

a church minister in Canada and later became a famous socialist MP. A biography of his life was published titled *William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie Radical*. There was an interesting reference to James in this book: "When war broke out, James, who had come to Canada and was working in a hardware store in the nearby town of Fort Francis, went to the recruiting office and joined the army. William worried that James did not really know what he was getting himself into, went to Fort Francis and obtained his brother's release ... James, however, promptly rejoined and was a member of the First Canadian Expeditionary Force. Irvine's attempt to prevent his brother's enlistment gave rise to the rumour that he was pro-German, and shortly after subjected to surveillance by the authorities. One Sunday evening after church, a secret service officer came to the manse and told Irvine that he had been in Ermo for a couple of weeks, had heard him preach four times and had heard him discussing matters in the street, and that his investigation was now concluded. He added: 'You've got some enemies in this town but I just wanted you to know that I'd been here and that I am giving you a clean sheet.'³

How must William have been feeling when the news came of his brother's disappearance?

By 26th April, Gravenstafel had been captured. Between 1st and 3rd May British forces withdrew to a new line – barely three miles from Ypres. Heavy

fighting continued and on 8th May the Germans seized ground on the Frezenberg Ridge, where desperate actions continued to 13th May.

In contrast to much of the experience on the Western Front, it was the defenders who suffered most heavily in this battle. The British loss included 59,000 souls, nearly double that suffered by the Germans. A fresh regular British brigade was put into an attack near St Julien. Around 2,400 men were mown down, a greater loss than had been paid for the loss of the Gallipoli beaches taking place on the same day. By the evening of the 25th, most of the Canadian Division was withdrawn into the reserve, having lost some 5,000 men.

Not long after in *The Shetland Times*, 19th June, 1915, Unst author Jessie M.E. Saxby wrote the following: "To Our Folks Gone Framm":- "How my heart had thrilled on the reading of the names of many Shetlanders in the lists of volunteers from the Colonies. Our Isles themselves have done well in that way, and there are few able bodied men at home. They are "au wede awa". But it is doubly gratifying to find that our folk gone framme are closely knit to the old land, and are willingly giving their lives to its service. What heroes have come to the flag from Canada, Australasia, New Zealand, South Africa, from everywhere. How proud we are of our Colonials!"

Saxby's summary was a laudable interpretation of the time

and stage of war. Within a few years, however, the assertiveness and independence of the Dominion nations grew further.

With the battle of Gallipoli on the same day as 2nd Ypres, an important moment was enshrined in Australian history. The relationship with Britain would change. Likewise, at Vimy Ridge just under two years later, Canadian national pride increased further. Defining moments for both countries during 1914-18. By 1918, self determination was a new concept throughout Europe. Likewise, for the Dominions, autonomy from Britain started to develop. ■

Acknowledgements and Sources:

Staff at Shetland Archives
Shetland Family History Society
Samuel Sjoberg, Great Great Nephew of James Irvine.
IWM Official History of the Great War, 1914-1918
5th Canadian Infantry Battalion, War Diary, April, 1915. Library and Archives, Canada.
8th Canadian Infantry Battalion, War Diary, April, 1915, Library and Archives, Canada.

Footnotes

1. *The Shetland Times*, August 19th, 1916.
2. *Canada in Flanders*, by Sir Max Aitken, MP. The Official Story of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, Vol 1. p97-98.
3. *The Life of a Prairie Radical* by William Irvine, Lormier, 1979.

Below: Front of the Menin Gate

