

Private Victor Dawe (found elsewhere as *Daw*) Number 54240 of the 18th Battalion (*Western Ontario*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Lijssenhoek Military Cemetery: Grave reference VIII. B. 8A.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 18th Battalion (Western Ontario) is from the CEFSG web-site.*)

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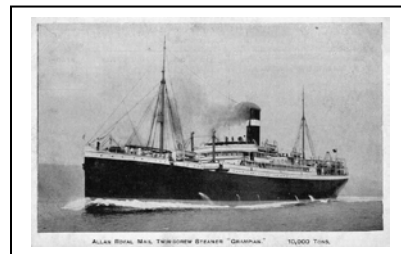
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a teacher, Victor Charles Dawe is documented as having arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, from St. John's, Newfoundland, on his way to Chicago, on September 7, 1914. On the same day he was documented as having left the port of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, to enter the United States.

Only five months later, he was re-crossing the Canadian border into the city of Windsor, Ontario. On this occasion it was to enlist - which he did on February 17, 1915. He also presented himself for a medical examination and for attestation, also in Windsor on that same day, and was immediately attached to the 21st Regiment (*Essex Fusiliers*) of the Canadian Militia.

It was a Major Robinson who conducted the final formalities of his enlistment when he declared – on paper – that ... *having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.* It had been a busy few hours for Private Dawe.

As a militia unit, the 21st Regiment (*Essex Fusiliers*) was excluded from *overseas service* so, at some point before leaving Canada, Private Dawe must have been transferred to "A" Company of the 18th Battalion (*Western Ontario*), based in London, Ontario – maybe on or about April 10. He sailed only days later for the United Kingdom.

Private Dawe embarked onto the requisitioned Royal Mail Ship *Grampian* in the harbour at Halifax on April 18th of 1915. He was not to travel alone: taking passage on the vessel for the crossing to the United Kingdom were his own 18th Battalion, the 2nd Divisional Train, the 7th, 8th and 9th Depot Units of Supply - all of them personnel of the Canadian Army Service Corps – as well as the Army's Field Butchery.



(Right above: *The image of RMS Grampian is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Having sailed on the same April 18, *Grampian* docked at six o'clock in the morning of April 29 in the English west-coast Avonmouth Docks, a component of the Port of Bristol. From there Private Dawe with his 18th Battalion were transported by train across the country to arrive nine hours later at West Sandling Camp. This was a part of the Shorncliffe military complex which the Canadians were establishing at the time, just southward down the Dover Straits from the English-Channel port-town of Folkestone.

On September 1, four months after his arrival in England, Private Dawe was transferred from "A" Company to the Battalion Machine Gun Section. Two weeks later again, on the night of September 14-15 of 1915, he and the 18th Battalion – in the company of other units of the newly-formed 2nd Division - were on their way *overseas* again, on this occasion on the short cross-Channel passage to the Continent and to the Western Front.

The unit made its passage from the nearby port of Folkestone to Boulogne, a town on the French coast normally about two hours sailing-time distant. However, having departed from England at about twenty minutes past nine that evening, the *St. Seiriol*, on which Private Dawe was travelling, was struck by a *friendly* destroyer.

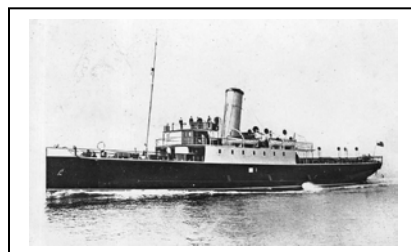
Fortunately, little damage apparently was done but it was not until five o'clock in the morning that the ship eventually docked in Boulogne.

(Right: 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 below: The photograph of HMT St. Seiriol is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

Once having landed, the 18th Battalion made its way to a rest camp where most of the day was spent before it then proceeded east by train to the larger centre of St-Omer. From there the unit began to march in stages to the vicinity of the community of Dranoutre where it arrived on September 22, having crossed the frontier from France into the Kingdom of Belgium earlier that day.



