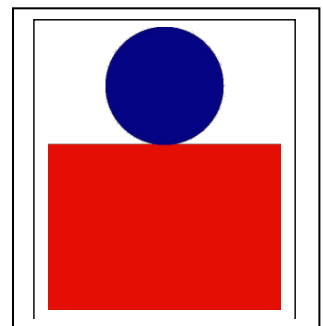




Captain* Charles H. Crowdy of the 13th Battalion, (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*), Canadian Infantry, is buried in Cité Bonjean Cemetery, Armentières: Grave reference IX.D.28.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 13th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada) is from the Canadian Expeditionary Force Study Group web-site.*)

(continued)



****Officers were often promoted from the ranks in which case their records contain an enlistment number – although it then was no longer referred to. However, as in the case of Captain Crowdy, many other officers did not enlist at all but, upon request, were granted a Commission from the outset of their service; they therefore have no enlistment (regimental) number.***

There is a reference, one on a medical report of April 26, 1915, to his enlistment in Montreal on August 12, 1914. While it may have been a matter of expediency to have him then promoted *from the ranks*, the writer of that document may well have erred as it seems unlikely that, being already an officer, Charles Hutton Crowdy had to enlist at all (see * above).

Then there is an accompanying second document on which he is reported to have undergone medical examination on September 2, the day before his wedding (see below). That second document also notes his attestation on September 23.

Then there is the question of his rank.

While the records of his pay as late as June of 1914 refer to him as Lieutenant Crowdy, on his marriage certificate of September 3, also of 1914, he refers to himself as a Captain of the 5th Regiment R.H.O.C.

His papers seem to only partially explain this contradiction: for example, his attestation paper of September 13 cites *Lieutenant*; his enlistment paper of the same date bears the rank of *Captain*. A pay sheet – without documenting the amount – of up until October 31 of 1914 records Lieutenant Crowdy as having received pay; and then a separation allowance form uses both *Lieut.* and *Capt.* within lines of one another.

Finally, up until July 31 of 1915, he was receiving the two-dollar daily pay of a lieutenant – although at the time having been documented as promoted *in the field* to the rank of *Temporary Captain* on April 24. After that July 31, the records show a daily three-dollar captain's payment, once more contradicting the *Transferred to captain's rate 24/4/15* written in the margin of his pay statement of the time.

All of this notwithstanding, Officer Crowdy was to train with the 5th Regiment of the Royal Highlanders of Canada during the intervening period at the newly-established military camp at Valcartier, Québec, until the beginning of the month of October. This formation, when the Canadian Division* was formed, was re-designated to become the 13th Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*) of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade.



(Above right: *The personnel of the Battalion wore a kilt, the tartan of which – a variation of the Black Watch - is shown here. – from the canadiansoldiers.com web-site*)

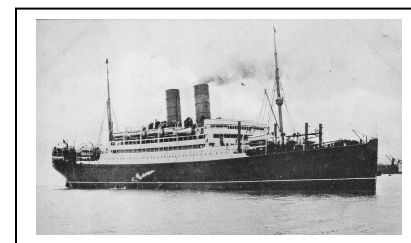
****Known simply as the Canadian Division until the formation of the Canadian 2nd Division. It obviously then became designated as the Canadian 1st Division.***

(continued)

(Right: Canadian artillery being put through its paces at the Camp at Valcartier. In 1914, the main Army Camp in Canada was at Petawawa. However, its location in Ontario – and away from the Great Lakes – made it impractical for the despatch of troops overseas. Valcartier was apparently built within weeks after the Declaration of War. – photograph (from a period later in the war) from *The War Illustrated*)



Only four days after his attestation, on September 23, Lieutenant/ Captain Crowdy and the 13th Battalion were transported to the port area of Québec City where the unit embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia*, a requisitioned vessel of the *Cunard Line*. The ship sailed that same day, then anchoring in the Gaspé to be joined by other vessels before proceeding on its trans-Atlantic crossing*.



