

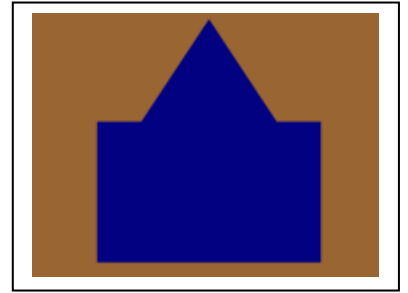


Private Francis John Furlong, Service Number 2137548 (Canada), is interred in Bellacourt Military Cemetery, Rivière, in the French *Département de Pas-de-Calais*; Grave reference: II.N.2.. (Photographs from April 9, 2024 – with thanks to Claire Rice and Christian Etchecopar)

(continued)

(Right below: *The shoulder-flash of the 29th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Vancouver) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force is from the 'Wikipedia' web-site.*)

Francis John Furlong was born on the island of Oderin in Placentia Bay (this from the *Ancestry.ca* web-site, although a second source cites St. John's), Newfoundland, on October 4, 1885, to be baptized nine days afterwards in the Roman Catholic Cathedral in St. John's, capital city of the independent British colony of Newfoundland. His parents were James Peter Furlong and Ellen Mary Stephenson* and he was one of perhaps seven siblings.



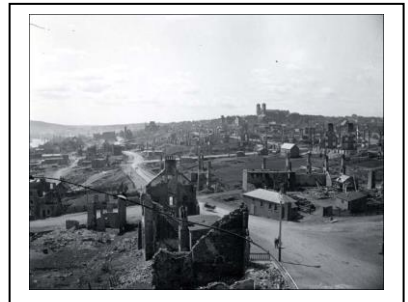
**The couple had married in St. John's on May 9, 1977.*

The family's history in Newfoundland had begun two generations prior to the birth of Francis John with the coming of James Furlong – James Peter's father - from New Brunswick to the aforementioned island of Oderin where he was to establish a business which was to prosper. In fact, it was to prosper so much that he, James, was to retire from it and move to St. John's where he would eventually become a member of the Legislative Council.

He – Alas! – was to die young, but his three sons, one of them James Peter, the father of Francis John, were to follow in his foot-steps and establish their own company of *General Importers* on Water Street where it was already active by the time of Francis John's arrival on the scene. Like that of James Furlong, his sons' business flourished, but the three brothers were, as had been their father, to apparently be attracted by greener pastures*, James Peter to be later involved as a Trustee with the local *Commercial Bank*.

Note: Much of the above information has been gleaned from an article 'The Furlong Family in Newfoundland' available on the 'Grand Banks Genealogy' web-site, a site which has been a constant source of help over the years to the author's research.

**It might be remembered that in the month of July of 1892 much of the capital city, including most of the down-town commercial centre, was destroyed in a catastrophic fire. While Number 11 (and/or 9), Monkstown Road, the family residence, was apparently not affected, the brothers' business on Water Street may well have been, an event which may also have had an influence on their decisions to curtail the commercial activities.*



(Right above: *This is much of what remained in 1892 of the city of St. John's as seen looking from the area of 'Devon Row' westward along Duckworth Street. The Roman Catholic Cathedral is seen outlined against the sky. - The photograph is from the Provincial Archives.*)

From this point on, however, few details appear to be available *a propos* the years of Francis John's childhood and adolescence. As for his schooling, the same applies. His father was to die of heart failure in November of 1901 and Francis John would at some time thereafter travel to the mainland to seek employment; he was to end up in the United States but whether or not he was spend any time in Canada during the interim appears to be uncertain.

Following soon after the death of James Peter Furlong ,Ellen Mary, his widow, was to emigrate to the United States, to the community of Lynn, Massachusetts, in that year of 1901. It also appears that she was accompanied by her daughter Elizabeth* – these details found in the United States' Census of 1910 – and perhaps by an older daughter Gertrude who was to be married in Lynn four years afterwards, in 1905.

Ellen Mary, still residing in Lynn, was unfortunately to commit suicide in July of 1913.

**In a City Directory of 1913, Elizabeth is listed as working as a laundress. She was still living on Union Street – since the 1910 Census - in Lynn in 1917 when her brother Francis John enlisted and named her as his next-of-kin., and is perhaps the Bessie Furlong, laundress, of Union Street, who is named – a few contradictory details notwithstanding – in the 1920 register.*

By that year of 1913, Francis John Furlong had apparently not only left Newfoundland to live and work in the United States, but he had also married. The Records of the County of Los Angeles, California, report him as having married a Miss Kathryn Maucher – laundress, born in the state of Pennsylvania – on February 2 of 1911, after which the couple may have moved eastward again since his service papers show that during his absence on overseas service that she was living at 2054, McKean Street in Philadelphia*, perhaps her parents' residence.

