



**Gunner John Goodison Hill (number 306625) of the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, is buried in Duisans British Cemetery, Étrun: Grave reference VI.H.14..**

**(Right: *The image of the Canadian Field Artillery (Style “A”) cap badge is from the E-Bay web-site.*)**

**(continued)**



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *clerk*, John Goodison Hill appears to have left little behind him a propos his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Ontario. Prior to his birth, his father, a Methodist minister had served variously in Twillingate, Conception Bay North, Harbour Main – and perhaps elsewhere – before moving to the United States of America where he was residing, in Pennsylvania, at the time of his son's enlistment.

John Goodison Hill, having at first named his father as his next-of-kin, then changed his mind and chose his older brother, Charles Rorke Hill; it may have simply been simply a pragmatic decision as both he and his brother were living in Toronto at the time, his brother's address – and perhaps his own – recorded as 72, Pleasant Boulevard.

He likely had been living in the city for a while as his attestation papers show that John Goodison Hill had served for an unspecified time with a Toronto-based Canadian Militia unit: *The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada*.

His first pay records show that it was on January 6 of 1916 that the Canadian Army first began to remunerate Private Hill for his services and also that, albeit temporarily, that he was *taken on strength* by the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade Ammunition Column of the Canadian Field Artillery. He had presented himself on that day for enlistment at the *Toronto Exhibition Camp* where he had also undergone a medical examination which had found him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force* and had thereupon been attested.

Two days later, on January 8, the formalities of his enlistment were brought to a conclusion when the Commanding Officer of the 47<sup>th</sup> Battery of the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, Major William Field, declared – on paper – that...*John Goodison Hill...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

Then, on January 29-30, he was transferred from the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade Ammunition Column to Major Field's 47<sup>th</sup> Battery and his designation transformed to that of *Gunner*.

The *Canadian Exhibition Grounds* in Toronto had by this time been established as a self-sufficient training area for various units from the Toronto area. While there appear to be no records readily available pertinent to the training period spent in Canada by Gunner Hill's unit, his personal military career at this time is documented as follows:

On March 1 of that year he was promoted to the rank of corporal (acting), this rank apparently amended after two weeks to that of provisional bombardier\*. Then, on either March 31 or April 19 he was transferred from the 47<sup>th</sup> Battery of the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, to the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade's Ammunition Column.

*\*'Bombardier' is in fact the artillery rank which corresponds to corporal.*

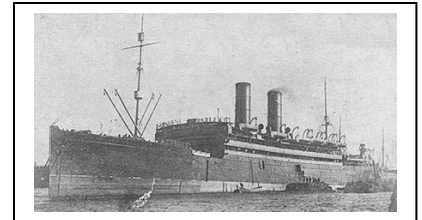
And on April 1, 1916, *Bombardier* Hill reverted to the rank of (provost) *corporal* – provost associated with the Military Police – to remain with the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, Ammunition Column.

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On May 29, Corporal Hill reported to a new posting at *Camp Petawawa*, the Canadian military complex in the Ottawa Valley and some hundred-seventy kilometres north-west of the Canadian capital. Fortunately, while the single sheet of paper in his file allows us no further information, the memoirs of another soldier in the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade confirms that the unit was to remain there until its departure for overseas.

On September 1, 1916, he began to allot a monthly twenty dollars to his brother Charles from his pay. Private Hill likely recognized this as being a sure sign that he and his unit were soon to be parting for service elsewhere. Only days later, the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade Ammunition Column was to begin the railway journey to the east-coast port of Halifax, apparently spending several days in the vicinity of the town of Amherst on the Nova Scotia-New Brunswick border while on the way.

It was onto the ship *Cameronia*\* that Corporal Hill's unit embarked on September 11, 1916. The Brigade's Ammunition Column was not to take passage alone for the trans-Atlantic crossing: also on board were the *staff* of the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery and the 47<sup>th</sup>, 48<sup>th</sup>, 54<sup>th</sup>, 59<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup>, 61<sup>st</sup> and 62<sup>nd</sup> Batteries of the same formation.



(Right above: *The image of Cameronia is from the 'At Sea: SS Cameronia – Percy's War' web-site.*)

And there was apparently still enough space left on board the vessel on September 13 – maybe because the Brigade had been ordered to leave its horses in Canada - for the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, Ammunition Column as well.

