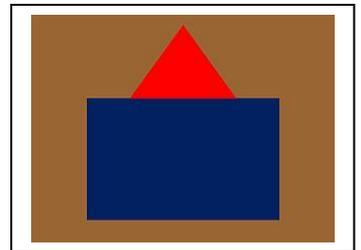




Private Benjamin Foote (Number 734286) of the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles), Canadian Expeditionary Corps is buried in Ramillies British Cemetery: Grave reference C.13.

(Right: The image of the shoulder-patch of the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *sailor*, Benjamin Foote appears to have left behind him no information pertaining to either his early life in Foote's Cove, or to his emigration – unless, like certain others, he simply left his ship – from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia*.

**As did those who joined the Australian Imperial Force.*

It is documented, however, that he was in the coastal town of Lunenburg, on February 29 – 1916 was a leap year - of 1916, for that was where and when he both enlisted and attested. The same pay-records also record him having been *taken on strength* by the 112th Overseas Battalion of the Canadian Infantry on that same day.

There was now to be a long wait before the formalities of Private Foote's enlistment would continue and yet another before they would eventually be brought to a conclusion: it was not until May 3 that he would undergo a medical examination in the Nova Scotian town of Windsor* – a procedure which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force* - and then apparently a further two months, not until July 13, 1916, that he was brought before the Commanding Officer** of the above-mentioned 112th Battalion who declared – on paper - that...*Benjamin Foote...having been finally approved and inspected this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

**Private Foote's 112th Battalion trained during that winter and spring of 1916 in, and in the vicinity of, the Nova Scotian town of Windsor.*

Private Foote was thereupon assigned to "A" Company after which it would be only a matter of days before the unit was to depart for the United Kingdom.

***Lt-Col. Hadley Brown Tremain (sic), the officer in question, was apparently not appointed Commanding Officer until July 23, ten days hence, and the day of his Battalion's departure for overseas service.*

On July 23, having travelled the short distance to Halifax, the unit boarded His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*, sister-ship to *Britannic* – to be sunk by a mine in the Mediterranean in November of that same year – and also of the ill-fated *Titanic*. She, *Olympic*, was one of the largest ships afloat at the time, able to easily carry more than six-thousand troops – which she oft-times did.



(Right above: The photograph of Olympic, shown here in her war-time dazzle camouflage, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

Thus Private Foote was not to take passage to the United Kingdom alone: apart from his own unit, travelling on *Olympic* were the 103rd, 109th, 115th and 116th Battalions of Canadian Infantry; the 4th Draft of the Canadian Mounted Rifles Depot; the 1st Draft of both the 65th and 71st Batteries of the Canadian Field Artillery; and the 2nd and 3rd Drafts of the 11th TD (*Training Depot?*) of the Canadian Army Medical Corps. Likely added to them were to be other miscellaneous military personnel, for a total of not far off six-thousand souls.

(continued)

Having cleared the harbour in Halifax on July 24, HMT *Olympic* docked a week later in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool on the last day of the month. Nine days later again the vessel had returned to Halifax, there to disembark repatriated soldiers.

From Liverpool the 112th Battalion was transported immediately by train to the large, newly-established, Canadian camp in the vicinity of the villages of Bramshott and Liphook in the southern English county of Hampshire.

There at *Camp Bramshott*, Private Foote and his comrades-in-arms were to remain for the following two months to complete their training while awaiting further orders to proceed from there to the Continent and on to the *Western Front*.

(Right below: *Royal Canadian Legion flags amongst others adorn the interior of St. Mary's Church in the English village of Bramshott. – photograph from 2016*)

On October 5, a re-enforcement draft from the 112th Battalion was transferred by ship, likely through the English port of Southampton, to its French counterpart, the industrial city of Le Havre, situated at the estuary of the River Seine. There it reported, on the morrow, October 6, to the nearby Canadian Infantry Base Depot, *Camp Rouelles*.



Private Foote's detachment was also transferred, on this occasion on paper, from the 112th Battalion, to be *taken on strength* by the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) already serving on the Continent*.

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



*A total of just one-hundred seventy-two re-enforcements arrived from England at the Base Depot on that day. At other times the number was up in the thousands.

It was to be a further two weeks before Private Foote departed from Le Havre to join his unit. On October 20 the Base Depot despatched three-hundred fifty-two re-enforcements to various units; one-hundred ten of them, Private Foote among that number – plus eleven signallers - were destined to join the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) in the field on October 22, at a time when the four fighting companies of the Battalion were in front-line and support positions forward of the commune of Bully-Grenay, adjacent to the city and mining centre of Lens.

The 25th Battalion was to remain in this general area for almost an entire year – even the Canadian contribution to the *Battle of Arras* in the spring of 1917 was to be fought there – and thus this was to be a period during which Private Foote and his unit were to become accustomed to the daily grind of war in the trenches.

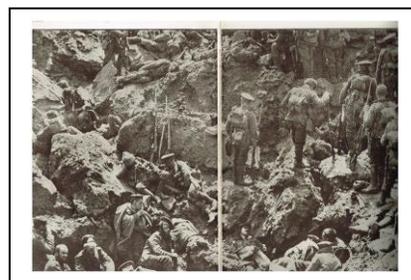
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(continued)

The 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force had already been serving in France and Belgium for some thirteen months by the time of Private Foote's arrival, since September of the previous year, 1915. It was a unit of the 5th Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2nd Canadian Division, and had been in service on the Continent continuously since its arrival on the *Western Front*.