**One year after her husband's death in France, Kathryn was again to marry and would become Mrs. Warren Brillinger of Miami Florida.*

A further perhaps curious addition to his records is that which gives as his *present address*, with which he furnished the recruiting officer when he enlisted in the capital city of British Columbia in November of 1917: *899, Fifth Street, St. Bernardino, California.*

His occupation that of a *locomotive engineer*, he enlisted in Victoria and was *taken on strength* on November 14 of that 1917 – elsewhere in the same source, personnel files, November 20 is cited – attested on November 20, and was attached to the 2nd Depot Battalion of the British Columbia Regiment, having made the journey, one must presume since there appears to be no evidence available of the same, from San Bernadino, to the east of the city of Los Angeles, to Vancouver Island – perhaps having crossed by ship from Seattle to Victoria.

He underwent a medical examination on the same November 20, a procedure which '*does not find him to have any of the causes of rejection specified in the Regulations for Army Medical Services*', was categorized as A2, and was then surely was to report with the Regiment – likely at the *Willows Camp* in Victoria.

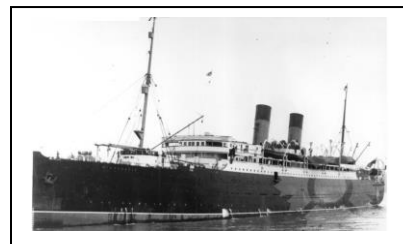
(Right: *The photograph of the 'Willows Camp' in Victoria in 1917-1918 is from the Ernest Crocker Fonds, these to be found on the web-site following: <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/>*)



Many of the troops sent overseas from Vancouver Island during the *Great War* traversed the Straits from Victoria to Vancouver on board the ferry *Princess Charlotte* – as had done the 1st Draft only a month before - before taking a train to cross the North American Continent as far as Montreal,

there to take passage to the United Kingdom. This was likely the itinerary followed by Private Furlong's draft in early December of 1917 – although the exact ship it travelled on from the Island appears not to be certain.

Of course, in that month of that year, the St. Lawrence River was already frozen over, the habitual alternative route was followed and the train continued its journey to the ice-free port of Saint John in the province of New Brunswick. It was there that on December 18, Private Francis John Furlong of the 2nd Draft of the 2nd Depot Battalion of the British Columbia embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie*, a requisitioned ship of the *Canadian Pacific* fleet, for passage to the United Kingdom.



The vessel docked in the Scottish port of Glasgow on December 31, the ultimate day of 1917.

(Right above: *The SS 'Missanabie' was an ocean-liner of some twelve-thousand five-hundred tons, built in 1914 in Glasgow for the Canadian Pacific Line. She was not requisitioned during the 'Great War' as was her sister-ship 'Metagama', but continued her trans-Atlantic service during the conflict and only carried troops when the occasion presented itself.*

On September 9 of 1918 she was torpedoed by a German submarine some eighty kilometres off the coast of Ireland and was sunk with a loss of forty-five souls. – The photograph is from the 'Museum of Immigration' via 'Google' - at Pier 21, Halifax.)

From Scotland, Private Furlong was to travel southward – likely overnight – almost the entire length of the country, to arrive on the morrow at Seaford in the county of East Sussex on England's south coast where by that late stage of the conflict, the Canadians had established a further military complex. At Seaford he was to be *taken on strength* by the Canadian 16th Reserve Battalion for the following six weeks until mid-February. On the fifteenth day of that month he was transferred to the 1st Canadian Reserve Battalion, also stationed at Seaford, in preparation for a departure in early April to *active service* on the Continent.



(Right above: *Seaford Cemetery on England's south coast, wherein lie two Newfoundlanders who also served and died in Canadian uniform: Frederick Jacob Snelgrove and Ebenezer Tucker – photograph from 1917)*

It was on April 4, 1918, that Private Furlong once again took ship, to arrive in France on the day afterwards and to be very temporarily quartered at the Canadian Infantry Base Depot – attached to the 2nd Canadian Division – situated in the vicinity of the French west-coast town of Étapes*.

