

Lieut.-Col. D. C. DRAPER, D.S.O.
5th C. M. R.

UNIONIST CANDIDATE
IN BROME COUNTY



Dauntless men in France, enduring
Rain and mud and utter Hell;
All true hearts at home support them,
Proud of those we love so well—
Every patriot, man and woman,
Rallies to our splendid men.

(Courtesy of Deanna and Carol Draper)

An unusual farmer: Brigadier-General Dennis C. Draper, C.M.G., D.S.O. & bar (PART II)

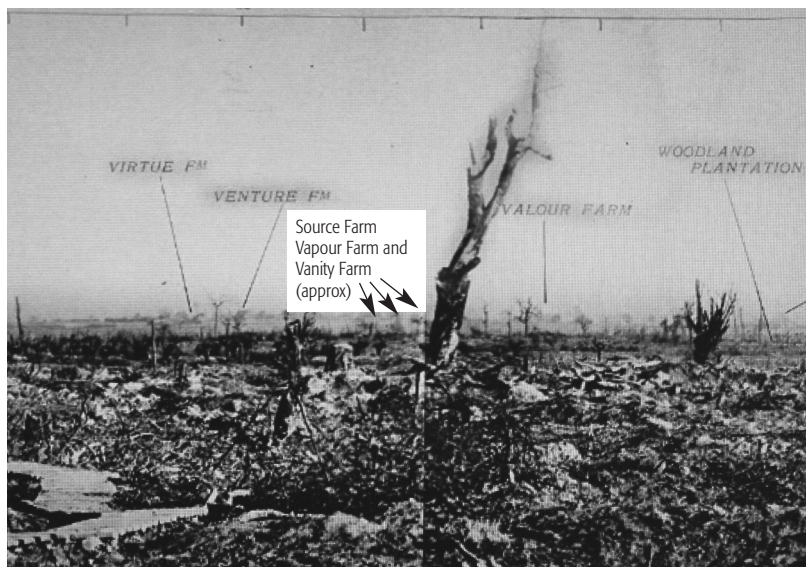
By Jocelyn Vachon

By 1917, the reputation and actions of Lieutenant-Colonel Draper have crossed the Atlantic. When elections are announced in 1917, Draper is offered the Unionist candidature in Brome County. He accepts, yet stays at the front. He writes to electors: "I am informed that I have been nominated as candidate... and I consider it my duty to accept... but I came to France to fight the enemies of our country... and I can not bring myself to go home until the fate of war brings me home..." Notwithstanding his total absence, he finishes second, 1,488 votes to 1,926! It must be mentioned that soldiers in Europe could vote in any county they preferred: Draper may have received a few partisan votes... Ironically, he loses to Andrew Ross McMaster (re-elected in 1921) who is incidentally partner in a small law firm with another well-known soldier: Major Talbot Papineau of the *Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry Regiment*.

In the fall of 1917, Canadians participate in what becomes synonymous with the futility of War: the capture of the featureless ridge of Passchendaele¹ in Belgium. Following the loss of 175,000 men, British General Douglas Haig finally calls in the Canucks. Conditions are the most appalling ever witnessed by any contemporary soldier.

Constant shelling has destroyed the vital drainage system located mere meters above sea level. Just from the sight of the morass battlefield, many realize they stand little chance to come back alive... What will happen to Draper, since he will inevitably be sent into the

1. See recent movie "Passchendaele", starring Paul Gross



Panorama photo taken in October 1917, a few hundred feet behind the jumping-off line of Draper and the 5th CMR (Imperial War Museum)

inferno? Canadian General Arthur Currie does not blindly throw his men into battle, but puts together a plan that will make the most of the futile situation. The Canadians intend to take the final 2,200 yards leading to the Ridge of Passchendaele in a three-step approach that starts with a slight gain on October 26th. It's now the turn of another six Canadian battalions, including 580 men of the 5th CMR, to be part of the attack, while British and Australian troops will cover their flanks. On October 29th, Draper establishes his H.Q. 1,000 yards behind the jumping-off line in a half destroyed, concrete farmhouse code-named *Kron Printz Farm*. For a change, the night is clear and dry; his troops move bit by bit to the jumping-off line. The task for the next morning is daunting: they must follow the Canadian rolling artillery barrage up a slow-rising crest and eliminate a series of German strong-points, all in this indescribable quagmire. Night shelling is heavy and casualties are already mounting.