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

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



Towards the end of that confrontation, on April 13-14, the 25th Battalion had relieved another unit in the craters and subsequently there had incurred a total of some eighty-five casualties, a greater toll than the unit had encountered on any other single occasion up until that date.

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

Six weeks later, in early June, the Battalion had been involved in the fighting in the area of *Mount Sorrel, Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60*, the village of *Hooge, Railway Dugouts* and *Maple Copse*, all just to the south-east of the city of Ypres. The Canadian 3rd Division had been the main recipient of the enemy's offensive thrust but the 25th Battalion of the 2nd Canadian Division was apparently to play a role sufficiently important for the name *Mount Sorrel* to become the first battle honour won by the unit during the Great War.



(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*)

(Right: *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*)



(continued)

From the middle of June up until August of 1916, the 25th Battalion had been in reserve well to the rear, so well to the rear, in fact, that it had been deemed safe enough for His Majesty the King and his son the Prince of Wales to pay a visit on August 14. Some two weeks later, on the 27th, the unit was withdrawn into northern France to the vicinity of Steenvoorde and to the village of Moule.

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

(Right below: Canadian troops likely in trenches built for training purposes – they are too prim and proper to be the real thing when compared to the photographs of the real thing – and here equipped with Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles, during the late summer or early autumn of 1916 – from The War Illustrated)

**The Canadian-produced Ross Rifle was an excellently-manufactured weapon; its accuracy and range were superior to that of many of its rivals, but on the battlefield it had not proved its worth. In the dirty conditions and when the necessity arose for its repeated use - and using mass-produced ammunition which at times was less than perfect - it jammed, leaving its user defenceless at a critical moment.*



By the summer of 1916 the Canadian units were exchanging it for the more reliable British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III, a rifle that was to ultimately serve around the globe until well after the Second World War.

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 costing 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 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 at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

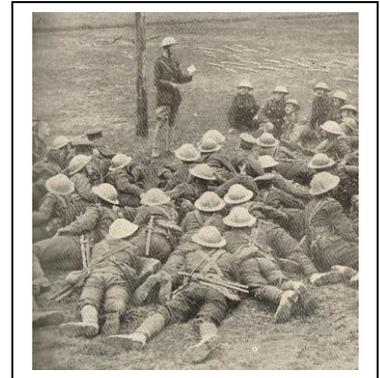


(Right above: The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette – photograph from 2015)

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

Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcelette.

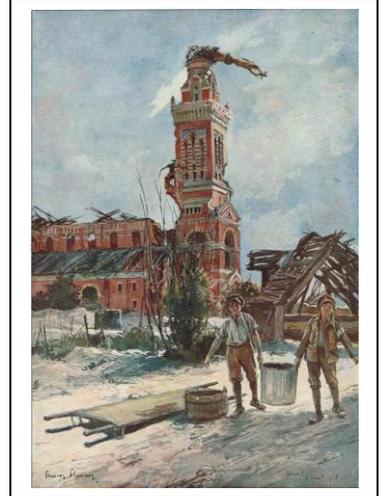
(Right: An image purporting to be that of a Canadian officer giving instructions to those under his command prior to the attack at Flers-Courcelette (see below), September 1916. – from *The War Illustrated*)



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

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

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



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

Of the six-hundred ninety personnel who had gone over the top on the day of the assault, the War Diary was to record thirty-six dead, one-hundred ninety-one wounded and seventy-seven as *missing in action**.

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



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

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

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

(continued)

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



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



On the night of October 1-2 the 25th Battalion had retired from *the Battle* - and from the area of - *the Somme* and was to make its way westwards and then northwards. It had subsequently passed to the west of the battered city of Arras and beyond, to the region of the mining centre of Lens. There the unit would remain for the following six months, in the area, and in the trenches, of places such as Bully-Grenay – where Private Foote and his draft were to report *to duty* on that October 22 - Angres and Bruay.

* * * * *

(Right: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery – from a vintage post-card*)



That winter of 1916-1917 was to be one of relative calm, allowing the 25th Battalion – and many others - to return to the everyday rigours and routines of trench warfare; after *the Somme* it was perhaps a welcome respite. Of course, for Private Foote it would all have been a new experience*.

**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*)

(continued)

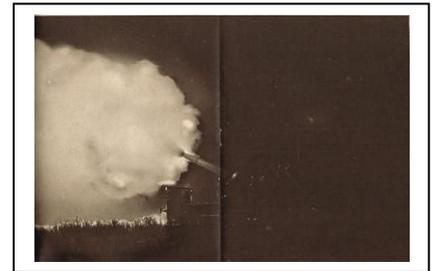
Casualties for the most part during this period were due to enemy artillery – shell-fire apparently to be responsible for some two-thirds of *all* casualties on the *Western Front* - with snipers also having taken their toll; but in fact, it was to be myriad sicknesses and, perhaps surprisingly, more than that, dental problems which would keep the medical services occupied during this time.

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

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

As these final days passed, the artillery barrage had grown progressively heavier; on April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion was to describe it as...*drums**.

