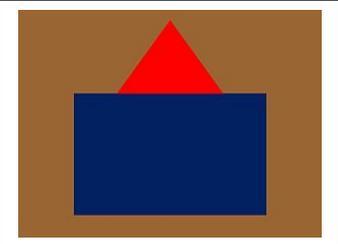




Private Laurence Dunphy (Number 67299) of the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Dickebusch New Military Cemetery: Grave reference I.40.

(Right: The image of the shoulder flash of the 25th Battalion is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, there is some evidence (from *Wartime Heritage Association – Remembering World War 1 Yarmouth Connections* web-site) that Laurence Dunphy was working on a fishing schooner that had put into Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, where he decided to enlist. His own papers confirm that he did *indeed* enlist in Yarmouth, apparently on November 9 of 1914, as that is the date on which the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services*.

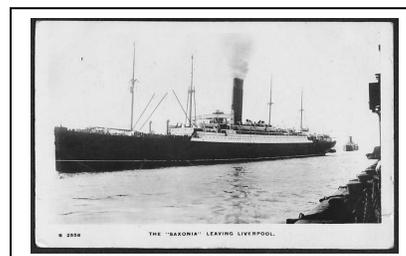
**This is also the date, according to the same pay-record, that he was taken on strength by the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles).*

He was thereupon sent to Halifax for further formalities and processing. Having presented himself for a medical examination on November 14, Private Dunphy underwent attestation on the following day before being *officially* attached to the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) some two weeks later again, on November 28, when he was... *approved and inspected* by the Officer Commanding, Lt-Col. G.A. LeCain.

By the end of that month, the strength of the unit was eight-hundred ninety-eight men.

It was to be a further six months after Laurence Dunphy's enlistment that the 25th Battalion embarked for overseas, the unit having trained at the *Halifax Armouries* during that period – although it was to be interrupted by an outbreak of diphtheria. For Private Dunphy this period was also interrupted on at least four occasions when he was awarded a fine and/ or detention for misdemeanours which are not recorded in any detail on his personal papers (also see below).

Private Dunphy and his unit embarked onto His Majesty's Transport vessel *Saxonia* in the harbour at Halifax on May 20 of 1915 for passage to the United Kingdom. The 25th Battalion was to travel in the company of the 22nd Battalion (*French Canadian*) from Québec, and also with a contingent of the 2nd Divisional Ammunition Park, a total of some two-thousand three hundred military personnel all told.



Saxonia sailed on the same May 20, to dock in the English south-coast harbour and naval facility of Plymouth-Devonport at ten minutes past four in the morning of May 29.

(Right above: *The image of the Royal Mail Ship Saxonia leaving the port of Liverpool is from the Wikipedia web-site. Requisitioned by the British for government service she was deployed for use early in the conflict as a floating prisoner-of-war camp before seeing use as a troop transport as of 1915.*)

The new arrivals apparently soon were on board trains which were to speed them across southern England to the county of Kent. There Private Dunphy's Battalion proceeded to East Sandling, a subsidiary camp of the large and newly-forming Canadian establishment of *Shorncliffe*, on the Dover Straits and in the vicinity of the town and harbour of Folkestone.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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)

During the time that followed, Private Dunphy’s record sheet was periodically stained with further misdemeanours including *absence without leave* – and often related to drink – which resulted in fines being awarded as well as periods of detention. It was apparently to be a recurring problem throughout the remainder of his brief military career.

The 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) was a component of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2nd Canadian Division. The 1st Canadian Division had been serving on the Continent since February of that same 1915, having been deployed in northern France and in the *Kingdom of Belgium* during that time, and had distinguished itself during the *2nd Battle of Ypres* in the spring of that same year. By the late summer of 1915 it was now the turn of the 2nd Canadian Division to take a place in the line.



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



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

On September 15, 1915, the 25th Battalion marched from *Shorncliffe Camp* in the late afternoon en route for Folkestone where the unit boarded a troop transport for the short crossing to the Continent. Sailing at ten o’clock that same evening, the troops disembarked in the French port of Boulogne two hours later, at one o’clock in the morning*.

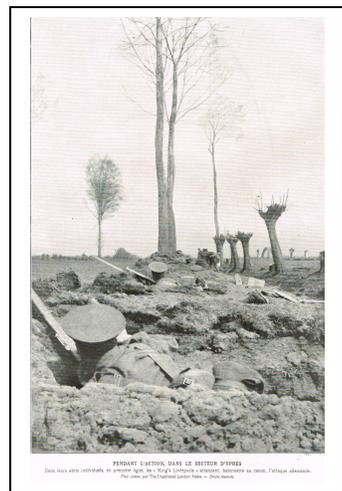


**There is a one-hour time difference between the United Kingdom and France.*

(Right above: *A convoy of troops crossing a river by means of a bridge of boats: This is surely early in the war as there is no sign of a steel helmet.* – from a vintage post-card)

Later, on that same September 16, and after several hours rest, the Battalion marched to meet transport which was to take them into northern France, not far from the frontier with Belgium, and not far distant from the large centre of Hazebrouk*. Three days later the unit crossed into Belgium.

