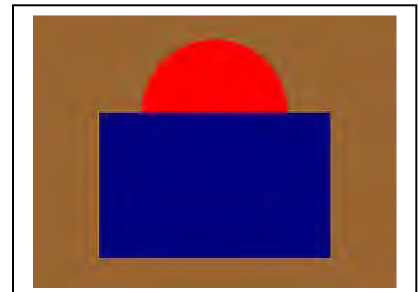


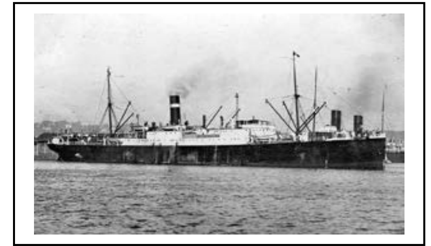
Private James Bray Anthony (Number 2075662) of the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Wood Cemetery, Marcelcave: Grave reference B 5.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 24th Battalion* (*Victoria Rifles*) *is from the Wikipedia web-site*.)

(continued)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *driver* (of *what* seems not to be documented), James Bray Anthony – with his parents and seven siblings - had immigrated from the Dominion of Newfoundland to Canada in or about the year 1898, his father finding work in Montreal with the *Great Trunk Railway* as a driller.

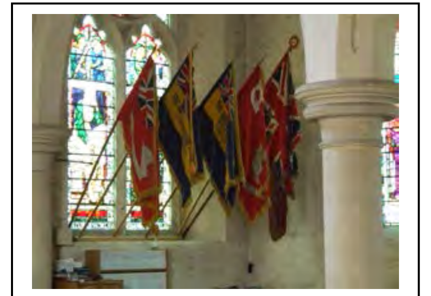
It was also in Montreal that, some twenty years later, he presented himself for medical examination at the Number 4 Mobilization Centre, enlisted and attested all on the same September 18, 1917. On that day again he was taken on strength by the 2nd Reinforcing Company of the 5th Regiment, Royal Highlanders of Canada.



It was a mixed bag of military personnel that embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Sicilian* in the harbour at Halifax, Nova Scotia, on or just prior to October 22, 1917: the Canadian Mounted Rifles Depot and the 12th Draft of a Canadian Army Medical Corps unit were both to take passage to the United Kingdom with the single non-commissioned officer and sixty-four *other ranks* of Private Anthony's detachment of the 5th Royal Highlanders of Canada.

Sailing on that same October 22, it was to be ten days before *Sicilian* docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool.

(Right above: *The photograph of the Allan Lines vessel Sicilian is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site*.)



From there the draft was transported to the Canadian military complex which by that time had been established in the vicinity of the villages of Liphook and Bramshott – the latter community lending its name to the ensemble - in the southern English county of Hampshire, for further training and organization. To that end the draft was attached upon arrival on November 2 to the Canadian 20th Reserve Battalion.

Private Anthony was to remain at Camp Bramshott for some five-and-a-half months.

(Right above: *Royal Canadian Legion flags amongst others adorn the interior of St. Mary's Church in the English village of Bramshott.* – photograph from 2016)

It was not to be until April 18 of 1918 that Private Anthony set foot on French soil. He had likely travelled via the English port of Southampton to Le Havre, a large French industrial city on the estuary of the River Seine. From there he and his draft were transported to the Canadian Infantry Base Depot newly-organized in the vicinity of the coastal town of Étaples where he was apprised of his transfer to the 13th Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*).

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

However, it does not seem as though Private Anthony ever served with the parent unit of the 13th Battalion: he left the Base Depot to join the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp where he reported on the following day, April 19. When he was eventually despatched from there on May 27, it was to report on May 28 to the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) *in the field* as by then, on the 24th or 27th of that month, Army bureaucracy had amended its former decision and Private Anthony was no longer a soldier of the 13th Battalion, but of the 24th.

