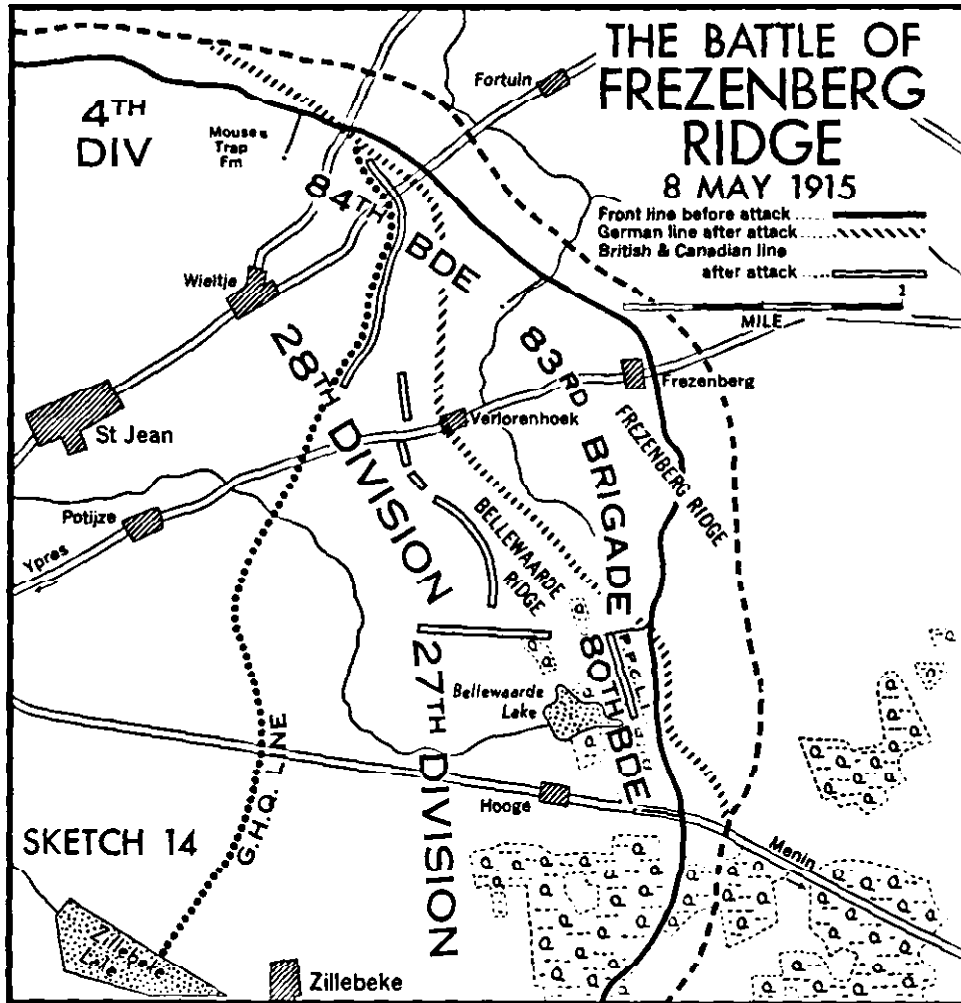


On the afternoon of the 2nd a shift of wind enabled the Germans to launch a strong attack with gas between St. Julien and Berlin Wood, on a three-mile front held by the three brigades of the 4th Division, all under General Alderson's command. But the trenches were far apart here and the fitful breeze dispersed the gas cloud so that only the trenches west of Mouse Trap Farm were affected; and Allied guns, which included all the Canadian field batteries, drove back the German infantry. The three Canadian infantry brigades, west of the canal, were alerted but were not required. In spite of another German attack on Berlin Wood the following afternoon, the 27th and 28th Divisions and the right of the Canadian Division carried out their planned withdrawal that night without the loss of a man. General Plumer's new line, a modification of that proposed earlier by General Smith-Dorrien, followed the recently manned front line from Turco Farm to Mouse Trap Farm,* continued south-eastward to Frezenberg and thence south to pass in front of Hooze and along the east edge of Sanctuary Wood, rejoining the old line 1000 yards north-east of Hill 60. At ten next morning the relief of the Canadian Division was completed as General Alderson handed over to the G.O.C. 4th Division. Only the Canadian Divisional Artillery remained in position attached to the British Division and covering the front between Mouse Trap and Turco Farms. Though the 4th Division's C.R.A. took over on 9 May, ten more days elapsed before the last Canadian batteries were withdrawn.

