



Private William Charles Green (Number 734288) of the Royal Canadian Regiment, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Buquoy Road Cemetery, Ficheux: Grave reference IV.C.15.

(Right: *The image of the cap badge of the Royal Canadian Regiment is from Wikipedia.*)

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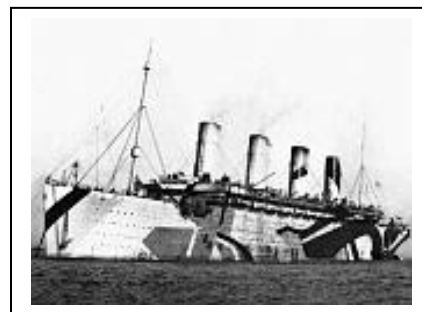
His occupation prior to military service recorded on his papers as that of a fireman – whether he who *puts out* fires or, on the contrary, who *feeds* the fire of a steam engine is not specified - William Charles (but also known as *Charley*) Green may have been the young man who is recorded as having disembarked from the Bowring Brother's vessel *Stephano* in Halifax on September 11 of 1915. Having left St. John's, Newfoundland, again according to the ship's passenger list, he was on his way to the Nova Scotia town of Windsor to seek work – on *that* paper he was registered as a carpenter.

Private Green's first pay records show that he enlisted on February 28 of the following year, that day being the first for which the Army remunerated him for his services; it was also on the same February 28 that he was *taken on strength* by the 112th Overseas Battalion (*Nova Scotia*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. On the morrow, February 29 – 1916 was a leap-year – in Halifax, he was attested before presenting himself for medical examination on the next day again.

It was not, however, to be until July 7, by which time the 112th Battalion was undergoing training in the vicinity of the town of Windsor that Private Green was... *finally approved and inspected* by Lieutenant Colonel Tremaine, the commanding officer of the Battalion, who then declared himself – on paper - to be... *satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

Apparently Private Green not only *trained* during that winter and spring of 1916 in or close to the town of Windsor, but he was also to make the acquaintance of a young lady. The relationship between him and Miss Flossie Sharpham was likely serious as, only a single month after his arrival in England, on September 1 of that same year, Private Green was to begin to allocate a monthly twenty dollars to her from his pay.

Almost six weeks before, it had been on July 23 that, having travelled the short distance to Halifax, Private Green's unit had boarded His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*, sister-ship to *Britannic* – to be sunk by a mine in the Mediterranean in November of that same 1916 – and also of the ill-fated *Titanic*. *Olympic* was one of the largest ships afloat at the time, able to easily carry more than six-thousand troops – which she oft-times did.



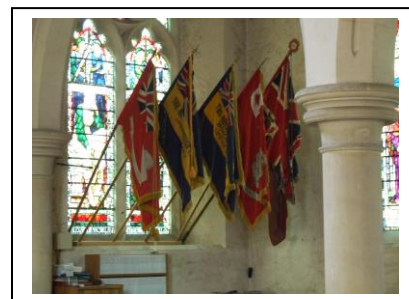
(Right above: *The photograph of Olympic, shown here in her war-time dazzle camouflage, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

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

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Clearing the harbour in Halifax on July 24, HM Transport *Olympic* docked a week later in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool, on the last day of the month. Nine days later again she was returning, on her way back to Halifax, repatriating returning soldiers.

From the harbour area at Liverpool the 112th Battalion was transported immediately by train to the Canadian Camp newly-established in the vicinity of the villages of Bramshott and Liphook in the southern English county of Hampshire – and named for the former. There Private Green and his comrades-in-arms were to remain for the following four months in order to complete their training and thereupon to await further orders to proceed from there to the Continent and on to the Western Front.



All that seems to be documented of Private Green during this period at *Camp Bramshott* is that it was then that he was prevailed upon to write his will. He did so on October 14, leaving his everything to his mother.

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

He was still serving with the 112th Battalion in early 1917 when the last personnel of that unit were absorbed by the newly-formed Canadian 26th (*Reserve*) Battalion (*Nova Scotia*). Different sources appear to record different dates for this move, but his own files record Private Green having been transferred on February 2 of 1917. As the 26th (*Reserve*) Battalion by that date was also at *Camp Bramshott* there was likely only a minimum of trouble in effecting the changeover.

It was then to be yet a further two-and-a-half months before Private Green would be despatched to the Continent. It eventually came about on April 21, his draft in all probability passing through the English south-coast port of Southampton and sailing to Le Havre, on the estuary of the River Seine.



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

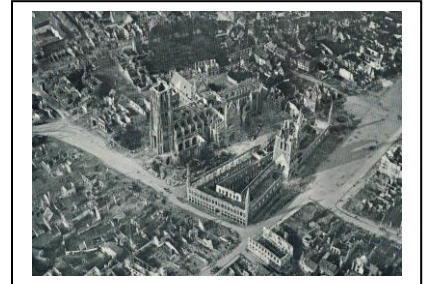
On the following day Private Green reported to the Canadian Base Depot established in the vicinity of Le Havre - one of about three-thousand re-enforcements from England to do so on the day - there to be *taken on strength* – and on paper - by the Royal Canadian Regiment. Three days afterwards he was one of eleven-hundred four personnel to be despatched to seek out their new unit.

