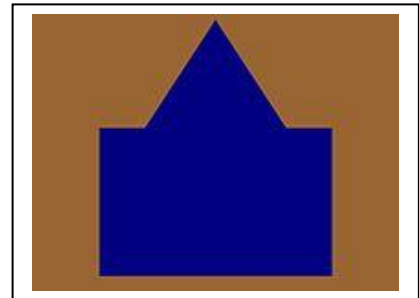




**Private James Walter Guy (Number 645850) of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Vancouver*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in LaPugnoy Military Cemetery: Grave reference IV.F.16..**

***(Right: The image of the shoulder-flash of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Vancouver*) is from the Wikipedia Web-site.)***

**(continued)**



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, James Walter Guy has left little information behind him a propos his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of British Columbia. All that may be said with certainty is that he was in the city of Vancouver in mid-September of 1915, for that is where and when he was married.

James Walter Guy and Amy Lavettal Foxall were joined in matrimony on September 20 of 1915 in Vancouver. There appears to be no further information about the couple during the time up until his enlistment except that their address in West Vancouver was recorded as 1781, 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

February 17 of 1916 was to be a busy day for James Walter Guy. On that date he underwent a medical examination which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force*. At the same time he also enlisted, attested, and, according to his first pay records – which show this to be the first day on which he was remunerated for his services to the Canadian Army – was thereupon *taken on strength* by the 158<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Duke of Connaught's Own*).

The formalities of his enlistment were then brought to a conclusion at the same time by the commanding officer of the 158<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Milne, when he declared – on paper – that...*James Walter Guy...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

His day, however was still as yet incomplete: there was also a promotion. After having spent only a few hours as a private soldier, he was thereupon appointed to the rank of (acting) corporal.

There appears to be little information available as to the activities of the 158<sup>th</sup> Battalion during the summer and autumn of 1916 after James Walter Guy's enlistment. The unit was based in Vancouver and the *Beatty Street Armoury* and also the nearby *Cambie Street Grounds* are associated with the British Columbia Regiment (of which the 158<sup>th</sup> Battalion was an component) but the extent to which these facilities were employed by Corporal Guy and his unit is unclear.

There was yet time for a further promotion before he was to depart for overseas service: on October 1 (Acting) Corporal Guy was elevated a further rank, to that of sergeant – and on this occasion he was not on probation.

It was on November 13, some six months after his enlistment, that the 158<sup>th</sup> Battalion – after a trans-continental train ride from Vancouver to Halifax – embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*, sister ship to the ill-starred *Titanic* and to *Britannic* which, eight days later, on November 21, was to sink, having struck a mine, in the eastern Mediterranean.



(Right above: *HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor along with HMHS Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London*)



Private Guy was not to travel alone for the crossing. Apart from his 158<sup>th</sup> Battalion, also taking passage to the United Kingdom were the 147<sup>th</sup>, 173<sup>rd</sup>, 180<sup>th</sup>, 194<sup>th</sup> and 222<sup>nd</sup> Battalions of the Canadian Infantry, as well as the 9<sup>th</sup> Draft of the Divisional Signal Company. The vessel sailed on November 14.

*Olympic* docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool on November 20-21 from where it appears that the 158<sup>th</sup> Battalion was transported by train to the Army Camp at Shoreham-on-Sea in the English county of West Sussex. Sergeant Guy was to remain there for just less than seven weeks.

On January 6 of the New Year, 1917, Sergeant Guy was transferred – on paper – to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion, one of the newly-forming reserve units. Thus he was ordered from *Shoreham Camp* to the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* by then established in the county of Kent on the Dover Straits and in the immediate vicinity of the harbour and town of Folkestone.

(Right below: *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*)

During this period, the entire structure of re-enforcing the Canadian forces on the *Western Front* was being reviewed, perhaps mainly due to the experience of the *First Battle of the Somme* which had just drawn to a close. Re-enforcements were needed in a hurry to fill the ranks of the depleted formations which had incurred horrendous casualties in the trenches, thus the 158<sup>th</sup> Battalion's personnel – as well as that of many other battalions - had become nothing more than a re-enforcement pool\*.



