



Private I. James Devereux* (Number 877120) of the Royal Canadian Regiment, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Vis-en-Artois British Cemetery, Haucourt: Grave reference IV.I.21..

(Right: The image of the cap badge of the Royal Canadian Regiment is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

(continued)



**The 'I.' seen on his headstone is not to be found elsewhere either in his personal file or in parish records or on a family monument in the Avondale Roman Catholic Cemetery. What is more, his family name is spelled 'Devereaux' in all local sources as well as on the fore-mentioned monument.*

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of an *electrician*, James Devereaux may have been the young man documented on the passenger list of May 23, 1911, of the SS *Ivermore*. The vessel at the time was traversing the Cabot Strait from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland to North Sydney, Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. The *Jas Devereaux* on board *Ivermore* was on his way to the industrial city of Sydney to seek work as a labourer.

It was in Sydney that the James Devereux of this short history – residing at the time at 160, Pitt Street in the city - presented himself for enlistment almost five years later, on March 7 of 1916. On the same day he underwent a medical examination which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force*...and was also attested. He was thereupon *taken on strength* by the 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*).

While his pay records indicate that this March 7 was the date on which the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services, it was then to be almost a further seven weeks, on April 24, before the formalities of Private Devereux's enlistment were officially concluded: it was on that date that the Commanding Officer of the Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Parker Day, declared – on paper – that...*877120 Pte James Devereux...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

By this time, Private Devereux would have already spent the intervening weeks undergoing training in the town of Broughton*, only some twenty kilometres distant, to the south of Sydney.

**Broughton had been a 'company town', developed towards the end on the nineteenth century by the Cape Breton Coal, Iron & Railway Company. Apparently too much money had been spent on it as the company went bankrupt in 1907 and the town was soon abandoned. At the outset of the Great War it was taken over by the Canadian Army and, more particularly, by the 185th Battalion (Cape Breton Highlanders).*

However, this posting to Broughton was not to last longer than just over two months: By that time, the authorities had decided to create a Nova Scotia Highland Brigade to comprise the 185th, the 85th, the 193rd and the 219th Battalions. On May 23 of 1915 these four formations were assembled to train together at Camp Aldershot, Nova Scotia, where the Brigade then spent all summer before receiving its colours on September 28, two weeks before its departure for overseas service.

While posted at Camp Aldershot, Private Devereux had the following incidents introduced into his military record: on May 6, 1916, he had received promotion to the rank of Provost Corporal (*Military Police*); towards the middle of that same month he had forfeited three days' pay for having been *Absent Without Leave*; and on the fourth day of August – for reasons unrecorded in his dossier – he had been deprived of his corporal's stripes and reduced to the ranks.

Apart from being a time of training, the period spent at Aldershot was also the occasion for some to write a will before leaving for *overseas service* in the United Kingdom. Private Devereux did so on September 3, in a document in which he left his everything to his father. It was also then on October 1 of 1916, also prior to his departure overseas, that he began to allocate a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay to his sister, Annie, residing in the Sydney suburb of Whitney Pier at the time*.

**On August 1, 1918, this allocation was transferred to Cornelius Devereaux, father of both Annie and James, possibly because she had married Thomas Russell – also from Newfoundland – on February 1 of that year.*

At seven o'clock in the evening of October 11, 1916, the one-thousand thirty-eight officers and *other ranks* of the 185th Overseas Battalion embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* in Halifax harbour. Earlier that day the 85th and the 188th Battalions had gone on board, to be followed on the morrow by the 219th and the 193rd.



(Right above: *HMT Olympic* on the right lies at anchor along with *HMHS Aquitania*, centre, at *Mudros Bay* in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph from the *Imperial War Museum, London*)

On October 13th - at about eleven o'clock in the morning - it was the turn of the half-battalion of the 166th – five-hundred three *all ranks* - the final unit, to march up the gangways before *Olympic* cast her lines and sailed towards the open sea. For the trans-Atlantic passage she was carrying some six-thousand five-hundred military personnel.

The vessel docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on October 19, six days later, and the troops disembarked on that same day. The 185th Battalion was thereupon transported south-eastwards to *Witley Camp* in the county of Surrey.

The 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) is documented as then having provided reinforcements for Canadian forces on the Continent. This role was to last until February of 1918 when the unit was definitively absorbed into the newly-organized Canadian 17th (*Reserve*) Battalion (but see below for Private Devereux). Some months later again, in November of that year, the unit was to be officially disbanded.

The Battalion's organizers had originally expected that it would be sent – with the other three units of the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade – into *active service* on the Continent, but this was not to be.