**Until the end of March of 1918, each of the four Canadian Divisions serving on the Continent had its separate Infantry Base Depot. In early April of that year, these were amalgamated into a single Base Depot – still at Étapes – from where the arriving reserves were ordered to one of the Canadian Corps Reserve Centres (Camps) thereupon to be dispatched to a 'fighting' unit.*

Private Furlong, on April 5, arrived at the now-combined Canadian Infantry Base Depot where he was *taken on strength* and was then on his way two days later to the 2nd Canadian Corps Reserve Centre from where, a week later again, he was one of forty-six *other ranks* to report to duty with the Canadian 29th Infantry Battalion (*Vancouver*) which at the time was serving in the support trenches at Berles-au-Bois, a commune in close proximity to the *Western Front* some six kilometres to the south-west of the medieval city of Arras.

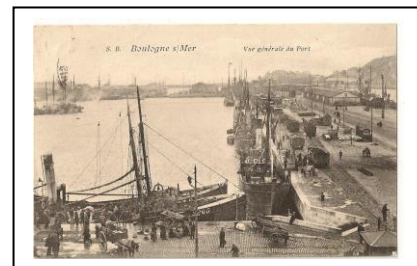
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The 29th Canadian Infantry Battalion (*Vancouver*) had been authorized in November of 1914 and at its outset had recruited in the city of Vancouver and nearby New Westminster. Some six months and two weeks later, on May 20, having travelled by train to Montreal, from there its thirty-seven officers and some eleven-hundred *other ranks* had crossed the Atlantic on the ship on which Private Furlong was to travel in late 1917, the trans-ocean liner *Missanabie**.

**The 29th Canadian Infantry Battalion was not to travel alone. Not only were the Headquarters' Staffs of the 13th, 14th and 16th Infantry Battalions on board but also taking passage were several Canadian Field Artillery units: the 4th Brigade as well as the 13th, 14th and 16th Batteries, all on their way to the English south-coast port and naval facility of Plymouth-Devonport where the first Canadian overseas forces had disembarked in October of 1914.*

From Devonport the unit was transported to the county of Kent where it was to remain in training until mid-September. Early on the morning of the seventeenth day of that month, the 29th Battalion marched to Folkestone Docks where it embarked on the SS *Seriol* on which it was to cross the Dover Straits to the French port of Boulogne, thence journeying by train to the northern French community of Cassel and on foot to its billets in nearby St-Sylvestre.

(Right: *The French port of Boulogne – through much of the Canadian Expeditionary Force passed at some moment during the time of the 'Great War' – from a vintage post-card*)



The 29th Canadian Infantry Battalion was one of the four such units attached to the 6th Canadian Brigade, itself one of three such components of the 2nd Canadian Division, and now, for almost a full year, was to be stationed in southern Belgium. During that period, in June of 1916, it was to play a peripheral role supporting other Canadian units as they fought the action of *Mount Sorrel*, this name to be one of the Battalion's Battle Honours.

(Right: *Remnants of Canadian trenches dating from 1915-1916 at 'Sanctuary Wood', and adjacent to 'Mount Sorrel', Belgium. – photograph from 2010*)



(continued)

Later, towards the end of that summer of 1916, the Canadians were to become involved in the *First Battle of the Somme*. While this campaign – as Newfoundlanders know - had already been underway since the first day of July, it had up until September been mainly troops from Great Britain* and France, then from the *Antipodes* (Australia and New Zealand) which were to champion the Allied cause.

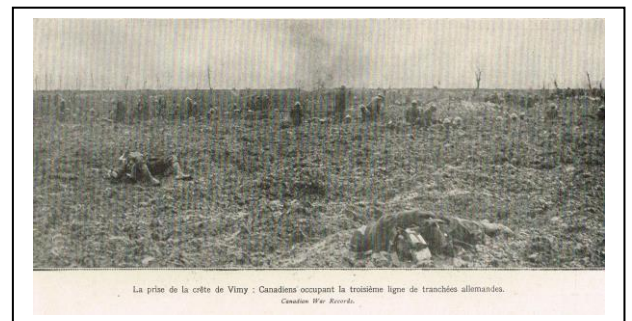
**Including the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which fought the ‘Great War’ as a unit of the British Army.*

From the month of September until mid-November of 1916, the Canadians were ordered into the fray, by the end of which some twenty-four thousand of them had been reported as *killed, wounded or missing in action*.



(Right above: *Wounded of ‘The Somme’ being evacuated to the rear in hand-carts for medical attention. – from Illustration.*)

The 29th Battalion was one of the first Canadian units to retire from *the Somme*, having begun to march away as early as October 5. All of the Canadians were eventually to be stationed in an area to the north of Arras which was where the winter was passed.



