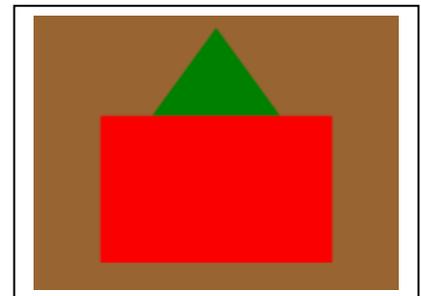


**Corporal Augustus Ralph Greening (Number 409630) of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (*Toronto Regiment*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge.**

**(Right: *The image of the shoulder flash of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (Toronto Regiment) is from Wikipedia.*)**



**(continued)**

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a driver\*, Augustus Ralph Greening was surely the young man who, having taken ship on board the SS *Inverness* in Port aux Basques, Dominion of Newfoundland, disembarked on June 1, 1912, in North Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Only fourteen years old at the time, he was on his way to Toronto with his father Samson and his eighteen-year old brother Thomas. There in Toronto they were all to stay at least temporarily with Samson Greening's brother, the uncle of the two boys. These two young brothers were still in Toronto some three years later, for that is where they were both to enlist into the Canadian Army in 1915.

*\*Given his age and the fact that he had lived in a logging community, Badger, in Newfoundland, it may well be that this 'driver' is the person responsible for moving logs downstream to the paper mill – the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Mill had opened in Grand Falls in October of 1909.*

The first pay records of Augustus Ralph Greening show that the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services on July 14 of 1915; logically this was thus the day and date of his enlistment - although some other files record July 16, the day on which he attested. On the day of his enlistment, July 14, he was *taken on strength* by the 109<sup>th</sup> Regiment (*Toronto*) of the Canadian Militia. His medical examination was undertaken on the same day as his attestation, July 16.

This relationship with the 109<sup>th</sup> Regiment lasted for four days (inclusive) as, on July 18, Private Greening was transferred to the 37<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Northern Ontario*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Only a single day afterwards again, Lieutenant Colonel C.F. Bick, the officer commanding this unit... *finally approved and inspected*... Private Greening and declared that he was ...*satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

*\*A single other pay record has him transferring from the 109<sup>th</sup> to the 84<sup>th</sup> Battalion and then sailing to the United Kingdom on June 18 of that year 1915. However, Lt-Col. Bick's signature and the stamp of the 37<sup>th</sup> Battalion seem to weigh in favour of this latter being Private Greening's unit.*

Private Greening may well have trained with the 37<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Niagara-on-the-Lake\*.



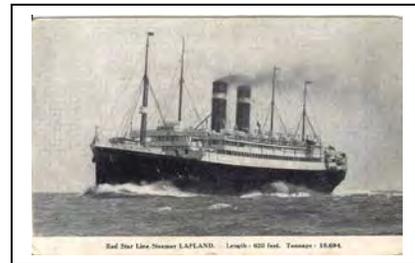
*\*The 37<sup>th</sup> Battalion had mainly, but not exclusively, recruited in Northern Ontario but a photograph (above) from the web-site of the Lorne Scots Museum shows the Battalion at an encampment at Niagara-on-the-Lake and states that it began to train there as early as January of 1915.*

The 1<sup>st</sup> Draft and 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of the 37<sup>th</sup> Battalion had sailed from Canada to the United Kingdom in June and August of 1915 respectively. Once in England drafts such as these were often fair game for battalions which were already there or which were serving on the Continent, so it may well be that most of these men had been sent as re-enforcements to other units before Private Greening and the parent unit of the 37<sup>th</sup> Battalion arrived.

That parent unit embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Lapland* on or just before November 27, 1915. It was not to sail alone: taking ship were also the 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the Cyclist Reserve; the 4<sup>th</sup> University Company, reinforcing the PPCLI (*Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry*); a draft of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of Canadian Infantry; and the Number 2 Siege Battery.

*Lapland* departed from the harbour in Halifax on that November 27, and docked in the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport on December 4 – although a card among his files shows a dubious December 11.

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



Upon its disembarkation, Private Greening's unit was transported by train to the Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* being established on the Kent coast just to the south of the English-Channel port and town of Folkestone. There Private Greening was to remain for almost fifteen weeks, undergoing further training.

It was the practice in the Army to encourage the troops to write a will – particularly before personnel left for *active service* at the Front - even though it is likely that some of the less affluent young men would have had very little to bequeath. Private Greening was to do so on February 1 of 1916, a short paper on which he left his everything to his mother, Helen. It was also common that the soldier allocate a part of his pay to a beneficiary of his choice, something that Private Greening chose to do two months later (see further below).