During the last half of May, the 24th Battalion had been serving in positions in the *Mercatel Sector* just to the south of the city of Arras. In the front lines on May 27, the unit had retired on May 28 to the area Mercatel itself where it was that Private Anthony and his reinforcement draft from Base Details arrived to report *to duty* on that date.

*** * * * ***

A component of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian 2nd Division, the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) was a Montreal-based unit with a history which dated back to 1862. After mobilization it had sailed to Great Britain from Canada in May of 1915, and had been transferred with the Division to France, then to the *Kingdom of Belgium*, in September of the same year. There it was to serve with the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade to the south of the *Ypres Salient* in a sector between the already battered city of Ypres and the Franco-Belgian border.

(Right above: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte* (Ypres the Dead) *– By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. –* from *Illustration*)

It was not to be until early April of 1916, more than six months following its arrival on the Continent that the 2nd Canadian Division was to undergo its baptism of fire in a major infantry operation. It was at a place called St-Éloi where, on the 27th day of March, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then followed up with an infantry attack. The role of the newly-arrived Canadian formation was to then capitalize on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the often putrid weather which turned the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and then a resolute German defence, had greeted the Canadian newcomers who were to begin to take over from the by-then exhausted British on April 3-4.

Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.

(Right above: *An attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines –* from *Illustration*)

The *Action of the St. Eloi Craters* had not been a happy experience for the novice Canadians. The 24th Battalion, however, according to its War Diary, had not been heavily involved and the majority of its casualties at the time had been due to artillery fire. Apart from repelling a German bombing party on April 15, the unit had been engaged in very little of the infantry action.

Six weeks following the episode at St-Éloi there had then been the confrontation at *Mount Sorrel*. This had involved mainly the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division* but many other units, since the situation at times was to become critical, had subsequently played a role.

**The Canadian 3rd Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. However, unlike its two predecessors, it was formed on the Continent, some of its units having already been on active service there for months. Others did not arrive until the early weeks of 1916, thus it was not until March of that year that the Division was capable of assuming responsibility for any sector. When it eventually did, it was thrust into the south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This was in a sector to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.

(Right: *Remnants of Canadian trenches dating from 1915-1916 at Sanctuary Wood* – photograph from 2010)

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, overran the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans were unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences. Sir Julien Byng's* hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, delivered piece-meal, poorly supported by artillery and poorly co-ordinated, was a costly disaster for the Canadians.

**The British-appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Corps.*

(Right above: *The Canadian Memorial which stands atop Mount Sorrel just to the south-west of the city of Ypres* (*today Ieper*) *whose spires and towers may be perceived in the distance.* – photograph from 1914)

The 24th Battalion was not to play a leading part in the action at *Mount Sorrel*. Uninvolved during the early days, the unit moved forward into the front-line trenches in the area of *Maple Copse* on June 7, there to remain until relieved on the 11th. Thus neither did it participate in the closing stages of October 12-13.

(continued)

The Battalion was not to escape without casualties however. Once again these were caused mostly by German gun-fire, particularly at the time when it was moving forward towards *Maple Copse* on June 7, one platoon incurring twenty-three casualties in a single extremely heavy bombardment and thus almost ceasing to exist.

(Right: *Maple Copse, the scene of heavy fighting in June of 1916, and its cemetery wherein lie numerous Canadians* – photograph from 2014)

(Right: *Railway Dugouts Burial Ground (Transport Farm) today contains twenty-four hundred fifty-nine burials and commemorations* – photograph from 2014)

From the time of its withdrawal from the area of *Mount Sorrel* until the final week of August the 24th Battalion passed the early summer submitting to the rigours, routines and perils of life in - and out of - the trenches*. Often the war diaries of this period refer to *quiet days…front quieter than normal* – although, of course, everything is relative. After the exertions of *Mount Sorrel*, any infantry activity was on a local level and limited to patrols and raids and most casualties were due to artillery and to sniping.

