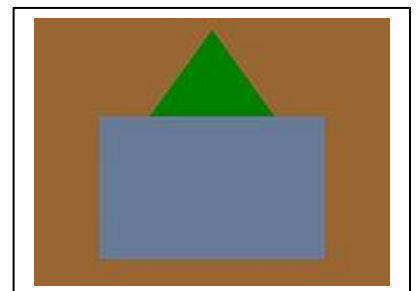




Private Patrick Downey (Number 901442) of the 42nd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Drummond Cemetery, Raillencourt: Grave reference I.B.12.

(Right: *The image of shoulder flash of the 42nd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada)*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *miner* – and perhaps prior to that, a *fisherman* – Patrick Downey appears to have left behind him little *a propos* the history of his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the county of Cape Breton in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. All that may be said with certainty is that he was present in the industrial city of Sydney at the end of November of 1912, for that is where and when he was married.

It was on the final day of that month that he and Miss Elma Blanche Rudolph became man and wife, the marriage perhaps a little unusual for that day and age in that the groom was of the Roman Catholic Church and the bride of the Methodist persuasion. The place of residence of each at the time is recorded as having been North Sydney but, between then and 1916, the couple moved to the town of Stellarton in Pictou County. It was there, in the not-distant centre of New Glasgow, during the month of March of that year, that Patrick Downey enlisted.

To be exact, it was on March 16, 1916, that he enlisted – his first pay-records confirm this date – that he was attested, and was *taken on strength* by the newly-forming 193rd Battalion (*Cumberland Highlanders*) based in Truro. On the following day, while still in New Glasgow, the now-Private Downey underwent a medical examination which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force*.

Yet another month was to pass before the formalities of Private Downey's enlistment were brought to a conclusion when the commanding officer of the 193rd Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel John Stanfield – also a member of Parliament at the time – declared – on paper – that...*Patrick Downey...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

Since the time that the unit had started recruiting in the north-eastern areas of Nova Scotia, in January of that same year, the new soldiers of the 193rd Battalion had begun training in detachments in their home counties. However, in May, this piece-meal organization was to change.

By that time, the authorities had decided to create a *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* to comprise the 85th, the 185th, 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*.

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 Downey for the moment did not, but on the first day of October, 1916, and just prior to his departure, he began to allocate a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay to his wife.

At seven o'clock in the evening of October 11, 1916, 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 thirty-three officers and one-thousand twenty-four *other ranks* of the 193rd.

(continued)

(Right below: *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 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 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 Battalions of the *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* were thereupon transported south-eastwards to *Witley Camp* in the English county of Surrey.

The 193rd Battalion (*Cumberland Highlanders*) is documented as then having provided re-enforcements for Canadian forces on the Continent. This role was to last only months, until January 20 of 1917, when the unit was absorbed into the newly-organized Canadian 17th (*Reserve*) Battalion.

The Cumberland Battalion's organizers had originally expected that it would be sent – in the company of 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 designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.

By the time of Private Downey'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* was to be deployed.



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

(continued)

It was the 85th Battalion which was to be the exception to this rule as it *alone* of the *Highland Brigade* was 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.

Private Downey was to spend but seven weeks less a day in the United Kingdom. On December 5 he was *struck off strength* by the 193rd Battalion in England to be *taken on strength* – on paper - a week later, on December 12, by the 42nd Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*) which was already serving on the Continent.

By that December 12, he had crossed the English Channel – on the night of December 5-6 – and had thereupon reported *to duty*, one of the one-hundred forty-seven arrivals of the day - to the Canadian Base Depot at Ruelles, in the vicinity of the French industrial port-city of Le Havre, situated on 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)

Private Downey was to remain at the Base Depot at Le Havre until the penultimate day of the month and of the year 1916, when two-hundred eleven *other ranks* were despatched from there to various Canadian units.

His personal file records that he arrived to report *to duty* to his new unit on January 5 of the New Year, 1917, at a time when the 42nd Battalion had retired into Brigade Reserve in the area of Neuville St-Vaast. The Battalion War Diary differs, documenting a draft of two-hundred fifty re-enforcements reporting two days earlier, on January 3.

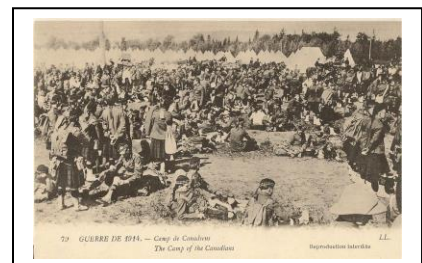
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The 42nd Battalion of the Canadian Infantry was a unit of the 7th Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 3rd Canadian Division, of which four were to serve on the *Western Front* during the *Great War*. However, neither the Brigade* nor the Division was officially to come into being until the midnight of December 31, 1915 – January 1st, 1916.



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

*The other battalions of the 7th Brigade were the 49th (Edmonton Regiment), the PPCLI (Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry) and the RCR (Royal Canadian Regiment).



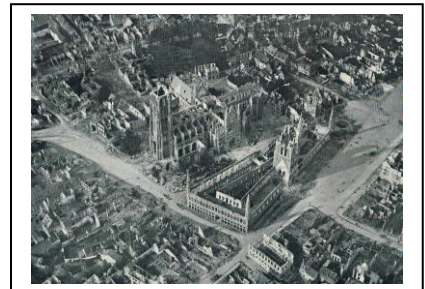
(Right above: *The caption reads merely 'Camp of Canadians' but it is from the early days of the Great War, thus likely in either northern France or in Belgium. The troops are from a Canadian-Scottish unit.* – from a vintage post-card)

In the winter of 1915-1916 and into the spring and summer of 1916, the 42nd Battalion had served in Belgium, at first just to the north of the Franco-Belgian frontier with the Canadian 1st Division in the *Ploegsteert Sector*, and then, as of March and April, 1916, in the *Ypres Salient* where it was responsible for an area to the south-east.

(Right: While the caption on the card reads that these troops are 'English', this could mean 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)



(Right: 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 first five months of the 42nd Battalion's service on the Continent had therefore comprised the day-by-day drudgery and dangers of the routines and rigours of trench warfare during the *Great War**.

