



# Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF  
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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May Extra # 1 2021



## THE BROWN BESS AT WATERLOO

Description and excerpts from Bernard Cornwell's book  
**WATERLOO**

### THE HISTORY OF FOUR DAYS, THREE ARMIES AND THE THREE BATTLES

Napoleon had also detached part of his army, the Marquis de Grouchy's, 33,000 men and 96 guns, to pursue the Prussians. Their job was to find the Prussians, engage them and so stop Bluchers men coming to Wellington's aid.

So, by dawn on Sunday, 18 June, the three armies are expecting battle. The rain stops at last, though there will be passing showers for much of the day and, though it is summer, it is still bitingly cold. Johnny Kincaid's riflemen, shivering beside the highway a little north of the elm tree, boil a big cauldron of water and throw in tea, sugar and milk; all the bigwigs of the army had occasion to pass,' he said, and I believe every one of them, from the Duke downwards, claimed a cupful.'

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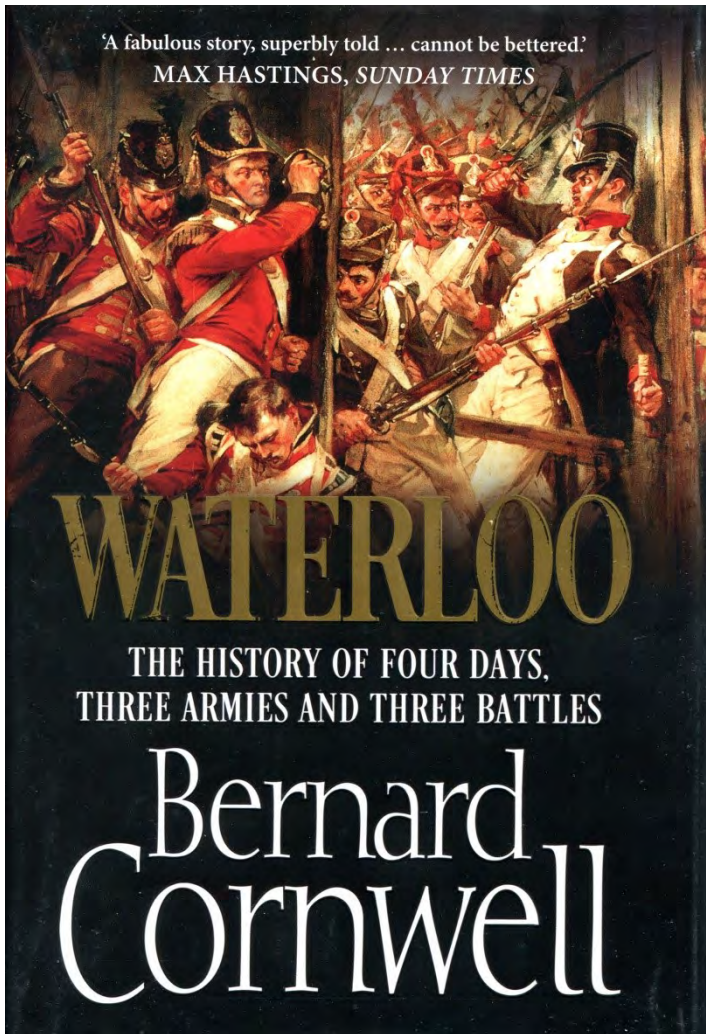
**Captain  
J.L.M. White**

**The RCAF'S  
FIRST FLYING  
CASUALTY  
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August 1924 Camp Borden



The French were no better off. Louis Canler, an eighteen-year-old infantryman, spent a bone-chilling night in the rain, but at least there was breakfast in the dawn. His company butchered a sheep and boiled it with some flour to thicken the broth, but they lacked salt for seasoning, so one of the men threw in a handful of gunpowder instead. The mutton, Canler recalled, 'tasted foul'.

