



Private John Joseph Adams (Number 716001) of the 87<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Canadian Grenadier Guards), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Écoivres Military Cemetery, Mont St-Éloi: Grave reference III. K. 4..

(Right: *The image of the Canadian Grenadier Guards cap badge – and of its British counterpart – is from the Regimental Rogue web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of both labourer and shoemaker, John Joseph Adams appears to have left behind him no indication in his files of his departure from Harbour Grace in the Dominion of Newfoundland to Sydney, Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, in March 1916 this his recorded place of residence.

However, it was in the town of Truro that John Joseph Adams enlisted on March 16 of 1916, two days before presenting himself for medical examination\*. On the day of his enlistment he was attached to the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) which was based in Truro and, twelve days later, underwent the formality of being... *finally approved and inspected* by the officer commanding the unit, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Innes.

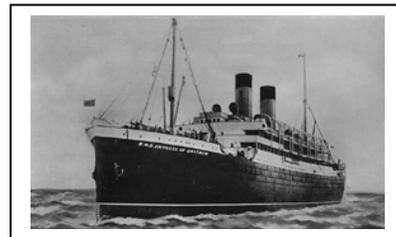
*\*Somewhat curiously, his original attestation papers are dated May 29, some two months later. This is surely an error...*

The following four months were to be spent in training in Truro\* – although a private diary of one of the recruits records that... *no barracks, parade ground or firing range, the men were living in hotels, the YMCA, or at home... training consisted mainly of shovelling snow and marching.*

*\*Two further companies were based in Pictou and Springhill.*

Six days after writing his will in which he bequeathed his all to his mother - on July 15, 1916 - Private Adams and the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion embarked onto the requisitioned Canadian Pacific Steamship Company's vessel – thus His Majesty's Transport – *Empress of Britain* in the harbour at Halifax.

Private Adams and his unit were not sailing alone: on board were also the 93<sup>rd</sup> and 105<sup>th</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry, the 5<sup>th</sup> Draft of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, the 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Regiment (*Halifax Rifles*), plus the 8<sup>th</sup> Draft of 'C' Battery of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery. *Empress of Britain* cleared Canadian waters later on that same day.



(Right above: *The image of the Empress of Britain is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries.*)

Apparently it was a rough voyage and the food poor – not that many of those aboard would have had much of an appetite. The weather may account for the long voyage as it was not until ten days after having sailed that the *Empress* docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool. From there the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion was transported by train to the large Canadian military complex based at *Shorncliffe*, just southwards down the Dover Straits from the English-Channel town of Folkestone, in the county of Kent.



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(Preceding page: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 2016*)

About four weeks later, Private Adams fell ill and was admitted into the Moore Barracks Canadian Military Hospital at the Lower Dibgate Camp, this also a part of the Shorncliffe complex. There he remained from August 20 until September 8, at least a part of the time in isolation, before being discharged *to duty* on the latter date. He had been suffering with a case of the measles.

The 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion was soon absorbed into another Canadian unit, the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia*) and thus, on October 5, Private Adams found himself transferred not only to a new force, but also to a new camp, *Caesar's Camp\**, once again a subsidiary of the *Shorncliffe* establishment.

*\*Thought to be the site of Julius Caesar's camp after his crossing of the Dover Straits to invade Britain.*

It was to be a short-lived transfer as, on November 14 of 1916, Private Adams was despatched for *active service* to the Continent. On the day of his departure, that same November 14, he was again transferred, on paper, to the 87<sup>th</sup> Battalion and, on ship, from England to France, likely taking passage from nearby Folkestone to Boulogne, the French port on the opposite coast some two hours' sailing-time distant.



(Right above: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)

(Right: *The French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



His next stop on the following day was Le Havre, an industrial port-city on the estuary of the River Seine, in the vicinity of which the Canadians had established their General Base Depot. There he was temporarily *taken on strength* to await orders to join the parent unit of his new battalion *in the field*.



(Right: *The French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Those orders appear to taken more than three weeks to be issued as it was not until December 10 that he was ordered to his unit – one of a reinforcement draft of two-hundred twenty-one despatched from the Base Depot. Private Adams and his draft reported *to duty* three days afterwards, on December 13, 1916, at a time when the 87<sup>th</sup> Battalion was in reserve at Fréwillers, to the north-west of the city of Arras.

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The 87<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Canadian Grenadier Guards*) was a component of the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian 4<sup>th</sup> Division, the last such Canadian formation to see service on the Continent and the Western Front\*. The Division had arrived in France in August of 1916 whereupon it was sent to serve for up to two months in areas in which units of the first three Canadian Divisions had already been serving and which they were about to cede to troops from the British Isles.

*\*A Canadian 5<sup>th</sup> Division was assembled but it remained in the United Kingdom to act as a reserve formation.*

These now-arriving British units were by this time in need of re-organization and re-enforcement after the efforts and losses experienced since July 1 after the British offensive at *the Somme* had begun so disastrously\*. On the other hand, the newly-arrived Canadians at times seemed eager to take their place.