**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*)

The first major confrontation in which the 42nd Battalion would play a role was to be the engagement between the Canadian Corps and the Kaiser's German Army, fought in June of 1916 at and about *Mount Sorrel*.

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooze*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.

(continued)

(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 successfully patched up their defences.

The hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, however, delivered piece-meal, poorly co-ordinated, and poorly supported by the artillery, had proved a costly disaster for the Canadians.

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

The 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, of which the 42nd Battalion was a component, was to be in the thick of it all. Excerpts from its War Diary take up the story:

2nd to 6th June – On the morning of the 2nd the enemy opened up a severe bombardment on our front, support and communicating trenches, commencing at 7.45 a.m. and keeping up an intense fire until noon when he launched an attack against our trenches. The artillery preparation had been so severe that he succeeded in penetrating our trenches and by evening of that day he was in possession of a good deal of our front and support trenches...

Counter attacks were made and succeeded in driving the enemy out of a portion of our trenches but owing to the difficulties of getting up reinforcements were unable to hold the ground recovered... The casualties suffered during the engagement were somewhat heavy in both officers and men...

The 42nd Battalion had incurred a total of two-hundred seventy-eight casualties up until the night of June 5-6 when the entire 7th Brigade was withdrawn. Neither the Brigade nor the Battalion was to play any further part in the affair. On the night of June 12-13 the Canadians had organized and then delivered what proved to be a final – and successful – counter-attack. Thus, after eleven days of fighting, the two sides had ended up for the most part where they had started.

(continued)



(Preceding page: *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*)

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



From then until the end of August would be a quiet time for the Canadians – as quiet as it ever became in the *Ypres Salient*: there was to be no further concerted infantry activity by either side, only patrols and raids on a local scale. The daily toll of casualties was to be mostly due to enemy artillery and snipers.

On August 22 the 7th Brigade had retired to rest billets in the Cassel area. There was to be little rest involved; the following two weeks would be spent in training in preparation for use in a different theatre. The Canadians were about to move south to *the Somme*.

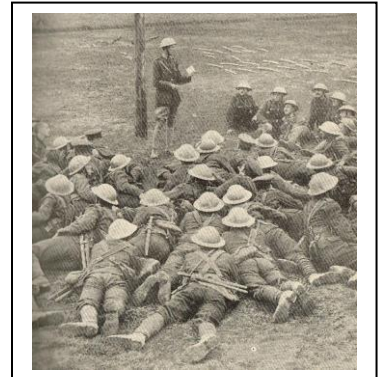
By that September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

On that first day of *First Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been comprised of 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1, 1916, at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.



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

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), and 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 Courcelette.



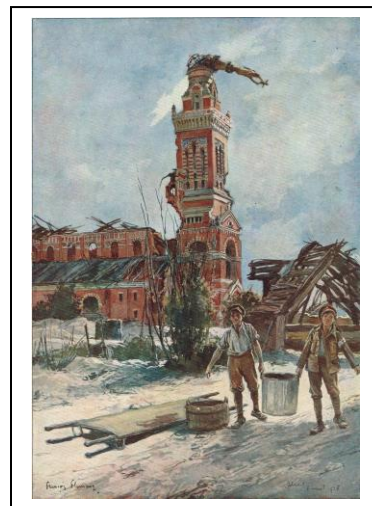
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(Preceding page: *An image purporting to be that of a Canadian officer giving instructions to those under his command prior to the attack at Flers-Courcelette (see below), September 1916 – from The War Illustrated*)

In the meantime, having left the north of France on the morning of September 7, the 42nd Battalion had arrived by train and by foot on September 13 at the large military encampment which had been established at the *Brickfields (La Briqueterie)* in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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

On the morning of September 15 the Battalion had still been at *Brickfields Camp*. By the late afternoon it had moved forward into its assembly area and then into its jumping-off positions. The unit's attack on Courcelette was to go in at six o'clock that evening.



The following is an excerpt from 42nd Battalion War Diary entry for September 15, 1916:

ATTACK *The position of assembly was reached and all in readiness for the attack at 5.50 pm. The attacking companies went over the top at exactly zero hour.*

OBJECTIVES *The first objective **SUNKEN ROAD** was reached – also the 2nd i.e. **FABECK GRABEN TRENCH** without heavy casualties, and immediately steps were taken to clear the trench, reverse the parapet and consolidate...*

This operation by the 42nd Battalion on the 15th was one of the few that had been successful on that day. The continuation of the attack on the following day was less so: total casualties for the two days had been seventy-four *killed in action*, two-hundred ninety-eight *wounded in action* and sixty-six *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 was perhaps then as early as September 17 that the 42nd Battalion had been withdrawn from the forward area to *Tara Hill Camp* where it was to spend the six subsequent days re-enforcing and re-organizing.

Then, from September 23 to 28, the Battalion had been marching. It had left Albert to return there five days afterwards. Not one of the War Diaries of several other units which had also marched in a like manner provides any apparent reason for all this movement: it may simply have been to liberate billeting space for newly-arriving units, whereas those marching were being allowed a reprieve – at least from being shot at - after the extremely hard fighting that they had encountered.

The final three days of September and then October 1 had been spent in billets in Albert before the 42nd Battalion would be ordered to return to the forward area. On October 5 it had relieved the 43rd Canadian Infantry Battalion in the front line.

The Battalion War Diary entry for the next day, October 6, reads as follows: *In the line. Early in the morning of the 6th a German attack was made on our Bombing Post in Kenora Trench which was repulsed. On the same night a Bombing Party was sent out West Miraumont Road proceed a distance of 200 yards but found no trace of the enemy.*



(Right above: *Evacuating Canadian casualties to the rear in hand-carts after the battle – somewhere on the Somme – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)

October 6, 1916, was to be one of the last that the 42nd Battalion would spend in trenches on *the Somme*.



Three days later, on the 9th, one of its last duties having been to provide stretcher-bearers to bring in wounded from No-Man's-Land, the unit withdrew.

