

**Private Thomas Patrick Dooley (Number 877787) of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on *Vimy Ridge*.**

**(Right: *The image of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) shoulder flash is from the Wikipedia Web-site.*)**

**(continued)**

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *miner*, Thomas Patrick Dooley appears to have left behind him little information *a propos* his movements from the capital city of St. John's in the Dominion of Newfoundland to the county of Cape Breton in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia.

It is possible that he was the young *P. Dooley* recorded on the passenger list of the steamship *Ivermore* which sailed from Port aux Basques to North Sydney on July 17 of 1912, but all that may be said with any certainty is that he was a resident in the Cape Breton community of Dominion Number 4, in close proximity to Glace Bay, in March of 1916, for that is where and when he enlisted.

His first pay records indicate that it was on March 1, 1916, that the Canadian Army began to remunerate the by-then Private Dooley for his services. The unit by which he was then *taken on strength* on that same day was the 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Two weeks later, on March 7, he subsequently underwent a medical examination – which found him fit...*for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force...* - and was also attested later that same day.

However, it was then to be a further seven weeks, not until April 28, before the formalities of his enlistment were officially concluded: it was on that date that the commanding officer of the 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Parker-Day, declared – on paper – that...*877787 Pte Thomas Patrick Dooley...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 Dooley 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 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Cape Breton Highlanders).*

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 185<sup>th</sup>, the 85<sup>th</sup>, the 193<sup>rd</sup> and the 219<sup>th</sup> Battalions. On May 23 of 1915 these four formations were assembled to train together at *Camp Aldershot* in Kings (sic) County, Nova Scotia, where the *Brigade* then spent all summer before receiving its colours on September 28, two weeks before its departure for *overseas service*.

By that time Private Dooley had already brought himself to the attention of the 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion authorities by having been *absent without leave*. There appear to be no further details other than that he was to forfeit four days' pay for his troubles on or about May 16. He was then to offend again a month later, being fined three days' pay on this occasion – on or about June 13 – for the same misdemeanour.

Apart from being a time of training, the period spent at Aldershot was also the occasion for Private Dooley, on August 28, 1916, to put his mark on a will by which he bequeathed his all to his mother. A month after this, on October 1, he began to allocate a monthly twenty dollars from his pay, also to his mother.

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

(Right below: *Sister-ship to Britannic – that vessel to be sunk by a mine a month later, in November of 1916 – and also to the ill-fated Titanic, HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor along with HM Hospital Ship Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London*)

On October 13<sup>th</sup> - at about eleven o'clock in the morning - it was the turn of the half-battalion of the 166<sup>th</sup> – 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 arrived in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on October 18, some five days later, and the troops disembarked on the following day. The 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion was thereupon transported south-eastwards to *Witley Camp* in the English county of Surrey.

The 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) is documented as then having provided reinforcements for Canadian forces already on the Continent. This role was to last until February of 1918 when the unit was absorbed into the newly-organized Canadian 17<sup>th</sup> (*Reserve*) Battalion.

The Battalion's organizers had originally expected that the *Cape Breton Highlanders* 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\*.

*\*Before the end of the Great War, Canada was to have despatched overseas two-hundred fifty battalions – although it is true that a number of these units, particularly as the conflict progressed, were below full strength. At the outset, these Overseas Battalions all had presumptions of seeing active service in a theatre of war.*

*However, as it transpired, only some fifty of these formations were ever to be sent across the English Channel to the Western Front. By far the majority remained in the United Kingdom to be used as re-enforcement pools and they were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by units that had by then been specifically designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.*

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By the time of Private Dooley'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 three-quarters of newly-arrived *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* were to be deployed.



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

This distribution of re-enforcements was, however, to take some time, even though a number had already crossed the English Channel by the end of the year, 1916. In the case of Private Dooley, the spring of the following year, 1917, had already arrived before he was ordered to proceed to the Continent.

It was on May 27 that he was *struck off strength* by the 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion to be *taken on strength* on the following day by his new unit, the 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles).

At that same time, Private Dooley was to travel to France - likely passing via the English south-coast port of Southampton and the French industrial city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine - as he is documented as having reported on that same date to a Canadian Infantry Base Depot – surely the 2<sup>nd</sup> as his unit was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division - in the vicinity of the coastal town of Étapes. There he was to remain for the next eighteen days.