By this time, of course, the Germans were well aware that something was in the offing and their guns in their turn were spewing retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft were constantly busy overhead.



(Right above: *A heavy British artillery piece continues its deadly work during a night before the attack on Vimy Ridge. – from Illustration*)

**It should be said that a great deal of the artillery used in the assault on Vimy Ridge was British and that a British Division – see above - also participated. Almost fifty per cent of the personnel who had been employed for that day were British, not to mention those whose contribution – such as those who dug the tunnels - allowed for it all to happen.*

On April 9 in that spring of 1917, the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be 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 most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, one of the few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign would prove an overall disappointment the French offensive was to be yet a further disaster.

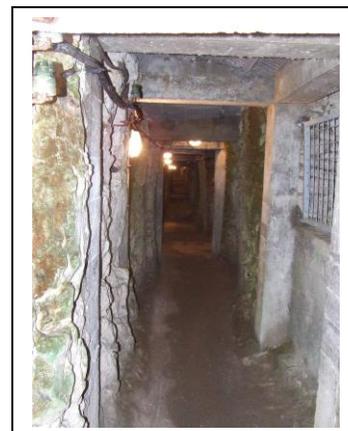
(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, has stood atop Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity, stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

The Canadian 2nd Division – with a British brigade under its command - was not responsible for the taking of *Vimy Ridge* itself, but for the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the southern slope, and therefore on the right-hand side of the attack.

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

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



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



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



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



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

(continued)

There had been, on the first days, April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted, and highly unlikely, *breakthrough* – but such a follow-up of the previous day's success had proved to be logistically impossible for the most part because of the horrendous weather – and not to forget the orders to halt and to consolidate .

Thus the Germans were gifted the time to close the breach and retire to prepared positions three kilometres to the east, and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

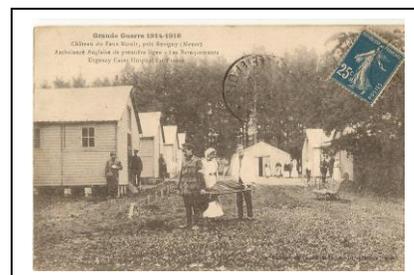
Nor was the remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* to be fought in the manner of the first two days and, by the end of those five weeks, little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success. At the time that the *Battle of Arras* officially drew to its conclusion in mid-May, the 25th Battalion was in reserve, resting and training – if that is not a contradiction – in the vicinity of the community of Gouy-Servins, to the west of the city of Lens.

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

Relief completed about 2 a.m. – No further casualties were to be documented for the remainder of the day: life in the trenches had thus returned to its usual routine.

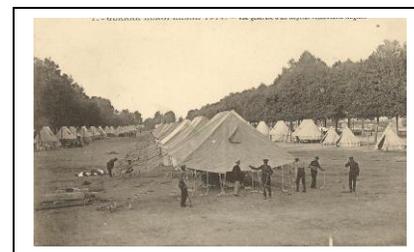
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Not for Private Foote, however, who had been one of those reported wounded, having incurred a GSW (*gun-shot wound*) to the right leg and chest. He was thereupon evacuated to the 6th Canadian Field Ambulance which had been established at Aix-Noulette on only the previous afternoon and which was operating two advanced dressing stations in the area.



(Right: *A British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some: it is certainly not an advanced dressing station.* – from a vintage post-card)

The 6th CFA forwarded him on that same July 3 to the 18th Casualty Clearing Station at nearby La Pugnoy where he was to spend the night receiving further treatment. On the following day, July 4, he was again transferred, on this occasion by barge, to the 7th General Hospital in the large northern centre of St-Omer.



(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* – from a vintage post-card)

(continued)

(Right below: *French wounded being placed onto a barge en route to hospital at an earlier period of the War – from Le Miroir*)

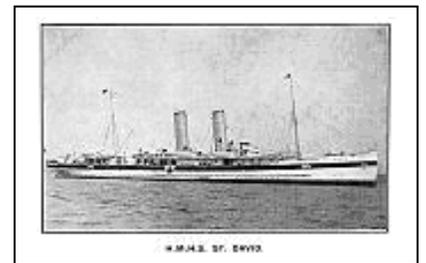
Private Foote apparently remained in hospital at St-Omer for another nineteen days by which time it had been decided to return him to the United Kingdom. Thus he was placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. David* on July 23 for the short cross-Channel journey and, by the end of that day, had completed the transfer and been admitted into the Horton (County of London) War Hospital at Epsom, a well-known horse-racing centre in the county of Surrey.



Also on that same day he had been transferred bureaucratically from the 25th Battalion to the NSRD (*Nova Scotia Regimental Depot*) based at *Camp Bramshott*.

(Right: *The photograph of HM Hospital Ship St. David is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

It was nine weeks later - to the day - that Private Foote left Horton War Hospital: *...some shrapnel fragments supposed to be in knee joint – wound however healed – no disability – Horton 23/7 to 6/9* (Excerpt from a medical report written just prior his discharge)



The *Woodcote Park Canadian Military Convalescent Hospital* had also been established in the town of Epsom and this was where Private Foote was now to be forwarded. There a further eighteen days were to pass before he was discharged *to duty*, on September 24, to the 2nd Canadian Command Depot in the vicinity of the south-coast town and pre-War resort of Hastings.

