation made the peril clear—that several German divisions were attempting to crush or drive back this devoted brigade, and, in any event, to use their enormous numerical superiority to sweep around and overwhelm its left wing at some point in the line which cannot be precisely determined. The last attempt partially succeeded, and in the course of this critical struggle German troops in considerable, though not in overwhelming, numbers swung past the unsupported left of the brigade, and slipping in between the wood and St Julien added to the torturing anxieties of the long-drawn struggle by the appearance and, indeed, for the moment, the reality of isolation from the brigade base.

**Heroic Highlanders.**

In the exertions made by the 3d Brigade during this supreme crisis, it is almost impossible to single out one battalion without injustice to others, but though the efforts of the Royal Highlanders of Montreal, 13th Battalion, were only equal to those of the other battalions who did such heroic service, it so happened by chance that the fate of some of its officers attracted special attention. Major Norsworth, already almost disabled by a bullet wound, was bayonetted and killed while he was rallying his men with easy cheerfulness. The case of Captain McCuaig, of the same battalion, was not less glorious, although his death can claim no witness. This most gallant officer was seriously wounded in a hurriedly-constructed trench at a moment when it would have been possible to remove him to safety. He absolutely refused to move, and continued in the discharge of his duty.

But the situation grew constantly worse, and peremptory orders were received for an immediate withdrawal. Those who were compelled to obey them were most insistent to carry with them, at whatever risk to their own mobility and safety, an officer to whom they were devotedly attached, but he knowing, it may be better than they, the exertions which still lay in front of them, and unwilling to inflict upon them the disabilities of a maimed man, very resolutely refused, and asked of them one thing only, that there should be given to him, as he lay alone in the trench, two loaded Colt revolvers to add to his own, which lay in his right hand as he made his last request. And so, with three revolvers ready to his hand for use, a very brave officer waited to sell his life, wounded and racked with pain, in an abandoned trench.

On Friday afternoon the left of the Canadian line was strengthened by important reinforcements of British troops, amounting to seven battalions. From this time forward the Canadians also continued to receive further assistance on the left from a series of French counter attacks pushed in a north-easterly direction from the canal bank. But the artillery fire of the enemy con-
tinually grew in intensity, and it became more and more evident that the Canadian salient could no longer be maintained against the overwhelming superiority of numbers by which it was assailed.

Slowly, stubbornly, and contesting every yard, the defenders gave ground until the salient gradually receded from the apex near the point where it had originally aligned with the French, and fell back upon St Julien.

Soon it became evident that even St Julien, exposed to fire from right to left, was no longer tenable in the face of overwhelming numerical superiority. The Third Brigade was therefore ordered to retreat further south, selling every yard of ground as dearly as it had done since five o'clock on Thursday. But it was found impossible without hazarding far larger forces to disentangle the detachment of the Royal Highlanders of Montreal, the 13th Battalion, and of the Royal Montreal Regiment, 14th Battalion. The brigade was ordered, and not a moment too soon, to move back. It left these units with hearts as heavy as those with which his comrades had said farewell to Captain M'Cuaig.

The German tide rolled, indeed, over the deserted village, but for several hours after the enemy had become masters of the village the sullen and persistent rifle fire which survived showed that they were not yet masters of the Canadian rearguard. If they died they died worthily of Canada.

Position of 2d Brigade.

The enforced retirement of the 3d Brigade—and to have stayed longer would have been madness—reproduced for the 2d Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General Curry, in a singularly exact fashion the position of the 3d Brigade itself at the moment of the withdrawal of the French. The 2d Brigade, it must be remembered, had retained the whole line of trenches, roughly 2500 yards, which it was holding at five o'clock on Thursday afternoon, supported by the incomparable exertions of the 3d Brigade and by the highly hazardous deployment in which necessity had involved that brigade. The 2d Brigade had maintained its lines. It now devolved upon General Curry, commanding this brigade, to reproduce the tactical manoeuvres with which earlier in the fight the 3d Brigade had adapted itself, to the flank movement of overwhelming numerical superiority. He flung his left flank round south, and his record is that in the very crisis of this immense struggle he held his line of trenches from Thursday at five o'clock till Sunday afternoon, and on Sunday
afternoon he had not abandoned his trenches. There were none left. They had been obliterated by artillery.

He withdrew his undefeated troops from the fragments of his field fortifications, and the hearts of his men were as completely unbroken as the parapets of his trenches were completely broken.

In such a brigade it is invidious to single out any battalion for special praise, but it is perhaps necessary to the story to point out that Lieutenant-Colonel Lipsett, commanding the 90th Winnipeg Rifles, 8th Battalion of the 2d Brigade, held the extreme left of the brigade position at the most critical moment. The battalion was expelled from the trenches early on Friday morning by an emission of poisonous gas, but recovering in three-quarters of an hour it counter-attacked, retook the trenches it had abandoned, and bayoneted the enemy; and after the 3d Brigade had been forced to retire Lieutenant-Colonel Lipsett held his position, though his left was in the air, until two British regiments filled up the gap on Saturday night.