Two days after drafting his will, he was *struck off strength* by his 37<sup>th</sup> Battalion to be *taken on strength* by the 17<sup>th</sup> Canadian (Reserve) Battalion, also based at *Shorncliffe*. It was during the short period of service with this unit that Private Greening chose to absent himself from two parades: on February 13 and, ten days later, on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The first incident cost him... *3 days Confined to Barracks and 1 Days' Pay*; the second was worth... *7 days Confined to Barracks and 7 extra drills*.



(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*)

Three weeks after having missed that second parade, Private Greening was once again transferred. Having been *taken on strength* by a reserve battalion was usually a sure sign that one was about to be sent *overseas again*, this time on *active service*, and so it was to prove. On March 15, 1916, Private Greening changed units once again – although only on paper - on this occasion to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (*Toronto Regiment*) of Canadian Infantry, a unit already serving on the Continent.

(continued)

It would have been on or about that March 15 that Private Greening crossed over to France – likely via the nearby port of Folkestone and the French coastal town of Boulogne about two hours’ sailing-time distant. From there he and his draft reported to the Canadian Base Depot, established in the vicinity of the port-city of Le Havre, itself situated on the estuary of the River Seine.



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

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



The Canadian Base Depot was a busy place: it was there that re-enforcements arriving from England were briefly held before being despatched onwards to the units to which they had been attached – on paper – often on just the previous day. Thus Private Greening was one of twelve-hundred eighty-eight *other ranks* to arrive on that day, March 16... and he was one of the sixteen-hundred five to be despatched – of course, not all to the same unit – two days later, on March 18.



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

He was documented by the Battalion War Diary as having reported *to duty* with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion on the following day again, one of a detachment of fifty *other ranks* to do so on that March 19. At the time the unit had just been billeted in Dranoutre, a Belgian village to the south-west of the remnants of the city of Ypres.

\* \* \* \* \*

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (*Toronto Regiment*) of Canadian Infantry had, by the time of Private Greening’s arrival, been serving on the Continent for more than thirteen months. After a stormy passage from England, it had disembarked in the French port of St-Nazaire on February 11 of 1915. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was a component of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian Division\*.

*\*The Canadian Division was designated thus until the formation of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division when, logically, it became the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> 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 followed, the unit served in and about the *Laventie Sector* in France to the south of Armentières, and it was not to be until April 18, at twenty-five minutes past ten in the morning, that the unit – in fact, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade - would cross the Franco-Belgian frontier into the *Kingdom of Belgium*.

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.



(Right top: *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: *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*)



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 broke - although it was gas rather than water which, for a few days, threatened to sweep all before it. The date was April 22, 1915.

(Right above: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> *Battle of Ypres* had seen the first use of chlorine gas by the Germans during the *Great War*. It was later to become an everyday event and, with the introduction of protective measures such as advanced gas-masks, the gas 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 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 was 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 wavered then broke, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered.

(continued)

Thus a retreat, not always very cohesive, became necessary while, at the same time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade were moved forward to support the efforts of the French and of the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade.

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

By the second day, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the situation had become relatively stable – at least temporarily - and the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan held until the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> when a further retirement became necessary. At times there had been breeches in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans were unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or else they did not have the means to exploit the situation. And then the Canadians closed the gaps.



The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion remained attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade to the north-east of the Salient until April 26 when it withdrew to Vlamertinghe and re-joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade. Remaining there to repose on the following day, the unit was next ordered forward to the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan to dig trenches. By that evening some twelve-hundred yards had been excavated whereupon the Battalion returned to Vlamertinghe. There it was to remain until May 3 when it was withdrawn to the northern French centre of Bailleul, there to re-enforce and re-organize.



(Right above: *The Memorial to the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was 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.

There at Festubert a series of attacks and counter-attacks took place in which the British High Command managed to gain three kilometres of ground but also contrived to destroy, by the use of the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what was left of the British pre-War professional Army. The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but – not possessing the same numbers of troops – was not to participate to the same extent. It nonetheless suffered heavily.

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

(continued)

The French effort to the south – using the same tactics - was likewise 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 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion had been relieved from its posting at Festubert; in a few days' time, however, it was 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 Canadian Division was 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 was to move towards and into Belgium, to *the Ploegsteert Sector*, just across the frontier.

Having reached the area of Ploegsteert, there the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion remained – as did the entire Canadian Division. In the next months it came 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 no distance at all from the frontier itself. And it was here that Private Greening, during one of those periods of respite from the trenches, reported *to duty* on March 19, 1916.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was to be almost a further eleven weeks after Private Greening's arrival in the *Kingdom of Belgium* before the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was to be involved in a further major altercation. Of course, local confrontations – brought about by raids and patrols - were fought from time to time, and artillery duels and the ever-increasing menace of snipers ensured a constant flow of casualties.

