

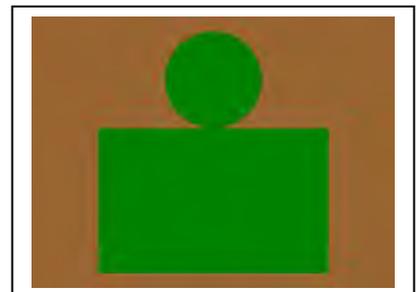


C · F · HICKMAN

Private Charles Forsey Hickman (Number 871526) of the 44th Battalion (*Manitoba*), 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 44th Battalion (Manitoba) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

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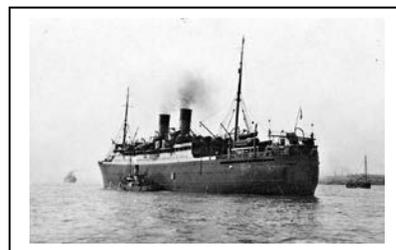
His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of both packer and shipper, Charles Forsey Hickman was possibly the young man documented as having arrived in North Sydney, Nova Scotia, from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland, on May 21, 1912, on board the SS *Ivermore*. The vessel's passenger list also documents him as being on his way to join his brother to work as a labourer* - although Toronto is named as his destination at the time. By the time of his enlistment his place of residence was noted as 407, Cumberland Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**All this preceding information a propos immigration needs to be confirmed.*

He is next reported as having presented himself for medical examination, for enlistment and also for attestation in Winnipeg all on the same March 17 of 1916. On the same day, Private Hickman was attached to the 183rd Overseas Battalion (*Manitoba Beavers*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, even undergoing the formality of being... *finally approved and inspected* by the officer commanding, Lieutenant-Colonel Edgecombe.

It was then to be some seven months before Private Hickman took passage for overseas service with the 183rd Battalion. The unit sailed on two vessels, His Majesty's Transports *Missanabie* and *Saxonia* from the port of Halifax, Nova Scotia, although on which ship was to be found Private Hickman appears not to be documented.

On board *Missanabie* there was also the 152nd Battalion of Canadian Infantry and the 8th Draft of the Canadian Army Service Corps Training Depot Number 2. *Saxonia* was also carrying the 175th and 179th Battalions of Canadian Infantry to the United Kingdom, plus a draft of the 55th Battery of the Canadian Field Artillery.



(Right above and below: *The photographs of Missanabie (above) and Saxonia are from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

The two ships sailed on October 4, 1916, the 183rd Battalion having embarked the day before, and both arrived in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on October 13. Private Hickman and his comrades-in-arms were immediately transported by train from there to Witley Military Camp in the county of Surrey for further training and organization, the 183rd Battalion being absorbed by the 144th Battalion (*Winnipeg Rifles*) only days afterwards, on October 26.



**By the end of that November the 183rd Battalion had, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist, its personnel all having been dispersed to other units.*

Some two months later again, Private Hickman was transferred once more when the 144th Battalion was in its turn absorbed by the 18th Canadian (*Reserve*) Battalion on January 12 of 1917. This unit was stationed at the time in the vicinity of the English south-coast community of Seaford and it was there that Private Hickman spent his final month in England. During this period, on February 2, he took the time to write a will in which he bequeathed his everything to his parents.

Transfer to the Continent was imminent.

(Right below: *The mortuary chapel and a part of the military plot in Seaford Cemetery in which are buried two Newfoundlanders – photograph from 2016*)

On February 16 of 1917 Private Hickman was transferred to another unit for the last time, on this occasion to the 44th Battalion (*Manitoba*). He then took passage to France – likely through Southampton and then through the French port-city of Le Havre situated at the estuary of the River Seine – on the 17th, upon arrival there to report to the Canadian Infantry Base Depot established nearby.



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

Things were then to happen fast for Private Hickman: on February 17 he was despatched as one of a reinforcement draft of sixty-eight *other ranks* to the parent unit of the 44th Battalion *in the field*. The draft reported to *duty* five days following, on February 22.



The 44th Battalion was, at the time of Private Hickman's arrival, serving in reserve in the area of Chateau de la Haie, to the south-west of the city and mining centre of Lens. On the morrow, however, it was to relieve the 47th Battalion, in the front line near Cabaret Rouge.



(Right: *The village of Souchez, adjacent to Cabaret Rouge, looked like this in 1915, two years before Private Hickman's arrival there. – from Le Miroir*)

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The 44th Battalion (*Manitoba*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force was a component of the 10th Infantry Brigade of the 4th Canadian Division, the last such Canadian formation to arrive for service on the Continent and the *Western Front**.

**A Canadian 5th Division was assembled but it remained in the United Kingdom to act as a reserve formation.*

The Division had disembarked in France in August of 1916 whereupon it was sent to serve for some two months in southern Belgium and in proximity to the city of Ypres, an area where the three Canadian Divisions preceding it had also served upon arrival from England. There the new-comers were to quickly learn about the rigours and routines of trench warfare**.

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(Right below: *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 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: *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)*



Two months after its arrival in the Kingdom of Belgium, the Canadian 4th Division – after a short period of training in northern France - had followed the three *senior* Canadian divisions and made its way south to the area of *the Somme* to play a role in the ongoing British offensive there.

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.

On that first day of *1st 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 *1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment* which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at Beaumont-Hamel.