(Right above: *A stretcher-bearer going about his business, likely after an infantry action: although not bearing arms, these men were subject to all the dangers of the battlefield, often for extended periods of time. – from Illustration*)

On October 10, as other Canadian forces were arriving in the theatre of *the Somme*, the 42nd Battalion was beginning a thirteen-day withdrawal on foot – to the west before turning north to pass behind Arras - to arrive in the Neuville-St-Vaast Sector, north-west of that fore-mentioned city. There the unit immediately took over front-line duties from the PPCLI.



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

And as has already been seen above, the 42nd Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*) was still posted in those same sectors when Private Downey reported *to duty* with his new unit during the first week of January, 1917.

* * * * *

The 42nd Battalion was to remain in the area for the next five months; the winter of 1916-1917 being a relatively calm period, the drudgery of trench warfare was the routine. Apart from local raids and the occasional more ambitious – and costly – venture, concerted infantry action was minimal and most casualties were again due to enemy artillery and snipers. However, overall, it was sickness and particularly dental work that kept the medical services busy during this period.

(continued)

For either a three-week period or for a single week, it appears that Private Downey was seconded to duty with the 5th Field Company of the Canadian Engineers. However the reason for this temporary transfer – from either February 5 or 14 until February 21 – appears not to be among his files.

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

Towards the end of March it had become evident that a major operation was in the offing as battalions were withdrawn to undergo training and familiarization with the objectives of the upcoming offensive.



Among these preparations were some novel developments: use of enemy weapons; each unit and each man to be familiar with his role during the upcoming battle; the construction of ground layouts built, thanks to aerial reconnaissance, to show the terrain and positions to be attacked; the introduction of the machine-gun barrage; and the excavation of kilometres of approach tunnels, not only for the safety of the attacking troops but also to ensure the element of surprise.

On April 7 the 42nd Battalion began to move forward, three of its four companies into tunnels – two of these three into *Grange Tunnel* (see below) - and the fourth into Empire Redoubt. At midnight on Easter Sunday, the troops started to leave these shelters to move forward again, on this occasion into assembly trenches.

The attack on *Vimy Ridge* was now imminent.

In the early morning hours of April 9 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 positive episodes being the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



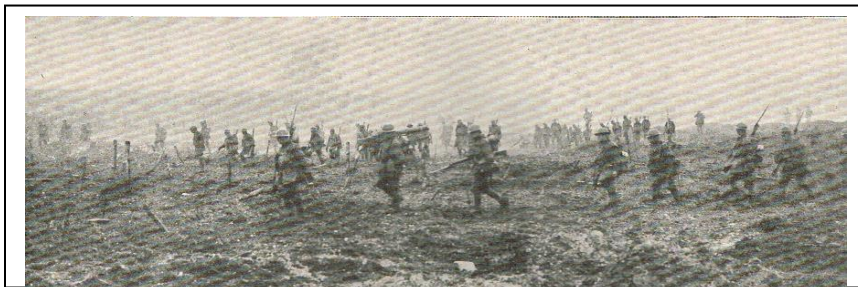
While the British campaign proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive at *le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

(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, separate entity under Canadian command, stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants. While the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions attacked the *Ridge* itself, the 1st and 2nd Divisions were to deal with other objectives on the right-hand, and southerly, slope of the prominence.

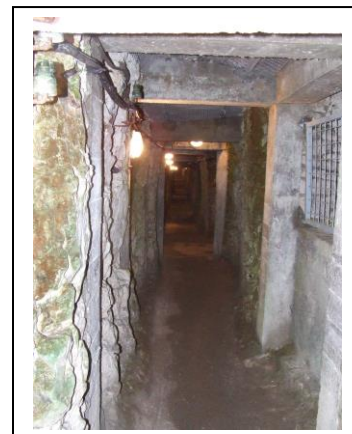
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(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division equipped with all the paraphernalia of war on the advance across No-Man's-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration*)



Anyone who has visited what remains of the several kilometres of tunnels built under the slope which leads up to *Vimy Ridge* will affirm the claustrophobic, cramped and confined conditions of those places. But they proved to be considerably better and safer for those thousands of troops who began to file into them as early as April 7 than the trenches would have been, and the secrecy that they ensured, avoided the welcome that a prepared and alert enemy would have offered to them otherwise.

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



As has been seen, two of the four Companies, 'A' and 'B', of the 42nd Battalion were among those soldiers who were to spend better than an uncomfortable twenty-four hours underground in *Grange Tunnel* before the attack went in. 'C' had spent the night in dugouts, while 'D' had moved up overland in the dark hours before the early morning assault.

Of a strength of some seven-hundred twenty before the attack, just over three hundred were to be reported as casualties by the Battalion War Diarist three days later in his entry of April 11. The Battalion was relieved during the evening of the same day and was withdrawn to Villers au Bois.

On April 20 the 42nd Battalion had received orders to move back into Corps Reserve. The respite, however, was fleeting. On the night of the 23rd it was ordered forward into close support in the area of the village of Vimy, a tour in the forward area which was to be subsequently followed by a month of less-strenuous activities out of the line.



However, Private Downey was to subsequently be out of the line for an appreciably *longer* period of time.

(Right above: *The village of Vimy, perhaps two or three kilometres removed from Vimy Ridge, as it was just after the conflict of 1914-1918 – from a vintage post-card*)

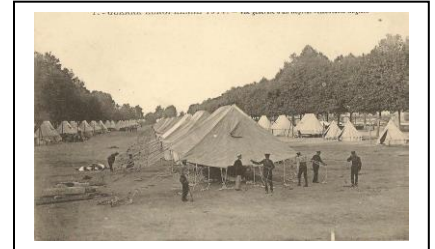
An excerpt from the 42nd Battalion War Diary entry for April 23-29, 1917, read as follows:

(continued)

The Battalion remained in close support at Vimy Village. Weather was very fine throughout. During the first few nights work was carried on under Battalion arrangements, on the construction of a 3rd line trench...In the matter of casualties the tour was very unfortunate.

(Three officers)...and 22 O.R. were wounded and 11 O.R...were killed. All these casualties were from shell fire...