(Right: *Dead of the Somme awaiting burial – an unidentified photograph*)

*\*Before the end of the Great War, Canada was to despatch overseas two-hundred fifty battalions – although it is true that a number of these units, particularly as the conflict progressed, were below full strength. At the outset, these Overseas Battalions all had presumptions of seeing active service in a theatre of war.*



*However, as it transpired, only some fifty of these formations were ever to be sent across the English Channel to the Western Front. By far the majority remained in the United Kingdom to be used as re-enforcement pools and they were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by units that had by then been designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.*

*Such was to be the case with the 158<sup>th</sup> Battalion: its personnel was eventually to be transferred to other battalions in the field, and definitively absorbed by the 1<sup>st</sup> Reserve Battalion on January 6, 1917, and officially disbanded later that same year.*

Sergeant Guy's sojourn at *Shorncliffe* was to last almost exactly two months before the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion was subsequently ordered to *Seaford Camp* on the south coast of England in the county of East Sussex.



(Right: *The community cemetery at Seaford in which are buried a number of Canadian soldiers, including two Newfoundlanders: Frederick Jacob Snelgrove and Ebenezer Tucker – photograph from 2016*)

The unit moved there on March 8, only days after Sergeant Guy had been released from hospital at *Shorncliffe*. There he had been admitted on February 20 for treatment for a case of influenza and had remained there for eight days before his discharge on the final day of the month.

It would seem that after his transfer to *Seaford*, that Sergeant Guy was soon to run afoul of the Battalion authorities: *Absent from Parade at 8 A.M. & C Co. Parade of 16/3/17...Reverts to Permanent Grade...* But whether this reversion to the rank of private, officially dated March 17, 1917, was a consequence of his absences or if it was for other reasons, does not appear to be documented.

One month later, on April 17, 1917, Private Guy was one of a draft to proceed to the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion, already serving on the Continent. His detachment likely took ship in the south-coast port of Southampton for the crossing to France on that night of April 17-18, to disembark in the industrial port-city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine.



His personal file shows that on April 18 he – one of a total of eighty-five re-enforcements from England to arrive on that date - reported to the Canadian Base Depot, by that time established in the vicinity of the afore-mentioned city, there to be temporarily *taken on strength*.

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

Only three days after his arrival there, on April 21, he was one of one-thousand three-hundred eighty-four *other ranks* to be despatched from the Base Depot to various units. His personal file then records that two days later he reported *to duty* with his new unit, the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Vancouver*).

The 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary does not report any re-enforcements arriving *to duty* until April 26 when a draft of forty-six *other ranks* arrived. However, on both of those dates, the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup>, the unit was in a rest camp to the west of the community of Aux Rietz (today *La Targette*), there to re-organize and to re-fit: according to the same source, there was little rest involved, but at least the personnel was not being shot at.

(continued)

**(Right: There are two cemeteries at La Targette (Aux Rietz): in the British Cemetery in the foreground are buried five-hundred ninety-nine British and Commonwealth dead; in the larger French burial-ground lie some twelve-thousand – just fewer than six-hundred from the Second World War. – photograph from 1916)**



\* \* \* \* \*

**The 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Vancouver) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force was a component of the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division. It had crossed the English Channel to France on September 17 of 1915, through the ports of Folkestone and Boulogne.**

**Unlike Private Guy's Draft, it had not travelled via Le Havre, as the Canadian Base Depot there was as yet not in operation, but had, within five days of its arrival on the Continent, been ordered across the Franco-Belgian frontier, to Camp Aldershot, to become familiar with the rigours, routines and perils of life in the trenches\*.**

***\*During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, 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)**

**It was while at Aldershot that things became just that little bit more real for the personnel of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion: Private Colin McDonald, Number 75370, was killed by a rifle bullet on September 26. He was the unit's first fatality of the War.**



**The sector for which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division eventually became responsible during that autumn and then the winter of 1915-1916 was north of the border and south of the shattered medieval city of Ypres: more precisely, from the area of Kemmel in the south to Voormezele in the north.**