Private Green's *own* draft from the Base Depot numbered ninety *other ranks*. While his files record him as reporting *to duty* on April 27, the Battalion War Diarist of the Royal Canadian Regiment cites the 28th as the day of his arrival, at a time while the unit was serving in the *La Folie Sector*, in the area of Vimy Ridge and the village of Vimy itself.

* * * * *

The Royal Canadian Regiment, although being the senior regiment in the Canadian Army at the outbreak of *the Great War*, had not been among the first units to be despatched overseas to the United Kingdom. In fact, it *had* been sent overseas, but in a different direction, to languish for a year on the British island possession of Bermuda.

After *that* posting the RCR had been brought home to Canada in the summer of 1915 and had then likely taken the same ship on to the United Kingdom where it had then been attached to the 7th Infantry Brigade of the newly-forming 3rd Canadian Division. The RCR had then been transferred at the same time as other units of the 3rd Division to the Continent on November 1 of 1915*. Having arrived in France it had immediately been sent to the Franco-Belgian frontier area and then, at the end of March of 1916, to the *Ypres Salient*.



**The Canadian 3rd Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31 of 1915 and January 1, 1916. While most of its units had already arrived on the Continent, it was to be some months later before the 3rd Canadian enjoyed a full complement of both infantry and artillery.*

(Right above: 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)

The first months of 1916 had been relatively peaceful for the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division in the frontier area. It was then in March, 1916, that the entire Division had been transferred to the *Ypres Salient*, a lethal place at the best of times, into a south-east area and in the vicinity of such places as the village of *Hooge*, and others that by then went by English-sounding names such as *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse*, *Railway Dugouts* and *Mount Sorrel*.

In April the Canadian 2nd Division, in a sector to the south of Ypres, was to receive the attention of the German Army for a few days*. For that Canadian formation, this period was to be a lot less tranquil than the one being experienced by the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion** and the other units of the Canadian 3rd Division in their allotted sector.

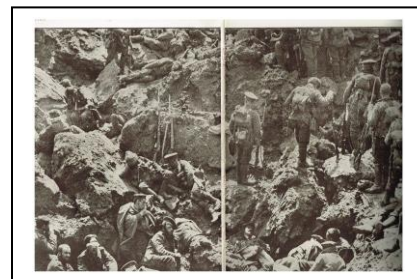
**In fact, it is not quite correct to say this as it was the British – then followed by the Canadians – who on this occasion sought a confrontation with the Germans.*

*** The term 'Regiment' is perhaps misleading as there is no regulation size to a regiment – during the Great War several British Regiments put more than a dozen battalions into the field and also recruited reserve battalions. The Royal Canadian Regiment put only a single fighting battalion into the field during the Great War.*

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The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* officially took 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 was here that the British had excavated a number of galleries under the German lines, there to place explosives which they detonated on that March 27. They immediately followed this with an infantry assault.

After a brief initial success the attack soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than had the British, and by the 17th of the month, when the battle was called off, both sides were back where they had been some three weeks previously – and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.



(Above right: *A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – from Illustration*)

However, as previously noted, this confrontation was a 2nd Division affair and the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the German artillery some kilometres away.



Its *own* first major action, some seven weeks later, was to be the altercation with the Germans at *Mount Sorrel*, in the south-east area of the *Ypres Salient*.

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

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, in the areas of the village of *Hooge* and those other places of English-sounding names as listed in a closely-previous paragraph. They are still referred to, by the local people, as such today.

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, overran the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans were unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences. On the other hand, the hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, delivered piece-meal and poorly coordinated, was a costly reverse for the Canadians.



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

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Ten days later the Canadians again counter-attacked, on this occasion better informed, better prepared and better supported. The lost ground for the most part was recovered, both sides were back where they had started eleven days before – and the cemeteries were a little fuller.



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

The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had been caught in the maelstrom of June 2 and had remained in the forward area until the night of June 5-6 when it had been relieved and had retired to Camp “B” well to the rear. The unit was not to serve again during the action at *Mount Sorrel* where it had by then incurred some one-hundred forty-five casualties.



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

Thus it was back to the everyday routines of trench warfare for some two months at which time the Battalion – as was also to be the case of most of the other Canadian Battalions – was once more withdrawn, on this occasion for training in ‘*open warfare*’. The Canadians were about to travel south into France, there to play a role in the British summer offensive of 1916.

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

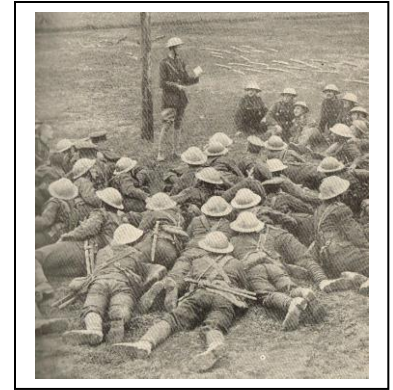


(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette – photograph from 2015*)

On that first day of *1st Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at Beaumont-Hamel.