(Right: *A century later, reminders of a violent past at the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres, the area today protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature*. – photograph from 2014)

****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*)

(continued)

On August 25 the 24th Battalion withdrew westward, entirely away from the *Ypres Salient* and the forward area to the region of Steenvoorde, back in France, where new training grounds had been established. Further to the south, the British summer offensive was not progressing as well as planned and losses had been heavy: help in the form of troops from the Commonwealth was already being ordered by the High Command.

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 which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short space of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

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

On that first day of *1st 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 1st 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 the New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcelette.

(Right: *An image purporting to be that of a Canadian officer giving instructions to those under his command prior to the attack at Flers-Courcelette (see below), September 1916*. – from *The War Illustrated*)

Meanwhile, on September 4, ten days after its retirement from Belgium, the 24th Battalion had left its billets at Eperlecques and marched to the railway station at Arques. There it had boarded a train for the journey to Conteville, just over one-hundred kilometres distant, arriving at its destination at five-thirty on the following morning.

Later on during that same September 5, the Battalion had started to march, to arrive some five days later at the large military encampment at the Brickfields (*La Briquetterie*), in the proximity of the provincial town of Albert. There it was to remain, providing working- and wiring- parties, until midnight of September 14 when it moved forward to positions in the Chalk Pits for the attack of the morrow.

(continued)

During the first two days of that offensive the 24th Battalion was as involved as any other Canadian Battalion – it just was not shooting or bombing anyone. It was, however, carrying small-arms ammunition and bombs (*grenades*) to the forward areas for others to use, as well as Bengal Lights, flares, stretchers, rations…

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

On September 17, the unit was ordered to deliver an attack on the German front line, an assault which began at five-thirty in the afternoon. The operation had mixed results – and heavy casualties - and the War Diarist wrote the following scathing paragraph in his entry of that day: *With regard to this attack, if the Artillery preparation had been in any way adequate, there is no doubt but that the objective would have been obtained along the whole line. As it was, a barrage was put up approximately 500 yards in rear of the German front line, which merely served to warn the enemy that an attack would probably be launched, and they were able when our men advanced, to stand up on their parapets and shoot them down.*

By the 18th the Battalion was back at *Brickfields Camp*: total casualties during the preceding days of all ranks, three-hundred twenty.

(Right: *Wounded soldiers at the Somme being evacuated to the rear area in hand-carts* – from *Le Miroir*)

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

On September 28, the unit was back in the line once more, on this occasion having been ordered to make an attack on the so-called enemy *Regina Trench* system. The attack was one of several to fail and *Regina Trench* was not to be taken definitively until November 11, six weeks later. The 24th Battalion's operation had cost a further two-hundred four casualties all told.

(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)

On October 2, the remnants of the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) had begun its withdrawal from the *First Battle of the Somme*. It had marched westward before turning northward, passing in a semi-circular fashion behind the city of Arras.

It had then continued in the direction of the mining centre of Lens, to be stationed in the suburbs, in the Angres Sector.

The late autumn of that 1916 – after the *1st Battle of the Somme* - and the winter of 1916-1917 was a time for the remnants of the Canadian battalions to re-enforce and to re-organize. There was to be little concerted infantry action during this period apart from the everyday routine patrolling and the occasional raid - sometimes minor, at other times more elaborate – against enemy positions.

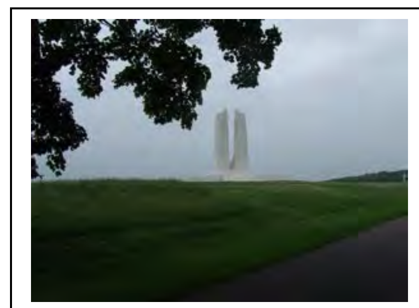
There was of course, the constant trickle of casualties, for the most part occasioned by the enemy artillery and snipers. However, it was mostly sickness and dental work that kept the medical services busy during this period.

As for the 24th Battalion itself, it had remained in the Angres Sector from October 15 of 1916 until January 17 of the New Year, 1917. The unit had then been posted to - and billeted in – the town of Bruay, well to the rear. It was to remain there for almost an entire month.