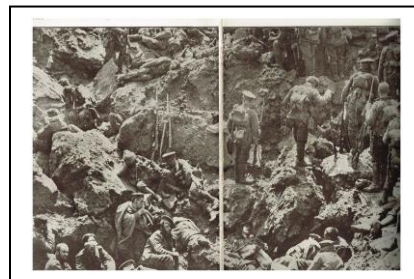
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**(Preceding page: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration)***

**In early April of 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had undergone its baptism of fire in a major infantry operation. It was at a place called St-Éloi where, on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of March, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then followed up with an infantry attack. The role of the newly-arrived Canadian formation was to then later pursue the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.**

**However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the often putrid weather which turned the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and then a resolute German defence, greeted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on April 3-4.**



**Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.**

**(Right above: *An attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – from Illustration)***

**At the very beginning of April the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been operating near Reninghelst to the west before moving towards Voormezele and Scottish Wood to the north-west of St-Éloi. There most of its personnel was deployed until April 9 when the entire 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade was relieved. The 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion's casualties for this tour in the line had finally amounted to seventeen *killed in action*, eighty-seven *wounded* and a further thirteen reported as *missing in action*.**

**Some nine weeks later, on June 2, the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under Canadian (and therefore British) control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action: *Mount Sorrel*.**



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

**(Right: *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)***



**(continued)**

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.



But the hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, June 3, delivered piece-meal and poorly co-ordinated, proved to be a costly disaster for the Canadians.

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

The German attack had primarily been on the part of the front held by the newly-arrived Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division\*, but such was its ferocity that units from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions were called upon to help hold the line. This was also true at the very end of the confrontation when troops from particularly the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division had been employed in the final attack of June 12-13.



*(Right above: A century later, reminders of a violent past close to the site of Hill 60\* to the south-east of Ypres, an area today protected by the Belgian Government against all except the whims of nature – photograph from 2014)*

*\*It was apparently much more of a hill before June of 1917 when a British mine blew off its summit on the opening day of the Battle of the Messines Ridge.*

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



*\*The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division had officially come into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. However, unlike its two predecessors, it had been formed on the Continent, some of its units having already been on active service there for months. Others were not to arrive until the early weeks of 1916, thus it was not until March of that year that the Division had been capable of assuming responsibility for any sector. When this moment had eventually arrived, the Division had been thrust into the south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

The 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion had not been among those most actively engaged at *Mount Sorrel*; at the outset other units from the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade had been sent forward but the 29<sup>th</sup> had been ordered to remain in reserve. On July 6 it had been ordered sent forward to establish a series of posts north of the *Menin Road* and to undertake a bombing raid but neither operation was to be entirely successful.

(continued)

There had also been a brief encounter with enemy troops at four o'clock on the following morning, July 7, but this had been driven off. For the remaining days of the confrontation it appears that it was the enemy artillery which posed the most danger to the Battalion and the unit did not have a role to play in the final attack of June 12 and 13.

On June 14 the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion was relieved, two companies retiring into the ramparts of Ypres thence to *Dickebusch Huts* while the other two were bussed further afield to *Camp 'D'*. Things were now about to become relatively quiet for a goodly number of weeks.

On August 19 the Battalion received notification that it was to be on the move the following morning. On that same day the *other ranks... Turned in all Ross Rifles and received Lee Enfield short rifles instead\**. (29<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary)

*\*The Canadian-made Ross Rifle was apparently a well-designed and well-engineered weapon but it was not a rifle designed for the rigours of the battlefield. The dirt and heat of the fight caused it to jam – stories, perhaps apocryphal, have soldiers jumping on the bolts (another problem) to release them – as did the smallest discrepancy in the dimensions of a cartridge. In contrast to the Ross, the Lee-Enfield was still to be in service even after the Second World War.*

As per that afore-mentioned notification, on the morrow, August 20... *Paraded at 8.30 a.m., full marching order. Joined Brigade at 9.00 a.m., and marched to STEENVOORD (sic) via RENINGHELST and ABEELE, arriving at 2.30 p.m.*

On the following day again the march to MERCKEGHEM took just under ten hours. This community was directly to the west again from Ypres, Poperinghe and Steenvoorde. According to the Battalion War Diarist the country was very beautiful and the... *Channel and shores of England visible from Church Tower.*

The object of this exercise – and of all the other exercises which were to follow in the next thirteen days - was to prepare the Battalion – and also the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Division – for what was optimistically described by some as *open warfare* to be undertaken in a different theatre of war.

