

# THE OFFICIALLY AUTHORIZED STORY OF THE 52 FIFTY-SECOND BATTALION 52 ITS RECORD IN FRANCE, BELGIUM AND CANADA

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## CHAPTER II. GRESLEY PARK.

On the night of June 14th, 1915, after many false alarms, the "First Draft," two hundred and thirty strong, surrounded by cheerful, but smiling relatives and friends, bid good-bye to the comrades they had been associated with while undergoing training, and marched down to the station, where they entrained for "Over There." Port Arthur boked upon them for the last time as a military unit, and a fine, husky-looking body of men they were.

Some of these boys are today resting in peace, far from their native home; some have returned with the added weight of dearly-bought experience and many months of suffering and hardship; some have come back saddened by the things they have seen and do not care to talk about; many have come back chastened and purified in the crucible of fire; few returned the light-hearted, care-free boys who left on that memorable night in June.

On the 15th, the Battalion, or such part as was quartered in Port Arthur and Fort William, moved out to the new camp, followed in a day or two by the detachments from Kenora, Fort Francis and Dryden. For the first time since its organization, the unit was complete. Tents were erected, and all settled down to the never-to-be-forgotten "GRESLEY PARK" days—days that will ever live in the memory of those boys who were fortunate enough to be present.

The camp was healthy. Some thought too much so. Incidentally it was also very cold when the summer had passed and ushered in the chilly Lake Superior winds. Every one settled down to work, and it soon became the scene of great activity and life. As has always been the case where the male animal is segregated, nicknames were bestowed on every one and on everything. Local celebrities were honored by having various places named after them. The camp soon boasted of a "Brooks Street," a "Muir Street" and a "Windy Street" (the latter in honor of the band). As usual, the R.S.M. secured a generous slice of glory by having the pride of the camp, the spacious parade ground, named after himself, "Cooper Square." Here a little platform was built for him, from which he could more conveniently keep an eye on his charges and give vent to his oratorical ability by occasionally yelling out, "You with the red hair, third man from the left of No. 13 platoon, stop picking your nose on parade;" or "You with the chest where your back ought to be, fourth man from the left, rear rank, No. 5 platoon, when you have thoroughly filled your blooming self with the beauties of nature behind you, would you mind looking straight ahead for a few seconds." Nothing escapes his eagle eye, from the batting of an eyelash to the furtive attempt to bite off a "chew."

The Battalion was now put through the mill as never before. Reveille at 5.30 and roll-call a few minutes later. Advance at 6.00, and everybody ready for P.T. sleeves rolled up, braces down, trouser legs inside socks; a truly business like aggregation. No breakfast till P.T. had imparted the proper appetite, and you can bet your bottom dollar that the appetites were not wanting after half an hour's brisk exercise. If you gentlemen and ladies who are suffering from dyspepsia or other ailments affecting your ability to eat properly, would only join some military organization where they would get you up at five in the morning and then put you through a stiff P.T. course for an hour or more, I don't believe you would have any difficulty whatever in getting away with a dozen or so eggs and half that many pork chops. (This advice is gratuitous.) After the P.T. and running, breakfast was served and eaten at 7.00, and after the consumption of a cigarette or two, all hands prepared for "fall-in" at 7.30. Morning parades were carried on independently by companies till 11.45. In the afternoon the entire Battalion, band and dogs of all breeds and description turned out for Battalion parade. This was inspected by the C. O., and then marched down to Current River Park, where manoeuvres, attacks, etc., were carried out. Quite a lot of manoeuvring took place in the bush country round about. One favorite spot was an old, disused silver mine—the Shuniah Mine—some miles away. The surrounding country consisted of hills, valleys, woods and open features, making a splendid training ground for Battalion manoeuvres. Time and time again the old mine was attacked, defended, captured, retaken, and so on, affording splendid opportunity for the demonstration of ability and genius in the budding Napoleons. It was in a measure play, but it was the kind of play that brought out the best that was in them.

In the evenings, all but those on duty repaired to the cities for evening recreation, although some evenings the Colonel insisted on the officers being present for lectures on bayonet fighting. During the summer months many of the men sought relief from the intense heat in the cool, inviting pools that abounded in the Current River. Regularly the Battalion was marched down to the lake for an exhilarating plunge.

