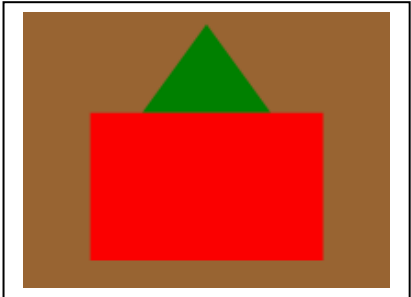




Private William Joseph Fowler (Number 172442) of the 3rd Battalion (*Toronto*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Adanac Military Cemetery, Miraumont: Grave reference, II.G.35..

(Right: *The image of the shoulder flash of the 3rd Battalion (Toronto) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupations prior to military service recorded as that of a *moulder* before later that of a *lineman*, William Joseph Fowler appears to have left behind little information about his early life in the Dominion of Newfoundland or his later move to the city of Toronto in the Canadian province of Ontario.

That he was already a resident there by the year 1908 – and likely before - appears to be in no doubt, as it was on June 17 of that year, in Toronto, that he married a Miss Henrietta M. Lane. There the story pauses until the year 1916 as there seems to be no record of the family in the 1911 Census although the couple was still together, living at 66 (or 56), Denison Street, Toronto, at the time of his enlistment.

That particular event came to pass on February 8 of 1916 according to the report of a medical examination that he underwent on the same day, an examination which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force.*

Private Fowler then was attested and the formalities of his enlistment brought to a close when the Officer Commanding the 83rd Battalion (*Queen's Own Rifles*) – by which unit he had been *taken on strength* – Lieutenant Colonel Reginald Pellatt, declared – on paper – that...*William Joseph Fowler...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

The 83rd Battalion had been authorized in 1915 and its training during the late summer and early autumn of that year had taken place at *Niagara Camp* in the vicinity of Niagara-on-the-Lake. However, by February of 1916 the unit had moved indoors, to the *Riverdale Barracks* in Toronto.

In Toronto, medical services for the 83rd Battalion were provided by the camp hospital situated in the grounds of the *Canadian National Exhibition* which is where Private Fowler was placed under care from March 22 until April 4. He was suffering from conjunctivitis but had completely recovered by the time the order came later that month to proceed overseas to the United Kingdom.

In late April the 83rd Battalion entrained for the journey to the east coast port of Halifax. Private Fowler's unit was to travel on board His Majesty's Transport *Olympic** and he and the Battalion embarked on April 28. They were not to travel alone: also taking passage on the ship were the 66th, 68th, and 81st Battalions of Canadian Infantry, as well as the 4th Divisional Cavalry Squadron, the 4th Divisional Cyclists Company, the 3rd Draft of the 10th Canadian Mounted Rifles and the 2nd Draft of the 1st Canadian Pioneer Battalion.

**Sister-ship to Britannic - she to be sunk by a mine in the eastern Mediterranean in November of 1916 - and also of the ill-starred Titanic*

Olympic sailed from Halifax at noon on May 1, 1916, to arrive in the English west-coast port of Liverpool some six days later, early in the morning of May 7. From dockside the travelling military personnel took trains to their various destinations, the final one having cleared the harbour area by mid-day.



(Preceding page: *The image of Olympic, one of the largest vessels afloat at the time, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Private Fowler and his 83rd Battalion were transported south-eastward to their training camp of *West Sandling*, a subsidiary of the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe*, by that time established on the Dover Straits and just to the south of the harbour and town of Folkestone in the county of Kent.



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



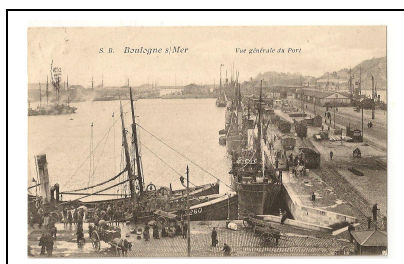
(Right: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)

Prior to the parent unit of the 83rd Battalion sailing to the United Kingdom, it had already some months earlier provided a re-enforcement detachment which had been absorbed by units already serving on the *Western Front*. This practice was to continue and the Battalion was never to see *active service*. On July 6-7, only two months after having arrived in England, its remaining personnel was to be transferred to and *taken on strength* by the 12th (Reserve) Battalion in preparation for soon-to-be drafts to the Continent*.