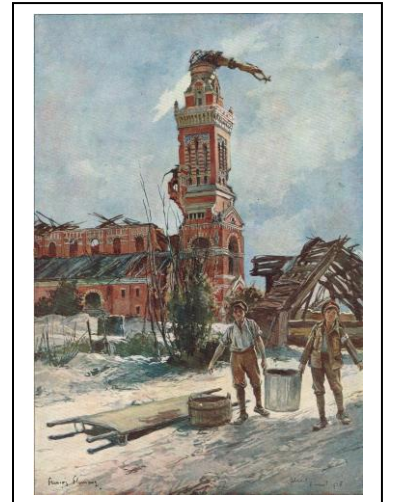
As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians had entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive.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

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



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

The RCR arrived in the area of the provincial town of Albert in the late evening of September 13 and just two days later, on September 15, was ordered to move forward in order to attack a German strong-point, the Zollern Graben, on the morrow. By four o'clock in the morning of September 17, when it was to withdraw, the Royal Canadian Regiment had incurred some two-hundred eighty casualties and the Zollern Graben redoubt was still in German hands.



But *the Somme* was not finished with the RCR: another major action was to follow. The attack of October 8-9 on the *Regina Trench* system was far from being a success: on the contrary it was another expensive failure; the German positions would not be definitively taken until November 11, by another Canadian unit. By that time the RCR was to be in the Lens sector, some fifty kilometres to the north.

In fact, the unit was to be moving in that direction within days of having fought at *Regina Trench*.

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



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



During the five weeks of its sojourn at *the Somme* the Battalion had lost, *killed* and *wounded*, about four-hundred fifty all ranks. Over two hundred more had been reported as *missing in action*, the War Diarist optimistically predicting that most of them would be later found in field ambulances and casualty clearing stations. The accuracy of that prediction does not appear to be documented.

The RCR Battalion began to withdraw from *the Somme* on October 10. The Battalion War Diarist makes no mention of any motor transport or train being employed so it may be assumed that the unit, as with many others, retired from the field on foot.

The route took it westward at first, then to turn northward so as to pass west of the by-then ruined city of Arras and beyond.

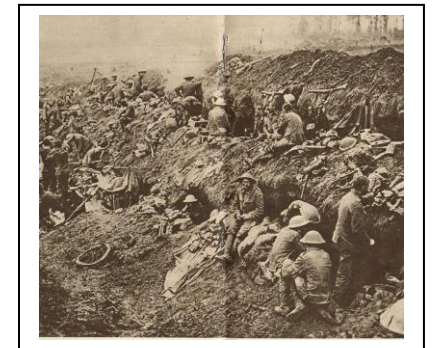
(Right: *Burying Canadian dead on the Somme, likely at a casualty clearing station or a field ambulance – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)



It was on the 24th of that October of 1916 that the Battalion arrived in the Neuville St-Vaast Sector to the north-west of Arras. The War Diarist on that date reported Battalion strength as being three-hundred eighty-six *all ranks*, less than forty per cent of regulation battalion numbers. *The Somme* had taken its toll.

The RCR, in its new quarters in the Neuville St-Vaast Sector, once more began the daily pattern of life in and out of the trenches*, a routine which lasted until the middle of February of the following year, 1917.

**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 the forward area, the latter furthest away.*



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

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

Thus the winter of 1916-1917 was to pass in that manner for the Royal Canadian Regiment. The Battalion War Diary is fairly repetitive in its entries: little in the way of infantry action except patrols and the occasional raid – by both sides: all local activity; and most casualties were due to German artillery and snipers.



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

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Then in February the unit was ordered into Divisional Reserve at Bruay where it began five weeks of training for the upcoming British offensive; not that it was all work: the War Diary reports sports events and concerts among the litany of parades, lectures, marches, drills, working-parties and visits from military and political persons.



(Right above: A Canadian carrying-party loading up before moving up to the forward area: the head-gear was apparently an adaption of a practice employed by Canada's indigenous peoples. – from *Le Miroir*)

(Right: Canadian soldiers while off-duty perusing the program of an upcoming concert 'somewhere on the Continent' – from *Le Miroir*)



On March 21 the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion* moved forward towards the trenches once again; after five weeks in Reserve perhaps the change was a bit of a shock to the Battalion's collective system: the War Diarist notes that the new quarters... *LA MOTTE Camp, is composed of Bivouacs, with nine tents for officers. We are its first occupants. It can be greatly improved.*

**The Royal Canadian Regiment and the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry were the two units of the Canadian Infantry not to be officially designated by a battalion number during the Great War. Similarly to the RCR, the PPCLI fielded only a single fighting battalion during the course of the conflict.*

But he also notes that... *"C" Company relieved the right Company of the 58th Battn. taking over the exact frontage from which we are expected to jump off.* Such an observation illustrates the recent policy of informing junior officers and senior NCOs of the plans of intended actions, knowledge that these personnel were to pass down to the men under their command.

