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What was the point?

Raiding in the Summer of 1917

Geoffrey Jackson

Canadian military historians have argued that through the Canadian Corps' flexibility and initiative, the Canadians had become the masters of trench raiding by 1917.¹ Raiding, so the argument goes, had a number of benefits. It gave the Canadian Corps an offensive *esprit de corps*, helped soldiers and junior officers escape the supposed monotony of trench warfare, seriously undermined German morale, and not the least, allowed the troops and Canadian headquarters to gain invaluable intelligence about enemy dispositions as well as familiarity with the terrain over which the Corps might soon be attacking.² However, raiding was also seen to carry with it certain costs, and at times the Canadian Corps frankly debated its usefulness. As Tim Cook noted in *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918*, while

Arthur Currie recognized the importance of raids in providing essential battle skills for his troops, he also knew the casualties sustained in these missions were taking out his best men. When he raised his concerns with Byng, the senior corps commander chided him for being too cautious...³

When Currie was promoted to lead the Canadian Corps in June of 1917,

Abstract: This article examines the effectiveness of raiding by the 4th Canadian Division in July and August 1917. The 4th Division carried out extensive raiding during this period, however, the raiding did not give the 4th Division any noticeable advantage when they attacked the city of Lens at the end of August. This paper concludes that raiding did not bring any benefit for the division.

he seemed to have at least temporarily cast aside his reservations about the cost of raiding, and during the next few months set an intensive raiding program for units.

A closer examination of the raiding program mounted by the 4th Division in the summer of 1917 shows that the operations undertaken, though successful in their own right, failed to generate many of these supposed benefits for the division's main attack on Lens launched in mid-August. In this instance, at least, it needs to be asked what was actually learned from the raids, and equally important, how was the information employed? This paper will argue that on the 4th Division front during July and August of 1917, even if individual attacks were successful, the overall benefit from raiding did not warrant the cost incurred.

From early 1916 onward, trench raiding had become a routine practice for the Canadian Corps. It was further

institutionalized in the winter of 1916-1917 when British General Headquarters ordered every British and dominion division to carry out at least two raids per month.⁴ This may have been done for intra-allied political considerations, so that Field Marshal Douglas Haig, commander-in-chief of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), could point to the large number of BEF raids as a rebuttal if the hard-pressed French complained of British "inactivity."⁵ That said, by the summer of 1917 not every division in the BEF took part in raiding operations. Notably, the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) had stopped mounting such attacks, having concluded that they generated little of military value. A company sergeant-major of the Australian 14th Battalion tersely summed up the Australian position: "Raids are not worth the cost, none of the survivors want to go anymore."⁶ The abandonment of raiding by an elite attacking formation like the AIF illustrates that not all BEF units viewed raiding as playing a significant role in achieving higher troop morale or gaining vital information about the Germans.

Nevertheless, senior officers of the Canadian Corps continued to give raiding a high priority during the summer of 1917, and this is essential context for the raids by 4th Division in the Hill 70/Lens

sector. Very large raids organized at the corps level using multiple brigades and battalions were launched in May and June as part of the Scarpe battles. Carefully planned, with the officers and men training over taped courses, these were broadly successful in the judgment of G.W.L. Nicholson, the CEF's official historian.⁷ One such "large" raid, executed around the same time period as the 4th Division's many raids on the Lens front, was launched on 23 July by the 3rd Division's 116th Battalion. The objective for this battalion-sized raid was the railway embankment in the southern section of Lens. The raid successfully reached the railway embankment where vicious fighting broke out. The Canadians succeeded in blowing up a series of dugouts and captured 53 prisoners before pulling back after 35 minutes. For its efforts, the 116th suffered 74 casualties.⁸ What useful information the raiders gleaned has not been looked at, however, as the 44th Battalion would discover a month later to the day, the formidable German defences around the railway embankment were still in place and undiminished. In practice, the Scarpe as well as the 116th Battalion operations constituted massive "one-off raids" – basically formal attacks followed by planned withdrawals. These were in sharp contrast to the more conventional "minor operations" (as the Canadian Corps referred to traditional-style



Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie, commander of the Canadian Corps (left) and Major-General David Watson, commander of 4th Canadian Division, both supported trench raids.

raids) which were planned and executed at the brigade and battalion level and sustained day-in and day-out, usually leading up to a major attack, the nature of the 4th Division operations that are the focus of the present study.