Activities were to include route marches; communication drill; musketry; bombing; lectures; section and platoon drill; semaphore; machine-gun classes; stretcher-bearer classes; clothing and equipment inspections; even training in co-operation with aircraft.



(Right: *Canadian troops undergoing training exercises during the time prior to their involvement at First Somme – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)

This *different theatre of war* was to the south, in an area which the French had recently relinquished to the British and where the armies of the two Allies converged: the French *Département de la Somme*, named for the river that meanders through the region.

(continued)



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 the short span of just four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

On that first day of *First 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

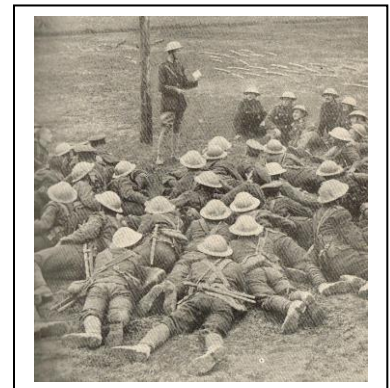


(Right above: *At Beaumont-Hamel looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences - The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – photograph from 2009*)

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 – the Anzacs - (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.

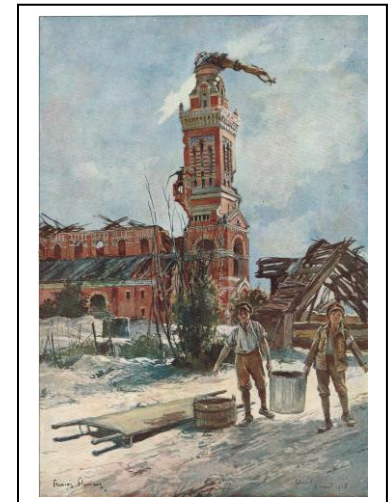
(Right: *An image purporting to be that of a Canadian officer giving instructions to those under his command prior to the attack at Flers-Courcellette, September 1916 – from The War Illustrated*)



On September 4, the... *Battalion* marched to St. Omer at 6.30 p.m. and entrained for Candas. Left St. Omer at 7.03 P.M. Arrived Candas at 8.00 A.M. and marched to LaVicogne. Arrived at LaVicogne at noon. In billets... (Excerpts from Battalion War Diary entries for September 4 and 5, 1916)

Two further days of marching were to follow before the unit found itself at *Brickfields Camp*, established in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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



Two more days of training had followed, much of it involving – surely for specialized personnel – communications with aircraft. Others had been busy laying cable.

(continued)

During the day of September 10... *Battalion left during the afternoon, in small parties, to take over the front line trenches...from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. But before leaving Brickfields Camp... all ranks from British Columbia voted on prohibition, women suffrage and for the Provincial Legislature.* (From War Diary entry of September 10).



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

By the end of that day, the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion had completed the relief and was posted in trenches in front of Pozières.

During those days spent in the front line before the attack of September 15 on German positions at Flers and Courcellette, the enemy had kept up a continuous bombardment of the Battalion positions; they had even mounted a small raid, subsequently beaten off. Working-parties, nonetheless, had been essential to carry forward all the necessities of the assault. These the Battalion had provided, as well as having been ordered to dig a number of trench-works.

On the evening of September 14 the unit had been withdrawn to trenches adjacent to Brigade Reserve. Despite the fact that its personnel had not ventured out of its front-line positions, during that first four-day tour at *the Somme* it had incurred a total of eighty-six casualties of which fifteen had been fatal.