**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.

Some thirty days later – likely via nearby Folkestone and Boulogne on the French coast opposite – on the night of August 17-18, Private Fowler crossed the English Channel and, by the latter date, was reporting *to duty* at the Canadian Base Depot situated at Rouelles in the vicinity of the French industrial port-city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine.



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

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

The task of the Base Depot was to organize re-enforcements arriving from the United Kingdom and returnees from hospitalization on the Continent and then to despatch them at an appropriate moment to their new units. In the case of Private Fowlow, he was to be sent, on August 25, at first to the 1st Entrenching Battalion (see below) where he reported two days later.



**These units, as the name suggests, were employed in defence construction and other related tasks. They comprised men who not only had at least a fundamental knowledge and experience of such work but who also had the physique to perform it. However they also came to serve as re-enforcement pools where men awaiting the opportune moment to join their appointed unit might be gainfully employed for a short period of time.*



(Right above: *Canadian troops from an unspecified unit engaged in road construction, this also being a job to which entrenching battalions were to be assigned – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)

When he joined the 1st Entrenching Battalion, this unit was still stationed in the area of Dickebusch, to the south-west of Ypres, Belgium. However, the 1st Canadian Division to which it was attached, was already on the move from there to serve in France in the ongoing British offensive at *the Somme*. Thus Private Fowler’s new temporary unit was also soon to be on its way.

Its first stop en route was to be on September 6 in the vicinity of the French community of Steenvoorde, on the French side of its border with Belgium. Three days later, on foot, by bus, by train, and finally on foot once more, it moved to the south and to the community of Senlis. There on September 13*...*Drafts sent to Units...*and Private Fowler, one of a detachment of a recorded forty *other ranks* (but see below), was on his way to join the 3rd Battalion (*Queen’s Own Rifles*).

**This is the date recorded in the 1st Entrenching Battalion War Dairy and in Private Fowler’s own papers. However the War Diary of the 3rd Battalion documents a draft of twenty-six other ranks from the 1st Entrenching Battalion arriving on the day before, September 12.*

It probably makes little difference: the 3rd Battalion was to spend both September 12 and 13 in the community of La Vicogne, resting after the exertions of a multi-day route march (see below).

* * * * *

(continued)

The 3rd Battalion (*Toronto Regiment*) of Canadian Infantry had, by the time of Private Fowler's arrival *to duty*, been serving on the Continent for some nineteen months. After a stormy passage from the west coast of England, it had disembarked in the French port of St-Nazaire on February 11 of 1915. The 3rd Battalion was a component of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian Division*, the entirety of which had crossed to the Continent at that same time.

**The Canadian Division was designated thus until the formation of the 2nd Canadian Division when, logically, it then became the 1st Canadian Division.*

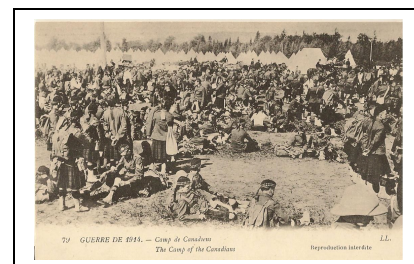
By February 17 the Battalion had reached the northern French town of Armentières on the Franco-Belgian frontier where it was to spend a week. During the month which had followed, the unit had served in and about the *Laventie Sector*, to the south of Armentières and it was not until April 18, at twenty-five minutes past ten in the morning, that the unit – in fact, the entire 1st Infantry Brigade - was to cross the Franco-Belgian frontier into the *Kingdom of Belgium*.



