(June 23rd, 1919.)

Operations in France and Italy

By Brigadier-General C. H. Mitchell, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

Mr. President, my Lord, General Logie, and Gentlemen: I assure you that I consider it the greatest honor to stand before the Canadian Club to-day. I am at home in Toronto, and this is like home. I assure you that, when I came into the city the other day, I felt that after being in Belgium, France, and Italy, Toronto certainly did look good. And to-day, particularly, the 23rd of June, is an unique day, especially when we think that June has been the month of justice, the month of battles throughout the war. We go back four years to 1915, when we had already fought—I am speaking of the Canadians—the battle of Ypres; and we had fought, too, the battle of Festubert.

The next year, 1916, during the month of June we fought the battle of Sanctuary Wood. In that battle the Canadians showed even greater ability than they had in the previous year. They had taken back the hill of the Observatory Ridge entirely on their own; and to no one was that due more than to General Currie, who commanded the First Division.

In 1917, in the month of June, the Canadians had already fought the battle of Vimy Ridge, the Second Army had fought the battle of Messines; and in June we were preparing for the various battles of the summer and the autumn of 1917. A year ago, the fourth year of the war as far as I am concerned, we fought in the battle of Asiago; which was part of the great Austrian offensive in Italy, the last throw they made in the great game. So we can well say that June is the month of battles. To-day, particularly, we read in the morning papers of the imminent signing of the peace terms in Paris. To-day is an unique day.

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We, perhaps, naturally think of the local situation, but we must not be influenced by it. A general is not a good general when he is influenced by the local color of what is happening on his own sector. And we cannot help but feel that what may be happening here is only a small thing in the whole. After all, when we think about the situation to-day, isn't it a natural thing in some respects? It is the thing which has been happening all over England, and in various parts of Europe. Last spring I took particular interest in the situation; and tried to study the industrial situation, endeavoring to see what was behind it. If I say something that is not new to you it is because there is good ground for saying it. It is that the way out of industrial unrest will be solved by education and industrial co-operation.

I think, perhaps, one of the greatest things that has happened in the war has been the extraordinary reversal of opinion among the workers in England. For several weeks we were on the verge of having a strike that would call up the whole of the Island Kingdom, the strike which had been threatened by the Triple Alliance—the miners, the electrical workers, and the transportation workers. The result was that in March the Sankey report was brought in and the alliance agreed to it in the spirit of co-operation—I don't like the word conciliation—and the result was the complete reversal of the opinion of the workers in regard to the great mining situation. That, perhaps, is the best text for to-day in Canada—Co-operation.

While touching on it, the word "co-operation" seems fitting. It is the key-word of every work in the army. Above all, co-operation is the greatest element in organization; and I don't need to say anything to the citizens of Toronto about organization. When we were on the other side we heard during the war what Toronto did financially and otherwise, and we were full of admiration; everybody knew about Toronto and the wonderful success of work which was done here.

The early part of the war, to which the president has alluded, brought us many things to learn. Some of us who worked hard at military work in the early days before the war thought we were getting on fairly well in trying to learn something about the art of war. We learned a great deal more when we got to England and France in 1915; and we learned that much of what we had learned before was useless, and that we had to change our plans. The year of 1916 brought many more things which we had to learn; and those

were the days when the real consolidation, the real building, and the uniting, of the Canadian Corps was carried out, with its two, three, and finally four, divisions, under Sir Julian Byng and his very able chief of staff, General Harrington. General Byng is the man who made the Canadian Corps in the first instance.

Those were the days when we were getting our real trial, and which we on the staff were using to the best advantage in learning our staff jobs. When, afterwards, in October 1916, I had the fortune or the misfortune to be taken away from the Canadians and to be sent to Sir Herbert Plumer—I hope you will excuse me in using the first person in telling about Intelligence, because it is very difficult to tell about Intelligence when one cannot speak rather conversationally—but it was with the Second Army that I really learned what real staff work was. There I was with the most magnificent type of British staff officer. There I got under the influence of that wonderfully fine old man of the British Army, Sir Herbert Plumer. There is no army commander that is more respected and trusted in the British Army than Sir Herbert Plumer. His extraordinary influence went down, not only through the staff that was around him, but through the various army corps, and thus to the divisions that were in his army at various times.

