

Private Owen Dyke (Number 842010) of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Victoria Rifles), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is honoured in the stone of the Menin Gate, Ypres (today Ieper): Panel reference 24-26-28-30.

(Right above: The shoulder-flash of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Victoria Rifles) is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of both fisherman and labourer, Owen Dyke may well have been the young man registered on the passenger list of the SS Bruce during the passage of January 1, 1915, from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland to North Sydney, Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. He was at the time on his way to the city of Montréal to seek employment.

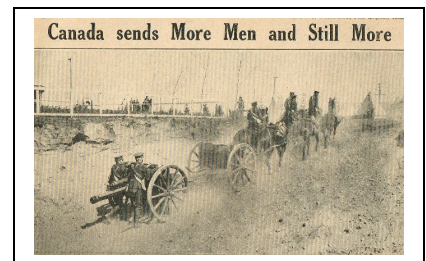
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Montréal was also where his mother, Barbara, appears to have been residing, at least by April of 1916, at 140, La Gauchetière Street West, as this is the address that Owen Dyke cited as that of his next-of-kin on his attestation papers.

He presented himself for enlistment on April 6 – this date confirmed by his first pay records – and also underwent a medical examination – which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force*. On the same April 6 he attested, before the formalities of his enlistment were brought to a close on the morrow, April 7, by Major Arthur Stewart Eve when he – on behalf of the Commanding Officer of the 148<sup>th</sup> Battalion – declared on paper that...*Owen Dyke...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation\**.

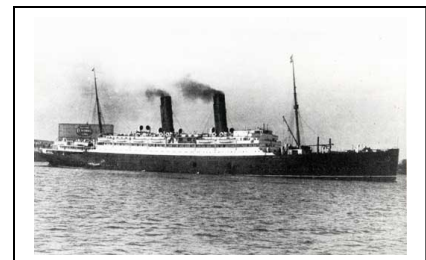
*\*His pay-records also show him to have been ‘taken on strength’ by the 148<sup>th</sup> Battalion at the time of his enlistment.*

Private Dyke was now to remain in Canada for more than five months before being ordered to proceed overseas. Much if not all of this period was to be spent in training at *Camp Valcartier*, to the north of Quebec City, a large military complex, which within the space of only weeks, had sprung into being in the late summer and autumn of 1914.



(Right above: *Canadian artillery being put through its paces at the Camp at Valcartier. In 1914, the main Army Camp in Canada was at Petawawa. However, its location in Ontario – and away from the Great Lakes – made it impractical for the despatch of troops overseas. Valcartier was apparently built within weeks after the Declaration of War. – photograph (from a later date in the war) from *The War Illustrated**)

Towards the end of that September of 1916 the 148<sup>th</sup> Battalion entrained for the east-coast port of Halifax where it boarded the SS *Laconia* on the 26<sup>th</sup> for passage to the United Kingdom. The ship had only just returned to the New-York to Liverpool run after having served for two years as an Armed Merchant Cruiser of the Royal Navy.\*



*\*Only five months hence, on February 25, 1917, Laconia was to be torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Ireland.*

(Right above: *The pre-War photograph of the Cunard liner Laconia is from the GG Archives web-site.*)

*Laconia* sailed from Halifax on September 27, 1916, having also by that time also taken on board the 96<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Canadian Infantry as well as the Number 8 Siege Battery of Canadian Artillery. Nine days later the vessel docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool.

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From Liverpool, Private Dyke's 148<sup>th</sup> Battalion was transported by train to *Witley Camp*, a Canadian complex in the southern part of the county of Surrey. The unit was to undertake further training there but any presumption of it seeing *active service* on the Continent was soon to be dispelled.

Its personnel was to be dispersed to other units already serving on the *Western Front* and those that remained, in January of 1917, would be absorbed only months following their disembarkation, by the 20<sup>th</sup> (Canadian) Reserve Battalion\*.

