

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi

by

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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

AUGUST, 1994

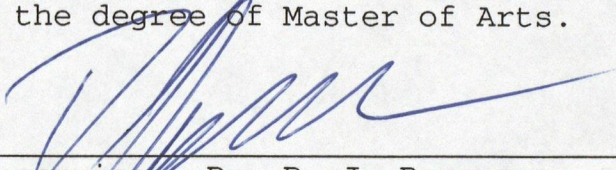
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The 'fold' was maybe five feet high and over it - beyond it in the open - lay the crater. . . . Robert scanned the edges with his field glasses looking for footholds. There were corpses - but not as many as Robert had imagined. Maybe only a dozen scattered around the sides. The bottom was filled with water. He could see the water rising. There was no way of knowing how deep it might be or would get. The whole of St. Eloi district was well below sea level. Before the age of dikes it might have been an inland sea.

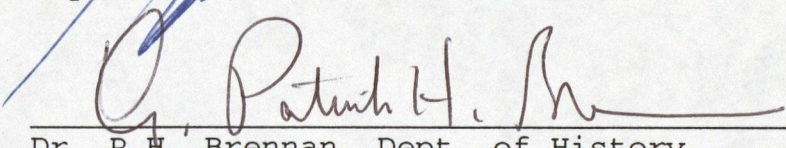
(The Wars", by Timothy Findlay., p. 119)

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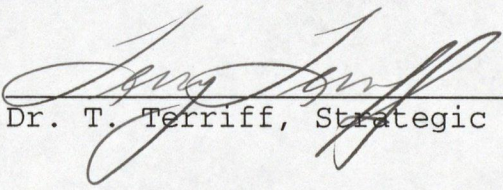
The undersigned certify that they have read, and
recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance a
thesis entitled Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi
submitted by Thomas P. Leppard in partial fulfillment of the
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7 Oct/94
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ABSTRACT

In April 1916 Major-General Richard Turner's 2nd Division suffered Canada's worst defeat of WW I at the St. Eloi craters. Historians blamed the defeat on mud, rain, and the German artillery but they also hinted that Turner was culpable. Although he was not responsible for the tactical nightmare he inherited or the Division's inexperience and serious systemic and logistical shortcomings, Turner made mistakes that significantly influenced the battle's outcome. Notably his inadequate preparation of the division's defenses and the misinterpretation of aerial photographs of the craters. Immediately after the battle an official inquiry replaced two corps commanders and a score of junior officers but Sir Sam Hughes prevented Turner's removal. Nonetheless, the defeat tarnished his reputation and derailed his chances of commanding the Canadian Corps. From November 1916 until the war's end he competently commanded Canada's forces in England.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

This thesis was made possible by the encouragement of my supervisor Dr. David J. Bercuson. His understanding of Canada's military history and dedicated tutelage have had a profound influence on me and shaped this thesis in so many ways. In the U of C. History Department, Dr. Tim Travers and Dr. Pat Brennan's interest, encouragement, and sound advice was instrumental. David Bright, Doctoral student in history and good friend, provided timely advice and superb editing. Olga Leskiew for handling the myriad of paper work and Shelly Wind for working me into Dr. Bercuson's hectic schedule. The staff of the National Archives of Canada provided invaluable assistance in researching the bulk of this thesis. Kathleen Jones, my teaching partner, patiently edited numerous drafts. To my friends and family for their support but especially to Bart Peake because he was always interested. Helen and Phil Leppard, my parents, and Merv and Lil Halvorson, my in-laws, for their support and encouragement. Finally to Jason, Christine, and Karen, for without you I would never have finished.

Thomas Leppard

August 1994.

DEDICATION:

This thesis is dedicated to my Grandfather, Philip H. Leppard. He was there; one of Canada's best. His yellowing picture, now nearly eighty years old, posing proudly for the camera in his cavalry trooper's uniform, was my inspiration. Alas, he died before I could ask him why he went.

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Introduction: Sir Richard Turner in Retrospect

On Tuesday 20 June 1961, the Ottawa Citizen reported the death in Quebec City of Canada's last surviving World War I general, Sir Richard Ernest William Turner, VC, KCB, KCMG, DSO. He was eighty nine. A wealthy Quebec city businessman and influential Tory, Sir Richard was predeceased in 1958 by his wife of fifty eight years, Harriet Turner (Gooday). He was survived by a son, two daughters, nine grandchildren and fifteen great grandchildren.¹

The obituary failed to mention Turner's three decades of distinguished military service during which he had received the Victoria Cross in the Boer War and commanded a brigade, a division, and Canada's Overseas General Staff during the Great War. Similarly, Canadian historians have also overlooked Turner's military career. A peripheral figure in numerous histories, he has yet to be the subject of a single biography, thesis, or even an article. Considering his spectacular feats, defeats, and memorable controversies, he deserves better.²

¹Ottawa Citizen, "Richard Turner's Obituary," Tuesday 20 June, 1961. Micro fiche collection, University of Calgary Library.

²Turner and the Canadian Corps talented cadre of officers have remained anonymous for eight decades. Not so the talented and enigmatic Sir Arthur Currie. The subject of three biographies, several thesis, and numerous articles including: Daniel D. Dancocks., Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography (Toronto, 1985)

Richard Turner was born in Quebec City 25 July 1871 to Emily Marie Turner and the Honourable Richard Turner, a prominent Quebec businessman and Tory politician. Raised in Victorian affluence, Turner attended several private grammar schools before graduating from Quebec City High School in 1889. Two years later he entered the family firm of Whitehead and Turner, Wholesale Grocers and Lumber Merchants, which he was to inherit in 1928.³

In keeping with the fad of his generation, Turner joined the Canadian militia in 1892 and commissioned as a subaltern in the 10th Queen's Own Canadian Hussars. Aided by Tory patronage and nepotism, Turner advanced rapidly, in 1895 he made captain and major in 1900.⁴ 1900 was also the year he went to war.⁵

Within days of the out break of hostilities between

AMJ Hyatt., General Sir Arthur Currie
(Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1987)

Hugh M. Urquhart., Arthur Currie - The Biography of a Great Canadian (Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. 1950)

Ian Brown., Currie and the Canadian Corps 1917 - 1918 (University of Calgary, 1990. Unpublished Masters Thesis.)

³RG 24, 1815, Vol. 2, Folder 4, File 40. Record of Service: Sir Richard William Everett Turner.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

Britain and Paul Kruger's Boers, Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier authorized the despatch of a volunteer force to South Africa.⁶ Eager to 'have a go' at the Boers, Turner could only secure a berth to South Africa by accepting a demotion to Lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Dragoons (R.C.D.). On reaching the Cape, the regiment was assigned to Brigadier General Edwin Alderson's Mounted Infantry Brigade.⁷

Turner served with great distinction in South Africa. He fought in at least eight major actions, was decorated twice, seriously wounded three times and was mentioned in despatches. All of which gained him a reputation for reckless bravery and made him a darling of the Canadian public.⁸ His first decoration, the Distinguished Service Order, was won in May 1900 near Pretoria for "swimming the [Viet] river at a crucial

⁶J.L. Granatstein et.al., Nation: Canada Since Confederation (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd. 1990), p 133.

⁷RG 24, 1815, 4-40, Folder 16, File 2. Alderson quickly earned the respect and admiration of the Canadians and the British high command. The Canadians because he treated them fairly and was a cool hand in a tight spot; and the British high command for adeptly controlling the 'wild colonials'. These factors contributed to his selection as GOC 1 Canadian Division in 1914.

⁸Ibid.

junction in the face of the enemy."⁹ Turner along with fellow R.C.D. officer Harold Borden (Robert Borden's nephew) and five men swam their mounts, under fire, across the river and drove off an estimated thirty Boers.¹⁰ In September, while serving as an intelligence officer near Wonderfontstein Transvaal, Turner received the first of three serious gunshot wounds. Recovering quickly, he rejoined the R.C.D. near Lillefontein in November.¹¹

On 7 November 1900 Turner was part of a rear guard, that included two twelve pound field guns of "D" Battery Royal Canadian Field Artillery, protecting General Smith-Dorrien's column, when they were ambushed by 200 Boers. Badly outnumbered, Lieutenant H.A.C. Cockburn, a brother R.C.D. officer, reacted instantly and formed a skirmish line that momentarily deflected the Boer onslaught. Killed or captured to a man, Cockburn's sacrifice bought Turner enough time to extricate the guns, but the Boers were soon in hot pursuit. A fierce running fight ensued. Turner's Colt machine gunner Sergeant E. Holland,

⁹A.F. Duguid, Official History of The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919. Vol I (Ottawa: King's Printer, Ottawa, 1938), p. 64.

¹⁰J.L. Granatstein & David J. Bercuson., War and Peacekeeping: From South Africa to the Gulf - Canada's Limited Wars. (Toronto: Key Porter Books Ltd., 1991) page 77. Harold Borden was killed in action on July 21 1900.

¹¹RG 24, 1815, 4 - 40, Folder 16, File 2.

courageously manned his limber mounted weapon until surrounded. Showing great presence, he calmly lifted the gun from its mount and cradling it like a football, galloped away. The jubilant Boers, believing they had captured the gun, swarmed the carriage but finding the weapon gone resumed the chase.¹²

The rugged Boer ponies quickly made up ground because the horses harnessed to Turner's field guns became 'blown' and slowed to a walk. With hundreds of Boers swirling all about, Turner ignored a severe gunshot wound to his left arm and dismounted a dozen troopers for a desperate last stand.¹³ Just then, he was hit again, this time in the neck.¹⁴ Trooper A.E. Hilder, a member of the rear guard, vividly recounted Turner's gallantry that day.

The guns were in grave danger of being captured. Lieutenant Turner galloped up and shouted, "Dismount and hold back the enemy!" I remember him distinctly saying " Never let it be said the Canadians had let their guns be taken." Again Lieutenant Turner galloped up, now seriously wounded in the neck and his arm shattered . . . But, the

¹²George C. Machum, Canada's V.C.'s (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 1956), pp. 28-29.

¹³RG 1815, Vol. 4-40, Folder 16, File 2.

¹⁴John Swettenham(ed), Valiant Men Canada's Victoria Cross and George Cross Winners. (Toronto: Hakkert, 1973), p. 23.

important thing was, the guns had been saved by the stubborn resistance of the R.C.D.¹⁵

The episode reads like something out of Kipling; the handsome young subaltern, fearlessly defying death and the Queen's enemies to rally his men and save the guns. A grateful British High Command, still smarting because of the guns lost at Colenso,¹⁶ awarded Turner, Holland, and Cockburn, the Victoria Cross.¹⁷ Turner's citation reflected the High Commands' 'gun loss' angst;

On 7th November 1900, near Lillefontein, two guns of the British column, rear guard to a convoy, were attacked by an overwhelming force of Boers. Endeavors were made to extricate the guns but Boers following in pursuit in large numbers, the horses of the guns became very exhausted and came down to a walk. Lieutenant Turner with a part of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, although twice wounded, gallantly dismounted his men and from his personal initiative, succeeded in saving the guns.¹⁸

Invalided home, Turner arrived in Quebec city to a hero's welcome. On 17 September 1901 he received the Victoria Cross from the heir apparent, Edward, Duke of York. The investiture, part of a Royal review of five

¹⁵Ibid,

¹⁶Thomas Pakenham., The Boer War. (London: Sydney Macdonald & Co.1979), Chapter 20, pp. 224-242, recounts the British defeat and loss of ten field guns at Colenso, 15 December 1899. Pakenham's pithy observation that "[British] courage (was) matched only by stupidity" , explains the defeat in a nutshell.

¹⁷Sweetenham, p. 23. One of the guns Turner saved is on permanent display at the National War Museum in Ottawa.

¹⁸Ibid.

thousand militia troops, took place during a torrential downpour. Undaunted by the weather, thousands of Quebec city's grateful citizenry attended the ceremony and presented to their famous son a privately subscribed gilded Sword of Honour.¹⁹ Though not yet thirty, Turner seemed the apotheosis of the pluck, courage, and tenacity that Canadians believed made their militia the world's best fighting men.

A decade of promotions, awards, and honours followed his return to the peacetime militia. In 1902 he was breveted Lieutenant Colonel, received the Queen's medal with six clasps, and commanded the King's Royal Colonial Escort at Edward the VII's coronation.²⁰ Command of the 10th Hussars followed in January 1903 with his colonelcy confirmed in 1905; from 1907-12 he commanded the 3rd Eastern Townships Cavalry Brigade. On 25 October 1911, he became Honourary Aide de Camp to His Majesty King George V, and in March 1912, Turner ended two decades of militia service transferring to the Reserve of Officers. It proved a short-lived retirement.²¹

On 1 June 1914, Turner returned to the active service list retaining his previous rank of colonel at the behest of his friend, the Minister of Militia and

¹⁹RG 24, 1815, 4-40, Folder 16, File 2.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

Defence, Sam Hughes.²² As early as 1912 Hughes had predicted that war with Germany was inevitable and that Canada must be ready to stand with Britain. In the spring of 1914 he believed that war was imminent and had started mobilizing Canada's 50,000 man militia. Events soon confirmed his intuition.²³

On 6 August 1914, two days after Britain declared war on Germany, Sam Hughes made Turner the Canadian Expeditionary Force's (CEF) first Brigade commander; not coincidentally, Sam's son Garnet, Turner's close friend, was named his Brigade Major. Hughes' patronage notwithstanding, Turner's credentials were excellent. He alone had both combat experience and experience commanding a brigade.²⁴ At the age of 43 Turner was embarking on the challenge of his life, not as an adventure-seeking militia subaltern fighting Boer kommandos but as the brigadier of four thousand raw recruits facing the world's foremost fighting machine -

²²Ibid.

²³Duguid, pp. 3 - 4.

²⁴Duguid, pp. 62 - 63. Arthur Currie joined B.C.'s 5th Garrison Artillery in 1895 and took command in 1909. In 1913 he took command of the 50th Infantry regiment (Gordon Highlanders) and completed the Militia's staff course. Currie also considered Garnet Hughes a friend; a relationship he lived to regret. M.S. Mercer, a Toronto lawyer, joined the 2nd Regiment (Queen's Own Rifles) in 1885, becoming its colonel in 1911. He too passed the Militia staff course.

the German Army.²⁵

Initially Sam Hughes had wanted a Canadian, preferably himself, to command the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). Lord Kitchener, the British Commander in Chief, told Hughes that the Canadians were too inexperienced to command the contingent. To his credit Hughes concurred and shelved, albeit temporarily, a finely honed antipathy toward professional British officers and accepted Kitchener's candidate, Lieutenant General Sir Edwin Alderson.²⁶

When the thirty thousand men comprising the first contingent reached England in October 1914, they were an army in name only. Guided by Alderson's patient tutelage, the 1st Canadian Division began to take shape, but not without some growing pains. Enduring a miserable winter on Salisbury's sodden plain, made worse by the constant meddling of Sam Hughes and his worthless Canadian made equipment. The division was eventually issued British kit and shipped to France in March 1915. A month later they made their immortal stand at St. Julien during the Second Battle of Ypres. Turner's first battle was almost his

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Duguid, page 92-93. Division commanders normally held the rank of Major-General but the British made Alderson a Lieutenant-General so he out ranked Sam Hughes who was a Militia Major-General.

last.²⁷

Turner handled the 3rd Brigade so awkwardly it was evident that despite being popular with his men and physically reckless to a fault, he was a second-rate field commander. On two occasions during the battle, he had misinterpreted Alderson's orders and moved his brigade to the wrong position thereby exposing the left flank of Arthur Currie's 2nd Brigade. After the battle Alderson wanted Turner removed but Sam Hughes would not allow the British to sack his protege. In fact, thanks to Hughes, Turner not only kept his brigade, in August 1915 he was promoted Major-General GOC (General Officer Commanding) 2nd Canadian Division; the largest field force ever lead into battle by a Canadian.²⁸

The rapid expansion of the CEF from one to two divisions with a third division in the wings set the stage for the formation of the Canadian Corps in September 1915. Hughes wanted to command the Corps and keep his portfolio but Prime Minister Borden told him to pick one or the other.²⁹ To the relief of Borden, the British High command, and a growing number of Canadian - mainly Hughes appointed-officers disgruntled by his

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Nicholson, p. 113.

²⁹Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War: 1914 -1919. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1964),p. 114.

incessant meddling, the Minister kept the portfolio.³⁰ If Corps Command was not to be his, Hughes wanted Turner to be the Corps first Canadian GOC.³¹ Despite the Minister's persistent lobbying, this too was not to be.³² Alderson got the Corps, Turner the newly formed 2nd Division and Currie replaced Alderson at the 1st Division. Ironically, this promotion only served to further expose Turner's shortcomings as a field commander. During the 2nd Division's baptism of fire at St. Eloi in April 1916, these deficiencies were largely responsible for " . . . the first and worst Canadian setback of the war." ³³ Once again Hughes had to intervene to prevent Turner's removal, but for the last time.³⁴

St. Eloi stands as the dividing line in Turner's chequered career. The defeat so tarnished his reputation that not even Hughes could override British objections to his becoming the Canadian Corps GOC; he was lucky to keep

³⁰Desmond Morton., A Military History of Canada (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1990), p. 144.

³¹Duguid, p. 541.

³²Daniel D. Dancocks, Welcome to Flanders The First Canadian Battle of the great War: Ypres, 1915: (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), pp. 238 -249.

³³Desmond Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Ltd., 1982), p. 72.

³⁴Ibid.

his division. Following Hughes's dismissal in November 1916, Turner was pressured by the Canadian government and Canadian and British military officials to give up the division and accept the newly created post of GOC Canadian Forces in England. He reluctantly agreed but only after receiving assurances that he was still a candidate for Corps command. When Arthur Currie got the Corps in June 1917, these promises proved counterfeit.³⁵

Defeat at St. Eloi, removal to London, and Currie's enormous success, have resulted in Turner becoming a historical castaway. The best treatment of Turner is found in Desmond Morton's prescient analysis of Canada's overseas wartime administration - A Peculiar Kind of Politics(1982). Morton fairly and accurately portrays Turner as an ineffective field commander who proved a competent, dedicated, sometimes factious, never vindictive CGS, who did much to rationalize Canada's chaotic overseas military administration. Yet even for Morton, the stigma of Hughes's patronage, defeat at St. Eloi and Turner's acerbic personality render him historically unattractive; historians seem to prefer writing about winners and victories. Thus, little has been written about Turner or his part in the defeat at St. Eloi. The dominate interpretation that has emerged from the literature on the battle is that Turner and his

³⁵Morton, "Peculiar Kind of Politics", pp. 97-98.

men were overmatched but did the best they could against the unholy trinity of incessant rain, oozing mud, and German artillery.³⁶

The first account of the battle was written in 1917 by the "Canadian Eyewitness", Sir Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook). Commissioned by Sam Hughes to write an official, contemporary history of the war, the frenetic Aitken produced the two volume; Canada in Flanders - the Official Story of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He wrote and published Volume II in 1917, which still contains the longest account of the Battle of St. Eloi. In three chapters of melodramatic revisionism, Aitken exonerated Turner by attributing defeat to nature's malevolence:

To the 2nd Division was left the more bitter task of fighting for a month under leaden skies above and crumbling mud below, and yet failing to retain their original positions. But they deserved none the less well of Canada. What mortal man could do they did. . . . The lesson of failure is as much a part of the education of a nation as that of success.³⁷

Yet Aitken knew better. During the battle's crisis, he had wired secret cablegrams to Borden and Hughes that Turner was losing. He had negotiated more heavy artillery ammunition for Turner's shell starved guns, and during

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Lord Beaverbrook, Canada in Flanders The Official Story of the Canadian Expeditionary Force - Volume II (London and Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), pp. 147-148.

the post-battle imbroglio, had helped Haig remove Alderson. Exposure of his secret involvement would have proven publicly embarrassing to all concerned.³⁸ Thus Aitken's account appears to be a cover-up and with that in mind, the final phrase of his account must be read cryptically: " The story of the craters is like that of most of the battle of St. Eloi, one of misfortune for the 2nd Division; but it is not one of blame."³⁹

Inter-war accounts perpetuated Beaverbrook's interpretation that Turner was not responsible for the defeat. The best account from this period is Sir James Edmonds's official British history published in 1932. Edmonds relied extensively on documents provided by Canada's apathetic official historian, A.E. Duguid, who published only one of a projected eight volumes and St. Eloi was not in that volume.⁴⁰

Edmonds' history is not without flaws, as Tim Travers warns in The Killing Ground:

" . . . Edmonds, believed that his task was simply to write the story, but not to pass judgement. His method of dealing with sensitive events was to either tone down offending passages, or to place awkward evidence in footnotes or appendices, or more usually simply to confine the text to facts, without drawing critical conclusions. . . . the general conclusion must be that Edmonds

³⁸A.J.P. Taylor, Beaverbrook (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), pp. 89 - 90.