It would not be correct, however, to say that the unit, even though now in reserve, was to play no role in the events of September 15: three of its four companies had supplied carrying-parties between the Brigade dump up to the two battalions who were attacking between Courcellette and the Pozières-Bapaume Road. And at the same time, the fourth company had furnished stretcher-bearers... *Killed 3 O.R. wounded 39 O.R.*



(Right above: *A stretcher-bearer goes about his duty, somewhere on the Somme. These men shared the dangers of the infantryman – which, of course, they often were. – from Illustration*)

On the afternoon of September 15 the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved back to *Brickfields Camp* where it bivouacked. The night, however, was to be short for all the personnel – including the just-arrived ninety-four re-enforcements – as at eight-thirty in the morning of the next day the unit had moved - most likely on foot - to billets at not-so-distant Warloy.

More of the same was to follow on the morrow: in heavy rain the unit had moved to the vicinity of Val de Maison where it had gone under canvas. Perhaps not surprisingly, the lodgings were found to be... *cold and disagreeable*. It is unlikely that even the call of congratulations from the Canadian Corps Commander was to suffice to warm the atmosphere very much.

The next day the unit was on the march to Bonneville where a count had been made of the casualties incurred since, and including, September 10: one-hundred sixty-one all told of which twenty-eight had been *killed in action*. Then a small draft had arrived; the billets had proved to be good; and everyone had taken a bath: spirits were high.

On September 22 the Battalion had begun to retrace its steps back to Albert and beyond; on the evening of September 25 the unit had been reported as back in trenches just to the east of Courcellette.

(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*)



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

The circular march from September 16 to 25 had not been undertaken only on a whim of the High Command. The general offensive begun on the 15<sup>th</sup> had continued long after the withdrawal of the first attacking battalions. As further troops were arriving on the scene, quarters had to be made available for them, thus the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion and others had been moved out of the area of Albert to free up billets.



The Battalion had then put in an attack on the next day, September 26. It had apparently succeeded in gaining about one-hundred yards of shattered ground, but not a great deal more. Relieved two days later, the unit had counted the cost: two-hundred seventy-six, of which fifty-two dead.

At the beginning of October the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be posted forward – from October 1 to – to the area of *Regina Trench*, this to be a major obstacle to the Canadians until its final capture on November 10-11. During this tour there had been little if any offensive action undertaken by the unit and most of its time had been spent in digging assembly trenches and jumping-off trenches, these to be used only days hence. They had also found time to bury the dead.



As it had transpired, those newly-dug positions were not to be used by the Battalion. Having incurred a count of twenty-three wounded during the tour, the unit had fallen back at first to *Brickfields Camp* before beginning to march west to the area of Warloy-Baillon.

(Right above: *Warloy-Baillon was also a centre for medical facilities, the Communal Cemetery Extension pictured here a necessary addition: over thirteen-hundred Commonwealth dead of the Great War – most of First Somme – as well as eighteen former adversaries lie within its bounds. – photograph from 2017*)



Whether those marching soldiers of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been aware of it or not at the time is not recorded, but the realization must surely soon have begun to sink in: for them the *First Battle of the Somme* had come to a conclusion.

They had marched by a semi-circular itinerary: west to Val de Maison, Pernois, Gezaincourt, then northwards to the west of the city of Arras to Gouy-en-Ternois, before turning north-east and on to La Comte, Hersin and, on the following day, the trenches in nearby Noulette Wood. By the end of the month the unit had moved to positions in the *Souchez Sector*.



(Right above: *The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'Place) in Arras had already been steadily bombarded for two years by the end of the year 1916. – from Illustration*)

This area, from Arras in the south to the town of Béthune in the north, was to be the destination for all the units of the Canadian Corps as they were withdrawn from *the Somme*. It was to remain much a Canadian responsibility for the remainder of the *Great War* apart from brief periods during the spring and autumn of 1917, and August of 1918\*.