Same view - December 2008 (Courtesy of Sonia Campens and Jean Gosselin)

Draper's Lieutenant Rogers² is in charge of stretcher-bearers who will recover the wounded. At zero hour - 05:50³, the ear-shattering Canadian artillery barrage flies overhead, including some "shorts" that wound Canadians. Draper had instructed his men to charge quickly ahead to avoid the German retaliation barrage and by 06:36, the mid-objective, 500 yards ahead, is gained. Ninety minutes later, many reach their final objective. The situation becomes nonetheless precarious. The two attacking battalions on their flanks are stopped after their initial gains, leaving the 5th CMR under enfilade fire from three sides by the German 238th Infantry Division. In theory, they should retreat. Yet, the bold courage of our troops and quick thinking by two men of the 5th CMR will save the situation that day: Major George Pearkes and Lieutenant-Colonel Dennis C. Draper.

2. Lt. Rogers, of West Farnham, is the archetype of the unsung hero who will die that day. He was brought out of anonymity by the *Globe & Mail* in November 2003, in one of the most poignant stories ever written about WWI: "It went to hell and back – Mr. Roger's teddy bear".
3. At that exact moment, a few hundred feet away on their right, Major Talbot Papineau with the PPCLI made his most famous quote: "You know, Hughie, this is suicide." He will die seconds later.

Major Pearkes suffers a leg wound before the assault begins but refuses to leave the command of his Company. He had made a contingency plan in case the British battalion to his left did not keep up. After gaining his objective, *Vanity and Vapour Farms*, he leads his troops to conquer a vital point outside of Battalion boundaries: *Source Farm*. As for Draper, he shows first-class leadership, judgment and courage. Making all the right decisions, with only scraps of information (the infamous *fog of war*), he reorganizes his frontage to prevent a collapse of the area. Within 20 minutes of receiving a message from Pearkes by pigeon-carrier, he “borrows” men from the 4th Brigade as well as British troops to establish flanking defenses, some he will lead personally under harassing fire, since some British officers prefer to disregard orders... After securing the zone, he stays at the front until help is organized to evacuate the wounded under constant German shelling. The action will gain Draper a *Bar* to his D.S.O. medal and yet another *Mention-in-Dispatch*; Pearkes receives the Victoria Cross⁴. The Canadian Corps will build on that success and gain slightly beyond Passchendaele Ridge by November 10th at the price of 15,600 casualties... Who knows how many more unnecessary losses would have occurred if Draper and his valiant men⁵ had not led and stabilized the front on that fateful October 30th, 1917? Back to a “quiet” sector north of Vimy Ridge, Draper is given command of the 9th *Canadian Infantry Brigade* for a few weeks. Does High Command have plans for him?

In spring 1918, 78 German Divisions smash into Allied lines in a decisive strike on Paris⁶. The thrust that breaks through French and British lines is finally stopped a mere 56 km from Paris. June 27th 1918, Draper is officially promoted to Brigadier-General of the 8th *Canadian*

4. Pearkes will be Minister of Defense under Diefenbaker.

5. 60% casualties that day alone for the 5th CMR.

6. The only sector avoided by the German attack is the Canadian sector.

Infantry Brigade (3rd Division), which includes the 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th *Canadian Mounted Rifles*, with over 5,000 men under his command.

Supreme Commander French General Ferdinand Foch chooses the Canadians to spearhead the offensive to hopefully end the war. Canucks are spared from combat duty (which annoys British soldiers who nickname them: *Foch's pets*) and are trained to a new form of war that includes infantry, cavalry, aircraft, artillery and tanks.