Excerpt from the medical report of Private Foote upon discharge from Woodcote Park convalescent Hospital: *Wound healed, patient claims leg as good as ever – now for gradual Physical training treatment. GSW R. knee – 6/9/17 – 24/9/17*

The posting to the 2nd CC Depot was also to be of perhaps unexpectedly short duration as just ten days were to pass before Private Foote was once more on the move, back into hospital. It is unlikely that the Germans were to blame for *this* admission on October 4 into the Military Hospital, Warlington, as the treatment was to be for a venereal problem*. On November 24 Private Foote was released from there to find himself once more in the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Epsom.

**It would also seem that there was a bureaucratic blunder on this occasion as Private Foote's records show that he was 'absent without leave' for an unspecified period beginning on October 11. It was apparently a mistake as all the relevant entries in his documents have a line in red ink drawn through them.*

(continued)

His treatment(s) at an end, Private Foote was ordered upon his departure from Epsom on December 10, to report to back to *Camp Bramshott* where he was *taken on strength* on that same date by the Canadian 17th (Reserve) Battalion. He was to remain with this unit for some four months, until April of the following year, 1918.

In the meantime, while still at *Bramshott*, on March 4, Private Foote was sent *on command* to undertake a non-commissioned officer's course.

However, apparently something must have gone amiss during that course – although exactly what that *something* might have been appears not to be recorded - but he was reported as having returned *off command* on March 30 without any promotion in rank. He was to retain the status of private soldier for the remainder of his military career.

Private Foote was now once more to undergo the formalities of a transfer overseas, his return to *active service* on the Continent. This came about on April 7, 1918, when he was bureaucratically attached to his previous unit, the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) and coincidentally physically despatched to France where he once more passed temporarily through the jurisdiction of the Canadian Infantry Base Depot – by that time established in the area of the coastal town of Étapes – from April 8 to 10. He was thereupon ordered posted to the *Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp* at Calonne Ricouart, some ninety kilometres to the east.

There it would seem that Private Foote languished* there at the CCR Camp for a further four months, the reason(s) for which are seemingly not documented. Then on August 12, a reinforcement draft of thirty-one *other ranks...left for unit in the field*. Private Foote and his detachment – accompanied by six junior officers – reported *to duty* with the 25th Battalion two days later, on the 14th – or three days later, on the 15th, according to the Battalion's War Diarist.

**Except for one period of ninety minutes on the afternoon of June 4 when he was reported as having been...‘absent without leave from CCRC’. There was no bureaucratic mix-up to be blamed on this date, and on June 17 Private Foote was...‘sentenced to 4 days F.P. (Field Punishment) No. 1.’*

To where exactly Private Foote and his comrades-in-arms reported upon the draft's arrival is not certain. The fighting companies of the Battalion had relieved other units during the night of August 14-15, to be themselves relieved on the night of the 15-16. At the time the Battalion was on the offensive in a region thirty kilometres to the east of the city of Amiens, in the area of the community of Chilly.

* * * * *

During those months of Private Foote's absence the 25th Battalion had fought in two major offensives, while observing a third from afar. The first had been fought in the area where he had been wounded, and had taken place six weeks after his evacuation from the sector.

(continued)

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



The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort.

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

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



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

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

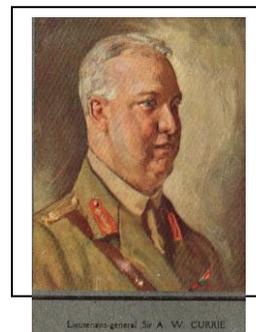


(Right: *This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15th Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. – photograph from 1914*)

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

(Right: *The portrait of Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie is from Illustration.*)

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



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

(continued)

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



Of course, the Germans had not been the only ones to have incurred casualties: by the time that the 25th Battalion was to retire on August 17, the unit had recorded some one-hundred fifty *killed, wounded and missing in action*, fifty of which were apparently incurred on that August 17.

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

While it may have retired temporarily from front-line positions on August 17, the respite was to last not even a day – and the unit had incurred casualties even while withdrawing into those support positions. On August 18 the Battalion War Diarist was to report a unit *trench strength* of just fifteen officers and three-hundred seventy-five *other ranks*.



On the night of August 20-21, the 25th Battalion had relieved the 22nd Battalion in the front line, still in the area of the Cité St-Laurent*. Relieved on the night of August 21-22, the depleted ranks of the unit had retired on foot and by bus to the afore-mentioned community of Gouy-Servins. To the casualty count of August 17, a further seventy could now be added.

**The many pit-heads and their neighbourhoods surrounding the mining-centre and city of Lens were often designated by the term Cité followed by the name of a saint.*

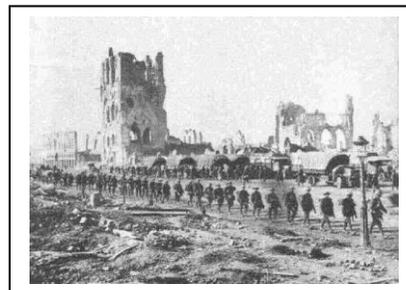
After the weeks of relatively little infantry activity during the early days of that summer of 1917, the attack on August 15 in the area of *Hill 70* and the city of Lens had apparently been intended as the precursor to further weeks of an entire campaign to be spear-headed by the Canadian Corps.

