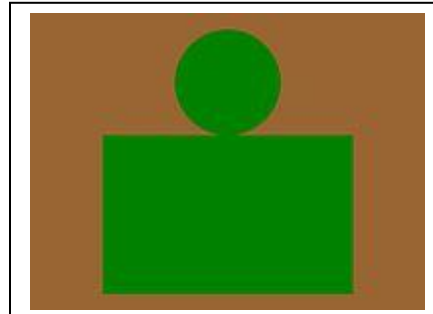
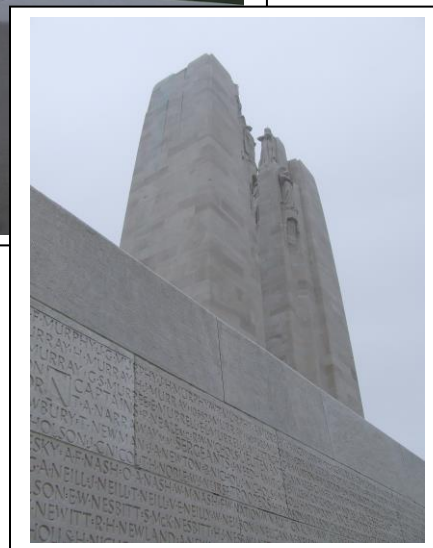




Corporal Harry Fowler (Number 460060) of the 44th Battalion (Manitoba), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is honoured in the stone of the Vimy Memorial.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 44th Battalion (Manitoba) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)



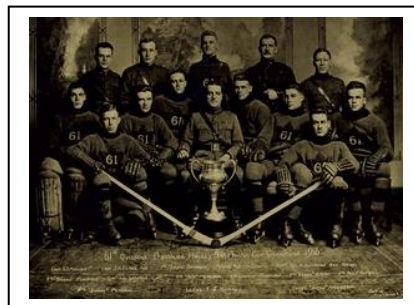
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, Harry Fowler appears to have left behind him no details of his emigration from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Manitoba. What *is* documented is that by the year 1915 he had already made his way west to the city of Winnipeg where he had then served for a period in the 106th Regiment (*Winnipeg Light Infantry*) of the Canadian Militia.

It was on June 4, 1915 that he not only enlisted but also underwent medical examination and attestation there in Winnipeg. Then, not only was he also attached to the 61st Overseas Battalion (*Winnipeg*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on that same day, but he was ...*finally approved and inspected...* by the Lieutenant Colonel commanding the unit as well. It had been a busy few hours for Private Fowler.

Although this has yet to be confirmed, it would seem likely that he was then despatched to Sewell Camp, Carberry, where the 61st Battalion recruits were to do their summer training. The location where the hockey team* trained appears not to be recorded.

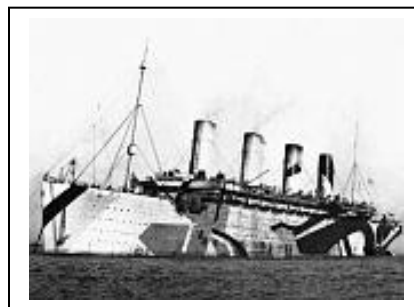
**The Battalion hockey team apparently became Allan Cup champions for the year 1916. The story goes on to surmise that the unit's late departure for overseas was to allow the team to participate in the competition.*

(Right: *The photograph of the victorious 61st Battalion hockey team of 1916 is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)



During that following winter of 1915-1916 Private Fowler and his unit moved back into quarters at the *Minto Armoury* in Winnipeg. An anticipated passage to overseas service was apparently postponed because the Battalion had a reasonable hockey team (see above) but eventually the unit was transported by train to Halifax where, on April 5, 1916, Private Fowler and his comrades-in-arms embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*.