In the meantime, in September of 1915 it had been the turn of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division to land on the Continent and to also 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-1<sup>st</sup> Division, but in-between, down the line south of Ypres in the area of St-Éloi. There, after some seven months of that thankless life in and about the trenches, it was to fight its first major action of the Great War.

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, the first weeks of April were not to be as tranquil as those being experienced during the same period by Private Greening and his comrades-in-arms of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division.

The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* officially took place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St. Eloi 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 series of galleries under the German lines, there to place explosives which they detonated on that March 27. That detonation had been followed up by an infantry assault.



After a brief initial success the attack soon bogged down – due to those very mine-craters which, filled with water, were to prove impassable - 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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.

However, as previously noted, this confrontation was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Division affair and the personnel of Private Greening's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the German artillery.

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

In fact, during that month of April the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was transferred closer to Ypres and, more precisely, to the area of Dickebusch, a village to the south-west of the city. From there it had moved into the forward area further east. Thus the unit was well placed to be of service on June 2.

From that date until June 14 was fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the area of *Hooze, Sanctuary Wood, Maple Copse, Railway Dugouts* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps.

(continued)

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

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



(Right below: *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*)

The Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, reacted by organizing a counter-attack on the following day, an assault intended to, at a minimum, recapture the lost ground. Badly organized, the operation was a dismal failure, many of the intended attacks never went in – those that did went in piecemeal and the assaulting troops were cut to pieces - the enemy remained where he was and the Canadians were left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.



Ten days later the Canadians again counter-attacked, on this occasion better prepared and better supported. The lost ground for the most part was recovered, both sides were back where they had started – except for a small German gain at *Hooze* - 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*)



On June 2 the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion had been ordered to stand to and at three o'clock in the next morning had been ordered forward from the *Dickebusch Huts* in the support(?) area. By mid-day of June 3 the unit was 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 Private Greening's Battalion supplied working-parties and burial-parties for the remainder of the day.

The unit remained at *Railway Dugouts* until the early morning of June 9 when it was relieved by the Canadian 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Not having been directly involved in any infantry activity while at *Railway Dugouts*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.



(continued)

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

The relief lasted for two days. On June 11, Private Greening and his comrades-in-arms were back in the same area, close to the village of Zillebeke. On the following day the unit moved 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 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion were 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 lifted towards the rear of the German front lines which were then rushed by the infantry. The succeeding German lines were attacked and carried, again using the same co-operative tactics between the artillery and infantry.



**(Right: *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 that evening when the Battalion was 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 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 a reversion to the routines of trench warfare\*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion apparently remaining in much the same area. Then on August 9 it marched west and to the vicinity of the northern French town of Steenvoorde. It was to be a further fourteen months before it would return to the Kingdom of Belgium.

*\*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.*

(continued)

(Previous 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*)

Three days later, and after a march of some fifty kilometres towards the west again, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion reached its destination and its billets at Tournehem. Private Greening's Battalion 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*.

It was ten o'clock in the evening of August 27 when the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 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 obliged to wait a further ninety-five minutes before the train departed.

Travelling at first by train, then by bus, and finally on foot, the Battalion 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 *1<sup>st</sup> Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 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.

(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*)



Meanwhile, on August 30, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion had marched to the large military encampment which had been 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 found to be... *quite comfortable*.

On the following day, August 31, the newcomers found themselves in likely less luxurious quarters as they moved to the forward area to relieve an Australian unit in *Sausage Valley*.

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

The second day of September saw 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 co-ordinated infantry action during this period but enemy planes put in an appearance and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was shelled almost incessantly for the duration of the six-day tour.

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

The Battalion 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 10<sup>th</sup>.

(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 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade began a five-day circular march in the region which saw it arrive back in 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 Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division on Courcelette had been perhaps the only successful venture on a day when most of the news was again bad.

It was on the evening of September 17 that Private Greening's unit was ordered to move forward to the trenches in front of Courcelette, there to relieve the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. They were 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 War Diarist, unfortunately caused by *friendly* artillery fire falling short.

(continued)



**(Preceding page: *The village of Courcellette just over a century after the events of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of the Somme* – photograph from 12017)**

**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 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade – of eight days' duration on this occasion, commencing on September 26. Upon its return to Albert the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 newly-arrived ninety re-enforcements, now mounted to only fourteen officers and four-hundred eighty-one *other ranks*.**

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



***Zero hour (4.50 a.m.) – The 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion to) enter the German trenches. Some congestion was caused by mixing with the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Battalion remained in the left of the German trenches but these men were withdrawn at dark...***

**(continued)**

(Right: *Wounded troops being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the 1<sup>st</sup> 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: 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary).