(Right above: *While the caption reads that these troops are 'English', this could mean any unit in British uniform – including Empire (Commonwealth) units. This is early in the war as there is no sign of a steel helmet. – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right below: *The caption reads merely 'Camp of Canadians' but it is from the early days of the Great War, thus likely in either northern France or in Belgium. The troops are from a Canadian-Scottish unit. – from a vintage post-card*)

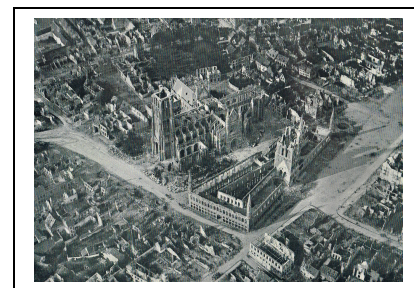
The Brigade had crossed the frontier to the west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe where it was then to remain for two days before advancing eastwards to Vlamertinghe for two more. It was at that moment that the Germans had decided to launch their attack in an effort to take the nearby city of Ypres.



Other units of the Canadian Division had only been serving in the *Ypres Salient* for a short space of time. During these few days of Canadian tenure *the Salient* had proved to be relatively quiet. Then the dam had broken - although it was gas rather than water which, for a few days, was to threaten to sweep all before it.

The date was April 22, 1915.

(Right: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2nd Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)



(continued)

The *Second Battle of Ypres* was to see the first use of chlorine gas by the Germans during the *Great War*. It would later become an everyday event and, with the introduction of protective measures such as advanced gas-masks, the chlorine was to prove no more dangerous than the rest of the military arsenals of the warring nations. But on this first occasion, to inexperienced troops without the means to combat it, the yellow-green cloud of chlorine had proved overwhelming.

(Right: *The very first protection against gas was to urinate on a handkerchief which was then held over the nose and mouth. However, all the armies were soon producing gas-masks, some of the first of which are seen here being tested by Scottish troops. – from either Illustration or Le Miroir*)



The cloud had been noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon of April 22. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left had wavered then broken, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered.

Thus a retreat, not always very cohesive, was to become necessary while, at the same time, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 1st Infantry Brigade had been ordered forward to support the defensive efforts of the French and of the Canadian 3rd Infantry Brigade.

(Right: *Entitled: Bombardement d'Ypres, le 5 juillet 1915 – from Illustration*)



By the second day, the 23rd, the situation had become relatively stable – at least temporarily - and the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan had held firm until the morning of the 24th when a further retirement had become necessary.

At times there had been breaches in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans had been unaware of how close they had come to a breakthrough, or else they had not had the means to exploit the situation.

And then the Canadians had closed the gaps.

The 3rd Battalion was to remain attached to the 3rd Brigade to the north-east of the Salient until April 26 when it had been withdrawn to Vlamertinghe, there to re-join the 1st Brigade. Having remained there to repose on the following day, the unit had next been ordered forward to the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan to dig trenches. By that evening some twelve-hundred yards had been excavated whereupon the Battalion was to return to Vlamertinghe.



There it was to remain until May 3 when it had been withdrawn to the northern French centre of Bailleul, there to re-enforce and to re-organize.

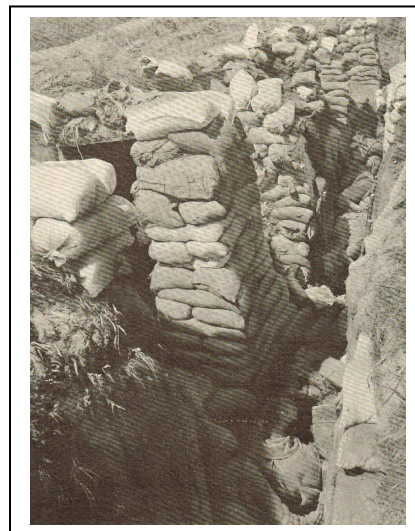
(continued)

(Preceding page: *The Memorial to the 1st Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier – stands just to the south of the village of Langemark (then Langemarck) at the Vancouver Crossroads where the Canadians withstood the German attack – abetted by gas – at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915. – photograph from 2010*)

On May 15 the 3rd Battalion had been ordered to move down the line to the south into France and into the areas of Festubert and Givenchy. The French were about to undertake a major offensive just further south again and had asked for British support.