By the summer of 1917, Major-General David Watson had commanded the 4th Division through two major battles – the latter stages of the Somme and Vimy Ridge – as well as several lesser operations. The division and its commander fought capably in their first engagement, and also acquitted themselves rather well in the Vimy assault, considering

they faced the most difficult conditions of any of the corps' four divisions, and suffered the heaviest casualties. Nevertheless the infamous raid on Hill 145 mounted five weeks prior to Vimy, in which several of Watson's battalions were all but annihilated, has raised questions among historians as to the battlefield judgement of Watson and his GSO 1, Lieutenant-Colonel William Ironside, in 1917.⁹ Watson's meteoric rise from battalion to divisional commander in a matter of months spoke of his political connections and savvy as much or more than his operational performance. An outward self-confidence seems to have masked insecurities, with the result that Watson could be susceptible to pressure from above to get "results."¹⁰ For his part, Ironside was a brilliant young

British staff officer, but arrogant and ambitious. Watson relied on the more experienced professional as a mentor, which was precisely the reason why Ironside had been seconded to the newly formed 4th Division in the spring of 1916. But there was evidence Watson, though a quick learner who was clearly maturing as a field commander, still relied on his GSO1 too much, and at the wrong times, particularly considering the degree to which Ironside's ego and impetuosity could interfere with his own thinking. The result was that neither acted as a check on the other's decision-making. Quite

rightly, Watson saw his responsibility as carrying out higher orders – if ordered to raid by Currie, he would raid, and enthusiastically and unquestioningly. His command, the CEF's most junior division, would not be found wanting in élan.¹¹

The 4th Division was blessed with capable brigadiers, all hand-picked by Watson. The British regular leading the 10th, Edward Hilliam, was made of stern Imperial stuff, a "fighter" but also a man whose relationship with his Canadian subordinates steadily deteriorated until he eventually had to be replaced. The commanders of the 11th and 12th Brigades – Victor Odlum and James MacBrien – were Canadians, the former an energetic prewar militia officer and the latter a regular with staff officer training and a more stolid personality. They were the only men to command their

respective brigades in action during the war, leading them with distinction and much impressing Generals Byng and Currie in the process. As much or more than any other brigadier in the corps, Odlum was a disciple of raiding, having personally led many such operations during his time with the 7th Battalion, even while serving as its commanding officer. All three were personally loyal to Watson and respectful of Ironside's undeniable talents. Overall, the working relationship among brigade and divisional headquarters was a smooth one.¹²

Collectively, the 12 infantry battalions making up the division were ably commanded by experienced officers, as the fighting during the remainder of the war would confirm. But all the units had suffered heavy combat losses earlier in the year, and

were still integrating large numbers of junior officer, NCO and enlisted reinforcements into their ranks, a time-consuming process.¹³

Watson commanded in a collegial style, regularly seeking not only Ironside's opinion in particular, but also the views of his brigadiers, at least when matters directly affected them. By predisposition, and sometimes still by necessity, Ironside exercised greater "command" responsibilities than were normally associated with his position, namely the organization and coordination and a significant role in the operational control of the division. In the raiding on the Lens front, Watson was responding to orders from corps headquarters, those generally emanating from Currie's very capable chief of staff, Brigadier-General Percy Radcliffe. In consultation with Ironside, Watson

Lieutenant-Colonel William Ironside was the GSO 1 (senior staff officer) of 4th Canadian Division in 1917. Ironside, a young British officer, was considered brilliant but arrogant and ambitious. His views held great sway as Major-General Watson relied on him as a mentor.

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Major-General Watson was fortunate to have three capable brigadiers – Edward Hilliam of 10th Brigade (left), Victor Odlum of 11th Brigade (centre) and James MacBrien of 12th Brigade. These men were the only commanders of their respective brigades during the war and earned the respect of Watson, Byng and Currie.

would then issue directions to Hilliam, Odlum or MacBrien and their staffs to work out the specifics of the raids with the battalions tasked to carry them out, though the input from battalions seems to have been quite limited in practice throughout the corps. During July and the first three weeks of August, raids were dispatched into Lens from one or more of the 4th Division's battalions in an apparent rotation (all battalions participated) about every three days. After the raids, the "results" were collected by the battalion, forwarded to brigade and then to divisional headquarters where the intelligence acquired from all the raids was collated, classified and summarized. This information was then placed at the disposal of the divisional commander as well as the corps commander and his staff.¹⁴

Tim Cook has argued that within the Canadian Corps raiding became a very competitive activity. This growing competitiveness had detrimental effects, as both the plans and operations were rushed.¹⁵ While this may have been the general case for the Canadian Corps, during the summer of 1917 the 4th Division had a clear purpose in the upcoming operation at Lens, and had plenty of

time to organize and carry out raids. The raids examined here were not just thrown together to showcase specific units' skills or to keep the men in an aggressive frame of mind.