(Right: *A detachment of Canadian troops going forward during the winter of 1916-1917* – from *Illustration*)

And then it was to serve for even more than a month in the *La Folie Sector*, from February 11 until March 22. On the next day, the 24th Battalion had transferred to Maisnil Bouche where, on the morrow… *Day spent cleaning up and getting ready for special training.* This training and preparation for the coming attack had continued until the afternoon of April 7. The entire day of the 8th had been spent moving forward but, apparently owing to the bad condition of the communication trenches, the troops had not taken place in their jumping-off positions until one o'clock in the morning of April 9: four and a-half hours to wait.

On April 9 of 1917 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the War for the British, one of the few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive was to be a disaster.

(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, has stood on Vimy Ridge* – photograph from 2010)

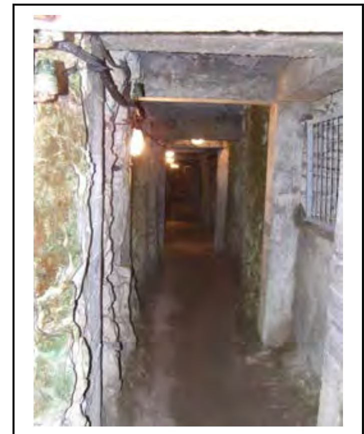
On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, separate entity*, had stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

And a British brigade had been placed under Canadian command.

(Right: ***Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division equipped with all the paraphernalia of war on the advance across No-Man's-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917*** **- from *Illustration*)**

While Battalions of the Canadian 3rd and 4th Divisions attacked the Ridge itself, it was the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions which had been handed the responsibility of clearing the slope to the south, including the village of Thélus, in the direction of Arras. The objectives of both Divisions had been realized early on the day of the attack.

The success of April 9, of course, came at a price: by the end of the day the 24th Battalion had incurred a total of two-hundred forty-one casualties.



(Right: *Grange Tunnel - one of the few remaining galleries still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years later.* – photograph from 2008(?))

On April 10 the Canadians had finished clearing the whole area of Vimy Ridge of the few remaining pockets of resistance and had begun to consolidate the area in anticipation of the habitual German counter-attacks – which in fact never amounted to much.

There had, on those two days, been the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on the previous day's success proved to be logistically impossible. Thus the Germans had closed the breech and the conflict once more had reverted to one of inertia.

The remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* was not to be fought in the manner of the first two days and by the end of those five weeks little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success. In fact, there were to be times, such as at Fresnoy in early May, when the enemy had successfully – and at a heavy cost to both the Canadians and the British – re-taken ground which had only recently been lost to them.

By the beginning of June much of the Canadian Corps had been transferred back to the sectors north of where it had just been fighting, from the vicinity of Neuville St-Vaast up to the town of Béthune. After the efforts of the recent confrontation, the units were once more to be reinforced and re-organized, and were also to undergo further training in areas to the rear. This relative calm was to last until the middle of August.

(continued)

The British High Command had by this time decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention from this area, as well as his reserve forces, it had also ordered operations to take place at the sector of the front in and around the city and mining-centre of Lens.

The Canadians were to be major contributors to this effort.

(Right: *An example of the conditions under which the troops were ordered to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917* – from *Le Miroir*)

(Right below: *Canadian troops in the Lens Sector advancing under shell-fire across No-Man's Land in the summer of 1917* – from *Le Miroir*)

On August 13 at six-thirty in the evening the 24th Battalion had been ordered to move forward into the support area. Its numbers were by now depleted – twenty-one officers and five-hundred seventy-two other ranks – at about sixty per cent of battalion strength. There was to be a fight for an anonymous rise of ground, identified only as *Hill 70*.

