



**Sergeant Graham Duff (Number 92858) of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, Canadian Garrison Artillery, is buried in Sucrerie Cemetery, Ablain St-Nazaire: Grave reference V.A.7.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a bank clerk, Graham Duff had emigrated from the Dominion of Newfoundland to Parrsboro\*, Nova Scotia, Canada, in March of 1915. He had arrived in Halifax from St. John's on board the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Stephano* on the sixth day of that month, perhaps already with a job awaiting at the Canadian Bank of Commerce.**

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*\*Parrsboro was his intended destination according to the ship Stephano's records.*

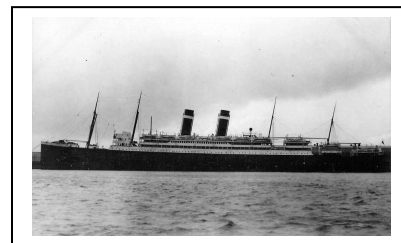
Several dates are recorded as being the day on which Graham Duff enlisted but it was surely August 18 of 1915, this being the day on which the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services, one week after he had presented himself on August 11 for medical examination in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. He is then recorded as having attested, also in Charlottetown, on September 16, some four weeks after enlistment.

On the day of his enlistment, Private Duff was *taken on strength* by the Canadian Artillery and posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Heavy Battery Depot (*Siege Artillery*) to train at Brighton Camp in the vicinity of the capital city. This unit's designation having changed on September 29 to become No. 2 (*Overseas*) Battery, Canadian Siege Artillery, Private (*Gunner?*) Duff received a first promotion, to the rank of bombardier – equivalent to the rank of corporal – during the month of October\*. Another month later again, Bombardier Duff was to be on his way to *overseas service*.

*\*It appears that it was not to be until October 12, exactly six weeks after the Battery had begun training on September 1, that he was officially... 'approved and inspected' by the lieutenant-colonel commanding the unit.*

It was to be on board the requisitioned *Red Star* liner *Lapland* that the six officers and the other two-hundred seventy-three *other ranks* of Bombardier Duff's unit were to take passage to the United Kingdom, boarding the ship in Halifax on November 27, 1915.

The Number 2 (*Overseas*) Battery was not to travel alone; also on *Lapland* were the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion of Canadian Infantry along with an un-numbered draft of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the 4<sup>th</sup> University Company reinforcing the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment and the 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the Cyclist Reserve Company. The vessel apparently sailed on the same November 27 – although a second source has the 28<sup>th</sup>.



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

*Lapland* docked in the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport on December 4, although it was only on the morrow that Private Duff disembarked. From Plymouth, he and his Battery were transported to Raffey Camp at the Horsham Siege Artillery School in West Sussex, there to train for the next four months under the guidance of the Royal Artillery.

On February 24 of 1916 the No. 2 Battery, Canadian Siege Artillery, became the 98<sup>th</sup> (Canadian) Siege Battery in order to conform with British designations since the unit was at first to serve in Royal Artillery groups. On April 12 the 98<sup>th</sup> (Canadian) Siege Battery was despatched to the vicinity of the Kentish community of Lydd; there it was that Bombardier Duff was recorded as having been *confirmed* to the rank of corporal on May 17, 1916.

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Only a month later, Corporal Duff and the 98<sup>th</sup> Canadian Siege Battery were ordered to move to Stockcross in the county of Berkshire; there it received its own guns, these being *BL 6-inch 26 cwt howitzers*, of which there were four. It was also at Stockcross that the unit learned that it was soon to be sent overseas once more, on this occasion to the Continent.



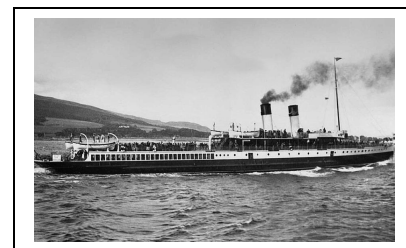
(Right: A photograph dated February of 1918 of a gun-team of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Siege Battery positioning one of their *BL 6-inch 26 cwt\** howitzers – from the Wikipedia web-site)

(Right: Another *BL 6-inch 26 cwt* howitzer, this one on a carriage of the Second World War – photograph taken in the year 2011 at the Royal Artillery Museum, 'Firepower', at the Woolwich Arsenal)



*\*The combined weight of the barrel and breech was twenty-six hundred pounds – cwt stands for hundredweight (100 lbs.).*

On May 31 Corporal Duff and his Battery boarded His Majesty's Transport *King Edward* in the harbour at Southampton for cross-Channel passage to the French port-city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine. Apparently the 98<sup>th</sup> was to be the first unit of the Canadian Garrison Artillery to cross over to serve on the *Western Front*.



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

It would be only two weeks after landing at Le Havre that the 98<sup>th</sup> Siege Battery fired its first rounds in anger – the date was June 16 and the place was Sailly-au-Bois. Two weeks and a day later again, in this same area, on July 1, 1916, the British were to launch the disastrous summer offensive which became known to history as the *First Battle of the Somme*.



