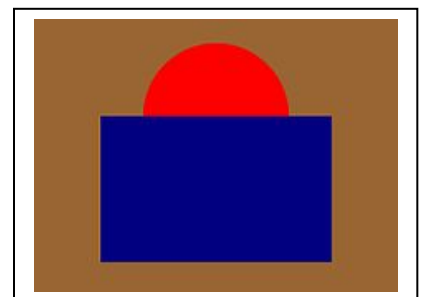




**Private William Henry Dennis (Number 742346) of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, is interred in Gezaincourt Communal Cemetery Extension: Grave reference I.L.20.**

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



**(continued)**

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, William Henry Dennis has left behind him little or no information a propos his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of New Brunswick. It was there that he apparently was to settle down as early as 1905 when he married the eighteen-year old Edna Kenderdine Vanwort. At that time he was recorded as working with *steamshipping*, this documented on the couple's marriage papers. They were later to have a single child, William Henry, born on August 27, 1909.

William Henry Dennis presented himself for medical examination and also attested in Saint John, New Brunswick, on January 4 of 1916. He had enlisted on the day before – despite other papers recording January 4 – as his first pay records shows January 3 to be the day on which the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services – and confirmed by the same date having been recorded on a Medical History Sheet.

While the same pay records document him as having been... *taken on strength* on the same January 3 by the 115<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, it appears that it was not until April 6 that the formalities of attestation officially came to a conclusion: on that date the Officer Commanding the unit, Lieutenant-Colonel FV Wedderburn 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.*

Perhaps it was at this moment that he was attached to 'B' Company.

The 115<sup>th</sup> Battalion was at the time based in St. John, New Brunswick, likely at the recently-constructed - in 1911 and 1912 - Barrack Green Armouries\*. Whether all of the Battalion's training before departure for *overseas service* was undertaken in Saint John is uncertain; the unit may have been ordered elsewhere as a single medical report documents Private Dennis as having reported to hospital at Valcartier, Québec, on June 20 – although he was not admitted on that occasion. Perhaps it was simply for a vaccination.

*It was also during these months in Canada that on two occasions, on or about March 23 and on or about May 9, he was fined three days' pay for an undisclosed misdemeanour.*

*\*The Armouries were, in fact, just around the corner from where Private Dennis and his family resided, at 115 Brittain (also found as Britain) Street.*

(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 later date in the war) from The War Illustrated*)



It was then on July 23 of 1916 that the thirty-four officers and eight-hundred one *other ranks* of the 115<sup>th</sup> Battalion embarked in the harbour at Halifax onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* for overseas service.

(continued)



The unit was not to take passage to the United Kingdom alone: also on board were to be the 103<sup>rd</sup>, the 109<sup>th</sup>, the 112<sup>th</sup> and the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry; the 4<sup>th</sup> Draft of the Canadian Mounted Rifles Depot; the 1<sup>st</sup> Drafts of the 65<sup>th</sup> and 71<sup>st</sup> Batteries of Canadian Field Artillery; and the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Drafts of the Canadian Army Medical Corps 11<sup>th</sup> TD (Training Depot?).



Likely also travelling would have been a miscellany of military personnel from other units which, all together, would have meant that some six-thousand souls were on the vessel when she cleared the harbour on July 24 for her trans-Atlantic crossing.

(Right above: *HMT Olympic* – sister ship to *Britannic*, to be sunk in the Mediterranean in November of 1916, and to the ill-starred *Titanic* - on the right, lies at anchor along with *HMHS Aquitania*, centre, at Mudros Bay on the Greek Island of Lemnos, in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London)

*Olympic* docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool a week later, on July 31. From there it is most likely that Private Dennis' unit was transported immediately by train to the large Canadian military encampment which by then had been established in the vicinity of the villages of Liphook and Bramshott – to which community the camp owed its name - in the southern English county of Hampshire\*.

*\*A further medical record has him reporting to hospital at Bramshott on August 17 although there are no other details noted and, as on the prior occasion back at Valcartier, he was not admitted.*

(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)



Some two months later, on October 5\*, 1916, Private Dennis was transferred from the 115<sup>th</sup> Battalion and... *taken on strength* of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) of the 1<sup>st</sup> Québec Regiment. He sailed to France on that same October 5, likely from the English south-coast port of Southampton to the French port-city of Le Havre at the estuary of the River Seine.