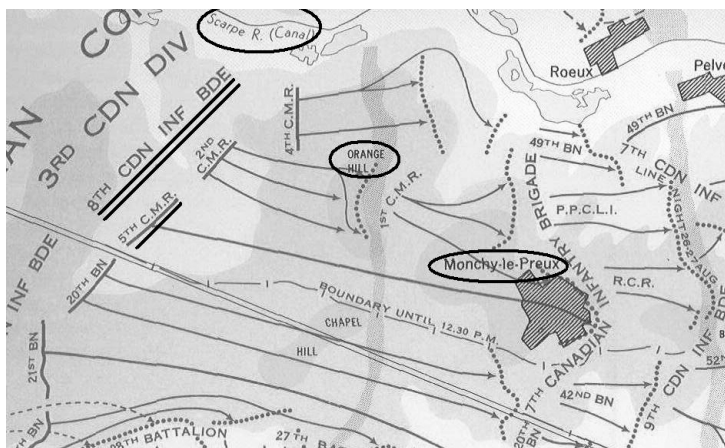
Foch will be proved right in the first modern *combined operation* that takes place at Amiens in Northern France: 630 tanks, 3,600 guns, 1,700 aircraft, in all 28 divisions cooperate with the Canadian Corps who will spearhead, along with Australians, French and British, an attack at dawn on August 8th 1918, favoured by a providential fog that masks their early movements. The 8th *Canadian Infantry Brigade*, commanded by Draper, performs splendidly and drives enemy lines two miles further in one day⁷. According to German General Ludendorff it was "*the Black Day of the German Army.*" The battle lasts four days and the front moves twelve miles.

Draper and Canadian soldiers are immediately moved east of Arras, to direct the blow against the new Gibraltar of German defense: the *Drocourt-Queant Switch* of the *Hindenburg line*. If Canadians can triumph over these 15 miles of impregnable barbed wire, trenches and concrete bunkers, it will finally be open warfare for the Allies. Draper undertakes the greatest challenge yet of his military career: 3rd Division's General Lipsett chooses him and his men to attack the main feature on the Canadian Front during the initial assault, against *Orange Hill* and the small town of *Monchy-le-Preux*.

Orange Hill stands 60 feet high, a mere knoll for a Suttonite. . . yet it overlooks and controls for miles the flat valley below. At 03:00 on

7. Two Suttonites give their lives at Amiens: Frank Young of Glen Sutton and Marc-Aurèle Pratte, a CIBC employee.

August 26th 1918, Draper astutely directs his 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade in a flanking attack along the Scarpe River. The powerful Canadian artillery in conjunction with this unusual large-scale night attack result in relatively light resistance. The farthest objective, the town of Monchy-le-Preux is rushed by the 1st CMR and 5th CMR⁸ and taken by 06:30. The Canadian Corps will complete the work in the next few days, during some of the most desperate combats of the Great War, the enemy knowing this was their last defense anchor.⁹ Nothing seems to stop the Canadians and they must take a three-week recess to wait for British and French Armies to catch up with them and renew the attack.



Unit movements, August 26th 1918 (Library & Archives Canada)

In early October, combats are taking place in the vicinity of Cambrai, a city of 26,000 and one of the last major hubs before the border. Once totally surrounded, the Germans abandon the city at night,

8. Charles Smith Rutherford of the 5th CMR receives the Victoria Cross during this action
9. For example, the 22nd French-Canadian Battalion (*Van-Doos*) loses 550 of 700 men, including all officers, its Padre and Doctor. Its Commanding Officer, future Governor-General George Vanier (the *Vanier* in Massey-Vanier!) loses a leg.



Draper (left) in Cambrai, morning of October 10th 1918 (Courtesy of L & A Canada and Dr. John Draper)

while trying to blow up as much as they can. Two men of the 5th CMR swim across the small canal and find the defense bunkers empty. Immediately, Draper sends strong patrols of 5th CMR who confirm that part of the city is clear. Draper enters the city in early morning. His men



capture the last group of enemy who are blowing up all they can: they are indecorously invited to disengage all explosives they had installed, or else... But, by 13:30 a curious incident occurs.

3^d British Army soldiers, who are supposed to liberate the city, find it full of soldiers: Canadian, that is! Therefore, the Canucks are asked to

leave so the British can claim the prized city officially! The French are not fooled and Draper will still receive the *French Croix de Guerre* for liberating the city¹⁰.

This will be his last combat operation. Exhausted by 14 weeks of non-stop intense stress, Draper takes a leave of absence but returns just in time to announce to his troops that the Armistice will take place at 11:00 November 11, 1918. Canadians are in Mons, Belgium, the furthest east of all Allied troops, a city made even more symbolic since it is where fighting started for the British in August 1914. Days before, Draper was again *Mention-in-Dispatch* by British General Sir Douglas Haig.