³⁹Ibid. pp. 163.

⁴⁰Nicholson, pp. xi.

often altered passages to suit the criticism of senior commanders and certainly sought to diminish the worst errors"⁴¹

His account of St. Eloi contains all these shortcomings. Edmonds contends that Turner's defeat was caused by a conspiracy of elements beyond his control, notably mire and mud, disrupted drainage systems, a constant downpour, and enemy shells, all of which rendered the position untenable.⁴² Thus, Edmonds avoided the issue of responsibility and absolved Turner. Evidence which pointed to the pivotal failure of both the British and Canadians to accurately identify their front line, is relegated to a footnote.⁴³ Edmonds' even failed to mention the post-battle degummings by Sir Douglas Haig of two Corps GOCs (Fanshawe - V Corps and Alderson - Canadian Corps), and a host of senior and junior staff officers and battalion commanders. Instead he concluded by discussing minor tactical questions and lessons learned from the battle.

Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson's official single volume history, The Canadian Expeditionary Force- 1914-1919 (1964) contains the best account so far of the battle.

⁴¹Tim Travers, The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare 1900 -1918 (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), p. 24.

⁴²Sir James Edmonds, History of the Great War: Military Operations - France and Belgium, 1916. (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd. 1932), pp. 187 - 188.

⁴³Ibid. p. 189.

Nicholson also relegated the most important, potentially embarrassing, indications that Turner and his staff made errors that significantly contributed to the defeat at St. Eloi to a footnote on page 142.

It is hard to understand why staff officers failed to interpret air photographs correctly. The photo taken on 8 April clearly shows Craters 6 and 7 half full of water and the others comparatively dry. Apparently no use was made of this obvious means of identifying the positions held by the Canadians⁴⁴

Nicholson's point was avoided, ignored, or overlooked by the historians who followed in his wake. Larry Worthington's Amid the Guns Below (1965) and John Goodspeed's The Road Past Vimy (1969) lack the detail of Edmonds or Nicholson but suffer many of the same shortcomings, because they too avoided the battle's contentious issues. Thus they add little to our understanding of Turner's defeat.⁴⁵

During the 1970's and early 1980's Canadian historians virtually abandoned WW I. Fortunately a renaissance of sorts during the last decade has yielded a number of noteworthy studies that have greatly enhanced our understanding and appreciation of Canada's role in the First World War. Ushering in this reawakening were

⁴⁴Nicholson. p. 142.

⁴⁵Larry Worthington, Amid the Guns Below: The Story of the Canadian Corps (1914-1919) (Toronto/Montreal: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1965).
John Goodspeed, The Road Past Vimy (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969)

Desmond Morton's previously discussed Peculiar Kind of Politics (1982), and Stephen Harris' seminal work Canadian Brass.⁴⁶ Harris details the transformation of Canada's officer corps from amateurs to professionals between 1866 and 1939. This transition, he contends, began only with the 1st Canadian Division's arrival in France in 1915. As the body count sky-rocketed, the division's best officers concluded that their inferior militia training, abetted by a corrupt Ministry, had not prepared them to fight in a modern war. Frustrated by Sir Sam Hughes' continual meddling and mishandling of promotions, administration, recruitment, training, reinforcement and equipment, these officers, along with enlightened politicians, concluded that a major house cleaning was an absolute necessity. Following Borden's sack of Hughes in November 1916, the house was swept clean. This change came, in part, because of Turner's new found professionalism which he exhibited after he took command of Canada's forces in England in December 1916.

Hughes' demise did not end Canada's military woes, but it cleared the way for the Corps best officers to fight the war professionally. Their accomplishments speak for themselves. While Canadian Brass provides an important context, Harris's major contribution is a call

⁴⁶Stephen J. Harris, Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988)

to arms for the continued study of Canada's talented cadre of WW I officers. To date, only Currie has received any serious attention.

Another avenue of research is suggested by Daniel Dancocks' three recent publications; Legacy of Valour(1986), Spearhead to Victory(1987), and Welcome to Flanders(1988).⁴⁷ Avoiding a Canadian penchant for studying Vimy and Currie ad nauseam, Dancocks demonstrates that other Canadian battlefield experiences are also important and require reassessment. Taken together, Harris and Dancocks point out that for too long Canada's WW I historians have studied too little, leaving too many important persons and events, like Turner and St. Eloi, ignored, overlooked, or mishandled.

One of the latest entries is Bill Rawling's technological dissertation, Surviving the Trenches(1992). Rawlings argues that technological innovation such as magazine-fed bolt action rifles, light and heavy machine-guns, rifle and hand grenades, all calibres of artillery, and tanks, compelled the Canadian Corps to experiment and change time honoured unit structures and infantry tactics. This transformation required two years of bloody trial and error and was not attained until the Corps

⁴⁷Daniel D. Dancocks., Legacy of Valour (1986) Spearhead to Victory (1987), Welcome to Flanders Fields (1988)

captured Mount Sorrel in late 1916; refinement continued until the armistice. Rawlings categorizes St. Eloi as a transitional battle from which the Corps gleaned several valuable lessons. But his account too closely resembles Beaverbrook, Edmonds, and Nicholson, attributing defeat to overcast rainy skies that grounded aerial photo reconnaissance flights during the height of the battle.⁴⁸

In sum, eight decades after the 2nd Division's defeat at St. Eloi a thorough analysis of Turner's responsibility for the setback has yet to be written. Previous accounts of the battle concluded that nature's malevolence and German artillery made defeat inevitable. Yet these same historians, most notably Edmonds and Nicholson, have intimated that Turner was also culpable. However, determining Turner's share of the responsibility is no simple task. At St. Eloi he lead his inexperienced division into a tactical nightmare. The battlefield was a bewildering muddy moonscape, the artillery was short of shells, the infantry carried the temperamental Ross rifle, communications were erratic, the German artillery dominated the battlefield, and the incessant rain flooded trenches, craters, and shell holes.

Nevertheless, Turner was in tactical command of the

⁴⁸Bill Rawlings, Surviving Trench Warfare Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) pp. 59 - 60.

2nd Canadian Division when they lost the craters, and is therefore accountable for any mistakes that he made which contributed to the Canadian Corps worst defeat of the war. Until Turner's share of responsibility for the defeat is established, the Battle of St. Eloi will remain shrouded in ambiguity, inaccuracy, and misconception.

...

CHAPTER I:

On the eve of the 2nd Division's departure for France, Richard Turner broke several ribs in an automobile accident. Fearing that he would be replaced if he reported the injury, Turner told no one and shipped to France in considerable pain. His stoicism on that occasion was typical; fifteen years earlier he had displayed similar grit during the Boer War. Ambushed by a Boer kommando and outnumbered 10 to one, he had ignored two serious gunshot wounds, rallied his men in a desperate last stand and saved two valuable field guns. His courage that day earned him the Victoria Cross.¹

Indefatigable courage and past glories were of little use to Turner when he arrived on the Western Front in the spring of 1915 in command of the 3rd Brigade, 1st Canadian Division. During the division's immortal stand at St. Julien in April 1915, a confused Turner twice ordered his brigade to the wrong position. Only the prompt action of another Canadian Brigadier, Arthur Currie, saved the division from almost certain destruction.² Following the battle, the division's

¹Daniel Dancocks, Welcome to Flanders Fields. The First Canadian Battle of the Great War: Ypres 1915 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), p.76

²Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, Official History of the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919 (Queen's Printer, Ottawa, 1964) pp.76. The debate over who ordered Turner's withdrawal still rages. Turner blamed Alderson who in turn, claimed he issued no such order. The most plausible

British GOC, Lieutenant General E.A.H. Alderson, wanted Turner removed, but Sam Hughes intervened and saved Turner's neck. His reputation however, had been sullied and from that point promotion depended entirely on Sam Hughes.³

When the 2nd Canadian Division arrived in England in the spring of 1915 its GOC was the venerable Major-General Sir Sam Steele. Lord Kitchener wanted the sixty five year old Mounted Police legend replaced by a younger, more experienced officer from the roster of "all unemployed [British] generals." Hughes protested: Canada's divisions must be commanded by Canadians, the nation would accept nothing less. If Steele was too old, Hughes wanted Turner. Borden concurred and instructed Canada's High Commissioner in London, Sir George Perley, to gently twist Kitchener's arm; "I would again urge on you the wisdom of giving the appointment to a Canadian Brigadier. . ." ⁴ Kitchener was prepared to concede on the question of nationality but stated that he preferred

explanation is that a stream of confusing phone messages lead Turner to believe Alderson wanted him to pull back to the G.H.Q. Line. Currie's part in the battle has also been roundly criticized and defended. Tim Traver's article, "Allies in Conflict: the British and Canadian official historians and the real story of Second Ypres (1915)" *Journal of Contemporary History* 24(1989) pp. 301-325, the debate's latest entry, concludes that Currie performed adequately.

³Ibid, p.29

⁴Ibid, p. 112.

Alderson's candidate, Arthur Currie. In June, Borden and Hughes sailed to England to negotiate with Kitchener on this and several other issues while they inspected Canada's soldiers. After several days of haggling they reached a compromise on 26 July; Alderson would get the new Canadian Corps, Currie would replace Alderson at 1st Division, and Turner would get the 2nd Division.⁵

Turner took command of the 2nd Canadian Division at Shorncliffe, England on 17 August 1915. A perfunctory royal inspection by the King and Kitchener on 2 September presaged embarkation. Marching orders arrived on 10 September with crossings from Folkestone to Bolougne scheduled for 13 to 21 September.⁶ Ferrying the division's twenty thousand men, five thousand horses, seventy-two artillery pieces, tonnes of kit and equipment across the channel at night in heavily laden transports blacked out to avoid U-boats was risky. Collisions were not uncommon. On 15 September, two transports packed to the gunwales with Brigadier-General Robert Rennie's 4th Brigade did just that. Fortunately, damage and injuries were minor and both ships reached France safely. The

⁵Ibid, pp. 111-113.

⁶J. Granatstein and D. Morton, Marching to Armageddon - Canadians and the Great War 1914-1919 (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys Ltd.), p. 106.

remaining crossings went smoothly.⁷

On 13 September Lieutenant-General Sir Edwin Alderson opened the Canadian Corps Head Quarters (H.Q.) at Ballieul, France. With the arrival of the 2nd Division's full complement the Corps became operational on 23 September.⁸ Divisions new to the front routinely served a short apprenticeship alongside veteran units. This training included a stint by the division's staff with the corps staff and the infantry serving a fortnight in the trenches alongside battle-tested battalions. Sam Hughes however, wanted the Canadian Corps activated immediately and demanded that the training be cancelled; Turner and his men would have to learn the hard way.⁹

By early October the Canadian Corps had joined Sir Herbert Plumer's 2nd Army and were holding ten kilometres(km) of line from Ploegsteert("Plugstreet") to a kilometre south of St. Eloi. Currie's 1st Canadians held the southern sector, Turner's 2nd Canadians held the northern five km sector from the inter-divisional boundary north of Wulverghem to just south of St. Eloi. Perched atop the fifty meter high Messines-Wytschaete ridge, a thousand meters to the east, the Germans watched

⁷Major D.J. Corrigan, History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment) in the Great War, 1914-1918 (Toronto: Stone & Cox, 1935), p. 23.

⁸Nicholson, pp. 113-114.

⁹Ibid, p. 114.

Turner's every move.¹⁰

The 2nd Division's first winter passed in quiet misery; there was too much rain and too little action. Turner used the time to iron out kinks in his command, communications, and intelligence systems, and to weed out inferior officers.¹¹ The winter's major operations were a series of successful trench raids.¹² One raid staged by Brigadier-General H.D.B. Ketchen's 6th Canadian Brigade on 31 January 1916 received Sir Douglas Haig's endorsement as a model operation.¹³ At 0240, two picked parties of 30 men each from the 28th(North West) and 29th(Vancouver) battalions crossed no man's land undetected and burst into the enemy trenches. The raiders from the 29th captured three startled Germans, bombed several dugouts and were on their way back in four and a half minutes. A thousand metres away, the men of the 28th battalion caught the Germans in the midst of a

¹⁰Ibid, p. 115.

¹¹National Archives of Canada(NAC) RG 9, 111, C3 Volume 4137, Folder 2 File 16. This 13 January 1916 missive admonishes the inconsistent communication of intelligence gathering by lower units. RG 9, 111, C3 4138, Folder 5 File 11 outlines battalion intelligence gathering procedures and the officer responsible. The most notable removal was Brigadier General Lord Brooke. The only British brigadier selected by Hughes, Brooke was returned to England where he took over a Canadian training depot and caused no end of trouble.

¹²Nicholson, pp. 135-137.

¹³Ibid, p. 135

relief. Grenades and pistols made short bloody work of the enemy. After eight minutes, the maximum time allowed in the German line, they fell back with several prisoners in tow. German machine guns hounded their retreat and killed all the prisoners. Canadian casualties were 2 killed and 10 wounded.¹⁴

Turner's post-raid report to Alderson attributed the raid's success to thorough planning, training and execution, control of no man's land, accurate intelligence, and up-to-date aerial photographs.¹⁵ Strangely, Turner signed the report even though it had, in fact, been written by Ketchen. Why Turner claimed authorship is not certain. Possibly he had wanted to impress on Alderson and the 2nd Army's GOC, Sir Herbert Plumer, that he was no longer the bungling brigadier they had wanted to fire after St. Julien in April 1915.¹⁶ But to achieve this, he would need something more than a successful trench raid. He was about to get his chance.

On 2 March 1916, Plumer summoned Turner and informed him that his Division would be involved in the

¹⁴Ibid, p. 137

¹⁵ RG 9, III, C3, 4098, Folder 42, File 3. Deductions From Recent Operations, 2 February 1916. Signed by Turner.

¹⁶RG 9, III, C3, 4098, Folder 42, File 3. Deductions from Recent Minor Operations 2 February 1916. Signed by H.D.B Ketchen.

impending St. Eloi operation.¹⁷ The operation's objective was to excise the enemy held, seven hundred metre, pimple-shaped, St. Eloi salient from the rump of the Ypres salient's southern flank and thereby straighten the British line. But the briefing ended in disappointment for Turner. Plumer had cast the 2nd Division as the understudy to Alymer Haldane's veteran 3rd British Division.¹⁸

The village of St. Eloi sat atop a low hill 3kms south of Ypres overlooking the critical Messines-Warneton crossroads. The centrepiece was the 'mound', a ten metre high pile of brick yard spoil and rubble on the village's southeast outskirts, that gave its occupiers an unobstructed vista of the surrounding countryside. By early 1916 heavy shelling had destroyed every building in the village and reduced the 'mound' to half its original height, yet it remained a valuable observation post.¹⁹

The first Canadians at St. Eloi had been Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). Then part of the British Army's 80th Brigade, the Patricia's had held the 'mound' at great cost from January to mid-March 1915.

¹⁷James Edmonds, Military Operations - France and Belgium 1916. volume 1, part 1. (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd, 1932), pp.177-179

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Reginal Roy (ed.), The Journal of Private Fraser (Victoria B.C: Sono Nis Press, 1985) p. 116.

In May 1915 the Germans captured the 'mound' and drove the British back onto the village thus creating the St. Eloi salient.²⁰ In November 1915 Plumer ordered the salient mined and the line straightened. Tunnellers began digging six mine shafts with completion set for February 1916. In mid-February, the operation was nearly aborted when Haig almost dismissed Plumer after Alymer Haldane's 3rd Division lost the 'Bluff'; an important observation post just north of the Ypres-Commines Canal. Haig sternly warned Plumer that he had better put the whip to timid Corps and division GOC's, strengthen his army's defences, and immediately take the offensive, or face removal! The message was clear enough. Plumer's next defeat would be his last. He must use the St. Eloi operation to show Haig his mettle. With the mines nearing completion Plumer ordered the attack to commence 15 March 1916 but mining delays forced postponement until 27 March.²¹

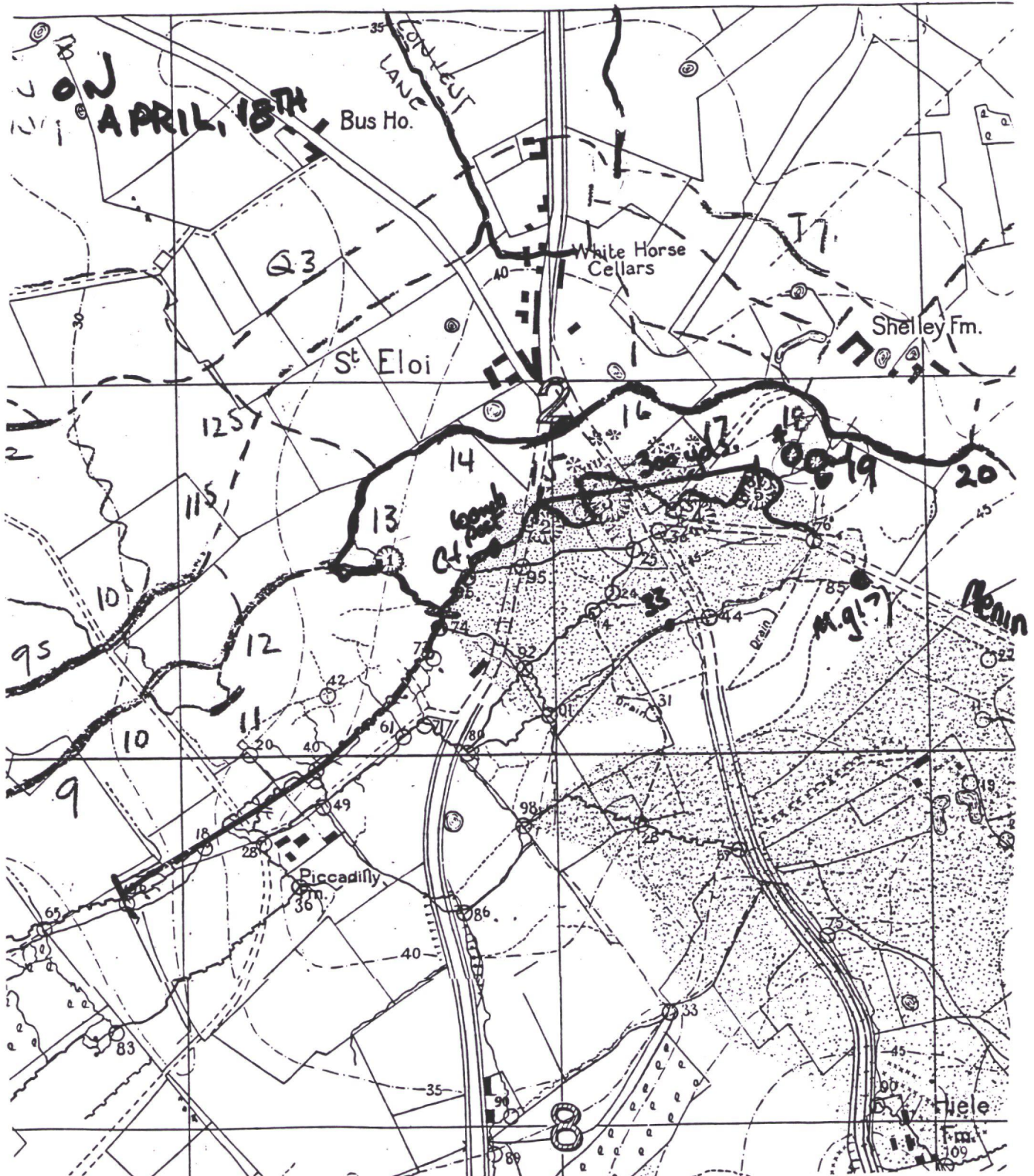
The stable blue clay strata in and around St. Eloi was ideal mining country; by early 1916 the Germans and British had detonated thirty three mines and thirty one camouflets (underground counter-mining charges) in and

²⁰Nicholson, pp. 88 & 138. In late December 1916, the Patricia's were permanently reassigned to the 3rd Canadian Division.