(Right above: The photograph of the SS *Alaunia* is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

****Whether Lieutenant/ Captain was aware of it or not is not documented, but it was during this voyage, off the south coast of Newfoundland and in the proximity of the French islands of St-Pierre and Miquelon, that the Canadian convoy was joined by the Bowring Brothers' steamer Florizel which was transporting the First Five Hundred of the Newfoundland Regiment to the United Kingdom.***

***Alaunia* dropped anchor at seven o'clock in the morning in the English south-coast harbour of Plymouth on October 14, but it was not until the following afternoon, at or about three o'clock, that the eleven-hundred fifty-four – all ranks – of the 13th Battalion began to disembark. The unit then was transferred by train to the large British military establishment on Salisbury Plain - arriving there at three in the morning of the 16th – to be sent, likely on foot, to West Down South Camp.**

The Canadian Division was to remain at Salisbury Plain until the second week in February when it took ship from the port of Avonmouth, near the city of Bristol, to St-Nazaire, France there to disembark some three days later.

Lieutenant/Captain Crowdy, however, was no longer serving with the 13th Battalion. He had been transferred to the 17th Battalion (Canadian Infantry) which was to be one of the founding units of the Canadian Training Depot and the Infantry Base Depot at Tidworth Barracks, but for the time-being established on the Salisbury Plain.

He was then, apparently on the same day, transferred for a second time, on this occasion to the PPCLI – the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry – a unit which was already by then serving on the Continent. Thus Lieutenant/Captain Crowdy was about to leave England with a re-enforcement draft to bolster the numbers of that formation.

(continued)

However, his services were apparently deemed not to be required and, after a month, on March 5, he was returned to the 17th Battalion. Ten days later again the 17th was recorded as having left Tidworth for the recently-chosen locale of the new Canadian Training Division; this was Shorncliffe, close to the English Channel town of Folkestone in the county of Kent.

(Right: *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 1916*)



On the 17th day of the month, Lieutenant/ Captain Crowdy was once more transferred, on this occasion to the 30th Canadian Reserve Battalion, to prepare for an imminent departure to France, thence to the Western Front.

Lieutenant/ Captain Crowdy's stay at Shornecliffe ended with his promotion in the field on April 24 to – or perhaps simply a confirmation of – his rank of *Temporary Captain*. On the 26th, two days afterwards, he embarked, likely in nearby Folkestone to land in Boulogne a short two-hour journey distant. He was taken on strength of the 13th Battalion on the morrow, the parent unit, of course, having already departed from England ten weeks prior.



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

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



It appears not to be recorded when exactly Captain Crowdy reported *to duty* with the 13th Battalion. On April 28 the Battalion of the day records the arrival of a draft of two-hundred seventy-six men – but no officers. However, officers or not, the new arrivals were without a doubt a welcome addition.

It had been on or about the afternoon of February 15, ten weeks earlier, that some of the ships carrying the Canadian Division – and that transporting the 13th Battalion - steamed into the harbour at St-Nazaire. There many of the men – still feeling the effects of the voyage - had apparently been kept on board ship for that night before boarding trains at half-past eight in the evening of the 16th.



According to the Battalion War Diary, it took three days for the train(s) carrying the 13th to make the journey of six-hundred ninety-four kilometres from St-Nazaire to the northern French town of Hazebrouck.

(Preceding page: An image of the town of Hazebrouck, from the period just after the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

There the unit... got off stiff and sore after our long and cramped journey, fell in and marched eight miles, through pouring rain, to FLETRE.

(Right: Troops – likely British – on the march in the north of France during the early period of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)



Four days later again, on February 23, the 13th Battalion was once more on the march: Paraded at 8 a.m. and marched to ARMENTIERES, 17 miles, very hard on the feet, roads paved with cobble-stones nearly all the way. Arrived at ARMENTIERES at 2.30 p.m. and were billeted in the Workhouse.

Armentières is a town on the French side of the Franco-Belgian frontier and, at that stage of the Great War, very close to the forward area, and those front lines were where the 1st and 2nd Companies of the 13th Battalion found themselves on only the day after its arrival there, to be relieved by the 3rd and 4th Companies on the next again, the 25th. No casualties were incurred on this occasion, but by then the rank and file of the Battalion had been introduced to at least some of the routines and rigours of life in the trenches.*

**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.*

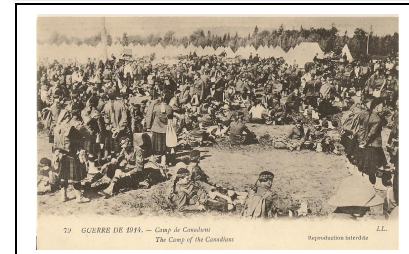
The unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.