By the time of Private Devereux's arrival in England, the Canadian Corps had been involved in the *First Battle of the Somme* for two months during which time it had suffered terrible losses. It was to fill the depleted ranks of those battered units that the newly-arrived Nova Scotia Highland Brigade was to be deployed.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *Dead of the Somme awaiting burial* – an unidentified photograph)

The 85th Battalion was to be the exception to this rule as it *alone* of the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade was eventually despatched to France - in February of 1917. Serving with the 11th and then the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigades of the 4th Canadian Division, it was to distinguish itself at first at *Vimy Ridge* and then during the remainder of the conflict.

Apparently, after its absorption by the 17th Reserve Battalion on February 15 of 1918, Private Devereaux appears to have remained, at least bureaucratically, on the nominal roll of the 185th Battalion for a further two weeks. Having spent more than sixteen months at *Witley Camp*, he was *taken off strength* from the 185th Battalion on March 1 to cross during that night the English Channel to France and to report on the following day, March 2, to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Base Depot in the vicinity of the coastal town of *Etaples*.

Taken on strength by his new unit, the Royal Canadian Regiment, on the same March 2, Private Devereux was despatched on the next day again to join it. His personal files record him as having done so two days afterwards, on March 5. On that day the RCR was at *Cellars Camp*, preparing for a return to the forward area on the morrow.

The RCR Battalion's War Diarist recorded the arrival of Private Devereaux's draft on that day: *A draft of 100 O.R. from England also arrived. All are from the 185th Battalion and are a stalwart looking lot of men.*

* * * * *

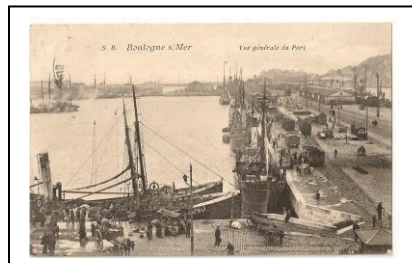
The Royal Canadian Regiment, although having been the senior regiment in the Canadian Army at the outbreak of the *Great War*, had not been among the first units to be despatched overseas from Canada to the United Kingdom in October of 1914. In fact, it *had* been sent overseas, but in a different direction, to languish for a year on the British island possession of Bermuda.

After that posting, in the summer of 1915, the Royal Canadian Regiment had been brought home to Canada and had then taken the same ship onward to the United Kingdom where it had then been attached to the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade of the newly-forming 3rd Canadian Division.

The majority of RCR* personnel and equipment had then been transferred through the English port of Folkestone and then its French counter-part, Boulogne, to service with the 3rd Canadian Division** on the Continent on November 1 of 1915, before having been sent to the Franco-Belgian frontier area with the 1st Canadian Division and then, at the end of March of 1916, to the *Ypres Salient*.

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

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



(Right below: Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, Ploegsteert Sector, where the 1st Canadian Division served in the winter of 1915-1916, a mine crater from the time of the 1917 British offensive showing in the foreground – photograph from 2014)

***The RCR was – and still is today – a regiment, a force which may comprise any number of battalions: today, in 2017, there are three. Some British regiments, for example, eventually sent twenty or more battalions to serve at the Front during the Great War. Only a single battalion - normally one-thousand strong but during the Great War oft-times often comprising a lesser number - of the Royal Canadian Regiment ever served at the front during the Great War.**



****The 3rd Canadian Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. Unlike the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions and, later, the 4th Canadian Division, the 3rd Division was not formed in the United Kingdom but, in an almost ad hoc fashion, of units already serving on the Continent at the time, and of others which were to arrive from England as late as February of 1916.**

The first months of 1916 had been relatively peaceful for the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division, also in the frontier area. It was in March, 1916, that the entire Division was transferred to the *Ypres Salient*, a lethal place at the best of times, into an area to the south-east and into the vicinity of such places as the village of *Hooge*, and those that now were to go by English names such as *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Maple Copse* and *Mount Sorrel*.

In April it was the Canadian 2nd Division, in a neighbouring sector to the south of Ypres, which was to receive the attention of the German Army for a few days. For that Division, these two weeks were not to be as tranquil as that being experienced elsewhere during the same period by the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion and the other units of the Canadian 3rd Division.



(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*)

The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* had officially taken place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it was here that the British had excavated a series of galleries under the German lines, there to place explosives which they detonated on that March 27, having then followed up with an infantry assault.

After a brief initial success the attack had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than had had the British, and by the 17th of the month, when the battle was called off, both sides were back where they had been some three weeks previously – and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.

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



However, as previously noted, this confrontation was a 2nd Division affair and the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the artillery duels some kilometres away.

Its own first major action, some seven weeks later, was to be the confrontation with the Germans at *Mount Sorrel*, in the south-east area of the *Ypres Salient*.