I heard it said that no division ever came into the Second Army to form part of it and went away again without wishing it might some day come back. That is a great deal to say, and I am sure those that have been there will appreciate that. I know the Canadians would have always been glad to serve again with the Second Army. That same spirit which Sir Herbert Plumer instilled into that Second Army staff was the spirit of co-operation. His magnificent staff officer, the greatest in the British Army, Sir Charles Harrington, used to use in his various speeches a motto of three words, all beginning with "T"; and this is the motto that carried that army to such great success: "Trust, Training, Thoroughness." I suppose we can't apply those words to better advantage than to our own future in Canada.

It has been said that the regular British officers are not efficient. I totally disagree with that statement. I suppose I am better qualified to speak, after nearly three years service with them, not only in France and Belgium but in Italy and at the War Office, than others; and for thoroughness, efficiency, honesty of purpose, for industry and for straight dealing and

cheerfulness and helpfulness, I will back the British staff officer against anybody. You can well imagine my pride, as a Canadian, to find myself injected into an atmosphere of that kind; and you can well imagine how a man could do his best work in conditions of that kind. There was no bickering, and I think the Second Army staff has been a model throughout the war.

Those were the days in the spring of 1917 when we were beginning to find ourselves with regard to Intelligence. We knew a good deal about it previously; but as time went on we found a good many things we hadn't known of before, by which we could apply the various sciences and the various methods to beating the enemy. And, after all, it has been a war of scientific methods,—apart from organization, of course, —mechanical, electrical, physical, chemical, to say nothing of the aeroplane service. One of the things which gave me more pleasure than anything else was, when I was with the Second Army, sitting at the end of a number of telephones; and thinking about the chap on the other side who was twenty miles behind the German side doing the same thing that I was. If you want to beat somebody, put yourself in his place and see how he is going to do to you. That is the way to beat him.

Intelligence deals solely with the enemy. It has nothing to do with our own force at all, except in the constant co-operation with our own forces to make the information useful. Intelligence, like all Gaul, is divided into three parts—the collection of intelligence, the dissemination of intelligence, and the process of keeping the enemy from getting intelligence about you.

With regard to the collection of intelligence, which is the largest part of it, I suppose that that is a thing which appeals most to the imagination of everyone; because they naturally think of the fellow I described sitting at the end of a telephone getting information. But it is only one of the ways of obtaining information in a large force. When I tell you that in the autumn of 1917 the Second Army consisted of seven army corps, of which the Canadian was one, the Australian was another, the remaining five being Imperials; and those seven army corps each had four divisions, making twenty-eight divisions, or a total of three-quarters of a million men, with 2,500 guns and 40,000 horses, you begin to get an idea of what that means. I might add that in the battle of Messines in June we had twenty-one divisions in the Second Army; but we only used twelve of them, because it was such an extraordinary success we found we didn't need to use all of them.

The work of getting the information from the front and from all the various sources of an army like that requires a great deal of organization; a great deal of care to see that it works smoothly. Again, that means co-operation. There are four or five different sources of information which are used for intelligence purposes; and, as you know, the most important, the most reliable source, is the prisoner. When caught, prisoners frequently tell of the operations; and if a long time occurred between prisoners we went out after them. That is the origin of the "raid," and I don't need to tell you that the Canadians were the originators of the raid. We don't say that boastfully, because all the world knows it; and all the world knows that that first raid, done by the First Canadian Division in front of Messines,—in which such extraordinary success was achieved, including the capture of twelve prisoners,—was translated into all the languages of the Allies, along with diagrams.

The obtaining of prisoners, as time went on, became an art. I don't say raids were solely for the purpose of intelligence, but very largely so; and the examination of prisoners became very much an art which was highly specialized. We had to organize a corps of Intelligence officers, thoroughly acquainted with the German language; and in turn they became acquainted with the German army organization, so that as soon as a prisoner was obtained the information got from him was made immediately useful. He was asked when he came into the line, who was leading him, what towns he passed through, what men of other regiments he had seen, and where the various railways had junction points, where they had dumps of material, and what was being talked about in the trenches, —and many other things, which it would take me ten minutes to tell you about.