Private Matthew Clay, the Guardsman who had spent a miserable night beside a ditch in the orchard of Hougoumont, had much the same experience. At dawn, he said:

*We procured some fuel from the farm of Hougoumont and then lighted fires and warmed ourselves. Our limbs were very much cramped sitting on the side of the wet ditch the entire night. The Sergeant of each section gave a small piece of bread, which was about an ounce, to each man, and enquiry was made along the ranks for a butcher.*

A pig was slaughtered and the carcass cut up. Clay received a portion of the pig's head, but though he scorched the meat, he found it inedible. Then he readied his musket. It was loaded,

because Hougoumont's garrison had feared a night attack which never came, so he fired the weapon into a muddy bank. All along both ridges men were clearing their muskets. The powder could have become damp and none wanted a useless musket when the enemy came, so they fired their weapons to get rid of the overnight charge. Clay checked his ammunition, tightened his musket's doghead, the screw-driven vice which held the flint in place, then oiled the powerful spring and trigger. The damp had swollen the wood of some muskets, hampering the springs.

Clay, like every other redcoat, carried a Brown Bess musket, though in truth there was no such weapon. There were Land Pattern muskets, India Pattern muskets and New Land Pattern muskets, all carrying the nickname of Brown Bess. The basic musket was developed during the early years of the eighteenth century, a hundred years before Waterloo, and a soldier of Marlborough's army would have had no trouble using a New Land Pattern musket made in the early nineteenth century. The muskets were heavy, weighing a little over 10 lbs, and cumbersome, with a barrel length of either 39 inches or 42 inches, firing a ball three-quarters of an inch in diameter. It was possible to fire five shots in a minute, but that was exceptional, and the normal rate of fire was between two and three shots a minute, and even that was optimistic. As a battle progressed the touch-holes became fouled with burned powder and the barrels caked with powder residue, and the flints chipped and needed replacing. Nevertheless a British battalion of 500 men could expect to fire between 1,000 and 1,500 shots a minute.



If fired at too great a range, say anything over 100 yards, most of those shots would miss because the smoothbore musket was notoriously inaccurate. Much of the inaccuracy was caused by 'windage', which is the difference between the barrel's interior width and the musket ball's width. This was usually about a twentieth of an inch, which made the ball easier (and thus quicker) to load, but the ball literally bounced as it sped down the barrel and the last bounce would dictate the direction of the flight. There were various tests made of a musket's accuracy, and a typical one was conducted by the Prussians, who discovered that a battalion firing at a target 100 feet wide and 6 feet high scored 60 per cent hits at 75 yards, 40 per cent at 150 yards and 25 per cent at 225 yards. Colonel George Hanger, who was an expert marksman, wrote in his book *To All Sportsmen*, published in 1814:

*A soldiers musket, if not exceedingly ill-bored (as many are), will strike the figure of a man at 80 yards; it may even at a hundred; but a soldier must be very unfortunate indeed who shall be wounded by a common musket at 150 yards, provided his antagonist aims at him; and as to firing at a man at 200 yards with a common musket, you may as well fire at the moon.*

Estimates were made during the Napoleonic Wars of the musket's efficiency. At the battle of Talavera it was reckoned that in half an hour 1,300 French were either killed or wounded, but it had taken 30,000 musket balls to achieve that! 3,675,000 rounds were fired by Wellington's army at Vitoria and caused 8,000 casualties, which is one hit in every 459! At close range the results were much better, and the British especially were trained to wait until the enemy was very close before opening fire.

The French too were clearing their muskets. Their weapon, the Charleville musket, was about a pound lighter than the Brown Bess, and just as inaccurate. The bore was smaller, and this meant that French infantry could not use British cartridges which they might find on their dead or wounded enemies, while British troops could, and did, use scavenged French ammunition. French powder was of significantly worse quality than British, which led to quicker fouling of the barrel and touch-hole. The normal way to rid a barrel of caked powder was to swill it out with hot water, but urine was almost as effective.



**Bernard Cornwell, OBE** (born 23 February 1944) is a British author of historical novels and a history of the Waterloo Campaign. He is best known for his novels about Napoleonic Wars rifleman Richard Sharpe. He has also written the Saxon / Last Kingdom stories about King Alfred and the making of England



The *Charleville musket* was a .69 caliber standard French infantry *musket* used in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was made in 1717 and was last produced during the 1840s. However, it still saw limited use in conflicts through the mid-19th century (such as the Crimean War).