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



On June 2 the Germans attacked the only high ground in the *Salient* which remained under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, in the areas of the village of *Hooze* and those other places of English-sounding names as listed in a closely-previous paragraph. They are still referred to by the local people as such today.

(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)



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 were unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences. The hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, delivered piece-meal and poorly co-ordinated, was to be a costly disaster for the Canadians.



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

Ten days later the Canadians again counter-attacked, on this occasion better informed, better prepared and better supported. The lost ground for the most part was recovered, both sides were back where they had started eleven days before – and the cemeteries were a little fuller.



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

(Right: *A century later, reminders of a violent past – in both 1916 and 1917 - at the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres: the area today is protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the caprices of nature. – photograph from 2014*)



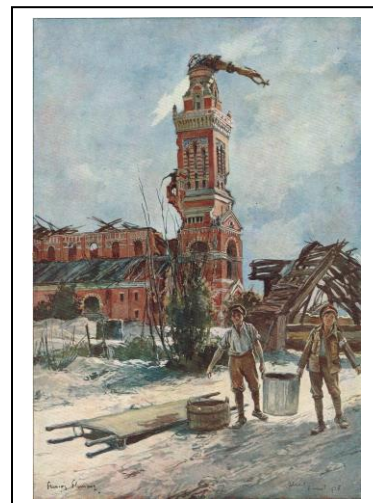
The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had been caught in the maelstrom of June 2 and had remained in the forward area until the night of June 5-6 when it had been relieved and had retired to Camp “B” well to the rear.

The unit was not to serve again during the action at *Mount Sorrel* where it had, by the time of its withdrawal, incurred some one-hundred forty-five casualties.

Thus it was back to the everyday routines of trench warfare for some two months after which time the unit – as was to be the case of most of the other Canadian Battalions – was once more ordered from the field, on this occasion for training in ‘*open warfare*’. The Canadians were about to travel south into France to play a role in the British summer offensive of 1916.

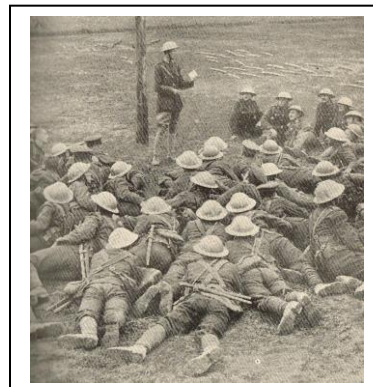
By September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of just four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

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



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

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 had entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first collective 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, September 1916 – from The War Illustrated*)

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



The RCR arrived in the area of the provincial town of Albert in the late evening of September 13 and just two days later, on September 15, was ordered to move forward in order to attack a German strong-point, the *Zollern Graben*, on the following day. By four o'clock in the morning of September 17, when it withdrew, the RCR had incurred some two-hundred eighty casualties and the *Zollern Graben* was still in German hands.

Three weeks later, another major action was to follow: the attack of October 8-9 on the *Regina Trench* system was not a success but, on the contrary, a further expensive failure; the German positions would not be definitively taken until November 11. By that latter date, however, the RCR was to be in the Lens sector, some fifty kilometres to the north. In fact, the unit was to be moving in that direction within days of having fought at *Regina Trench*.



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



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

During the five weeks of its sojourn at *the Somme* the Battalion had lost, *killed* and *wounded*, about four-hundred fifty *all ranks*. Over two hundred more had been reported as *missing in action*, the War Diarist optimistically predicting that most of them would be later found in field ambulances and casualty clearing stations. The accuracy of that forecast does not appear to have been documented.

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



The RCR Battalion began to withdraw from *the Somme* on October 10. The Battalion War Diarist makes no mention of any motor transport or train being employed so it may be assumed that the unit, as did many others, retired from there on foot. The route took it westward at first before it then turned northward so as to pass to the west of the by-now shattered city of Arras and beyond.

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

It was on the 24th of that October of 1916 that the unit arrived in the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector* to the north-west of Arras. The War Diarist on that date reported Battalion strength as being three-hundred eighty-six *all ranks*, less than forty per cent of regulation battalion numbers. *The Somme* had taken its toll.

The RCR, in its new quarters in the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector*, once more began the daily pattern of life in and out of the trenches*, a routine which lasted until the middle of February of the following year, 1917.

(Right: *Canadian soldiers while off-duty perusing the program of an upcoming concert 'somewhere on the Continent' – from Le Miroir*)

**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*)

Thus the winter of 1916-1917 was to pass in that manner for the Royal Canadian Regiment. The Battalion War Diary is fairly repetitive in its entries: little in the way of infantry action except patrols and the occasional raid – by both sides: all local activity; and most casualties were due to German artillery and snipers. However, it should be added that during the winter, the majority of admissions into the various Canadian medical facilities was of those who were sick and particularly – perhaps a little surprisingly – of those in need of dental care.