Foremost among the arguments for the usefulness of raiding put forward by the Canadian Corps was the acquisition of practical knowledge of the enemy-held territory over which the troops would advance during a main assault.¹⁶ This holds some truth, though through the diligent employment of existing maps, trench observation posts, and aerial reconnaissance the terrain was generally very well known. Nevertheless, it was still argued that the raiding troops would gain a better insight into the details of the Germans' trenches and gun positions. Raiding the forward German lines in front of Lens during July and August 1917 was done during both the hours of daylight and darkness.¹⁷ At night, with limited visibility, learning the lay of the land and the details of German defences would have been extremely difficult. During the day, the raiders also would have faced the obvious problem that attacking in broad daylight would bring – their own exposure – although they could at least clearly see the terrain

they were crossing. No records from these so-called "minor operations" – the Canadian Corps' euphemism for raiding – demonstrate that the 4th Division's raiders brought back any information of such importance that it warranted a change in overall plans, such as altering the axis of the main attack on Lens. The tactical realities of Lens and the infamous Green Crassier position dictated the direction of the attacks decided at brigade and divisional level, regardless of any information brought back by raiders.

At Lens, most tellingly, any information the raiders may have gained to familiarize the troops with the ground and enemy dispositions simply did not pay off. Almost immediately after the 4th Division launched its attack on 21 August there was confusion as to where to go, and the withering fire from the German defenders fighting from hidden pillboxes that raiding (and all other intelligence gathering for that matter) had failed to locate began to decimate the attackers.¹⁸ The 50th Battalion's effort to push into the ruins of the city was typical of the intelligence failure on the Lens front. The intelligence reports used by Lieutenant-Colonel Lionel

Page, commanding officer of the 50th Battalion, stated that the German front (Aloof Trench) was weakly held.¹⁹ Unfortunately for Page and his men, these reports were wrong and the 50th battalion ran into heavy German resistance. In the words of one signaller: "[The Germans] launched a powerful attack against our decimated ranks with such ferocity that [their] onslaught drove us back to our original position."²⁰ Another serious intelligence failure that occurred despite the extensive raiding and patrolling in Lens contributed to the selection of the wrong route for the 44th Battalion's attack on the Green Crassier two days later. Lieutenant-Colonel Reginald Davies had decided, based on supposedly sound raiding and scouting intelligence, that the chosen route to the Green Crassier was only lightly defended.²¹ Just the opposite was true. As the Canadians made their way to the Green Crassier, the route was defended by tunnels and hidden German pill boxes that had been built into the rubble of Lens. Hard fighting ensued and the Canadians were forced to fall back. The 44th Battalion suffered 260 casualties in its assault on the Green Crassier.²² These were far from the only examples of the vital questions that intelligence from raiding was supposed to answer, but had not. In summary, the raids mounted around Lens in the summer of 1917 did not gain information that helped Canadian commanders and staff officers understand how best to navigate the terrain in major assaults or how the enemy was deployed.