However, the British offensive of that summer, further to the north, in Belgium, had been proceeding less well than had been presumed and the Canadians, the Australians and the New Zealanders were to be needed there. Offensive activities in the *Lens Sector* had been suspended in early September and thus for a short period the 25th Canadian Infantry Battalion was to revert to those rigours and routines, the everyday grind, of existence in – and out of - the trenches.

It was not to be until the final weeks of the month of October that the Canadians were to become embroiled in the British summer – and then autumn - offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign has come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a ridge that had been – *ostensibly* - one of the British High Command's objectives.

(continued)

(Right: *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*)



(Right below: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)



From the time that the Canadians were to enter the fray, it was they who had shouldered a great deal of the burden. From the week of October 26 until November 3, the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions had spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair the reverse was to be true with troops of the 2nd Canadian Division having finally entered the remnants of the by-then non-existent village of Passchendaele itself.

The strength of the 25th Battalion on that November 5 was to be reported as twenty-one officers and five-hundred seventy-six other ranks, perhaps some sixty per cent of establishment unit numbers.



(Right: *The Canadian Memorial standing on Passchendaele Ridge, at the south-western outskirts of the re-constructed village – photograph from 2015*)

During the three days that the unit would spend at the front at this time, the casualties sustained by the 25th Battalion had been, by comparison to those incurred by other units, fairly light: seventeen *killed in action*, sixty-seven *wounded* and six *missing in action*.



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

During the late evening of November 8 the 25th Battalion was to be ordered withdrawn from the area of the front line and it had eventually moved to the west of Ypres itself, to the area of the village of Vlamertinghe.



On November 13 it would retire back across the frontier into France and south to the area of Neuville St-Vaast, adjacent to *Vimy Ridge*.

(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war – from Illustration*)

(continued)

(Right below: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)

The 25th Battalion was to remain in this area until, a month later again, on or about December 6, it had then been ordered back to the area of Villers-au-Bois, not many kilometres distant from where it had just been serving, and from where it would now move up into *support* and the *front-line* – and back again during the next three weeks of the month.

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



Although the 25th Battalion War Diarist appears to have neglected it in his entries of the time, the month of December, 1917, had held a special interest for the Canadian Forces serving overseas: the Canadian National Election.

From the first day of the month until the seventeenth(?), Canadian militia personnel were to vote. While the 25th Battalion's journal does not, other war diaries *do* record the event and in most cases the number of participants were to reach and at times even surpass ninety per cent. At the same time the soldiery had been encouraged to purchase *Government War Bonds* which thus was to allow the troops to not only *fight* in the conflict but to also directly help to *pay* for it as well.



The 25th Battalion was not to spend Christmas of 1917 in the trenches as it had done the previous year, but in the rear area at Enquin-les-Mines. Church services had been arranged for at least two of the Christian denominations – Roman Catholic and Church of England - and...*all ranks enjoyed a special Christmas dinner in the afternoon*. What had been on the day's menu, however, we have not been given to know.

The winter of 1917-1918 was then to be spent in the same area. As had been the case during the previous winters of the Great War little concerted confrontational military activity for that period was to be reported in the 25th Battalion War Diary – or in any other battalion war diary. There had been the habitual patrolling, by both sides, and in the case of the 25th Battalion several raids would be planned, all except one of which had subsequently been cancelled or postponed indefinitely for the very good reason that the artillery had been unable to cut the German wire.

The 25th Battalion was to remain at Enquin-les-Mines until mid-January when it had moved in stages to the sector forward of Villers-au-Bois and once again the routine became one of *front*, *support* and *reserve*. All would remain quiet for the next two months.

(continued)

On March 23, two days following the first day of spring - the unit had been ordered moved further southwards once more, on this occasion to the area of St-Aubin on the outskirts of Arras, to arrive there on the 24th.



The Battalion was then to be ‘*standing-by*’, ready to move on short notice, owing to expectations of an attack by the enemy.

(Right above: *While the Germans did not attack Lens – some sources say that this is neighbouring Liévin - in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it very 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*)

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 enemy had launched a massive attack, Operation ‘*Michael*’, on March 21. The main blow was to fall at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it was to descend for the most part on the British Fifth Army stationed there, particularly where its forces were serving adjacent to French units.

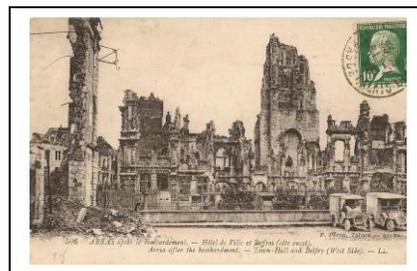
The German advance had continued for some two weeks, petering out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was a result of a combination of factors, British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British the most significant.

**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 29th Division. It also was to be successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.*



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

Its War Diary suggests, however, that the 25th Battalion was not to be involved in the heaviest – if any - of the related fighting. The unit had been posted mostly near Wailly*, just to the south-west of the city of Arras, the majority of the casualties incurred having been due – as they usually had been - to enemy artillery activity rather than to any infantry action.