And it must have been clear to the men of the RCR that there were intended actions; the forward and rear areas in the Neuville St-Vaast were hives of ongoing activity for which the unit supplied working-parties and carrying-parties each day: dumping areas were being cleared, bivouacs were being sand-bagged, stone laid for walks, new trenches dug and old ones deepened, troops familiarized with the newly-excavated tunnels and other positions, water-pipes and communication lines buried, artillery and machine-guns sited...

On April 1 the RCR Battalion retired to Villers-au-Bois for a week, there to organize for the first day of the offensive. On April 7, the first of the Companies moved into one of those tunnels which had been hewn out of the chalk; it was hoped that these galleries would reduce the number of casualties with the men sheltering there until the last possible moment, and that it would also nurture the element of surprise.

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The men of the Royal Canadian Regiment were to remain underground for well over twenty-four hours.

On April 9 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 few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

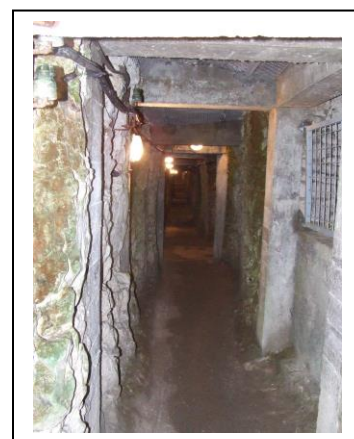


The French offensive was to be a disaster.

(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands in commemoration on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions plus two British units stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

For no reason other than that it is one of the more legible entries to follow, an extract of the experience of “A” Company, RCR, during the opening of the attack of April 9 is here included as being representative of the events of the assault as undertaken by the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion.

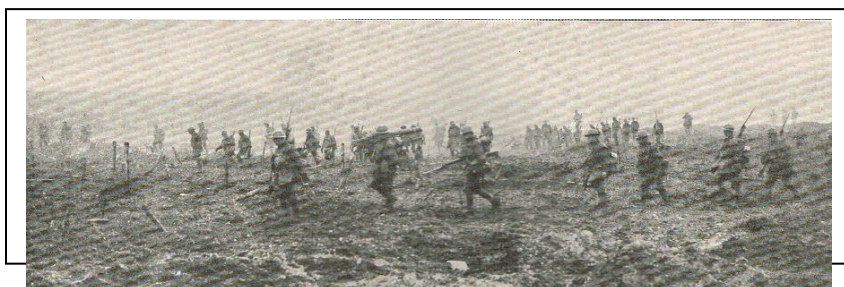


(Right above: *Grange Tunnel - one of the few remaining galleries still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years after the attack. – photograph from 2008(?)*)

(Right below: *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*)

(Excerpts from the Battalion War Diary of April 9, 1917) 3.12 a.m. “A” Company under Captain Munn reports Co. in Assembly trenches.

5.30 a.m. Raining. Barrage opens.



While the other three Companies were in communication with Headquarters at a relatively early hour, apparently not so “A” Company, not until... 1.40 p.m. Message from “A” Co. delivered by wounded runner stated that they had captured four machine guns, were in touch with Units on both flanks... and that they had sent a patrol over the Ridge.

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2.15 p.m. "A" Co. (left Co.) is in its objective. Strength 1 Officer and approximately 50 other ranks with no N.C.O.'s. It is in touch with "C" Co (right) who's (sic) approximate strength is 1 Officer and sixty other ranks... "A" Co. has sent a patrol over the ridge from which as yet no report has been sent. There is a small gap between "A" Co. and the P.P.C.C.L.I. owing to the shortage of men.

We command the whole situation at present, but unless reinforcements and supplies of every sort, more especially S.A.A. (small arms ammunition) available, machine Guns, shovels etc., are sent up at first opportunity, it will be difficult to withstand another counter attack.

It was the 3rd Division – of which the Royal Canadian Regiment was an element - and also the 4th Division whose objective had been Vimy Ridge itself, the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions both having objectives on the right-hand side of the main slope*.

***This was the first occasion on which the four Canadian Divisions were to act in concert as an autonomous Canadian Army Corps rather than as a constituent of a British formation. In fact, on this occasion, a British brigade had been placed under Canadian command.**

Of the ten thousand Canadian casualties of the day, the Royal Canadian Regiment incurred fifty-six killed in action, one-hundred sixty-five wounded, and sixty-five missing in action.



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

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



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

There had been, on the first days, April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted, and highly unlikely, breakthrough – but such a follow-up of the previous day's success proved to be logistically impossible.

Thus the Germans were gifted the time to close the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

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It was only three weeks after the fighting on Vimy Ridge that Private Green's draft had reported to the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion*, the unit at the time being stationed in the *La Folie Sector*. While not in the firing-line, the Battalion was nonetheless busy digging and consolidating trenches, burying cables and salvaging equipment – in three days no fewer than sixty rifles had been sent back to be re-conditioned.