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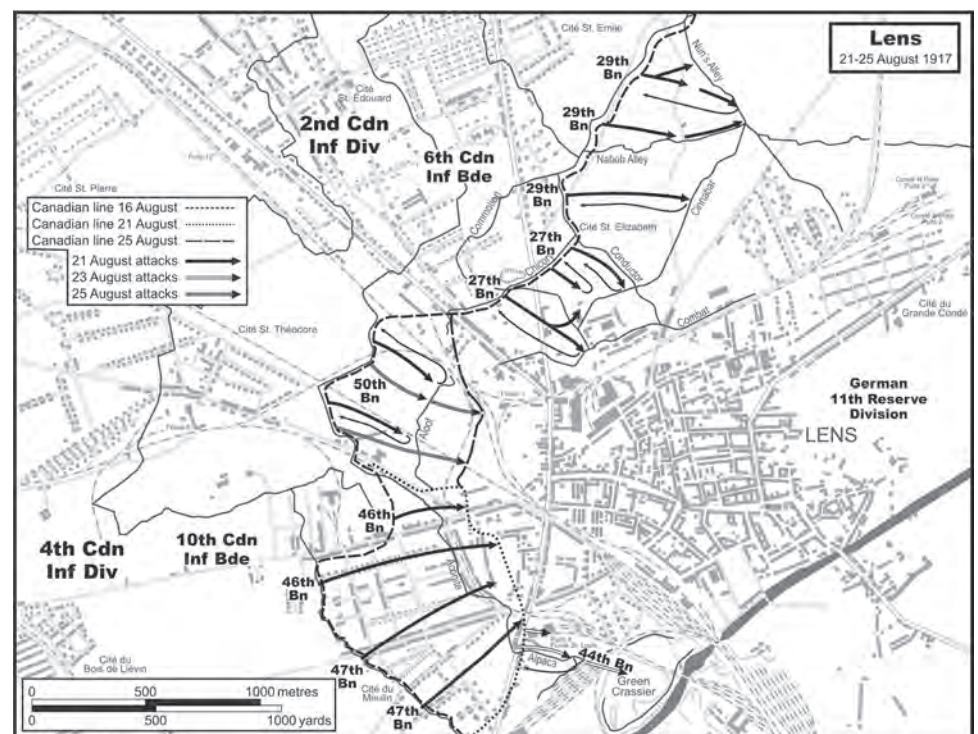
Another often hailed benefit of raiding was the acquisition of information, usually from prisoners, about enemy units, and in particular their strength, morale, and combat readiness. Yet how useful was this information? Through raiding and other forms of intelligence gathering,

the 4th Canadian Division believed they had identified the German units facing them, the 8th and 11th Reserve Divisions. Major-General Watson and his staff viewed the former as having very high fighting ability and morale, in contrast to the latter which they categorized as average.²³ Despite this assessment Watson and his staff did not alter their attack plan to take advantage of the sector held by the less effective division. In any case, the raiding and other forms of intelligence gathering were only partially right, as the German force opposing them in the Lens area actually consisted solely of the supposedly weaker 11th Reserve Division.²⁴

It has also been argued that one of the main goals of raiding was to keep the Germans "taut and nervous"²⁵ and that it "forced them to abandon their forward posts and patrolling, and limited their ability to detect attacks which was being prepared against them...keeping German morale low."²⁶ On the Lens front, however, the Germans, despite extensive Canadian raiding, were thoroughly prepared when the Canadian Corps launched its

attack, with their forward positions fully manned and their artillery accurately registered on the Canadian start line. The assault companies of the 50th Battalion had to endure a savage German bombardment for 25 minutes before even commencing their attack.²⁷ The Canadians then met stiff resistance from the forward-most German posts whose machine guns had bloody effect. Overall, out of five Canadian battalions that attacked on 21 August, only two reached their planned objectives – the German front lines – after a full day of fighting, and the other three had to return to their jumping off points.²⁸ Though the claim that raiding was effective at lowering the German frontline troops' morale is impossible to measure, it was irrelevant in the Lens case. The 11th Reserve Division had been replaced by the elite 1st Guards Reserve Division on 20 August, a development the Canadians were unaware of until their attack commenced less than 24 hours later.²⁹

Another benefit claimed for raiding was that it stopped the Germans from sending out their own raids and reconnaissance patrols,



Map drawn by Mike Bechthold ©2010

and thus helped to mask Canadian activities. However, historian Bill Rawling, who argues that raiding was aggressively pursued by both sides over the course of the war, states that: “[German] raids continued even as the Canadians became more active in trying to gain information for upcoming offensives.”³⁰ This held true on the 4th Division’s front during the summer of 1917. Even with the Canadian artillery pummeling the German front lines, and the division carrying out a very aggressive raiding program, the Germans were still actively patrolling no-man’s-land as confirmed by the 38th Battalion war diary.³¹ Raiding was supposed to gather vital information, and the German dugouts often contained maps and other documents that in Canadian hands would help the corps plan its assaults more effectively. Raiders were also under orders to bring back prisoners who could be interrogated on everything from issues bearing on the upcoming battle to how the German home front was coping with the demands of the war.³² A raid by the 75th Battalion illustrated the importance placed on capturing prisoners. As the war diary recorded matter-of-factly:

A raid on the front line was carried out by the platoons under Lieuts. Brunton and Bradfield on the

morning of the 9th. The object of this raid was to secure a prisoner for identification purposes [and] the raiders brought back two...³³

Though the diary mentions that the battalion suffered casualties, it does not say how many. The purpose of the raid was to gain information from prisoners, information which had already been acquired from earlier raids, and which was unlikely to alter the plans one way or another during the final days before the main assault. In the lead up to the Lens attack, the raiders did acquire German documents and maps, but these did not change the plans that had been laid out in mid-July – before the raiding had even commenced.