Out of the four-hundred ninety-five personnel of the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 accept.



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

On October 13 a draft of fifty re-enforcements arrived in Albert to bolster the strength of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. They were just in time to march from there with the remnants of the unit away from *the Somme*. In fact it was the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade which passed the starting point at eight o'clock on that morning of what was apparently... *a fine day* - from the point of view of the weather as well.

The itinerary of the march took the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade at first well to the west before it turned northwards to pass behind – again to the west of – the battered city of Arras. By October 24, having left Albert ten days earlier, it had turned eastward to end its trek in the vicinity of Camblain l'Abbé – fifteen kilometres to the north-west of Arras - and in Divisional Reserve.



(Right: *Camblain l'Abbé, the village today a little less busy than it was a century ago – photograph from 2017*)

This was the area – from Arras in the south to Béthune in the north - to which all the Canadian units withdrawing from *the Somme* were sooner or later to find themselves and where they were to remain until October of 1917.

During much of this period, however, Private Greening had been receiving medical attention. On September 20 or just prior, he had incurred a gun-shot wound to the left shoulder and had eventually been evacuated to an unidentifiable casualty clearing station before being forwarded on the following day, on board the 25<sup>th</sup> Ambulance Train, to the 8<sup>th</sup> Stationary hospital at Wimereux.



(continued)

**(Preceding page: 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: Other such medical establishments were of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card)**

Having received treatment at Wimereux for a week, Private Greening was released to the Number 1 Convalescent Depot at nearby Boulogne where he was to remain for a further four weeks. Discharged to Base Details at the Canadian Base Depot at Le Havre, it was to be yet another seven days before he reported – on November 3 – back to his unit which had retired to Camblain l'Abbé only two days previously.

**(Right below: The French coastal resort of Wimereux at some time prior to the Great War – it was to be transformed into a major medical centre during the time of the conflict. – from a vintage post-card)**

The winter of 1916-1917 was one of the everyday grind of life in and out of the trenches. There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides. This latter activity was encouraged by the High Command who felt it to be a morale booster which also kept the troops in the right offensive frame of mind – the troops who were ordered to carry them out in general apparently loathed these operations.



There was of course the daily trickle of casualties, for the most part due to the enemy's artillery and to his snipers. To this should be added, it should not be forgotten, the daily count of those sick – and the dental problems - who also helped to keep the field ambulances and the casualty clearing stations busy.



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

On a both military and personal note there was, at this same time, a first promotion for Private Greening. On February 1 he was appointed to the rank of lance corporal.

On March 9 Lance Corporal Greening's Battalion was withdrawn to a training area in the proximity of the community of Cambligneul. It was to remain there for eighteen days, undergoing a programme that was to be the eventual lot on the majority, if not all, of the battalions of the Canadian Corps before the upcoming British offensive.

On March 27 the unit moved to the area of Écoivres and St-Éloi in order from there to relieve another battalion in the forward area; it remained there until April 1, on that date moving back into support. A further four days and Lance Corporal Greening and his comrades-in-arms were back at Cambligneul.



(Preceding page and right: *The village of St-Éloi\* – adjacent to Écoivres - at an early period of the Great War and a century later - The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – destroyed in 1793 – are visible in both images. – from Le Miroir and (colour) from 2016)*



*\*Not to be confused with St. Eloy (St-Éloi) in southern Belgium where Canadian forces also served, Mont St-Éloi is to be found to the north-west of the city of Arras in northern France and was, at the time, well behind the lines.*

In reading the Battalion War Diary entries for this short period, it appears evident that the artillery of both sides – but more particularly on the *Canadian* side – were more active than usual, and becoming ever-increasingly so.

On April 8 the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was to move to its assembly points – although not through any of those kilometres of tunnels of which so much has rightly been written. The War Diarist noted the address of the Battalion's Commanding Officer... *stating that we had one of the most difficult feats to perform and had been given the honoured position of the right of the Canadian Corps and he had every confidence that the Battalion's work would be as gallant and steady in the attack and as firm in holding and consolidating as ever...*

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.



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

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

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity – and with a British brigade now under Canadian command - stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

(Right: *The monument to the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division which stands just outside the village of Thélus – photograph from 2017)*



(continued)

The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions had been handed responsibility for the Ridge itself; to their immediate right had been the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, attacking in the area of the village of Thélus on the southern slope; and to the right again the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division had been ordered to clear the area lower down the slope again towards the village of Roclincourt.