*\*It is still being argued whether at the time the vessel was a requisitioned troopship at this time or if she was on her commercial run from New York to Liverpool and Glasgow. Whatever the case, seven months later - when she was a bona fide troop transport and carrying some two-thousand five-hundred military personnel – Cameronia was torpedoed, on April 15, 1917, and sunk with the loss of two-hundred ten lives.*

*Cameronia* was not to travel by herself on this voyage of September, 1915: *Scandinavian*, *Northland* and *Metagama*, requisitioned ocean-liners, were all sailing in convoy with her, accompanied by the obsolescent cruiser *Drake* of the Royal Navy.

The ship sailed on that September 13: nine days later, on September 22 at about four o'clock in the afternoon, she docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool. There the new arrivals to England boarded trains.

They were transported towards their destination, *Witley Camp*, in the southern extremes of the county of Surrey. The train arrived early in the morning at Milford Station from where the unit was then obliged to march to its quarters in the nearby complex.

In fact, it was near Milford, it being a subsidiary of *Witley Camp* and established for the use of the Canadian Artillery, that the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade was to be posted and was soon to commence training.

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However, before that there was to be a period of several days' rest: as well as their horses, the Brigade was lacking guns, equipment and harness. All that could be done to pass the time was to undertake a series of route marches.

On November 1, Corporal Hill was transferred from the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, Ammunition Column at *Milford Camp*, to the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisional Ammunition Column based next door at *Witley Camp*. On that same day he was caught up in a small bureaucratic tangle: he was reduced from the rank of corporal to that of private soldier so that he might be once more appointed to be (*acting*) bombardier.

Possibly adding insult to injury, on February 1 of 1917 (*Acting*) Bombardier Hill learned that – as his rank was an '*acting*' one only – he was now to cease to draw the ten cents daily allowance for a corporal/ bombardier whose rank had been confirmed.

Then a month later again, in March, the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisional Ammunition Column was re-designated as the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisional Ammunition Column. It was not alone, in that a number of former 4<sup>th</sup> Division units were to be transferred to the newly-forming 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisional Artillery based at Milford during this period.



(Right above: *A convoy of ammunition on its way to providing shells to artillery units: This is likely at the Somme during the summer of 1916. – from Le Miroir*)

At the same time those units still designated as 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division Artillery were also to continue to train and organize in the United Kingdom until they were transferred to the Continent in May of 1917\*.

*\*While 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division had arrived in France during August of 1916, in time to play a role in the First Battle of the Somme, units of the British Royal Artillery were to provide support for the Division until the summer of the following year, 1917, when they were replaced by newly-formed Canadian Artillery units.*

It was to be after almost twelve months of training in the area of Milford – at times on the estates of the local aristocracy - that, on August 20-21, 1917, Bombardier Hill was despatched to serve in France and landed in the French port-city of Le Havre on the morrow.

His was not the only transfer to be effected during that month of August: it had been decided that the entire 5<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery should now be mobilized and ordered to France. Its role was not to act as a Divisional Artillery Group, since each of the four Canadian divisions serving on the Western Front by now had its own guns; instead, the different brigades and batteries of the 5<sup>th</sup> CDA were to be posted as and where the need arose. Its guns, therefore, would later still be available to serve with the 5<sup>th</sup> Division if and when that formation were ever called to the Continent\*.

*\*This was not to happen as the rest of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division remained in the United Kingdom for the remainder of the conflict, employed as a training formation and re-enforcement pool.*

Thus, at the same time that Bombardier Hill crossed the English Channel, so did all the other personnel, horses, wagons and other transport, ammunition, guns and mortars, tents, field-kitchens, and black-smith equipment of the 5<sup>th</sup> CDA. Within days the formation had been transported to northern France in the vicinity of Lillers and by August 29 was ready to be inspected by Brigadier General E.W.B. Morrison, General Officer Commanding the Royal Artillery, Canadian Corps.

Exactly where and with which unit (*Acting*) Bombardier Hill was now to serve for the next little while appears not to be recorded. After his disembarkation in France it may well be that he was to remain in the area of Lillers awaiting a posting. The trench mortars with whom he was soon to serve began to move to their postings closer to the line in the area of Barlin on September 5.