* * * * *

It was argued during the war – and continues to be argued – that raids were justified for enhancing the attacking soldiers’ élan and thus strengthening the Canadian Corps’ battlefield prowess. Senior officers thought that junior officers and other ranks would become bored and restless with the monotony of trench life, and raiding was something that would break this up.³⁴ Raiding demanded a lot of initiative, fitness, and bravery as the raiders had to enter the enemy’s lines, either sabotage German trenches or grab something of

importance for Canadian intelligence, and flee before the enemy had time to respond. On 28 July the 87th Battalion carried out a raid against the 11th Reserve Division for identification purposes. After a sharp skirmish, in which three Canadians were killed and four wounded, the patrol returned with neither useful German documents nor prisoners.³⁵ One is hard pressed to see how this raid could have raised the confidence of the men in the 87th Battalion. With an approaching large scale offensive, moreover, the “monotony of trench life” should not have set in on this front, as the troops had only been moved into their positions in mid-July.³⁶ Instead of sending a constant stream of raids into the German lines, these soldiers, a great many of them replacements for the division’s heavy losses at Vimy Ridge, would surely have benefited more by focusing on preparations for the main assault.

The number of troops assigned to a particular raid during the summer of 1917 varied, usually from eight to 30 men. In what was typical for the organization of small raids at the time, on 29 July the 54th Battalion sent out a party comprising one non-commissioned officer, two riflemen, two rifle grenadiers and three bombers.³⁷ A larger raid would have committed a force of about 30 men led by a lieutenant but

Canadian soldiers examine concrete German gun positions in the destroyed suburbs of Lens following the battle.



otherwise would have been made up of similar proportions of NCOs, bombers, grenadiers and riflemen. In August, when the attack on Hill 70 was approaching, the raiding parties of the 4th Division progressively grew in the attempt to confuse the Germans as to where the corps' main thrust would fall. The 87th Battalion, for instance, launched a company sized raid on 12 August.³⁸

Some raids might suffer no casualties at all, such as one on 12 August by the 38th Battalion, though this was a rarity.³⁹ Examination of the war diaries of the battalions of the 4th Division confirms that the raiding parties usually suffered five or six casualties, though there are instances of much heavier losses. An 87th Battalion raid on 1 August miscarried when the Germans became aware of its presence and dropped gas shells on top of the men, inflicting eleven casualties.⁴⁰ In another instance, from the 102nd Battalion's war diary: "a raiding party proceed[ed] up the road ...the crater was entered and their [sic] in successfully bombed, but the lip of the crater facing the wrong way we had no cover and were compelled by heavy machine gun and rifle fire to withdraw."⁴¹ The casualties suffered were four other ranks killed and seven wounded.⁴²

During July and the first three weeks of August, raids were dispatched into Lens by one or more of the 4th Division's 12 infantry Battalions about every three days. One private boasted before the attack that "we even know the names of the streets we are to march up and the actual houses we are to mop up" but the troops were mistaken in their belief they had a good feel for the lay



A German bunker near Lens, photographed in September 1917.

of the land.⁴³ Soldiers sent to scout the route that the 44th Battalion would take into Lens and up the Green Crassier reported back that the route was relatively clear of Germans.⁴⁴ Four days later, when the 44th Battalion attacked on this "relatively clear route," it turned out that the scouts had been wrong. Allen Hart, a private in the battalion, recounted after the war how unprepared they were for the attack into Lens and up the Green Crassier – "Well of course everything was anything but lovely because these boys got over there and it was – it was no small show, it was a big show, and it hadn't been realized how big an undertaking it was..."⁴⁵ The 44th Battalion was involved in vicious street fighting where they suffered 260 casualties.⁴⁶ The disastrous attacks into Lens and against the Green Crassier demonstrated that the intelligence from all sources, including raiding, was a failure, and that many enemy strong points had in fact not been located.