By the spring of 1917 the French had decided to launch an offensive in an area known as *Le Chemin des Dames*, an effort which was to prove a further horrific failure. To support this assault, the British – and thus the Canadians – were also to make a *push* at the same time in support. This British drive was to become known to history as the *Battle of Arras**.

(Right above: *The translation of the caption of the photograph reads: The capture of ‘Vimy Ridge’: Canadians occupying the third line of German trenches. – from Illustration*)

**The ‘Battle of Arras’ will be likely known to those readers from Newfoundland since the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment also fought during this time, April 14, at a place called Monchy-le-Preux – perhaps twenty – five kilometres distant from Vimy Ridge - this to prove to be, after Beaumont-Hamel of the previous year, the most costly day of the Regiment’s war with just fewer than five-hundred casualties.*

April 9 of 1917 – Easter Monday – was the day on which the Canadians, with British support, fought on and captured *Vimy Ridge*. The objective of the 29th Battalion appears not to have been the *Ridge* itself, but positions to the south and down the long slope leading to the village of Thélus and onwards towards Arras, positions which were seemingly taken with little opposition in the advance of the 29th Battalion which was to commence several hours after the first attacks of the day had begun.

If the attack of *Vimy Ridge* was a success – and some sources are less positive about this than was the propaganda of the day – the days following were perhaps less so and, not for the first

time, a situation of stale-mate was to set in with the 29th Battalion rotating for several weeks in the *Front, Support, and Reserve Lines**, yet still in the general area of the villages of Vimy and Thélus**.

**Further to the rear there were also general (Battalion, Brigade and Divisional Reserve Areas.)*

*** While it is true that some advances were made by the Canadians and British – and other efforts repulsed – it should be remembered that by this time the Germans were constructing defensive positions to the rear – these to become known as the ‘Hindenburg Line’ towards which some of their forces were already retiring.*

In July, the 6th Brigade was to move into the area of the mining city and centre of Lens. While the British were preparing for a further offensive further to the north in the region of Belgian Flanders, the Canadians were mean-while to remain in this industrial area of France until the autumn until it was their turn to suffer in the morass of the *Third Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele*.

However, before that day came, the Canadian military hierarchy was to seek battle honours – as well as the control of its own terrestrial Forces* - among the slag heaps and the pit-heads of the mining communities of the North of France.

Thus it was that the Canadian Corps was to fight the action to become known as *Hill 70* – in fact, a hill in name only, despite some sources claiming it to be a dominating feature – the objectives of the exercise being two-fold: firstly to convince the Germans to vacate the city of Lens and; secondly, because of the Canadian threat, to ensure that German troops remained in the area rather than employed as reinforcements in Flanders.



A total of some nine-thousand casualties was incurred by the Canadians during the four days – it was to begin on August 15 - that the fighting for *Hill 70* lasted.

**Until this moment, all British and Empire troops had been operating under the command of the British General Staff.*

(Right above: Canadian soldiers walking, days after the battle for ‘Hill 70’, through the desolation that had once been a neighbourhood of the French Mining city of Lens. – from Illustration)

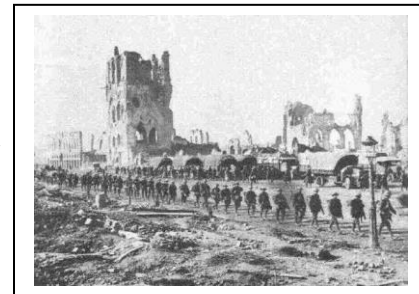
Following the events at *Hill 70* the 29th Battalion returned to the procedures and peril of life in the trenches. Then in September the enemy troops opposite were fewer in number and the Canadian Battalions were more often situated in Reserve Camps to the rear. Of course during all of this time the battle around Ypres was raging – not always successfully – and, since the British (including the Newfoundlanders), the Australians and the New Zealanders were already playing, or had played their part, the Canadians had no delusions as to whose turn it was to be next.

While in many cases it was to be mid-October or even just prior, that the Canadian Corps began to trudge northwards, it was not until the end of that month that the trek into Belgium began for the 29th Battalion, and not until November 3 – after a final stage by train – that its personnel clambered

down from the train at Ypres station and proceeded to their temporary camp just a single mile (says the *War Diary*) to the east of the city.

