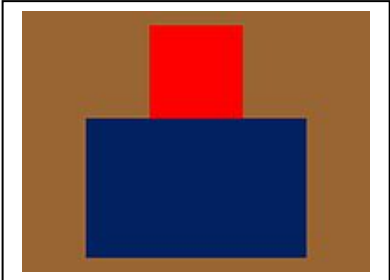




Private James Hanrahan (Number 69380) of the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick), Canadian Expeditionary Force is buried in Choques Military Cemetery: Grave reference I.L.25.

(Right: The image of the shoulder-patch of the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is from the Wikipedia Web-site.)

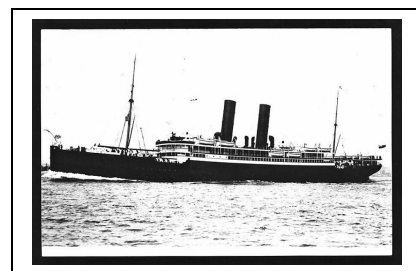


(continued)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, James Hanrahan appears to have left no trace behind him a propos his travels from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of New Brunswick; all that appears to be documented among his papers is that, by the end of the year 1914, James Hanrahan had made his way to Saint John, New Brunswick.

It was there in Saint John that on December 22 of that year he presented himself for medical examination, for enlistment and for attestation, all on the same day. He thus found himself taken on strength by the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*) of the Canadian Infantry... *having been finally approved and inspected by me...I certify that I am satisfied with correctness of this Attestation.* This certification was signed on that December 22 by Lieutenant Colonel McAuity, the officer commanding the 26th Battalion.

The 26th Battalion had been authorized only the month prior to Private Hanrahan's enlistment. The unit had begun training immediately in Saint John – at Barrack Green Armouries? - and continued to do so – with a week off during the Christmas period – until the time arrived for its embarkation for passage to the United Kingdom. The ship that Private Hanrahan was to board was the requisitioned *Anchor Line* passenger vessel *Caledonia*.



(Right above: *The photograph of the Anchor Line vessel Caledonia is from the Old Ship Photo Galleries web-site.*)

A number of sources cite June 15 of 1915 as the date of Private Hanrahan's embarkation but this was apparently not quite so: the ship is documented as sailing from Montreal on June 9 having taken "A" Squadron of the 7th Regiment of the Canadian Mounted Rifles on board. Her next stop was Saint John, New Brunswick, on June 13, where she welcomed not only the 26th Battalion but also Section 1 and the Headquarters Company of the 2nd Divisional Ammunition Column.

Caledonia sailed from St. John on the same June 13 to next put into Halifax, there to embark the 1st Draft of the 40th Canadian Infantry Battalion. Thus June 15 was the date on which she finally set out to cross the Atlantic to drop anchor in the English south-coast naval harbour of Portsmouth-Devonport nine days later, on June 24.

From there Private Hanrahan's 26th Battalion was to be taken by train to the coastal area of the county of Kent and just down the Straits of Dover from the harbour and town of Folkestone to where the Canadians were busy establishing *Shorncliffe*, a large military complex.



The 26th Battalion was to be posted to the subsidiary camp at East Sandling.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *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*)

It was to be a relatively short wait for Private Hanrahan and his comrades-in-arms until they were to be called to *active service* on the Continent. On September 15 the 26th Battalion took ship to France as a component of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the newly-formed Canadian 2nd Division. Private Hanrahan and his unit - following an inspection by the King on September 2 - sailed on that September 15 from Folkestone to the French port-town of Boulogne on the coast opposite, some two hours' sailing-time distant.

On the afternoon of the next day the Battalion boarded a train which, after a laborious six hours, eventually was to make its way some fifty kilometres eastward to the community of Wizernes. The War Diary then recounts that the men were obliged to march... *all night to Bivouac about three miles from Arque*. By the evening of the 17th the unit had marched to the larger centre of Hazebrouck and, a week later again, it had finally reached permanent billets near Scherpenberg, a small hill – there are no *big hills* - in Belgian West Flanders.