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

The 18th Battalion (*Western Ontario*) was a component of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian 2nd Division. Upon its arrival on the Continent the entire Division had immediately been sent north into southern Belgium, in sectors of the front leading southwards from the shattered remnants of the city of Ypres towards the Franco-Belgian frontier.



It was to serve there for almost an entire year.

Private Dawe's 18th Battalion was sent into the reserve trenches for the first time on the night of September 25-26 and then into the front line on the 27th and 28th. It was on the day following that the unit incurred its first fatality *in action*, a Private Logan who was killed while serving at a listening post.

By that date, however, Private Dawe was no longer at the front. On September 24, while the unit was still in billets at Dranoutre, the records show that he had been sent to the 5th Canadian* Field Ambulance suffering from the by-then familiar NYD (*Not Yet Determined*). From there he was forwarded to the 3rd Casualty Clearing Station on September 29 where *glaucoma* and *eye infection* were both diagnosed.



(Right above: a British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card)

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****While the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance was operational at this time, it was close to the city of Amiens. The British 5th Field Ambulance was near to Bailleul in northern France and thus close to where the 18th Battalion was stationed. The 3rd Casualty Clearing Station (British) was also in the area at the time, whereas the documentation shows the 3rd Canadian CCS to not be operational at all by then. All this to say that he went***

On the 30th of that same September, Private Dawe was transferred on board the 5th Ambulance Train to the Rawalpindi General Hospital at Wimereux-Boulogne, being admitted there on October 1 for treatment for conjunctivitis. Apparently the medical attention received there was at least *temporarily* successful for he was released into the 5th Convalescent Depot at Wimereux on October 12.



(Right above: The French seaside-resort town of Wimereux, seen here just prior to the Great War, became a part of a major medical complex during the years 1914-1918. – from a vintage post-card)

But it was to be only five days later again that he was hospitalized for a second time. On October 17 he was taken into the 8th Stationary Hospital at Boulogne, there to be found to have inflamed and pus-filled sinuses (*maxillary empyema*). Two days subsequent he was on his way back to England on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Anglia*.



(Right: The image of HMHS Anglia is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

On that same day, October 19, Private Dawe was transferred from *Anglia* to Heald Place, Rusholme, in Greater Manchester, where he was admitted into the 2nd Western General Hospital. There, after having undergone X-rays, Private Dawe was considered to have a condition serious enough for him to be operated on: on November 10 his sinus was opened, scraped and drained.

On this occasion his treatment was *totally* successful and on November 19 he was transferred to *Beech House* Auxiliary Hospital (in northwest London?). There on November 25 his report read: *Fit for discharge, no further operation treatment required*. Private Dawe, nevertheless, remained at *Beech House* for a further eleven days.

His next stop was to be on December 6 when he entered Hillingdon House Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Uxbridge, also a suburb of London. The convalescence was to be short-lived; it was a mere three days before he was discharged to the Canadian military complex at Shorncliffe.

While he was recovering in hospital, for some of this time it would appear that Private Dawe was elsewhere, at least on paper. His payroll records have him on strength of the 48th (*Reserve?*) Battalion for a week – October 31 to November 6 – and from then on, until February 3, 1916, with the 36th Canadian (*Reserve*) Battalion at Shorncliffe to which unit he surely *did* report, but later, *after* his release from medical care.

(Right below: *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)

On February 3 Private Dawe would have known that he was soon to report back to his unit on the Continent when he was transferred from the 36th Canadian (Reserve) Battalion back to the 18th Battalion. Two days later he was reporting to the Canadian General Base Depot, by then established in the vicinity of the French port-city of Le Havre.

At the Base Depot he was temporarily *taken on strength* before, on February 15, being despatched to the parent unit of the 18th Battalion *in the field*. Private Dawe reported *to duty* on the day following, February 16, one of a draft of twenty *other ranks* to do so.

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



(Right below: *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*)

At the time of Private Dawe's return to the 18th Battalion, the unit was posted behind the lines, some twelve kilometres to the west of those remnants of the city of Ypres. It was to remain there for a further four days during which time the personnel received an inoculation against para-typhoid. Then it moved forward once more, continuing the daily grind of trench warfare that it had been enduring since its arrival in Belgium six months earlier*.



