

CAPTAIN ARTHUR CLAYDON DFC

5 MONTHS AT THE FRONT ON DH5s, THEN 3 ON SE5s

BY STEWART K. TAYLOR

AROUND THE TURN of the Twentieth Century, the lure of a building and economic boom throughout Canada's four western provinces persuaded the Claydon family of Deeping,

Lancashire, in the heart of one of England's coal-mining districts, to leave their futureless environs behind and try for a new beginning in Winnipeg, an expanding city and, like others even further west that were situated on the main line of the country's first transcontinental the Canadian Pacific Railway, caught up in the flood-tide of pre-WWI migration. Anyone with a trade did not take long to find employment; Arthur Claydon, the eldest of three sons and like his younger sibling, Ernest, part of the father's General Contracting Business which struggled in such a competitive market even though the demand remained high right up to the outbreak of war.

Until 18 February 1916, the day he was declared medically fit to enlist as a commissioned officer in the 38th Battery, 10th Overseas Field Artillery Brigade of the CEF, Arthur had lived with his parents at 442 Balmoral Street, Winnipeg, in a house the Claydon's had helped to construct.

So hurried was the Battery's departure, they left for St John, New Brunswick, five days after Arthur enlisted, that his family and a lady friend hardly had time to accept the realization he was gone. Passionately wanting to do his 'bit' for King and Country, the 31-year-old Arthur, born 25 September 1885 in Deeping, did not know it at the time, but once the *Missanabi* slipped anchor and sailed for Plymouth, England on 26 February 1916, the only personal contact he should again have with friends and family would be with his brother Ernest, who also donned a Canadian Army uniform.

All officers in the 10th Bde CFA underwent School of Gunnery courses at Shoeburyness in the months after their arrival in England, and when he finally landed in France a lull had settled over the 1916 Ypres battlefields although artillery bombardments by each side proved that the fighting was far from finished. Plans to retake territory lost in the Salient required a greater concentration than ever of large calibre heavies, field guns and trench mortars. The Wytchaete Sector, where Lt Claydon served, was a hive of constant activity, much of it to forestall any attempt by the Germans to increase their



This excellent studio portrait of Arthur Claydon was taken while at officer of 38 Battery, 10th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, before he landed in France and the original was prized highly by his parents, particularly his mother.
:Ernest Claydon(brother) via S.K. T.

sphere of influence. Just weeks prior to the allied advance on the Somme, a suspected attack by the 4th German Army was stalled when a three-quarter of an hour barrage from Canadian and British batteries caught the German infantry in the middle of a relief, taking a terrible toll of its support and front-line troops. Even as late as 12 July, elements of the 10th Field Artillery Brigade, now on strength of other CFA batteries, played a part in a minor operation against the German front lines, their troops being gassed, smoked out, shot up and raided and taken prisoner while the CFA guns splashed the craters, communication trenches and supports for a good hour.

Open warfare training to ready the CEF for re-deployment on the Somme was cut short by adverse weather conditions. That lack of tactical exercise, signalling and gun drill did not seem to affect the performance of the Canadian's artillery at Courcellette, for it was there in the cool grey light of a 15 September dawn that his ears had to sustain the deafening crescendos of a massive

artillery bombardment. For miles to the north and south of him the world erupted into a cauldron of flame, trembling concussions, plunging explosions, great geysers of earth spouted skyward in front of him. As a Forward Observing Officer, he was spared the gunners plight; temporary stone deafness, blood oozing from their ears and nostrils, as the reverberations echoed, a thousand times magnified off the rough splinter-roof gun pits; for him the worst came during the heavy jolt of retaliation the moment German machine-guns and their 5.9s joined in to slash and gore their way amid the Canadian battery positions. The disgusting sight of continuous slaughter: the grisly sight of dead lying around for days before they could be buried and to keep the noisome stench from the nostrils, the incessant smoking of cigarettes was a necessity to allay the sight and smells of decaying death about him. Lt Claydon, a relative teetotaler found it necessary to mix his tea with a good shot of rum, but, aided by repeated artillery barrages, the field-guns in his battery on the average firing four rounds per minute, while every few seconds ceasing to lift the range as the barrage crept forward in front of the assaulting Canadian troops. Gains over the two-mile front were inevitable; objectives secured in spite of gruelling shellfire that never ceased, a repetition that continued on into