*\*These exceptions coinciding with the battles of Arras, Third Ypres (Passchendaele) and Third Somme*

The late autumn of that 1916 – after the 1<sup>st</sup> *Battle of the Somme* - and the winter of 1916-1917 had been a time for the remnants of the Canadian battalions to re-enforce and to re-organize. There was to be little concerted infantry action during this period apart from the everyday patrolling and the occasional raid - sometimes minor, at other times more elaborate – against enemy positions.



(Right above: *The once-village of Souchez already looked like this by 1915 when it was the responsibility of the French Army. – from Le Miroir*)

There had been of course, the constant trickle of casualties, for the most part occasioned by the enemy artillery and snipers. However, it was mostly sickness and dental work that had kept the medical services busy during this period.

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



The 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diarist for the months of January and February almost inevitably begins his sparse comments with a report on the day's weather. In all fairness to him, on most days there appears to have been little else to talk about.

(continued)

The unit had been ordered to various sectors of the front and rear; in the latter areas – where in fact the majority of this time was spent - there were usually training exercises to be undertaken and working-parties to be organized; in the forward areas it was the enemy artillery that often featured in the day's entry.



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



*\*Not to be confused with St-Éloi in Belgium in the region of which the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion had served during the previous year.*

For the first week in March the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion had served in support trenches before then having been ordered to the rear area in the vicinity of Villers-au-Bois for two weeks of specialized training.

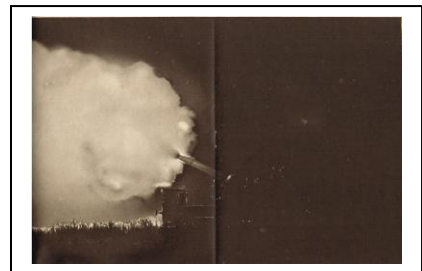


(Right: *Villers Station Cemetery, Villers-au-Bois, is the last resting-place for just over one-thousand two-hundred Commonwealth military personnel and thirty-two former adversaries. – photograph from 2017)*

Among these preparations were to be introduced some novel developments: the use of captured enemy weapons; that each unit and each man be familiar with his role during the upcoming battle; the construction of ground layouts built, thanks to aerial reconnaissance, to show the terrain and positions to be attacked; the introduction of the machine-gun barrage; and the excavation of kilometres of approach tunnels, not only for the safety of the attacking troops but also to ensure the element of surprise.

On March 24 the unit had been sent back into support and another battalion had taken its place in training. It was not only the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion which was to undergo this process but by far the majority of the entire Canadian Corps.

On April 1 it was noticeable that the artillery was now ranging onto its pre-selected targets and that the preliminary barrage was in its opening stages.



(Right: *A heavy British artillery piece located in the Vimy Sector continues its deadly work throughout the night. – from Illustration)*

On April 4 the Battalion had moved away from the forward area once more, to the area of Bois des Alleux. Apart from a bath for all personnel on April 7, the time had been spent in organizing and re-organizing for the attack which was then imminent.

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On April 8, those with special assignments had been ordered to their temporary units, and all equipment necessary had been distributed at dumps to the troops as they made their way forward to the assembly areas.

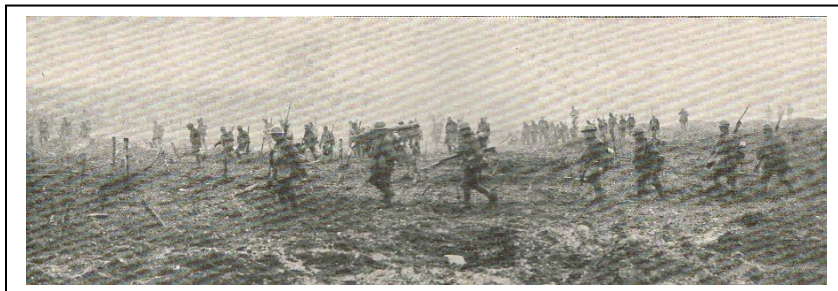
(Right below: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, has stood on Vimy Ridge* – photograph from 2010)

On April 9 in that spring of 1917, the British Army had 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 count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great 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 at Arras had proved an overall disappointment - the French offensive of *Le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

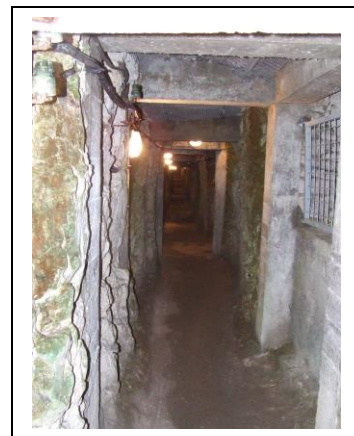
On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity\*, had stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.



