

April 16, 1962

Mr. J.L.Stevens,
Box 532,
Winnipeg 1, Manitoba.

Dear Mr. Stevens,

Noticing in the "Legionary" that the veterans of the 8th Battalion (L.B.D.'s) are having a reunion on April 23, the anniversary of Gravenstafel Ridge in 1915, I write to mention a matter of interest.

I am the son of Lieut.Col. T.H.Raddall, D.S.O., who went overseas with the Battalion as machine gun officer in 1914, and rose to the command in 1918, when he met his death at Amiens.

He was wounded in the head and arm at Ypres, when the machine gun section on the right flank at Gravenstafel Ridge played a great part in clobbering the German attack. He was wounded again in 1917, when German aircraft bombed the brigade headquarters shortly after the Hill 70 fighting. He was second-in-command to Colonel Prower in the Passchendaele battle, and I have his message-maps, showing the 8th Batt. positions and objectives in this fighting. I also have his diary, which reveals his concern over getting out the wounded over the awful morass of the battlefield. He was awarded the D.S.O. and twice mentioned in Haig's despatches for his work in these battles of '17, and shortly after New Year, 1918, he was given command of the Battalion.

On August 8, 1918, he led the Battalion into the battle of Amiens. It had a supporting role, being reserved for the supreme effort on the second day. Early on the morning of August 9th he received orders to move the Batt. to Hospital Wood, and at daylight to attack towards Warvillers. The L.B.D.'s poured out of the wood, rushed across the Caix-LeQuesnel road, and wiped out some German infantry in the old French defence line, originally dug in 1915.

Moving on, they came under severe rifle and machine gun fire from Hatchet Wood, where about 400 Germans had dug themselves in. The wood stood on a rise in the wheat fields, with a wide field of fire, not only to the front, but to both flanks. The Brigade orders were hard and fast -- to attack without waiting for tank or artillery support. It had been expected that the chief German resistance would be about Le Quesnel, on the right, and all of the available tanks and most of the artillery had been placed there. As it turned out, the 8th. Batt., on the left, got the toughest nut to crack. And Hatchet Wood had such a long field of fire to both flanks that it could not be by-passed.

My father turned to his second-in-command, Major Saunders, and said, "Bug, this is going to be a bad one." He made the usual dispositions, and by short rushes through the wheat the companies advanced towards the wood from both flanks as well as in front. It was obvious that the troops attacking from the front, where they had to cross a wide draw and then the rise to the wood, were going to suffer worst. Father had never asked a man to go where he wouldn't go himself, and he chose to move forward with the front attack. He was hit

in the right arm and knocked down. Someone, I believe his faithful batman, bandaged the wound, crouching in the wheat. Father then jumped up and put up his field glasses, trying to see the progress of the attack. A burst of machine gun bullets struck him in the chest. He just had time to gasp," Send word to Major Saunders, to take command at once."

As you know, the attack succeeded, and sergeants Brereton and Coppins both received the V.C. for their part in it. But the cost was heavy. Eight officers (including the colonel) and 59 other ranks had been killed; seven officers and 309 men had been wounded; and 52 were missing. That evening the padre and others, searching the wheatfields for the dead and wounded, came upon my father's body. As he wrote me afterwards, "The sounds of battle had died away, and you could hear the larks singing."

Four years ago I visited the Amiens battlefield, following the course of the 8th Batt. to the village of Caix, and then to the little cemetery (Manitoba Cemetery) in the wheat fields before Hatchet Wood. All traces of the war had gone, of course. As you stand by the graves Hatchet Wood still rises, dark and ominous, on the farther side of the draw. The villages of Caix and Le Quesnel are distant and hidden in folds of the landscape. You stand in a wide expanse of gently rolling country, mostly covered with grain fields. The approach to the cemetery is along a rough clay cart-track, leading off the Caix-LeQuesnel road, and you travel at least a quarter-mile on this track before you recognise the clump of maples, planted in 1919, which now mark Manitoba Cemetery.

In the low wall surrounding the graves there is a niche with a bronze door, and inside you find the usual list of the dead soldiers, and a visitors' book. Looking over the list I noticed that my father, at 41, was far the oldest; most were young lads between 18 and 25. The cemetery is ~~so~~ far off the motor road, on a track that must be very sticky going for a car in wet weather, and I noticed that all the names signed in the visitors' book were French, although someone had added in English, "May they rest in peace". The graves are well kept, but you find none of the flower beds and shaved green lawn that adorn the war cemeteries on well travelled motor highways. Someone long ago planted in Manitoba Cemetery a modest little creeping plant called London Pride, which now blossoms on most of the graves.

One further word about my father. One of the 8th Batt. officers wrote me long after the battle, saying in part, "Colonel Raddall was a regular soldier and a strict disciplinarian; but he was always absolutely fair in his judgement of men, and his care for them earned him the nickname of Uncle Tom. He had a sense of humor, and was one of the few men I have ever met who was truly without fear."

I enclose some verses which I wrote many years ago.

With best wishes to you and all veterans of the L.B.D.'s.

Sincerely,

April 16th, 1962.

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Box 532,
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WHERE THE DEAD LAY THICKEST

(Amiens, France, August 9, 1918)

Where the dead lay thickest, there they found
My father with the sunset on his face,
Amid the wheat. There was a cheerful sound
Of Skylarks; nothing else, as if that place
Had never known a battle. The dead lay
As athletes fling themselves to earth at last.
The trampled wheat, the shattered roofs of Caix,
and These, marked where the regiment had passed.

He was their colonel, they had loved him well;
And so they buried him amongst the grain
With three-score men beside him where they fell.
And when their marching came that way again,
They placed a signboard, Manitoba, there,
To show that prairie men were taking rest
In this half acre, free from toil and care
Amid the wheat, and dreaming of the West.

J.H.R.



Eighth Battalion (Overseas) Association

November 29
1962

Thomas H. Raddall, Esq.
LIVERPOOL, N. S.

Dear Mr. Raddall:

Many thanks for your letter dated April 16th.

I had intended to thank you before this, but my wife had died a few weeks before the arrival of your letter and I was very upset, and as soon as the Annual Reunion Dinner was over I went to Victoria and Vancouver for a few weeks and visited many of our friends. I then went to Ottawa and stayed with my son and his family for a few weeks.

I am one of the original members of the Eighth Battalion, and I remember your father well. He was very strict and very fair, and a real soldier.

Your letter and verses were read at the Reunion and at the Officers' Luncheon on Nov. 10th. They were received with spontaneous applause, and everyone wanted a copy, so the Board of Governors decided to include them with our Annual Letter to our members. I enclose copies herewith for your perusal.

Again, many thanks.
Yours sincerely,

J. L. Stevens
(J. L. STEVENS) (Major Retired)
Secretary.