As the battle progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), had been brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians had entered the fray on August 30 to be part of a third general offensive. Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of two villages, Flers and Courcellette, three weeks and more before the arrival of the *44th Battalion to the Somme.*

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



On October 3 the 44th Battalion had entrained in the northern French centre of St-Omer and travelled the ninety kilometres to the town of Doullens, well to the rear of the theatre of battle. A further five days of marching interspersed with training saw the unit at *Brickfields Camp** (*la Briqueterie*) on the outskirts of the provincial town of Albert – and within range of the German artillery.

**The Battalion War Diarist calls it 'Bricklands'.*

(Right: *The once-splendid railway station at St-Omer – today in need of a great deal of attention - through which the 44th Battalion passed on its way to the Somme – photograph from 2015*)



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

On October 11 the Battalion had moved up into support; on the morrow it was in the front line. For the next two weeks it followed the usual pattern of trench warfare, albeit with more than the usual number of casualties. It was not until October 25 that the unit was ordered to the offensive, to capture a portion of the German *Regina Trench* system.

The venture was not a success: the 44th Battalion incurred losses of forty *killed in action*, one-hundred thirty-three *wounded in action* and twenty-six *missing in action*. It was not to be until November 11 that *Regina Trench* would eventually be taken in the course of a night-time operation.



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

Days later the War Diarist was still noting... *morale somewhat shaken...* and it was not until November 4 that the unit was ordered back into the front line.

Although the Battalion was to find itself again on occasion in the forward areas it was no more to be ordered to the attack during *1st Somme*. On November 27 and 28 the unit began to withdraw to the north and six days and sixty-five kilometres later, much of that distance covered on foot, it was in reserve in the area of Houdain and soon to enjoy the luxury of a bath.



(Right: *Ninety-eight years later, this is Regina Trench Cemetery and some of the area surrounding it, finally wrested from the Germans by Canadian troops in November of 1916. – photograph from 2014*)



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



The following months were spent in the same area, life in the trenches following much the usual routine although a large raid was undertaken in mid-February during which the Battalion suffered fairly heavy losses – one-hundred fifty-three all told. Otherwise, casualties were usually due, as usual, to the enemy’s artillery or to his snipers.

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



Towards the last week in March the unit retired to undergo training for an upcoming offensive operation. After the difficulties at *the Somme*, the Canadian Corps High Command was developing new tactics for both infantry and artillery.

Among these exercises were to be some novel developments: use of captured enemy weapons; each unit and each man to 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.

By three o’clock in the morning on the night of April 8-9, 1917, the twenty-four officers and eight-hundred sixty-five other ranks of the 44th Battalion had moved into one of those galleries, *Souchez Tunnel*, there to spend the next thirty-two hours.

On April 9 of 1917 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the War for the British, one of the few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign was to prove an overall disappointment, the French offensive - *le Chemin des Dames* - was to be a disaster.

(Preceding page: *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 – there was even a British brigade operating 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: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3^d Division, equipped – or 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*)



**While Battalions of the Canadian 3^d and 4th Divisions attacked the Ridge itself, the other Canadian Divisions were responsible for clearing the slope to the south, including the village of Thélus.*

The 44th Battalion, however, was not to play a role on that historic April 9; it was to sit all day in *Souchez Tunnel*, its task being on the following day, April 10 – the orders received at eleven in the morning of that day - ...to capture and consolidate, as an outpost line, the eastern edge of *VIMY RIDGE* lying beyond *Hill 145*; the Battalion frontage to extend from Left of 42nd Battalion to junction of *BESSY* and *BANFF* Trenches...



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

...By 4.15 P.M. “C” Company had established a post... A further post was established by “D” Company... thus completing the task assigned to 44th Battalion, in accordance with Divisional plan. (Excerpt from 44th Battalion War Diary, Appendix I) This had been achieved at a total cost of eighty-six casualties.

By the evening of April 10 the Canadians had finished clearing the area of Vimy Ridge of the few remaining pockets of resistance and had begun to consolidate the area in anticipation of the habitual German counter-attacks – which, in fact, were never to amount to very much.

On the following two days the 44th Battalion was ordered to continue the advance that it had started on the 10th and was thus involved in operations in area of Vimy Ridge itself and the village of Givenchy, at the foot of the slope at the northern end of the sector.

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

Excerpt from 44th Battalion War Diary, Appendix II: *Report of an Attack on Pimple Area, April 12*

Barrage was opened promptly at 5 P.M. and though somewhat thin was very well placed on enemy front line. All parties moved out promptly but owing to heavy ground conditions the attack fell behind barrage movement. The average progress of the 44th Battalion attack was approximately 20 yards per minute throughout. In spite of this, however, advance was carried out steadily and mopping up thoroughly done.



Casualties totalled one-hundred eighteen.

The son of James Hickman, fisherman, and of Harriet Hickman (née *Forsey*) – to whom he had allotted fifteen dollars a month from his pay - of Grand Bank, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Percy, to Joseph-Stanley, to Harold, to Susan-Clarissa, to Chester-Lloyd and to Ralph-Frederick.

Private Hickman was reported as having been *killed in action* on April 12, 1917, during the still-ongoing fighting at Vimy Ridge.

Charles Forsey Hickman had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-two years and four months: date of birth in Grand Bank, Newfoundland, October 9, 1893.



(Right above: *The sacrifice of Private Charles Forsey Hickman is honoured on the War Memorial which stands in the community of Grand Bank. - photograph from 2015*)

Private Charles Forsey Hickman was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