It was on April 24 that shrapnel struck Private Downey in the face. He was evacuated from the field to the 13th Field Ambulance – likely an advanced dressing station – before being forwarded to the 23rd Casualty Clearing Station behind the lines at Lozinghem. On April 24 he was placed on board the 17th Ambulance Train and transported to the 35th General Hospital established in the French coastal town of Calais.



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

The wound was apparently not too serious, although in those days before anti-biotics any wound, however slight, posed the risk of infection. Private Downey was released to the Canadian Base Depot at Le Havre, was declared as 'A' Category - fit for service – two days later and, two days later again, was ordered to the new 3rd Canadian Infantry Base Depot just opened up the coast at Étaples.

It was now to be a further month, on June 8, before Private Downey was to leave Étaples to re-join his unit which he did on the morrow. But it is likely that he reported to - and then remained in - the rear area for the remained of that day and maybe the next.

* * * * *

The official conclusion of the *Battle of Arras* is recorded as May 16, 1917, but well before that date the offensive had lost the momentum of the first few days. The conflict had by that time once more degenerated into a stalemate and it had finished thus.

However, this is not to say that there were no longer confrontations on a local level afterwards and in exactly the same sectors. Private Downey was about to be witness to that.

On the night and early morning of June 9, the day of his return, the 7th Infantry Brigade had conducted a major three-battalion raid on the German positions in the sector of La Chaudière and in the area of the Lens-Arras railway line, commencing just after mid-night and ending on or about five o'clock that morning. The aftermath of the action, including the care of the Battalion's sixty-nine wounded was the priority of the day.



(continued)

(Preceding page: A part of Vimy Ridge and the Canadian National Memorial as seen from La Chaudière, on April 9, 1917, in what was at the time German-occupied territory – photograph from 1915)

(Right: transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card)

After this operation, the remainder of the month was spent in training, in construction work and in being inoculated – against exactly *what* seems not to be documented but it would seem that a recovery time for all the troops was involved. And of course, there were always the routine tasks allotted to troops out of the line.

(Right: A Canadian carrying-party – some of the work done by troops when in support and reserve – on the Lens front during the summer of 1917 – from *Le Miroir*)

Then Private Downey was once again in need of medical attention.

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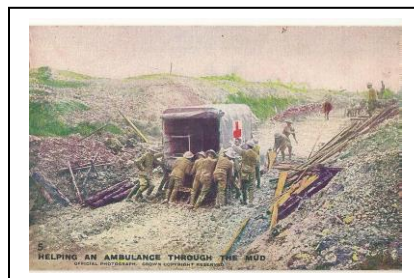
It was only twenty-five days after his return to his unit that Private Downey reported sick. He did so on July 4, at a time when the Battalion was holding front-line positions in the *Avion Sector* several kilometres to the North of Vimy and, by the next day, had been admitted into the Number 8 British Red Cross Hospital at Paris Plage, a part of the sea-side resort area of Le Touquet.

(Right above: *Paris-Plage, Le Touquet, likely at a period just after the Great War, and probably not changed a great deal since that time* – from a vintage post-card)

On this occasion the treatment was to be for *hæmorrhoids* – more commonly known as *piles* – and Private Downey was to remain there for the following ten days by which time it had been decided to invalid him back to the United Kingdom. On July 15 he was transported by ambulance train once more – to which port is not recorded – before being placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Princess Elizabeth* for the return journey across the English Channel.

(Right above: *The image of the Princess Elizabeth in peace-time is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site*)

Having arrived back in England, Private Downey was to be no longer the responsibility of the 42nd Battalion. Thus, bureaucratically, he was transferred to the 1st Quebec Regimental Depot based at Shoreham, in the south coast county of Sussex.



Physically, however, he was sent in a different direction, northwards, to the 2nd Western General Hospital in the city of Manchester. There he was admitted on July 17 and was operated on shortly afterwards – the date is undocumented – before being sent to recuperate in an auxiliary hospital at nearby Heaton Mersey.

On August 3 Private Downey was next admitted into the Canadian Military Convalescent Hospital of *Woodcote Park*. This was in the town of Epsom, in the southern county of Surrey, in peace-time well known for its horse-racing, in particular the annual Derby.

His convalescence was to last but a week: on August 10, discharged from Epsom, he was granted the ten-day furlough – plus free transportation - allowed military personnel upon release from hospital in the United Kingdom. On the same date he was transferred – once again only on paper – to the 20th Canadian Reserve Battalion (*Quebec*) also at Shoreham to which he was to report after those ten days of leave.

Where he was to spend those ten days does not appear to be recorded among his papers, but one might surmise that nearby London was a likelihood.

(Right above: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



That furlough concluded, Private Downey would have returned to Shoreham to take up his duties with the 20th Reserve Battalion with an eye to an eventual posting back to the 42nd Battalion. However, in the meantime, his reserve unit was to be transferred from Shoreham to the Canadian military complex of *Camp Bramshott* in the adjacent county of Hampshire. The exact day of *his* movement from one camp to the other is not clear although the official date is documented as having been October 11 of that 1917.



(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*)

The next record of Private Downey in the united Kingdom is one of free transportation having been granted on December 18. It is for a return journey from *Bramshott*, but to exactly where is not clear. Three weeks less a day later a further report has him back in hospital.

The Connaught Hospital is a military medical complex at Aldershot, the large British Army establishment to be found – as was the Canadian *Camp Bramshott* – in the county of Hampshire. Thus during the Great War, the hospital was close enough to serve the needs of the Canadians as well as the British. It was to here that Private Downey was admitted on January 7 of the New Year, 1918. And it was here that he was to stay, undergoing treatment for a venereal problem, for the following seventy-six days, until March 23.

(continued)

Having been released from medical care on that last date, he returned *to duty* with the 20th Reserve Battalion at *Camp Bramshott* where, apart from a further transportation pass issued on April 12, there is nothing more recorded of him until the month of June.

Except that his pay records show that his stay in hospital had cost him a total of forty-eight dollars*.