*\*In fact, British troops had served under Canadian command.*

(Right above: *Canadian troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>d</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*)

The Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had not been responsible for the taking of *Vimy Ridge* itself, but for the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the southern slope and therefore on the right-hand side of the attack. The Division's objectives had apparently been captured on schedule and much of the remainder of that day and the next was to be spent in consolidating these newly-won positions.



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

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



The Germans, having lost *Vimy Ridge* and the advantages of the high ground, had 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 to be 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.



Thus the Germans had been allowed the time to close the breach and the conflict had once more reverted to one of inertia.

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

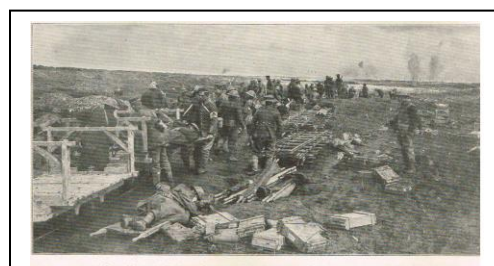
The attack by the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion on April 9, if the War Diarist is to be believed... *was carried out according to instructions. The artillery preparation was uniformly excellent and the German Trenches were practically obliterated. At ZERO HOUR, 5.30 a.m., the Fourth and Fifth Brigades advanced from their Assembly Area... At 8.05 a.m. the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved forward from the Assembly Area to its allotted position behind the LENS-ARRAS Road and formed up ready for the advance at 9.35 a.m.*

*At 9.35 a.m. on the barrage moving forward, the Battalion followed through behind it, and captured THELUS LINE without opposition and a few Germans were seen running...and every other man of the Front Wave advanced firing from the hip... Mopping-up parties...dug themselves in on the forward edge of the SUNKEN ROAD and established Headquarters. "A" and "B" Companies continued forward behind the barrage and gained their positions without encountering any resistance.*

*Hostile shelling...followed them but inflicted few casualties. Most casualties up to this time were caused by 'shorts' from our own barrage... Up to this point casualties were light.*

*At 12.26 pm the FOURTH PHASE commenced, but it was not until 1.30 p.m. that "D" Coy. could move forward to their position for advance. The advance was made under our barrage and the BROWN OBJECTIVE was gained at 2.15 p.m. During this advance, considerable enemy H.E. (high explosive) and shrapnel was directed on the Company and a Machine Gun...inflicted several casualties. The Woods were cleared and the lines established by 4.00 p.m... This phase ended with all the Battalion's objectives gained and touch established with the Flank battalions. (The above excerpts are from the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for April 9, 1917.)*

Thus the offensive action of the day as undertaken by the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion came to a conclusion. The casualties incurred by the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion up until this time have been recorded in his journal by the War Diarist as seven *killed in action*, eighty-seven *wounded* and a further seven *missing in action*.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *Canadian troops and German prisoners organize the evacuation of wounded of both sides from Vimy Ridge on a light railway still being constructed by Pioneer troops following close behind the attacking infantry. – from Illustration*)

On the next day, April 10, in the area of the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade's responsibility, the Germans had retreated as far as the Arras to Lens railway line close to the village of Farbus. The 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered to follow up this German withdrawal but, due to strong enemy resistance, had been unable to reach its objectives. Later during that night, the unit had been relieved and the Battalion had withdrawn once more into the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector*.

On the morrow morn it had retired again, back to Mont St-Éloi.