* * * * *

Historians have argued that "by raiding and patrolling, the Canadians experimented with

new battle theories and tactics [and that] it was the trench patrol and raid that became the laboratory of battle."⁴⁷ Perhaps this was true on quiet fronts in the long months between major operations. It stretches credibility, however, that while preparing for an imminent assault by three of the corps' divisions there would be tactical experimentation.⁴⁸ None of the war diaries, operational orders, or directives from battalion, brigade, and divisional commands

mention anything about raiding being intended to generate new tactics or ideas that would be employed in the assault on Lens. Rather the documentation exclusively concerns intelligence gathering.⁴⁹

In the summer of 1917, intelligence gained from a number of different sources made the information raiders brought back less significant. Gathering information on the enemy's forward defences came from a wide range of sources including existing maps, aerial observation, interviews with local citizens, diligent forward observers, the experiences of BEF units previously engaged in the same sector, "quiet" patrolling, the interception of German wireless messages, in addition to raiding.⁵⁰ Confirmation, for example, that the preparatory shelling severely disrupted the Germans' front line defences came from intercepted wireless communications: "the British [sic] by destructive fire lasting for four weeks have turned the foremost German positions into a shell hole area like Flanders."⁵¹ Of course, these results had also been picked up by aerial photography. Raiding confirmed such reports, at the cost of unnecessary casualties, and seemed



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Aerial photographs, such as this composite image of the northern half of Lens taken on 9 August 1917, provided a great deal of essential intelligence for the Canadian Corps.

like a high risk activity compared to other more passive intelligence-gathering methods.

Most historians agree that raiding was an inherently limited activity, in the sense that raids could not penetrate very far into enemy lines, usually only reaching the Germans' first line of defence. In an area such as Lens, the pulverized ruins of a small city, it was especially difficult for raiding troops to find their way. Getting useful information from beyond the front lines by raiding alone would have been very challenging. At best, the information gathered from raids could only be of limited use, since the 4th Division's assault was planned to press much farther into Lens than raiders had been able to reconnoitre.

The 4th Division's raids may have been more effective in contributing to

the formation's mission to deceive the German defenders into believing that the primary assault would be on Lens rather than Hill 70, where the 1st and 2nd Divisions were in fact to make main effort a few days before the 4th Division's attack on Lens. Fourth Division strived mightily to attract the enemy's attention to Lens, placing dummy tanks in the sector facing the town, subjecting the town to heavier artillery shelling than Hill 70, and sending more raids into Lens than the surrounding areas.⁵² As many historians have argued, artillery played a crucial role in the Canadian Corps' success throughout the Great War. Hill 70 and Lens were no different.⁵³ In interviews conducted after the attack, German prisoners often mentioned how fierce the machine gun barrage or artillery bombardments had been,

but were silent on the raiding.⁵⁴ As Major-General Edward Morrison, commander of the Canadian Corps field artillery, subsequently wrote of the role his guns had played in convincing the Germans that the main attack was Lens: "to our great satisfaction the enemy put down a tremendous barrage in front of Lens and Avion...He was entirely outmanoeuvred...and by the time the Germans realized their mistake the attacking troops [at Hill 70] were in their final objective."⁵⁵ The raids could only have confirmed the Germans in their misapprehension that the main attack would be against Lens, but the after-action interviews leave little doubt that the artillery bombardment was the key to the successful deception.⁵⁶

Certainly the Lens sector was a unique situation for raiding in the

Canadian Corps' history. The 4th Division's attack into the town on 21-24 August demonstrated that fighting in the ruins of a built-up area posed daunting challenges, and underscored the unique difficulties that the raiding program in that same area had encountered.⁵⁷ Yet, the raids carried out in July and August *were* viewed as being successful, and not just by the 4th Division's own commanders. The participating soldiers did not report difficulties different from those encountered in raids carried out over other types of ground. They were confident about the intelligence gleaned from their prisoners and the other information they brought back from their forays into German lines. A 12th Infantry Brigade report that "daylight raids were [sent] out from 72nd Bn., and gained valuable information as to the enemy defences and his method of holding the line opposite our front" was typical of opinion on the utility of the raids.⁵⁸ This confidence demonstrates that the raids were working as the Canadians intended. The disappointing results of the 4th Division's main attacks starkly illustrate that the "valuable information" the 12th Brigade had received was an illusion.

One reason why the raiding might have been ineffective on the Lens front is that the information gathered may have been misinterpreted. Though the war diaries and after-battle reports do not mention the underlying purpose of these raids,

documents at the divisional and corps level confirm that it was thought success at Hill 70 would rely to a significant degree on the 4th Division misleading the Germans into believing that the main thrust of the coming Canadian attack was going to be directed at Lens.⁵⁹ Perhaps the meaning of the intelligence gathered on other issues (such as how well defended Lens was, how booby-trapped the rubble and how disorienting navigating through the town would be for the attackers) was ignored in pursuit of the overarching goal for the raids: trying to confuse the Germans about where the main thrust of the Canadian Corps' assault would fall. Concerned that the 4th Division's feinting role succeed, corps headquarters may have been focusing on certain questions about Lens and misinterpreting, downplaying or even ignoring other information that had been gathered which would have been important for the second phase of operations, the attack on Lens itself.