*Editor's note; I have read a number of books on the Battle of Waterloo and I would rate this book as one of the best.*



**Captain J. L. M. White, DFC, Air Ace**

## THE RCAF's FIRST FLYING CASUALTY

**By F/O H. A. Halliday,  
RCAF Air Historian's Office**



This photo of F/L White was taken in August, 1924 at Camp Borden. Note that he is still wearing the old CAF uniform, even though the RCAF had come into being.

JOSEPH Leonard Maries White was one of Canada's leading aces of the Great War. With 31 victories he was Canada's eighth ranking fighter pilot, and twenty-first among British aces. He was born on January 6, 1897, and was educated in Halifax, being a student at Dalhousie University when the war broke out.

He enlisted in the Canadian Machine Gun Corps, but on September 22, 1917 he transferred to the Royal Flying Corps. After training at Reading and Shoreham, he was sent to 65 Squadron. White was taken on strength on April 3, 1918, at the height of the German offensive.

His first victory was on May 18, when he drove down an enemy plane out of control. The following day he drove a two seater down.

Guns jammed easily, so he fired only short bursts, until the enemy plane crashed. Another "kill" followed six days later.

On August 3, Lieutenant White was awarded the DFC, the citation reading as follows:

**"This officer is distinguished for his bravery and dash in action, never hesitating to attack, regardless of the enemy's numerical superiority. He has destroyed three enemy aircraft and driven down two out of control. In addition he has carried out most valuable reconnaissance service at low altitudes."**

The best was yet to come. On September 1, he was awarded a bar to his DFC, though it was not Gazetted until November. Even on the date of the actual award, White had exceeded the feats detailed in the citation. He shot down two

German planes on August 8—his first "double."

While leading a patrol of six Camels he attacked two Fokker D-VIIs. One went down in flames, while the pilot of the other lost control and crashed.

On the 9th, another victory fell to White. At this time, he and his squadron were also engaged in the less glamorous but equally dangerous and important job of ground strafing and reconnaissance.

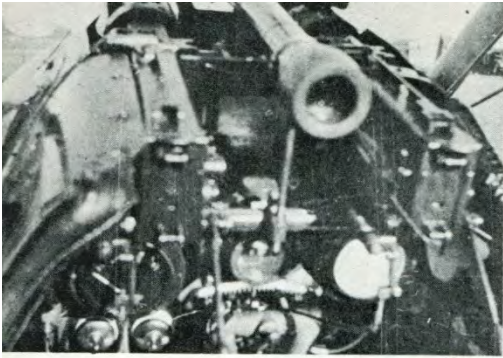
The fighting in Flanders was bitter, but in fact No. 65 was part of a bluff, for the British offensive was centered further south. There were, in fact, more German aircraft in Flanders than was warranted by either the number of British aircraft or the scale of the local thrusts.

Throughout October and early

While flying an instruction mission with a student in an Avro 504K like this model, F/L White met his death, in 1925. (Photo courtesy "Aircraft Camouflage & Markings, 1907-1954" published by Harleyford Publications Ltd, England.)







Typical cockpit of the Camel used by pilots like F/L White in World War I.

November the aerial fighting went on. Unlike its comrade, the army, the German Air Force was in *excellent* condition, with plenty of pilots, *skilled* leaders, and splendid machines. The dogfights were as hot as ever. Number 65's Camels, however, were a match for all comers, and with them White, promoted to Captain, continued to raise his score.

One of the classic air battles of the war was fought on October 14, when the Second Brigade RAF destroyed twenty-four German aircraft in aerial combat—a one day record for any single Brigade up to that date.

Captain White was leading an early morning patrol that day. At 10,000 feet he attacked eleven formidable D-VIIs. He attacked one and opened fire at twenty feet, but it spun away.

Another Camel was under attack, so White came to the rescue, firing 100 rounds into the nose of the Fokker. The German plunged down, pouring black smoke.

He then pounced on another Fokker from behind and fired three bursts. The Fokker turned on its back and part of its tail plane folded over. In spite of this, it was

able to right itself, but another burst sent it down to crash.