*\*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 aspirations 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 Dyke's arrival in England, the Canadian Corps had been involved in the *First Battle of the Somme* for just over a month during which time it had suffered terrible losses. It was to fill the depleted ranks of those battered units that the reserves drawn from the Canadian battalions arriving in the United Kingdom were to be deployed.



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

As for Private Dyke himself, two months after having boarded *Laconia* to travel overseas from Canada, he was to be again posted overseas, on this occasion from England to France. It was to be on November 28, 1916, that a detachment of the 148<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered from Witley to join the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) on the Continent. It, Private Dyke among its ranks, voyaged overnight to arrive at the Canadian Base Depot in the vicinity of the French industrial port-city of Le Havre on the following day.

Private Dyke had not travelled without company on that previous night: the Canadian Base Depot War Diary documents eleven-hundred fifty-seven arrivals – most would have come from England – on that November 29. Not all, of course, were destined for the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion but Private Dyke was, and was *taken on strength* by his new unit on that same day.

It was now to be a further two weeks before he was despatched to join the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion. That date was December 14, a day when five-hundred thirteen re-enforcements were to leave the Depot to join their different units. His own files record that Private Dyke reported *to duty* on December 17.

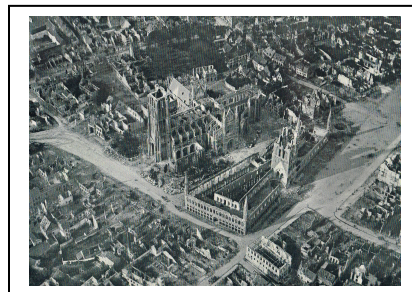
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The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary dissents, documenting that it was on the next day, December 18, that...*A draft of 130 O.Rs arrived from the 148<sup>th</sup> BN., and were taken on the strength. This is the first draft the BN. has received from a Montreal Regiment.*

The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion on both of those dates was busy in the front line attracting the attention of the enemy's artillery and mortars – although no infantry action was being reported. It is thus likely that the newcomers were held at the rear, to be attached to the different fighting companies – of which a battalion had four – when they had been relieved a few days afterwards, after the current tour.

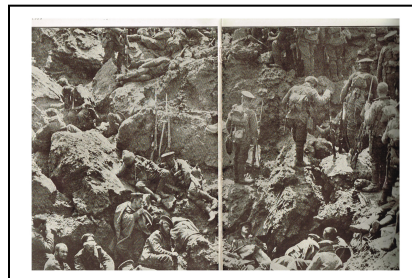
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A component of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) was a Montreal-based unit with a history which dated back to 1862. After mobilization it had sailed to Great Britain from Canada in May of 1915, and had been transferred with the Division to France, then to the *Kingdom of Belgium*, in September of the same year. There it was to serve with the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade to the south of the *Ypres Salient* in a sector between the already battered city of Ypres and the Franco-Belgian border.



(Right above: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)

It was not to be until early April of 1916, more than six months following its arrival on the Continent, that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was to undergo its baptism of fire in a major infantry operation. It was at a place called St-Éloi where, on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of March, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then had followed up with an infantry attack. The role of the newly-arrived Canadian formation was to then capitalize on the presumed British success, to hold and to consolidate the newly-won territory.



However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the often putrid weather which was to turn the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and then a resolute German defence, had greeted the Canadian newcomers who were to begin to take over from the by-then exhausted British on April 3-4.

Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.

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

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The *Action of the St. Eloi Craters* had not been a happy experience for the novice Canadians. The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion, however, according to its War Diary, had not been heavily involved and the majority of its casualties at the time had been due to artillery fire. Apart from repelling a German bombing party on April 15, the unit had been engaged in very little of the infantry action.

Six weeks following the episode at St-Éloi there had then been the confrontation at *Mount Sorrel*. This had involved principally the newly-arrived Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division\* but a number of other units from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions, since the situation at times was to become critical, had also subsequently played a role.