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



The requisitioned White Star liner *Olympic* – sister ship to *Britannic* which was to be sunk in the Mediterranean in November of the same year, and also to the ill-starred *Titanic* – was at the time one of the largest passenger ships afloat. On this occasion she was to carry not only the thirty-seven officers and one-thousand ninety-one *other ranks* of the 61st Battalion, but also the 59th, the 67th and the 71st Canadian Infantry Battalions, the Number 1 Party of the 224th Battalion, the 5th Draft of Section 'B' of the 2nd Canadian Field Ambulance, the personnel of the Ontario Military Hospital, the 4th Siege Battery and the 1st and 2nd Drafts of the Royal Canadian Regiment: likely close on six-thousand souls.

(continued)

Olympic cleared the harbour of Halifax on that same April 5 – some units had boarded four days before - to dock in the English west-coast port city of Liverpool six days afterwards, on April 11. From there the 61st Battalion was transported by train to a Canadian camp – but to which one is not clear. One paper in his files suggests that Private Fowler’s unit was taken temporarily to Bordon, a staging camp, on the border of the counties of Surrey and Hampshire.



(Right above: *The Military Cemetery at a now non-existent Camp Bordon wherein lies at least a single Newfoundlander, Private W. Kennedy, whose headstone is on the right – photograph from 2016*)

A further source suggests that at some time during this period spent in England, the 61st Battalion was stationed at Seaford, on the East Sussex coast.



(Right: *Seaford Cemetery, in which are to be found two Newfoundland graves – photograph from 2016*)

It would then appear that, eventually, by May 12 of 1916, Private Fowler and his unit were stationed at the large Canadian military establishment of *Shorncliffe*, on the English Channel coast and adjacent to the sea-side town and port of Folkestone in the county of Kent.



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

On that May 12 Private Fowler and, doubtless, others were transferred from the 61st Battalion* to the nominal roll of the 44th Battalion (*Manitoba*) and despatched to another Canadian complex, *Bramshott Camp*, in the county of Hampshire**.



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

**The 61st Battalion was never to serve on the Continent; while in the United Kingdom it served to provide reinforcements to other units before being disbanded on July 17, 1917.*

***There, on July 30, he was awarded four days ‘confined to barracks’ for having overstayed a pass by forty-five minutes.*

(continued)

The parent unit of the 44th Battalion (*Manitoba*) had arrived in England on October 30, 1915, and was still there more than six months later, at Bramshott, at the time of Private Fowler's transfer of May 12, 1916.

The Battalion – now with Private Fowler among its ranks - was to take ship to the Continent from the south-coast port of Southampton. It was HM Transport *Viper* which carried the unit to the French port of Le Havre on August 10-11, the unit disembarking there on the next morning, August 12.

(Right: *The photograph of Viper is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)



After an eight-hour period of rest the Battalion entrained, only for the train to wait in the station for a further three-and-a-half hours before leaving Le Havre at seven in the evening.

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



The journey of some three-hundred fifty kilometres took more than twenty-one hours, the unit de-training in the northern French community of Godeswaervelde at half-past four in the afternoon of August 13. From there it was to complete its journey on foot to billets in the community of Steenvoorde three hours later.

The 44th Battalion (*Manitoba*) had by that time been designated to be a component of the 10th Infantry Battalion of the newly-formed Canadian 4th Division. The first three Canadian Divisions were by then already serving in the Kingdom of Belgium, in the *Ypres Salient* and on that sector of the front leading south from the city of Ypres to where it crossed the border into France.



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

Steenvoorde, directly to the west of Ypres, is itself close to the Franco-Belgian frontier – but far removed from the front lines - and by August 19 the Battalion was already crossing into Belgium to serve a first tour in the Vierstraat reserve and support trenches, and to *Ontario Camp* at Reninghelst.



(Right: *Reninghelst New Military Cemetery in which lie numerous Canadians – photograph from 2015*)

(continued)

There it was that Private Fowler and his fellow *other ranks* were to encounter the rigours and the routines of life in the trenches*.

**During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, perhaps a hundred metres or so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.*

Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

(Right: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of the same year, 1916, but by that time equipped with steel helmets and also the less-evident British-made Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles – from Illustration)



The 44th Battalion served for a month in the area of the Vierstraat (before the war a major thoroughfare) before commencing a withdrawal into France on September 20. The 4th Division was to be the last such Canadian formation to leave Belgium, the other three Divisions having either already departed or been well advanced in the process of doing so.