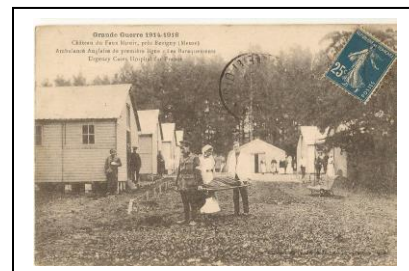
(Right above: *A part of Vimy Ridge – crowned with the Canadian National Memorial - almost a century later as seen from the German perspective in the La Chaudière Sector – photograph from 2014*)

And while undoubtedly more secure than the troops in the forward area, those out of the line and employed in carrying-, working-, and salvaging-parties were not altogether safe from the wrath of the enemy, particularly his artillery. The daily entries of the War Diary are evidence of a constant trickle of casualties.

This work to the rear continued for the next number of weeks although not always in the same area. In fact, during a period of about a week in May, the RCR Battalion was based in one of the galleries which had been excavated for use in the attack of April 9. That was *Grange Tunnel* (seen in a photograph above).

The remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* was not destined to be fought in the manner of the first two days; thus, by the middle of May, little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success and in fact had inflicted a reverse – as previously mentioned - on both the Canadians and British at Fresnoy on May 3.

It was during the relative lull of June and July that Private Green became afflicted with a case of the scabies. He was admitted for treatment – one of seventy-four sick who reported on that day - on July 4 into the 8th Canadian Field Ambulance established at the time at Grand Servins*.



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

**His papers suggest an immediate transfer to the 13th CFA on the same day, but this unit had left Grand Servins only two days prior – redistributing to other ambulances what patients it still had. On July 4 it was still in the throes of re-establishment at Estrée-Cauchin, and appears not to have had any patients on its books until after Private Green's discharge date.*

That discharge date was July 21 or 22 and Private Green is recorded as having returned to re-join his unit on July 22.

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



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

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

One of the first primary objectives of the Canadian campaign was to be *Hill 70* in the northern outskirts of the mining centre of Lens. However, the principal Canadian players were to be the 1st and 2nd Divisions, the majority of the units of the 3rd and 4th Divisions being only peripherally involved or not at all.

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

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



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

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



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

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



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(Preceding page: A 220 mm. Canadian artillery piece, under camouflage on the Lens Front in the summer of 1917, being readied for use – from *Le Miroir*)

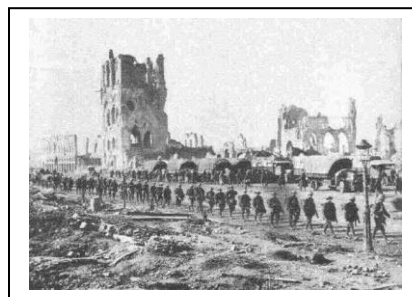
The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion, however, was one of the units not to be involved *at all* and, on that particular day, Private Green and his comrades-in-arms were in fact busy in training at LaPugnoy. As far as anything of military importance on August 15 was concerned, the Battalion War Diarist was sparing with his ink: *Nil*.

****The Canadian efforts had been expected to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium was proceeding less well than expected and the High Command was looking for reinforcements to make good the exorbitant losses. The Australians and then the Canadians were ordered to prepare to move north; thus the Canadians were obliged to abandon their plans.***

It was just over seven weeks after the capture of *Hill 70*, on October 6, that the Royal Canadian Regiment began to make its way on foot and by train, to the area of the Franco-Belgian border. Later that same day, Private Green was being billeted in the northern French town of Bailleul.

But it was not to be until October 23, having travelled in a circuitous route, once more on foot and by train, that the RCR Battalion was to find itself in the war zone of the *Ypres Salient*.

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



Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign into which the Canadians were about to be flung – already ongoing since the end of that July of 1917 - came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – ostensibly - one of the British Army's objectives.

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



From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Divisions in reserve.

From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 (the dates vary) - the reverse was true with the 2nd Division finally entering the rubble of Passchendaele itself.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians standing in the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele (today Passendale) – photograph from 2010*)

From October 23 until the end of the month the RCR was in reserve in the area of Sin Jaan contributing to carrying-parties, working-parties and stretcher-parties. On October 30 it was ordered forward and was involved peripherally in an attack by the 3rd Division. The unit then remained in the lines until relieved on November 4 – all of this at a cost of two-hundred fifty-eight casualties.

(Right: *Just a few hundred to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the monument pictured in the page above – photograph from 2010*)



It was not until November 14 that the Royal Canadian Regiment was back in the trenches where they intersected what in peace-time had been the road leading north from Passchendaele (today *Passendale*) to the community of Westroosebeke*.

There it was almost continually shelled for three days, incurring fifty casualties, before withdrawing from its positions – and from the *3rd Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele* – on the morning of November 18.

**The Battalion's positions were also atop the Passchendaele Ridge.*

Two days later again, on November 20, the unit was back in northern France, at Rely, some eighteen kilometres to the west of Béthune. There it was to remain, both resting and training, for a month, until December 21 when it was bussed back to the Lens sector. That daily grind of life in the trenches began once more.