*\*The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. However, unlike its two predecessors, it was formed on the Continent, some of its units having already been on active service there for months. Others did not arrive until the early weeks of 1916, thus it was not until March of that year that the Division was capable of assuming responsibility for any sector. When it eventually did, it was thrust into the south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

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 in a sector to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.



(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 were able to patch up their defences.



Sir Julien Byng's\* hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, however, delivered piece-meal, poorly supported by artillery and poorly co-ordinated, had proved a costly disaster for the Canadians.

*\*The British-appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Corps.*

(Right above: *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*)

(continued)



The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to play a leading part in the action at *Mount Sorrel*. Uninvolved during the early days, the unit moved forward into the front-line trenches in the area of *Maple Copse* on June 7, there to remain until relieved on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Thus neither did it participate in the closing stages of October 12-13.

The Battalion was not to escape without casualties however. Once again these were caused mostly by German gun-fire, particularly at the time when it was moving forward towards *Maple Copse* on June 7, one platoon incurring twenty-three casualties in a single extremely heavy bombardment and thus almost ceasing to exist.

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



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



From the time of its withdrawal from the area of *Mount Sorrel* until the final week of August the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion had passed the early summer submitting to the rigours, routines and perils of life in - and out of - the trenches\*. Often the war diaries of this period refer to *quiet days...front quieter than normal* – although, of course, everything is relative. After the exertions of *Mount Sorrel*, any infantry activity was to be on a local level and limited to patrols and raids, and most casualties were due to artillery and to sniping.



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

*\*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.*

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(Previous page: *A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration*)

On August 25 the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion withdrew westward, entirely away from the *Ypres Salient* and the forward area, to the region of Steenvoorde, back in France, where new training grounds had been established. Further to the south, the British summer offensive was not progressing as well as planned and losses had been heavy: help in the form of troops from the Commonwealth was already being ordered by the High Command.

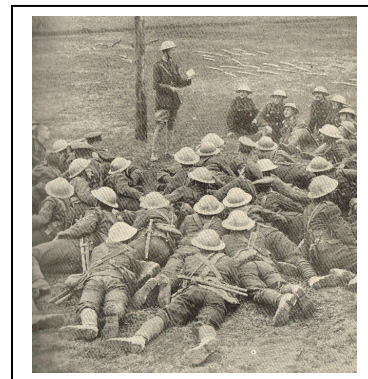
(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette – photograph from 2015*)



By September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short space 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 troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

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



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

Meanwhile, on September 4, ten days after its retirement from Belgium, the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion had left its billets at Éperlecques and marched to the railway station at Arques. There it had boarded a train for the journey to Conteville, just over one-hundred kilometres distant, arriving at its destination at five-thirty on the following morning.

Later on during that same September 5, the Battalion had started to march, to arrive some five days later at the large military encampment at the *Brickfields (La Briquetterie)*, in the proximity of the provincial town of Albert.

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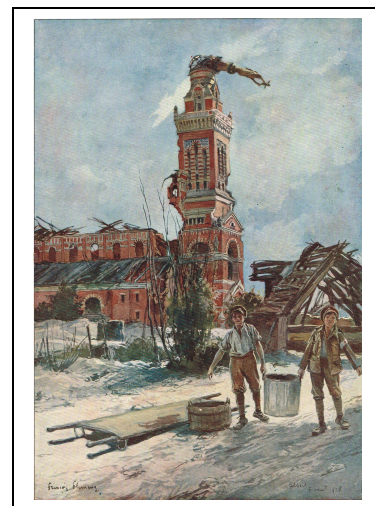


There it was to remain, providing working- and wiring-parties, until midnight of September 14 when it had moved forward to positions in the *Chalk Pits* for the attack of the morrow.

During the first two days of that offensive the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion was as involved as any other Canadian Battalion – it just was not shooting or bombing anyone. It was, however, carrying small-arms ammunition and bombs (*grenades*) to the forward areas for others to use, as well as Bengal Lights, flares, stretchers, rations...