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

Then in February the unit was ordered into Divisional Reserve at Bruay where it began five weeks of training for the upcoming British offensive; not that it was all work: the War Diary reports sports events and concerts among the litany of parades, lectures, marches, drills, work-parties and visits from military and political persons.



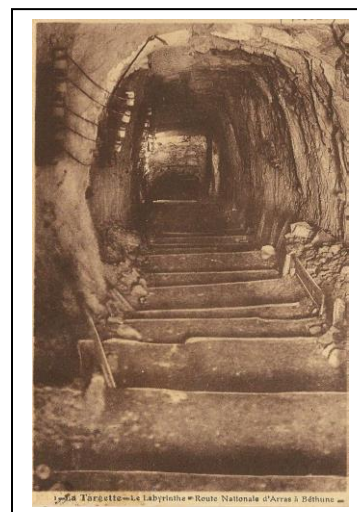
(Right above: *A Canadian carrying-party loading up before moving up to the forward area, one of the many duties of troops when in support or reserve: the head-bands - called 'tumps' - was an idea which had been adopted from the North American aboriginal peoples – from Le Miroir*)

On March 21 the RCR moved forward into the trenches once again; after five weeks in reserve perhaps the change was a bit of a shock to the Battalion's collective system: the War Diarist notes that the new quarters... *LA MOTTE Camp, is composed of Bivouacs, with nine tents for officers. We are its first occupants. It can be greatly improved.*

But he also notes that... *"C" Company relieved the right Company of the 58th Battn. taking over the exact frontage from which we are expected to jump off.* Such an observation illustrates the recent policy of informing junior officers and senior NCOs of the plans of intended actions, knowledge that this personnel was to pass to the men serving further down the hierarchy.

And it must have been clear to the men of the RCR that there were intended actions; the forward and rear areas in the Neuville St-Vaast were hives of ongoing activity for which the unit was supplying working-parties and carrying-parties each day: dumping-areas were being cleared, bivouacs were being sand-bagged, stone laid for walks, new trenches dug and old ones deepened, troops familiarized with the newly-excavated tunnels and other positions, water-pipes and communication lines buried, artillery and machine-guns sited...

On April 1 the RCR Battalion retired to Villers-au-Bois for a week, there to organize for the first day of the offensive. On April 7, the first of the Companies moved into one of those tunnels which had been hewn out of the chalk; it was hoped that these galleries would reduce the number of casualties with the men sheltering there until the last possible moment, and that it would also nurture the element of surprise.



(Right above: *Just one of the network of tunnels, this one in the area of Neuville St-Vaast–La Targette, which became known as the Labyrinth – from a vintage post-card*)

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The men of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion were to remain underground for well over twenty-four hours.

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 count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great 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.

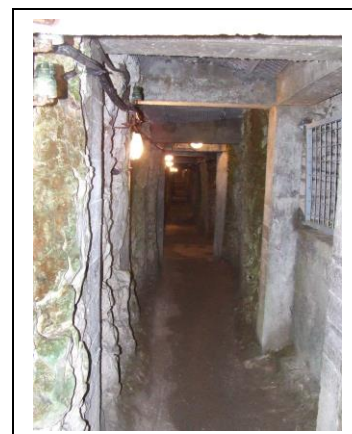


While the British campaign proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive was to be yet a further disaster.

(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, autonomous, entity, 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 after the attack – photograph from 2008(?))



(Right below: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3^d Division, burdened 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*)

For no reason other than that it is one of the more legible entries to follow, an extract of the experience of “A” Company during the opening of the attack of April 9 is here included as being representative of the events of the assault as undertaken by the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion.

(Excerpts from the Battalion War Diary of April 9, 1917)
3.12 a.m. “A” Company under Captain Munn reports Co. in Assembly trenches.

5.30 a.m. Raining. Barrage opens.



While the other three Companies were in communication with Headquarters at a relatively early hour, apparently not so “A” Company, not until... 1.40 p.m. Message from “A” Co. delivered by wounded runner stated that they had captured four machine guns, were in touch with Units on both flanks... and that they had sent a patrol over the Ridge.

2.15 p.m. "A" Co. (left Co.) is in its objective. Strength 1 Officer and approximately 50 other ranks with no N.C.O.'s. It is in touch with "C" Co (right) who's (sic) approximate strength is 1 Officer and sixty other ranks... "A" Co. has sent a patrol over the ridge from which as yet no report has been sent. There is a small gap between "A" Co. and the P.P.C.C.L.I. owing to the shortage of men. We command the whole situation at present, but unless reinforcements and supplies of every sort, more especially S.A.A. (small-arms ammunition) available, machine Guns, shovels etc., are sent up at first opportunity, it will be difficult to withstand another counter attack.