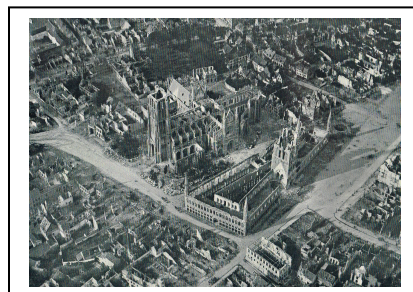


(Right above: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)



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

Thus the 26th Battalion arrived in Belgium, to the south of the already-shattered medieval city of Ypres, a sector which it would come to know well as it was to remain there for the best part of a year. And it was there that Private Hanrahan would become familiar with life in the trenches*.



(Right: *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*)

**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.*

(continued)

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: 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)



One of the many discomforts of that existence in the trenches was the scourge of scabies, a condition brought about by dirty conditions, lice, and also close contact with other persons carrying the mite responsible. On December 28 of that 1915, Private Hanrahan was admitted for treatment into the Divisional Rest Station being administered by the 6th Canadian Field Ambulance at Locre. The Ambulance War Diary reports him to be one of the one-hundred ten patients admitted on the day.

He returned to *duty* with the 26th Battalion on January 12 of the New Year, 1916.

In early April of that 1916, the 2nd Canadian Division underwent its baptism of fire in a major infantry operation. It was at a place called St-Éloi where, on the 27th day of March, the British detonated a series of mines in galleries driven under the German lines. They had followed this with an infantry attack. The newly-arrived Canadian formation was to subsequently capitalize on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which turned the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and then a resolute German defence, greeted the newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.



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

However, the 26th Battalion, albeit a part of the 2nd Canadian Division, had found itself playing a peripheral role: while other units had been fighting up to their waists in water and mud, the Battalion War Diarist could find the time to comment on the weather for twenty-two days in a row.

Private Hanrahan soon had a further medical problem: *measles*. This condition, the subsequent period of convalescence and the time that he was to spend in preparation for a return to *active service* was to render him *hors de combat* for more than ten months. He was not to return to his unit *in the field* until March of 1917.

(continued)

In his files there exist two sets of records which document this period, the dates and locations oft-times, however, the one not corresponding with the other. Both versions will be offered below:

Version a) On May 7, 1916, Private Hanrahan was admitted into the 7th General Hospital in the large French centre of St-Omer and diagnosed as with measles. On the 30th of that month he was transferred to the 14th Stationary Hospital at Wimereux before, on or about June 7 being evacuated across the English Channel back to the United Kingdom on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Cambria*.

(Right: *The image of Cambria in peace-time livery is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

(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*)

Upon arrival back in England Private Hanrahan was transported to the 3rd Northern General Hospital in the city of Sheffield, there to remain for a month. On July 7, by then having been diagnosed as suffering from debility, he was forwarded for convalescence to King's Canadian Red Cross Hospital at Bushey Park, Hampton Hill, there to be admitted for a period of only two days.



The next stop on Private Hanrahan's itinerary was in the county town of Epsom, Surrey, well known for its horse racing. The Canadians by this time had established a military convalescent hospital there at Woodcote Park and it was to this institution that on July 9 he was sent for a period of physical rehabilitation.

Version b) It was on May 8 that Private Hanrahan, while serving close to Ypres, began to develop dizziness, headaches and anorexia. He then reported sick of May 10 and was evacuated two days later to hospital in Boulogne – this may well have been, nevertheless, the 14th Stationary Hospital in the adjacent community of Wimereux – where he was kept in isolation until May 28.

On that latter date he was transferred to Winter Street Military Hospital for infectious diseases in Sheffield – perhaps the same hospital as in a) – for only a further two days of isolation. From June 1 to 15 this second documentation records Private Hanrahan in a Red Cross auxiliary hospital of thirty-seven beds at Hathersage.

From that last date until July 6 he is then further documented as having been admitted into Ranmore Military Hospital in Sheffield for convalescence before being forwarded - via the King's Canadian Red Cross Hospital at Bushey Park, Hampton Hill - to the Canadian Military Hospital at Epsom where he was also reported to be on July 8.

(continued)

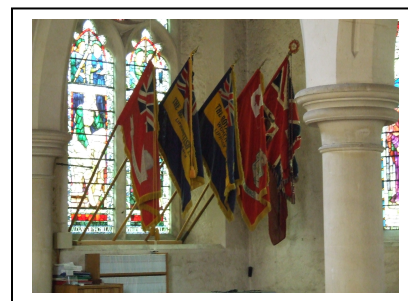
From this point onwards the two histories appear to concur: Private Hanrahan was discharged on July 14 from Epsom to the Canadian Casualty Assembly Centre at Folkestone, there to pass before a Medical Board which apparently had no hesitation in declaring him as... *fit for duty*.