It might be mentioned at this point that during that month of December, the personnel of the Canadian Expeditionary Force were allowed to vote in the National Election. It appears that the RCR Battalion War Diarist forewent the occasion to enter this in his journal, but other units apparently turned out in large percentages to cast their collective ballot*.

**Apparently, at the same time, the troops were given the opportunity to subscribe to Canada's Victory War Loan. Thus the soldier fighting the war was also encouraged to help pay for it as well*

For Private Green, that daily grind became a little more tolerable early in the New Year of 1918, in the month of January: he was granted a fourteen-day leave of absence to the United Kingdom which began on the 9th of that month. Unfortunately, however, we are left only to surmise how he spent his two weeks – no details appear to be recorded. He reported back to his *unit in the field* on January 26.



(Previous page: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion was still stationed in the area of the city and mining centre of Lens when the Germans struck on March 21.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, the Germans launched a massive attack, Operation 'Michael', on that March 21. The main blow fell at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops there*.

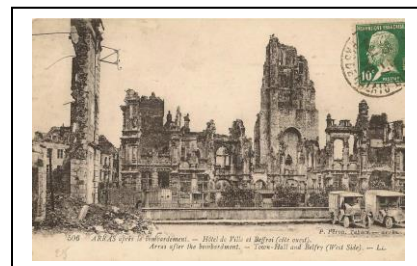


(Right above: *While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they did bombard it heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and thus to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir*)

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

*A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in the area where the by-then Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It also was successful for a while, but petered out towards the end of the month.

(Right: *The City Hall of Arras and its bell-tower looked like this by the spring of 1918 after nearly four years of bombardment by German artillery. – from a vintage post-card*)



However, despite, at times, the critical situations in the areas of both *the Somme* and *Flanders*, the services of the Royal Canadian Regiment were apparently not required to rebuff either *Michael* or *Georgette*.

That entire period was spent by the unit in the sector of Lens, in the southern suburb of Avion and then, latterly, withdrawn to the vicinity of the commune of Cambigneul, sixteen kilometres north-west of Arras.

The following two months were then spent well to the rear, in an area where games, parades and concerts were to also be a part of the routine of army life, although maybe not quite as frequent as the seemingly-everyday salvage-parties, working-parties and carrying-parties.

(continued)

(Right: A salvage party here at work in artillery positions recently prised from the Germans – from *Le Miroir*)



It was to be the end of July before the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion was to see action at the front again except on certain occasions when training exercises were held in areas that were necessarily as realistic as possible.

(Right: Cited as being an Official Canadian Photograph of a... 'violinist playing traditional music near Lens' - from *Le Miroir*)



It may well have been that Private Green and his comrades-in-arms at times asked themselves not only... *why this welcome quiet period?* ...but also what the purpose could be of all the drills, marches, exercises, use of German weapons, familiarization with new tactics, lectures, bayonetting, grenade-throwing, gas evasion and manœuvres.

(Right: A photograph, from 1917, of a Canadian soldier during training in the use of his 'gas-helmet': As may be imagined, it was difficult for the wearer to perform the duties of a soldier, particularly in the event of an attack. – from *Le Miroir*)



The period of relative quiet after the efforts of the German spring offensives, *Michael* and *Georgette*, was due of course – certainly in the earlier stages - to the exhaustion of both sides by the end of that April of 1918.

And the *purpose* of all that activity by the Allies and the newly-arriving Americans was, of course, in preparation for an offensive campaign. There was also considerable effort on the other side of the lines as the Germans began to gird themselves for the retribution which they surely knew was to burst upon them.

The newly-appointed Generalissimo of the Allied and Associate forces on the Western Front was Ferdinand Foch. His plan was to strike not only hard, but to strike often and ubiquitously, thus eventually overwhelming an already-stretched enemy defence. Any retirement by the enemy was to be closely followed up, the pressure to be unrelenting.

The month of July was quiet as well, but there also appeared to be the same continuous preparations for something grand in the offing. On July 30 the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion was ordered to parade in battle order.

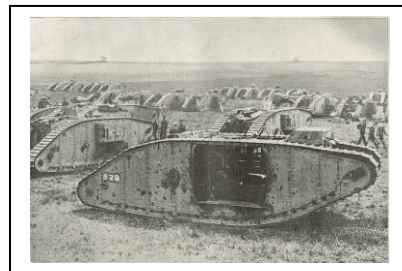
(Right: The gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the leading German troops had been able to see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918 – photograph from 2007(?))



Then: on foot to LeSouich; by train to Doullens; from there to the cathedral city of Amiens by train on the first day of August; on the evening of the 2nd to billets in Sains en Amienois some four kilometres distant - and within enemy artillery range as several casualties, including fatalities, were to prove.

At Sains en Amienois Private Green likely spent three days in cleaning-up and drying clothes, in training, in meeting French comrades-in-arms and also, on two of the three evenings given unto him, attending a concert given by an unidentified – at least to the War Diary reader – band.

On August 6 the RCR Battalion was ordered to move: **GENTELLES WOOD** full of troops. Whole Division and tanks – recorded the War Diarist. From there on the 9th it moved forward yet again, to **Le Quesnel Wood** on the Roye Road, expecting to attack on the next day*.