Their places in the former Canadian sectors were being taken over by troops from British divisions – including the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to be stationed for ten weeks in the remnants of the city of Ypres itself. These divisions were now in need of re-enforcement and re-organization after their efforts, and losses, in the still-ongoing British offensive just over a hundred kilometres to the south at *the Somme*.



(Right above: the entrance to the quarters of 'A' Company, 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, in the ramparts of Ypres where it was posted in 1916 – photograph from 2010)*

**It has, of course, been repaired and somewhat refurbished since those days as has the rest of the city.*

Private Fowler's unit was to march across the frontier to the vicinity of the northern French community of Éperleques where it arrived on September 23. Ten days of training ensued during which time the troops were subjected to exercises in what was optimistically called *open warfare*. On October 3 it began to move further south.

On this occasion, the first stage of the transfer was done by train, from the large centre of St-Omer as far as Doullens, ninety kilometres – and eight-and-a-half hours - distant.

(continued)

From there the remainder was to be all on foot as Private Fowler moved eastward towards the sound of the guns.

(Right: *The venerable railway station at St-Omer – today in a state of dis-repair - through which the 44th Battalion passed en route to the Somme in October, 1916 – photograph from 2015*)



(Right below: *The provincial town of Doullens, through which Private Fowler's Battalion also passed on its way to the Somme – from a vintage post-card*)

Six days following, on October 9, the 44th Battalion was in Brigade Reserve near the shattered village of Pozières and, two days later again, was moving up into the forward area to serve in support and front-line positions in front of the German trench-system known as *Regina Trench*.



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

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



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

On that first day of *1st 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 July 1 at 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 New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians had entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive.

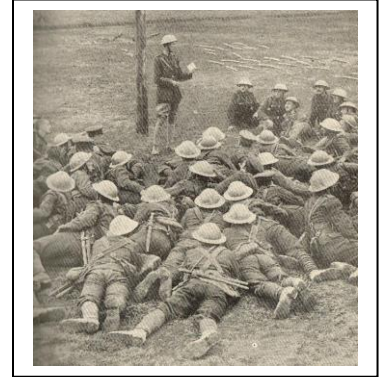
Their first major collective contribution was to be the attack in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette on September 15, a full month before the arrival on the scene of Private Fowler.

(continued)

(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 of September 15, 1916. – from *The War Illustrated*)

The 44th Battalion was relieved from those support and front-line trenches on October 14 and retired to the area of *Tara Hill Camp* before being ordered two days later again to another such behind-the-lines area known as *Brickfields (La Briqueterie)*.

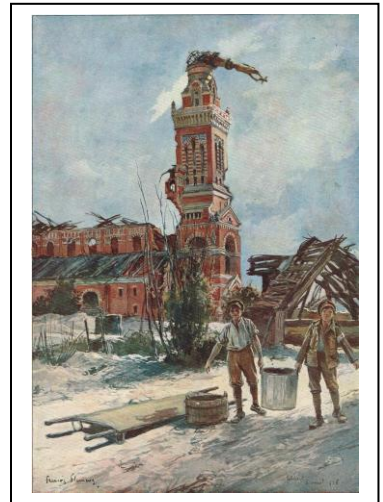
The stay at the latter was short-lived for two of the Battalion's four companies, as they were ordered forward on the 18th and 19th. For the period of those eleven days since the unit's arrival at the forward area – and having taken no part in any infantry action – until its retirement on October 20, the casualty toll, all told, already totalled sixty-nine.



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

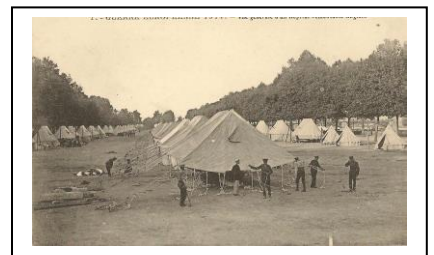
On or about October 23, some three days after the 44th Battalion had been withdrawn from the forward area, Private Fowler was slightly wounded in the right cheek by shrapnel and evacuated to the 13th Canadian Field Ambulance – possibly on the Albert-Pozières road. He was then forwarded to the nearby Corps Rest Station before being released to his unit on the same day.