*\*One of these units was the Newfoundland Regiment (see below), of the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division, which was to spend some ten weeks based in the ruins of Ypres itself before being returned to the Somme.*

The months of August and September in Belgium were a relatively quiet time, so it presented to the units of the Canadian 4<sup>th</sup> Division a good opportunity to quickly absorb the finer points of the rigours, routines – and perils - of trench warfare\*\*.

*\*\*During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, perhaps a hundred metres or so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.*



*Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.*

*(Right above: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration)*

Towards the end of September and the beginning of October, the battalions of the Canadian 4<sup>th</sup> Division were withdrawn from the front to undergo training for the battle that was soon to come. Thus, two months after disembarking on the Continent, the new arrival was to follow the three senior Canadian divisions, making its way south to the area of *the Somme*, there to play a role in the ongoing British offensive.



(Preceding page: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcelette – photograph from 2015*)

By that September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault costing the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in a span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

On that first day of *1<sup>st</sup> Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the *1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment* which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at *Beaumont-Hamel*.

As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of *Flers and Courcelette*.

It was during the last days of September that the Canadian *4<sup>th</sup> Division* – this including the *87<sup>th</sup> Battalion* - began to move towards the theatre of operations at *the Somme*, but it was not until October 10 that it, the *87<sup>th</sup> Battalion*, arrived at *Brickfields Camp (la Briqueterie)* in the outskirts of the provincial town of *Albert*, much of the latter part of the move effected on foot.

(Right: *Canadian soldiers at work in Albert, the already-damaged basilica in the background – from Illustration*)

It was then a further week before... *Battalion took over right sector of trenches in front of Courcelette, facing Regina Trench, preparatory to an attack, relieving the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion (87<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary, excerpt from entry of October 17).*

The attack on the German *Regina Trench* system went in on October 21... The Regina Trench was captured at 12.15 P.M., a strong screen thrown out in front, the trench bombed and blocked for fifty yards on our right, and a strong point established...in advance of our front... *During the attack and the two following days there were 281 casualties, all ranks, including all but one of the Officers who took part in the attack. (Excerpt from 87<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary).*

(Right above: *Regina Trench Cemetery and some of the area surrounding it, finally wrested from the Germans by Canadian troops in November of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)

(continued)



The Germans later re-took the position which was not definitively captured by the Canadians until November 10-11, three weeks later.

(Right: *Wounded at the Somme being transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from Le Miroir*)



Relieved on October 23 the remnants of the 87<sup>th</sup> Battalion withdrew. The depleted unit was then to spend the following weeks at first at Pozières before moving into billets in the town of Albert.

However, it was soon to be ordered to deliver a second attack, on November 18 – days after the official end of 1<sup>st</sup> Somme - against German positions in much the same area as previously. On this occasion the casualty count, all told, was a further two-hundred thirty-eight.



(Right above: *Burying Canadian dead on the Somme, likely at a casualty clearing station or a field ambulance – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)

This was to be the Battalion's last infantry action at *the Somme*. On November 22 it began to withdraw from the area by a semi-circular itinerary to the west before turning north to pass to the west of the city of Arras and then beyond. Marching during a twelve-day period, the unit arrived at Frévilleers on December 4.

It was on December 13, nine days afterwards, while the Battalion was still at Frévilleers, that Private Adams and his draft reported *to duty*.

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And it was in this same area that the 87<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to spend the winter of 1916-1917, once more enduring life in – and out of – the trenches. Private Adams was to be exempted from that routine for a total of four days when he was seconded to the 67<sup>th</sup> Canadian Pioneer Battalion, from January 28 until February 1, for an undisclosed reason.



(Right above: *Canadian Pioneer troops at work road-building, although whether this is the work that Private Adams did during his few days of service with the 67<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Battalion has not been documented. – from Le Miroir*)

On March 19 the 87<sup>th</sup> Battalion had begun another tour in the front line. The Battalion War Diary entry for each of seven successive days comprises only the number of casualties incurred. It is likely that most were due to the enemy's artillery action or to his snipers but, of course, one cannot be absolutely sure.



The entry for March 21, 1917, in its entirety, reads simply as follows: *4 men killed, 4 men wounded.*

(Right above: *Canadian troops moving up to the front lines during the winter of 1916-1917 – from Le Miroir*)

The son of James Adams, fisherman, and of Julia Adams (née *Griffin*, deceased May 14, 1919), he was brother to Francis-Joseph (Number 41452, Gunner of the Canadian Field Artillery), and possibly to James and to Margaret.

John Joseph Adams had enlisted at the *apparent* age of eighteen years: date of birth in Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, January 16, 1898.



(Right above: *The photograph of Private Adams is from a web-site entitled – A Short History and Photographic record of 106<sup>th</sup> Overseas Battalion C.E.F.*)

Private John Joseph Adams was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