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

On September 17, the unit was ordered to deliver an attack on the German front line, an assault which had commenced at five-thirty in the afternoon. The operation had enjoyed mixed results – and heavy casualties - and the War Diarist wrote the following scathing paragraph in his entry of that day: *With regard to this attack, if the Artillery preparation had been in any way adequate, there is no doubt but that the objective would have been obtained along the whole line. As it was, a barrage was put up approximately 500 yards in rear of the German front line, which merely served to warn the enemy that an attack would probably be launched, and they were able when our men advanced, to stand up on their parapets and shoot them down.*



By the 18<sup>th</sup> the Battalion was back at *Brickfields Camp*: total casualties during the preceding days of *all ranks*, three-hundred twenty.

(Right: *Wounded soldiers at the Somme being evacuated to the rear area in hand-carts – from Le Miroir*)



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

On September 28, the unit was back in the line once more, on this occasion having been ordered to make an attack on the so-called enemy *Regina Trench* system. The attack had been one of several to fail and *Regina Trench* was not to be taken definitively until November 11, six weeks later. The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion's operation had cost a further two-hundred four casualties all told.



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

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On October 2, the remnants of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) had begun its withdrawal from the *First Battle of the Somme*. It had marched westward before turning northward, passing in a semi-circular fashion behind the city of Arras.



(Right: *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*)

It had then continued in the direction of the mining centre of Lens, to be stationed in the suburbs, in the *Angres Sector*, in which area it was to serve for much of the subsequent autumn and early winter.



(Right: *Lens was treated no better than Arras, this image likely from a period later in the War. – from a vintage post-card*)

The late autumn of that 1916 – after the *First Battle of the Somme* - and the winter of 1916-1917 was a time for the remnants of the Canadian battalions to re-enforce and to re-organize. There was to be little concerted infantry action during this period apart from the everyday routine patrolling and the occasional raid - sometimes minor, at other times more elaborate – against enemy positions.

And it was, as seen above, during this period while it was posted in the *Angres Sector*, that the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion had seen the arrival of the one-hundred thirty-man draft of Private Dyke on December 17-18.

\* \* \* \* \*

Not that Private Dyke's arrival was to change things very much: There was as ever to be, of course, the constant trickle of casualties, for the most part still occasioned by the enemy artillery and his snipers, although it was to be mostly sickness and particularly dental work which kept the medical services busy during this period.

As for the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion itself, it then remained in the *Angres Sector* from October 15 of 1916 until January 17 of the New Year, 1917. The unit was then posted to - and billeted in – the town of Bruay, further north and well to the rear where it was to remain posted for almost an entire month.



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

And then it was to serve for even more than a month in the *La Folie Sector*, this in the forward area, from February 11 until March 22. On the next day, March 23, the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion transferred to Maisnil Bouche where, on the morrow... *Day spent cleaning up and getting ready for special training*. This training and preparation for the coming attack was to continue until the afternoon of April 7.

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.

The entire day of the 8<sup>th</sup> had been spent moving forward but, apparently owing to the bad condition of the communication trenches, the troops had not taken place in their jumping-off positions until one o'clock in the morning of April 9: only four and a-half hours to wait.

On April 9, 1917, the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the War's most expensive operation for the British, one of the few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

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

(Right: *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\*, stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

*\*And a British brigade – with reserves - had been placed under Canadian command.*

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



While Battalions of the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions were to attack the *Ridge* itself, it was the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions which had been handed the responsibility of clearing the slope to the south, including the village of Thélus, in the direction of Arras. The objectives of both Divisions were realized early on the day of the attack.

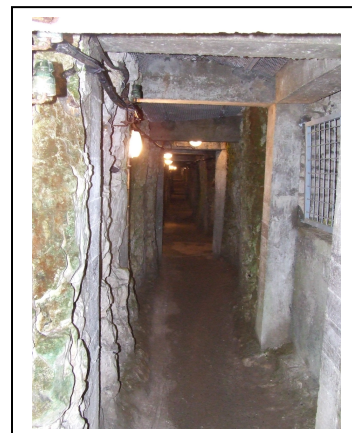
The success of April 9, of course, came at a price: by the end of the day the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion had incurred a total of two-hundred forty-one casualties.