**The area just to the south and west of Arras was at the northern extreme of the German offensive. Unsure as to what the enemy’s intentions were, the High Command moved the 2nd Canadian Division into the area to forestall any attack if and when it occurred to protect the avenue to the Channel ports and also the coal-fields in the area of Béthune.*

In the event, the offensive in that direction was stopped cold by the British Third Army before it reached Arras, but during the period of the crisis the Germans had stayed active enough to keep the British and Canadians wondering.

As for the situation to the north, it apparently was never deemed serious enough to warrant any Canadian movement in that direction.

(Preceding page: The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery – from a vintage post-card)

By the end of April the 25th Battalion officers appear to have had nothing more important to discuss than whether or not to adopt the kilt as part of the regimental uniform.



By that time a relative calm had descended on the front as the German threat had faded – the enemy had won a great deal of ground, but had gained nothing of any military significance on either of the two fronts.

Nor was the calm to be particularly surprising: both sides had reached exhaustion and had needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to re-enforce.

(Right above: A Canadian carrying-party loading up before moving up to the forward area, one of the many duties of troops when in support or reserve: the use of head-bands - called ‘tumps’ - was an idea which had been adopted from the North American aboriginal peoples – from Le Miroir)

The Allies from this point of view were to be a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had had two empires to draw from and the Americans had been belatedly arriving on the scene.

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

The 25th Battalion had remained in the same area to the south of Arras after the crisis, the months of May and June to be spent in relative calm in the vicinity of Neuville-Vitasse; July was likely to have been even calmer as the unit had been withdrawn further back to Bellacourt.



(Right: 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)

From time to time, of course, that relative calm would be punctuated by local operations, apart from the eternal – so it must have seemed – patrolling; raids by both sides had at times been undertaken.

(continued)

The War Diary entry for June 14 sums up the activities – or lack thereof – of most days: *The usual patrols were out, but nothing unusual to report. The garrison worked hard on the trenches, deepening and repairing, during the night.* Thus it had been in that manner that things were to continue in the forward area until the end of the month of July.

There had been training in the area of Fosseux towards the end of that month, but on July 30...*At 7.30 p.m. the Battalion paraded in heavy marching order and marched to the busses at the Gouy Cross-roads. Embussing completed at 8.30 p.m. when the Battalion proceeded, via SAULTY and DOULLENS, to BRIQUEMESNIL, debussing at 4.00 a.m...* (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of July 30, 1918)

On the morrow the unit had rested but in the afternoon...*At 2.00 p.m. the Battalion paraded and marched via PIQUIGNY, to ST. PIERRE A GOUY, arriving at 1.00 a.m. All were settle in tents and barns at 2.00 p.m.*

The 25th Battalion – and indeed almost the entire Canadian Corps – had been on the move in a semi-circular itinerary to the west of Amiens, then south, then east again to finish in front of the city towards the intended theatre of the upcoming offensive to the east of the city of Amiens. Whereas the first part of the transfer by the Canadian Corps, as it had been with the 25th Battalion, would be undertaken mostly by train or motorized transport, the latter part was to be undertaken on foot – and by night, out of sight of any German aerial observers.

On August 1 and 4 the Battalion had spent some of its time resting. Sandwiched in-between had been two days of training in tandem with tanks.

(Right: *In 1917 the British formed the Tank Corps, a force which became ever stronger in 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again ‘somewhere in France’ – from Illustration)*



Two more overnight marches were to see the Battalion move towards the forward area, then rest under cover during the day-time. At ten o'clock on the evening of August 7...*the Battalion moved forward to “jumping-off” trenches...being in position at 12 midnight... All movement was carried out with the greatest of secrecy...no whistling or singing was allowed and all ranks were forbidden to enter any village... Watches were synchronized and ZERO hour was timed at 4.20 a.m. August 8th.1918.* (Excerpts from 25th Battalion War Diary entry for August 7, 1918.

(Right: *The venerable gothic cathedral in the city centre of Amiens which the leading German troops had apparently been able see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918 – photograph from 2007(?)*)



(continued)

The arrival of the Canadian Corps, and of other British, Commonwealth and French forces had been intended to surprise the enemy – and it was to succeed.

At 4.30 in the morning on that August 8, the advance had begun – *the Hundred Days* as it would become known - which was to bring the *Great War* to a close on November 11. The Canadians were to move forward some twenty kilometres in the first three days of the offensive, a feat unheard of since the autumn of 1914 when the opposing forces had first settled into four years of trench stalemate*.

**The only exceptions to this rule having been the opening day of the First Battle of Cambrai, November 20, 1917, and the German advance in that March of 1918.*

(Excerpt from the 25th Battalion War Diary entry of August 8, 1918) *The weather was greatly in our favour, a thick mist hung over the ground. At 4.20 a.m. our Artillery opened as one gun, our counter-Battery work was especially good, the enemy artillery being forced to cease in half an hour, scarcely a shell falling in our trenches. The plan of the attack was as follows:- ...the 5th Cdn. Inf. Bde. moved up at ZERO plus 1 hour, in artillery formation and formed up on the consolidated line with the 24th Canadian Battalion on the left, 26th Cdn. Battalion on the right, 25th Canadian Battalion in support and the 22nd Canadian Battalion in reserve, the objective being about 1000 yards in advance of GUILLACOURT, which was successfully reached and consolidated about noon, the general line of advance was parallel to the AMIENS-CHAULNES Railway...*

The mist was so thick that it was impossible to proceed other than by compass, this method was also difficult at times owing to the obscurity of all land marks. Strong opposition from enemy machine gun nests encountered...but were all attended to in quick time... The work of the tanks was also especially good in destroying enemy machine gun nests... At 6 p.m. the 6th Cdn. Inf. Bde. passed through us, together with Cavalry Patrols, exploiting the success. The Battalion remained on the consolidated line until next day.