Many of you will ask why we placed so much reliance on what a prisoner tells us. One reason is, that the German prisoner is so disciplined that he will automatically stand to attention and tell what he knows. That is discipline. The second reason is, that he is so well disciplined that he is afraid to lie to an officer, particularly since he has been told the British will maltreat their prisoners. That has been exploded. Then he finds, as soon as he gets in front of the officer examining him, that the latter knows a great deal about his division.

Of course we had refractory prisoners who had to be brought along for further treatment and I know you want to

know how that is done. I am not going to tell you, because we don't do it. There are many ways in which a further examination can be done by officers whose job it is to do nothing but that.

Another source of information was the documents of various kinds, maps, sketches, orders, letters, note books, charts, and all that sort of thing. Those we found on prisoners or dead men—which are especially examined under all circumstances wherever found—also in dugouts. It is needless to tell you of the details, of how this information is gathered; suffice to say that the first examination is very rapid, to pick out the stuff which will be useful at the front; and thus it is useful within an hour for tactical purposes. That is the first principle of tactical intelligence in the field, to help the troops that are fighting. Intelligence is the hand-maiden of Operations, and exists solely to help operations and to assist the troops in fighting at the front, so that information is immediately available.

The next source of information, probably, in importance is what we get from the air, from the R.A.F.; and no doubt there are some of the members here. The service of reconnaisance and the service of taking photographs formed a very large part of this work; and you can see yourself that with eyes in the air, and photographs, a great deal could be developed. We went so far in France,—and even further in Italy,—with regard to observation of railways, that we had every day the schedule and the train movements of all the railways in France and Belgium between Lille and the sea. And it got so extensive at one time that we really had a time-table made up, which we had some pleasure in comparing with the pre-war time-tables. The information with regard to railway movements has a great bearing on the movement of troops. The information obtained with regard to the movements of troops ten, twenty, and thirty miles behind the lines is very important with a view to strategic operations. It played a great part in giivng us sufficient time to make preparations for any possible attack in various places. When you consider that sort of thing, you can see it gave very wide scope for the intelligence officer's imagination and his powers of guessing. After all, I think that is what develops more than anything else.

All of that information—what we call visual—comes up, in the ordinary course of events, first to the division, then to the army corps, and then to the army. It gets pretty small by the time it gets to the army. Somebody called it a great *stationery* war. It was.

Another very important source of information was the thing you probably heard of, but not very much; and that was the listening set. At the start of the war, when the Canadians first went to France, we found that the enemy seemed to know in some occult manner just what was doing in the way of reliefs of our front line. I remember being told by a prisoner that his officer had told him that the Third Battalion had come into the line the night before. We could not believe it, and we found subsequently through officers that they got this very occult information through an electric appliance which they used in the front line, by which they overheard our telephone conversations. You can imagine how we felt on hearing that.

As time went on, the French made a device of the same kind; and we got a listening outfit of our own. We took precautions to prevent the enemy from hearing what we were talking about. It ultimately culminated in the company commander not talking on the telephone at all. In the end, the British and French together got a listening-set service which was superior to the German service. That information, of course, is the kind of thing which demands the use of the very finest German-speaking operators, in order to listen to the conversation in German on the other side of the line.

Another source of information, which I consider one of the most valuable and unique of the intelligence service—on the scientific side—was the wireless intelligence, and interception of the enemy's wireless. It was a very difficult process, getting this information and using it successfully. But, sufficient to say that the enemy had five times as much wireless in operation as we did. He depended a great deal on his field stations for passing his orders and that sort of thing. But, beyond that, there was another device developed during 1917 which was of greater use; and that was the ability to locate the enemy's wireless stations. That was done by an electrical process; by means of what they call a "detector," by which the intensity of the wireless waves going from any station was localized; and we were able to locate his stations. And it got so perfect during the summer and autumn of 1917 that our wireless intelligence officers used to say that they could show us the location of the enemy's wireless stations to within 500 yards.

From that we were able to tell—even if we didn't know

what was being said, the messages being coded—the volume of business between any two or three stations. When you realize that each enemy army corps had its own group of wireless stations; and that we were able by that means to locate the boundaries of the divisions and the army corps, and to be able to describe by synthesis the incoming relief to the division or the change of boundaries,—you will see what we had to do.