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



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



On April 10 the Canadians finished clearing the area of Vimy Ridge of the few remaining pockets of resistance and began to consolidate the area in anticipation of German counter-attacks – attacks which in fact really never amounted to much. There had on that day been the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on the previous day's success had proved impossible. Thus the Germans closed the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

The remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* was not to be fought in the manner of the first two days and by the end of those five weeks little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success.

By mid-day of April 11, the cost to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion for the period April 9 -10 had been counted: thirty *killed in action*; seventy-three *wounded*; fifteen *missing in action*. There were more to come before the end of the month: seven *killed*, forty-one *wounded* and three *missing*.



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

It was on, April 9, the day of the Canadian storming of Vimy Ridge that Lance Corporal Greening, perhaps due to the losses of that day, received his second stripe and thus promotion to the rank of corporal.

(continued)

During the *Battle of Arras*, the success at Vimy Ridge had been almost the sole exception to the rule\*, the rule being costly engagements more often than not accomplishing nothing. Arleux-en-Gohelle on April 28 gained some ground for the Canadian attackers but at great sacrifice. The confrontation at Fresnoy on May 8, in which Corporal Greening's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion – and the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade - played a role, was otherwise; the losses were greater than those at Vimy Ridge: forty-four *killed*; one-hundred sixty *wounded*; and *twelve* missing – *and* the Germans retained the village.

*\*This was so not only for the Canadians. The British and Australians experienced bloody reverses, not to forget the Newfoundland Regiment and its four-hundred eight-seven casualties on April 14 at Monchy-le-Preux.*

On May 6 the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion retired to the area of Petit Servins where it was to remain until the first days of June. It was then transferred to another vicinity, identified only as F.11, for training which lasted for a week during which period the unit also received the attention of some German aircraft which dropped a number of bombs on top of Corporal Greening.

The remainder of the month of June and then all of July comprised once again the rotations of the troops into the front, support and reserve positions. The casualties of the last ten days of that month of July while the Battalion had been in Brigade Support had come to five killed and fourteen wounded.

(Right below: *The remnants of the village of Loos (see below) as it was already in early 1915 – from Le Miroir*)

The first nine days of August were again quiet, seven of them having been spent in billets in the mining community of Nœux-les-Mines. On August 10 Corporal Greening and his Battalion were ordered forward into the Left Sub-Sector at Le Bis 14 and near to the mining village of Loos. The following is an excerpt from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of the day\*:



*...Our heavies bombarded enemy's defences from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m., it being necessary for us to thin out our front line... Our 60 pounders dropping short at 9.30 p.m. resulting in 409630 Cpl. Greening, A.R. being killed and 1 O.R. being wounded in 'A' Company...*

*\*The date August 10, of course, is in conflict with an official paper in Corporal Greening's own dossier which reports: 'While in the trenches in the vicinity of Loos he was killed by enemy shell fire'. The date on this latter occasion was reported as August 11.*

*A second file in his files cites Corporal Greening's death as due to... 'being buried by one of our own shells'.*

The son of Samson Greening, fisherman, and of Helen (elsewhere *Ellen* and *Eleanor*) to whom he had allocated a monthly twenty-five – later twenty – dollars per month from his pay, he was also brother to Thomas\*, to Frances, to Rhonda-Florence and to Sophia\*\*.

(continued)

**\*Sergeant Thomas Ralph, MM (Number 413042) of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Central Ontario) of Canadian Infantry**

**\*\*Originally from Indian Arm (re-named Summerville in 1904), Bonavista Bay, by the time of Sophia's birth in March of 1908 the family had moved to Badger Brook, Newfoundland. The parents' address in December, 1915, was 125, Cooper Avenue, Toronto; later again, in 1921, it was recorded as 44, Rosethorn Avenue, also in Toronto; the Newfoundland 1935 Census has them once again in Summerville.**

**Corporal Greening was at first reported as *missing in action* - and later on the same day, September 11, as having been *killed in action*. (See above for the report of September 10 by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (Toronto) War Diary.)**



**(Right above: *The Summerville War Memorial honours the sacrifice of Corporal A.R. Greening – photograph from 2009(?)*)**

**Augustus Ralph Greening had enlisted at the *apparent* age of July 28, 1897(?) – the year as written on his attestation papers is hard to discern. A copy of *Newfoundland Civil Registrations – Greening Births 1891-1923* - documents the date of his birth as October 3, 1898.**

**Corporal Augustus Ralph Greening was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**