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

On April 10 the Canadians finished clearing the whole area of *Vimy Ridge* of the few remaining pockets of resistance and subsequently begun to consolidate the area in anticipation of the habitual German counter-attacks – assaults which in fact never amounted to very much.

There had, on those two days, been the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on the previous day's success proved to be, thanks to the weather, logistically impossible. Thus the Germans closed the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.



The remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* was not to be fought in the manner of the first two days and by the end of those five weeks little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success. In fact, there were to be times, such as at Fresnoy in early May, when the enemy had successfully – and at a heavy cost to both the Canadians and the British, as well as themselves - re-taken ground which had only recently been lost to them.

By the beginning of that June of 1917, much of the Canadian Corps had been transferred back to the sectors north of where it had just been fighting, from the vicinity of Neuville St-Vaast up to the town of Béthune. After the efforts of the recent confrontation, the units were once more to be reinforced and re-organized, and were also to undergo further training in areas to the rear.

This relative calm was to last until the middle of August.

The British High Command had by this time decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention from this area, as well as his reserve forces, it had ordered operations to also take place at the sector of the front in and around the city and mining-centre of Lens.



The Canadians were to be major contributors to this effort.

**(Right above: *An example of the conditions under which the troops were ordered to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)**

On August 13 at six-thirty in the evening the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion began to move forward into the support area. Its numbers were by now depleted – twenty-one officers and five-hundred seventy-two other ranks – at about sixty per cent of battalion strength, but on August 15 they were to fight for an anonymous rise of ground, identified only as *Hill 70*.



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



**(Right below: Canadian soldiers at an unidentified camp on the Continent perusing the program of an upcoming concert – from *Le Miroir*)**



**The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion remained engaged in the contest for Hill 70\* and for Lens until the night of August 17-18. Having played its role in the still-ongoing struggle, the unit retired back to Cité St-Pierre where for the next number of nights it provided carrying-parties to supply ammunition to the front.**

**(Right below: 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*)**



**The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion by then counted just thirteen officers and two-hundred sixty-five other ranks.**

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



**(Right: This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. – photograph from 2014)**

**The Canadian-led operations in the Lens-Béthune Sector were apparently still incomplete towards the end of August when the British High Command decided to cancel any further actions there other than defensive ones. Things were not going altogether as had been planned in the summer campaign further north and the British were becoming short of re-enforcements. The Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians were to be called upon to remedy that shortage.**

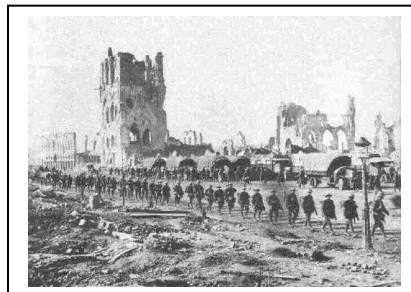


**(Right above: Canadian troops in the vicinity of Hill 70 during the days subsequent to its capture – from *Le Miroir*)**

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The Lens-Béthune campaign thus having been drawn to a close, it was to be only some six weeks hence that the Canadians found themselves ordered to join the ongoing battle in Belgium, to the north-east of Ypres. Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – at least ostensibly - one of the British Army's objectives.

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



From the time that the Canadians entered the fray - after the Anzacs - it was they who were to shoulder 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 to be true, with troops of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division eventually entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

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

Meanwhile, a week after the affair at *Hill 70*, back on August 22, awaiting busses had transported the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion into a reserve area at Guoy-Servins where it had remained until September 3, when the unit had then marched to Mingoal. From then until the 16<sup>th</sup> of the same month, when it had eventually been ordered once more towards the forward area, the unit's days had comprised drills, lectures, parades, inspections, sports, training, musketry...and those inevitable working-parties.