Bombardier Hill was to remain until early October with the Canadian Reserve Artillery\* before a need was found for him. On September 6 he may have attempted to make a posting more feasible for himself when he requested a permanent demotion from the rank of bombardier to that of driver.



It was still to be, however, a further twenty-six days, until on or about October 2, 1917, before he was then *taken on strength* by the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisional Trench Mortar Battery.

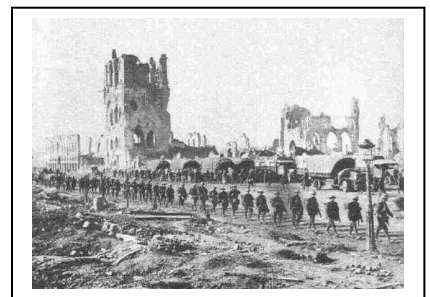
*\*It appears that the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisional Artillery may also have become known as the Canadian Reserve Artillery.*

(Right above: *French mortars of the Great War stand in the entrance-way of Les Invalides, Paris. Of different calibres, the smaller ones would have been operated by infantry rather than by specialized trench-mortar troops. – photograph from 2015*)

During the final weeks of October, the Canadian Corps became embroiled in the fighting to the north-east of Ypres. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, this British-led campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – at least *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.

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

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. From the week of October 26 until November 3 it was to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair the reverse was true with troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division finally entering the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.



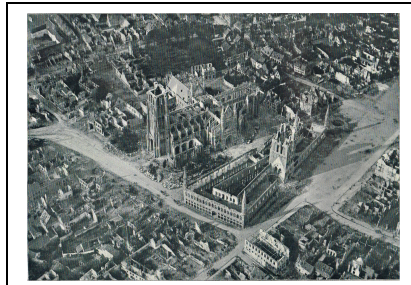
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*(Right: An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield during the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration)*



Whereas the great majority of the units of the Canadian Corps – all four of its Divisions – was to serve at Passchendaele, the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisional Artillery was to be the major exception to the rule.

After the *Battle of Arras* in April and May of 1917, the offensive during which, on the first day, April 9, the Canadians had distinguished themselves at *Vimy Ridge*, the Corps had remained in the sectors from Béthune to the north, to the city of Arras, some thirty kilometres southwards.



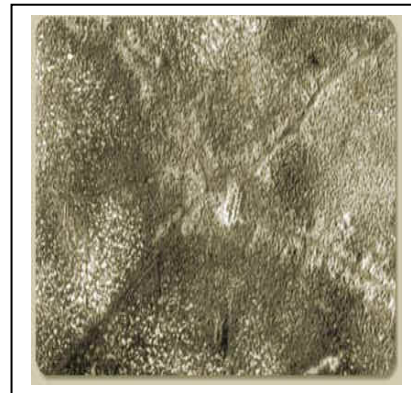
*(Right: A Belgian aerial photograph showing the devastation of Ypres as early as 1915 – the city is described as ‘morte’ (dead) - before the arrival of Private Batson – from Illustration)*

It was from this area that the four Canadian divisions were to be withdrawn in that October to fight in Belgium. As the infantry battalions departed so also did the supporting Canadian Artillery units. And in many instances it was the newly-arrived 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisional Artillery which was to take its place.



*(Right: The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war – from Illustration)*

*(Right: The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration)*



On October 1, all the current personnel of the 5<sup>th</sup> Divisional Trench Mortar Group had been transferred to units in the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions. On the following day, six officers and one-hundred eighty *other ranks* – of which Driver Hill was one – arrived at Sains-en-Gohelle to take their place.

On October 15, three officers and seventy-one men of this contingent then moved to Les Brébis, just to the south of the mining village of Loos, to take over a sector of the front from the 6<sup>th</sup> (*British*) Division.

It was to remain there into the New Year, 1918.

*(Right: The Canadian Memorial which today stands on Passchendaele Ridge in the outskirts of the re-constructed village – photograph from 2015)*



(continued)

This prolonged tour in the forward area seems to have been a placid period: it appears to not have been until November 5 that the unit's War Diary recorded its first casualty...1 Other Rank "Gassed slightly" and admitted Hospital. The first fatality, a Gunner Wain, was reported as having been *killed in action* on November 21.