²¹Geoffrey Powell, Plumer - The Soldier's General, A Biography of Field-Marshal Viscount Plumer of Messines, (London: Leo Cooper, 1990) p. 143-147

Turner's Situation Map

ST ELOI. 29



around the village.²² The Germans had held the upper hand until August 1915 when the British recruited companies of experienced miners officered by mining engineers whose expertise and innovation began to tell in this deadly underground warfare. At St. Eloi, the British drove new shafts 15 to 20 metres underground, twice the previous depth, which made them virtually undetectable. The Germans failed to locate a single British mine, though two were stopped short to avoid discovery. The Germans were never able to match these new British tactics.²³

Plumer's plan of attack had been devised by the irascible Alymer Haldane, a veteran crater campaigner and GOC of one of the old contemptibles, the 3rd British Division. Though not Plumer's favorite commander, his experience at the Hooze crater fight in 1915 made him the best choice for the job. That battle had convinced Haldane that German artillery made craters untenable positions. His plan at St. Eloi was based on this conclusion. Following the detonation of the mines his infantry would secure the craters and then advance 200 meters to the third German line and dig-in. Nightly fatigue parties would consolidate and connect the

²²Ibid, p. 233.

²³John Terraine, White Heat: The New Warfare 1914-1918 (London: Sidwick & Jackson, 1982) pp.237

captured line to the main British trench system. Once completed, Turner's Canadians would relieve Haldane's Imperials but the relief was complicated by the Canadian governments request that its Corps stay together. Thus, in order to relieve Haldane and comply with the Canadian government's request, Plumer had to replace the entire V Corps (Fanashawe) with Alderson's Canadian Corps; this would be the British Army's first Corps for Corps relief of the war.²⁴

Turner protested to Alderson. He wanted his division to lead the attack, not Haldane's battle weary, understrength, trench foot-infested division.²⁵ Alderson agreed but Plumer demurred. With the 3rd Division's training nearly complete, delaying the operation once again to train Turner's men was out of the question. The attack would proceed as planned.²⁶

At precisely 0415, 27 March 1916, British sappers detonated the six St. Eloi mines sequentially from right to left. Thirty three thousand kilograms of ammonal hurled tonnes of debris 50 meters skyward, obliterating

²⁴Nicholson, p. 139.

²⁵Edmonds, pp. 177 - 179. Haldane's 8th and 76th Brigades had lost heavily at the Bluff and the division had reported 600 cases of trench foot.

²⁶MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. Report on Operations of the 2nd. Canadian Division After Arrival in the New Divisional Area St. Eloi. From April 3rd to April 7th 1916.

a company of Bavarian Jagers (18th battalion) and several old landmarks. Trenches on both sides collapsed and trench drains backed up flooding thousands of shell holes and old craters. Ypres' few remaining windows rattled and the blast was heard in far off Folkestone.²⁷ Numbered right to left, the smallest mines, 1 and 6, contained 800 and 270 kilograms of explosives respectively, were detonated just short of the German line. Directly under the German line, mines 2 through 5 were exploded in such close proximity that they created an impassable crater barrier. The largest mine was #3, it contained 13,850 kilograms of explosive and created a crater measuring sixty meters across, ten meters deep, with lips five meters high.²⁸

Mining operations were always extremely risky and unpredictable enterprises that rarely went according to plan.²⁹ At the moment of detonation tonnes of earth were hurled skyward obliterating familiar landmarks and creating craters which often confused and disoriented the attacking infantry. If the attackers managed to reach the craters, the rapidly recovering German artillery invariably severed hastily laid telephone lines and cut

²⁷Nicholson, p. 139.

²⁸ Edmonds, p. 182; Nicholson, p. 139; Granatstein and Morton, p. 111

²⁹Terraine, pp 238.

off the attackers. When this happened, success hinged on the ability of company and platoon commanders and section leaders to take action without the guidance of battalion or brigade H.Q. But in 1916 this was a level of tactical expertise that Haldane's subalterns and N.C.Os, like those of most British and Canadian divisions, lacked.³⁰

Even before the first clods of dirt and mud had settled back to earth the two assault battalions from Brigadier-General Potter's 9th Brigade sprang to the attack.³¹ On the right the 1/Northumberland Fusiliers secured their objectives in thirty minutes. Meeting no resistance they quickly cleared craters 1, 2, and 3, advanced to the third German line and linked with the left hand battalion, the 4/Royal Fusiliers, at the cost of just one casualty.³² At 0800 Haldane reported that "the right hand battalion was in occupation of its objective [but] the left attack was holding a line rather short of the original objective but joining up with the right attack."³³ This was not totally true; the Royals had blundered.

³⁰Ibid, pp.

³¹Edmonds, pp. 181-182.

³²Edmonds, p. 182.

³³RG 9, III, C1, 3842, Folder 42, File 5/6. 3rd Division's Report on St. Eloi Operations 27th March, 1916.

Raked by machine gun fire, likely from point 85, the Royals suffered heavy losses, particularly in officers.³⁴ Confused and disoriented by these losses and by the suddenly altered land-scape, the Royals occupied Crater 6 and an old crater later christened 7, but mistakenly reported securing craters 4 and 5. Their forward elements pushed into no man's land, missing the real craters 4 and 5, and linked with the Northumberlands. This explains Haldane's 0800 report that the position was all but secured.³⁵

Within minutes after the mines had been blown, the rapidly recovering German gunners found the range and started pummelling Potter's Fusiliers; casualties mounted rapidly. British counter battery fire, hampered by shell rationing and bad spotting, failed to slacken the enemy's fire.³⁶ The momentary advantage provided by the craters during the attack now worked against Haldane's men. The lips of the craters blocked observation of, and communication with, Potter's forward sloping position in front of the craters. The only route forward was via a continually shelled communications trench that passed through crater 1. Worse yet, the mines had disrupted the German's deep drainage system. Seepage quickly filled

³⁴Edmonds, p. 182.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶3rd Division's Report on St. Eloi Operations

thousands of shell holes, old craters, and collapsed several hundred meters of the British P. line trench(see map page 29) and, to make matters worse, a heavy rain began to fall.³⁷

At dark Haldane relieved the Fusiliers, thinned the line, established a series of 'forlorn hope' bombing and machine gun posts 200 meters in front of the craters, and commenced consolidating this position. Potter's two reserve battalions furnished working and carrying parties that suffered severe losses as heavy shelling continued all night. At daybreak German artillery systematically obliterated the night's work and wreaked havoc amongst the relief companies. In twenty four hours Potter's brigade suffered 850 casualties which, when combined with the cumulative effects of battle exhaustion and fatigue, forced Haldane to commit his understrength reserve brigades. That night the 8th Brigade relieved Potter's fusiliers.³⁸

Haldane was in trouble but didn't know it. On 29 March, from their vantage on the Messine-Wytschaete ridge, the Germans spotted the gap in the British line between craters 4 and 5; during the night of 29/30 March they trickled about 100 men through the gap and by

³⁷Edmonds, pp. 183 - 184.

³⁸Ibid.

morning had occupied crater 5. That same day, a British patrol sent to inspect crater 4 came under machine gun fire from crater 5.³⁹ Haldane promptly mortared and attacked crater 5, but the Germans resisted tenaciously. On 1 April, Haldane's weakest brigade, the 76th, relieved the 8th, and Plumer informed Alderson that he had decided to accelerate Turner's relief by forty eight hours from 5/6 April to 3/4 April.⁴⁰ Anticipating that Turner, like Haldane, was in for a rough time and would find it necessary to rotate his forward infantry battalions almost daily, Alderson reduced Turner's frontage from the common two brigades up and one back, to one up and two back.⁴¹ This doubled Turner's reserves from four to eight battalions.⁴²

The next day, 2 April, the Canadians decamped and started moving towards the sound of the guns at St. Eloi. Brigadier-General H.D.B. Ketchen's 6th Brigade (Western Canadian), designated to relieve the 3rd Division's 76th Brigade, moved into Haldane's reserve area at Reninghelst. Brigadier-General David Watson's 5th

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Frederick Myatt, The British Infantry 1660-1945 (Dorset: Blandford Press, 1983)p.177

⁴²MG 30, E 46 , Vol. 1, File 9. Lt.- Colonel C.A. Ker, GSO 1, 2 Division, Narrative of the Events up to the Occupation of the St. Eloi Position.

Brigade went to Zevecoten on 3 April, and Brigadier-General Robert Rennie's 4th Brigade (Ontario) replaced Ketchen's 6th Brigade at Reninghelst on 5 April after they moved up.⁴³

Haldane promised Turner that he would do everything possible to recapture crater 5 and consolidate the line in front of the craters before the relief. On the night of 2/3 April the 76th Brigade, reduced to using the instructors from the Brigade's Grenade School, launched a desperate final attack on the crater. The attack faltered but with no chance of relief the exhausted German defenders surrendered.⁴⁴ The next morning Haldane reconnoitred the entire line; though not yet consolidated, he had at least kept the most important part of his promise to Turner, the craters had been captured. However, as the Official British History observed, "All depended on whether or not this line could be put in a thorough state of defence before the enemy counter attack which was bound to come."⁴⁵

⁴³MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. Major-General Richard Turner's Report on 2nd Canadian Division's Operations at St. Eloi. 3-16 April 1916.

⁴⁴Nicholson, p. 139. The actual number captured is debatable. The officer commanding the attack, Capt. William D. La Touche-Congreve reported taking sixty eight men and five officers prisoner; Edmonds and Nicholson list seventy seven men and five officers; while the 2nd Division reported 72 men and four officers.

⁴⁵Edmonds, p. 185

Turner's inexperienced division had inherited a nightmare. The ground was a quagmire, the line had not yet been consolidated, and the German guns hit anything that moved. Incredibly, Turner had received no orders or instructions from 2 Army, V Corps or Canadian Corps. His only guidance came in the form of Haldane's 3 April handing-over report. The report advised Turner to improve his forward defences by connecting the forward machine gun and bombing posts with trenches, build dugouts, string wire, fix drains, and reclaim old trenches with all despatch. Lest he consider occupying the craters in strength, Haldane warned Turner that it was a "fatal mistake and productive of heavy casualties to occupy a crater."⁴⁶ Haldane's advice ignored the obstacles that made consolidating the position a nightmare; the craters, the rain, the mud, and the imperious German artillery, but for now, Turner had little choice but to follow it.⁴⁷

On the night of 3/4 April, Turner's untried Canadians relieved Haldane's battle weary veterans. To assist the Canadians, Haldane left behind his GSO 1 to brief his 2nd Division counterpart. He also left behind

⁴⁶MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. Haldane to V Corps 4 April 1916.

⁴⁷RG 9, III, C3, 4098, Folder 42, File 3. Haldane's Handing Over Report to 2nd Canadian Division, 3 April 1916.

his Stokes mortars, a Vickers machine gun battery, and twenty four Lewis guns. Plumer told Haldane to leave his artillery in place until a lull in the fighting allowed for the insertion of Turner's guns. This did not occur until 12 April.⁴⁸

At 0248 on 4 April, Brigadier-General H.D.B. Ketchen's 6th Brigade relieved the weary 76th Brigade. For the first time the Canadians wore the new standard issue helmets, fifty per company; several participants later claimed that the helmet saved their lives.⁴⁹ The moonless night made for a difficult relief. Haldane's Fusiliers and Highlanders were so exhausted that they left behind over 200 dead and wounded and could not provide the Canadians with an up-to-date situation report. In spite of these encumbrances, at 0430 Ketchen's brigade-major, Captain Jukes, reported to 2nd Division's GSO 1, Lt. Colonel C.A. Ker, "that all parties of the 2nd Canadian Division had reached their allotted places."⁵⁰

Turner had initially ordered Ketchen's 31st battalion into the exposed forward sector with the 27th battalion holding the left flank. On the day of the relief he had inexplicably switched their positions. This

⁴⁸Nicholson, pp. 139-140

⁴⁹RG 24, 1891, 107. Lt. W.F. Bradley Notes on St. Eloi Fighting.

⁵⁰Turner's Report 3 - 16 April.

created considerable confusion because it effectively negated the pre-battle reconnaissance that both battalions had made that morning. Why Turner switched their positions remains a mystery. Whatever the reason, there was no time to reconnoitre their new positions and Ketchen's battalions went in blind.⁵¹

At day break Ketchen reported to Turner that Lt. Colonel Snider's 27th battalion had stationed two companies in the crucial forward sector from pt. 74 to pt. 76 inclusive(see map page 29). A third company anchored the right flank from the old British trench line at P. 9 via a communications trench to crater 1. On the left Lt. Colonel Bell's 31st battalion had one company in the line from pt. 76 to the old British P. line at P.19 and had two companies from there north to the Ypres-Comines Canal, the boundary with Currie's 1st Division. Ketchen's other battalions, the 28th and 29th, were in division and brigade reserve at Dickebusch and Voormezeele respectively.⁵²

Turner inspected the line at mid-morning. When he arrived at Ketchen's H.Q. at Walled Garden near Dickebusch nearly three hours later, he was extremely distraught.

⁵¹Bradley file, Interview with Ketchen.

⁵²MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. Ketchen's Report to 2 Canadian Division. British trench lines were designated alphabetically. At St. Eloi the front line trenches were labelled the P.line.

He told Captain D.E. McIntyre, 6th Brigade's staff captain and scout officer, that "the situation was bad, much worse than he had thought it was".⁵³ He then informed Alderson that "the whole system was very wet" with some trenches containing two to three feet of water. There was no wire and "the actual position of the German infantry had not been definitely ascertained."⁵⁴ In his view the worst problem was that: "Craters 2 - 3 - 4 and 5 had been blown so close together that they formed a continuous and almost impassable obstacle . . . [and] greatly increased the difficulty of getting any communication through the centre."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, he continued, "if we were given time, we could make a pretty good line of the position selected, but that a very great amount of work would be required." The tactical realities however, made him wince; his men were sitting ducks as, " . . . the captured line was such a short one [700 meters] that it formed an ideal objective for the concentrated artillery of the Germans." ; and to make matters worse, his artillery was short of shells.⁵⁶ The 2nd Division's tactical situation was indeed desperate

⁵³RG 24, 1891, 107. Excerpted from War Diary of Lt-Col. D.E. McIntyre.

⁵⁴Turner's report, 3-16 April

⁵⁵Ibid

⁵⁶Ibid

and confused, and Turner had not helped his cause any with his last minute reversal of the positions to be held by Ketchen's battalions. Nonetheless, displaying his trademark grit and steely determination, Turner ordered his men to begin the daunting task of consolidating the position.

CHAPTER II:

Consolidating the line was unlike anything the 2nd Division had ever faced or trained for. Simply getting men and supplies around the craters and into the forward outposts took four hours of mind-numbing slogging through boot-sucking, knee-deep mud, while under fire. The ordeal exhausted even the strongest and fittest men and as one engineer officer noted, they were unfit for digging when they arrived.¹ The journey had to be shortened; Turner needed fresh, energetic men for digging. He requested buses to move the men up to at least Bus House (see map page 29) thereby cutting the journey in half, but the request was denied.² Communications were another hurdle. With Turner's view of the forward line blocked by the lips of the craters, laying a reliable buried armoured telephone cable to the front was imperative but the only such line stopped a kilometre north at Voormezeele. Extending this line began immediately.³

¹MG 30, E 46, Vol 2, File 10. Major General Richard Turner's Report on 2nd Canadian Division's Operations at St. Eloi 3 - 16 April

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Turner knew that unless he reduced the volume of German artillery fire his men would soon face, or better still, silence the enemy guns, he was in serious trouble. Laid out like a map below the German artillery observers on the Wytschaete-Messines ridge, Turner's men wallowed in muddy sodden trenches that offered no protection. Lt.-Colonel Snider's 27th battalion held the most exposed sector.

We got maps showing where the new line was - on the flat about 300 - 400 yards [he over-estimated by half] south of the Craters. . . . The only place the line existed at all was on the maps. . . . There was no connected line at all from our old front line, round the craters and back to the old front line. . . . The whole place was such a confused mess.⁴

Snider had been told that Haldane's division had left behind 12 fully manned Lewis guns, but his men found only four. Just one gun worked, and the crew was so feverish and exhausted they were, according to Snider, "useless." He ordered four of his own Lewis guns into the line and supported each with twenty bombers and riflemen.⁵ Carrying shovels, sandbags, extra grenades, ammunition, and the cumbersome Ross rifle, no one 'rushed' anywhere in that muddy shell-pocked wasteland. By morning Snider had two companies in front of the craters. A company

⁴RG 9, III, D1, 4679, Folder 14, File 1: W.R. Bradley File. Verbal Statements from Officers and Men who participated in [St.Eloi] Operations.

⁵Turner's Report 3 - 16 April.

held from P.13 via a communication trench through crater 1, then along the old German line from pt. 74 to pt. 44 (see map page 29). B company held from there to pt. 76 but had not as yet linked with Lt. Colonel Bell's 31st battalion on the left.⁶ Bell's position was not much better than Snider's. One of his men remembered that, "the trenches were in...a quagmire and unconnected; communications were entirely broken down; there was not such a thing as a firing trench."⁷ Snider and Bell set their men to work repairing the trenches, rebuilding dugouts, and stringing barbed wire. But the knee deep sludge made even the strongest muscles ache. Although progress was slow, given time and a maximum effort by all three brigades, Turner might have consolidated the line, but time was short.

Some time around 1030 Snider's men had just started repairing the trenches and removing over two hundred British dead and wounded when their baptism of fire began.⁸ German 15 cm (5.9") and 10 cm (4.1") guns methodically shelled the forward line, shattering Snider's battalion. B company, the most exposed unit, was wiped out, losing 67 of 130 men. Two Lewis gun crews

⁶Bradley file. Notes on conversations with Snider and Bell.

⁷Roy ed., The Journal of Private Fraser, p. 111

⁸MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. Ketchen's Report.

were wiped out, and the other two guns were put out of action. In order to reduce his losses, Snider thinned the forward line by forty men; they returned after dark. That night, 4/5 April, Snider relieved B company, sent out four new Lewis guns, and supported these with four obsolete Colt machine guns from the Borden Battery in the right hand P. trenches.⁹ Everything hinged on the work of the division's 1000 man fatigue party, which, despite the shelling and casualties, moved forward after dark and commenced pumping out and repairing the trenches, stringing wire, and digging a new support line between the forward posts and the craters eastward from pt.85. By morning the situation had improved.¹⁰

At 0800, Ketchen, along with his orderly officer, Snider, and Major Kitson (Snider's Second in Command) inspected the line. At pt. 33 they were caught in a murderous barrage which they survived by diving into a dugout. Miraculously unscathed they turned back. Ketchen made no further attempts to reconnoitre the position; in the days to come this proved a serious handicap. The barrage that nearly killed Ketchen lasted until 2130; about every two hours the shelling became extraordinarily intense.¹¹ Snider described one episode:

⁹ Turner's Report 3 - 16 April 1916.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid.

900 high explosive and 2000 other shells fell into an area 200 yards by 50 yards within about 45 minutes. In places it was impossible for anyone to live under the rain of steel.¹²

Left of pt. 33 the shelling cut off D company and several attempts to regain contact were unsuccessful. By late afternoon the Germans had again destroyed the previous night's consolidation work, knocked out the Lewis guns, and rendered half of Snider's men casualties.¹³ Around noon Ketchen ordered his reserve battalion, the 29th, Major J.S. Tait in temporary command, to relieve Snider's battered battalion that night, 5/6 April.¹⁴ On the right, Bell's battalion had also been hit hard. Over one hundred meters of freshly strung barbed wire was destroyed and A company lost so many men that Bell relieved it after dark.¹⁵

Turner's position was deteriorating rapidly. As he had feared, German gunners were wreaking havoc and had destroyed several hundred meters of the trench line from P.13 to P. 20. (see map page 29), and had inflicted over 600 casualties in Ketchen's brigade. Fortunately most were stretcher cases because the thick mud muffled the

¹²Bradley File - St. Eloi - Verbal Statement by Lt. Col. Snider.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Bradley file. notes on interview with Ketchen.