(Right below: *A French photograph of some German trenches – complete with dead defenders and perhaps attackers - captured in the area south of Givenchy before it was to become an area of British responsibility. – from Illustration*)

There at Festubert a series of attacks and counter-attacks was to place in which the British High Command would manage to gain three kilometres of ground but would also contrive to destroy, by the use of the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what had been left of the British pre-War professional Army after Second Ypres. The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but – not able to field the same numbers of troops – was not to participate to the same extent. It was nonetheless to suffer heavily.



The Canadian Division and Indian troops - the 7th (Meerut) Division* also having been ordered to serve at Festubert - had hardly fared better than the British, each contingent – a Division – having incurred over two-thousand casualties before the offensive had drawn to a close.

The French effort further south – using the same tactics - was likewise to be a failure but on an even larger scale; it was to cost them just over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded and missing*.

****The Indian troops also served – and lost heavily – in other battles in this area in 1915 before being transferred to the Middle East.***

(Right: *A one-time officer who served in the Indian Army during the Second World War, pays his respects to those who fell - at the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle. – photograph from 2010(?)*)



On the first day of June the 3rd Battalion had been relieved from its posting at Festubert; in a few days' time, however, it was to be ordered further south to Givenchy-les-la-Bassée*, a small village not far distant south of Festubert. Ordered into the forward trenches on two occasions during that month to support British efforts – and with the same results, although less numerous, from repeating the same mistakes – on or about June 24 the entire Canadian Division was to be retiring from the area.

**Since the place is oft-times referred to simply as Givenchy it is worthwhile knowing that there are two other Givenchys in the region: Givenchy-le-Noble, to the west of Arras, and Givenchy-en-Gohelle, a village which lies in the shadow of a crest of land which dominates the Douai Plain: Vimy Ridge.*

As a part of that withdrawal from Givenchy, the 3rd Battalion was to march to billets in or near to the community of Oblinghem, two kilometres removed from the larger community of Béthune. From there it would move towards and into Belgium, to *the Ploegsteert Sector*, just across the frontier.

Having reached the area of Ploegsteert, there the 3rd Battalion was to remain – as was the entire Canadian Division. In the next months it would come to be well-acquainted with the Franco-Belgian area between Armentières in the east – any further east would have been in German-occupied territory – Bailleul in the west, and Messines in the north; given the route marches enumerated in the Battalion War Diary and the itineraries used, it would have been surprising had it been otherwise.



(Right above: *Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, Ploegsteert Sector, a mine crater from the time of the 1917 British offensive in the foreground – photograph from 2014*)

The 3rd Battalion, when out of the forward area, was often to be found billeted *in* or in the vicinity of the Belgian community of Dranoutre (today *Dranouter*) at some two kilometres distant from the frontier itself.

It was now to be a further nine months before the 3rd Battalion would be involved in a further major altercation. Of course, local confrontations – brought about by raids and patrols – were to be fought from time to time, and artillery duels and the ever-increasing menace of snipers would ensure a constant flow of casualties. But by far the greatest part of that period, however, was to be spent submitting to the routines, to the rigours and to the perils of that daily grind 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.*



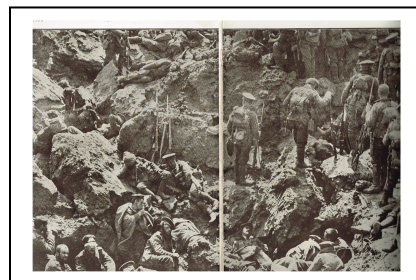
Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

(Preceding 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)

In the meantime, in September of 1915 it had been the turn of the 2nd Canadian Division to land on the Continent and to also immediately be posted north into Belgium. It was not to be stationed in the *Ypres Salient* as had been - or on the frontier itself, as were - the units of the Canadian now-1st Division, but in-between, down the line south of Ypres in the area of St-Éloi. It had been there, after some seven months of that thankless life in and about the trenches, that the 2nd Division was to fight its first major action of the *Great War*.