(Right below: *Troops – perhaps Australian – on the march from the railway station file through the rubble and past the Cloth Hall of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the Front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

The *Front Line* was even farther to the east but by the morrow, November 4, the 29th Battalion had relieved its sister 21st Battalion and had occupied the assigned trenches. For once there had been few casualties, the only incident on the next day being the relatively placid one of the continuous arrival of prisoners – who were bringing in wounded from the field as they came in.



On November 7 the Battalion was ordered back to Potijze and in the successive days even further away from *The Front*. By the following evening it was camped on the relatively *safe* side of Ypres and, two days later again, was back in France. The unit had been very fortunate: and even though one day had been spent outside sheltering as best as was possible from the rain, most of the return journey was accomplished either by train or by bus.

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



On November 15, some four days after *The Third Battle of Ypres* had ground and bled to its close, the 29th Battalion was once more in *The Line* near the village of Vimy with the War Diarist reporting little other than such events as *no hostile patrols; little enemy shelling; enemy quiet and little to report*. Fortunate indeed.

In December life for the 29th Battalion comprised the routines of trench warfare with the Canadian General Election added for good measure with the polls having been open from the beginning of the month for the following seventeen days.

The winter of 1918 would be quiet, as war-time winters were wont to be until the era of the bomber fleets some twenty years later. So quiet that some of the Battalion personnel were able to relax in the luxury of a bath.

The storm following that calm was to break sixteen weeks later on the first day of spring, March 21, but it was to break to the Canadians' south, at the juncture of the French and British Armies, much of it on ground already fought over: *The Somme*.

By the end of 1917 Russia was no longer an active participant in the *Great War*; a member of the *Triple Entente* – France, Great Britain and Russia – at the outset of the conflict, in December of

1917 her new Soviet* leaders had signed an armistice with the Germans which had seen the Russians withdraw from the fighting. This was followed in March of 1918 by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk which not only confirmed the armistice but made huge concessions to the Germans. Both these agreements thus allowed the German High Command to withdraw large numbers of troops from the *Eastern Front***.

**1917 had seen the overthrow not only of the Czarist regime but also the moderate government of Kerensky by the Left-Wing Bolsheviks led by Lenin, Trotsky and, later, Stalin.*

***The Treaty was annulled by the Armistice of November 11 of 1918, but by then the Czar was dead and Russia was undergoing a civil war which was to eventually see the Soviets victorious.*

Many of these afore-mentioned German troops were to be transferred to the area of the *Western Front* and were available for a number of offensives undertaken against the French, British – and later American – forces in France. The largest of these was that of March 21 and it was also the most successful in terms of territory won although nothing was taken of absolute importance and after some weeks, for a number of reasons, the German advance petered out. There was to be no German victory, but at times it was to be a *very close-run thing**.

**The 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment was involved in the lesser attack made in the area of the Franco-Belgian border, an offensive which was launched on April 9 with the objective of reaching the ports on the continental side of the Dover Straits and North Sea. This too failed and this northern German threat was over by the end of that April. The ‘close-run thing’ was reportedly said by the Duke of Wellington following the Battle of Waterloo.*

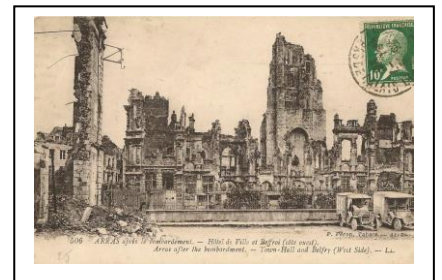


(Right above: These are the De Seule crossroads, lying astride the Franco-Belgian frontier, also the scene of fierce fighting involving the 1st Battalion of the, by that time, Royal Newfoundland Regiment, on April 12 -13, 1918, during the German offensive of April 9. Today the locale boasts several houses and a convenience store. – photograph from 2009(?))

The Canadians in the mean-time, were stationed in an area which was neither north nor south nor, as it transpired, was it directly threatened by any of the five offensives hurled against the French and British. In fact, theirs was the only sector of the *British Front* which was not menaced, although a number of Canadian units were transferred to areas which might have come under duress had the Germans been at any time able to achieve the elusive break-through.

Thus on March 22 the 29th Battalion, having been apprised of the crisis to the south, prepared to march ... and did so on the following morning ... and as well during the next several days. Indeed, confusion at times appears to have been the order of the day as many units appear to have marched at times in circles.