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

**The first attack had already been delivered by then, in the early – and foggy – morning on August 8. But as the offensive was planned to be a continuous advance, it was necessary to have troops which were fresh and ready to continue the operation, allowing the previous units the time to regroup, refresh, re-enforce and to prepare for a further assault a few days hence.*



(Right above: Canadian and German wounded from the first days of the battle – some cases more serious than others - waiting to be evacuated to the rear – from *Le Miroir*)

Things, however, apparently went somewhat awry as the Battalion sat awaiting orders all the following day and, in fact, it was not until the early morning of the 14th that Private Green moved into the trenches at Brigade Reserve, recently vacated by the PPLCI* Battalion** which had moved to deliver its attack from another quarter.

**Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry was named for the daughter of the Duke of Connaught, Governor General of Canada at the time.*

That attack eventually *did* go in and by four o’clock of the next morning, August 15, the Brigade had captured the village of Parvillers. It was then relieved and... *Brigade moved by march route and lorry to LEQUESNEL AREA into bivouacs. In the late afternoon the Brigade moved to VALLEY WOOD AREA* (From the 7th Brigade* War Diary).

Battalion casualties *all told* for the period of August 8-16 inclusive were: ten killed in action; sixty-five wounded; and three missing in action.

**The 7th Brigade comprised the 42nd, 49th, RCR and PPCLI Battalions.*

By the evening of August 19 the entire 7th Brigade was on its way from the recent battlefield and on its way back whence it had come three weeks before. It was not alone: by August 27 the final units of the Canadian Corps were moving back to the area to the east of Arras, their places in front of Amiens being taken over by elements of the French Army. The Canadians were to move much in the same manner as they had before: on foot, by motorized transport and by rail; they also moved rapidly and discreetly.

By the time that the last Canadian troops arrived back to Arras, the first had already gone to the offensive – to become known to history as the *Battle of the Scarpe* - on a new front. As early as the evening of August 25... *a very wet and dirty night...* the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had moved forward into its assembly areas,... *trenches 1500 yards EAST of ARRAS*. By mid-morning on the following day the 8th Brigade had already attacked and was reported as having captured Monchy-le-Preux.



(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux, well known in Newfoundland history, and reconstructed after the ravages of the Great War, as it was almost a century afterwards – photograph from 2014*)

The 7th Brigade – and thus the RCR, now accompanied by tanks – was ordered forward. By the late afternoon of August 29, after three days of fighting, most objectives had been secured and the Germans had been driven back some eight kilometres. The Battalion was withdrawn to billets in Arras while the *Battle of the Scarpe* officially drew to its close on August 30.

As the fighting had progressed the German resistance had become more pronounced and as usual, his machine-gunners gave and asked no quarter. Casualties from August 25-29 were as follows: thirty-two *killed in action* or *died of wounds*; one-hundred fifty-seven *wounded*; seven *missing in action*.

Only two days later, on September 2, a further offensive lasting but two days began. It became to be known as the *Battle of Drocourt-Quéant* and by September 4 it had driven the enemy back six more kilometres.

(Right: *The Canadian Memorial to those who fought at the Drocourt-Quéant Line in early September of 1918: It stands to the side of the main Arras-Cambrai road in the vicinity of the village of Dury and of Mount Dury. – photograph from 2016*)

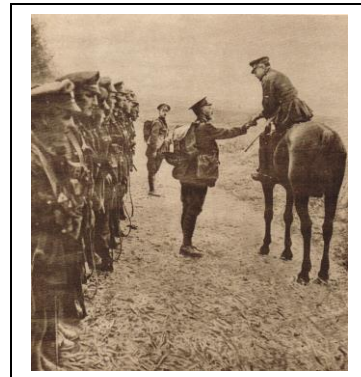


At this point the enemy decided to withdraw all along the entire front facing the Canadian Corps and the British forces co-ordinated with it. His new line of defence was to be hinged on the *Canal du Nord*, an as yet uncompleted work, but sufficiently advanced to present a formidable obstacle to any further offensive.

(continued)

In the meantime the Canadians continued their advance along the Arras to Cambrai road axis. This was largely unopposed apart from artillery fire and the occasional well-placed machine-gun nest but, even so, it was to be a further three weeks before men and supplies could be brought up to the west bank of the Canal in preparation for a forced crossing.

(Right: *After the successful operation of breaking the Hindenburg Line at Drocourt-Quéant, Canadian troops are here being inspected by the Commander-in-Chief of the British and Commonwealth Forces in Europe, Douglas Haig. – from Le Miroir*)



After its retirement at the end of August, the RCR Battalion had spent six days in the area of Arras before moving up to become a part of that general advance towards the *Canal du Nord*. There was again a period, from September 19 to 26, when the unit had been withdrawn by train as far to the west as Berneville. On that latter date the Battalion and Private Green returned – on this occasion by bus – to the forward area.

All was by that time ready for an assault across the Canal du Nord in an area two and a half kilometres long where, having not been completed, the bed was still dry. The attack went in on September 27.