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

*\*Little more than two weeks afterwards, all remaining personnel of the 115<sup>th</sup> Battalion were absorbed into the 112<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The 115<sup>th</sup> Battalion was then officially disbanded some eleven months later again, in September of 1917.*

(continued)

Once having disembarked at Le Havre, Private Dennis proceeded to the nearby Canadian Infantry Base Depot. From there, on October 20 of that 1916, he was despatched to his new parent unit, one of a reinforcement draft of one-hundred twenty *other ranks* which joined the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion *in the field* three days later, on October 23.

\* \* \* \* \*

A component of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) was a Montreal-based unit with a Canadian Militia background which dated back to 1862.

The Battalion had sailed to Great Britain from Canada in May of 1915, and had then been transferred to France, then almost immediately to Belgium, in mid-September of the same year. There it was to serve in a sector to the south of the *Ypres Salient* where the front progressed further southward towards the Franco-Belgian frontier. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division then remained in this area for the following eleven months.



(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*)

In early April, 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had undergone its baptism of fire in a major infantry operation. It was at a place called St-Éloi where, on the 27<sup>th</sup> 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 later pursue 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 24<sup>th</sup> 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.

(continued)



Following this encounter, some six weeks later, there was to be a second confrontation with the German Army, at *Mount Sorrel*. This would involve mainly the troops of the newly-arrived Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division but a number of other units had subsequently played a role.

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under British (and thus, in this case, Canadian) control. This was just 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, had overrun the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans had been unable to exploit their success and the Canadians had been able to patch up their defences. The hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, delivered piece-meal and poorly coordinated, was a costly disaster for the Canadians.



(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 24<sup>th</sup> 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 11<sup>th</sup>. Thus neither did it participate in the closing stages of the confrontation on October 12-13.

The Battalion was not to escape without casualties however. Once again, as at *St-Éloi*, these were caused mostly by German gun-fire, particularly at the time when it was moving forward towards *Maple Copse* on the 7<sup>th</sup>, one platoon incurring twenty-three *killed* and *wounded* in a single extremely heavy bombardment and thus practically ceasing to exist.

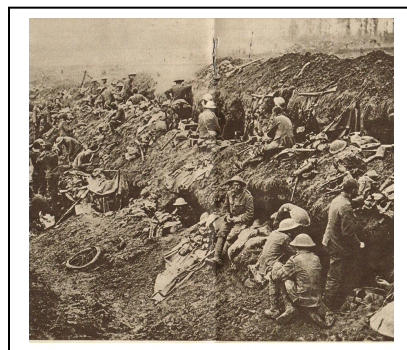
(Right below: *Maple Copse, the scene of heavy fighting in June of 1916, and its cemetery wherein lie numerous Canadians* – photograph from 2014)

From that time until the final week of August the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion had again resumed the rigours and routines of life in 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.



(continued)

***\*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)***

**On August 25 the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion withdrew entirely from the Ypres Salient to the area of Steenvoorde where new training-grounds had been established.**

**Further to the south, the British summer offensive had not been 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 British 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 costing the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the space of four short hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.**



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

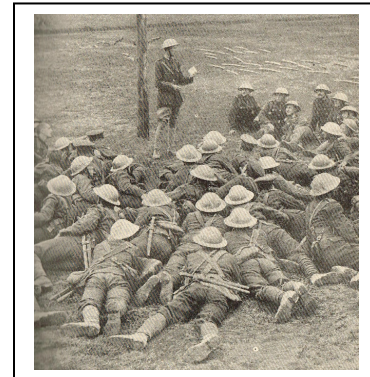
**On that first day of 1<sup>st</sup> Somme, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and those eight-hundred personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion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

**(continued)**

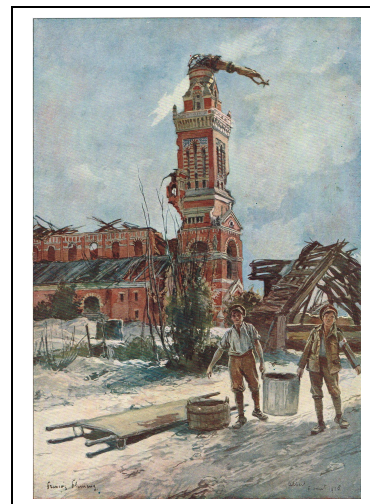


(Right: *An image purporting to be that of a Canadian officer giving instructions to those under his command prior to the attack at Flers-Courcelette (see below), September 1916. – from The War Illustrated*)



Meanwhile, ten days after its retirement from Belgium and into north-western France for training, on September 4 the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion had left its billets at Éperlecques 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. The unit then continued on foot the five kilometres to its billets.