(Right below: *Canadian soldiers at an unidentified camp on the Continent perusing the program of an upcoming concert* – from *Le Miroir*)

The 24th Battalion remained engaged in the fight for *Hill 70 and for Lens until the night of August 17-18. Having played its role in a still-ongoing struggle, the unit retired back to Cité St-Pierre where for the next number of nights it provided carrying-parties to supply ammunition to the front.**

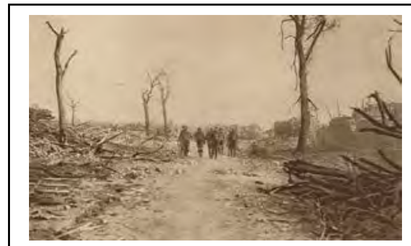
(Right: *A Canadian carrying-party – some of the work done by troops when in support and reserve – on the Lens front during the summer of 1917* – from *Le Miroir*)

The 24th Battalion by then counted thirteen officers and two-hundred sixty-five other ranks.

****Those expecting Hill 70 to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear. Yet it was high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie - the key feature in the area, its capture more important than the city of Lens itself.***

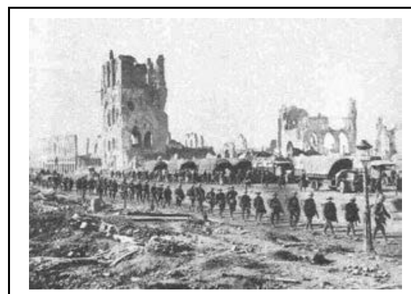
(Preceding page: ***This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15th Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute*. – photograph from 2014)**

The Canadian-led operations in the Lens-Béthune Sector had apparently still been incomplete towards the end of August when the British High Command decided to cancel any further actions there other than defensive ones. Things were not going altogether as had been planned in the summer campaign further north and the British were becoming short of re-enforcements. The Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians were to be called upon to remedy that shortage.



(Right above: *Canadian troops in the area of Hill 70 during the days subsequent to its capture* – from *Le Miroir*)

The Lens-Béthune campaign thus having been drawn to a close, it was to be only some six weeks hence that the Canadians were ordered to join the ongoing battle in Belgium, to the north-east of Ypres. Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – at least ostensibly - one of the British Army's objectives.



(Right above: *Troops file through the rubble and past the Cloth Hall of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917*. – from *Illustration*)

From the time that the Canadians had entered the fray - after the Anzacs - it was they who were to shoulder a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions who spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was true, with troops of the Canadian 2nd Division finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

(Right below: *Somewhere, perhaps anywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the dreadful autumn of 1917*. – from *Illustration*)

Meanwhile, after the affair at *Hill 70*, on August 22 awaiting busses had transported the 24th Battalion into reserve at Guoy-Servins where it remained until September 3, when the unit marched to Mingoval. From then until the 16th of the same month when it was eventually ordered towards the forward area, the unit's days comprised drills, lectures, parades, inspections, sports, training, musketry and those inevitable working-parties.

Then there was a ten-day tour at the front where no infantry action was reported but where the German artillery produced the usual trickle of casualties.

On September 26-27 the Battalion moved to the rear again, to Villers-au-Bois where it was placed in reserve once more. The following four weeks – in and out of the line - proved to be similar to those earlier on.

On October 24 the 24th Battalion marched to the railway station at nearby Tinques, there to board trains which would take the unit northward to Caëstre, close to where, at Pradelles, it was to remain billeted for the remainder of the month. On the first two days of November, parties of NCOs and men travelled north to the outskirts of the Belgian community of Poperinghe to view something that their officers had already inspected just days before… ***a plasticine model of the area the Division is detailed to attack.*** **(Battalion War Diary)**

On November 3 the Battalion… ***paraded at 5am and marched to CAESTRE where they entrained at 6.45 for YPRES, arriving there at 8.40 am, then marched by Platoons through City of YPRES to POTIJZE Camp… where BN. was distributed in the open occupying funk holes and tarpaulin shelters. The ground was very muddy and accommodation very poor. About noon enemy shelled our area…*** **(Excerpt from 24th Battalion War Diary entry of November 3)**

(Right above: ***Canadian soldiers on the Passchendaele Front using a shell-hole to perform their ablutions*** **– from** ***Le Miroir*****)**

(Right: ***The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians which stands in the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele*** **(*****today Passendale*****) – photograph from 2010)**

On the following day, November 4, the unit – all except 'C' Company which had been detailed as a working-party – moved forward in individual platoons and relieved the 19th Canadian Battalion in the line. On next day, the 5th, the Battalion remained in its positions where it was re-joined by 'C' Company, and there heavily shelled by the enemy.