We were able during the battles of the summer of 1917 and during the autumn, sometimes to tell that a new division was going into the line three days before it actually appeared. That, of course, was of very great service to the higher command. I could go on with many instances to tell of the discovery of things of that kind, but time will not permit. I do want to speak further of the information we got from letters, such as were not yet posted. We got a great many letters written by the Germans, who were rather lax in their censorship and didn't censor their letters for some time; and the German soldiers would carry these letters around for a considerable time. In that way, we often got information right down to the minute.

What I have been dealing with has been the *gathering* of the information, but the *dissemination* of that information is very important to the troops. A great deal was done by telephone and a great deal by conversation. We issued a summary, sometimes two in a day, which went to all troops and kept them in touch with what was going on. Many of you will remember the summary, which I know you used to say was a lot of hot air; but perhaps you were not the one it was intended for. We tried to make it as useful as possible for the fighting troops.

I have not yet touched on the other side of the intelligence work; which is to protect ourselves, so that the enemy will not get information about our troops. That is called the service of contra-espionage. Of course, all well-regulated armies have spies. It is done in good armies. The Germans had them as well as we had; and they had more before the war, but a good many less before the end. The service of contra-espionage was peculiar, in our case; because we not only had the French to deal with, but Belgians and Italians as well. The civilians who lived on the frontier, many of them, had made a business of smuggling; and of course they were ready to work for any German agents who wanted to use them.

The difficulty in this, of course, was to find them and get them when working. We spent a good deal of time in doing that. In the autumn of 1917 the Second Army had a card index consisting of 40,000 cards. You will now understand the service we were doing. That doesn't mean that they were all enemy spies, but it means that every person who moved from one place to another had his movements and his business watched.

I have touched on the Intelligence in France; and with the short time available, I will get away to Italy. The flight into Italy was a most extraordinary feat, as far as we were concerned. We had been watching the catastrophe in the newspapers and in our wireless press. We were still fighting the battles of Flanders and Paschendael; and, while very much engrossed in our own job, because we knew we were beating the enemy to a standstill, we were afraid the breaking of the line in Italy was going to nullify what we were doing in France. We were still more surprised when one evening Sir Herbert Plumer got word he was to go to Italy immediately and take two or three staff officers with him to examine the situation. It was the view of the British Government, as it turned out, to send five British divisions, and the French were going to send six, to Italy. As a matter of fact, we had two and one-half days only to get started for Italy, and that in an entirely strange country we knew nothing about. The only thing I had about Italy, when the General Staff Officer asked me for some information, was newspaper clippings.

The arrival of the British in Italy I will remember all my life. The first day of the passage of British troops was such an extraordinary event, that it will always go down to history as a remarkable scene. The divisions marched through the first big town on November 19, after breakfast in the morning. The reception from the people was a wonderful one. They threw all sorts of things to the soldiers, and one began to wonder if it were not a comic opera. Finally, we got our troops into the front line after some dramatic conferences, in which General Diaz and General Plumer took part. It was with particular pride that the British fought in the line at the Piave River. Three weeks after Sir Herbert Plumer and a few of his staff, in which I was included, left his headquarters with the Second Army, we were fighting in Italy. It was a triumph not only for the British, but for the French, who were only a day or two behind us in getting into the front line. It was a triumph for the transportation methods.

There are people here who have the idea that it was the British and French soldiers in the line that stopped the Austrians. That is wrong. The Italian army defeated the Austrians at Caparetto entirely unaided. They stopped the Austrians on the Piave River before any British or French soldiers got there.

I claim that that is the measure of the quality of the Italian soldiers; who, realizing what had happened, put everything they had into the battle and saved the day. It is true, they lost 250,000 troops and 2,000 guns and 2,000 lorries in the series of engagements,—and the cause of that, I expect, will be known as the Disaster of Caparetto. There are many things said about the cause of that disaster. I think, perhaps, there are three or four principal reasons. One is, the extraordinary propaganda and insidious influence of the Germans in the north of Italy, which never stopped. When one realizes that Italy, in the first instance, was an ally of Germany and Austria, in the second instance that she became neutral for the first year of the war, and in the third instance that she threw in her lot with us, it was an extraordinary action on the part of the Italian nation. Thus there was an influence in Italy that was very hard to eradicate. And it took months and years to do so.