*\*The date of arrival of nine-hundred fifty-four re-enforcements from England, according to the Base Diary, was May 29. There were none recorded for the previous day.*

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

When exactly Private Dooley was despatched to join the 2<sup>th</sup> Battalion is not documented on his *active service* files – several hundred were being despatched for days on end. However, they *do* record that he reported *to duty* with his new unit on June 16, 1917. On the other hand, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diarist cites the arrival of a draft of one-hundred forty-seven re-enforcements as having occurred on June 15, the day before, at a time when the unit was serving in the rear area, in the vicinity of the community of Gouy-Servins.

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The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force had already been serving in France and Belgium for some twenty-one months by the time of Private Dooley's arrival, since mid-September of the year, 1915. The Battalion was a component of the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, and had been in service on the Continent continuously since its arrival there.



(Preceding page: *While the caption reads that these troops moving towards the forward area are 'English', this could be any unit in British uniform – including Empire (Commonwealth) units. This is early in the war as there is no sign of a steel helmet. – from a vintage post-card*)

Only days after having passed through the port of Folkestone and its French counterpart, Boulogne, on September 22, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was taking over trenches from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of *The King's Own* in the *Kingdom of Belgium*.

This was in the areas forward from the communities of Locre and Kemmel, in that small part of the country which had not by then been occupied by the Germans, and to the south of the already-battered medieval city of Ypres.

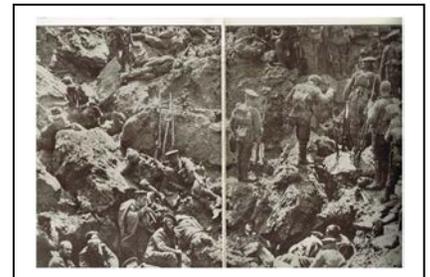


(Right above: *A Belgian aerial photograph showing the devastation of Ypres as early as 1915 – the city is described as 'morte' (dead) - before the arrival of Private Batson – from Illustration*)

The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to remain in these sectors until August of the following year, 1916.

In early April of 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had undergone its baptism of fire in a major infantry action. It was at a place named St-Éloi where, at the end of March, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the British had detonated a series of mines beneath the German lines and then had followed up with an infantry attack. The newly-arrived Canadian formation had been ordered to follow up on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which had turned the just-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, plus a resolute German defence, greeted the newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.



Towards the end of that confrontation, on April 13-14, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had relieved another Canadian unit in craters and new trenches, and subsequently had incurred a total of some eighty-five casualties, a greater toll than the unit had known on any single occasion up until that date.

(Right above: *The occupation of a crater in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps in the St-Éloi Sector – from Illustration*)

Six weeks later, in early June, the Battalion had then been involved in the fighting in the area of *Mount Sorrel, Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60, Railway Dugouts* and *Maple Copse*, in the so-called *Ypres Salient* and just to the south-east of the city of Ypres.

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The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division had been the main recipient of the enemy's offensive thrust but the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had played a role sufficiently important for the name *Mount Sorrel* to become the first battle-honour won by the unit during the Great War.

(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*)



(Right below: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 and 1917 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooze, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government – photograph from 2014*)



(Right below: *Maple Copse Cemetery, adjacent to Hill 60, in which lie many Canadians killed during the days of the confrontation at Mount Sorrel – photograph from 2014*)

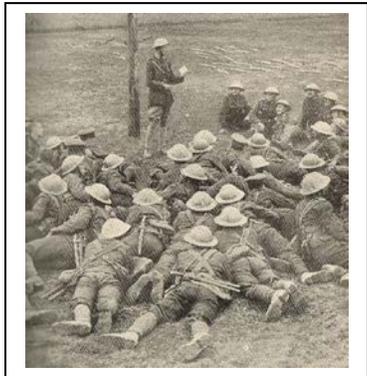


From the middle of June up until August of 1916, 20, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been in reserve well to the rear, so well to the rear, in fact, that it had been deemed safe enough for His Majesty the King and his son the Prince of Wales to pay a visit on August 14.

Some two weeks later, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the unit was withdrawn into northern France to the vicinity of Steenvoorde and to the village of Moule.

The following week at Moule had been spent in becoming familiar with the British Lee-Enfield Mark III rifle which was replacing the Canadian-made Ross rifle, and also in training for a Canadian role in the British summer campaign of that 1916, an offensive which to that date had not been proceeding exactly according to plan.

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



(Right above: *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**)

(continued)

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 the eight-hundred personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at Beaumont-Hamel.

As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette.