The original communique for that day credited White with one victory, but a few days later confirmation was obtained that the other two Fokkers had, in fact, crashed. Captain White had done the hat trick!

He was to repeat the performance on November 4, the last day of extensive combat before clouds and rain smothered the aerial war. White, by now, was an experienced patrol leader, having led twelve offensive patrols the previous month.

### Two-A-Day

That day he was leading a force composed of 65 and 204 Squadrons, when they came upon forty enemy scouts. He attacked one, shooting off the wings and tail. A Fokker began to shoot up his Camel, but White twisted around in a turn which only a Camel could make, opened fire, and sent the German down in flames.

For a few minutes he was kept busy with first one and then another enemy plane. A Fokker attacked him head on, and the two opened fire, playing "chicken" in the sky. Neither plane gave way, and White could feel his plane shake as bullets tore into the wings. Just as it seemed that a collision was inevitable the Fokker burst into flames and dropped away.

Six other German planes had been destroyed. On landing White discovered his plane to be damaged from nose to tail. For him, as for the air war itself, it was practically over.

Late in November, Captain White left 65 Squadron, and in January, 1919 he was made Chief



An early picture of F/L White taken during the war period. Note the mustache in the picture on preceding page, taken year before he died.

Instructor at No. 3 School of Aerial Gunnery. In April, 1919 he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre with Bronze Star. Finally, in August of that year, he returned to Canada.

Back in Canada, White joined the newly-formed Canadian Air Force, serving in and around Dartmouth, and taking an artillery course at Camp Borden in 1923. When the RCAF was formally organized on April 1, 1924, he entered the force as a permanent officer, and was posted, first to Ottawa, and then to Camp Borden as an instructor.

On 24 February, 1925, he was up in an Avro 504K with Flying Officer R. H. Cross, instructing the latter. Emerging from a cloud, he collided with a second Avro at about 1,000 feet. The second Avro was able to land safely, but White's machine crashed, and both he and Cross were killed. They were the first flying casualties of the RCAF. ■

At left is the S.E.5, a single-seat famous contemporary of the Camel, shown at right. In aircraft such as these, Canadians like F/L White chalked up significant World War I victories.





## Taber Alberta

German First World War 7.7cm Infanteriegeschütze L/27 (7.7-cm IG L/27), (Infantry Gun), (Serial Nr. 9383), no data. This gun stands beside the town cenotaph, opposite the Royal Hotel.

The 7.7cm IG (Infanteriegeschütz) L/27 was Krupp's third attempt at building an infantry support gun which could closely follow the infantry in attack and provide close support and anti-tank fire in defence. The gun was extensively modified compared to the standard field



gun. From observation some of the changes are: 1. the wheel diameter was reduced to about 1m. 2. the wheel track was reduced by about 30cm. 3. the axle was moved back about 30cm. 4. no axle tree seats were fitted. 5. the gun shield was designed so it could be removed easily and was narrower. 6. the cover over the recuperator spring adjuster was enlarged and hinged (the barrel could be removed by unlocking the spur under the barrel from the recoil assembly). 7. the gunner's and loader's seat brackets were a different design so they could be quickly removed. 8. there are brackets at the end of trail which originally held a counterweight required because the gun unbalanced because the axle had been moved back. 9. the spade is a different profile (TBC). Charlie Clelland.

**Artillery In Alberta** comes from the website belonging to **Harold Skaarup**  
[www.silverhawkauthor.com](http://www.silverhawkauthor.com)

The aim of this website is to locate, identify and document every historical piece of artillery preserved in Canada. Many contributors have assisted in the hunt for these guns to provide and update the data found on these web pages. Photos are by the author unless otherwise credited. Any errors found here are by the author, and any additions, corrections or amendments to this list of Guns and Artillery in Canada would be most welcome and may be e-mailed to the author at [hskaarup@rogers.com](mailto:hskaarup@rogers.com).

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 The SOCIETY

is a non-profit registered society which fosters the study of the military and the police, and the heritage of Canada, the British Empire, and the world as well as the preservation of military artifacts and records. The CMHS meets once every calendar month at:

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