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



On the next day again, September 6, the Battalion had started to march at eight-thirty in the morning – billeted each night on the way - to arrive four days later, September 10, at the large military encampment of the *Brickfields* (*La Briqueterie*), in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

During the next several days the unit was occupied in a number of tasks, among them burying cable, cleaning trenches and training. On September 15 and 16, while other battalions were engaged in the ongoing offensive, the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered to carry ammunition, rations, stretchers and supplies forward. On the evening of September 16 it had moved into close support, allowing the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion to move up to the front line.

At half-past mid-day on September 17, the unit had received orders to deliver an attack later that afternoon on the German front line, an assault which began at five-thirty in the afternoon.

The operation had 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 18<sup>th</sup> the Battalion was back at *Brickfields*: total casualties of *all ranks* during the preceding days, three-hundred twenty.

(continued)

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

(Right: *Evacuating Canadian casualties after the battle – somewhere on the Somme – 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 such to fail and *Regina Trench* was not to be taken definitively until November 11, some six weeks later. The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion's operation had cost a further two-hundred four casualties all told.

(Right: *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 24<sup>th</sup> 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, then continuing in the direction of the mining centre of Lens, to finally be stationed in the suburbs, in the Angres Sector\*.

*\*This implies only a certain military area, not a specific place or even trench system. During this time the personnel would have followed a calendar of front-line, support and reserve duties as outlined earlier.*

(Right: *The city of Arras was to endure four years of bombardment during the Great War; the Grand'Place (Grande Place) already looked like this by March of 1917 and more was to follow. – from Le Miroir*)



There, at a time while the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) was in the area of Lens, was where and when Private Dennis reported *to duty*, according to the Battalion War Diary on October 23 – his own papers record the date as the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

\* \* \* \* \*

Private Dennis and his Battalion remained in the Angres Sector from October 15 of 1916 until January 17 of the New Year, 1917. The unit then moved to - and was billeted in – the town of Bruay, well to the rear. It was to be posted there for almost an entire month, to rest, to re-enforce and to re-organize.

The winter of 1916-1917 for the Canadian infantry was one of the everyday grind of life in and out of the trenches. There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides.

(continued)



Many of the units were withdrawn in rotation to rest – but also to train – in the rear areas of the sectors which stretched from Béthune in the north to Arras in the south, this being the part of the front for which the Canadians, since *1<sup>st</sup> Somme*, had become responsible.

(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 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been transferred to Maisnil Bouche where, again on the morrow... *Day spent cleaning up and getting ready for special training.* This *special training* and preparation for the coming offensive then continued until the afternoon of April 7.

The entire day of April 8 had been spent moving to the forward area but, apparently owing to the poor condition of the communication trenches, the troops had not taken their place in the 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 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.

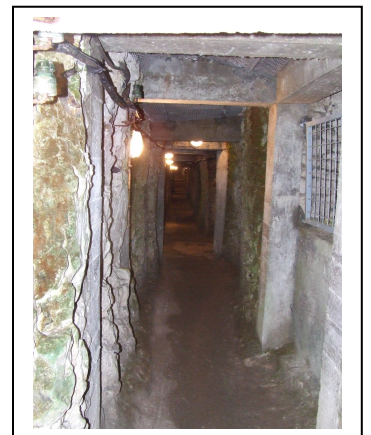


While the British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive was a disaster.

(Right above: *the Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands 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, autonomous, entity, had stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants\*.

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



*\*While Battalions of the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions attacked the Ridge itself, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had the responsibility of clearing some of the slope to the south, including the village of Thélus.*

(continued)

***(Right: Canadian troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> 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)***



The following are excerpts drawn from the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary Appendix submitted on April 18, 1917 (with reference to the events of April 9):

***The assaulting Battalions were the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the Right, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the Left, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion in Reserve and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion broken up for carrying parties and for mopping up.***

***At Zero hour, namely 5.30 a.m., the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Battalions moved forward to the attack closely followed by the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion...***

***The Artillery at Zero hour opened on the German front line until 5.33 and then lifted to the German Support Line from 5.33 to 5.41...***

***The German front line was captured at 5.34 and the Support Line at 5.42, very little resistance being met with owing to our effective artillery fire. Some forty Germans were secured in the dugouts...***

***The BLACK Line (captured at 6.03) was consolidated by the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Battalions and the RED Line (captured at 7.14) by the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion: each Battalion digging the new line about 100 yards in advance.***

***(Right: A part of the cost of capturing the German third-line trenches at Vimy Ridge – from Illustration)***



On April 9 the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion incurred a total of two-hundred forty-one casualties.