¹⁵Turner's Report 3 - 16 April 1916.

incoming rounds. These losses were not extraordinary but when combined with the physical and emotional strain of standing for two sleepless nights in knee deep mud, waiting to be blown to bits, the 27th battalion, which had suffered the most, was spent.¹⁶

At 2100 on 5 April, a 1000 man fatigue party moved forward for the third time, this time accompanied by the 29th's two relief companies, but German shelling held them up until midnight. Just after midnight Tait's men reached the signals dugout in the P. line where they were met by Lt. Colonel Snider. He instructed Captain Gwynn, the commander of A company 29th battalion, to relieve his men holding three bombing posts between points 33 - 76 and then to try and establish contact with the 31st battalion to the left of pt. 76.¹⁷

Turner knew that reducing the volume of German fire on his forward positions was the key to consolidating the line. But without enough artillery shells to sustain counter-battery fire he had to find another way. Haldane had suggested that showing work on the craters lips might draw some German fire and at least provide a measure of relief. How or why Turner thought the Germans peering down from their perch on the ridge would be duped by this

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. Appendix No. 5. Captain G.I.Gwynn Report on the night of 5/6 April.

he did not explain. Nonetheless, he ordered the 28th battalion to send fatigue parties of four or five men and an N.C.O. into craters 2 to 5. Shortly after midnight they occupied the craters without incident and set to work sandbagging the crater lips.¹⁸

At 0130 Gwynn left Snider's position and took an advance patrol of thirty men forward to find the 27th battalion. Without a scout or a reliable map, Gwynn's men stumbled blindly forward until 0245, at which time they encountered the 27th battalion's Capt. Meredith somewhere between pt. 14 and pt. 33. Meredith reported that the bombing posts and Lewis guns between points 44 and 76 had been destroyed and that no one was sure where the 31st battalion was. Meredith then refused Gwynn's request for a scout and left. Disturbed by this report, Gwynn left his men and returned to the telephone at pt. 74 to ring up battalion for instructions.¹⁹

Turner, responding to Ketchen's request, ordered the 5th Brigade's commander, Brigadier-General David Watson, to provide fresh Lewis gun crews to relieve Ketchen's battered gunners. By 0130 Watson's machine gunners had relieved the gun crews at points 74, 92, 44, and 33. According to Lt. Brown (22nd battalion) at pt. 33, and Sgt. Naylor (24th battalion) at pt. 74, the guns they

¹⁸Turner's Operations Report 3 - 16 April 1916

¹⁹Gwynn's report

took over were in bad shape from being repeatedly buried by the German barrage. Without a proper cleaning kit, canvas breech cover, or metal magazine panniers, Brown and Naylor swabbed out the breech and barrel with rags, wrapped the breech in canvas, and placed the 47 round circular magazines in empty sandbags. Ironically, just before they had moved forward, these crews had been ordered to leave their clean Lewis guns, magazines, and gun cleaning kit behind.²⁰

At 0200 several scout patrols reported that no man's land was all clear. About an hour later the enemy's 15 cm guns and minenwerfers (mortars) blanketed the entire line. British counter-battery fire was ineffective and the German fire continued unabated, tearing gaps in the Canadian line and wiping out entire bombing posts. Forty five minutes after the barrage began, two German Jager(hunter) battalions advanced astride the St. Eloi - Hiele Farm road between points 92 and 64. Miraculously, three of the 5th Brigade's four Lewis guns and Gwynn's men at pt. 33 had survived the shelling, but to their left everyone had been killed or wounded, including the 25th battalion's Lewis gun crew.²¹

The lone survivor from that gun had just stumbled

²⁰RG 24, 1891, 107. 7 April 1916 Report, Lt. P.S. Brown 22nd Battalion and the 10 April 1916 Report, Sgt Naylor 24th Battalion.

²¹Turner's Report 3 - 16 April 1916

into Brown's position when the sentry cried "stand to." The attacking Germans were only meters away when the muzzle flash from Brown's Lewis gun split the night; twenty Germans were hit, the rest dove for cover. The loader changed the empty magazine but the gun jammed; Brown calmly ordered his five riflemen to open fire.

When the (Lewis) gun stopped I gave orders to open fire with rifles, but after having fired 2 clips[10 rounds], with one exception the rifles stopped working, the breech action refusing to work.²²

Then his revolver jammed and with the position about to be overrun, Brown shouldered the Lewis gun and abandoned the post.²³ At the same time the 26th battalion's Lewis gun at pt. 92 also jammed and the position fell. Only one man survived.²⁴ Near pt. 33 Gwynn's men fought until they ran out of grenades and then retreated across country towards pt. 74.²⁵

²²Ibid , Lt. P.S. Brown, 22 bn. The 1st Canadian Division's Ross rifles had been replaced by Lee Enfields following it's poor performance at St Julien in April 1915. Hughes blamed bad British ammunition and demanded that 2nd and 3rd Divisions retain the Ross. The breech was modified to better accommodate British ammunition. Turner's men paid dearly for Hughes' misplaced allegiance. The Ross was permanently withdrawn by Haig in August 1916.(Nicholson, pp. 106 and 154-155)

²³Browne's report

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. Ketchen's Report 5/6 April

Exploding flares, muzzle flashes, and star shells, silhouetted Brown's retreating men; four fell mortally wounded and Brown was nicked in the head. Nine frightened and confused survivors from a fatigue party joined Brown. Suddenly twelve Germans barred their escape route. Without hesitating Brown's men attacked with rifle butts and bayonets and cleared the path. A short time later Brown's party, now numbering twenty five men, reached pt. 74.²⁶ Capt. Gwynn was still there trying to reach battalion when the German barrage cut the phone line. He tried to get back to his men at pt. 33 but the barrage was too thick. Returning to pt. 74 Gwynn ordered the twenty five riflemen there to man the parapet. Suddenly, hundreds of Germans loomed out of the dark heading for the craters. Crossing Gwynn's sights at right angles the silhouetted Germans made excellent targets but, as elsewhere, Sgt. Naylor's Lewis gun and 17 of 25 rifles jammed after a few rounds.

Only the artillery could stop the attack but the infantry had not been given SOS signal flares to mark targets and the telephone lines to the forward artillery observers had been cut; they futilely shelled the German rear. Unfettered by Canadian fire, the Germans quickly reached the craters, overpowered the 28th battalion's work parties and commenced consolidating; only two

²⁶Browne's Report

survivors eventually made their way back from the craters to the Canadian lines.²⁷

Naylor later claimed that with a regulation cleaning kit, breech cover, and magazine panniers, the 5th brigade's three surviving Lewis guns would have stopped the Germans that night, but this seems unlikely. The hole in the line between pt. 33 and pt. 76 was just too big. However, if the Canadians had been armed with clean Lewis guns, reliable rifles, and if the artillery had shot better, the Germans would not have taken the craters so cheaply.²⁸

At 0400 about 150 Germans attacked the 31st battalion near crater 6; they were driven off by small arms and machine gun fire but from the craters the Germans then fired green and red signal rockets to bring in their own artillery fire on Turner's communication trenches and assembly areas. The shelling lasted until 0530.²⁹ Turner's phone to the front had gone dead at 0500 despite the valiant efforts of several signallers to repair the line. One dauntless signaller spliced eleven breaks while under fire. Ketchen tried using runners to maintain contact with Turner and the front line but the

²⁷Naylor's report

²⁸Ketchen's report

²⁹Ibid.

Germans, using 10cm guns for sniping, killed eighteen of them. With his communications cut, the fog of war enveloped Turner. At 0640, nearly three hours after the craters had fallen, he informed Alderson that he feared the Germans had taken the craters.³⁰ Twenty minutes later he told Alderson that he believed Ketchen's brigade still held most of the forward line from pt. 73 to 92, and from there to pt. 33; in fact he really had no idea what was going on. He then rang off and left for Ketchen's H.Q.³¹

At about the same time Gwynn's phone at pt. 74 rang for the first time in several hours. He reported seeing a machine gun barrel pointing over the lip of crater 3 and that the Germans were digging a new trench around the crater's base. British eighteen pounders immediately opened fire but Gwynn observed only two hits and both were duds. With all his weapons jammed and losing men to snipers, Gwynn decided to abandon pt. 74 at 1330. The Colt guns in the P. trenches provided effective covering fire and all Gwynn's men reached the that trench unscathed.³²

At Ketchen's headquarters the situation was desperate. With his phones to the front cut since 0500

³⁰Turner's Report 3 - 16 April 1916.

³¹Ibid.

³²Gwynn's report

and his runners all slaughtered, Ketchen had no idea what was happening. His communications stopped a kilometre from the front at Voormezeele's armoured buried telephone cable. He ordered his staff captain and scout officer, Captain D.E. MacIntyre, and two scout observers to Voormezeele to be his ears and eyes. MacIntyre arrived at the telephone terminus at 0720. He manned the phone and placed his observers in a ruined school attic that provided a good view of the craters. Minutes later he told Ketchen that the Germans were in possession of craters 2 to 5.³³

Despite MacIntyre's report, Ketchen was uncertain which craters the Germans actually held because at 0600 a Forward Artillery Observer had reported seeing Germans in craters 4 and 5. But this report was contradicted at 0735 by the 151st Brigade 50th Division on Ketchen's right. They reported that the enemy held just two craters, one being crater 3. During the night of 6/7 April, the 31st battalion captured three Germans who when interrogated individually revealed that they held craters 2 thru 5; which in fact they did. This confusion was likely caused by the craters being blown so close together that they could not be distinguished individually through field glasses. Add to this the fact

³³RG 24, 1891, 107. Report from Captain D.E. MacIntyre, Staff Captain, 6th Brigade. to G.O.C., 2nd Canadian Division.(9/4/16).

that Ketchen's men had been rushed headlong into the line before they had studied aerial photographs of the craters and without maps.³⁴

Turner arrived at the 6th Brigade's H.Q at 0850, five hours after the craters had fallen and three hours since the phones had gone dead. After conferring with Ketchen, he reported to Alderson that there were "definitely" no Germans in crater 5 and that counterattacks had commenced. None of this was correct. In the afternoon McIntyre added to the confusion by contradicting his morning report stating that he only observed Germans in craters 2 and 3.³⁵ Ketchen had wanted to shell all the craters but feared hitting Gwynn's men who were still holding out at point 74 directly behind crater 2.³⁶ At Voormezeele MacIntyre patched together a makeshift force of seven machine guns and forty snipers and opened fire on the craters, but the Germans kept digging.³⁷

³⁴MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. Ketchen's Report Appendix No #1.

³⁵McIntyre's Report 9/4/1916

³⁶Turner's Report 3 - 16 April, see Appendix No. 1, Ketchen's Report.

³⁷McIntyre's Report 9/4/1916. One sniper claimed 12 Germans but McIntyre believed the total was conservative. The Canadian government, citing cost, had almost removed Alderson's sniper scopes in early 1916. They remained only after the Division GOCs promised to keep these expensive optical devices far from the fighting.

Turner's performance to this juncture requires careful consideration. Taken completely by surprise he had lost the craters without much of a fight because he had not considered that an attack was imminent even though Ketchen had warned him that it was brewing. Ketchen had gone on to suggest that the best plan was to fall back and occupy the craters but Turner's reply had been that "there was no time to change policy or to arrange for the men and materials required for such a task."³⁸ His 4 April defensive instructions to the division's brigadiers which detailed wiring, sandbags, telephone cables, Lewis guns, fields of fire, unit disposition, and relief schedules, made no mention of a possible German counterattack.

Turner's slipshod preparation of his defenses had been further evidenced by his last minute reversal of the positions to be held by Ketchen's battalions. To make matters worse, they were not supplied with signal flares to call for artillery support until shell resistant buried armoured phone cables were installed. When the Germans attacked he had not released Ketchen's divisional reserve battalion until mid-morning, hours after the craters had fallen.³⁹ Ketchen's reserves should have

³⁸Nicholson, p 141.

³⁹RG 9, III, C3, 4098, Folder 42, File 3. Turner's Defensive instructions to the 2nd Division's Brigadiers.

been sent forward when the phones went dead with orders to counterattack if necessary. Instead, Turner had done nothing to help Ketchen. Five hours after the craters had fallen and three hours after he had lost contact with Ketchen, he had finally gone forward to sort out the mess. These lost hours were to prove decisive because counterattacking against a rapidly consolidating enemy supported by massed artillery would be a difficult and costly enterprise.

Turner decided not to relieve Ketchen's brigade until they recaptured the craters; he ordered these attacks to commence immediately. Ketchen's reserves were finally moved forward. The 29th battalion's reserve companies moved from Dickebusch to Voormezeele and Turner released the 28th battalion from Divisional reserve. Having committed Ketchen's entire command, Turner sent the 4th Brigade's 18th and 19th battalions to act as Ketchen's reserve. The man on the spot, organizing, coordinating and initiating the counterattacks, was McIntyre.⁴⁰

The 28th battalion rushed two platoons and a machine gun to shore up the 31st battalion's left flank and then sent a company to attack the left hand craters in conjunction with a right flank attack by two companies

⁴⁰Rg 9, III, D1, 4679, Folder 14, File 1. Lt. William F. Bradley's Notes on St. Eloi Fighting.

from 27th and 29th battalions.⁴¹ Brigade informed the 28th battalion's commander, Lt. Colonel Embury, that crater 6 was empty, that the 31st held craters 4 and 5, and that the Germans held only craters 2 and 3; none of this was true. In fact, the Germans held craters 2 to 5, the 31st battalion held crater 7 and another unnumbered crater which they later abandoned. The likely source of this misinformation were inexperienced platoon and company commanders who, having been sent forward without the benefit of studying aerial photographs and without maps, drew their own maps peering furtively over the lip of a water-filled shell hole while under fire. Operating under such handicaps, mistakes were inevitable.⁴²

At 1020, seven hours after the craters had fallen, Ketchen told McIntyre to counterattack with the bombers from the 28th and 31st battalions. Thirty minutes later, Ketchen cancelled the attack because British guns were about to shell craters 2 and 3. McIntyre's runners reached all the attack units except for the 28th battalion's twenty bombers led by Lt. MacIntosh. He had already advanced and occupied what he believed to be craters 4 and 5 (actually 6 and another unnumbered crater) when the shelling came in from both sides. Four

⁴¹Turner's Report 3 - 16 April, Appendix No. 1 - Ketchen's Report

⁴²Bradley file: Notes on Interview with Lt. Colonel Embury 14/4/16

men were killed outright and McIntosh pulled back to the P. line.⁴³

At 1245, Turner and Ketchen ordered McIntyre to launch another attack when the artillery ceased firing at 1330 but coordinating a simultaneous two flank attack without telephones was impossible. McIntyre tried using runners but most were killed. Only the 27th battalion's twenty bombers attacked. Integrated German artillery and small arms fire cut them to pieces; seven men returned.⁴⁴

At 1450 McIntyre tried again. This time elements of the 18th, 31st, and 28th battalions were ordered to attack the craters as soon as the enemy shelling slackened. At 1550 Turner inexplicably ordered McIntyre not to use the 18th battalion's bombers; a runner found them at about 1600 hours and sent them back. At 1700 hours seventy five bombers from the 28th attacked. They were supposed to rendezvous in the P. trenches with a guide, but he never showed up. After waiting for two hours the officer in charge, Lt. Murphy, decided to push forward. Shell fire and darkness separated the attackers but thirty bombers did manage to follow Murphy into the craters. He placed ten men each in what he thought were

⁴³McIntyre's Report

⁴⁴Ibid.

craters 4, 5, and 6 but what in reality were craters 6 and 7, and an old unnumbered crater.⁴⁵ Hence, at this time, the Canadians did not realize that in fact, the Germans held craters 2 to 5.

At 2200 Lt. Colonel Embury, having received no word from Murphy, told the commander of B company, Capt. Styles, to find Murphy, support his attack on crater 3, and establish contact between crater 4 and the P. trenches.⁴⁶ The combined artillery of the 2nd Army, the Canadian Corps, two British Corps, and the 3rd Division would provide covering fire, but as before, shell rationing reduced the rates of fire to twelve rounds per gun per hour while six inch howitzers were reserved for emergency use only.⁴⁷

At 2245 Styles left Voormezeele with 3 officers and 110 men. Each man carried over 45 kilograms of equipment that included twelve grenades, six empty sandbags, two hundred rounds of rifle ammunition, two days rations, and a Ross rifle. Men cursed and groaned as pack straps cut into their flesh and the mud made each step seem like an eternity. In addition, more than half carried shovels. Around midnight, just as the Germans were relieving their

⁴⁵Bradley File: Embury's Interview 14/4/16.

⁴⁶McIntyre's report.

⁴⁷RG 9, III, C1, 3859, Folder 87, File 1: Canadian Corps - Operations Report 6 April, 1916.

crater garrisons unopposed, Styles reached Bus House and, accompanied by Lt. MacIntosh, went forward to find Murphy. Once again the combination of mud, shelling, and darkness made for slow going. Four hours later they found Murphy and his men so exhausted by their ordeal that Styles sent them back. A platoon of Styles' heavily laden men finally reached the craters at 0430 but Germans shelling forced them back to Convent Lane almost immediately.⁴⁸

About the same time Ketchen ordered Styles to return and attack craters 2 and 3 with all despatch. Enemy shelling held them up and Styles did not reach the trench head at Shelly Lane until 0930. Embury decided to support Styles' attack and ordered Captain Bidwell to reoccupy craters 4 and 5 which had been empty since Murphy's departure and which in fact were craters 6 and 7. Bidwell encountered a heavy German barrage but his men skilfully slipped through the salvos and he reported reaching craters 4 and 5 at 1330. But he and his men had occupied craters 6 and 7; the Canadians had unwittingly repeated the British mistake, they had misidentified craters 6 and 7 as craters 4 and 5.

About the time Styles reached Shelly Lane a machine gun from the 31st battalion, occupying a detached post

⁴⁸RG 24, 1891, 107. Report From Captain Styles to O.C. 28th Battalion. 10/4/1916.

near crater 6, wiped out a forty man German assault and Alderson arrived at Turner's H.Q. (Turner had returned from Ketchen's H.Q. the previous night). Relations between the two men had been icy since St. Julien but they had learned to work together. They agreed that the best plan was to turn the heavy guns of the 3rd Division and Canadian Corps on craters 2 and 3, the support trench running south from the craters, and the German reserve line. Alderson also agreed that it was time to relieve Ketchen's embattled brigade.⁴⁹ They then ordered Styles to attack craters 2 and 3 but failed to tell him that they were about to shell the German held craters. Styles sent Lt. Rowlinson and two men to reconnoitre the ground but they were caught in the shelling. The two men fell wounded but Rowlinson continued on until he had reached the lip of crater 3, which he found to be empty. In reality he was in an old crater fifteen metres short of crater 3. German shelling continued after the British and Canadian guns fell silent, which forced Brigade to cancel Styles' attack.⁵⁰

This shelling cut off Bidwell's men in craters 6 and 7 until after dark. When the German guns fell silent at

⁴⁹Rg 9, III, C1, 3860, Folder 89, File 1. Canadian Corps - Operations Report 7 April 1916.

⁵⁰RG 24, 1891, 107. Statement by Captain Styles, O.C. B Co. 28th Battalion.