On one memorable night the Battalion marched out, lighted fires and bivouacked in the open—a beautiful, clear, serene, starlit night, such as only a Canadian summer can produce. The men thought they were roughing it then. They learned differently a year later on the Somme, and many who came out alive through that bitter experience would welcome the opportunity of living over again that wonderful night bivouac by the Shuniah Mine.

Sundays were taken advantage of to march into Port Arthur for Church Service. Men of different denominations went to the churches of their choice, but the majority either paraded to the square, where Canon Hedley talked to them in his quiet, earnest manner, or were taken to the Presbyterian Church. They usually sat in the galleries, and during the warm June days, the heat rose overpoweringly from underneath. The men had marched three miles through the summer air, and the result was an irresistible desire to slumber. In fact, a large number did drop off, led by the Colonel. It was almost impossible to prevent it, fight as you would, heads would begin to droop. This was in no way a reflection upon the ability of the worthy divine to preach a good sermon; it was simply a contest between mother nature and eloquence, and as usual, the persistent old lady won out.

Mingled with the seriousness of hard training was an occasional humorous incident that relieved the monotony of camp life. Some of the more-venturesome culprits confined in the guard tents would match their wits against the sentries and attempt to get out. Usually they tried crawling under the tent wall when they thought the sentries were either dozing or not on the job. At the suggestion of the R.S.M., these guards were supplied with a businesslike chain, and stationed at the points where it was thought most likely the attempts to get away would take place. As soon as a gentle movement near one of the walls indicated that some one was about to sally forth, the beclubbed sentry would get himself in readiness, and as a cautious head protruded from under the canvas, the club would come down with a resounding thwack upon an unsuspecting cranium, and though a few managed to make their getaway, the majority retreated in disgust, nursing bruised and aching heads and smouldering wrath.

Many visitors came to see the camp, especially tourists from the States. The lake steamers from Detroit stopped at Port Arthur, and large numbers of the fair sex came out to the camp. On a Saturday afternoon, when all training ceased till Monday morning, the Orderly Officer would bestow his luck at being kept away from the city on a fine afternoon. Then the Orderly Sergeant would appear with a message from the Adjutant requesting the dismountable officer to show some visitors about camp. What a change would take place. Our drooping Sub would

suddenly swell out with pride, set his cap at the proper rakish angle, adjust his sword (a few of them were available at that time) and set out with "head up, chin in and chest out" to greet the fair ones. Private Kearney relates that on one occasion a subaltern was showing a kitchener young American girl round the camp, and stopped for a moment or two at the kitchen. Kearney was preparing milk with a powder called K.L.I.M. very much in evidence in those days, which required lots of stirring and beating in the process of conversion. The innocent one, seeing Kearney busily mixing the concoction, asked in a wondering tone, "Do they give the Canadian soldiers whipped cream?" Without cracking a smile, Kearney solemnly replied, "Yes, marm, that's for the strawberry shortcake." The young lady left, marveling at the extreme kindness and solicitousness of our paternal (?) government.

It was this same Kearney who, overhearing a disgruntled one who had been handed trifles once, too often, remark, "What the hell and damnation, more of these bloody beans, again!" hastily reproved the excited gentleman with a "Tut, tut, man, you're not in the Officers' Mess now."

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Speaking of "Teddy" recalls many an amusing stunt that this quadruped managed to pull off. Although he was kept chained to a post, he always managed to either pull up the post or break the chain or collar when he got tired of his confined existence. On one occasion he calmly waddled into the quartermaster stores, picked up two big loaves of bread, tucked one under each "arm" and with a whoop and a grunt, waddled out again. Another time he "left his post" without orders, walked into a Greek candy store presided over by a none too tidy woman, picked up a box of chocolates, and ignoring the frightened shrieks of the lady, sidled off of the door, sat down on the ground and made away with the entire box of sweets. The excited lady reported the fact to the Colonel, who awarded the offender "indefinite C.B." and paid the woman the price of the chocolates. Once, when the Colonel ordered a tub filled with water for "Teddy" to take a bath in, the latter broke all precedent by picking up the tub by the handles and turning it upside down over his head. Many a night he would break away from his post and hunt around for an empty tent, and when he found one, would curl up in the blankets and remain there till the occupant returned from Port Arthur in "high spirits," when the latter would conclude that it was time to get on the wagon. Teddy led a high life, till one day he broke loose and turned his attention to a local farmer's barnyard, and the farmer not possessing a high sense of humor, poor "Teddy" received his quietus from the business end of a gun barrel.