It was the 3rd Division – of which the Royal Canadian Regiment was an element - and also the 4th Division whose objective had been *Vimy Ridge* itself, the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions having objectives on the right-hand side of the main slope*.

****This was the first occasion on which the four Canadian Divisions were to act in concert as an autonomous Canadian Army Corps rather than as a constituent of a British formation. In fact, on this occasion, British forces had been placed under Canadian command.***

Of the ten thousand Canadian casualties of the day, the Royal Canadian Regiment incurred fifty-six *killed in action*, one-hundred sixty-five *wounded*, and sixty-five *missing in action*.

The five-week *Battle of Arras* having terminated, the Royal Canadian Regiment was once again to face a long period of trench warfare. However, for many of the other units of the Canadian 1st and 2nd Divisions which were serving in sectors from Vimy in the south to Béthune to the north, this monotonous work was going to be spiced up: the Canadian Corps High Command had some offensive work planned.



(Right above: *The village of Souchez, just to the north of Vimy, already looked like this in 1915 when the French passed control of the area over to the British. – from Le Miroir*)

The British High Command* had long since by this time decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention – and also his reserves - from *that* area, it had also ordered operations to take place in the sectors of Canadian responsibility running north-south from Béthune to just north of Arras.



The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort.

(Right above: *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*)

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(Preceding page: *Canadian troops under fire advancing across No-Man's Land in the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

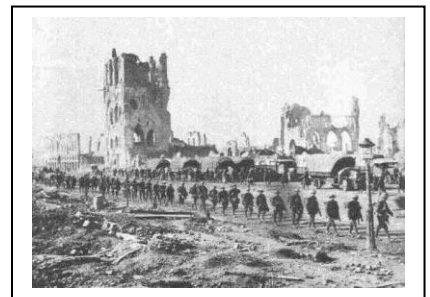
**It should be remembered that during the Great War the British High Command was in control of not only its own troops but also those from all the British Dominions, colonies and territories.*

On August 15, a major attack was launched by Canadian troops in the suburbs of the city of Lens and just to the north, in the area of a small rise known as *Hill 70*. The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion, however, was not a part of this particular offensive and on that day was in fact busy in training at LaPugny. As far as anything of military importance on that day was concerned, the Battalion War Diarist was sparing with his ink: *Nil*.

The Canadian efforts had been expected to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium was proceeding less well than expected and the High Command was looking for reinforcements to make good the exorbitant losses. The *Anzacs* and then the Canadians were ordered to prepare to move north; thus the Canadians were obliged to abandon their plans.

It was just over seven weeks after the capture of *Hill 70*, on October 6, that the Royal Canadian Regiment began to make its way on foot and by train, to the area of the Franco-Belgian border. Later that day the unit was being billeted in the northern French town of Bailleul.

But it was not to be until October 23, having travelled in a circuitous route on foot and by train that the RCR was to find itself in the war zone of the *Ypres Salient*.



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

Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign into which the Canadians were about to be thrust – already ongoing since the last day of that July of 1917 - came to be better known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.



(Right above: *Somewhere, perhaps anywhere or everywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which 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 2nd Canadian Division finally entering the ruins of Passchendaele itself.

(Preceding page: *The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians standing in the south-western outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele (today Passendale) – photograph from 2010*)

From October 23 until the end of the month the RCR was in reserve in the area of Sin Jaan, contributing to carrying-parties, working-parties and stretcher-parties. On October 30 it was ordered forward and was involved peripherally in an attack by the 3rd Division.

The unit then remained in the lines until relieved on November 4 – all of this at a cost of two-hundred fifty-eight casualties.

(Right above: *Just a few hundred to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the above monument – photograph from 2010*)

It was not until November 14 that the Royal Canadian Regiment was back in the trenches where they intersected what in peace-time had been the road leading north from Passchendaele (today *Passendale*) to the community of Westroosebeke*.

(Right above: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war – from Illustration*)

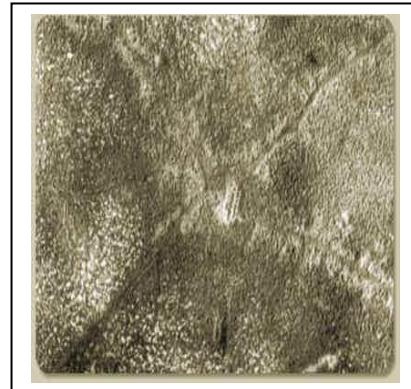
(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)

There it was almost continually shelled for three days, incurring fifty casualties, before withdrawing from its positions – and from the 3rd *Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele* – on the morning of November 18.