However, later again on the same October 23, he was sent again for treatment for the same injury – one might speculate that infection had set in – on this second occasion to the 54th Field Ambulance before being transferred to the 90th Field Ambulance on October 24. Private Fowler was then sent on to an unspecified casualty clearing station on the 25th, before finally returning to the 44th Battalion on the 26th.



(Right below: 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)

The numbers of casualties in many battalions were much higher than those incurred by the 44th Battalion, sometimes hundreds in only a day or two of fighting, and on occasion, enough to necessitate the complete withdrawal from the battle of the unit in question. These losses, of course, occurred when the units had been ordered to attack strongly-defended German positions, one of the most lethal being that of the *Regina Trench* system.



(continued)

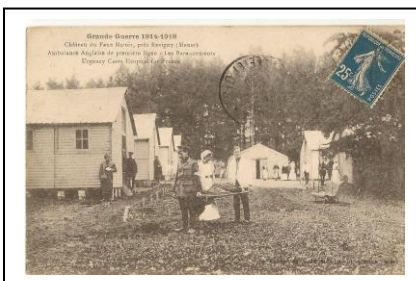
(Right: *Burying Canadian dead on the Somme, likely at a casualty clearing station or a field ambulance – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)



The 44th Battalion, according to its War Diary, while still at *the Somme* up until November 28, was not to play a role in any major incident; in fact, the Battalion War Diary records twenty-eight days spent in the relative calm of the nearby provincial town of Albert*. On that November 28 - with 1st Somme at least *officially* over - the unit, using motorized transport, retired from the area, one of the last Canadian units to do so.

**It was thus possibly while with a working-party that Private Fowler found himself once more in need of medical attention. He was evacuated once again to the 13th Canadian Field Ambulance, on this occasion, November 21, having been buried by a shell explosion. Apparently there was nothing too serious and he returned to duty three days afterwards, on November 24.*

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



By December 4, the latter stages of the transfer having been accomplished on foot, the Battalion personnel was being billeted at Houdain, a coal-mining town some seventy kilometres to the north of Albert and twenty kilometres to the west of the fighting in the vicinity of the mining centre and city of Lens.

It was in this area north of the city of Arras that Private Fowler and the 44th Battalion were to re-discover the drudgery of trench warfare. On occasion the unit played a role in some raid on German positions – one in particular on March 1st supporting an action by the 11th and 12th Brigades - but the period was mostly calm, even uneventful at times. As ever, most casualties were due to the enemy's ever-active artillery and to his snipers.



(Right above: *Another mining community in the same area as Houdain, Loos-en-Gohelle, as it already looked by the spring of 1916 – from Illustration*)

It was also during this period that Private Fowler was sent, on New Year's Day of 1917, to a forty-day NCO course and was promoted in the field on January 20 to the rank of corporal before returning to the Battalion on February 9.



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

Towards the end of March, on the 25th, the Battalion was withdrawn into brigade support. There, life appears to have become an assortment of activities: working-parties, training, salvage work, sports, accommodation of re-enforcements, carrying-parties, even the occasional concert – all of this well within the range of the German guns.

(Right: *Canadian soldiers peruse the attractions of an upcoming concert. – from Le Miroir*)



(Right below: *A Canadian carrying-party using head harnesses adopted from the North American indigenous peoples – from Le Miroir*)



More training was in store for Corporal Fowler when he and the Battalion moved back to Bouvigny – yet still within artillery range, so the War Diarist reports - on the first day of April. Re-enforcements arrived from Le Havre and the unit was now at its greatest strength since its arrival in France, well over one thousand officers and men combined.