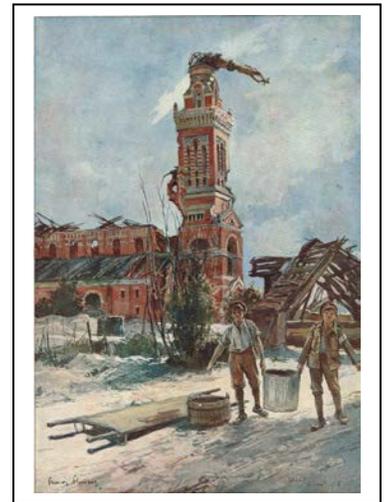


(Right above: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette – photograph from 2015*)

Meanwhile, on the evening of September 10, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the Brickfields (*La Briqueterie*) in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

On September 14 the Battalion had been ordered forward into dug-outs in assembly areas. On the next morning again, September 15, the Canadians were to be going to the attack.

(Right: *Canadian soldiers working, carrying water in the centre of Albert, the town's already-damaged basilica in the background – from Illustration*)



Excerpt from 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for September 15, 1916: *5<sup>th</sup> Brigade attacked and captured the Town of Courcellette... the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved forward as though on General Inspection the young soldiers behaving like veterans, going through very heavy artillery barrage without a quiver...*

Of the six-hundred ninety personnel which went over the top on the day of the assault, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diarist was to record thirty-six dead, one-hundred ninety-one wounded and seventy-seven as *missing in action*\*.

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



*\*It seems that some of the missing may have soon returned to duty as a later War Diary entry records two-hundred fifty-eight casualties all told.*

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On October 1 the Battalion – its operational strength by then apparently reduced to two-hundred (sic) all ranks and twelve machine-guns – *received orders to attack and capture “at all costs” enemy trenches known as KENORA and REGINA... “B”, “C” and “D” Companies... were to proceed over KENORA up to REGINA, which they did, but by the time they had got to the wire the casualties had been so heavy that only one officer was left... and about thirty men...*

The attack was a failure and the survivors had been obliged to fall back to *Kenora Trench*. Total casualties during the action had been a further one-hundred twelve.

(Right: *Ninety-eight years later on, the land on which the action was fought, as seen from Regina Trench Cemetery – photograph from 2014*)



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

On the night of October 1-2 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had retired from *the Battle* - and from the area of - *the Somme* and made its way westwards and then northwards. It had subsequently passed to the west of the battered city of Arras and beyond, to the region of the mining centre of Lens. There the unit was to remain for the following six months, in the area and in the trenches of places such as Bully-Grenay Angres and Bruay.



(Right: *The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand’Place) in Arras which had already been steadily bombarded for two years by the end of the year 1916 – from Illustration*)

That winter of 1916-1917 was to be one of relative calm, allowing the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion – and many others - to return to the everyday rigours and routines of trench warfare\*; after *the Somme* it was perhaps a welcome respite.



There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides.

The medical facilities during this period were kept much more busy by cases of sickness and particularly dental problems than by the numbers of wounded in need of treatment.



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

(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 the year 1916, by that time equipped with steel helmets and the less visible, British-made, Lee-Enfield rifles – from Illustration)**

**Towards the end of the month of March, on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Battalion had been withdrawn well to the rear, to Maisnil-Bouche, there to undergo intensive training. The exercises were to last until, and also to include, April 7, only two days following which that training was to become the real thing. On the final five days, April 2-7, the unit had been sent to become familiar with ground that had been re-arranged so as to resemble the terrain which was to be attacked.**

**On April 8... Battalion less 1 platoon per company moved from MAISNIL BOUCHE to concentration area at BOIS DES ALLEUX. In the evening the Battalion moved up to its position...via cross country route... (25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary). It apparently did not pass via those well-documented tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety.**

**On April 9 in that spring 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 *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 of *le Chemin des Dames* was to be a further disaster.**

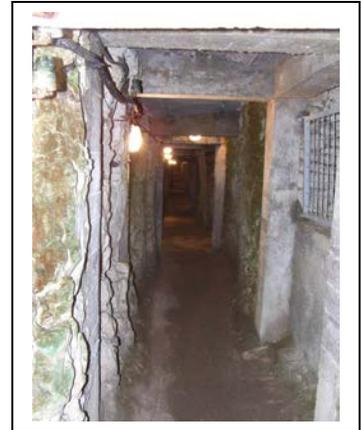
**(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial* which, since 1936, has stood on *Vimy Ridge* – photograph from 2010)**