The casualties incurred by the 25th Battalion on this first day of the *Battle of Amiens* were to be eight *killed*, one-hundred seven *wounded* and three *missing* – *all ranks*.

(Excerpt from the 25th Battalion War Diary entry for August 9, 1918) *...Some slight shelling of "A" Coy's position, causing two casualties.*

...Just after nine o'clock on the following morning orders were received by the Battalion to continue the attack in conjunction with other troops... The Battalion rapidly moved to the assembly position – the heights S.E. of Caix – and crossed the British front line...at 1 p.m..



(Right above: *French dead in the communal cemetery at Caix, just to the west of Rosières, the French having relieved Canadian troops towards the end of the second week of the battle: Caix also hosts a British Commonwealth cemetery as well as a German burial ground. – photograph from 2017*)

(continued)

As the Battalion moved over the ridge in front of CAIX, they were met by a light artillery barrage, and strong enemy machine gun fire. Pushing through this, the British front line was soon crossed and a party of about 250 Germans...were taken prisoners.

The advance continued towards VRELY, the only opposition being large numbers of enemy machine gun posts...Tanks came up and gave assistance in the taking of the village...some hard fighting in a wood on the right...

It was to be a week after this, the opening day of the *Third Battle of Amiens*, on August 14-15, that Private Foote had returned to report to duty to the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*), just as the unit had been preparing to move elsewhere.

* * * * *

At Caix the unit passed the morrow, and most of the day following, in...*cleaning up and resting. Clothing, pay and bathing parades were also held during the day... Rifle and respirator inspections were held during the morning (of the 19th). At 9 p.m. the Battalion formed up and marched to BLANGY WOOD, arriving at 4.10 a.m. and settled in bivouacs (Excerpts from 25th Battalion War Diary entries for August 18 and 19, 1918).*

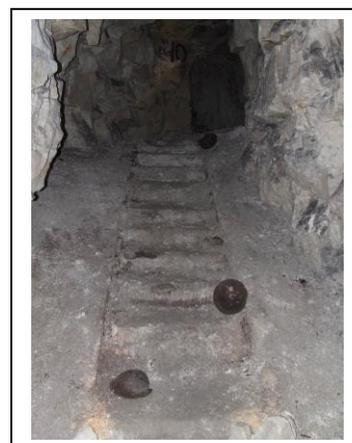
The Canadian Corps was now to make a complete turn-around and to return whence it had come a brief three weeks earlier, to the area of Arras where a further offensive, on this occasion in conjunction with British troops, was about to be launched.

And now, not only were the itineraries of the Canadians' coming in early August to the field in front of Amiens to be used for their return to the new front at Arras, but so also was there to be the same cloak of secrecy, troop movements – Canadian retirements, French arrivals to replace them – to be made under cover of darkness.

Busses were to take Private Foote's unit on the following evening, August 20, to Herlin-le-Sec from where it marched the remaining three kilometres on that same night to Maisnilles-Saint-Pol. The men would rest there all the next day before then moving again on the morrow, August 22: the War Diary records that the journey was made on foot from Hauteville to Petit Houvain; from Petit Houvain(?) by train to Marœuil; and again on foot from Marœuil to Fosseux.

A further march to Warlus on August 23 was followed by yet another one just two days later, a trek which would see the 25th Battalion arrive just after midnight of August 24-25 at Beaurains in the outskirts of Arras where the other three battalions of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade were also to assemble.

Seeking its next orders...*the Commanding Officer and the Adjutant proceeded to Bde. H.Q. at RONVILLE CAVE...at 2 a.m. but could get no definite information re attack, except that ZERO HOUR would be 3 a.m. (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of August 26, 1918).*



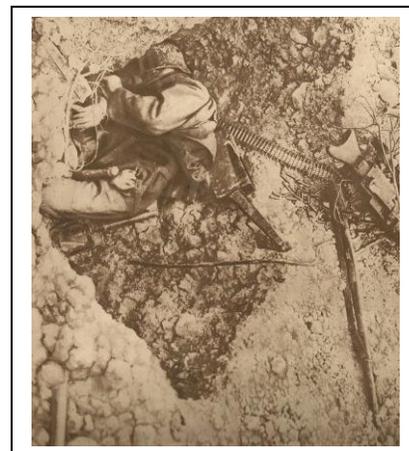
As it transpired, this particular piece of information – the timing of *Zero Hour* - was to prove to be incorrect: the offensive, however, would proceed.

(Preceding page: *One of the several entrances into the Ronville Cave system, Arras, 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(?)*)

Later on during that day of August 26, the 25th Battalion moved forwards into a reserve position, perhaps because the unit's numbers were by then only one-half of establishment battalion strength. The attack had already gone in at several sectors at three o'clock in the morning of that same day, but the assault by the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade was not due to be delivered until the morning of August 27.