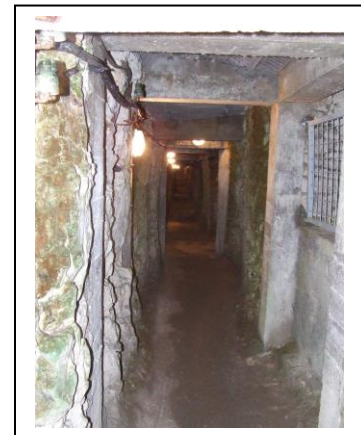
The exercises and other work continued, although on April 7 the Diary entry for the day was simply a curt... *Nothing of importance* – perhaps a little surprising in view of the events of the days that followed.



On April 8 the twenty-four officers and eight-hundred sixty-five other ranks who were to be who were to be involved moved forward into intermediate positions and waited.

(Right above: *the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

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 the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the War for the British, one of the positive episodes being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



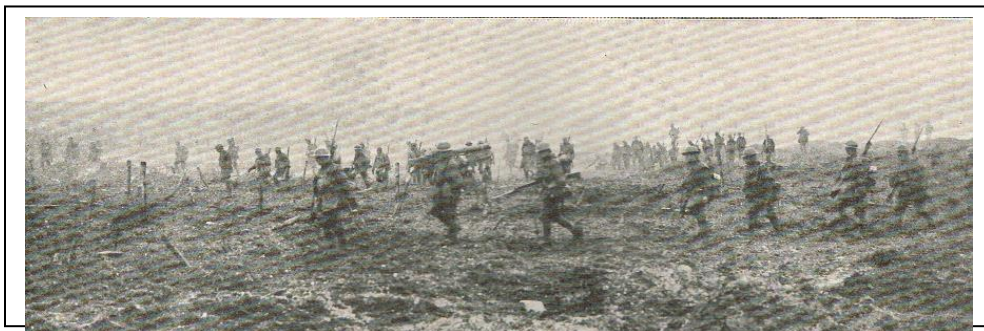
While the British campaign proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive was to be a disaster.

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

(continued)

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.

(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)



The 44th Battalion did not attack on April 9; it moved into and spent the day in *Souchez Tunnel* – one of many built with the elements of both safety and surprise in mind – there to await the time to come when it would play its role. It was to do so on the next day, as the following excerpts from Appendix I of the 44th Battalion War Diary relate:

At 11 A.M. April 10th, I received orders to capture and consolidate, as an outpost line, the eastern edge of VIMY RIDGE, lying beyond Hill 145; the Battalion frontage to extend from Left of 42nd Battalion to junction of BESSY and BANFF Trenches...

Assembly all complete at 1.40 P.M. with very few casualties...

At 3.04 P.M. covering Artillery opened slow barrage fire on our objective along BANFF Trench, continuing till ZERO time. At 3.15 intense barrage commenced, remaining on objectives for four minutes...

When Barrage lifted attacking parties moved forward in good order, touch being maintained with the 50th Battalion on left throughout. At 3.21 "D" Company reached the Western edge of BOIS DE LA FOLIE, "C" Company entering BANFF Trench at the same time and working down BLIGHTY Trench...

On the right "D" Company had some difficulty in clearing the wood. Mopping up parties moved through to farther edge, capturing a good number of prisoners. Very heavy casualties were inflicted... By 4.15 P.M. "C" Company had established a post... A further post was established by "D" Company...thus completing the task assigned 44th Battalion, in accordance with Divisional plan.



Consolidation of positions was at once commenced.

The total 44th Battalion casualty count for the operation was eighty-six.

(Right above: 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 son of William Fowler - fisherman, labourer, or both – and Helen (also *Ellen*) Fowler (née *Lane*) – to whom he had, as of April 1, 1916, allotted a monthly sixteen dollars from his pay and, on June 6 of the same year, willed his all – of Goulds (Road?), Brigus, Newfoundland, he appears to have been brother to at least Nellie.

Corporal Fowler was reported as having been *killed in action* on April 10, 1917, during the fighting at Vimy Ridge.

Harry Fowler had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-one years and five months: date of birth at Goulds, Brigus, Newfoundland, October 17, 1893.

Corporal Harry Fowler 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 26, 2023.