From there the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion had made its way back and forth to the front and rear areas on several occasions. On one of these, of course, as of April 21, it had been relieved and withdrawn to the rest area at Aux Rietz (today *La Targette*) where it was, on either April 23 or 26, when Private Guy reported *to duty*.

\* \* \* \* \*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was now to be engaged in three further major engagements before May 15, the date of the official end to this, the *Battle of Arras*: at Arleux-en-Gohelle in late April, and at Fresnoy on May 3 and 8. However, the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion appears to have figured in none of these confrontations.

The remainder of that month of May, 1917, spent in support, then at the front, and ending in the Divisional Rest Camp at Neuville St-Vaast, was to be a quiet affair – and so was the entirety of June.

Maisnil-les-Ruitz was roughly ten kilometres behind the front lines of that summer of 1917 and out of range of all but the biggest German guns. Before the war it had been both a farming and mining community but currently its barns and cottages were being used to billet Canadian military personnel. It was now a large Canadian complex that served as a training area, a rest area and also as a place where the various units could compete, not only in events of military prowess, but also in the sports that were played back home.

And while the officers and *other ranks* were still segregated, each group was to represent his unit in the various activities and events that were on offer – or ordered. Whether fortuitously or otherwise, it would appear that an *esprit de corps* was being built.

Private Guy's Battalion was to pass the whole month of June there, having arrived on the first day of the month and not to leave until the second day of July. That last-mentioned month was about to remind any personnel of the Battalion who had forgotten it, that there was still yet a war to be fought. While the last days of that period were spent in Divisional Reserve, much of the rest of the time the unit had been in the support and front-line trenches.

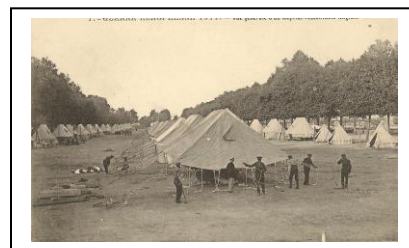


**(Right above: A Canadian carrying-party – some of the work done by troops when in support and reserve – on the Lens front during the summer of 1917: The use of the head-band to facilitate carrying had by that time been adopted from the indigenous peoples of North America – from *Le Miroir*)**

This pattern was to continue into August, during which period, on August 11, the Battalion was reported having been bombarded with gas shells. This, of course was nothing new, except that, on this occasion, there was a new odour detected. The troops were already all too familiar with chlorine and phosgene; now the Germans had added a new element to their arsenal: mustard gas.

The 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Vancouver) War Diary entry for that August 11, 1917, is brief: ***FRONT LINE LAURENT RIGHT – Fine day. Aeroplanes active; otherwise quiet. Casualties: Killed - 1 O.R. Wounded 2 - O.R.***

One of the wounded was Private Guy. After preliminary aid for multiple gun-shot wounds, he was then evacuated from the field to the 18<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at LaPugnoy. A Casualty Report offers more detail: ***“Died of Wounds” – Whilst in a bombing post he was struck by a fragment of an enemy shell which burst close by, and sustained numerous wounds in different parts of the body. He was taken out on a stretcher to No. 18 Casualty Clearing Station where he died shortly afterwards.***



**(Right above: 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)**

The son of William Thomas Guy, blacksmith, and of Anna Bertha Guy (née *Peach*) of Carbonear, Newfoundland, he was also brother to John-Sawford-Peach, to Alfred-Joseph Peach and to D(?)-Eddie.

To his wife Amy-Lavetta he had bequeathed his everything in a Will which he had penned on April 6, 1917, while at Seaford. Prior to that, on November 1 of 1916, he had also allotted to her a monthly twenty dollars from his pay.

Private Guy was reported by the Commanding Officer of the 18<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station as having *died of wounds* on July 12, 1917. He was buried on that same day.

**(Right: The sacrifice of Private James Walter (Walter J.) Guy is honoured on the Cenotaph in the community of Carbonear – photograph from 2012)**



(continued)



James Walter Guy had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-nine years: date of birth at Carbonear, Newfoundland, November 19, 1886 (attestation papers and parish records).

Private James Walter Guy 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 25, 2023.