2100 a patrol visited the craters and found Bidwell's men dug in and ready to fight. Ketchen attempted no further counterattacks that night because during the early morning hours of 7 April his men were to be relieved by Brigadier-General Robert Rennie's 4th Brigade.⁵¹

Ketchen's relief marked the end of the first stage of the battle, and the 2nd Division was losing. The tactical conundrum Turner had inherited was in large measure Plumer and Haldane's doing. Haldane's failure to secure the crater line coupled with Plumer's decision to accelerate Haldane's relief had caught Turner unprepared. Hastily strung telephone lines that provided haphazard communication, a lack of transports, and the shell starved artillery added significantly to Turner's woes. Moreover, nothing could have prepared Turner or his men to fight in that featureless shell-pocked quagmire. Nonetheless, Turner, and to a lesser degree, Ketchen, had preformed ineptly. Turner got off to a bad start when he switched the original positions to be held by Ketchen's battalions. Compounding this mistake (though it was not Turner's doing) was the lack of maps and aerial photographs, thus Ketchen's men had gone into battle blind. However, Turner's most conspicuous error had been his failure to anticipate the inevitable German

⁵¹ Bradley Notes: Ketchen 's Verbal Statement
9/4/1916

counterattack. Then, during the attack, he had lost contact with Ketchen for at least three hours and the reports he sent to Alderson were so confused and inaccurate that they suggest he had not sent runners or staff officers to find out what was happening. By the time he finally went forward, five hours after the craters had fallen into German hands, the division's cohesion had dissolved in a morass of conflicting and countermanding reports and orders because no one knew what was going on. Command devolved to the division's inexperienced brigadiers, battalion commanders, and subalterns who were out of their league trying to fight a tactically fluid engagement such as this.⁵²

Why Turner had been caught napping is hard to explain. Possibly he had been overwhelmed by the complexities of consolidating the pulverized forward line, but this seems unlikely. Ketchen had tried to warn him that a German counterattack was brewing, but Turner had shrugged him off. After a year at the front Turner should have known better. By 1916 counterattacking had become the cornerstone of German defensive strategy. Their tactics were predictable. While the German artillery impeded consolidation of any ground lost to the enemy, reserve units rushed forward and counterattacked

⁵²Bill Rawling, Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps 1914-1918 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) pp. 58-61.

within forty eight to seventy two hours; the 6 April attack came three days after Haldane's men had secured the crater line. Turner had issued defensive instructions to his brigadiers on 4 April but these had not included artillery and counterattack contingencies in the event that they were attacked and the craters fell to the enemy. Quite possibly he thought these instructions were sufficient.⁵³ Thus the Canadians lost the craters without much of a fight and then allowed the enemy a morning of uninterrupted digging before Turner and Ketchen managed to counterattack.

For his part Ketchen had failed to provide the calm, sure-handed leadership inexperienced troops look for from their commanding officer. Confused by a string of contradictory reports as to who held what craters, Ketchen refused to let the artillery fire on the craters. Turner's arrival at his H.Q. at 0850 had done little to clear up the confusion, and the counterattacks they launched at mid-morning went forward without knowing the enemy's exact whereabouts, without adequate artillery support, and without hope of success.

To their credit Ketchen's men had fought bravely in this their first major action. Not one unit had faltered during three days of the worst shelling north of Verdun,

⁵³Bruce I. Gudmundsson, StormTroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-18, (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 55-72 & 91-104.

in mud and rain that one veteran later claimed equalled Passchendale's.⁵⁴ When attacked they had fought to the last man or retreated only after their Lewis guns and Ross rifles jammed. Nonetheless they had lost the craters, a fact that a contemptuous London Times derisively trumpeted to the Empire: "Canadians lose Trenches captured by British."⁵⁵

Turner however, remained confident that the lost craters would be retaken and the line secured, but this conviction was based on the erroneous belief that the Germans only held craters 2 and 3. In fact, the Germans held craters 2 to 5, and Turner's men held crater 1 and craters 6 and 7, which Bidwell had incorrectly identified as craters 4 and 5. This mistake went undetected for ten days. In the early morning hours of 7 April, Brigadier-General Robert Rennie's 4th Brigade relieved Ketchen's exhausted battalions. Cloaked by a blanket of fog that hid them from the German gunners, Ketchen's weary men, barely noticed Rennie's relief columns as they shouldered arms and turned away from St. Eloi towards hot showers, hot food, and sleep. Tomorrow, Rennie's men would try to take back the craters.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Bradley File: Interview with Capt. Gywnn

⁵⁵RG 24, 1896, Folder 5, File 81. Notes on a conversation with Major A. Styles D.S.O., 18 August 1922.

⁵⁶Turner's Report 3 - 16 April

CHAPTER III

On the morning of 7 April Turner awoke to an uncertain situation. Ketchen's beleaguered brigade had failed to retake craters 2 and 3, the German artillery had knocked down over 700 meters of P. line and continued to make movement during daylight extremely hazardous. Unbeknown to Turner, Ketchen's men had not recaptured craters 4 and 5 but had occupied craters 6 and 7.¹ The likely cause of this mistake was Plumer's acceleration of Haldane's relief which had caused Turner to rush Ketchen's brigade precipitously into the battle. Without enough aerial photographs of the craters or maps, Ketchen's men had to rely on their pre-battle reconnaissance, but Turner had reversed their positions at the last minute and sent them in blind. Baffled by the battlefield's bewildering topography and bashed about by a storm of German artillery, Ketchen's inexperienced brigade had made many mistakes, of which the most serious had been the misidentification of craters 6 and 7 as craters 4 and 5. This mistake went undiscovered for ten days and undermined many of Turner's tactical decisions during that time.²

Several mistakes Turner made had nothing to do

¹MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. Major General Richard Turner's Report on 2nd Canadian Division's Operations at St. Eloi. 3 - 16 April 1916.

²Ibid.

with the misidentification of the craters, however, the most costly had been his failure to adequately prepare the 2nd Division's defences for the inevitable German counterattack. Most notably was his failure to prepare artillery and counterattack contingencies. When the Germans had attacked, the Division had been caught unprepared and lost the craters. In the tactically fluid engagement that followed, Turner's ineptness conjured up memories of his much criticized performance at St. Julien the previous April.

The relief of Ketchen's battered 6th Brigade by Brigadier-General Robert Rennie's 4th Brigade on the night of 6/7 April had gone like clockwork. But like Ketchen before him, Rennie's Brigade went forward before they had reconnoitred the battlefield and without enough maps of the area. After four days in reserve watching the battle develop, Rennie should have been better prepared.

Turner ordered Rennie to recapture craters 2 and 3 that night (7/8 April) and commence rebuilding the P. line (see map page 29). It was imperative for these repairs to be completed post haste as only the thinly held reserve line at Voormezeele a kilometre northwest of St. Eloi stood between the Germans and Ypres. A full scale assault could have unhinged the entire Ypres

salient!³

On the eve of the 2nd Division's entry into the battle Turner had concluded that unless the accuracy and volume of German artillery fire was reduced, he was in trouble. Events had confirmed this prognosis. From atop the Messines-Wystachate ridge, German artillery observers had directed their guns with great skill and had decimated Ketchen's brigade; the same fate awaited Rennie's brigade unless Turner acted quickly.

On 7 April he proposed to Plumer that they abandon Haldane's consolidation plan and either pull back and shell the Germans out of their craters, or capture the German line south of the craters from Piccadilly Farm to Ruined Farm. This he hoped would diffuse the German fire over a wider target area.⁴ Plumer endorsed the second option and ordered Alderson to have Turner attack the farm house line with his two reserve brigades on 11 April. In the meantime Turner was to continue repairing the P. line, recapture craters 2 and 3, and then dig a new forward line along the crater's southern edges.⁵

³RG 9, III, C1, 3859, Folder 87, File 1. Canadian Corps Operations Report for 8 April 1916.

⁴Ibid.

⁵RG 9, III, 4098, Folder 42, File 3. Plumer's instructions to Canadian Corps 10/4/1916.

That night, Turner doubled the nightly fatigue party from 1000 to 2000 men as Rennie attacked the German craters with 100 enthusiastic volunteers from the 21st battalion(Kingston). Brigade intelligence reported that each crater contained about 20 Germans but the actual number was five times that. Caught in a withering fire from the craters the 21st suffered 36 casualties.⁶ Rennie immediately ordered the assault renewed by 150 bayonetmen but shelling stopped them before they reached the start line, killing 3 and wounding 25.⁷ At dawn Rennie postponed operations against the craters until that evening (8/9 April), at which time the 18th, 19th, and 21st battalions would try to reach the north lips of craters 2 and 3. Lt. Colonel Wigle, the 18th battalion's commanding officer, led the assault. He ordered his men to carry only their rifles, ammunition, bayonets, and water bottles, and to blacken their faces and bayonets with charcoal. They had barely cleared their own wire when an unexpected fog rolled in and hid the craters.⁸ Somehow they managed to secure a foothold on the north

⁶RG 9, 4930, File 410(1). War Diary 21st Battalion.

⁷RG 24, 1807, 107. Lt. W.F. Bradley File - Notes from interview with Lt. Col. W. St. Hughes.

⁸Bradley file - Notes from interview with Brigadier General Robert Rennie.

lip of crater 3 but small arms repulsed the attack on crater 2. The attack cost 8 killed and 33 wounded. Nevertheless, the next morning Rennie confidently reported to Turner:

Operations last night . . . have resulted in the strengthening our positions considerably. We now have a firm hold on [sic] Craters 3, 4, 5, and 6, which have been joined up, and we have located the enemy's line running just south of the line of craters.⁹

The report was inaccurate. Disoriented by the darkness, fog, and unfamiliar terrain, and without the benefit of guides or maps, Wigle's men had occupied the north lip of an old unnumbered crater about fifty meters short of the objective. It was three days before the error was discovered.¹⁰ Believing that the Germans now held only crater 2, Rennie ordered the capture of the old German line south of crater 1 from pt. 74 to pt. 96. This would anchor his right flank and act as a springboard for the capture of what he thought was the remaining German held crater, crater 2.¹¹

At 0200 on 10 April, two groups of bombers from

⁹RG 9, III, C1, 3842, Folder 42, File 5/6. 2nd Division Operations Report 8/9 April.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid. Rennie's report.

the 21st battalion bombed their way up the "Canadian" communication trench and entered the German line at pt. 74. The first group turned south, linked with a third bombing party that had attacked cross country, and established a trench block at pt. 94. The second party worked left, secured pt. 85, and established a bombing post a grenade throw from crater 2. By morning the Canadian Corps confidently reported to Plumer that:¹²

The situation there this morning[10 April] is that our line runs from our original trench line through crater 1, pt. 74, Pt.94, around the southern edges of craters 2 and 3 which are joined across to craters 4 and 5 which we are holding in our possession, thence to crater 6 in our original line. . . . It is hoped to-night that the southern portion of craters 2 and 3 will also be captured and that further communication between the craters and our original line will be constructed.¹³

Their misguided optimism was short lived. Just after midnight on 11 April, engineering officers sent to oversee the consolidation of the position that Wigle's men reported was crater 3 correctly identified it as an old crater 50 metres away from the actual crater 3. Why these engineers were able to correctly identify the position when others were not remains a mystery. A pall descended over Division H.Q. A distraught Turner sent

¹²Bradley file: Interview with officers of the 21st battalion.

¹³RG 9, III, C1, 3842, Folder 42, File 5/6 Canadian Corps Operations Report 10 April 1916.

Ker to confer with Rennie. After much deliberation they concluded that they still held craters 4 and 5 (they did not, they actually held craters 6 and 7) with forty men each, but that the Germans definitely held craters 2 and 3 (In fact, the Germans still held craters 2 to 5).¹⁴

Based on this, Turner cancelled the 4th Brigade's relief scheduled for that night (11/12 April) and ordered them to recapture craters 2 and 3 without further delay. Rennie protested: he had lost all his bombers, he had no fresh reserves, and his infantry was exhausted.¹⁵ Relieving the 4th Brigade would delay operations by 24 hours but Rennie's emotional plea caused Turner to reconsider. After consulting with Canadian Corps and the 2nd Army, he decided to commit his last fresh brigade, Brigadier-General David Watson's 5th Brigade.¹⁶ Under the circumstances he had little choice.

Alderson immediately cabled Plumer about the misidentification of crater 3 and outlined what he had been told were Turner's latest positions. He then sent a staff intelligence officer, Lt. S.A. Vernon, to

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid

¹⁶Ibid.

corroborate. Accompanied by the 2nd Division's intelligence officer and brigade major, Vernon reconnoitred Turner's entire front line on the night of 11/12 April. The next morning Vernon confirmed that the Germans held craters 2 and 3 in strength and that the 4th Brigade held craters 1, 4, and 5. Again the mistake made by Ketchen's men had not been discovered; Rennie's men were actually in craters 6 and 7.¹⁷ Since 6 April at least three separate reconnaissance patrols, including Vernon's, had failed to uncover the error made by Ketchen's men. Thus on the morning of 12 April, Turner, Alderson, and Plumer had no reason to doubt that the Germans only held craters 2 and 3.

Alderson however was displeased with Turner's inability to retake craters 2 and 3 or consolidate the P. line and decided to set matters right. That day, 12 April, he sent his GSO 1, Brigadier-General Charles 'Tim' Harington to meet with Turner and his brigadiers. By the end of the meeting they had agreed that the best course of action was to temporarily abandon craters 4 and 5 (actually craters 6 and 7) and then attack simultaneously from both flanks and roll up the crater line.¹⁸ Plumer

¹⁷Bradley file: Notes on St. Eloi

¹⁸RG 9, III, C1, 3842, Folder 42, File 5/6. Canadian Corps Operations Report 12 April 1916.

vetoed the plan because he believed the Germans held only craters 2 and 3 and instructed Turner to hold his position, recapture the lost craters, continue repairing the recently captured German trench and the P. line, and then dig a communication trench from the captured German line to the Canadian-held craters.¹⁹ Plumer was not finished yet. A terse missive from Major-General Williams, the 2nd Army's Major-General General Staff(MGGS), to Alderson admonished him for not supervising Turner more vigilantly.

I am to point out the necessity for superior commanders, [Alderson], especially in the case of comparatively new units at present in our Armies, to take steps at once to satisfy themselves that all that is necessary, advisable, and possible has been done. The principle of leaving execution entirely to subordinates[Turner] may easily be carried too far in dealing with troops and subordinate officers who are far from being trained or experienced.²⁰

The day after he received this directive Alderson took control of a significant portion of the 2nd Division's operations. On 13 April he again sent Harington to straighten out the 2nd Division. Arguably the British Army's best staff officer, the gifted Harington reorganized the 2nd Division's defences, established work

¹⁹Ibid

²⁰Ibid. Major-General Williams MGGS 2 Army to Canadian Corps 12 April 1916.

schedules, and planned counterattacks. Next, he ordered the 2nd Division's artillery, which had relieved Haldane's guns the previous day, to prepare a fire plan in the "unlikely event of the enemy capturing craters 4 and 5 and attempting to pierce our line."²¹ Turner apparently sat quietly on the sidelines.

Until Harington arrived on the scene, the 2nd Division's staff work had been rather slipshod especially in the area of intelligence assessment and evaluation.²² Their failure to correctly interpret the 8 April aerial photographs that clearly showed craters 1 and 6 brimming with water but not so craters 2 to 5 is hard to explain. It was, however, a very costly oversight.²³

Substandard staff work was not just a Canadian shortcoming. The British Army's rapid expansion from 7 to 60 divisions in the first two years of the war had created a critical shortage of college trained staff officers. The Canadian Corps was fortunate that the British loaned them quality staff officers like

²¹Rg 9, III, 3824, Folder 42, File 5/6

²²MG 30, E 46, Vol. 1, File 9. 2nd Division Daily Intelligence Summaries, 6 - 9 April 1916

²³Nicholson, pp 143.

Harington, but they could not do it alone. Until the Canadians learned this intricate craft, staff work remained substandard.²⁴ But this does not entirely explain why Turner's staff, which included several experienced - albeit overworked - staff college graduates, most notably the Division's GSO 1, Lt. Colonel J.A. Ker, performed so badly. Why they had not provided Turner with defensive and artillery contingencies prior to the 6 April counterattack or correctly interpreted aerial reconnaissance photographs remains a mystery.

On 13 April Alderson, still smarting from Plumer's tongue lashing, interviewed Turner. He ordered Turner to use the 2nd Division's staff officers to personally supervise and inspect all consolidation work and submit daily progress reports to Corps by 0900.²⁵ Later that day Plumer visited Turner, reiterated Alderson's instructions, and installed several of his own staff officers to monitor and supervise consolidation.

Plumer's growing concern over Turner's inability to retake the craters and consolidate the position was

²⁴Geoffrey Powell, Plumer: The Soldier's General (London: Leo Cooper, 1990), p. 148.

²⁵Turner's Report 3 - 16 April

shared by the Commander in Chief, Sir Douglas Haig.²⁶

At the weekly Army Commanders meeting Haig criticized Haldane's crater-fighting tactics while lauding the Germans for their ingenuity and tenacity. He concurred with Plumer's 11 April change of plans and then mused about crater-fighting tactics. Craters, he stated, must be used as strong points complete with parapets and dugouts, and that accurate counter-battery work was vital. The position, Haig concluded, could only be held by troops with the "discipline, grit and determination in holding the ground once gained, even though small parties, holding out in localities . . . are eventually destroyed".²⁷

Since officers who lacked this "discipline, grit and determination" were to be removed, the 27th battalion was swept clean.²⁸ On 15 April Lt.-Colonel Snider, his second in command, staff captain, and all four company commanders were sent home. Turner did not order the

²⁶RG 9, III, C1, 3827, Folder 6, File 2. Haig's Instructions 13 April 1916.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸ Tim Travers, The Killing Ground (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987) provides a prescient analysis of Haig's 'organic' command philosophy.

removals, the order likely came from Alderson.²⁹ Snider's replacement was Major Daly. The commander of D company 31st battalion, he had displayed the qualities Haig so admired. While holding the right flank from 4 to 8 April, his cut-off company had lost 110 of 170 men but had held their ground.³⁰

Snider's removal by Alderson coupled with Harington's intervention into the operations of the 2nd Division was unprecedented; officers judged incompetent in the chain of command conscious British army were replaced, not pushed aside. Why Turner was not removed was likely a matter of nationality. Why he did not resign is not known but it seems reasonable to suggest that Alderson and Plumer were trying to force him to do so by usurping his command. It was a matter of record that neither man believed Turner was capable of commanding a division, and to date his performance at St. Eloi had confirmed this judgment.

Brigadier-General David Watson's 5th Brigade relieved Rennie's 4th Brigade on the night of 11/12 April without incident. By morning, he reported that the 22nd battalion (Van Doos), the 25th battalion (Nova Scotia

²⁹RG 9, III, D1, 4676, Folder 4, File 5. Turner's letter to Sir Max Aitken, 17 April 1916.

³⁰Bradley File: notes on interview with Major Daly.

Rifles), and the 26th battalion (New Brunswick) held the P. trenches from left to right respectively, and that the 24th battalion (Victoria Rifles) was in brigade reserve at Voormeezle.³¹ At 0430, the Germans briefly shelled the craters and then Watson's H.Q. at Voormezeele; this was the only firing on this the battle's quietest day.

Watson had intended to attack the German-held craters that night but at 1300 Turner cancelled the operation and in compliance with Plumer's instructions, ordered the entire brigade to work on the P. line.³² Watson told the commander of the 25th, Lt. Colonel E. Hilliam, to prepare an assault on craters 2 and 3 but only after he had reconnoitred the ground and the artillery softened up the objectives. That night Hilliam put out four patrols to find attack routes, they returned before first light. At dawn a thick fog hid the enemy positions, Hilliam told Watson that unless it lifted enough to allow better spotting and improved shooting by the artillery, the attack stood little chance.³³ He asked Watson to postpone the operation until the

³¹Bradley notes: notes on interview with Brigadier General D. Watson.

³²Ibid.

³³Bradley file: notes on interview with Lt. Colonel Hilliam.

battalion had completed repairs to the P. line because he had concluded that even if they managed to capture the craters (which he doubted) "the Germans are only allowing us to hold Craters 4 and 5 [actually craters 6 and 7] till they get Craters 2 and 3 thoroughly consolidated."³⁴

That night Turner sent out the largest fatigue party to date, 3000 men drawn from all three brigades, to rebuild the battered P. line. At the same time signallers laid a buried armoured telephone cable to the post at pt. 74 and then into the trench line at P. 16. From there they spliced an unarmoured line into crater 5. At 0315 Alderson paid a surprise visit to the 22nd battalion without Turner! He told Plumer that repairs to the trenches were well underway and that the men were in fine spirits.³⁵ The situation in the craters, however, was an entirely different matter.

Around midnight the German artillery lightly shelled the P. line then shifted its fire to the craters, permanently severing the recently installed telephone cable. At 0520 the German infantry launched four

³⁴RG 9, III, C1, 3842, Folder 42, File 5/6. Hilliam to Watson.