**The Army did not look kindly on soldiers who contracted venereal disease; even though it was not always adhered to - less and less so as the war progressed - there was in place a policy to penalize men who found themselves so diagnosed*. The entry in his pay-records for that period shows that Private Downey forfeited his Field Allowance – a daily ten cents - plus a further 50c per diem – from his \$1.00 per day pay – for eighty days.*

**Officers were usually treated more kindly and often the diagnosis was documented as NYD (Not Yet Determined) or even PUO (Pain – or Pyrexia (fever) – of Unknown Origin), thus allowing those afflicted to avoid any penalty – or stigma.*

On June 1 of 1918, Private Downey was *struck off strength* by the 20th Reserve Battalion in preparation for a return to *active service* with his former unit on the Continent. Having crossed the English Channel overnight, he then reported on June 2 to the Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Étaples where he was *taken on strength* – on paper - once more by the 42nd Battalion. From there on June 17 he was ordered to the adjacent Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp to await despatch to his unit in the field.

He was to await that despatch for the next fifty days. This may have been partly due at least to his having been awarded twenty-eight days of Field Punishment Number 2* for...*being in possession of a defaced AB 64* (Soldier's Service & Pay Book).

**This usually meant being hand-cuffed and fettered – although permitted to be with one's unit – a loss of pay and the possibility of performing hard labour. Private Downey again was deprived of his ten-cent per day Field Allowance, and also lost a further fifty cents from his daily one dollar pay for those twenty-eight days.*

He was finally ordered to return to his unit on August 6 and was reported as having done so four days afterwards, on August 10, 1918. He had by that time, been absent from the 42nd Battalion for a year and a month; his unit had been busy during that interim.

* * * * *

By the time of Private Downey's hospitalization on July 4-5 of 1917, the British High Command had already been planning to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention from this area – and also his reserves - it had also ordered operations to take place in the sectors of the front running north-south from Béthune to Lens.



The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort, the incident probably best known to students of Canadian military history being the assault of August 15 on the so-named *Hill 70*. The attack was to be, in fact, the responsibility of the Canadian 1st and 2nd Divisions, thus the 42nd Battalion was not involved.

But even so, maybe the action merits a short passage at this point.



(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*)

(Right: *Canadian troops moving into No-Man's-Land at some time during the operations of 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. Yet it would seem that it was high enough to have been 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.



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

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

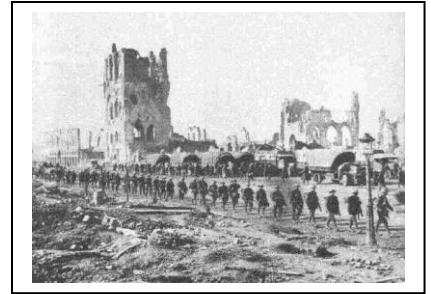
These defences had held and the Canadian artillery, which had been employing newly-developed tactical procedures, had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* was to remain in Canadian hands.

(Right: *A Canadian 220 mm siege gun, here under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action – from Le Miroir*)



As afore-mentioned, the 42nd Battalion had played no role whatsoever in the engagement at *Hill 70*. It had been in a rear area at the time and symbolic, perhaps, of the importance of the activities of the day undertaken by the unit, the Battalion War Diarist of the day made no entry at all for August 15.

This Canadian-led offensive campaign had apparently been scheduled 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 Australians and New Zealanders, and then the Canadians, were ordered to prepare to move north, thus the Canadians were obliged to abandon any offensive actions that they may have been contemplating.



(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*)

In the middle of October the Canadians had been ordered north into Belgium and to the *Ypres Salient*. Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign – ongoing since the end of that July - came to be 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: *Somewhere, perhaps anywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

From the time that the Canadians had 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 to be the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which were the spearhead of the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Divisions in reserve.

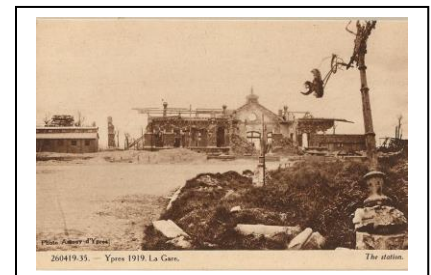
From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was to be true with troops of the 2nd Canadian Division having finally entered the remnants of Passchendaele itself.



(Right: *The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians which stands in the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele (today Passendale) – photograph from 2010*)

On October 16 the 42nd Battalion had begun to move northward to play its role at Passchendaele. By train and then on foot on that day it had transferred from Magnicourt to the vicinity of the town of Hazebrouck. There... *it was quartered in tents and billeted.*

It had remained there in training for a week before, on October 23, marching – commencing at two-thirty in the morning - to Cæstres station from where it had entrained, crossing the Franco-Belgian frontier before reaching Ypres, and from there had retired into Divisional Reserve where it was to daily supply working-parties.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The remnants of the railway station just outside the southern ramparts of Ypres where the Battalion detrained – the image is from 1919 – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right below: *Just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the monument pictured on the previous page – the Canadians would have been attacking up the slope and advancing towards the camera – photograph from 2010*)

Moving forward in stages, the 42nd Battalion was nonetheless still serving in the rear areas for a week until October 30 when orders had been received to move forward to the *Gravenstafel Ridge* and to take over positions from the Royal Canadian Regiment which was thereupon to advance up to the front lines. On the following day the unit had received instructions to move up in preparation for carrying out an operation... to *rectify the front line*.



Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of November 1, 1917: *The dispositions taken over by the Battalion consisted of a more or less regular line of shell holes, there being no trenches. During the first night this line was somewhat straightened out and the shell holes consolidated and connected up as far as was possible considering the wet conditions of the ground. An advanced post was established...*



(Right above: *Canadian troops performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir*)

An attack was carried out by the Battalion on November 2 with limited success and the unit retired from the front on the night on November 3-4. Casualties during those five days in the forward area had amounted to forty-eight *killed in action or died of wounds*, one-hundred twenty *wounded* and four reported as *missing in action*.

The unit had then withdrew to Watou to the west of the town of Poperinghe where it had remained, receiving some re-enforcements, until the morning of November 13. At that time the 42nd Battalion - indeed the entire 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade – had been moved by bus back to the southern outskirts of Ypres.