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This was, however, not to be the case for the 29th Battalion as its movements were to come to an end on March 29 at a place called Berles-au-Bois, only a few-kilometres to the south-west from an already-battered city of Arras. Berles-au-Bois, as seen further above, was – and still is – a commune (not just a community) to be found just south of the main road leading from Arras to Doullens, from where the Battalion was readily available to man positions in the nearby front-line trenches as it was to do on April 3.

(Preceding page and right: *Two views of the same buildings in the medieval city of Arras: the above sepia version, taken from a vintage post-card, shows the 'hôtel de ville' (city hall) and belfroi (clock tower) in 1918, towards the end of the conflict and following some four years of bombardment – and as Private Furlong would likely have seen them; the coloured photograph to the right finds them both restored and as they were in September of 2015, almost a century later.*)

And there at Berles-au-Bois and in the immediate area the 29th Battalion was to remain, apparently until the Canadian Corps was to be transferred in almost its entirety to face the German positions in front of the city of Amiens in early August to fight in the first of several battles which would eventually bring the *Great War* to its close in November of that year.



* * * * *

It was of course, also during the period spent at Berles-au-Bois that on April 14 Private Furlong was one of the draft of forty-six *other ranks*, recorded in a previous paragraph, to be escorted from a Canadian Reserve Camp to serve with the 29th Battalion.

Life for Private Furlong in the trenches during the period after his arrival on the scene was little different from that of any other soldier of any country during the *Great War* – the photographs of the time likely only scratch the surface of what was the daily reality.

The Battalion was at the time in the *support trenches*, the second line behind the *Front Line* – certainly not close but still within range of enemy bullets and shells as the casualties of each day – *one killed* and *two wounded* on April 15 – were to attest. It would be worse in the *Front Line* where it relieved the 25th Canadian Infantry Battalion on the next day.

Apart from the constant patrolling and the work parties, the soldiers would not leave the relative safety of the trenches during the month of May as there was no offensive action planned and most effort was spent in preparing for the German advance that in fact was never to come. Daily artillery bombardments, however, were a part of the routine practised by both sides, a routine that accounted for most of those aforesaid casualties.



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(Preceding page: This is a photograph of Berles-au-Bois Churchyard Extension Cemetery, one of three British military cemeteries in this small commune. There is a total of three-hundred seventy dead interred in them, several of whom were wearing a German uniform; however, despite the Canadian presence in the area, and the casualties incurred by them, not one of the graves is that of a Canadian soldier.

However, in Bellacourt Military Cemetery in which lies Private Furlong – and within whose walls are found four-hundred thirty-three dead – there lie one-hundred sixty-three Canadians of whom fourteen were men of his, Private Furlong’s, 29th Battalion. – The photograph is from the Commonwealth War Grave Commission web-site.)

There was one infantry activity which in most cases was despised by the rank and file but, as trench tradition would have it, a favourite of the staff officers: the raid. To the former it meant discomfort and unnecessary combat and dangers as well as employing officers behind the line instead of serving in the trenches*; to the latter it was a means of keeping everyone in the trenches on his toes and aggressive, and of keeping the enemy apprehensive.

***There was also the danger of being shot-up by one’s own artillery which, while purportedly supporting the action, often saw its operations go awry with a number of its poor-quality shells falling short and among the attackers.**

A minor operation against the enemy positions on the Arras-Bapaume Road and opposite the Right Sector of the Right Brigade Front – in other language, a *raid* – was thus planned for the 29th Battalion on the night of June 2-3, one of the eight officers and one-hundred seventy-five other ranks involved, to be Private Furlong. Despite the enemy appearing to be alert and nervous, and his artillery and machine-guns being quite active, the event was to go ahead.

It did so in three waves, two just prior to mid-night with the third following just after.

According to the subsequent report things were to go well: the Germans were to lose heavily in the operation and those who survived did so because they had run away; enemy positions had been bombed and destroyed; and a goodly amount of abandoned equipment and supplies had likewise been destroyed.

On the Canadian side casualties had reportedly been light, although some seven or eight were attributable to the Canadian artillery’s efforts which had apparently at times been below par. The attacking party had also incurred casualties of several wounded and several dead due to the enemy, one of those killed having been Private Furlong, the circumstances of his demise apparently un-recorded by the War Diarist. Nor was his name documented in that subsequent report.



The Army hierarchy offered its congratulations to the 29th Battalion on the reported success of the operation and then decided that Private Furlong’s remains would be interred in the Bellacourt Military Cemetery, Rivière, where they remain to this day.

Private Francis John Furlong was entitled to the British War Medal and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (both seen above, the British War Medal to the left).

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 – May 20, 2024.