For the infantry battalions of the 2nd Canadian Division, the first weeks of April were not to be as placid as those being experienced during the same period by the personnel of the 3rd Battalion of the 1st Canadian Division.

The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* was officially to take place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it had been there that the British had excavated a series of galleries under the German lines in which to place explosives which they had detonated on that March 27. That detonation had been followed up by an infantry assault.



(Right above: A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps in the area of St-Éloi – from Illustration)

After a brief initial success the attack had soon bogged down – due to those very mine-craters which, filled with water, were to prove impassable - and by April 4 the Canadians were to be replacing the by-then exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than had had the British, and by the 17th of the month, when the battle had been called off, both sides had been back where they had been some three weeks previously – and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.

However, as previously noted, this confrontation had been a 2nd Canadian Division affair and the personnel of the 3rd Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the German artillery.

In fact, during the first days of April the 3rd Battalion had been transferred closer to Ypres and, more precisely, to the area of Dickebusch, a village just to the south-west of the city. Then it was posted to the forward area further to the east. Thus the unit was well placed to be of service on June 2.

From *that* date until June 13 was to be fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the area of *Hooge, Sanctuary Wood, Maple Copse, Railway Dugouts* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps.

(continued)

(Right: *Remnants of Canadian trenches dating from 1915-1916 at Sanctuary Wood – photograph from 2010*)

The Canadians had been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans had delivered an offensive, had overrun the forward areas and, in fact, had ruptured the Canadian lines, an opportunity of which they had never taken advantage.



If the fighting at St-Éloi had been a 2nd Canadian Division affair, the confrontation at Mount Sorrel had started as a 3rd Canadian Division* action. However, the situation had very soon become critical, and had necessitated the intervention of forces from the two other Canadian Divisions.

**The Canadian 3rd Division had officially come 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 where it was to be serving at the time that the Germans made their assault.*

(Right: *The Canadian memorial which stands atop Mount Sorrel just to the south-east of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) whose spires and towers may be perceived in the distance – photograph from 1914*)

The British Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, had reacted – perhaps a bit precipitately - by organizing a counter-attack on the following day, an assault intended to, at a minimum, recapture the lost ground.



However, that operation – badly organized and poorly supported - was to be a horrendous experience. Many of the intended attacks had never materialized – those that had done so had gone in piecemeal and the assaulting troops had been cut to pieces - the enemy was to remain in his captured Canadian positions and the Canadians were to be left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.



Ten days later the Canadians had again counter-attacked, but on this occasion better prepared and better supported by a competent artillery programme. The lost ground for the most part had been recovered, both sides were to find themselves back where they had started – except for a small German gain at *Hooge* - and the cemeteries were now that much fuller.

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

At the outset of this episode, on June 2, the 3rd Battalion had been ordered to stand to and at three o'clock the next morning had been ordered forward from the *Dickebusch Huts* in the support(?) area. By mid-day of June 3 the unit had been at the *Railway Dugouts* – having sustained twenty casualties on the way in - in the south-east sector of *the Salient* and some two kilometres behind *Maple Copse*. From there the 3rd Battalion had supplied working-parties and burial-parties for the remainder of the day.

The unit had remained at *Railway Dugouts* until the early morning of June 9 when it had been relieved by the Canadian 25th Battalion. Not having been directly involved in any infantry activity while at *Railway Dugouts*, the 3rd Battalion had nonetheless continued to provide working-parties for the area of *Hill 60* and had been almost constantly subjected to bombardment by a very active German artillery during this period.



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

The relief had lasted for two days. On June 11, the 3rd Battalion had been ordered back into the same area, close to the village of Zillebeke. On the following day the unit was to move up towards the forward area: the *Battle of Mount Sorrel* was about to come to its violent conclusion.

In their jumping-off trenches by ten o'clock on the evening of June 12, the personnel of the 3rd Battalion was to be witness to the intense forty-five-minute barrage undertaken by the Canadian artillery just after midnight.