During the resulting occupation of the German border towns, Draper commands the *3rd Canadian Division*, 22,000 men strong. He is also appointed by the King to be a Companion of the *Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George* (CMG) for service rendered to the British Empire. Over 300 people acknowledge his return on April 30th 1919, when he arrives at Sutton Junction at 19:45. Finally, he is back home.

Dinners and parades are organized in Sutton and Knowlton for the returning soldiers and Brigadier-General Draper is guest of honour. We can suppose that the return to farm life is not easy: the contrast is too great between the bucolic fields of Sutton and the extreme tension of combat. So many Veterans will silently suffer for the rest of their lives the intolerable experiences they endured. What was the effect on the rest of Draper's life? All we know of that period is that he leaves the farm in the early twenties and accepts a job with the International Paper Company.

Life still takes back its rights: at 49 years of age, the hardened old boy marries Miss Marjory Hume, daughter of a Sherbrooke Doctor. His reputation as a leader is not forgotten. He is selected Chief of Police for

10. Two Suttonites are killed-in-action at Cambrai: Gordon H. Crowell and Victor Prémont.

Toronto in 1928. His steadfastness and dynamism are quickly put to the service of the Queen City where criminality and so called social unrest are growing as fast as its demography.



General Draper on a hunting & fishing trip with nephew Dennis Currie Draper – Circa early 1940's (Courtesy of Dr. John Draper)

The 20's and 30's are periods of significant social and political change in Canada. Multicultural European immigration and worldwide fervor for socialism unsettle traditional Canadian beliefs. Eventually the *Communist Party* is declared illegal by Bennett's federal government. Draper is ordered to eliminate the threat in Toronto and he goes to work

with his legendary zeal. He puts together the *Red Squad*, a special unit that chases and strikes with brutality anyone suspected of belonging to the Fascist or Communist movements and at the same time, Union

movements as well... His methods, harsh comments and also contempt for the written press will be scrutinized with a critical eye by future generations. He is described as hard-boiled, blunt and impolitic, advocating the whip for gamblers and bookmakers... Why such draconian measures? Can we simply say: "other times, other values"?

The fear inspired by the Communist movement in Canada may appear comical today. Back then, popular discontent and *The Great Depression* created a state of paranoia among governmental authorities. Immediate results were expected from Chief of Police Draper. Furthermore, could we state that the perception of a front-line veteran and "what needs to be done" was quite different from that of the ordinary citizen? Not unlike thousands of veterans, he probably also held the strong belief that he and his fellow comrades had not fought and died in vain: they were protecting a way of life. To let "newcomers" and alleged "Great War-dodgers" impose their views in Canada would have been considered a betrayal of their long-lost comrades.

Charitable organizations are part of appropriate upper class involvement in those days. Yet, Draper is interested by an unglamorous form of distress. Recognizing that social reintegration of past convicts in the community is far from easy, he establishes in 1929 the *Citizen Service Association* to supply their basic needs: temporary shelter, clothing and work. This is one of his actions that will survive him, amalgamated to the John Howard Society. His desire to serve the community remains at the center of his preoccupations: "the first responsibility of the Police is to serve and improve the life of the community" he declares in 1932. Among his peers, Draper acquires great notoriety, becoming President of the *International Association of Chiefs of Police* in 1944-45, an organization based in Washington that promotes improved methodologies to fight crime. He has not forgotten his old comrades either, supporting the 5th *CMR Association* that will reunite annually until 1968.

The dynamic Dennis Colburn Draper, DSO and Bar, CMG and Croix de Guerre, passes away on November 8, 1951. He rests in Fairmount Cemetery on Maple Street in his native town of Sutton, QC.

Let's transport Brigadier-General Draper to our era for a moment. Would his iron discipline, combativeness and vigor when taking on critical situations still be appreciated or even accepted today? Certainly, his acute sense of duty, pragmatism and natural leadership along with his athletic abilities would still make him a first-rate commander, "a Man's man". If ever we are forced to live through such a difficult event as the *Great War* again, would it reveal individuals with the resolve of Dennis Colburn Draper? ●

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Special thanks to MS Carol and Deanna Draper, Dr. John Draper, Maureen McMullin, Gill Sowerby and Chris Wight (CEF Study Group)

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