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: 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)



The first seven weeks of active service passed much as described above for the 13th Battalion.



(Right: The caption reads merely 'Camp of Canadians' but it is from the early days of the Great War, thus likely in either northern France or in Belgium. The troops are from a Canadian Scottish unit. – from a vintage post-card)

On April 16, the 13th Battalion had been posted to the front lines in the area of Sint-Juliaan, just to the north-east of the medieval city of Ypres. The area which Canadian, British and French troops were then holding was known as the *Ypres Salient*. It was to be one of the most lethal theatres of the entire war and the Canadians were about to be witness to that.

The 2nd Battle of Ypres saw the first use of gas by the Germans in the *Great War*. That use was later to become an everyday event and, with the advent of protective measures such as advanced gas-masks, it was to prove no more dangerous than the rest of the military arsenals of the warring nations. But on this first occasion, to troops without means to combat it, the yellow-green cloud of chlorine proved overwhelming.



(Right above: *The very first protection against gas was to urinate on a handkerchief which was then held over the nose and mouth. However, all the armies were soon producing gas-masks, some of the first of which are seen here being tested by Scottish troops. – from either Illustration or Le Miroir*)

The cloud was noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon of April 22. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left wavered then broke, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered, particularly that of the 13th Battalion which was obliged to call forward Number 3 Company, at the time in reserve. A retreat, not always very cohesive, then became necessary.



(Right above: *Entitled: Bombardement d'Ypres, le 5 juillet 1915 – from Illustration*)

On the 23rd the situation was relatively stable, the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan held until the morning of the 24th when a further retirement became necessary. At times there had been gaps in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans were unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or they did not have the means to exploit the situation. And then the Canadians closed the gaps.



The 13th Battalion was relieved on the 25th and retired to some former French reserve trenches. Called forward again on the 28th, it remained in the area of the front until May 1 when it withdrew into divisional reserve in the area of Vlamertinghe, to the west of Ypres. On May 3 the unit moved into northern France to re-enforce and to re-organize.

(Right above: *The Memorial to the 1st Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier – stands just to the south of the village of Langemark – at the Vancouver Crossroads - where the Canadians withstood the German attack – abetted by gas – at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915. – photograph from 2010*)

The information to be gleaned from the Battalion War Diary during this period is sparse. The number of casualties incurred is not noted – neither does it seem to appear in the 5th Brigade Diary – but it was on April 28 that that re-enforcement draft of two-hundred seventy-six other ranks reported *to duty* to the unit*.

**The Battalion War Diary entries for this period are rather sparse and no mention of any further re-enforcements – or of Captain Crowdy - appears to have been made for June, July or August.*

One month later, at the beginning of the month of June, the unit had moved down the line to the south and into the areas of Festubert and Givenchy. Here a series of attacks and counter-attacks were to take place during which the High Command managed to destroy what was left of the British pre-War professional Army. The Canadians were also ordered to contribute to the campaign but not to the same extent.

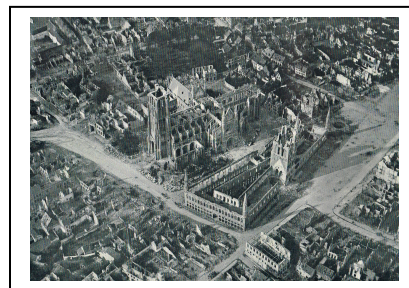
The role of the 13th Battalion was to relieve the 16th Battalion after its attack planned for May 20 on a German-held position, and then was to consolidate and defend that same position. Despite heavy losses the 16th captured its objective, positions which then the 13th occupied. On the following day, the 21st, the unit fought off a German counter-attack before being relieved on the following day again.

On that same May 22 the 13th Battalion marched away from Festubert to billets in or near to the community of Essars.