(Right: *German prisoners evacuating wounded out of the area of the unfinished part of the Canal du Nord which the Canadians crossed on September 27, thus opening the road to Cambrai – from Le Miroir*)



On that September 27 the twenty-three officers and five-hundred eighty-eight other ranks of the RCR moved up by stages to the Canal which, by the time of their arrival, they were able to cross without opposition. The surprise attack of that morning had been a complete success and, although German resistance to the east of the dry waterway had stiffened later in the day, the Canadians were by then advancing away from the Canal towards the town of Cambrai.

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



By three o'clock in the morning of September 28, Private Green's RCR Battalion was in an assembly point to the north-east of the Bourslon Wood.

(Right above: *Two German field-guns of Great War vintage stand on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City, the one in the foreground captured during the fighting at Bourslon Wood – photograph from 2016*)



Excerpt from Appendix 9 of the Royal Canadian Regiment War Diary: ...“D”, “C” and “A” Companies being in front line, “B” Company in reserve.

At 5.30 they jumped off. Little opposition was met with during preliminary stages, the prisoners taken numbered under 50. One long field gun and one light field gun being captured. Opposition was met and heavy Machine Gun fire...on the right... The right company was temporarily checked, but an opening being located in enemy wire, a footing was gained in MARCOING LINE. On the left the enemy still occupied houses along th CAMBRAI road...and severe fighting took place. Three tanks came forward but were put out of action...

The operation had started well but had soon been encountering strong opposition which had halted – and at times thrown back – the Canadian advance. At seven o'clock that evening the attack was ordered broken off to allow the by-now depleted companies to move to re-enforce the troops already occupying the captured *Marcoing Line* and *Marcoing Support Line*. There they were to re-organize for a resumption of the advance.

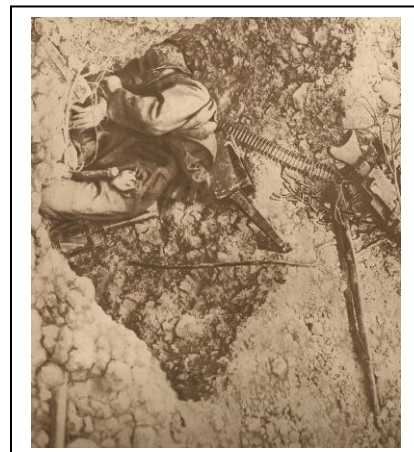


(Right above: *A tank – the word was first used as a code-name for these new ‘land-ships’ – either at repose or out of action for no evident reason – from Le Miroir*)

That resumption began at eight o'clock on the following morning... *with the 49th Battalion on right and the 42nd Battalion on left. Heavy casualties from machine gun fire resulted during day. Opposition was strong and progress limited. The general line of the CAMBRAI-DOUAI Road was reached.*

However, neither the Canadian 7th Infantry Brigade War Diary nor the Royal Canadian Regiment War Diary mentions any activity by the RCR Battalion on that day.

Excerpt from Appendix 9 of the Canadian 7th Brigade War Diary: Sept. 30th. ...*our barrage came down at 6:00 a.m. and P.P.C.L.I. and R.C.R. attacked in conjunction with the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the right and the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the left. The line fluctuated during the day, due to the uncertain situation of the left exposing the left to machine gun fire. We reached the Chapel on high ground...but were forced to retire for above reason...*



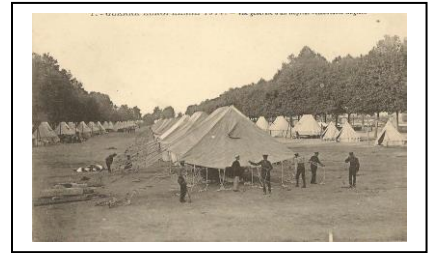
(Right above: *A German machine-gunner who also gave his all – from Illustration*)

By six o'clock that evening the RCR Battalion was holding positions in a sunken road. It continued to do so until the Canadian 9th Infantry Brigade passed through it at five o'clock on the following morning.

By that time, however, Private Green had been evacuated from the field and was receiving medical attention in the 33rd Casualty Clearing Station at Ligny St-Flochel*. There he was considered to be *dangerously ill*, having incurred wounds to both his head and his back.

**Ligny St-Flochel is some fifty kilometres distant – to the west - from the area where the RCR Battalion was operating at this time. It may be that Private Green was wounded on a date prior to this.*

(Right: 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 son of George Green, fisherman, and of Hannah Green (née *Parrott*) of Scilly Cove (since 1912, *Winterton*) Trinity Bay, he was also the brother of Delphinia, Frederick, Francis, Eliza, Millie, Chesley and of Allison.

Private Green was reported as having *died of wounds* on October 1, 1918, by the Officer Commanding the 33rd Casualty Clearing Station.

(Right: The Winterton War Memorial honours the sacrifice of Private Green. – photograph from 2012)



William Charles Green had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-three years and ten months: date of birth in Scilly Cove (*Winterton*), Newfoundland, April 27, 1892. A copy of the 1911 Census has April, 1890.

Private William Charles Green 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.