³⁵MG 30, E 45, Vol. 2, File 10. 5 CIB Report. and Bradley Notes - interview with Lt. Colonel Gunn o.c. 24 bn.

successive attacks against the craters.³⁶ In crater 6 the officer in charge, Lt. Morgan, had scavenged over two hundred discarded rifles and had given 4 or 5 to each of his 30 riflemen. Without pausing to reload, they maintained a withering fire and drove off each German attack with heavy losses; Canadian casualties were light, 1 killed and 6 wounded.³⁷

Around 1030, about two dozen Germans sprang from crater 2 and attacked pt. 74. Canadian riflemen manned the fire step and poured fire into the advancing field grey uniforms. Five or 6 Germans crumpled in the first volley and the rest scrambled back to the crater.³⁸ Watson's men had repulsed the heaviest counterattacks since 6 April but, as Hilliam had predicted, the Germans had served eviction notice on craters 6 and 7.³⁹

The 5th Brigade's fine showing had buoyed Turner's flagging spirit. The next day he ordered Watson to resume efforts to retake craters 2 and 3.⁴⁰ That night

³⁶Bradley Notes: Interview with Watson.

³⁷Bradley Notes: Interview with Lt. Col. E. Hilliam o.c. 25bn.

³⁸Bradley Notes: Interview with Watson.

³⁹Bradley Notes: Interview with Watson GOC 5 CIB

⁴⁰Ibid.

(14/15 April) Watson sent out two reconnaissance patrols. Lt. Robertson and Lt. Duclos, 24th battalion, moved out from crater 1 and began working their way towards crater 2 when they happened across an old tree-lined ditch running perpendicular to that crater. They followed it to within 50 metres of crater 2 and observed that the Germans had built a parapet from which they fired rifles every time a flare went up. They concluded that any attack against such a strongly defended position would be suicidal. Having seen enough, they drew a remarkably accurate map and retired.⁴¹

The second patrol that night was led by Major Ross and Lt. Greenshields. From P.16 they followed a small trench into no man's land, and then crawled to the lip of an old crater about 15 meters from crater 3. Nicholson, the official Canadian historian, claimed that "Ross . . made a personal reconnaissance of Craters 2, 3, 4, and 5 and found all four in the possession of the enemy." But the patrol report contains no such reference. For the record, Ross stated that crater 3 was either three times the previously-reported length, or that the enemy had

⁴¹RG 9, III, C1, 3842, Folder 42, File 5/6. Appendix VII contains the map they drew.

connected the near lips of craters 2 and 3.⁴² Based on these patrol reports, Lt. Colonel Gunn, commanding officer of the 24th battalion, advised Turner to order a battalion strength, artillery supported, counterattack or pull out of our craters and shell the Germans out of theirs. Apparently Gunn was unaware that Plumer had already rejected the latter proposal.⁴³ Nonetheless, these patrols had again confirmed that the Germans held only craters 2 and 3.

At dawn on the morning of 15 April, the sun broke through. The rain clouds that had drenched the battlefield and curtailed flying for a week, scattered. Reconnaissance aircraft from the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) 16th Squadron soon filled the skies over St. Eloi. On the ground the Germans attacked craters 6 and 7, but were driven off by Gunn's Victoria Rifles. Later that same day, a box barrage announced another German infantry attack. Watson endured several anxious hours before a pigeon-borne message confirmed that Gunn's men still held the craters. At 2240 the Rifles drove off the last

⁴²Ibid. Reconnaissance Report St. Eloi Positions 14/15 April.

⁴³MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. 5 CIB Operations Report.

attack of the day.⁴⁴

That night (15/16 April) Watson sent out more patrols, including Duclos, Greenshields and Ross, to confirm the previous night's findings. One group spent all night observing crater 2 and set up a bombing post before retiring. When they arrived back at Brigade H.Q. the first aerial photographs since 8 April had arrived, and the news was all bad.⁴⁵

There was no chance that these photographs would be misinterpreted, the evidence was obvious and indisputable; the Germans, not the Canadians, held craters 4 and 5. In fact they showed that the Germans held craters 2 to 5 and had dug inter-locking trenches around the base of each. Turner's men held craters 1 and 6 and an old crater they labelled crater 7. A contrite Alderson, still smarting over the 12 April misidentification of crater 3, immediately cabled Plumer:⁴⁶

I very much regret to have to report to you that aeroplane photos taken today (the first opportunity since April 9th) disclose a state of affairs at the craters at ST.ELOI quite different from what was

⁴⁴RG 24, 1891, 107, Notes on St. Eloi. 16/4/1916.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. Major General Richard Turner's Report on 2nd Canadian Division's Operations at St. Eloi. 3 - 16 April 1916.

supposed to be the situation. It is evident that the enemy are in possession of Craters 2,3,4, and 5, and have been so ever since the original attack made on April 6th. The craters which we hold and have always understood to be Craters 4 and 5 are evidently Crater 6 and the Crater alongside it. . . I have ordered the Craters which we hold to be strongly wired and all efforts for the present to be concentrated on strengthening and repairing our front and support line. I very much regret this unfortunate mistake, more especially as it has quite unintentionally misled you as well as myself throughout the whole of the operations.⁴⁷

That same day he wrote Turner and told him not to worry because Plumer had taken the news like the gentleman he was. Harington also wrote Turner and reiterated the Corps Commander's sentiments. But the knives were already being sharpened and Turner knew it.⁴⁸ The official historians, Nicholson and Edmonds, both end their accounts of the battle with this disclosure but some of the worst fighting was yet to come.⁴⁹

⁴⁷RG 9, III, C1, 3842, Folder 42, File 5/6., Correspondence between 2nd Army and Cdn Corps.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Nicholson, p. 554
Appendix "F" *BATTLES AND OTHER ENGAGEMENTS IN WHICH CANADIAN FORCES PARTICIPATED*. The official history dates the the Battle from 27 March to 16 April.

CHAPTER IV

On 17 April a fine mist dampened the fighting ardour of both sides. The 20th battalion's diary contained just one entry that day, a 3 - 0 soccer victory over an engineer company. The nightly 3000 man fatigue party endured a cool drizzle but were spared from shelling.¹ It was the calm at the eye of the hurricane. That night, 17/18 April, the first Canadian patrols in two days crept towards the German lines. One stealthy group got to within 25 meters of craters 4 and 5 and for three hours, watched the Germans dig parapets and paradoss. A four man patrol from the 26th battalion was not so lucky. Ambushed by a dozen Germans, two were killed outright and the other two left for dead.² At 1000 18 April the Germans systematically bombarded Turner's entire front line, Voormezele, and some battery positions. The 2nd Division's guns, assisted by the guns of the V Corps and Canadian Corps, replied until they ran out ammunition for the 6 inch howitzers. The Germans ceased fire at 1230. Two hours later they began to shell the Canadian left and

¹RG 24, 1891, 107: Report on Operations of 2nd Canadian Division from April 16th to April 30th. General Staff, 2nd Canadian Division.

²Bradley notes: Lt. Dolphin's patrol night 17/18 April

another fierce artillery duel raged for over an hour.³

Fearing that this latest round of shelling signalled a new infantry attack, Turner ordered Watson to move his reserve battalion forward and replaced it with a battalion from Ketchen's 6th Brigade. He then told Rennie and Ketchen to be ready to move their brigades forward on thirty minutes notice. At 2130, a 40 or 50 man German raiding party attacked the NewBrunswickers holding P. 19. The Germans were driven back with heavy casualties, the maritimers suffered only two wounded.⁴

Around 0200 Turner's gunners provided a rare display of accurate shooting knocking out a machine gun emplacement in crater 3 and then finished by putting forty five 18 pounder rounds into crater 2. The German retaliation was immediate and overwhelming. In a matter of minutes 200 15cm rounds ripped up the P. line, smashed barbed wire, sent defenders scurrying for cover, and inflicted heavy losses.⁵

Turner decided that the best course was to abandon the German trench from pt. 73 to 96, and to cancel any further attempts to retake craters 2 to 5 until he had

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid

⁵Daily Intelligence summary - 2 Division 17 April

anchored craters 1, 6, and 7 to a rebuilt P.line. He was disappointed with the efforts of the 3000 man fatigue parties. Unable to come up with a better alternative, that night he sent out another of these leviathans to work on the line. The problem was that he had too many men concentrated in too small an area and the infantry reserves he employed were apathetic about the duty and thus worked with little enthusiasm or effort. That night he also rotated Ketchen's rested brigade into the line.⁶

Ketchen took over command from Watson around noon on 19 April. After 12 days in reserve his brigade had been rested, retooled, and reinforced. In contrast to their first tour they inherited a reliable telephone network which linked all corners of the battlefield, more buses, and a series of communication trenches that significantly reduced the amount of time and the amount of danger required to get men and equipment forward.⁷

Ketchen quickly organized his defences, sending 93 men and five Lewis guns to takeover the actual craters 6 and 7. He then established several strong points along the P. line including a Colt gun at P. 14, and a Lewis gun at P. 16. His men began repairing the P. line from

⁶RG 9, III, C3, 4098, Folder 42, File 3. Turner's Operations Report for 14 - 21 April

⁷Ibid.

P. 17 towards his isolated garrison at P. 19. Once that was completed, he planned to dig a communications trench from P. 19 to craters 6 and 7. Ketchen had wanted the crater garrisons to build dugouts that could withstand a 15 cm shell but it was impossible to get them the heavy timbers and sheets of corrugated metal they needed.⁸ Without these materials, his men had but one option, to burrow holes into the crater's muddy side walls.⁹

At 1430 German guns and minenwerfers inundated craters 6 and 7 and scored at least thirty direct hits inside each. In crater 7 the officer in charge, Lt. Meyers, placed his wounded under the only cover offered by the crater, an overhanging crater lip. A direct hit killed most of them instantly and tossed several into the crater's fetid pond to drown. When the shelling stopped around 1930, Meyers had 15 men left. From their trenches at the base of crater 5, about forty meters away, the Germans called on the survivors in crater 6 to surrender. Several men emerged with their arms raised, including the officer in charge of crater 6, Lt. Biggs, but in crater

⁸Military Illustrated Past and Present(Rahway N.J.:Windrow and Green Inc.1990), *British Field Works 1914 -1918: Dugouts, Posts and Concealment*. p.18.

⁹RG 24, 1891, 107. 2 Division's Operations Report for 16 - 30 April 1916.

7 Meyers decided to hold out. The shelling had exploded all his grenades and clogged the Lewis guns and all but one Ross rifle, which jammed after a couple of rounds. Only Meyer's service revolver worked and he defiantly emptied it at the approaching enemy. The Germans replied with two high explosive rounds that had killed or wounded four more men. Meyers then told his men to surrender or run for it. Five or six followed him in a death defying escape across no man's land.¹⁰

At Brigade H.Q. Ketchen had no idea what was happening up front but assumed the craters were under attack and ordered his guns to shell the German craters. At 1900, he informed Turner that craters 6 and 7 were under attack and that the 29th battalion had two companies ready to recapture the craters if necessary.¹¹ At 1930 several high explosive rounds slammed into Ketchen's H.Q. at Walled Garden, near Dickebusch, killing and wounding several officers and clerks. Stunned but unscathed, Ketchen had just got back on his feet when the phones went dead at 1945. Miraculously the line was repaired in 27 minutes. The first voice Ketchen heard

¹⁰RG 24, 1891, 107. 2 Division Operational Reports: Lt. Meyers Report 20/4/1916.

¹¹Ibid. 2 Division Operations Report for 16 - 30 April 1916.

was that of the 29th battalion's temporary commander, Major Tait, reporting that the Germans had overrun P. 19 and 20.¹² Ketchen then told Turner that "the situation was not clear, various reports of the enemy having also broken into trenches 19 and 20."¹³ On the right the 27th battalion's new commander, Major Daly, reported that he still held crater 1 and the old German line.

At 2015, Tait ordered Captain Gwynn to take A company and recapture the craters if necessary. At 2110 Ketchen inexplicably relieved Tait and replaced him with the 31st battalion's commanding officer, Lt. Colonel Bell. Bell immediately ordered Major Latta to take C company and support Gwynn.¹⁴ Around 2130 Meyers and his survivors reached Voormezele and confirmed that the craters had fallen. Thirty minutes later Ketchen informed division. Turner's GSO 1, Lt. Colonel Ker, relayed the message to Harington.¹⁵

Meanwhile Gwynn finally reached P.16 at 2210 and

¹²MG 30, E 46, Vol. 1, File 9. Messages Received, General Staff, 2 Cdn Division. 19/20 April.

¹³RG 24, 1891, 107. Ketchen's report to 2 Division on the capture of craters 6 and 7.

¹⁴RG 9, III, C3, 4140, Folder 1, File 10. Major Tait's report 22 April 1916.

¹⁵Bradley's Notes on St. Eloi: From conversations with officers of 6th Brigade.

sent a patrol to find out who held P. 19. About the same time Ketchen asked Bell why Gwynn had not attacked the craters. Bell phoned Gwynn at P. 16 and told him to attack without delay but Gwynn replied that he could not do so until he found Latta, which he expected to do at any moment. Two hours later Gwynn was still trying to find Latta. In desperation, Bell sent Tait to find Gwynn and Latta and get the attack going.¹⁶

Ketchen had other problems. He had requested that the British and Canadian artillery maintain their current rate of rapid fire on the German craters until he was ready to counterattack but a rather curt artillery officer told him that except for the 18-pounders, that was impossible. A heated exchange followed but the rate of fire slowed.¹⁷ At 2335 Bell telephoned Ketchen that Gwynn had requested two more companies. Ketchen replied that he could only supply extra grenades and that Gwynn must attack without delay. When they had still not attacked an hour and a half later, an apoplectic Ketchen phoned Tait and left no doubt that Gwynn and Latta, supported by a company from Bell's 31st, must attack

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷MG 30, E 46, Vol. 1, File 9. Messages Received, General Staff, 2 Cdn Div. 19/20 April 1916.

immediately and retake craters 6 and 7 "at all costs". "It was a straight point of honour" he continued for his brigade "to clear up the situation and reoccupy craters 6 and 7".¹⁸ Tait ignored the command. At 0136 Bell sent a company from his own battalion forward and received word from Captain MacIntyre's brigade scouts that they had found P.19 occupied by Canadians. Tait finally found Gwynn at 0130 but it was another hour before he found Latta.¹⁹ With dawn approaching, he ordered them back to Voormezeele. At 0245 MacIntyre reported that Gwynn had attacked, which he certainly had not. Fifteen minutes after this, Tait informed Bell that he had cancelled the attacks until he had reconnoitred the ground, which he promised to do as soon as the shelling lightened up. When Ketchen found out he ordered Bell to send Latta and Gwynn back with orders to counterattack immediately!²⁰ Bell met Latta at the H.Q. door and ordered him to take his men back and attack but Latta refused stating he would do so only if Major Tait ordered him to. A heated exchange ensued. Bell told

¹⁸Bradley's notes: conversations with officers 6 CIB.

¹⁹Ibid

²⁰MG 30, E 46, Vol. 1, File 9. Messages Received, General Staff, 2 Cdn Division 19/20 April

Latta, "I give you [a] direct order from the GOC of the Brigade to carry out the attack at once." Latta still balked. An uneasy silence descended over the two men. Then, without warning, Latta fell forward in a dead faint.²¹ The insubordinate Latta was removed on a stretcher but a compassionate Bell attributed the breakdown to nervous tension and battle fatigue, not cowardice.²²

Meanwhile the German shelling had lightened up enough for Tait, accompanied by two officers and two men, to hazard a trip to craters 6 and 7. The only occupants they found were the stripped bodies of the Canadian dead. At dawn they returned to their lines. At 0431, Bell informed Ketchen that he needed ten minutes of artillery preparation before attacking, but by now Ketchen's fighting ardour had cooled and he asked Turner's permission to cancel any further attacks. At 0435 Ker cancelled the attack and the Battle of St. Eloi was over.²³

Over the next eleven days the German artillery

²¹Bradley file: notes on interview with Lt. Colonel Bell

²²Ibid.

²³RG 9, III, C3, 4140, File 10. Major Tait's Report 22 April 1916.

continued to kill and wound Canadians and to hamper consolidation efforts, but they mounted no further infantry attacks. Turner abandoned crater 1 on 26 April and concentrated on repairing the P. line. When the shelling petered out at month's end, the Germans had regained all the ground they had lost on 27 March at a cost of less than 500 casualties; Turner's casualties numbered over 1400.²⁴

The full extent of Turner's responsibility for the Canadian Corps worst defeat of the war must be explained within the context of the intractable systemic, tactical, and logistical problems that handicapped him throughout the battle and for which he was not responsible. Systemically, Turner's 2nd Division was the progeny of the Canadian Militia's corrupt and chaotic system of procurement and patronage that sent men to war carrying the unreliable Ross rifle lead by officers who owed their rank to patronage and not to merit; Turner himself being the most notable example of this system. These flaws had been compounded in England by a training curriculum that had contained too much parade square drill and too little of the small unit tactics that were fast becoming the

²⁴RG 9, III, 3835, Folder 25, File 4. Daily Intelligence Summary: 2nd Canadian Division. 19 - 30 April 1916.

infantry's bread and butter on the shell churned Western Front.²⁵ Reliable rifles, competent officers, and practical training may not have guaranteed victory at St. Eloi but without them Turner's courageous men had been overwhelmed by the battle's tactical complexity.

Tactically, Haldane's failure to consolidate the narrow front line, the torrential downpour that transformed St. Eloi's soggy lowlands into a quagmire, and the ubiquitous German artillery were intractable obstacles. Turner's only hope was to buffer their impact on the battle, especially the German artillery.

Logistically, the parsimonious supply of maps and aerial photographs seriously handicapped Turner's men. For example, by 11 April the 6th Brigade had received 28 maps and 5 sets of aerial photographs to share amongst 4000 men! Under such conditions mistakes were inevitable, the foremost being the 6 April misidentification of the craters by Ketchen's men.²⁶ Leading frightened men across no-man's land at night toward an unseen enemy without a map and carrying unreliable weapons is not for the faint of heart or poorly trained. Youthful exuberance and enthusiasm had

²⁵Desmond Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*.

²⁶Rg 9, III, C3, 4131, File 5, Folder 9.

initially carried them to the crater's lips but heavy casualties soon engendered hesitation, caution, and in the battle's latter stages, insubordination.²⁷

Turner's efforts to consolidate the line and recapture the craters had been hampered by the lack of transports to carry his men forward. Hence his men arrived at the front line too exhausted after a gruelling four hour trek to dig or to fight. His most critical logistical problem had been artillery ammunition. Six inch howitzer ammunition, the preferred counter-battery gun, was particularly difficult to get and Turner had correctly surmised early in the battle that suppressing the German guns was the key to victory. In addition an unacceptably high percentage of all the shells that the British and Canadians fired during the battle proved to be duds. Thus, not only was Turner short of the artillery ammunition he needed to overcome the German artillery's domination of the battlefield, an inordinate number of the shells that his guns fired failed to explode.

Notwithstanding these provisos, Turner was responsible for the 2nd Division's tactical operations at St. Eloi, and in that capacity he made mistakes that had

²⁷Nicholson, p. 142.

little to do with the aforementioned systemic, tactical, and logistical, shortcomings but which lessened his chances of winning. On the eve of the 2nd Division's entry into the line, he had inexplicably reversed the positions of Ketchen's battalions which negated their pre-battle reconnaissance. He then failed to adequately prepare his defenses despite warnings from Ketchen that a German counterattack was imminent. As a result, when the Germans had attacked on 6 April, Ketchen's brigade had been routed from the craters without putting up much of a fight.

In the ensuing battle that followed, Ketchen's men had counterattacked and recaptured craters 6 and 7 but mistakenly reported capturing craters 4 and 5. The error went undetected for ten days despite the fact that Turner and his staff had in their possession aerial photographs of the craters taken on 8 April that showed craters 4 and 5 were relatively dry compared to craters 6 and 7. A week of fruitless counterattacking and disappointing efforts by large nightly fatigue parties to consolidate the trench line led to Alderson and Harington's intervention on 13 April. But their efforts had gone for naught when Ketchen's mutinous brigade had lost craters 6 and 7 on 19 April. The revelation by the aerial photographs taken on 16 April that the Canadians had

misidentified the craters confirmed for Alderson and Plumer that Turner was incapable of making the 2nd Division an efficient and effective fighting machine.