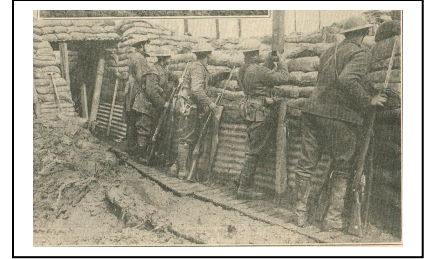
At one-thirty in the morning the curtain of fire had lifted towards the rear of the German front lines which had then been stormed by the infantry. The succeeding German lines had then been attacked and carried, again using the same co-operative tactics between the artillery and infantry.

(Right above: *Hill 60* as it remains a century after the events of 1916 and 1917 in the area of *Mount Sorrel*, the village of *Hooge*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Railway Dugouts* and *Maple Copse*: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government. – photograph from 2014)

By eleven o'clock of that evening when the 3rd Battalion was to be relieved, the unit had incurred forty-four *killed in action* or *died of wounds*, two-hundred eighteen *wounded* and ninety-three *missing in action*. Thus had ended the *Battle of Mount Sorrel*: status quo.

The remainder of the month of June, that of July and the first days of August were to be a reversion to the routines of trench warfare, the 3rd Battalion apparently having remained in much the same area. Then on August 9 it was to march westward and to the vicinity of the northern French town of *Steenvoorde*. It was to be a further fourteen months before the unit would return to the *Kingdom of Belgium*.

Three days later, and after a march of some fifty kilometres towards the west again, the 3rd Battalion had reached its destination and its billets at Tournehem. The unit was to remain there for the following two weeks, time that would be occupied by training and by route marches. It was then to be ordered southwards and to the area of the British offensive of that summer, *the Somme*.



(Right: *Canadian troops likely in trenches built for training purposes – they are too prim and proper to be the real thing when compared to 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.

It had been ten o'clock in the evening of August 27 when the 3rd Battalion had marched out of Tournehem on its way to the railway station at Audvieuq. Apparently, according to the unit's War Diary... *Civilians extremely sorry to see battalion go.* Having then arrived at the station at one-thirty in the morning, the Battalion was to be obliged to wait a further ninety-five minutes before the train had departed.

Having travelled at first by train, then by bus, and finally on foot, the Battalion had arrived in the provincial town of Albert in the French *Département de la Somme* on the penultimate day of August.

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 span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

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



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 having been 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.

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 had entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first collective major action was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette.

Meanwhile, on August 30, the 3rd Battalion had marched to the large military encampment designated as *Brickfields Camp (La Briqueterie)* in the near proximity of the provincial town of Albert. A few hours later the unit had been allotted billets in the town itself, accommodations which at least the War Diarist had found to be... *quite comfortable*.



(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*)

On the following day, August 31, the newcomers were to find themselves in undoubtedly less luxurious quarters as they had been ordered into the forward area to relieve an Australian unit in *Sausage Valley*.

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

The second day of September had seen the Battalion move forward again, on this occasion into the front-line trenches in the area of *Mouquet Farm*. There appears to have been no coordinated infantry action during this period but enemy planes would put in an appearance and the 3rd Battalion had been shelled almost incessantly for the duration of the six-day tour.



Even without there having been any infantry action, the unit had incurred a casualty count of twenty-two killed and one-hundred forty-five wounded.

The Battalion had thereupon retired to the *Brickfields Camp* on September 8 but apparently not too far away from the front for *one* company to be ordered to mount a reportedly successful raid on enemy positions on the morning of the 10th.

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

On the following day again the entire 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade was to begin a five-day circular march in the region in order to free up billets for the incoming troops who were to attack the German positions on that September 15.



It was, as recorded some pages above, during this trek that Private Fowler and his re-enforcement draft reported *to duty* with the 3rd Battalion in the village of La Vicogne.