For the next two days the unit moved forward, individual companies supporting other units as and when events necessitated. Progress at times was slow, German snipers and machine-gunners proving to be, as ever, formidable opponents, and the enemy artillery was still very active. Despite all its efforts, several objectives of the 2nd Division still remained contested as this offensive, the *Battle of the Scarpe*, drew to its conclusion. It was to cost the Canadian Corps some fifty-six hundred casualties.

(Right: *A German machine-gunner who also gave his all – from Illustration*)



On August 29 the 25th Battalion withdrew all the way to Achicourt, there to be treated with hot meals, dry socks and, on the evening of the 30th, a concert.

(Right: *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*)



The first five days of the offensive had succeeded in overcoming the German defences to a depth of eight kilometres – overrunning the battlefields of 1917 - and thus, despite the several set-backs, was to be considered a great success. It had laid the foundation for the next operation.

After a two-day respite the advance was to be re-launched to reduce the enemy positions on the *Drocourt-Quéant Line*, but on this second occasion the attack was to be delivered by troops of different Canadian and British divisions. The 25th Battalion rested.

(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 not until September 14 that the services of Private Foote's 25th Battalion were once more required in the forward area. Until then the unit had remained withdrawn, mostly undergoing training, although at times not so far back as to escape injuries from enemy artillery. Things remained relatively quiet while preparations continued to be laid for the assault on, and the crossing of, the *Canal du Nord*.



September 27 was the date on which units of the four Canadian Divisions attacked and traversed the *Canal du Nord*, then pursued the Germans through the area of *Bourlon Wood* and in the direction of the historic town of Cambrai.



(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*)

(Right above: *The same area of the Canal du Nord as it is almost a century after the Canadian operation to cross it – photograph from 2015*)

(Right below: *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*)

Private Foote and his 25th Battalion were not to be called upon for the storming of the *Canal du Nord*. In fact his unit was not to cross the waterway until two days later, on September 29, in order to support the left-hand side of the attack which was to advance towards the town of Cambrai from the north-west. At half-past eleven in the evening of October 1 it moved into the front line at Sailly, relieving the 54th Canadian Battalion.



The unit remained entrenched at Sailly for the next number of days, receiving two reinforcement drafts of *other ranks* for a total of fifty-one newcomers. Otherwise it supplied working parties to dig new – and to repair old – trenches. The enemy's artillery was active as were his bombing planes but casualties were light.

Extract of Operational Order 275 as pertaining to the 2nd Canadian Division and as issued on October 8, 1918: *The 2nd Canadian Division has been ordered to secure the passage of the Canal de L'ESCAUT* between RAMILLIES and MORENCHIES, both inclusive, and to advance its Right Flank to gain touch with troops of the XVII Corps East of CAMBRAI ANNEXE Station.*

This operation will not be begun until information has been received from Canadian Corps that the XVII Corps has secured the whole of the NIERGNIES-AWOINGT Spur...

...The objectives of the 5th C.I. Bde. shall include MORENCHIES Wood, the road junction at A.6.a.O.2., the CAMBRAI-IWUY Railway...the village of ESCAUDOEUVRES and the chateau in T.19.c.

(Right: German prisoners, some wounded, taken during the advance in October of 1918, in the company of their Canadian captors – from Le Miroir)



Extract from the 25th Battalion War Diary entry of October 9, 1918: Oct. 9th At 0130 in accordance with O.O. No.295, the Battalion attacked the CANAL DE L'ESCAUT. "C" and "D" Companies establishing bridgeheads at 3.24.d.6.7. and 3.30.a.8.5. "A" and "B" Coys. continued the attack and reached their objective in short time and consolidated their positions.



Patrols were sent out to exploit the success and later the Cavalry went forward. The ground exploited by the Cavalry was consolidated by the Battalion during the afternoon and evening.

Weather fair. Casualties – 15 O.R. killed and 85 O.R. wounded.

***The Canal de L'Escaut, upon reaching the outskirts of the town of Cambrai, runs north-south through the western side of the town, perpendicular to the direction of the Canadian advance.**

(Right above: Canadian cavalry, little used during the war up until this period, escorting German prisoners towards the rear as infantrymen look on – from Le Miroir)

Casualty Report: During military operations in the vicinity of Escaudœuvres he was struck by a splinter from an enemy shell and was instantly killed.

The son of Joseph Foote, fisherman, and Susan Foote (née Mayo) – to whom he had allotted a monthly twenty dollars from his pay as of September 1, 1916, and to whom he had willed his all on October 21 of the same year – he was also brother to Levi, to Susan-Matilda, Morgan, Eliza-Victoria, Carrie-Melinda, Warrick, Charles-Eli, to Cecil, to James-Ronald and to Joseph-(Scott?).

Private Foote was reported as having been killed in action on October 9, 1918, during the fighting of that day in the vicinity of the Canal de l'Escaut.

Benjamin Foote had enlisted at the apparent age of nineteen years and five months: date of birth at Foote's Cove, District of Burin, Newfoundland, September 4, 1896 (from attestation papers); the original Newfoundland Birth Register cites his birth as having been on June 6, 1896, on Pardy's Island.



(Right above: *The photograph of Private Benjamin Foote is from the Ancestry.ca web-site.*)

Private Benjamin Foote 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 23, 2023.