It would be unfair to leave the impression that Turner made all the mistakes committed by the 2nd Division during the battle. Two senior officers in particular deserve mention in that regard, Lt. Colonel Ker, the 2nd Division's BGGs, and Brigadier-General Ketchen, GOC 6th Brigade. Both preformed incompetently. But this does not let Turner off the hook, because as the GOC of the 2nd Division he was ultimately responsibility for the Division's operations at St. Eloi and therefore is accountable for the errors made by his staff officers and his brigadiers.²⁸

Even if Turner had preformed flawlessly at St Eloi the cards were stacked against him. Still, a sure handed tactician might have turned the tables or reduced the odds, but Turner was not that man. The inescapable conclusion is that Turner was a marginal field commander and that the mistakes he made at St. Eloi seriously compromised his chances of winning the battle, however slim they might have been.

In summary, St. Eloi taught the Canadians several

²⁸ Bill Rawling, Surviving Trench Warfare. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p.51-52

valuable lessons. Crater fighting tactics were modified, the Ross rifle debate was reopened and, in August, Haig replaced it with the dependable Lee Enfield. However, in England, training remained chaotic, outmoded, and facile, and Sam Hughes continued to give his cronies commissions. But this was about to change. In May, Julian Byng replaced Alderson and in November, Borden finally sacked Hughes. With the meddlesome Minister gone, merit replaced patronage, and the Corps, under Byng and Currie, developed the small unit tactics and infantry - artillery coordination that carried it to victory at 'Vimy' and the '100 Days'. The artillery got enough shells and in late 1916, fuse 106 significantly reduced the number of duds. Maps became abundant but communications, despite some improvements, remained unreliable. In late April of 1916 however, none of this concerned the British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig. What he needed to find was a politically acceptable scapegoat to sacrifice for the St. Eloi debacle.²⁹

²⁹Travers, pp.22 - 23.

CHAPTER V

When Sir Douglas Haig learned about the misidentification of the craters on 16 April, he ordered Plumer to launch an immediate investigation.¹ The next day Plumer responded to Haig's earlier criticism that he was too lenient with his senior officers and ordered Alderson to take severe disciplinary action against the officers he deemed responsible.² Whereupon Alderson ordered Turner to report on "the whole of the [2nd Division's] operations at St Eloi" from 3/4 April to 16 April.³ Despite assurances from Alderson that he need not be concerned, Turner was worried.⁴

Since their squabble following St Julien in April 1915, relations between the two men had been strained. At that time Alderson tried to remove Turner but Sam Hughes had intervened. Alderson had tried to prevent Turner getting command of the 2nd Division in August 1915 and then in December he had forced Turner to apologize to Prime Minister Borden for criticizing his appointment of

¹RG 9, III, D1, 4676, Folder 4, File 5. Turner to Aitken, 17 April 1916.

²Borden Papers, OC 183 - OC 186. (MG 26, H 1(A), Volume 36), p.14955

³RG 9, III, C1, 3842, Folder 42, File 5/6. Correspondence: 2 Army to Canadian Corps:

⁴MG 30, E 46, Vol. 2, File 10. Alderson to Turner 16 April 2100 hours, and Harington to Turner 16 April.

two British staff officers.⁵ These incidents taught Turner not to trust Alderson and to value his friends in high places.

In the months prior to St. Eloi, however, the two men had reached a fragile detente of sorts but the tension between them remained apparent. In December 1915 a letter from the "Canadian Eyewitness", Sir Max Aitken, to Borden had predicted that trouble between the two was only a matter of time: "Indeed I apprehend a clash between General Alderson and General Turner. If any difficulty arises. . . I will stand on the side of General Turner."⁶ On 4 March 1916 Sir George Perley, Canada's High Commissioner to Great Britain, told Borden that he agreed with Hughes that there was bad blood between the two men and that, "There seems no doubt that the senior officers [Turner and Alderson] have been working a good deal at cross purposes." Now facing the worst crisis of his career, Turner sought out his powerful friends. On the evening of 17 April, before he penned Haig's report, he cabled off an urgent request for help to the man who promised to "stand on the side of General Turner", Sir Max Aitken⁷

⁵Borden Papers, Oc 331 - Oc 339 page 39333

⁶MG 27, II, D12, Vol. 5, File 1. Aitken to Borden 15 December 1915.

⁷Turner to Aitken, 17 April 1916

The affair turned ugly on 17 April. Under pressure from Plumer, Alderson had ordered Turner to criticize Ketchen in his report. His brigade had lost six of the seven craters and had made the crucial error of the battle when they misidentified craters 6 and 7 as craters 4 and 5. Turner refused because he did not think Ketchen was specifically to blame. Alderson raised the stakes. In a sharp turnabout from his message of the previous day, the Corps Commander told Turner that if he did not comply with this request, he had no alternative but to submit a report indicting both he and Ketchen. Turner still refused and Alderson forwarded his report to Plumer. Turner's report, submitted to Plumer on 18 April, blamed the division's misfortunes on the dreary wet weather, the German guns, the unfamiliar terrain, a lack of heavy artillery shells, and Vernon's botched reconnaissance, but he did not blame Ketchen.⁸

Plumer summoned Turner on 18 April and told him that he concurred with Alderson's report. Strangely, the Corps Commander's report did not mention the St. Eloi debacle but instead dredged up Alderson's earlier criticism of Turner, which he had written after St. Julien. He had stated that in his professional opinion, "General Turner had not the necessary qualifications for Divisional Commander beyond the fact that he was, as

⁸Aitken to Hughes 26 April

testified by his Victoria Cross, physically brave to a fault."⁹ Alderson then went on to say that Turner had told him that "I have no faith in Ketchen". Turner rejoined that what he actually said was that he considered Ketchen " . . . the weakest of my Brigadiers." Plumer refused to accept Turner's amendment. Turner put his objections in writing: " I wish to protest most strongly against [the] misrepresentation of my views in the matter". Plumer forwarded the report to Haig unchanged.¹⁰ At this juncture, Turner and Ketchen believed they were about to be relieved. On 19 April Turner formally requested a meeting with Haig but it was never arranged.¹¹

For Sam Hughes the issue was simple, Alderson and his British cronies were again trying to wrest control of the Corps from the Canadian government by removing its Canadian officers. In his view the dispute was not about military competence but about nationality; for Hughes and Alderson the struggle had also become very personal.¹² By 1916 Hughes interpreted Alderson's every action, every order, every move, in short everything he did as a

⁹Aitken to Hughes 26 April.

¹⁰Borden Papers, Aitken to Hughes 26 April, pp. 14955 - 14957

¹¹RG 9, III, C1, 3842, Folder 42, File 5/6. Turner's request for a meeting with Haig.

¹²Morton, Peculiar Kind of Politics. pp 1 - 41.

challenge to his Ministerial prerogatives. For his part Alderson thought that the meddlesome minister should leave the business of soldiering to the professionals.¹³ Caught in the middle of this feud was Canada's Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden. On the eve of St. Eloi, Hughes had written Borden with his trademark petulance that he had evidence proving that General Alderson was "trying to ruin Turner."¹⁴ Alderson answered the attack as he always did, with his own equally shrill, equally vindictive, and equally voluminous epistle. In his diary Borden wrote that "there is probably much truth in what Alderson says about Hughes", but, "that he did not much respect him[Alderson]".¹⁵ It was becoming increasingly evident to Borden that for the good of the Corps, the war effort, and his own peace of mind, one or both of them would have to go.¹⁶

At British Army Headquarters, Sir Douglas Haig faced a complicated dilemma. An officer of considerable political intuition, he knew that sacking Turner and Ketchen would cause a full blown political crisis with the Canadian government. On the other hand, if he did

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Borden Papers 14899 - 14903. Hughes to Borden 24 March 1916.

¹⁵Henry Borden ed., Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd, 1938) p. 607.

¹⁶Ibid.

not remove them, Plumer might resign. On 21 April Haig decided to keep Turner because "the danger of a serious feud between the Canadians and British is greater than the retention of a couple of incompetent commanders".¹⁷

The next morning, 22 April, Sir Max Aitken arrived at Haig's Headquarters in France with instructions from Borden to do all he could to save Turner. First he had to get past Haig's Chief of Staff, General Lancelot Kiggell. The meeting between the two men was cordial but strained. Kiggell told Aitken that he concurred with Alderson's report on Turner. Aitken replied that Alderson had been deeply prejudiced against Turner since Ypres and then hinted that he had been trying to have Turner removed ever since that battle.¹⁸ At this point, Aitken asked Kiggell for an audience with Haig. Haig agreed and the two men met later that same day. After a lengthy interview, described by both men as very amicable, Haig stated that he was not prepared to act on Alderson's report and remove Turner.¹⁹ He then told Aitken that if Turner stayed the Canadian government must help him remove Alderson because, "it would be utterly impossible to retain both Turner and Alderson and that it

¹⁷Robert Blake ed., The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914 - 1919 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952), pp 140.

¹⁸Borden Papers, Aitken to Hughes

¹⁹Ibid.

was even probable that Plumer would resign."²⁰ Unaware that Haig had decided twenty four hours earlier to keep Turner, Aitken accepted Haig's quid pro quo without first asking the cabinet to approve the deal. The next day on 23 April, Aitken cabled Borden that if Canada offered Alderson the post of Inspector General of Canada's Troops in England, Haig would advise him to accept it.²¹ Over the next three days Borden and Hughes, aided by Perley's endorsement of the deal, pressed cabinet to accept Haig's offer, which they did on 26 April.²² Hughes informed Aitken and Perley of the cabinet's decision:

. . . Upon the understanding that the plan which you propose has approval of Commander in Chief. . . We shall appoint General Alderson Inspector General of Canadian Forces in England . . . Commander in Chief is authorized to so inform General Alderson. . . We leave to Commander in Chief the nomination of General Alderson's successor.²³

To make certain everyone in England understood that Hughes was acting on behalf of cabinet, Borden informed Aitken and Perley that he had personally written the

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²² MG 27, II, D12, Vol. 7, File 3.

²³Borden Papers, Hughes to Aitken, pp. 14958

Minister's communique.²⁴ That same day marked the first anniversary of the 1st Division's legendary stand at St. Julien. Borden cabled Alderson the nation's best wishes for his continued success and thanked him for his capable command of the Corps: "I pray that every success attend the Canadians forces under your Command and that the traditions of Ypres so firmly established a year ago may always be upheld."²⁵ It was an inexcusable way to treat a man who had done so much for Canada; Alderson bore the shame to his grave.²⁶

Haig was pleased with events so far but he was not out of the woods yet. Like Turner, Alderson had friends in high places, notably the King's brother and Canada's Governor General, the Duke of Connaught, and His Majesty King George V.²⁷ In his weekly correspondence to the King, Haig explained why he believed it had become necessary to keep Turner and replace Alderson with Sir Julian Byng.

²⁴Borden Papers, Borden to Perley 26 April, p. 14959.

²⁵Borden Papers, Oc 329(1) - OC 331. (MG 26, H1(a), vol, 74.), p. 39015. Borden to Alderson 26 April 1916.

²⁶Hugh M. Urquhart, Arthur Currie: The Biography of a Great Canadian (Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1950), p. 123

²⁷RG 9, III, C1, 3842, Folder 42, File 5/6, Alderson to the Duke of Connaught.

Although Turner is not the best possible Comd[sic] of a Division, I think it would be an error to change him at this moment. On the other hand General Alderson, Comd the Canadian Corps which is soon to be increased to four Divisions, has so much political work to do and administration arrangements to discuss with the Canadian Government, that it will be well nigh impossible for him to carry it out, and also command the Corps in the Field. I therefore think the suggestion to appoint him Inspector Gen of all Canadian troops in England and France a very good one. The Canadian Govt. has given me a free hand in the choice of his successor. I propose to recommend Gen Byng for the appointment. I think he will do it well and is sure to be popular.²⁸

Why Byng was better suited to handle these pressures Haig did not explain, nor did the King ask. He accepted Haig's explanation and the affair was all but over, except for Sam Hughes. On 11 May he asked Borden to give Turner the Corps if Haig did not produce an acceptable candidate. The nomination of Byng derailed the Minster's initiative.²⁹

On 22 May Alderson summoned Major General's Arthur Currie, GOC 1st Division, and M.S. Mercer, GOC 3rd Division, to his H.Q. Over lunch he disclosed that he was being transferred to England to become the Inspector - General, it was that or half-pay. The news did not come as a complete surprise to Currie. He believed that Alderson had always acted in the Corps best interest but

²⁸Geoffrey Powell, Plumer: The Soldier's General (London: Leo Cooper, 1990), p. 145

²⁹Borden Papers, OC 183-186, (MG 24, H.1(a), Vol, 36), Hughes to Borden 11 May 1916. p.15045

in doing so doing had alienated both Hughes and many of the Minister's senior officer appointees. This had made him the Minister's prime target.³⁰

On 28 May, Alderson bid the Corps a heartfelt farewell in a message that revealed his deep regret at leaving but which also revealed his integrity and strength of character. ..

I have been ordered to take up the appointment Inspector General to the Canadian Forces. In accordance with this order I am this day handing over the Command of the Canadian Army Corps to Lieutenant - General Hon. Sir J.H.G. Byng. . . . To Soldiers "the order" is a magic word, that is it goes without saying, or questioning, that what is ordered is right and for the best. This fact is the only thing that in any way alleviates the intense regret I have at leaving the Corps which I have been so proud to command.³¹

Misfortune and ignominy continued to stalk him in England. An embarrassment to the Canadians, he was rescued on 26 September by a War Office appointment as inspector of British infantry.³²

Haig's finely tuned political acumen, Aitken's advocacy, Hughes patronage, and the Canadian government's willingness to sacrifice an unpopular British Corps commander had temporarily saved Turner's career. The same

³⁰Urquhart, p 123.

³¹Borden Papers, OC 271 - OC 282 (MG 26, H1(a), Vol. 62), Special Order by Lt.-General Sir Edwin Alderson, 28 May 1916.

³²Morton, p. 74.

could not be said for many of the 2nd Division's officers. By the end of August the GSO 1, Lt. Colonel Ker, the GSO 2 (intelligence), Major Parsons, 6 of 12 battalion commanders and several brigade majors had been replaced.³³ Ketchen and Rennie kept their brigades, A.H. Macdonell replaced Watson who left to command the newly constituted 4th Division; Watson, a Montreal Tory newspaper hack, was to be Hughes' last major appointment.³⁴ Byng took over the Corps and thus began a happy marriage that culminated at Vimy eleven months later. Turner's performance did improve marginally but not enough to satisfy Byng.³⁵ Haig stroked Plumer's bruised ego and he did not resign.³⁶ The affair had shaken Turner. He would not survive another battlefield setback, even patronage had its limits, and Douglas Haig rarely forgave the same officer twice.

On 30 August the Corps was ordered to the Somme. The bloody stalemate was two months old when the Canadians relieved the battered Australian Corps. On 15 September Turner's division, supported by seven tanks, captured the town of Courcellette; undoubtedly Turner's greatest

³³RG 24, 1891, 107. 2 Cdn. Div. Tactical Commanders and staffs during Actions of St. Eloi Craters, April 1916.

³⁴Nicholson, pp. 541 - 542

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Powell, p. 147.

achievement as a divisional commander. However, it required several days of hard fighting to mop up pockets of stubborn German resistance. Consequently the Division did not secure two important objectives north of the town, Regina trench and Kenora trench. The town was finally cleared by 17 September but heavy rains delayed operations against the trenches until 27 September. For a week Turner's infantry hurled themselves at the trenches but to no avail. Casualties were heavy, the 5th Brigade suffered the most losing over half its men. The attack was cancelled on 11 October when Currie's 1st Division replaced the 2nd; Turner had lead the 2nd Division into battle for the last time.³⁷

On 16 November 1916, Robert Borden fired Sam Hughes for insubordination. With Hughes out of the way, Sir George Perley, under increasing pressure from the British, told Borden that the best way to clean up the Canadian Army's mess in England was to appoint a "General Officer in command of Canadians in England with proper staff such as, Adjutant General, Quarter Master General, and Director of Training, under him. This meets with universal [British] approval.[sic]"³⁸

Borden had little choice but to accept. Perley

³⁷Nicholson pp. 175-177.

³⁸MG 27, II, D 12, Vol. 7, File 3. Perley to Borden 22 Nov. 1916.

wanted Currie for the job but Currie was Byng's protege and likely successor and had shunned Perley's advances. Turner also fit the bill and, as Perley indicated to Borden, his Tory connections probably would make Turner "more popular with our following."³⁹

Like Currie, Turner was reluctant to accept the job. Perley asked Borden to write a cable which he could use to entreat Turner to accept the post.⁴⁰ Borden's persuasive note, Turner's sense of duty, a firm shove from Byng, and Perley's tacit agreement that he was still a candidate for Corps Command, proved irresistible.⁴¹ Turner arrived in England on 27 November and assumed his new post on 5 December 1916. Brigadier-General H.E. Burstall, commander of the 1st Division's artillery, took over the 2nd Division.⁴² In June 1917, when Currie succeeded Byng and took over the Corps, Turner was passed over without being seriously considered. Haig tried to soften the blow by making him senior to Currie when both were made Lieutenant-Generals on 23 June 1917.⁴³

Turner's record in England was impressive. Though at times his subordinates found him to be hot-headed,

³⁹Ibid. Perley to Borden 22 November 1916.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Morton, p. 98

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

irascible, and condescending, he proved a competent administrator. His business experience likely provided the administrative skills he used to clean up the mess left behind by his friend Sam Hughes. In short order he standardized and updated the infantry's training syllabus, sent home or to France a host of surplus officers, cleared out the log jam of reinforcements at the depot battalions, and mediated the medical corps continual bickering.⁴⁴ Some problems remained intractable but for the most part things in England got better and consequently, so did things in France. Thus Turner made a significant contribution in the transformation of the Canadian Corps into "much the best Corps in the British Army. . . ." ⁴⁵ It was unfortunate that he had not displayed the same clear headed, sure handed, style of command during the heat of battle.

Relations between him and Currie were another matter.⁴⁶ Competitors for Corps command, the antipathy between the two men was never far below the surface. A slightly paranoid Currie believed Turner and his staff were his real enemy, trying to usurp his command prerogatives. In fairness to Turner, Currie's charges

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Denis Winter, Haigs Command: A Reassessment (London: Viking Press, 1991) p.

⁴⁶Morton, Peculiar Kind of Politics. pp.189 - 190.

were groundless and whatever he personally thought of Currie, Turner never allowed their animosity to interfere with the welfare of the Corps; a tribute to his new-found professionalism. In fact, he supported Currie on every major issue, most significantly the controversial break up of the 5th Division in early 1918. Even after the war Turner, on several occasions, publicly defended Currie's reputation.⁴⁷

In assessing Turner's checkered military career, St. Eloi stands as the dividing line. Had he won, the Corps was his. However, his much publicized defeat at St. Eloi confirmed his shortcomings as a field commander. In battle, a divisional commander must be an imperturbable manager of men, material, and chaos. As GOC in England Turner became a capable manager of men and material, laudably disentangling Hughes' bureaucratic labyrinth with sure handed professionalism. Unfortunately he was never able to manage the chaos inherent in battle. Controlling this confusion over an erratic telephone system, deciphering a stream of conflicting reports, calming panicky officers, restoring order, and making the correct tactical decision more often than not, was beyond Turner's ken. To be fair, at times at St. Eloi he had appeared to be on the right track. For example when he

⁴⁷A.M.J.Hyatt, General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), pp. 137-146.

abandoned Haldane's consolidation plan. Yet in the final analysis when it really counted the most, when the division needed a sure hand at the helm, he had lost control of the battle. As a result the division's cohesion had evaporated and serious mistakes, most notably the misidentification of craters 6 and 7 on 7 April, became virtually unavoidable. St. Eloi confirmed that, in battle, Richard Turner forever remained the dashing subaltern whose fearless courage and fiery presence inspired men.