Thus it was that he was *taken on strength* by the 40th Canadian Reserve Battalion on that same July 14. The 40th Battalion at the time was stationed at Caesar's Camp, Shorncliffe, back in the vicinity of Folkestone, and it was there that Private Hanrahan was to serve for almost six months, until January of the following year, 1917.

January 4 of the New Year, 1917, saw Private Hanrahan transferred to another reserve battalion, the 26th*. In fact, the 26th Reserve Battalion (*Nova Scotia*) was officially formed on only that same date, having bureaucratically absorbed personnel from three other battalions, one of which had been Private Hanrahan's 40th.

While it was formed at Shorncliffe on January 4, it was to be only four days later, on the 8th, that this new unit was transported to the Canadian military complex at Bramshott Camp in the southern English county of Hampshire.

**Not to be confused with the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick) which was on active service on the Continent and to which Private Hanrahan was soon to return.*



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

For Private Hanrahan, this change of units was to be of fleeting duration; on February 1 he took ship, likely in the port of Southampton, and sailed to France. The ship docked in Le Havre on the following day and those on board reported to the Canadian Base Depot established by that time in the vicinity of the city.



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

There he was to languish for three weeks before being despatched in a re-enforcement draft of fifty-three *other ranks* to the 2nd Entrenching Battalion*.

**It having been found that it was more efficient to have specialized formations – strong physique and experienced in such work in civilian life – rather than regular battalions for the task of digging trenches and the like, the entrenching battalions came into being.*

Held behind the line to be ready for duty wherever and whenever necessary, they were often used as a unit to which re-enforcements could be attached temporarily – and yet gainfully employed - until the moment was right for these drafts to report to the units to which they had been despatched.

(continued)

(Right above: *Canadian sappers building a road... 'in liberated territory'* – from *Le Miroir* or *Illustration*)



From there it was to be yet a further month before, on March 27 of 1917, Private Hanrahan was ordered to report – in a re-enforcement draft of thirty *other ranks* - to his unit, the 26th Battalion, *in the field*.

* * * * *

In the meantime, during the period of Private Hanrahan's absence, the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*) had been busy.

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

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



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. In the meanwhile, the 26th Battalion was still in the area of *St-Éloi*, serving in the left sub-sector.

It was '*standing to*' in the same place for the following four days. Thus it had taken no part in the counter-strike of the day following the attack, June 3, an ill-managed operation which proved to be a costly disaster for the Canadians.



In fact, on June 7, the Battalion found itself retiring to a camp in the rear rather than advancing towards the fighting.

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



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

(continued)

On the next day, however, the unit was sent forward to relieve troops in support positions in the area of *Railway Dugouts*, two kilometres distant behind the places which had seen the heaviest fighting but still well within the range of the German artillery. There it remained until June 12 when, once more, it withdrew to the rear.



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

By the time that the 26th Battalion moved up to the front again on the next day, the action at *Mount Sorrel* and vicinity was all but over. During the night of June 12-13 the Canadians had once again attacked and, thanks to better organization and a good artillery barrage, had taken back almost all of the lost ground. Both sides were now back much where they had been just eleven days earlier.

(Right below: *Hill 60* as it remains a century after the events of 1916-1917 in the area of *Mount Sorrel*, the village of *Hooze*, *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)

It must be added, however, that although units from the Canadian 1st and 2nd Divisions saw action during those eleven days, it was the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division on whose sector that the German onslaught fell, and it was that same Division which, logically, was to bear the brunt of the fighting.



Thus, after having played its role at *Mount Sorrel*, the 26th Battalion was relieved and withdrew to Camp “D” on June 20.

The second half of that following month of July was spent at first in *Alberta Camp* and then further back again, at Brigade Reserve in the Vierstraat Sector. However, on the other hand, the Battalion was then posted back into the trenches for twenty-two of the first twenty-four days of August.