By the evening of April 10 the Canadians had finished clearing the area of Vimy Ridge of the few remaining pockets of resistance and began to consolidate the area in anticipation of the expected German counter-attacks.

There had on those first two days been the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on those days' successes proved logistically impossible. Thus the Germans closed the breach and the conflict once more 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.

(continued)



In the meantime, on April 30, Private Dennis had been wounded.

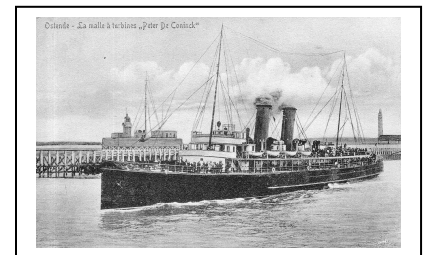
The Battalion War Diary entry for May 1 reads as follows: *The position of the Battalion is Right Section of Divisional Area Front Line occupied by C. & D. Coys... A. & B. Coys in Support Line 800 yards in Rear... Quiet day. Relieved by the 27<sup>th</sup> Canadian BN. Casualties 1 OR killed and 3 ORs wounded.*

The following report is from a medical record written while Private Dennis was at Epsom (see below): *Cause Wounded May 1<sup>st</sup> near Vimy Ridge by shrapnel while in trenches.* Private Dennis had been badly hit in the left thigh and also had lesser injuries to the left leg and cheek.

There appears to be no record of where Private Dennis was evacuated for treatment after having been wounded but it was likely to have been to an advanced dressing station. From there he was taken to be admitted on May 3 into the 5<sup>th</sup> British Red Cross (*Lady Hadfield's*) Hospital, in the peace-time coastal resort-town of Wimereux.



It was from there, likely on May 8 or 9, that he was placed on board the Belgian Hospital Ship *Pieter de Coninck* for the short cross-Channel journey back to the United Kingdom.



(Right above: *The French coastal resort of Wimereux at some time prior to the Great War: it was to be transformed into a major medical centre during the time of the conflict.* – from a vintage post-card)

(Right above: *The Pieter de Coninck sailing, in peacetime, from the harbour at Ostend* – from the *Old Ship Picture Galleries* web-site)

Upon his arrival in England, Private Dennis was admitted for further treatment into the Northumberland War Hospital at Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in the northern county of Northumberland, on May 9. At a bureaucratic level, on paper, he was... *taken on strength...* by the 1<sup>st</sup> Québec Regimental Depot at Shoreham in the county of (West) Sussex.

Private Dennis remained for treatment in the Northumberland War Hospital for a total of one-hundred seventy days, the biggest problem for the medical staff being the battle against infection... *On left femur...round entrance wound no exit wound...edges of the wound are reddened and pus wells out on pressure... X-Ray revealed 3 FB (foreign bodies) 2 smaller... 16/6/17 – Operation to find FB failed...* The infection, in those days before antibiotics, was to persist for more than two months.

It would be a long road to a full recovery for Private Dennis and it was not until October 26 that he was discharged from Gosforth. At that point he was transferred to the Canadian Military Hospital at Woodcote Park, Epsom – a well-known peace-time horse-racing venue – for eighteen days of... *physical drill.*

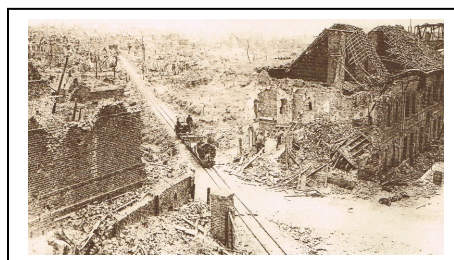
(continued)

Following Epsom, he was forwarded to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Convalescent Depot at Bramshott where he was to stay for a further fifty-three days. Private Dennis' rehabilitation was presumably successful as on January 4 of 1918 he... *ceases to be attached to 2 CCD on return to 23<sup>rd</sup> R Bn.* This return to the 23<sup>rd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion (Québec) – also stationed at Bramshott - suggests that the authorities were beginning to feel that he was by that time fit enough to return to serve on the Continent.