**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.

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(Preceding page: 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 rigours of the everyday pattern of trench warfare continued for the 18th Battalion until the month of April, 1915. Then it became involved in the incident which became known as the *Action – or Battle - of the St-Éloi Craters*.

The confrontation had begun on March 27 when the British had detonated a series mines under the German lines and had followed this up with an infantry assault. All had not, however, gone as planned: the British attack had become bogged down, not least of all because of the problem of crossing the craters caused by its own mines – the all-too-frequent rain having ensured that they had become filled with water. The troops had often fought immersed up to their waists.



(Right above: An attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines, possibly at St-Éloi – from Illustration)

On April 3 the Canadian 2nd Division entered the fray, relieving the by-then exhausted British. Fighting under the same abominable conditions, they, *like* the British, found that the shattered and torn landscape little resembled what they had been told to expect. And they, *like* the British, floundered and lost their way as the German defences daily grew more resolute – and transformed into counter-attack - and their artillery fire grew ever more in strength.

The fighting lingered on into the fourth week of April – although the *official* end of it was dated as April 17 - by which time the Canadians alone had lost almost fourteen-hundred men and all for nought: the Germans had won back all that had been lost.

The 18th Battalion itself had been kept in reserve until April 8 when it had moved forward into support. On that day the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade – of which the 18th Battalion was a unit – had been ordered to attack Craters 2 and 3. The attack was also to continue on the following night of April 9-10. A total of ninety-eight casualties had been incurred.

It would seem that a laudatory message from the Army Commander – of which an excerpt is presented here - hardly portrays the reality of the situation: *The Army Commander wishes to say how pleased he is with the good work done last night (April 8-9) which has materially improved our position.* It had done no such thing.

Six weeks later, the next major altercation in which Canadian forces were to be involved was in the south-east sector of the *Ypres Salient*. For the most part it was the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division upon which fell the brunt of the fighting, but units from the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions were also to play a greater or lesser role. The 18th Battalion was one of those to play that *lesser* role – in fact, no role whatsoever – having been withdrawn in reserve at *Quebec Camp* during most of that period.

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(Right: *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*)

On June 22 the unit was once more serving in the front line. The 18th Battalion War Diary entry for that day comprises only two lines which read as follows: *Position quiet. Lieuts. W.F. COLE and J.F. PERKINS proceeded on leave. 6 OR (other ranks) wounded. 2 or returned from hospital. 2 OR died of wounds.*



A casualty report concerning one of those who had died of wounds is somewhat more detailed: *On the night of June 21st/ 22nd, 1916, Private Dawe accompanied by Private Kean made a daring reconnaissance of the enemy wire opposite our trenches. While returning they were discovered and fired on by rifles and grenades from the enemy front line. Both men were wounded, Private Dawe by a bullet in the head, and he later died at No. 3 Canadian Casualty Station.*

(Right: *A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War: Other such medical establishments were of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card*)



The son of Captain Henry Dawe, master mariner, deceased 1921 – to whom he had allotted a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay - and of Naomi Dawe (née *Parsons*) of Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, he was also brother to (at least) eleven siblings: brothers Samuel, Hugh-Augustus and Stephen; and to eight (nine?) sisters of whom the names of five were Winnifred, Effie-Gertrude, Naomi-Millicent (known as *Daisy*), Ethel (died in infancy) and Beatrice-Frances.

Private Victor Charles Dawe was reported as having *died of wounds* in the 3rd Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, by that time at the Rémy Sidings just to the south of the Belgian town of Poperinghe, on June 22, 1916.

(Right above: *A family monument which stands in Bay Roberts Old United Church Cemetery commemorates the sacrifice of Victor Charles Dawe. – photograph from 2010(?)*)

Victor Charles Dawe had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-four years: date of birth in Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, February 6, 1891.

(Right: *The sacrifice of Private Victor Charles Dawe is honoured on the War Memorial in the community of Bay Roberts. – photograph from 2010(?)*)



Private Victor Charles Dawe 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).