Having retired to *Alberta Camp* near *Reninghelst* on August 25, the 26th Battalion prepared to leave Belgium. The Regimental War Diarist noted in his entry of that day: *All ranks in the best of spirits anticipating the move and eager to effect all details in the number of days training, SOMME OPERATIONS.*

The training area for the 26th Battalion was at *Tilques*, back over the border in northern France and in the vicinity of the larger centre of *St-Omer*. It would require three successive days of marching for the unit to reach its billets at *Éperlecques* by August 28 before commencing training on the morrow. One of the first items on the agenda of the 29th was the replacement of the Canadian-made Ross rifles by its British counterpart, the short Lee-Enfield Mark III.

A week later the Battalion marched to the railway-station in Arcques to entrain for the journey south to Conteville. A day spent resting in billets was followed by five more on foot *not* resting, a march which terminated on September 11 at the Brickfields (*la Briqueterie*), a large military camp in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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

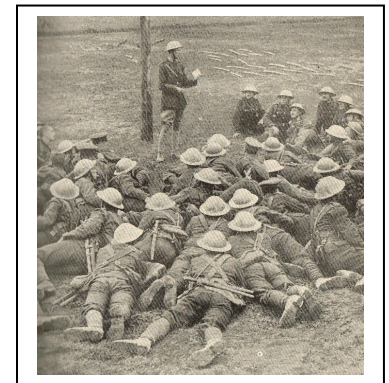
By that September 11, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for well over two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the space of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.



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

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

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



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

On September 15, a general attack ordered by the British High Command was undertaken, the Canadians playing an important role in the offensive. The 26th Battalion was in reserve at the outset and, as such, did not move forward until five o'clock in the afternoon, twelve hours after the initial assault, at which time it re-enforced the efforts of the 22nd and 24th Battalions.



On the following day the 26th Battalion, according to its War Diary, was moved to the relative safety of a succession of shell holes, apparently staying there all day and... *where the most intense shelling was endured by the battalion throughout this entire day.*

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

On the 17th the unit was moved once more and took up positions in a sunken road, to once again remain there all day. The only exception was that of 'B' Company which assisted in an attack delivered by the 24th Battalion before also it moved to the sunken road. The attack in question... *met with considerable opposition and rifle and machine gun fire was very heavy.*

By the time of its relief at three o'clock in the morning of September 18, the 26th Battalion had incurred a total of three-hundred eight casualties.

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

On September 27 the Battalion had been ordered forward once again, on this occasion to play a role in *the Battle of Thiepval Ridge*, more specifically on the right flank, in the area of *Regina Trench*. The operation had proved to be a further costly failure for the price of one-hundred eighty-two more casualties.

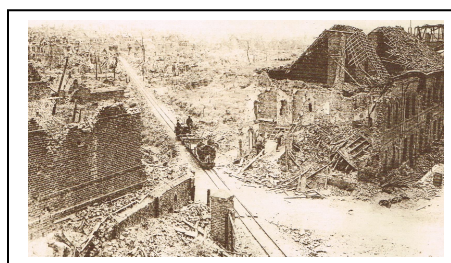
(Right: *Regina Trench Cemetery and behind it, some of the ground on which the Canadian battalions fought in the autumn of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)

After one more local attack at the beginning of October, the 26th Battalion had been withdrawn from *the Somme* and thereupon posted to a sector in the mining area of Lens, to the north of the city of Arras.

(Right: *The city of Lens as it was to be in 1917 – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)

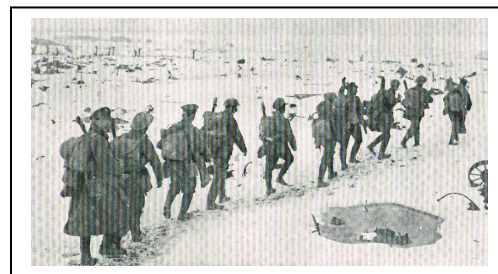
The months of November through until - and including - March of 1917, all appear, according to the Battalion War Diarist, to have more or less followed the often-described pattern of trench warfare, and were all spent in that same area just to the north of Arras. The rare infantry action was that of localized raids – by both sides – and most casualties were due to German artillery activity and to his snipers.

(Right above: *The city of Arras was to endure four years of bombardment during the Great War; the Grand'Place (Grande Place) already looked like this by March of 1917 and more was to follow. – from Le Miroir*)



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

From the middle of March the Canadians, battalion by battalion, were beginning to withdraw to the rear areas for training for the upcoming British offensive of that spring. At the time of Private Hanrahan's return to his unit – the exact date of which appears not to be recorded - the 26th Battalion was undergoing intensive training in the rear area at Grand Servins, on ground that had been re-arranged so as to resemble the terrain which was soon to be attacked.