By 1917, raiding was an activity most of the BEF engaged in religiously – only the Australians considered raiding ineffective. Analyzing the multitude of raids carried out in the summer of 1917 in front of Lens shows that for the most part the actual operations were successfully carried out.⁶⁰ In sum, however, most of the intelligence gained through raiding was either of little importance, redundant or obtainable by alternative means. In some cases

it was actually misleading, causing overconfidence among the attackers when the main assault went in. As for disrupting the Germans, one is forced to conclude that the raiding program had no great effect.

This paper solely analyzes a six-week raiding campaign carried out by the 4th Division of the Canadian Corps at Lens in 1917. To establish if these conclusions have validity over a longer period – in other words, that raiding did not serve as vital a role in the CEF as much of the historical wisdom asserts, and that there would have been few adverse effects on the corps' operational effectiveness if it had been reduced or perhaps even eliminated – would require a far more extensive study of raiding operations. What is clear, however, is that the paradigm that raiding was a worthwhile activity must be questioned, as Canadian military historians have recently begun to do. Yet arguments that there was a cult of competitiveness in the Canadian Corps and that raids lost their effectiveness because of increasingly reckless behaviour do not seem relevant in this particular study. The 4th Division raids were carefully planned and carried out with specific goals in mind over a period of weeks. They were viewed as successful, and the information garnered from the raiders was used – it just happened to have had very little of value. It is worth noting that in the summer of 1918, the Canadian Corps did not partake in raiding leading up

A shell bursts in the outskirts of Lens, August 1917.



to one of its most successful attacks, the battle of Amiens. Instead, it was felt that the element of surprise would bring much more benefit for the attacking Canadians than any information raiding would have gleaned about, or the chaos it would have sewn in, the enemy's forward defences. The extensive employment of raiding in the Lens sector proved of marginal use and the resources and effort expended could have been channelled into different preparations which would have been more beneficial to the Lens operation's success. Perhaps in the end the raids of the 4th Division in the summer of 1917 did not matter.