**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.**

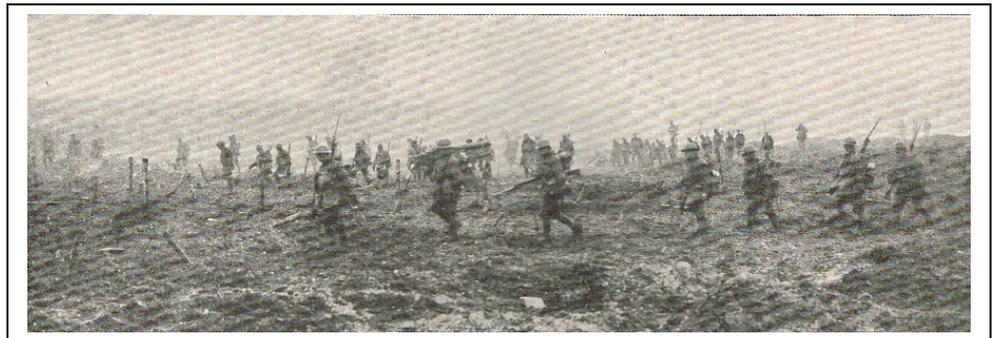
The Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was not responsible for the taking of *Vimy Ridge* itself, but for the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the southern slope and therefore on the right-hand side of the attack.

The Battalion's objectives were apparently soon captured and much of the remainder of the day was spent in consolidating these newly-won positions.

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



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



(Right: *Canadians under shell-fire occupying the third line of trenches on Vimy Ridge: the fighting of the next few days was to be fought under the same conditions. – from Illustration*)

The Germans, having lost *Vimy Ridge* and the advantages of the high ground, retreated some three kilometres in front of the Canadians whose further offensives were less successful than that of Easter Monday; while some progress at times was made – at Arleux-en-Gohelle, for example - German counter-attacks also re-claimed ground from the British and Canadian troops – as at Fresnoy in early May.

(Right: *German prisoners being escorted to the rear by Canadian troops during the attack on Vimy Ridge – from Illustration*)



There had been, on those first days of April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted, and highly unlikely, *breakthrough* – but such a follow-up of the previous day's success had proved to be logistically impossible, the weather preventing any swift movement of guns and material.

Thus the Germans were gifted the time to close the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

Nor was the remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* 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. At the time that the *Battle of Arras* officially drew to its conclusion, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was in reserve, resting and training – if that is not a contradiction – in the vicinity of the community of Gouy-Servins, to the west of the city of Lens.

And it was a month later, on June 15-16, while the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was serving in the area of Gouy-Servins, that the re-enforcement draft of Private Dooley reported *to duty*.

(Right: *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*)



It was then to be a further seventeen or so days before the newcomers were to experience the realities of the forward area and front line.

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Excerpts from 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War diaries of July 2 and 3, 1917: *Battalion at BOUVIGNY HUTS. Preparations to relieve 46<sup>th</sup> British Division, 138<sup>th</sup>. and 137<sup>th</sup>. British Brigades, 1/5 Battalion Leicesters and 1/4 Battalion Leicesters. Casualties, 1 Other Rank killed, 9 Other Ranks wounded.*

*Relief completed about 2 a.m. – No further casualties were to be documented for the remainder of the day.*

The British High Command had by that time had long before decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention – and also his reserves - from this area, it had ordered other operations as well to take place at the sector of the front running north-south from Béthune to Lens.



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*)

One of the primary objectives was to be *Hill 70* in the outskirts of the mining centre of Lens.



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

Those expecting *Hill 70* to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear.

(Right below: *This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute.* – photograph from 1914)

Yet *Hill 70* was high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than the city of Lens itself.

Objectives had been limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it had been expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it had proved; on the 16<sup>th</sup> several strong counter-attacks had been launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.



These defences had held and the Canadian artillery, by then employing newly-developed procedures, had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* remained in Canadian hands.

(Right: *Canadian troops in the vicinity of Hill 70 a short time after its capture by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions* – from *Le Miroir*)



Of course, the Germans were not the only ones to incur casualties: by the time that the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion retired on August 17, the unit had recorded some one-hundred fifty *killed, wounded and missing in action*, of which an estimated fifty-three had apparently been incurred on the first day of the operation, August 15.

One of these had been Private Dooley.



(Right above: *The spoils of war: Canadian officers and men on some of the terrain on which they had recently fought – and captured* – from *Le Miroir*)

The son of William (Thomas?) Dooley (deceased by the time of his son's enlistment), and of Charlotte Dooley (née *Best*), he was also brother to at least Clara who married James Doran in Cape Breton in 1907.

Private Dooley was reported as having been *killed in action* on August 15, 1917, during the fighting at *Hill 70*.

(continued)

**Thomas Patrick Dooley had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-seven years: date of birth (from attestation papers) in St. John's, Newfoundland, March 6, 1888.**

**Private Thomas Patrick Dooley was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**