It was only on April 8 that Private Hanrahan and his comrades-in-arms began to move into their assembly areas for the attack of the following morning – although *not* via those well-known tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety.

* * * * *

On April 9, 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 daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the entire Great War for the British, one of the only positive episodes being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

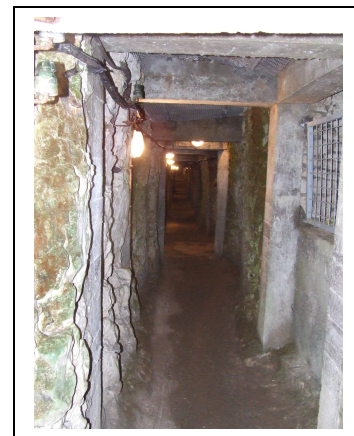


While the British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive was to be a disaster.

(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands 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 under its command - stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

The Canadian 2nd Division was not responsible for the Ridge itself, thus the 26th Battalion had been involved in the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the slope and on the right-hand – the southerly - side of the attack. It had cleared its objective in thirty-two minutes and spent the rest of that April 9 consolidating the captured trenches against the anticipated German counter-attacks – which never really did materialize.



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

(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, equipped 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 Germans, having lost Vimy Ridge and the advantages of the high ground, retreated some three kilometres in front of the Canadians whose further offensives were less successful than that of Easter Monday; while some progress at times was made – at Arleux-en-Gohelle, for example - German counter-attacks often re-claimed ground from the British and Canadian troops – as at Fresnoy in early May.



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

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

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

After the *official* end of the Battle of Arras, the remainder of the month of May, then June, July and the first days of August were again to be spent in the daily grind of trench warfare.

(Right: *A Canadian working-party loading up during the summer of 1917, somewhere in France: even when out of the forward area a soldier's work was never done. The use of head-bands was adopted from a practice employed by Canada's indigenous peoples. – from Le Miroir*)



Apart from routine patrolling by both sides and the raids – so appreciated by High Command: so loathed by the lowly soldier who undertook them - there was to be little in the way of concerted infantry action, most casualties still being due to enemy artillery aided and abetted by his snipers. Towards the end of July and while in reserve at Bois des Bouvigney, the 26th Battalion began to train for things to come.

Private Hanrahan, however, no longer had any role to play.

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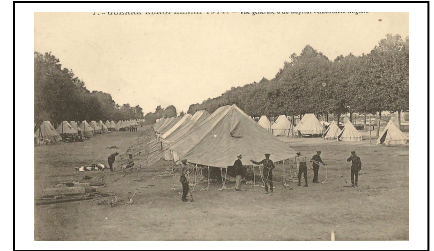
26th Battalion War Diary entries for July 3 and 4*, 1917: Angres (Lens left sub-sector)

**July 3 – Brigade Reserve. Weather fine.
Shelling of batteries by enemy in vicinity of Batt'n. billets.
Our own artillery active.**

**July 4 – Brigade Reserve. Weather showery.
Enemy artillery active against batteries in our vicinity caused us a few casualties. Our
artillery (heavy) very active.**

***Both dates are cited among Private Hanrahan's documents.**

Private Hanrahan was evacuated on July 4 to the 1st Casualty Clearing Station established at the time near to the community of Choques. He had incurred gun-shot wounds, likely from shrapnel, to the right buttock and to his left knee. There at the CCS he was immediately deemed by the medical staff to be *dangerously ill*.



(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 – from a vintage post-card)

The son of John Hanrahan, labourer, to whom he had willed his everything, and of Anastasia Hanrahan (née Hennessey) of Low Point, Conception Bay, District of Bay de Verde, he was also older brother of Martin.

Private Hanrahan was reported by the Commanding Officer of the 1st Casualty Clearing Station as having *died of wounds* on July 8 of 1917. He was subsequently buried by a Reverend Henry in the British Cemetery, Choques, where he rests to this day.

James Hanrahan had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-two years and seven months: *declared* date of birth – from his attestation papers - at Low Point, Conception Bay, Newfoundland, May 20, 1892. However, the Roman Catholic Parish Records for Bay de Verde cite May 19, 1890.

Private James Hanrahan was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 26, 2023.