**The Battalion's positions were also atop the Passchendaele Ridge.*

Two days later again, on November 20, the unit was back in northern France, at Rely, a community some eighteen kilometres to the west of Béthune. There it was to remain, both resting and training, for a month, until December 21 when it was bussed back to the *Lens Sector*. There that daily grind of life in the trenches began once more.

The month of December, even though the Battalion War Diarist appears to have neglected it, had nevertheless offered something a little different – and a reminder of home - to all the Canadian formations which were serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army were open during that month and participation, in at least *some* units, was in the ninety per cent range*.



**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 pay for it as well.*

The winter of 1917-1918 was for the most part to be a quiet period, much as had been the three previous winters of the *Great War*. The RCR Battalion War Diary suggests that there was little offensive activity on the part of the unit – patrolling was no more than routine and there appears to be no mention of raiding by either side. Much of its time was spent in the rear area and the numbers of casualties recorded per diem are very low.

It was during the course of this period that Private Devereux and his ninety-nine comrades-in-arms from England reported *to duty*, on March 5, 1918, to the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion, his new unit.

* * * * *

The tranquillity of the winter was to continue until the very end of the season, but no further. The first day of spring of 1918, March 21, the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion still stationed in the area of the city and mining centre of Lens, was to bring to a close this relative calm.

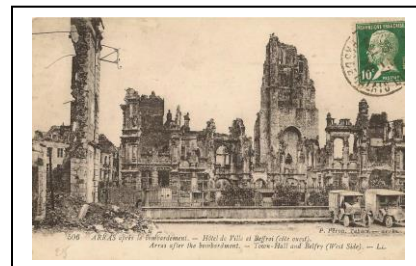
Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the divisions no longer necessary on the *Eastern Front* because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, they launched a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21. The main blow fell 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 city of Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily during the time of their spring offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and thus to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le 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 Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It also was successful for a while, but petered out towards the end of the month.



(continued)

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

However, despite, at times, the critical situations in the areas of both *the Somme* and *Flanders*, the services of the Royal Canadian Regiment were apparently not required during either *Operation Michael* or *Operation Georgette*.

That entire period was spent by the unit in the sector of Lens, in the southern suburb of Avion and then, latterly, withdrawn to the vicinity of the commune of Cambigneul, sixteen kilometres north-west of Arras.

The following two months were spent well to the rear, in an area where games, parades and concerts were also a part of the routine of army life, although maybe not quite as frequent as the seemingly-everyday working-parties and carrying-parties.



(Right above: *A further photograph of a Canadian carrying-party delivering the trappings of war somewhere on the Western Front – from Le Miroir*)

(Right: *Cited as being an Official Canadian Photograph of a... 'violinist playing traditional music near Lens' - from Le Miroir*)

It was to be the end of July before Private Devereux's Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion was to see action at the front again except on certain occasions when training exercises were held in forward areas, these activities, of necessity, made to be as realistic as possible.



It may well have been that Private Devereux and his comrades-in-arms at times asked themselves not only *why* there was this very welcome and quiet period, but also *what the purpose could be* of all the drills, marches, exercises, study and use of German weapons, familiarization with new tactics, lectures, bayonetting, grenade-throwing, gas evasion and manoeuvres.

(Right: *A photograph, from 1917, of a Canadian soldier during training in the use of his 'gas-helmet': As may be imagined, it was difficult for the wearer to perform the duties of a soldier, particularly in the event of an attack. – from Le Miroir*)

The period of relative quiet after the efforts of the German spring offensives, *Michael* and *Georgette*, was due of course – certainly in the earlier stages - to the exhaustion of both sides by the end of that April of 1918.



(continued)

But then it was to continue that way as the Allies and the newly-arriving Americans began in their turn to prepare for an offensive campaign – and therefore also as the German forces began to gird themselves for the inevitable retribution which was soon to burst upon them.

(Right: *Le Maréchal Ferdinand Jean-Marie Foch, this photograph from 1921, became Generalissimo of the Allied Armies on March 26, 1918. – photograph from the Wikipedia web-site)*

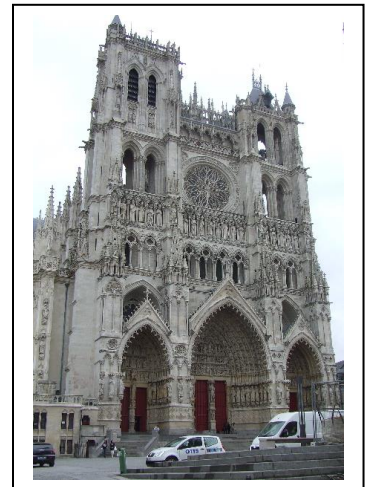


The newly-appointed Generalissimo of the Allied and Associate forces on the Western Front was Ferdinand Foch. His plan was to strike not only hard, but to strike often and ubiquitously, thus eventually overwhelming an already stretched enemy defence. Any retirement by the enemy was to be closely followed up, the pressure to be unrelenting.