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

From July 4 until December 11 the 98<sup>th</sup> Siege Battery served with various British units thus, apart from the opening days of the battle, playing a role during – and beyond - the entire drama of *First Somme\**.



(Right above: *Man-handling a gun in the mud: one of the rigours of the life of an artilleryman* – from *Le Miroir* or *Illustration*)

(continued)

***\*From July 4 to September 3 the unit was firstly in action during the Battle of Albert – July 1 to 13 – and then during the Battle of Bazentin Ridge – July 14 to 17. There appear to be no further details a propos its subsequent service at the Somme except that... ‘it was continuously engaged.’ (This information from Wikipedia)***

**In December, by that time attached to the Canadian Corps Heavy Artillery, Corporal Duff’s unit moved into northern France, to the sectors of Lens and to the surrounding mining areas which were to become more and more a Canadian responsibility. On January 11 of 1917 the Battery’s designation reverted to its former one, from the 98<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> Siege Battery.**

**Further promotion was on the way for Corporal Duff: on February 12 he was appointed to the rank of acting sergeant. The *acting* half of this advance assured him of all the responsibilities of a sergeant, but his pay remained that of a corporal. It was not until a month later, on March 15, that he was confirmed in this rank and that his payroll documents began to reflect this promotion.**

**Sergeant Duff and his guns were to play their part on April 9 – Easter Monday - when, on the opening day of the Battle of Arras, the Canadians stormed Vimy Ridge.**

**The Battery War Diarist made the following entry for that day: *Before, during and after the attack we fired on 29 Enemy Batteries, also on Enemy Transport on Roads, Masses of Troops and Trenches. Lieut. J.P. Hooper detailed to follow up attack and report progress, etc. to Group Headquarters from La Folie Farm. Attack has succeeded beyond all expectations and am holding Battery in readiness to move forward\**.**



***\*During the first three days of the attack the Battery incurred only a single casualty.***

**(Above right: *The Canadian National Memorial which since 1936 stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)**

**Many of the reports received during that April 9 were of the success of the artillery operations which reflected new techniques and organization – and co-operation with the infantry. By the end of the morning the Canadian battalions had achieved their objectives and were consolidating the captured positions in expectation of enemy counter-attacks. In several cases these German counter-strikes were dealt with by the Canadian artillery.**

**On April 10 the Canadians finished clearing the area of Vimy Ridge of the few remaining pockets of resistance and were also continuing to consolidate the area, still in anticipation of a German reaction which, in the event, was surprisingly light.**

**There had, on that day, April 10, been the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted, and also highly-unlikely, breakthrough – but such a follow-up of the previous day’s success proved logistically impossible\*. Thus the Germans were gifted the time to close the breach and the conflict reverted to one of inertia.**

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***\*One of the most significant problems was that the ground had been so devastated by the artillery barrages – and then had been saturated by the rain and snow – that it was not possible to move the guns forward with any rapidity to support immediate operations.***

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Siege Battery was to remain with the Canadian Corps in the area of Lens until October 11 when it again passed under British control for an eight-day period.

***(Right below: 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)***

The early summer of that year was to be a relatively quiet time but in August the Canadian Corps had undertaken offensive operations – notably at *Hill 70* on August 15 where the Battery had played a key role, destroying the enemy's communications, neutralizing his batteries and harassing his troop movements\*.



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

But by that time Sergeant Duff was back in England: he had been wounded during that quiet month of June.

Excerpt from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Siege Battery War Diary entry of June 26, 1917: *Lievin\* - Gun reported in action at 11 a.m...At 8.20 am a shell (Anti-aircraft) landed beside gun while Capt. Layton, Lieut. Stephens and 10 Other Ranks (Gun team) were working on it...93858 – Sgt. Duff, G.,...“wounded”.*

***\*Lievin is a suburb of the northern French at-the-time mining centre and city of Lens.***

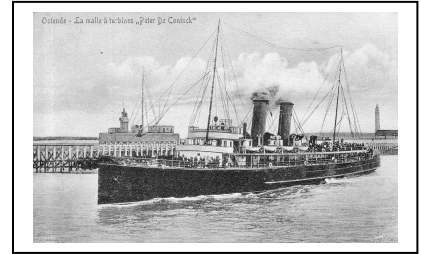
On June 26, 1917, Sergeant Duff was admitted into the 1/2 North Midland Field Ambulance to be forwarded later that same day to the 18<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at La Pugnoy. From there he was transferred again on the next day, June 27, to the Number 8 British Red Cross Hospital at Paris-Plage, Le Touquet, on the French west coast. There he was further treated for gun-shot wounds to his right buttock, an injury which the medical staff deemed to be severe.



***(Right above: a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card)***

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On June 30, four days after his admission into hospital at Le Touquet, he was placed on board the Belgian hospital ship *Pieter de Corninck* for the short English-Channel crossing back to the United Kingdom. Upon his arrival in England he was transferred – but only on paper - to the Canadian Artillery Regimental Depot at Shorncliffe: in reality Sergeant Duff was transferred to the Berrington War Hospital (*Quarry Place Auxiliary Military Hospital*) at Shrewsbury, where he was to remain for the next three weeks.