By this time the *Third Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele* was floundering to its conclusion, some sources even citing the early date of November 6 as the official end to it. Official date or not, it certainly did not mark the end to the fighting and although the 42nd Battalion took no part in any further offensive – one was cancelled at the last moment – a further hundred casualties were incurred during these few days.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *An unidentified Canadian-Scottish unit, preceded by its pipe-band, on the march 'somewhere on the Continent' – from Le Miroir*)

On November 19 and 20, having retired on the night of the 17th-18th, the unit had bussed and marched away from *Passchendaele*, across the border into France, to halt at Bourecq at two o'clock on the afternoon of the 20th. It was there on the morrow that... *146 O.R. reinforcements arrived and were taken on strength and posted among the Companies to fill vacancies caused by casualties.*

The Battalion was to remain at Bourecq until December 18, the day after the polls closed. A national election was taking place at home at this period and military personnel serving abroad were also to have their say. Thus the polls were open from December 1 to 17 and during that period seven-hundred ninety-one soldiers of the 42nd Battalion cast a ballot, over seven hundred on the first day.

On December 18 the unit received orders countermanding a scheduled move to Neuville St-Vaast and was instead instructed to proceed to the area of Fosse 10* in the vicinity of Lens. The expected busses failed to materialize until the following morning by which time the Battalion had marched two kilometres, had acquired good rations and had found comfortable billets. It had then arrived at Fosse 10 some twenty-four hours behind schedule, but well-fed, well-watered and well-rested.

**The word 'fosse' in French not only signifies a ditch or a common grave, it is also means a pit, or mine-shaft, of which apparently there were at least ten in the area.*

The winter of 1917-1918 was spent in much the same area until the month of March and in much the same manner as during the preceding winters of the Great War – relatively peaceably. Training appears to have been intense but so does the number of activities which were laid on for the troops; some were of a military nature with inter-unit competitions frequently held but sports also seems to have been often recorded in the War Diary, as does the occasional concert.



(Right above: *Canadian soldiers in front of a temporary theatre peruse the attractions of an upcoming concert. – from Le Miroir*)

There was little infantry activity on the part of the 42nd Battalion to be reported until March 12-13 when a raid was conducted. The War Diarist in his file of the day notes... *the raid was carried out exactly to schedule and with the greatest dash by the whole party.* He then adds that... *Unfortunately on reaching the objective the post was found to be empty.* But, on the plus side again, there were no casualties incurred.

For March 21, the first day of the spring of that 1918, there again is no entry of the day found in the War Diary. The 42nd Battalion was in the line but apparently on that day its part of the line was a great deal quieter there, in the Vimy-Souchez area, than it was not so far to the south.



(Preceding page: *The piles of rubble are the remains of the village of Souchez – in the Canadian sector - as it was already in 1915 when it was in French hands. – from Le Miroir*)

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, the Germans then 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 there*.



(Right above: *While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily during the time of their 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 almost three weeks later, on April 9, in the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It too was also successful for a while, but was petering out by the end of the month.**



(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

The first intimation of urgency came about on March 25 when the Battalion was ordered to... '*stand to*' in readiness to move at one hours notice from 5.30 am. morning March 26th. Acknowledge by wire. At five minutes to eight on the morning of the 26th the order came from Brigade to '*stand down*'.

Then, at six-thirty on the morning of March 28, all companies were ordered once more to '*stand to*' in their battle positions... *The reason for the order was the enemy attack which was taking place to the south... The Artillery bombardment covering the attack was easily heard and in fact the Brigade Area was subjected to bombardment at the same time...all precautions were made to meet an enemy attack...*(War Diary excerpt for March 28, 1918)

But at half-past nine on that same evening the order was once again given to '*stand down*'. And despite those latter days of activity, casualties for the entire month were a single killed in action and sixteen wounded.

(continued)

By the beginning of April, the 42nd Battalion was serving in the area of Avion, a community just to the south of the city of Lens; for the unit there was to be no further '*standing to*'. Further to the south the German spring offensive was being held and coming to a halt, as so was soon to be '*Georgette*' in Belgian Flanders where the British front had been somewhat bent but not broken.

Thus a relative calm descended on the front as the German threat faded – the enemy had won a great deal of ground, but there had been nothing lost to the Allies of any military significance on either of the two fronts. Nor was the calm particularly surprising: both sides were exhausted and needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to reinforce.

(Right: *The 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(?)*)

From the point of view of reserves, the Allies – French and British and Commonwealth - were a lot better off than were their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were belatedly arriving on the scene.

An overall Commander-in-Chief had also been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – casualties were minimal – until the second week in August.



(Right below: *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*)

On the penultimate day of that July of 1917, the 42nd Battalion unit began to make its way from the Neuville-Vitasse Sector, just south of Arras, to that part of the lines in front of the city of Amiens where the German offensive had been halted in April, almost four months previously. Having made its way on foot and by train, by the evening of the 31st it was billeting in the vicinity of Dury*, to the south of the city of Amiens. After a halt there of two days it was on its way east once more, towards the area of the imminent battle.



**Not to be confused with a second Dury – on the Arras-Cambrai road - where the Battalion was to fight only a month later.*

The 42nd Battalion was not alone: a large number of other Canadian units* – indeed almost the entire Canadian Corps – had at that time begun to move in a semi-circular itinerary to the west of Amiens, then south, then east again to finish in front of the city. This movement was to be effected in only a matter of days, much of it on foot, and all of the latter stages during the hours of darkness; during the day-time the assembling forces were secreted in woods, out of sight.

****The Third Battle of Amiens was to involve not only Canadian forces, but British, Australian, New Zealand, French and American units as well.***

This secrecy was intended to surprise the enemy – and it did*.