The month of July was quiet as well, although Private Devereux was soon aware of the dangers of the forward area: that he could be shelled and shot at. He was also sent to the 6th Corps School to attend a course – in anti-aircraft procedure? – from July 20 until August 5. But there also appeared to be certain ongoing preparations for something grand in the offing. On July 30 the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion was ordered to parade... *in battle order*.

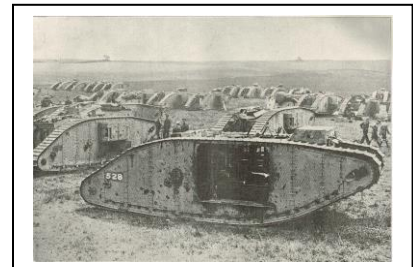
Then: on foot to LeSouich; by train to Doullens; from there to the cathedral city of Amiens by train on the first day of August; on the evening of the 2nd to billets in Sains en Amienois some four kilometres distant - and within enemy artillery range as several casualties, including fatalities, were to prove.

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



At Sains en Amienois Private Devereux likely arrived from his course to join his fellows in cleaning-up and in drying clothes, in training, in meeting French comrades-in-arms and also, on two of the three evenings given unto them, attending a concert given by an unidentified – at least to the War Diary reader – band.

On August 6 the RCR Battalion was ordered to move: *GENTELLES WOOD full of troops. Whole Division and tanks* – recorded the War Diarist. From there three days later, on August 9, it moved forward yet again, to *LeQuesnel Wood* on the Roye Road, expecting to attack on the next day.



(continued)

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

The first attack had already been delivered by then, in the early – and foggy – morning of August 8. But as the offensive had been planned as a continuous advance, it was necessary to have troops which were fresh and ready to continue the operation, allowing the preceding units the time to regroup, refresh, re-enforce and to prepare for a yet further assault a few days hence.



(Right above: *Canadian and German wounded from the first days of the battle – some cases more serious than others - waiting to be evacuated to the rear – from Le Miroir*)

Things, however, apparently went somewhat awry on this occasion as the Battalion sat awaiting orders all the following day and, in fact, it was not until the early morning of the 14th that Private Devereux and his unit moved into the positions at Brigade Reserve recently vacated by the PPLCI* Battalion which had moved to deliver its assault from another quarter.

**Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry was named for the daughter of the Duke of Connaught, Governor General of Canada at the time.*

That attack eventually *did* go in and by four o'clock of the next morning, August 15, the Brigade had captured the village of Parvillers. It was then relieved and... *Brigade moved by march route and lorry to LEQUESNEL AREA into bivouacs. In the late afternoon the Brigade moved to VALLEY WOOD AREA (From the 7th Brigade* War Diary).*



(Right above: *Hillside Cemetery, Le Quesnel, within whose bounds lie at least two Newfoundlanders – photograph from 2015*)

Battalion casualties *all told* for the period of August 8-16 inclusive had been: ten killed in action; sixty-five wounded; and three missing in action.

**The 7th Brigade comprised the 42nd, 49th, RCR and PPCLI Battalions.*

By the evening of August 19 the entire 7th Brigade was withdrawing from the recent battle-field and was on its way back whence it had come only three weeks before. It was not alone: by August 27 the final units of the Canadian Corps were moving back to the area to the east of Arras, their places in front of Amiens being progressively taken over by elements of the French Army. The Canadians were to depart in much the same manner as they had arrived: at first on foot, then by motorized transport and by rail; they also moved rapidly and discreetly.

(continued)

By the time that the last Canadian troops arrived back in the area of Arras, the *first* had already gone to the offensive – an operation to become known to history as the *Battle of the Scarpe* - on a new front. As early as the evening of August 25... *a very wet and dirty night...* the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion moved forward into its assembly areas,... *trenches 1500 yards EAST of ARRAS.*

The attack was to follow the axis of the main road from Arras to Cambrai. By mid-morning on the following day the neighbouring 8th Brigade had already attacked and was reported as having captured Monchy-le-Preux.

(Right: *Some of the ground on which fighting took place at the end of August and beginning of September of 1918: The Arras to Cambrai road – looking in the direction of Cambrai – may be perceived just left of centre on the horizon. – photograph from 2015*)



**Of interest to Newfoundland readers may be that on August 26 Monchy-le Preux was captured by troops of the 3rd Canadian Division. More than sixteen months earlier, on April 14 of 1917, the Newfoundland Regiment had been ordered forward into a battle that should never have been. While a desperate defence later in the day had earned ten men – nine from the Regiment – a medal each, the unit had suffered some four-hundred fifty killed, wounded, missing or taken prisoner.*



After Beaumont-Hamel, April 14, 1917, was to be the costliest day of the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment's war.