At midnight the 26th Battalion, ordered to attack with the 24th, began to move into a position alongside. At six in the morning of November 6… ***our attack was launched under a heavy barrage, the 26th BN. passing through us to their Objective. Throughout the day the enemy shelled us continuously… Throughout the night enemy artillery was concentrated on our Front and Support Trenches*****. (24th Battalion War Diary)**

(Right above***: A part of Tyne Cot cemetery, perhaps a kilometre from Passchendaele – the cross stands atop a German bunker. Apart from the twelve-thousand graves therein, of which more than eight-thousand are of unidentified soldiers, there are some thirty-five thousand names engraved in stone panels of those who died but have no known grave: there was insufficient space for them to be commemorated on the Menin Gate. –*** **photograph from 2011(?))**

The following day had been spent in the trenches attempting to avoid the attention of the enemy artillery which was busy all day. On November 8 the shelling was apparently less intense – fortunate because the 24th Battalion, having been relieved, now had to move back over open ground to the relative safety of the camp at Potijze.

(Right below: *Canadian soldiers on the Passchendaele Front using a shell-hole to perform their ablutions* – from *Le Miroir*)

The 24th Battalion was not to see *Passchendaele* through to the end: having played its short assigned role, the unit had withdrawn from the forward area to Brandhoek on November 11, been well to the south of the Franco-Belgian border two days later and, on the 15th, had arrived at the Canadian camp at Villers au Bois. On November 22 the Battalion was back in front-line positions and had resumed the routines of trench warfare.

There had then been a premature Christmas present of sorts during the early weeks of that month of December, 1917: the Canadian forces overseas had participated in the national election. The War Diarist of the 24th Battalion appears to have chosen not to make mention of the event, but others did, and in some cases they reported a ninety per cent participation in the vote*.

**Apparently, at the same time, the troops were given the opportunity to subscribe to Canada's Victory War Loan. Thus the soldier fighting the war was also encouraged to help pay for it as well.*

The 24th Battalion had spent the month of the election and January of the New Year, 1918, in the *Méricourt Sector*, at the southern end of the area of Canadian responsibility; February had then seen the unit move further north to the area of Lens and Lievin before it was withdrawn for a further month of training well to the rear.

Then abruptly, on March 26, hurried orders had arrived to be prepared to move at short notice. The message having been received by the unit at four o'clock in the afternoon, some seven hours later, at eleven-twenty that same evening, the Battalion began to march and, twenty-eight hours later again, was relieving another unit in support trenches in the area of Ficheux, eight kilometres south-west of Arras.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, the Germans launched a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21, the first day of spring. The main blow fell at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops there.

(continued)

(Previous page: ***While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they did bombard it heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and to oblige them to retain troops in the area*. – from *Miroir*)**

The German advance continued for a month, petering out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was a result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British were the most significant.

A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in Flanders, the area where the by-then Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It too was successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.

(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918* – from *Illustration*)

The unit's War Diary suggests, however, that the 24th Battalion was not involved in any of the infantry confrontations. Posted mostly near Wailly, just to the south-west of the city of Arras, the majority of the casualties incurred were again due to enemy artillery activity rather than face-to-face action.

However, the Canadian presence in the area allowed for British troops to be sent from there to stem the German tide further south, and it assured the defence of the *Arras Sector* if the enemy chose to switch his attack further to the north.