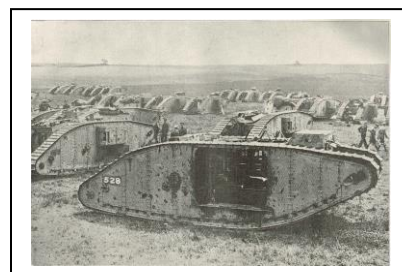
****According to the 42nd War Diary the Germans were successfully led to believe that the Canadian Corps was at the time operating on the Ypres Front in Belgium.***

However, it was not only the enemy that was being kept unaware of the purpose of all this marching by all these troops. It was not until August 4 that the War Diarist included the following in his entry of the day: *On this date the very secret announcement was made that the Battalion would take part in a large offensive operation on the AMIENS Front in co-operation with Tanks, RAF Squadrons, Cavalry, Motor M.G.s etc.*

Also on that day the 42nd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada) buried its Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Bartlett McLennan, D.S.O.. *He was killed in the forward area while making a personal reconnaissance of the country over which the Battalion was to attack some days later...* (42nd Battalion War Diary)

On the night of August 5-6 the Battalion moved into the *Bois de Gentelles*. It there remained until the night of August 7-8 when it moved forward into its jumping-off positions: the Allied attack - well supported by tanks - was to commence on the morrow morn.

(Right: *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 next morning, August 8, was foggy when the barrage descended upon the German defenders. The 42nd Battalion, in the second wave of the attack, had reached and attained its objective by twenty minutes past ten in the morning. There it consolidated its gains while other units continued forward. On that day the enemy – particularly the machine-gunners – had fought hard at times but the pursuit, albeit sometimes slowed, had never stopped.



By the evening the Canadians had in places advanced some eleven kilometres, a remarkable effort by *Great War* standards.

Even the casualty count was unusual: fourteen *killed in action* or *died of wounds* and thirty-one *wounded*.

(Right above: *A group of German prisoners, some serving here as stretcher-bearers, being taken to the rear after their capture by Canadian troops: a tank may be seen in the background – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

The day after the first assault, other units passed through to continue the attack and pursuit. The 42nd Battalion was ordered to rest and recover in readiness for a further effort in a few days' time. It thus halted, then moved forward through captured territory to the village of Folies. There it remained overnight to remain there on the following day, August 10, to allow the Battalion Transport and Details time to catch up...and to give the German Air Force a target to bomb – three killed and twelve wounded.

And although no mention of re-enforcements arriving on that day has been noted by the War Diarist, his own records cite this as having been the date on which Private Downey returned to service with the 42nd Battalion.

* * * * *

Having been rested as of August 9, Private Downey's Battalion moved forward again on August 12 in preparation for an attack on the *Parvillers Trench System* on the following day, the 13th. The position was carried but only following a ten-hour battle, at times fought hand-to-hand. By the 15th - when the unit had been relieved and a casualty count made - the Battalion had suffered a further one-hundred thirty-one dead and wounded all told.



(Right above: *Canadian soldiers consolidate newly-won positions while others cross a river on an improvised bridge. – from Le Miroir*)

After three days behind the line in the area of Le Quesnel, the 42nd Battalion began the return journey whence it had come only three weeks previously. The same means of transport – foot, motor vehicles and rail – and the same semi-circular itinerary were employed, and for the same reason as before. And once again, it was the entire Canadian Corps that was to be on the march; by the last week of August the French Army had taken over responsibility for the area of the Canadian advance, and the Canadians were back on the *Arras Front* where they were to immediately resume the offensive.

In the meantime the 42nd Battalion was in camp at Duisans – just to the west of Arras – on August 24. Excerpt from 42nd Battalion War Diary entry for August 25: *At 2.30 pm. a conference...issued instructions...for the Operations which were to take place at 3. am. on the following morning. ...The 7th Infantry Brigade was to attack...and to capture MONCHY* - BOIS DE VERT – BOIS DU SART – and JIGSAW WOOD.*

**Monchy-le-Preux was the village attacked by the Newfoundland Regiment – not 'Royal' until January of 1918 - on April 14 of 1917, where a force of only ten men, nine from the Regiment, held off the enemy for hours (all were decorated); and also where it incurred some four-hundred sixty dead, wounded or taken prisoner, losses second only to those at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916.*



(continued)

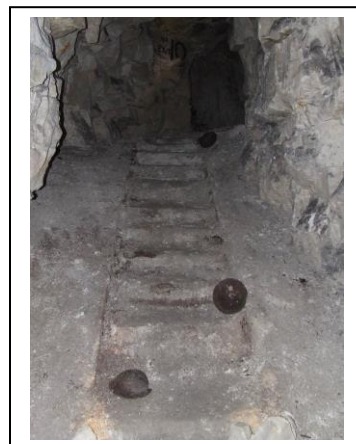
(Preceding page: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux, the photograph taken from the western side from which the Canadians were to attack and from the Arras-Cambrai road, the axis along which the attack of September-October of 1918 advanced* – photograph from 2014)

The 42nd Battalion moved forward that evening of August 25, and a three-hour march took it to the eastern outskirts of Arras. After some four hours' rest the unit moved forward again, but such had been the difficulties encountered by the preceding troops that it was late in the afternoon before the unit was to attack German positions in the area between Monchy-le-Preux – even though the village had by then been taken - and the Arras-Cambrai road.

The confrontation in which Private Downey was now involved is known to posterity as the *Battle of the Scarpe*. For the 42nd Battalion it was to continue until the night of August 28-29 when the 3rd Division, of which it was a component, was relieved by the Canadian 4th Division. By that time the Canadians had advanced a distance of about eight kilometres – for its part in the operation the 42nd Battalion had paid the price of three-hundred twelve casualties of which seventy-five dead.

The unit retired to billets in the remnants of the city of Arras. Whether the unit found shelter in the shattered buildings, in cellars or in the caves which had been enlarged during the war is not recorded. In any case, the unit was *in situ* for only two nights before being withdrawn to the west of Arras to the vicinity of Hermanville.

(Right: *One of the several entrances into the Ronville Cave system, almost a century after its use by Commonwealth and British troops. It was used at different times by personnel of thirty-six different Army Divisions.* – photograph from 2012(?))