Notes

1. See Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918* (Toronto: Viking, 2008), pp.59-61, Andrew Godefroy, "A Lesson in Success: the Calonne Trench Raid 17 January 1917," *Canadian Military History* 8, no.2 (1999), and Kenneth Radley, *We Lead Others Follow: First Canadian Division 1914-1919* (Toronto: Vanwell Publishing, 2006) p.369.
2. Dan Jenkins, "The Other Side of the Hill: Combat Intelligence in the Canadian Corps," *Canadian Military History* 10, no.2 (2001), pp.7-26.
3. Cook, *Shock Troops*, p.61.
4. Bill Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p.102.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
6. Peter Pedersen, *The Anzacs: Gallipoli to the Western Front* (Victoria: Penguin, 2007), p.122.
7. G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force: The Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War 1914-1918* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1964), pp.279-283.
8. *Ibid.*, p.287.
9. Patrick Brennan, "Major-General David Watson: A Critical Appraisal of Canadian Generalship in the Great War," contained in Andrew Godefroy, ed., *Great War Commands: Historical Perspectives on Canadian Army Leadership 1914-1918* (Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2010), p.122.
10. *Ibid.*, p.122.
11. *Ibid.*, p.123.
12. *Ibid.*, p.124.
13. *Ibid.*, p.124.
14. David Love, *A Call to Arms: The Organization and Administration of Canada's Military in World War One* (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1999), p.14.
15. Cook, *Shock Troops*, p.61.
16. Godefroy, "A Lesson in Success," p.25.
17. Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 9 III C I vol.3850 folder 61, file 1, Lens: Main file: Army and Flank Corps.
18. LAC, RG 9 III C 1, vol. 3851 folder 63, file 9, Report on Operations by 50th Battalion from August 17th/18th to August 25th/26th, 1917, 27 August 1917.
19. *Ibid.*, 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade Operations, c. September 1917.
20. Victor Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion in No Man's Land* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2000), p.139.
21. LAC, RG 9 III C 1, vol. 3850 folder 62, file 4, Report on the Attack on the 'Green Crassier' by the 44th Canadian Infantry, 23 August 1917.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, folder 61, file 1 G.435/25-15-1, Canadian Corps Scheme of Operations, 26 July 1917. Precisely how they determined the morale of the German divisions was not spelled out in the report.
24. LAC, RG 9 III C 3, vol. 4041 folder 25, file 2, "Appreciation of Enemy's Defences and Disposition around Hill 70," 19 July 1917.
25. Tim Cook, "'A Proper Slaughter': The March 1917 Gas Raid at Vimy Ridge," *Canadian Military History* 8, no.2 (1999), p.9.
26. Godefroy, "A Lesson in Success," p.26.
27. LAC, RG 9 III C 1, vol. 3851 folder 63, file 9, Report on Operations by 50th Battalion from August 17th/18th to August 25th/26th, 1917, 27 August 1917.
28. Geoffrey Jackson, "Anything but lovely: The Canadian Corps at Lens in the Summer of 1917," *Canadian Military History* 17, no. 1(2008), p.9.
29. Geoffrey Jackson, "Hill 70 and Lens, the Forgotten Battles: The Canadian Corps in the Summer of 1917" (unpublished MSS thesis, University of Calgary, 2007), p.53.
30. Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare*, p.101.
31. LAC, RG 9 III D 3, vol. 4938, War Diary (WD), 38th Battalion, 1 August 1917.
32. Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare*, p.112.
33. LAC, RG 9 III D 3, vol. 4943, WD, 75th Battalion, 9 August 1917.
34. Cook, "'A Proper Slaughter,'" p.9.
35. LAC, RG 9 III D 3, vol. 4945, WD, 87th Battalion, 28 July 1917.
36. LAC, RG 24 vol. 1832, file G.A.Q.
37. LAC, RG 9 III D 3, vol. 4847, WD, 54th Battalion, 29 July 1917.
38. *Ibid.*, vol. 4945, WD, 87th Battalion, 12 August 1917.
39. *Ibid.*, vol. 4723, WD, 38th Battalion, 31 July 1917.
40. *Ibid.*, vol. 4945, WD, 87th Battalion, 1 August 1917.
41. *Ibid.*, vol. 4967, WD, 102nd Battalion, 5 August 1917.
42. The war diaries do not mention the size of the 102nd Battalion's raid, but do specify that the raiders came from D Company.
43. LAC, MG 30 E 488, William C. Morgan Papers, diary, 24 July 1917.
44. LAC, RG 9 III C 1, vol. 3851, folder 63, File 9, "4th Canadian Division Operation Order No. 52," 19 August 1917.
45. RG 41 B III 1, vol. 10, 44th Battalion, Allen Hart interview
46. LAC, RG 9 III C 1, vol. 3850 folder 62, file 4, Report on the Attack on the "Green Crassier" by the 44th Canadian Infantry, 23 August 1917.
47. Cook, *Shock Troops*, p.54.
48. The troops leading up the attacks on Hill 70 and Lens spent time practicing new tactics outlined in a document that had been issued by then Lieutenant-General Julian Byng specifically for the Canadian Corps. "Notes on the Attack" released in May, covered the training needed for success in the "modern" attack. It should be noted that the tactical innovations that were mentioned in this document were also being implemented by the BEF. LAC, RG 9, III C3, vol.4028, folder 17, file 20, "Notes on the Attack," 21 May 1917.
49. LAC, RG 9 III D 3, vol. 4943, WD, 75th Battalion, 9 August 1917.
50. LAC, RG 9 III C 3, vol. 4026 folder 11, file 10, "German Wireless Extract," 20 August 1917.
51. *Ibid.*
52. LAC, RG 9 III C 1, vol. 3850 folder 61, file 4, "Artillery Appreciation of the situation with reference to proposed attack on Hill 70," 11 July 1917.
53. On why artillery was so crucial both Cook, *Shock Troops* and Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare* offer excellent arguments.
54. LAC, RG 9 III C 1, vol. 3940 folder 43, file 1, "Employment of Machine-guns at Hill 70," c. August 1917.
55. Edward Morrison, "Vimy and Hill 70," *Toronto Star Weekly*, 24 April 1928.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Jackson, "'Anything but lovely.'"
58. LAC, RG 9 III D 3, vol. 4938, WD, 12th Infantry Brigade, 5 August 1917.
59. LAC, RG 9 III C 1, vol. 3850 folder 61, file 4, "Artillery Appreciation of the situation with reference to proposed attack on Hill 70," 11 July 1917.
60. "Successful" meaning the attack plan was carried out, and with acceptable casualties, not that valuable intelligence was necessarily gleaned.

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