(Right: *The City Hall of Arras and its bell-tower looked like this by the spring of 1918 after nearly four years of bombardment by German artillery*. – from a vintage post-card)

The Battalion was to remain in approximately the same area, to the south of Arras after the crisis and it was there, in the vicinity of Wailly, that, towards the end of the month of May, Private Anthony reported *to duty* with the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*).

(Right above: *Troops of a Canadian-Scottish regiment moving up towards the front* – from *Le Miroir*)

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Unfortunately, it is also at this point – the end of May – that the War Diarist of the 24th Battalion concludes his journal, at least as far as *Canada Archives* is concerned. It is likely, however, that Private Anthony's unit's history closely follows that of its sister battalion, the 25th (*Nova Scotia Rifles*), both being attached to the 5th Infantry Brigade – *its* War Diary *is* available - itself attached to the Canadian 2nd Division.

(continued)

Thus a relative calm descended on the front as the German threat faded – it had won a great deal of ground, but nothing of any military significance on either of the two fronts. The calm was hardly surprising: both sides were exhausted and needed time to once more reorganize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to re-enforce.

The Allies from this point of view were a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had two world-wide empires to draw from and the Americans were belatedly arriving on the scene. An overall Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

Towards the end of July, Private Anthony and the 24th Battalion – and a large number of other Canadian units - began to move in a circular itinerary to the west, then south, then east again to finish in front of the city of Amiens. The first stages of the switch were made by train and by motorized transport before, from north of Amiens onwards, the remainder was undertaken on foot.

Not only was it made on foot but all the marching was undertaken at night to ensure that the troop movements were not to be observed by the Germans. The High Command had envisaged surprise playing a major role in the success of the upcoming offensive.

On August 2, while en route, the Battalion underwent a day of tactical training in co-operation with tanks. Bombed by enemy aircraft on August 6, but having incurred few casualties, the unit was in its assembly area in the vicinity of Gentelles and Bois D'Aquenne by two-thirty in the morning of August 8.

(Right: *In 1917 the British formed the Tank Corps, a force which was becoming ever stronger during 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again 'somewhere in France'* – from *Illustration*)

(Right: *The gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the leading German troops had been able see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918* – photograph from 2007(?))

The 5th Brigade War Diary entry for that day, August 8, reads as follows: *Weather very fine. The 2nd Canadian Division attacked at 3.20 a.m.* (sic)

The 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade passed through the 4th Canadian Infantry brigade at the first objective at 8.20 a.m. The attack of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade was on a frontage of 2,200 yards.

The villages of WIENCOURT L'EQUIPEE, GUILLAUCOURT and all objectives were taken with a large number of guns and prisoners.

(continued)

The Appendix pertaining to the attack cites the success of the co-operation of tanks and infantry. It also notes that many of the casualties of the day were caused by enemy artillery, snipers, and – those of the 24th Battalion – by enemy aircraft operations.

(Right: *A group of German prisoners, some serving here as stretcher-bearers, being taken to the rear after their capture by Canadian troops: a tank may be seen in the background* – from *Le Miroir*)

The son of Moses Anthony, machinist, and Susana Anthony (née *Bray*, deceased 1920) – to whom on September 19, 1917, he had willed his all - formerly of St. John's, Newfoundland*, he was also brother to Florence, to Maud, Jessie, Nellie, John, to Beatrice and to William.

The address of Private Anthony and of his mother at the time of enlistment was 275, Hibernia Road, Montreal – she later at 105 Ash Avenue, also Montreal. The address of Moses Anthony in 1922 was recorded as 138, Charron Street, Point St-Charles, Montreal.

Private Anthony was at first reported as *wounded in action* on August 8, 1918, before being recorded as *killed in action* by a Burial Officer of the Canadian Corps later on that same day. He was buried in Wood Cemetery on August 11, three days later.

James Bray Anthony had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-five years: date of birth, August 8, 1892, in St. John's Newfoundland. He thus died on his twenty-sixth birthday – and on his first day of battle.

Private James Bray Anthony was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).