That did not last long either: on September 2 the unit was back in eastern Arras and obliged to find shelter... *in portions of dis-used trenches, and in shell holes, but the great majority of the Battalion were forced to lie out in the open for the night.* (Excerpt of 42nd Battalion War Diary entry for September 2, 1918)

By the next night most of the troops had found tents and bivouacs – and also a few dug-outs in a cemetery - in which to rest. Later that day a further move appeared to be imminent on the morrow and so it proved. On September 4, Private Downey was again on the march, to Vis-en-Artois, and also to another night to be spent in bivouacs in the open.

He moved eastward with his Battalion to the area of Cagnicourt on the following day, September 5.

By this time, on September 2, the Canadian-British forces had broken through the imposing German defensive system between the villages of Drocourt and Quéant. The Germans had retreated on the following day as far east as the *Canal du Nord* with the Canadian Corps following up.

(continued)

There had been sporadic and resolute resistance – as usual the enemy machine-gunners fought bravely and often to the end – but by nightfall on September 3 the Canadians were reportedly in control of most of the ground up to the waterway*.

**There was still some mopping-up to be done: as late as September 10 the 42nd Battalion had to deal with some local German attacks which, when driven off, retired to the eastern bank of the Canal, still under German control.*

(Right: Douglas Haig, C.-in-C. of British and Commonwealth forces on the Western Front inspects Canadian troops after their successful operation of September 2 against the German Drocourt-Quéant Line. – from *Le Miroir*)



It was time now to consolidate, to re-enforce – the Canadian Corps from September 1 to 3 (inclusive) had incurred just short of six-thousand casualties – to re-organize and to prepare for the next stage, the crossing of the *Canal* itself. The 42nd Battalion, after six days in the forward area, was relieved and moved back to Vis-en-Artois where it remained in...*very damp and generally very depressing...underground accommodation commonly referred to as the Cave* for the following six days.

Private Downey's Battalion was then withdrawn as far back as the Berneville-Dainville area west of Arras where it stayed for only a few days before being called forward on the 26th. The Canadian 1st and 4th Divisions were going to attempt a crossing of the *Canal du Nord* on the morrow and, if all went well, the 3rd Division was to follow through in their wake and exploit the hoped-for breakthrough.

It *did* go well. On the morning of September 27* the Canadians crossed the *Canal du Nord*, broke through the *Hindenburg Line* in that sector, captured *Bourlon Wood* and were then advancing on the venerable town of Cambrai. In fact, on the first day the attack was so successful that the 42nd Battalion, crossing the Canal on a hastily-constructed bridge about mid-day of the 27th, apparently was opposed only by enemy artillery, so far had the Germans been obliged to fall back.

However, the opposition then soon stiffened and on the following day Private Downey's Battalion, having in the morning advanced as far as a railway embankment to the east of *Bourlon Wood*, was then forced to spend the remainder of the day there.



(Right above: *German prisoners evacuating wounded out of the area of the unfinished part of the Canal du Nord which the Canadians crossed on September 27, thus opening the road to Cambrai* – from *Le Miroir*)

(continued)

(Previous page: *The same area of the Canal du Nord – today full of water - as it was almost a century after the Canadian operation to cross it – photograph from 2015*)

**Two days later, on September 29, the British – the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, by that time a Battalion of the 9th (Scottish) Infantry Division - the French and the Belgians struck at Ypres.*

(Right: *Two German field-guns of Great War vintage stand on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City, the one in the foreground captured during the fighting at Bourlon Wood – photograph from 2016*)



Unfortunately the Battalion War Diary entry for September 29 is sparse and what it does offer is firstly a short resume comprising the actions of the dates from September 26 to 30 inclusive, a quantity of higher-level correspondence, decorations awarded, and, a propos the attack of the 29th, a paragraph concerning the officers of the Battalion. Of the rank and file there is little mention except the casualty total of them for that month of September had been fifty-seven *killed in action* and two-hundred sixty *wounded*.

However, the Diary Appendix pertaining to that day has proved more generous. The following are excerpts drawn from it: *At 8 o'clock on the morning of September 29th the Battalion jumped off...The attack was made on a two company front...Good progress was made until the Battalion reached the wire running in front of the drop(?)... This consisted of a broad low belt. It was not cut and the men were compelled to work their way through it which seriously delayed the advance. Some casualties from Machine Gun fire were suffered while going through.*

When we had advanced about half way between the wire and the DOUAI-CAMBRAI Road a withering fire from Machine Guns at point blank range opened up from the road in front and from the right flank and caused very severe casualties.

In spite of this four parties succeeded in crossing the DOUAI-CAMBRAI Road and established posts... It was evident that he (the enemy) had a very strong outpost line in front of the railway...



(Right above: *A German machine-gunner who fought to the last – from Illustration*)

Enemy machine gun fire was intense from the railway embankment in front and from both flanks. ...it was impossible to make any further advance The slightest movement drew fire from all sides.

At 11 am, the enemy placed a heavy barrage along the line of the CAMBRAI-DOUAI Road...and parties of Germans were seen coming over the high ground...towards the railroad. ...they were forced to withdraw.

(continued)

However, it soon became clear that any further advance by the 42nd Battalion on that day was impossible, further attempts having been stymied repeatedly by the machine-guns opposite. Thus the attack was halted pending a different plan of attack.

Casualty report: “Killed in Action” – During military actions near the Cambrai Road, in front of a belt of wire surrounding an enemy ammunition dump, he was fatally wounded, while advancing with his company about 9 a.m. on September 29th, 1918. He succumbed to his wounds before he could be evacuated to a dressing station.

The son of Mark Downey, fisherman, and of Alice Downey, of Brigus(?), Newfoundland*, he was husband to Elma Blanche (see above) – by October of 1916 residing at Pond Road, Sydney - to whom, on November 30 of 1916, he had willed his everything**.

**There is little family information to be found: what is here has been found in the Nova Scotia Marriage Records.*

**A further address of his widow, that of 1922, was c/o Pension Section, Nurses’ Home, Camphill Hospital, Hospital.*

Patrick Downey had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-seven years: date of birth (from attestation papers) at Brigus, Newfoundland, June 24, 1889.

Private Patrick Downey 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.