By September 23, the Nova Scotia Unit was relieving the 2nd Battalion, *the King’s Own*, in trenches close to the Franco-Belgian border in the area of the Kemmel-Ypres Road.



(Preceding page: Troops – in this instance British, the King’s Regiment (Liverpool) – in hastily-dug trenches in the Ypres Sector. These are still the early days of the year as witnessed by the lack of steel helmets which came into use only in the spring and summer of 1916. – from Illustration)

The following months were to be a relatively quiet period for all the troops of both sides in the trenches in Belgium; there was, of course, a steady trickle of casualties, usually due to enemy artillery fire and to his snipers, but until the spring of 1916 there was only the daily grind of the infantryman’s life in – and out of – the trenches*.

***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 same year, 1916, but by that time equipped with steel helmets and also the less-evident British-made Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles – from Illustration)

The 25th Battalion’s first two casualties – not fatal - on active service were in fact to be self-inflicted wounds. However, on September 25...**Had one man killed in action. #67563 L/Cpl McLean J.A. was sniping and succeeded in hitting two Germans. He was in the act of taking a third shot when he was hit in the head, almost the whole top being shot off. He lived two hours unconscious...** Excerpt from 25th Battalion War Diary entry for September 25, 1915.



The 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) had incurred its first fatality. More were to come, of course, in the months to follow but, relatively speaking, that autumn and winter period of 1915-1916 was to be a period of calm.

(Right above: La Laiterie Military Cemetery, within the bounds of which is buried Lance Corporal John Archibald McLean – photograph from 2014)

Private Dunphy’s bad habits had apparently continued once he had set foot on French and Belgian soil, notwithstanding that the unit was now on active service which increased the gravity of any offence.

(continued)

The following entry is copied from his personal documentation: *In confinement awaiting trial from 11/12/15. Tried and convicted by F.G.C.M.* of “When on Active Service drunk” and sentenced to 42 days of F.P. No 1**, 27/12/15. Sentence confirmed by G.O.C. 5th Can. Inf Bde – 27/12/15*

**Field General Court Martial*

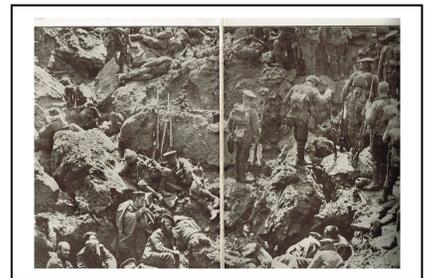
***Field Punishment Number 1*

The rigours of the everyday pattern of trench warfare continued for the 25th Battalion until the month of April, 1916. Then it became involved - although not to the same degree as were many other units of the 2nd Canadian Division on whom much of the burden fell - in the episode which was to become known as the *Action – or Battle - of the St-Éloi Craters*.

It had begun on March 27 when the British detonated a series of mines under the German lines and had followed up with an infantry assault. All had not, however, gone as planned: the British attack became bogged down, not least of all because of the problem of crossing the craters caused by its own mines which had then become filled with rain-water. The troops often fought immersed up to their waists.

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

On April 3 the 2nd Canadian Division entered the fray, relieving the by-then exhausted British. Fighting under the same abominable conditions they had as yet no steel helmets and few machine guns; they, like the British, found that the shattered landscape little resembled what they had been told to expect. And they, like the British, floundered and lost their way as the German defences daily grew more resolute and their artillery fire grew ever more in strength.



The fighting lingered on into the fourth week of April – even though the *official* end of the affair is recorded as April 17 - by which time the Canadians alone had lost almost fifteen-hundred men and all for nought: the Germans had won back everything that had been lost.

The 25th Battalion had been *standing to*, ready for action on April 7, but was not to move into the forward area until April 12, there to alternatively occupy front lines and support positions, and to relieve some of the troops in the craters.

The Battalion War Diary entry of April 14 reads partially as follows: *Our casualties in No.5 Crater were 3 Killed and 8 Wounded. Shelling still very heavy on craters. Total casualties during tour in front line 2 Officers Shell Shock – Killed 18 O.R. Wounded 42 O.R. Battalion relieved by 24th night of 14-15.*

One of those casualties had been Private Dunphy. He was reported as having been *killed in action* on that April 14, 1916, in the *Action of the St. Éloi Craters*.

(continued)

There appears to be little information available a propos the immediate family of Private Dunphy except that he had an uncle, John Devereux of Trepassey, Newfoundland, who was later to receive his medals and other documentation.

Laurence Dunphy had enlisted at the *apparent* age of thirty-four years of age: date of birth, April 25, 1879.

Private Laurence Dunphy was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) 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 26, 2023.