* * * * *

Private Fowler's Battalion now reported back to the *Brickfields Camp* on September 16. Only the day before, of course, Canadian units had attacked in the area of Flers-Courcelette as part of a larger general offensive. The assault by the 2nd Canadian Division on Courcelette had been perhaps the only successful venture on a day when most of the news was yet again disappointing.

It was to be on the evening of September 17 that the 3rd Battalion would be ordered to move forward to the trenches in front of Courcelette, there to relieve the 25th Battalion of the Canadian 2nd Division. They were then withdrawn from that forward area again on September 20, the tour having cost a total of ninety-four casualties - many of them, according to the Battalion War Diarist, unfortunately caused by *friendly* artillery fire falling short.



(Right above: *The village of Courcelette just over a century after the events of the 1st Battle of the Somme – photograph from 2017*)

Back in the trenches for but a single day on September 24, the unit had to contend with three local counter-attacks by the Germans. These were beaten off but, of course, at a price: eight *killed* and sixty-five *wounded* all told. Relief came at midnight.

Then there was another march undertaken by the entire 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade – of eight days' duration on this occasion, commencing on September 26. Upon its return to Albert the 3rd Battalion received re-enforcements and began to prepare for an upcoming operation.

On October 7 it moved from the town and proceeded to its assembly points in the appropriately-named *Death Valley*. The numbers of the attacking party, even counting the ninety newly-arrived re-enforcements, still amounted to only fourteen officers and four-hundred eighty-one *other ranks*, less than fifty per cent regulation battalion strength.

The Battalion War Diarist has dedicated over three pages to the events of October 8 during the attack by the 3rd Battalion on the enemy *Regina Trench* system. The following is a resume based upon excerpts from the War Diary of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade:



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

(continued)

Zero hour (4.50 a.m.) – The 3rd Canadian Battalion advanced straight to their objective and found little trouble in passing through the enemy’s wire which had been fairly well cut by the artillery. They met with some resistance from the enemy but soon overcame this and succeeded in taking their objectives which they at once began to consolidate...

...in front of the Quadrilateral many gaps were found which allowed the troops (of the 4th Battalion to) enter the German trenches. Some congestion was caused by mixing with the 3rd Canadian Battalion until a bombing party had worked along the front line trench...

...the enemy commenced very strong bombing attacks against both Battalions. The force of these attacks was against the Quadrilateral and apparently came along the trenches leading to it from the northeast and northwest. An extremely heavy artillery bombardment was opened about the same time on our newly captured trenches and on our jumping off trenches.

The bombing posts were driven in at the Quadrilateral and the enemy forced our men along the trenches to the southwest and southeast. The local commanders reorganized bomb sections and led them forward but could not relieve the pressure and our men were finally forced to retire to the jumping-off trenches.

A few of the 3rd Canadian Battalion remained in the left of the German trenches but these men were withdrawn at dark...

(Right: Wounded troops being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the 1st Battle of the Somme – from Le Miroir or Illustration)



By the end of the day the casualty count, all ranks, was as follows: Killed in action – thirty-four; wounded – one-hundred-fifty three; missing in action – one-hundred fifty-two (Source: 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary).

Out of the four-hundred ninety-five personnel of the 3rd Battalion (Toronto) who had attacked on that morning of October 8, 1916, one-hundred fifty-six remained to be counted – the Battalion War Diary says... 1 officer and about 85 O.R. were left: Terrible... whichever version one chooses to believe.



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

The son of John Fowler, likely fisherman, and of Mary Fowler (née Behan?) of Goulds Road, Brigus, Newfoundland, he was also husband to Henrietta (née Lane, also see further above) – born in Ireland – to whom he had allocated a twenty dollars per month from his pay as of May of 1916 and father to at least a son, Joseph William, born 1909.

(continued)

Private Fowler was reported as having been *killed in action* during the attack on the *Regina Trench* position on October 8, 1916.

William Joseph (also found as *Joseph William*) Fowler had enlisted at the *apparent* age of thirty-two years and two months: date of birth at Brigus, Newfoundland, November 15, 1886 (from attestation papers).

Private William Joseph 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 24, 2023.