This was the last of the Battalion Mascots, though there were any number of them attached to the various companies. One in particular was highly thought of. Most of the men still remember Sergt. Jolly's sad-faced dog, which, like Mary's little lamb, was always to be found wherever Jolly was. Many even accused the pair of having a facial resemblance, but in view of the canine's inability to defend himself, I don't think it fair to make such a slanderous accusation against him.

At this time frequent night "Alarms" were pulled off in order to insure that the men would respond under any and all conditions. Usually only the C.O., the Adjutant and the R. S. M. had any inkling as to when a night alarm was to take place. Spontaneously, somewhere around two or three in the morning, bugles would sound down the avenues, men tumbled out of blankets and into a few clothes, and rustled out to the parade ground like "a bat out of hell" as one disgusted luck termed it. Rolls were called, and absentees were hard put to satisfactorily explain their non-appearance. Giddy Subs who remained at dances in Port Arthur or Fort William till the wee hours in the morning took a big chance if the alarm was sounded during their absence. It is on record that two of these were returning one morning about 3.15 from Port Arthur, when just as they got to the edge of the camp, they heard the alarm. Waiting a few minutes for decency sake, they walked, fully dressed, onto the parade ground, and received the Commanding Officer's congratulations on the promptitude with which they had turned out so completely dressed.

As the weather grew colder, and daylight hours shorter, reveille was advanced to 6.00 a.m. Many of the platoon commanders will remember calling the roll by moonlight at 6.20 a.m. with the temperature "umpteens" below zero.

Many inspections were also held during this period. Of these the most thorough was the one made by General Lessard, who after a long inspection of the Battalion in France. He complimented the Battalion very highly, the only flaw having been the lack of training on the part of the stretcher-bearers. This squad had been detailed by the C.O. from the band and attached to the staff, but as there were no stretchers or other equipment it was difficult to give the men the required training. While on the rifle range the Colonel had a stretcher manufactured out of some canvas and wooden poles, and in order to give the men the required practice, had the biggest and heaviest man in the Battalion placed on the improvised stretcher, while different men in the squad were put through the process of carrying him off and on the field. Needless to add they didn't enjoy the work very much, although the pseudo patient didn't mind it a bit. However, General Lessard made allowance for the lack of training equipment, and on the whole was highly pleased with the showing made by the Battalion; and coming from a general of Lessard's experience, it was really considered a high compliment. H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught, also inspected the troops, and of course, it had to be pouring rain. But nothing daunted the Battalion formed up and made a very good showing. The frequent inspections were interspersed by great activity in the sports line. Football received particular attention, and games were played every day, when it didn't rain.

In August, the second call for men came. Another draft of five officers and two hundred and fifty men was formed, with Captain Ford, the Adjutant, in command. Lieutenant Roberts, who later rejoined the Battalion in France, Lieuts. Ellis, Snaddon and Mills also formed part of this draft. Of these officers, Snaddon was killed in action, Ellis was wounded and taken prisoner on the Somme and Mills, now a Major, came out of the war alive.

For the first time since its formation, the Battalion had to institute a recruiting programme in order to fill up the vacancies caused by the draft, which left about a month later. Hitherto it had been necessary to turn men away, as the Battalion was always slightly above strength. However, a short campaign of vigorous recruiting soon filled up the ranks and placed us above our strength again. During this campaign Major Allen displayed remarkable oratorical ability.

(To Be Continued.)

NOTE—This story of the Fifty-Second Battalion, with illustrations, will be published shortly in book form and may be purchased at the usual prices.