The individual fortunes of these two brigades have brought us to the events of Sunday afternoon, but it is necessary to make the story complete to recur for a moment to the events of the morning.

After a very formidable attack the enemy succeeded in capturing the village of St Julien, which has so often been referred to in describing the fortunes of the Canadian left. This success opened up a new and formidable line of advance, but by this time further reinforcements had arrived.

Here, again, it became evident that the tactical necessities of the situation dictated an offensive movement as the surest method of arresting further progress. General Anderson, who was in command of the reinforcements, accordingly directed that an advance should be made by a British brigade which had been brought up in support. The attack was thrust through the Canadian left and centre, and as the troops making it swept on, many of them going to certain death, they paused an instant, and with deep-throated cheers for Canada gave the first indication to the Division of the warm admiration which their exertions had excited in the British Army.

The advance was indeed costly, but it could not not be gainsaid. The story is one of which the brigade may be proud; but it does not belong to the special account of the fortunes of the Canadian contingent. It is sufficient for our purpose to notice that the attack succeeded in its object, and the German advance along the line, momentarily threatened, was arrested.
Another Call.

We had reached, to describe the events of the afternoon, the points at which the trenches of the 2d Brigade had been completely destroyed. With this brigade the 3d Brigade and the considerable reinforcements which had by this time filled the gap between the two brigades were gradually driven, fighting every yard, upon a line running roughly from Fortuin, south of St Julien, in a northerly direction towards Passchendaele. Here the two brigades were relieved by two brigades after exertions as glorious, as fruitful, and alas! as costly as soldiers have ever been called upon to make.

Monday morning broke bright and clear, and found the Canadians behind the firing line. This day, too, was to bring its anxieties. The attack was still pressed, and it became necessary to ask Brigadier-General Curry whether he could once more call upon his shrunken brigade.

“The men are tired,” this indomitable soldier replied, “but they are ready and glad to go again to the trenches.”

And so once more, a hero leading heroes, the General marched back the men of the 2d Brigade—reduced to a quarter of its original strength—to the very apex of the line as it existed at that moment. This position he held all day on Monday. On Tuesday he was still occupying the reserve trenches, and on Wednesday was relieved, and retired to billets in the rear.

Such, in the most general outline, is the story of a great and glorious feat of arms. A story told so often after the event, while rendering bare justice to units whose doings fell under the eyes of particular observers, must do less than justice to others who played their part. And all did it as gloriously as those whose special activities it is possible even at this stage to describe. But the friends of men who fought in other battalions may be content in the knowledge that they, too, shall learn, when time allows the complete correlation of diaries, the exact part which each unit played in these unforgettable days. It is rather accident than special distinction which has made it possible to select individual battalions for mention.

It would not be right to close even this account without a word of tribute to the auxiliary services. The signallers were always cool and resourceful, the telegraph and telephone wires being constantly cut, and many belonging to the service rendered up their lives in the discharge of their duty, carrying out repairs with the most complete calmness in exposed positions. The despatch carriers, as usual, behaved with the greatest bravery. Theirs is a lonely life, and very often a lonely death. One cycle messenger lay upon the ground badly wounded. He stopped a passing officer, and delivered his message, together with some verbal instructions. These were coherently given, but he swooned almost before the words were out of his mouth.

The artillery never flagged in the sleepless struggle in which so much depended upon its exertions. Not a Canadian gun was lost in the long battle of retreat. And the nature of the position renders such a record very remarkable.

One battery of four guns found itself in such a situation that it was compelled to turn two of its guns directly about and fire upon the enemy in positions almost diametrically opposite.

It is not possible in this account to attempt a description of the services rendered by the Canadian Engineers or the Medical Corps. Their members rivalled in coolness, endurance, and valor the Canadian infantry, whose comrades they were, and it is hoped in separate communications to do justice to both these brilliant services.

No attempt has been made in this description to explain the recent operations except in so far as they spring from—or are connected with—the fortunes of the Canadian Division. It is certain that the exertions of the troops who reinforced and later relieved the Canadians were not less glorious, but the long-drawn-out struggle is a lesson to the whole Empire.

“Arise, O Israel!” The Empire is engaged in a struggle without quarter and without compromise against an enemy still superbly organised, still immensely powerful, still confident that its strength is the mate of its necessities. To arms, then, and still to arms.

In Great Britain, in Canada, in Australia there is need, and there is need now, of a community organised alike in military and industrial co-operation. That our countrymen in Canada, even while their hearts are still bleeding, will answer every call which is made upon them we know. The graveyard of Canada in Flanders is large; it is very large. Those who lie there have left their mortal remains on alien soil. To Canada they have bequeathed their memories and their glory.

On Fame's eternal camping ground
Their silent tents are spread,
And glory guards in solemn round
The bivouac of the dead.
ADVANCE GUARD OF PRINCESS PATRICIA'S CANADIAN LIGHT INFANTRY