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

On June 20 Sergeant Duff was once more to be moved, on this final occasion to the Canadian Military (Convalescent) Hospital (*Woodcote Park*) at Epsom in the county of Surrey and just to the south of London. His stay there was for only a single week's duration as, on June 27, he was posted to, and *taken on strength* by, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reserve Brigade of the Canadian Artillery at Shorncliffe.



(Right above: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 2016*)

It was yet to be more than four months later before Sergeant Duff once more was despatched *to duty* in France from Milford Camp, Witley, to where the Reserve Brigade\* had been transferred on September 3.

*\*On November 1 of 1917 the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigades had amalgamated into a single unit.*

He was one of a detachment of seventy-four *other ranks* to leave camp on November 6 to set foot on French soil two days following. On that day of his arrival he reported to be *taken on strength* at the Canadian Artillery Pool.

On November 13, 1917, he was despatched *to duty* with the 6<sup>th</sup> (Canadian) Siege Battery, a posting which, however, lasted but nineteen days; Sergeant Duff thereupon returned to his former unit, the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Canadian) Siege Battery, on December 2-3.

By the time of Sergeant Duff's return, the Battery had not only fought with the Canadian Corps in northern France during the summer, but it had then, during the autumn of that same year, seen action in Belgium.

Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign into which the Canadians had been flung – already 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 had been – so it was later claimed to be – one of the High Command's main objectives.

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

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions in reserve.

From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was true with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.



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

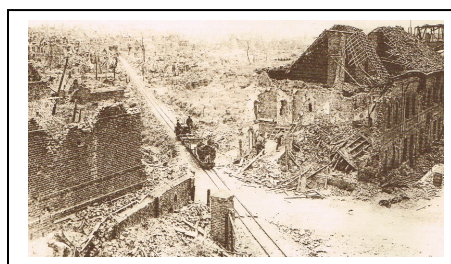
The 2<sup>nd</sup> (Canadian) Siege Battery remained in Belgium with the Canadian Corps from October 21 until November 19; then it again passed under British control from November 20 until December 10, remaining in the area of Ypres during those three weeks.



Where exactly Sergeant Duff had reported *to duty* with his unit on December 3 upon his return from hospitalization is not clear. However, the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Canadian) Battery returned a week later to France – once again to the proximity of Lens - and to the Canadian Corps where it became a component of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Heavy Brigade on December 22. A month later, in January, a further two guns were added to the unit's firepower.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Siege Battery was still stationed in the area of the city and mining centre of Lens when the Germans struck on March 21.

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 Great War, they launched a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21. The main blow fell at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops there\*.



**(Right above: *While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they did bombard it heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Miroir*)**

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The German advance continued for a month, petering out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was a result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British were the most significant.

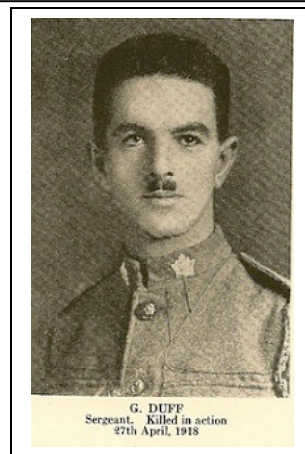
*\*A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division. It also was successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.*

(Right: *In the outskirts of Lens during 1918, the caption translated reads: a northern sector held by the Canadians – from Le Miroir*)



However, despite, at times, the critical situations in the areas of both the Somme and Flanders, the services of the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Canadian) Siege Battery were apparently not required during Michael or Georgette. The unit – and with it Sergeant Duff - remained stationed near Lens and it was still there on April 27.

(Excerpt from the entry of April 27, 1918, from the No. 2 Canadian Siege Battery War Diary) *27 Visibility poor – Rounds fired. – 20, Neutralization. 95. Harassing. 68 Special Target. At 1.45. pm until 2. pm. 15 rds. At Rear position S.8.b.4.1". Gun. 92852 (sic) Sgt. G. Duff, killed during this bombardment...*



The son of Robert MacPherson Duff, importer of dry goods and sub-agent of the *Palatine Insurance Company*, and of Maud(e) M. Duff (née Foote) – to whom he had allotted a monthly fifteen (later twenty) dollars from his pay - of Water Street in Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, he was also the brother of David A. and Esther-Ruth (later married *MacLachan*).

Sergeant Duff was reported as having been *killed in action* on April 27 of 1918 while serving his gun in the Lens Sector.

(Right: *This monument commemorating the sacrifice of Graham Duff – and also that of James M. Cron who served in the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment – is to be found in the Presbyterian Cemetery in the community of Harbour Grace. – photograph from 2011(?)*)



The above photograph of Sergeant Graham Duff is from the Canadian Virtual War Memorial Web-site.

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Graham Duff had enlisted at the *apparent age* of nineteen years: date of birth, May 5, 1896, in St. John's, Newfoundland.

Sergeant Graham Duff was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to [criceadam@yahoo.ca](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 26, 2023.