(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the south-west. In 1917 the Newfoundlanders, already in the village, had advanced towards the east out of its ruins, away from the camera; in 1918 the Canadians, attacking from the west, encircled the place. – photograph from 2014*)

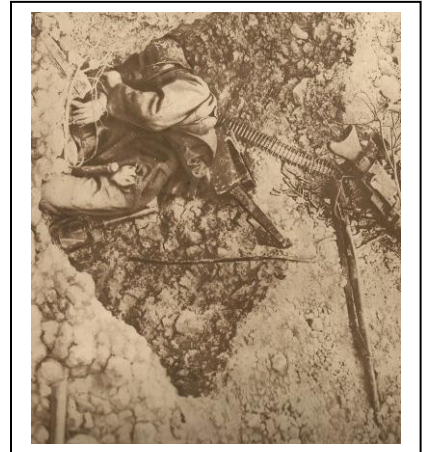
But what of Private Devereux and his unit? There appears to be no record of the Company in which he served, and of course, the individual private soldier is rarely cited apart from a particularly noteworthy incident. The following is therefore a general summary of the day's events as deduced from the RCR War Diary entry of August 26, 1918.

At three o'clock of that morning the barrage that was to support the attacking troops of the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade fired its opening salvos. However, the RCR Battalion, in reserve, was to await three and a-half hours before being ordered to move forward. In the meantime, the immediate objectives were being reported as taken against only a light enemy resistance.

At six-thirty Private Devereux's Battalion was ordered to advance. By eight-thirty it had done as ordered and was in its new position awaiting the arrival of tanks. Seventy-five minutes later again the unit was ordered forward on its planned front of attack as Monchy-le-Preux had fallen to the 8th Brigade and the itinerary of the advance was thus protected.

By eleven o'clock, however, there were no longer troops protecting the Battalion's right flank and a halt was called. Moments later, two of the four Companies, 'A' and 'B', continued forward but were beginning to meet heavy machine-gun- and rifle-fire. 'C' Company, its right still unprotected, remained where it was but by now the German artillery was also beginning to respond to the situation.

By mid-afternoon, to the strengthening German machine-gun- and rifle-fire there were now added a growing number of snipers and a very active enemy air-force. The Canadians in the newly-won positions were now beginning to take a real beating. By later that evening, enemy-counter-attacks had forced retirements in some areas and this pressure was to continue well into the night.



At eight-fifteen...*"A" Co. (was) counter-attacked from front and rear and (was) forced to take up a position in LONG TRENCH. "D" Co. moving forward met enemy party attacking "A" Cos. rear and forced them to withdraw, after inflicting heavy casualties.*

(Right above: *A German machine-gunner who also gave his all – from Illustration*)

The struggle was to continue over three days before the Battalion was relieved to withdraw to billets in Arras; despite the German resistance, particularly from his machine-gunners who gave and asked no quarter, the offensive, like the one in front of Amiens, would prove a success and would be followed by further advances on the days following. In fact, the drive was only to end at eleven o'clock in the morning of that November 11.

There was, however, a price to be paid: over the period August 26 to 28, the RCR Battalion suffered twenty-eight *killed in action*, four *died of wounds*, one-hundred fifty-seven *wounded*, one *wounded and missing*, three *missing in action* and three *missing believed prisoner*.

Casualty report: *"Killed in Action":- Shortly after "jumping off" from Long Trench, during the advance along the Cambrai Road about ten o'clock on the morning of August 26th 1918, he received a bullet wound in the left side and died while the wound was being dressed.*

The son of Cornelius Devereaux, fisherman, and of Mary Devereaux (née Moore), of Salmon Cove, Avondale (former name Gastars until 1901), Newfoundland, he was also brother to Margaret Anne and to Anastasia.

Private Devereux was reported as having been *killed in action* on August 26, 1918, in fighting during the *Battle of the Scarpe*.



(Right above: *In Avondale Roman Catholic Cemetery stands this family monument, erected by Mary Devereaux, to the memory of her husband Cornelius and to their son, James... 'killed in war'. – photograph from 2016(?)*)

James Devereux had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-four years: date of birth in Avondale (on his attestation papers), Newfoundland, September 5, 1892 (also from attestation papers). A copy of the local Roman Catholic Parish Records cites September 2, 1891 as his birth-date.

Private James Devereux 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. Last updated – January 25, 2023.