A further ten weeks were to pass before Private Dennis, on March 16, 1918, returned to France, once more likely passing through the ports of Southampton and Le Havre. Upon debarkation, he was apparently one of only nine personnel to report from England on that March 17 to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Étaples. There he awaited orders to transfer back to the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

Days after Private Dennis' arrival at Base Depot, the relative calm of the winter months of 1917-1918 was shattered - on the first day of spring.

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, they delivered a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', launched on March 21. 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 stationed there\*.



(Right above: *While the Germans did not attack the area of Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily at 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 the area where the Newfoundland Regiment – by that time 'Royal' - was serving with the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division. It also 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*)

Meanwhile, that wait at Étaples lasted until April 2 on which date Private Dennis was ordered by the 2<sup>nd</sup> CIBD to report *to duty* back with his unit – although no arrival of reinforcements is noted in the Battalion War Diary either on or about the date of April 3.

(continued)



The Battalion had only just itself marched back from the forward area to the vicinity of Berles au Bois, to the south-west of Arras, arriving there at half past six on that same morning.

Just two days later again, on April 5, the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion returned forward, relieving the 20<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalion in support positions at Wailly. On April 9 Private Dennis' Battalion advanced once more, relieving the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the front-line sector, the relief being completed by midnight of the night of April 9-10.

(Right: *Wailly Orchard Cemetery almost a century later: Of the three-hundred sixty-six burials therein, almost one-half are Canadian.* – photograph from 2014)



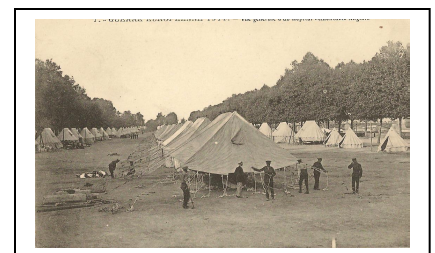
April 10 was a day on which the enemy artillery constantly and heavily shelled the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion's front-line and support positions. The War Diarist reported nine *killed in action* and ten *wounded* on that day. The morrow was to be worse.

The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for April 11 reads partially as follows: *At 6 a.m. enemy opened up heavy bombardment on our front line, Support trenches and rear of Support trenches. Same lasted throughout the day. At 9.30 a.m. a party of 80 Huns attempted to get into the left of "B" Company, but were driven off by our Lewis Gun and rifle fire suffering many casualties, while falling back the remainder of the attacking force were caught in our Artillery barrage and very few got back to their own line. At the same time a similar enemy force attempted to get in on the left of our "A" Company, but were driven off by our Lewis Gun & Rifle fire.*

*The enemy then resumed his bombardment and at 2 p.m. again attempted to get in on the left of "B" Company. A few of them succeeded in getting into our trench but were ejected within five minutes by bombing parties... During the second attack the enemy advanced his line to Saps about 60 yards in front of "B" Company. At 5.30 p.m. the 5<sup>th</sup> Cdn. T.M.B. (Stokes) along with "B" Company rifle grenadiers succeeded in driving him out... During the night quietened down. Casualties 17 Killed & 40 Wounded.*

There, in fact, appear to be no details in his personal files of the wounding of Private Dennis – not even the date – but perhaps it was on this above-reported occasion. It seems to be known only that he was admitted into the 56<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Gezaincourt on the next day, April 12, for treatment to gun-shot wounds that he had incurred to the right arm and chest.

(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)



(continued)

The son of Henry Dennis and of Sara Dennis (also found as *Sarah*, deceased before her son, perhaps as early as June 10, 1888, aged twenty-nine) of Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, he was also father to William Henry and husband to Edna (see above) – to whom he had allocated a monthly twenty dollars from his pay - \$1.10 per diem - as of August 1, 1916, and to whom he had willed his all on September 29, 1916.

Private Dennis was reported as having *died of wounds* on April 12, 1918, by the Officer Commanding the 56<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station.

William Henry Dennis had enlisted at the *apparent age* of thirty-two years: date of birth at Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, May 19, 1884.

Private William Henry Dennis was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 27, 2023.