On 15 August 1919, after five long years of war, Sir Richard Turner closed up shop and went home. He was officially struck off strength on 22 November 1919. Borden had instructed the military not to offer Turner a peace time post but it was unlikely he wanted one.⁴⁸ Back home in Quebec city he was reunited with his family, rejoined the family business which he inherited in 1928, took up fishing and hunting, joined several prestigious country clubs, and became the president of the Canadian Cavalry Association.⁴⁹ In 1925 he re-entered the public eye briefly, playing a key role in the formation of the Royal Canadian Legion.⁵⁰ He did not however, follow in

⁴⁸Morton, pp. 189 - 190.

⁴⁹RG 24, 1815, 4-40, Vol. 2.

⁵⁰Clifford H. Bowering, Service: The Story of the Canadian Legion 1925 - 1960. (Ottawa: Pub. Dominion Command, 1960) pp.13 - 28

his father's footsteps and enter politics, but quietly faded into private life.⁵¹

⁵¹RG 24, 1815, 4-40, Vol. 2. Record of Service, Sir Richard Ernest Turner, VC., KCB., KCMG, DSO.

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APPENDIX # 1:CHRONOLOGY OF THE BATTLE OF ST. ELOI AND RELATED EVENTS.

- 17 August 1915: Major General Richard Turner takes command of the Second Canadian Division.
- 13 - 21 September 1915: The Division crosses to France
- 23 September 1915: The Division takes over 5 kilometres of line from the inter-divisional boundary north of Wulverghem to just south of St. Eloi.
- November 1915: British tunnellers start six new mines behind St Eloi.
- 31 January 1916: 2nd Division's 6th Brigade conducts two successful trench raids endorsed by British Commander-in-Chief Sir Douglas Haig as model operations.
- 2 March 1916: 2nd Army GOC Sir Herbert Plumer informs Turner of the 2nd Division's role in the upcoming St. Eloi operation.
- 15 March 1916: Original date of operation; postponed twelve days by mining delays.
- 27 March 1916: At precisely 0415 the St. Eloi mines are detonated. Major General Alymer Haldane's 3rd Imperial Division attacks but misidentifies craters 6 and 7 as craters 4 and 5.
- 30 March 1916: The Germans occupy crater 5 and fire on British patrols in crater 4.
- 30 March - 1 April 1916: Haldane's division repeatedly fails to retake crater 5. Prompting Plumer to accelerate Turner's relief of Haldane from 5/6 April to 3/4 April.
- 2 April 1916: 2nd Canadian Division decamps and moves to St. Eloi.
- 2/3 April 1916: Haldane's exhausted division manages to capture crater 5.

- 3/4 April 1916: Turner relieves Haldane. Brigadier General H.D.B. Ketchen's 6th Brigade occupy front line.
- 5/6 April 1916: Taken by surprise Ketchen's men are driven from the forward line.
- 6 April 1916: Chaos engulfs the division. Turner and Ketchen uncertain what they have lost. Counterattacking infantry claim to have regained craters 4 and 5 but are actually in craters 6 and 7; mistake is undiscovered for ten days.
- 6/7 April 1916: Brigadier General Robert Rennie's 4th Brigade relieves Ketchen's 6th Brigade.
- 7 - 11 April 1916: Believing the Germans only hold craters 2 and 3, Rennie's men erroneously report capturing north lip of crater 3, but in reality they are in an old crater well short of crater 3. This mistake is discovered on 11 April.
- 11/12 April 1916: 2nd Army Intelligence Officer Lt. Vernon reconnoitres entire front and concludes Germans hold craters 2 and 3.
- Brigadier - General David Watson's 5th Brigade relieves Rennie's 4th Brigade.
- 12 April 1916: 2nd Division artillery replaces 3rd Division artillery.
- 13 April 1916: Sir Douglas Haig expresses concerns about the problems at St. Eloi.
- 14/15 April 1916: Lt. Colonel Snider, officer commanding 6th Brigade's 27th battalion, is replaced along his second in command and all four company commanders.
- Sir Max Aitken cables Borden that Turner is in trouble.
- Germans launch at least five attacks; four against craters 6 and 7. Driven off with heavy losses.
- Two reconnaissance patrols again confirm the Germans hold only craters 2 and 3.

- 15 April 1916: Rain clouds scatter allowing the first aerial reconnaissance flights since 8 April.
- 16 April 1916: Aerial photographs provide conclusive evidence that Germans hold craters 2 to 5 and Canadians are in craters 6 and 7.
- Haig orders Plumer to launch investigation
- 16/17 April 1916: Ketchen's 6th brigade relieves Watson's brigade.
- 17 April 1916: Alderson orders Turner to submit report criticizing Ketchen. He refuses. Alderson submits report indicting Ketchen and Turner.
- Turner writes Sir Max Aitken asking for help.
- 18 April 1916: Plumer summons Turner and tells him that he concurs with Alderson's report.
- 19 April 1916: Turner requests audience with Haig.
- Craters 6 and 7 captured. Ketchen's brigade comes unglued and is unable to counterattack.
- 21 April 1916: Aitken arrives in France.
- Haig decides to keep Turner.
- 22 April 1916: Aitken meets Haig. Agree that if Turner and Ketchen stay, Alderson must go and Canadian government must help in his removal.
- 23 April 1916: Aitken cables details to Borden and Hughes.
Perley cables his endorsement of deal.
- 26 April 1916: Cabinet agrees to proposal.
Canadians abandon crater 1.

- 28 May 1916: Alderson to England as Inspector General Canadian forces. Replaced by Julian Byng.
- 30 August 1916: Canadian Corps relieves Australian Corps at the Somme.
- 15 September - October 11 1916: Turner's division captures Courcellette but fails to take Regina and Kenora Trenches.
- 16 November 1916: Sir Sam Hughes is fired by Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden.
- 27 November 1916: Pressured by Perley, Borden and Byng, Turnere accepts the post of GOC Canadian Forces in England.
- 5 December 1916: Turner takes up new post.
- 9 June 1917: Currie gets Canadian Corps. Haig makes Turner senior Canadian Lieutenant-General.
- 18 May 1918: Turner appointed Chief of Staff, Overseas Military Forces of Canada.
- 15 August 1919: Turner returns to Canada.
- 22 November 1919: Turner is struck of strength Canadian Expeditionary Force on general demobilization.

APPENDIX # 2:2nd Canadian DivisionTactical Commanders and Staffs
During ACTIONS of St. Eloi Craters
April 1916G.O.C. DIVISION:

Major-General R.E.W. Turner, V.C., C.B., D.S.O.

G.S.O.(1):

Lt.-Colonel C.A. Ker, D.S.O. 5/2/16 - 24/5/16

G.S.O.'s(2):

Major C.M. Hore-Ruthven, D.S.O.

19/2/16 - 18/2/17

Major J.L.R. Parsons,

21/12/15- 3/10/16

Canadian Royal Artillery 2nd Canadian Division.G.O.C.

Brigadier-General E.W.B. Morrison, C.M.G., D.S.O.

2/10/15 - 21/5/16

O.C. 4th bde. Canadian Field Artillery (C.F.A.)

Lt. - Colonel W.J. Brown

O.C. 5th bde. C.F.A.

Lt. - Colonel W.O.H. Dodds

O.C. 6th bde. C.F.A.

Lt. - Colonel W.B.M. King, D.S.O.

4th Canadian Infantry Brigade:

Brigade G.O.C.: Brigadier-General R.Rennie, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

Brigade Major:

Major C.H. Hill relieved 20/04/16

O.C. 18th C.I. Bn.

Lt.- Colonel E.S.Wigle 17/2/16 - 30/4/19
(On leave and to precede to Canada, retained for duty)

O.C. 19th C.I.Bn.

Lt.- Colonel J.I. McLaren 20/10/14 - 29/4/16
(Struck of Strength, returned to Canada for duty
21/7/16)

O.C. 20th C.I. Bn.

Major H.V.Rorke(acting) 25/3/16 - 27/4/16
(Lt.- Colonel Rogers, the o.c., on leave during period)

O.C. 21st C.I. Bn.

Major E.W. Jones(acting) 2/4/16 12/4/16
Lt.- Colonel W.St. P. Hughes 12/4/16 - 14/7/16

5th Canadian Infantry Brigade:G.O.'s C. 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade.

Brigadier-General D. Watson C.B. 6/4/16 - 22/4/16
(Lt.- Colonel J.A. Gunn, acting G.O.C. 1/4/16 - 6/4/16)

Brigade Major:

Major T.M. McAvity, D.S.O. 27/3/16 - 24/5/16

O.C. 22nd C.I. Bn.

Lt.- Colonel T.L. Tremblay, 25/1/16 - 8/5/16

O.C. 24th C.I.Bn.

Lt.- Colonel J.A. Gunn, 6/4/16 - 4/5/16
(Major R.O. Alexander, acting o.c. 25/3/16 - 6/4/16)

O.C. 25th C.I.Bn.

Lt.- Colonel E. Hilliam, D.S.O. 25/2/16 - 21/6/16

O.C. 26th C.I.Bn.

Lt.- Colonel E. Hilliam, D.S.O. 25/2/16 - 12/4/16
(relieved for health reasons 16/7/16, to Canada 29/6/16)

6th Canadian Infantry Brigade:

G.O.C. 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade.

Brigadier - General H. Ketchen, 31/3/16 - 20/4/18

Brigade Major.

Major A.H. Jukes, 22/3/16 - 15/6/17

O.C. 27th C.I.Bn.

Lt.- Colonel I.R. Snider, 31/3/16 - 15/4/16
(proceeded to Canada 10/5/16, appointed o.c. 14th res.
bn.)

Major P.J. Daly, 15/4/16 - 11/5/16

O.C. 28th C.I.Bn.

Lt.- Colonel J.F.L. Embury, 31/3/16 - 15/5/16

O.C. 29th C.I.Bn.

Major J.S. Tait(acting), 20/3/16 - 19/4/16
Lt.- Colonel A.H. Bell, 19/4/16 - 21/4/19
Lt.- Colonel H.S.Tobin, (to bde. H.Q.) 9/4/16 -
19/4/16 resumed command 21/4/16 - 20/7/16

O.C. 31st C.I.Bn.

Lt.- Colonel A.H. Bell, 29/12/15 - 19/4/16
to 29th battalion 19/4/16 - 21/4/16

O.C. 4th C.M.G. Coy:

Lt. a/Capt. J. Edwards

O.C. 5TH C.M.G. Coy:

Capt. S.W. Watson

O.C. 6TH C.M.Coy:

Capt. T.A.H. Taylor, (wounded) 6/4/1916
Capt. A. Eastman.

Canadian Royal Engineers 2nd Canadian Division.

O.C. Lt.- Colonel H.T. Hughes, C.M.G., D.S.O.

O.'s C. 4th Field Coy. C.E.

Capt. H.D. St. A. Smith, 30/3/16 - 19/4/16
Maj. G.A. Inksetter, 19/4/19 - 1/5/16

O.C. 5th Field Coy. C.E.

Maj. S.H. Osler.

O.C. 6th Field Coy. C.E.

Maj. W.L. Malcolm.¹

¹RG 24, 1891, 107., 2nd Canadian Division:
Tactical Commanders and Staffs During ACTIONS
OF ST. ELOI CRATERS, April 1916.
Compiled by Historical Section (General Staff),
Department of National Defence, 28/6/1928.

APPENDIX # 3:Extract from "WHO'S WHO IN CANADA" 1923-24.

TURNER, Lieut. - General Sir Richard Ernest William, V.C. - D.S.O. Of Whitehead & Turner, Wholesale Grocers and Lumber Merchants, 44-46 St. Paul Quebec St., Quebec. Born Quebec, July 25, 1871, son of Hon Richard and Emily Marie (Ellis) Turner.

Educated: Quebec High School. Entered office Whitehead & Turner, 1891, and gradually promoted, until admitted to partnership. Long in volunteer Militia service; served in South African War, 1899 - 1900: Intelligence Officer, Wonderfonstein, Transvaal, Sept. 20 to 22, 1900

(severely wounded; Victoria Cross conferred for conspicuous bravery at Komati River, Nov.7, 1900; presented with the Victoria Cross and Sword of Honour

(subscribed by the citizens of Quebec) by the Prince of Wales 9 (now King George), Quebec, Sept. 17, 1901; presented with the D.S.O., March 7, 1902; Brevet of Lieutenant - Colonel Queen's medal with six clasps; commanded the King's Royal Colonial Escort at the Coronation, 1902; attained command 10th Queen's Own Canadian Hussars, July 10, 1905; appointed to command 3rd Eastern Townships Cavalry Brigade, Feb.3, 1907; appointed commandant North Camp Larkhill Dec. 17, 1914.

Went to France, Feb. 10, 1915; appointed Brigadier-General, March 2, 1915; assumed command 1st Canadian Division during absence of General Alderson, July 12, 1915; S.O.S.[struck of strength] 1st Division on return to England to command 2nd Canadian Division, Aug. 12, 1915; Major-General, Sept.1, 1915; proceeded overseas with 2nd Division Headquarters, Sept. 14, 1915; commanded Canadian Corps Headquarters, Sept. 14, 1915; commanded Canadian Corps in the absence of General Byng from Sept.1, 1916 to Sept. 15, 1916; S.O.S. 2nd Division on vacating appointment as G.O.C. and transferred to headquarters C.T.D., Shorncliffe, Nov. 27, 1916; appointed G.O.C. Canadian Troops in British Isles, Dec. 5. 1916, mentioned in despatches, Jan. 2, 1917; awarded Croix de Commandeur Legion of Honour, Feb. 14, 1917; made K.C.M.G., June 14, 1917; Lieut.-General, June 9, 1917; made K.C.B., Jan 1, 1918; awarded Order of the White Eagle with Sword(Russia), Jan 14, 1918. President Canadian Cavalry Association. Married Harriet Augusta Goodday, daughter of Horace George Goodday, London, Eng., Jan. 8 1900; Has one son and two daughters. Clubs: Garrison; Quebec; Orleans Fish and Game; Junior Army and Navy (London, Eng.) Society: St. George's. Recreations: Fishing riding. Anglican. Address 55 D'Auteuil Street, Quebec.¹

¹Rg 24, 1815, 4, 40, vol 2., Extract from " Who's Who in Canada" 1923-24.

APPENDIX # 4.RECORD OF SERVICEMILITIA, BOER WAR, AND WORLD WAR I

Lieut.- General Sir Richard Ernest William Turner,
V.C., K.C.B., K.C.M.B., D.S.O.

1. Date and Place of Birth - 25/7/1871, Quebec City, P.Q.
2. 2nd Lieutenant The Queen's Own Canadian Hussars, 22/4/1892
3. Captain The Queen's Own Canadian Hussars, 9/2/1900.
4. Boer War Lieutenant 1st Regiment Canadian Mounted Rifles, 1900 - 1902.
5. Brevet Lt.-Colonel, 15/5/1901.
6. Officer Commanding the Queen's Own Canadian Hussars, 1/3/1903.
7. Lt.-Colonel The Queens' Own Canadian Hussars, 10/7/1905.
8. Colonel Commanding 3rd Cavalry Brigade, 3/2/1911.
9. Honourary Aide-de-camp to H.M."The King", 25/10/1911.
10. Transferred to Reserve of Officers 1/9/1912.
11. Colonel, Canadian Militia, 1/6/1914.
12. Major-General, Canadian Militia, 1/9/1915.
13. Lieut.-General, Canadian Militia, 9/6/1917.
14. Transferred to the Reserve of Officers, 1/6/1920.
15. Honourary Colonel, 13th Scottish Light Dragoons, 15/2/1921.

BOER WAR SERVICE RECORD:

1. This Officer was Major in the Queen's Own Canadian Hussars at the time of the outbreak in South Africa, but he elected to go as a Lieutenant.
2. 1st. Regt. Canadian Mounted Rifles - South Africa, 1899-1901.

3. Operations in Orange Free State, February to May 1900 including Operations at the Viet River where he won the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) on May 5 and Zand River (10 May).
4. Operations in the Transvaal in May and June 1900, including actions near Johannesburg (29 May), Pretoria (4 June), and Diamond Hill (11-12 June).
5. Operations in the Transvaal, east of Pretoria, July to 20th November, 1900, including actions at Reit Vlei (16 July), Belfast (26 and 27 August 1900).
6. Operations in the Cape Colony, south of Orange River, 1899-1900.
7. Operations in the Transvaal between 30th November 1900 and 31st May 1902.
8. Severely Wounded.
9. Honours and Awards.

Victoria Cross - The presentation was made at Quebec on 17th September 1901, during a review of five thousand troops of the Canadian Militia in honour of H.R.H. The Duke of Cornwall and York.

The presentation immediately preceded the presentation of South African medals, which took place after the inspection of the troops and before the March Past, the following details of the act for which the Cross was bestowed being read to his Royal Highness: -

" On the 7th November, 1900, at Lilfontein, two guns of the British Column, rear guard of a convoy, were attacked by an overwhelming force of Boers. Endeavors were made to extricate the guns but Boers following in pursuit in large numbers, the horses of the guns became very exhausted and came down to a walk. Lieutenant Turner with a part of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, although twice wounded, gallantly dismounted his men and from his personal initiative, succeeded in saving the guns".

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER - Award for swimming the Viet River.

DESPATCHES: Lord Roberts, 2nd April 1901 - Lord Kitchner, 8th March, 1902.
(London Gazette, 16th April, 19th April and 23rd April 1901.)

BREVET OF LIEUT.-COLONEL.

QUEEN'S MEDAL WITH SIX CLASPS.WAR SERVICE - GREAT WAR

1. Appointed Colonel, commanding 3rd Infantry Brigade C.E.F. 6/8/1914.
2. A.A.G., Valcariter Camp, 6/8/1914-22/9/1914.
3. Left Canada, 3rd Infantry Brigade, H.Q. 22/9/1914.
4. Commandant North Camp, Larkhill, Salisbury Plain 17/12/14 to 10/3/15.
5. To be Brigadier-General with effect from 29/9/1914.
6. Proceeded to France, 3rd Infantry Brigade, H.Q., 10/2/1915.
7. In command of 1st Canadian Division during absence of Lieut.-General Alderson, 12/7/1915 - 12/8/1915.
8. Proceeded to England 13/8/1915.
9. Assumes Command, 2nd Canadian Division 17/8/1915.
10. To be Temporary Major-General, 1/9/1915.
11. Proceeded to France, 2nd Canadian Division 14/9/1915.
12. Assumed Command of Canadian Corps during absence of Lieut.- General Byng, 1/11/1916.
13. Vacated appointment as G.O.C., 2nd Canadian Division, and transferred to H.Q., Canadian Training Division, Shorncliffe, 27/11/16.
14. Appointed General Officer Commanding Canadian Troops in the British Isles, 5/12/1916.
15. Ceases to be General Officer Commanding Canadian Troops in the British Isles on being appointed Chief of General Staff, Overseas Military forces of Canada, 18/5/1918.
16. To be Temporary Lieut.-General with effect from 9/6/1917.
17. S.O.S.[struck off strength] O.M.F.and C. on transfer to C.E.F. in Canada, 15/8/1919.

18. Granted leave from 22/8/1916 - 22/11/1916.
19. S.O.S. C.E.F. in Canada on General Demobilization
22/11/1919.

HONOURS AND AWARDS - WORLD WAR I

Mentioned in Despatches,	(Auth. London Gazette d/22/6/1915)
C.B.	(Auth. London Gazette d/22/6/1915)
Mentioned In Despatches	(Auth. London Gazette d/2/1/1917)
Legion of Honour, Croix de Commandeur	(Auth. London Gazette d/14.2.1917)
Mentioned in Despatches	(Auth. London Gazette d/1/6/1917)
K.C.M.G.	(Auth. London Gazette d/4.6.1917)
K.C.B.	(Auth. London Gazette d/14/1/1918)
Order of White Eagle with Swords (Russia)	(Auth. London Gazette d/14/1/1918)
Brought to the Notice of the Secretary of State for War by Army Council for very valuable services rendered in connection with War up to 31/12/1917	(Auth. London Gazette d/12/2/1918)
Croix de Guerre. (French)	(Auth. London Gazette d/5/11/1920) ¹

¹Rg 1816, 4, 40, folder 2., Record of Service, Sir Richard Ernest William Turner, VC., KCB., KCMG., DSO.