The month of June was again the routine of trench warfare with the Battalion remaining in the same areas – Essars behind the lines and Givenchy *in* the line.

Then, towards the end of the month, the unit began the march which would eventually, by stages, cross the Franco-Belgian frontier once again, to end in the *Ypres Salient*, just to the south-east of the remnants of the city itself.

(Right: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2nd Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration)*



For the Canadians, service in the Ypres Salient and in the area of the Franco-Belgian frontier settled into a routine which was to last for almost a full year. The newly-arrived Canadian 2nd Division was to be involved in a confrontation with the enemy in early April of the following year, 1916, but it was not until the German attacks – and the Canadian response - in the area of Mount Sorrel of June that the entire Canadian Corps - by then the 3rd Division had arrived – would be involved in a large-scale operation.

During the period of June to October of 1915 the 13th Battalion was in the border area, in the vicinity of Ploegsteert. Any infantry activity was local in nature and comprised offensive and defensive patrolling to which from time to time was added the occasional raid. Most casualties incurred were due to enemy artillery and sniper fire.

The 13th Battalion War Diary entry for October 19, 1915, reads partially as follows:

LA PLUS DOUCE FARM - Weather clear and fine except for mist in the morning. Our guns were active all day shelling the enemy trenches and behind the lines. Our heavy howitzer batteries opened fire on **LA PETITE DOUVE FARM** – one of the shells failed to burst.

Hostile aeroplane was observed flying at a great height to the North. It was heavily shelled and retired to the East.

Three allied aeroplanes patrolled enemy lines during the day – two of these were moderately shelled.

Heavy wheeled transport was heard behind enemy lines.

CASUALTIES:- Capt. C.H. Crowdy* – killed in action along with Capt. L. Currie, 42nd Battalion, while about 2 days in 16th Battalion lines making investigations. Buried with Military honours in **ARMENTIERES****...

*The name of Captain Crowdy does not appear at any time in the 13th Battalion War Diary from October of 1914 until it does so on the day of his death. The wording of that report of that October is somewhat ambiguous in that it may suggest that both he and Captain Barry were on site for only two days. If this is so, it may be that Captain Crowdy was attached to the Headquarters' Company.

It should also be remarked that the Brigade Diarist, in his entry of the day, refers to both these officers as lieutenants.

**His papers document... First burial in Officers' Cemetery Armentieres & cross erected 21/10/15... Captain Crowdy was re-interred in Cité Bonjean Cemetery, Armentières, on 1/12/1915 (Burial Report)

From Captain Crowdy's personal file: *Circumstances of Casualty* – Killed by a portion of an enemy mortar bomb shell which exploded in Trench 134 about 9.25 P.M. on October 19, 1915, inflicting wounds in his back and thigh, from which he died at 10.40 P.M.



Location of unit at time of casualty – Wulverghem

(Right above: A picture of a British trench mortar from the early days of the Great War: the mortar was soon to lose the wheels which impeded the weapon's movement in the narrow confines of the trenches – from a vintage post-card)

The son of George James Crowdy, book-keeper (variously reported as born in Newfoundland and in England), and Mary Louise Crowdy (variously recorded as born in Ireland, Prince Edward Island and Montreal – and likely deceased prior to 1921), he was also brother to Beatrice-Alice (born in Newfoundland or Montreal in 1887)*.

*The family is recorded in the Canadian Census of 1891 (much of the information contradictory to that of 1901, ten years later), thus confirming their emigration from the Dominion of Newfoundland during the late 1880s.

On September 3 of 1914, Charles Hutton Crowdy (born in Newfoundland or in Montreal and of 482, Roslyn Avenue, Hochelaga, Montreal) had married Lorraine Mae Welch of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Quebec City.

His wife is recorded as also being in England by October 17 of that same year, staying at 5, Westbourne Mansions, Sandgate Road, in Folkestone. Whether they crossed the Atlantic on the same ship is, however, *not* documented.

The couple had no children and Mrs. Crowdy, having returned to Canada as a young widow, apparently re-married, her name later recorded as Worrall.

Charles Hutton Crowdy died at the age of twenty-six years and eight months: date of birth, February 2, 1889.

Captain Charles Hutton Crowdy was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 27, 2023.