The Germans sent down six divisions to help out. But, because they went to Caparetto, they were sufficient to stampede the whole part of the line in which they were placed. Another cause of the disaster was that there is a political party in Italy that wanted to stop the war. That was the party that caused the delay in preventing them standing with us. The Church had some effect. But, perhaps, the condition of the soldiers themselves was partly to blame. They kept constantly getting letters from home saying people had no money, and people had no fuel and no food. All those things were partly to blame. When the time was ripe, the Germans got the Austrians up under camouflage.

In the spring, the offensive came on in France; and it was necessary to reduce the British force in Italy, and at the same time the British were taken from the Piave into the mountains for the summer. So, in April, you find us in the mountains at an altitude of 5,000 feet above the Venetian Plain, under the most magnificent mountain conditions you can imagine. The first time I walked down the slopes of the mountains I could not help but think how much it was like Muskoka, only ten times as great. It didn't seem much like

Muskoka, however, when they began shooting. It was a great experience for the British and for those who had been in France. The British Tommy soon learned mountaineering, and the intricacies of a mule instead of a horse, and the transport forces soon learned the intricacies of the mountain roads. They could not take up the lorries we had, and we had to replace them with three-ton lorries. Then the Americans brought five-ton lorries to Italy, but they soon found they were useless and had to get others.

Then came the Austrian offensive on June 15 a year ago. As far as we were concerned, it was all over in about two days. After we had been watching for days for the signs leading to the actual launching of the offensive, which had been much heralded by the Austrians; and after we had been trying to guess at what points they would attack;—on the 14th we sent out a message, a telegram to all the troops, Italian and French, to say that they might expect the Austrian attack to be launched at daybreak. As a matter of fact, it did take place at 3.30 the next morning.

The Austrians broke through a portion of the British lines by sheer force of numbers. They had two or three times as many men as we had. It took a long time to get re-inforcements up of course. The one place where they were brought to a standstill was right outside a little Canadian hut which was run by an army chaplain. It is a fact that he and his friends kept on serving coffee in a little wooden shanty—because it was not a dugout—while the Austrians were actually, with their rifles and machine guns, within 300 yards of that place, and bullets were going through the building.

While speaking of that I want to speak of the same work which was done under my observation by the Y.M.C.A. I think that too much cannot be said about the diligence, the energy, and the real helpfulness of the Y.M.C.A. throughout this whole war; and when I came home to Canada and found some criticism of the "Y," I tell you I could not understand it.

During the summer of 1918 we had quiet in Italy, but we watched our Canadian brothers in France. Of course, the tremendous work which was done by the Canadians during August and the last One Hundred Days was watched with the greatest of interest, because we ourselves in Italy had a rather quiet time until October.

I just want to say now what I have heard about the various Canadian divisions. They cannot be too highly praised. I am saying it because I heard it from the British, the French,

the Italians, the Belgians. They speak very highly of the Canadian boys and particularly of the General Officer Commanding, General Currie. Again, I say, when I come back to Canada and find some criticism of General Currie, I cannot understand it. He is a great leader, not only as a soldier, but as a true citizen of Canada.

I am just through, but I want to tell you of the last two or three days of the war in Italy. You know, the British were launched against the Austrians, in concert with the Italians and French, on the 25th of October. The crossing of the Piave River was a triumph of engineering, a triumph for everybody concerned. For two days we had to maintain bridges on the other side of a river two miles wide, because we could not get heavy enough guns across. We could only get infantry over, but on the fourth day the Austrians began to weaken, and from then on it was a complete rout. If I described it, it would make a most interesting story. With November 4, came the end of the war as far as Italy was concerned. It is not an exaggeration to say they made prisoners of 500,000, and they got something like 6,000 guns, with tremendous supplies. So the Italians can well say that they took a very large part in winning the war.

I am back to Toronto. I am going to the University and I am going into another kind of war, where education and training and co-operation is as needful as it was in the War. And I want to say that Canada's war of development during the next ten or twenty years is the war that we are all concerned in most. It is the war in which co-operation is required. I maintain, sir, that there is no branch that is more needed than the help of Practical Science in getting on with that war and making the success of it that we should.