The P.P.C.L.I. in the Salient

The Battles of Ypres, 1915 were to continue for three more weeks, but in these later phases the only Canadian battalion engaged was Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. The unit had crossed to France as part of the 80th Brigade of the 27th Division, and from 7 January to 23 March 1915 had served in the St. Eloi sector. In this period its most significant operation had been a small local attack carried out by upwards of 100 Patricias on 28 February. At a cost of sixteen casualties (five of them fatal) they inflicted an unknown number of casualties on the Germans and destroyed thirty yards of enemy trench.¹⁰⁰ On 9 April, as the division relieved the French 17th Division in the Ypres Salient, the Patricias occupied positions in front of Polygon Wood, three miles south of the 2nd Canadian Brigade's right at Berlin Wood. During the bitter fighting on the northern flank the battalion was under repeated bombardments, and suffered 80 casualties. On the withdrawal of Plumer's Force on the night of 3-4 May the Patricias fell back to Bellewaarde Ridge, half a mile north-east of Hooze on the Menin Road. Here on 4 May, before there was time to develop their unfinished, shallow trenches, they suffered 122 casualties in the shelling and machine-gun fire that accompanied the enemy's follow-up.

* On the moonlit night of 28-29 April three battalions of the 1st Canadian Brigade, with the 2nd Battalion acting as a covering party, had dug a traversed trench 1200 yards long between Hampshire and Turco Farms. By this achievement important ground was gained without a casualty.¹⁰¹



On 8 May a violent bombardment of the whole 5th Corps front heralded a major German assault. Duke Albrecht had ordered three converging attacks to reduce the Salient—the 26th Reserve Corps to advance from the north against the sector Mouse Trap Farm to Frezenberg; the 27th Reserve Corps to make the central and main attack westward between Frezenberg and Bellewaarde Lake; and the 15th Corps to break through north-westward between Bellewaarde and Zillebeke Lakes. The 27th and 28th British Divisions were thus under attack by at least six German divisions.¹⁰¹ As a preliminary, in three gas attacks on 5 May the 15th Corps had captured Hill 60.

The brunt of the main onslaught on the 8th fell on the 28th Division's 83rd and 84th Brigades holding Frezenberg Ridge. Two assaults were beaten back, but the third overwhelmed the front line, and by mid-morning Frezenberg had fallen. Before noon the Germans had penetrated nearly a mile and were in Ver-

Iorenhoek. They advanced no farther, but by mid-afternoon they had widened their breach of the Salient to a gap of two miles and had begun rolling up the British line on either flank.

In their positions on Bellewaarde Ridge at the 27th Division's extreme left the Patricias with the 80th Brigade's other front-line battalion, the 4th King's Royal Rifle Corps, on their right, held the southern shoulder of the gap. The devastating fire that the enemy concentrated on the British trenches from the Menin Road to Frezenberg obliterated whole sections of the P.P.C.L.I. front line on the forward slope of the ridge. Two of the unit's four machine-guns were put out of action and casualties were so heavy that Major Hamilton Gault, who had taken over command of the regiment on 5 May, ordered signallers, pioneers, orderlies and batmen forward into the support trenches. When the Germans launched their main assault at 9:00 a.m., the Patricias' steady rifle fire drove them back on the left; but on the right the enemy gained a footing, compelling a retirement to the main defence line on the crest. Here the battalion, reinforced by a company from the 4th Rifle Brigade, stood unflinchingly for the rest of the day, enduring repeated bombardments and beating back every German attempt to advance from the captured trenches.¹⁰² During the afternoon the left flank, drawn back to face the danger from the north,* was extended by reserve battalions of the 80th and 81st Brigades. These units linked up with counter-attacking battalions of the 85th Brigade in the centre to seal off the German encroachment. East of Mouse Trap Farm a heroic stand by the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers, when the remainder of the 84th Brigade's front-line battalions were annihilated, held firm the northern shoulder of the gap. On the 4th Division's front west of Mouse Trap Farm British artillery (including eight Canadian field batteries) broke up the infantry attack which followed the early morning bombardment.

When the Patricias were relieved shortly before midnight, their total trench strength was four officers and 150 men. The day's casualties totalled 392. For the last few days of the Battle of Frezenberg Ridge (which ended on 13 May) they formed a composite unit with the 4th King's Royal Rifles, which had shared their valiant stand on Bellewaarde Ridge. On 24 May, when the Fourth Army again attacked the 5th Corps, releasing a heavy concentration of chlorine along a front of 4½ miles (the largest scale yet attempted), the 27th Division was in corps reserve. The Germans captured Mouse Trap Farm and Bellewaarde Ridge, breaking through on both sides of Bellewaarde Lake. Late on the 24th the 80th Brigade made an unsuccessful counter-attack, the Patricias being held in brigade reserve. This operation, named the Battle of Bellewaarde Ridge, ended the Battles of Ypres, 1915. A successful counter-thrust by the French on 15 May had driven the Germans back over the canal about Steenstraat.¹⁰⁴ But the Allies regained no more ground. For the next two years the opposing lines around the Salient were to remain virtually unchanged.

* Remnants of the 83rd Brigade's two right-hand battalions, cut off when the enemy broke through the centre, continued to fight from isolated positions on the Patricias' left.¹⁰³