Then there was to be a ten-day tour at the front where no infantry action had been reported but where the German artillery had produced the customary trickle of casualties.

On September 26-27, Private Dyke's 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion had moved towards the rear again, to Villers-au-Bois, there to be placed in reserve once more. The following four weeks – in and out of the line – had then proved to be similar in nature to those earlier on.



(Right above: *Villers Station Cemetery, Villers-au-Bois, is today the last resting-place for just over one-thousand two-hundred Commonwealth military personnel and thirty-two former adversaries. – photograph from 2017*)

(continued)

Then on October 24 the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion marched to the railway station at nearby Tinqués, there to board trains which would take the unit northward to Caëstre, close to where, at Pradelles, it was to remain billeted for the remainder of the month. On the first two days of November, parties of NCOs and men travelled north to the outskirts of the Belgian community of Poperinghe to view something that their officers had already inspected just days before... *a plasticine model of the area the Division is detailed to attack.* (Battalion War Diary)

On November 3 the Battalion... *paraded at 5am and marched to CAESTRE where they entrained at 6.45 for YPRES, arriving there at 8.40 am, then marched by Platoons through City of YPRES to POTIJZE Camp... where BN. was distributed in the open occupying funk holes and tarpaulin shelters. The ground was very muddy and accommodation very poor. About noon enemy shelled our area...* (Excerpt from 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of November 3)



(Right above: *Canadian soldiers on the Passchendaele Front using a shell-hole to perform their ablutions – from Le Miroir*)

(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 the following day, November 4, the unit – all except ‘C’ Company which had been detailed as a working-party – moved forward in individual platoons and relieved the 19<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalion in the line. On next day, the 5<sup>th</sup>, the Battalion remained in its positions where it was re-joined by ‘C’ Company, and there heavily shelled by the enemy.

At midnight of November 5-6, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*), having been ordered to attack in tandem with Private Dyke’s 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion, began to move into a position alongside.

Only hours later, at six o’clock in the morning of November 6... *our attack was launched under a heavy barrage, the 26<sup>th</sup> BN. passing through us to their Objective. Throughout the day the enemy shelled us continuously... Throughout the night enemy artillery was concentrated on our Front and Support Trenches.* (Excerpt from 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for November 6, 1917)



(Right above: *A part of Tyne Cot cemetery, perhaps a kilometre from Passchendaele – the cross stands atop a German bunker: Apart from the twelve-thousand graves therein, of which more than eight-thousand are of unidentified soldiers, there are some thirty-five thousand names engraved in stone panels of those who died but have no known grave: there was insufficient space for them to be commemorated on the Menin Gate. – photograph from 2011(?)*)



(Right: *In the stone of the Menin Gate at Ypres (today Ieper) there are carved the names of British and Empire (Commonwealth) troops who fell in the Ypres Salient during the Great War and who have no known last resting-place. There are almost fifty-five thousand honoured there; nevertheless, so great was the final number, that it was to be necessary to commemorate those who died after August 16 of 1917, just fewer than thirty-five thousand, on the Tyne Cot Memorial. – photograph from 2010)*



There is no real casualty report for Private Dyke – perhaps in the maelstrom that was *Passchendaele* no-one saw him fall. In its place is the following notation: *Previously reported Missing now for official purposes Presumed to have died on or since 6/11/17* (Dated: 9/8/18)

Private Dyke son of Barbara Dyke (by then widowed) – to whom he had allocated a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay as of October 1, 1916 (then twenty dollars as of April 1, 1917), and to whom as of November 25, 1916, he had willed his all – of 193, St. George's Street, Montreal, by the time that the will was written. He appears to have left behind him little information a propos any other family members.

Owen Dyke had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty years and seven months: Date of birth in Bonavista (*Bonfeister* on his papers), Newfoundland, August 31, 1895 (from attestation papers).

Private Owen Dyke 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 25, 2023.

