

Sir Edwin Alderson

Sir Edwin Alfred Harvey Alderson (1859-1927) served with Canadian forces during the First World War from 1914 until his removal from field command in 1916 in the wake of a calamitous command failure at St Eloi.

An infantryman by training Alderson's real enthusiasm however was for the cavalry, publishing in 1900 *Pink and Scarlet, or Hunting as a School for Soldiering*. The First World War offered few opportunities for cavalry action however. Alderson, a Lieutenant-General, was himself handed command of the 1st Canadian Division in September 1914 comprised of 33,000 officers and men upon its arrival in Britain.

Alderson's division suffered during the first German gas attack at Second Ypres on 24 April 1915, the Canadians situated north-east of Ypres. The German forces gained ground against the unprotected Canadian troops, although fighting was fierce, spreading far south to Hill 60.

With the novelty of gas warfare wearing off (its initial use coming two days earlier against French Algerian and territorial division troops), advancing German infantry sustained heavy losses from the defending Canadians, who were relieved by British troops on 3 May. During this time the Canadians had suffered heavily, with 5,975 casualties, including 1,000 fatalities.

In September the same year Alderson was promoted to command of the newly-formed Canadian Corps. However Alderson's performance at St Eloi the following April (where Canadian forces were decimated by their own artillery barrage, suffering some 1,300 casualties), in addition to a public disagreement with Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence Sam Hughes over performance of the Ross rifle, led to his effective removal, moved instead to the largely ceremonial post of Inspector-General of the Canadian Corps.