At the beginning of the month of December, Driver Hill was transferred on paper, on this occasion to the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Canadian Field Artillery. This change, for the moment, was exactly that: on paper – and was of little consequence to him for the moment, since he continued to serve...*on command*...with the 5<sup>th</sup> Divisional Trench Mortar Group for another month.

There was, perhaps, to be a Christmas present of sorts during that month of December, 1917: the Canadian forces overseas were to participate in the national election. The War Diarist of Driver Hill's Mortar Group appears to have chosen not to make mention of the event, but those of other units did, and in some cases they reported a ninety per cent participation in the vote\*.

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

On January 3 of the New Year, 1918, Driver Hill joined – in person - the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery *in the field*. Only days later, on January 7, perhaps by now *Gunner* Hill for a second time, he was ordered on a course at the Canadian Corps Signals School - Pigeon Service. He returned to service with his unit five days later again, on January 12, but whether his immediate role was now to deal with pigeons is not documented.

\* \* \* \* \*

The 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, had been serving on the Continent for less than four months by the time of Driver/ Gunner Hill's transfer. Having been stationed at Witley and Milford, it had passed through the ports of Southampton and Le Havre at the same time as had Bombardier Hill – on August 20-21, 1917 - before having been ordered to take up station in the mining areas of Lens, Loos and that of Liévin where the unit was then to spend much of its time.



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

(Right: *The mining village of Loos-en-Gohelle as it was already in 1915, before the arrival of the Canadians to the area: the structures atop the pit-heads in the centre of the photograph became known to the British troops – and thus later to the Canadians – as Tower Bridge. – from Le Miroir*)



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Artillery units, unlike their infantry counter-parts, were posted for longer periods in – or just behind – the forward area but, of course, the casualty counts of the two services were hardly to be compared.

Gunner Hill's first posting with his new unit was a case in point: from the time that he reported *to duty* with the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, that unit was to be continuously serving in the *Liévin Sector*, from then until the end of March\*.

*\*However, that is not to say that individuals, gun-teams and other personnel were not relieved from time to time while the guns and the ammunition dumps remained in situ.*

\* \* \* \* \*

After the fighting of *Passchendaele* and then the withdrawal of the Canadians from Belgium - mostly during that November of 1917\* - the winter that followed had been spent in the same area; little if any confrontational military activity for that period is reported in any of the War Diaries. There was still, of course, a steady trickle of casualties, mostly due to artillery activity and the enemy snipers but the medical services were mostly kept busy by treating sickness and, perhaps surprisingly, dental problems.

*\*The 14<sup>th</sup> Battery, CFA, as was the case of Driver Hill's Trench Mortar Group, was not to serve in Belgium during the autumn of 1917, but remained as already seen, in the area of Loos, Lens and Liévin. It also was one of the few Canadian units not to experience Passchendaele.*

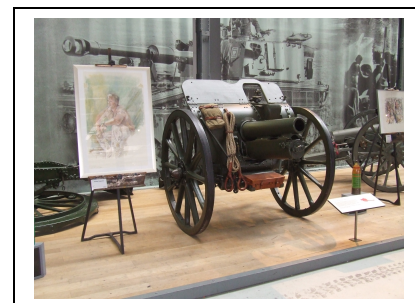
On occasion in October, November and December, the four batteries of the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, twenty-four guns in all, were called upon to put over a supporting barrage during a raid on enemy positions by the infantry – or defensive barrages when the Germans decided to do likewise. And if a patrol encountered difficulties and sent up SOS flares, then the guns would offer support.

Three of the four batteries were equipped with 18-pounder guns, the main medium quick-firing gun of the British and Commonwealth forces during the Great War. The fourth battery employed 4.5-inch howitzers, firing a larger shell. Each battery had six guns.

(Right: A *British eighteen-pounder quick-firing artillery piece, the mainstay of the British and Empire (Commonwealth) artillery forces during the Great War, here seen at the Imperial War Museum, London – photograph from 2011(?)*)

(Right below: A *British-made 4.5-inch howitzer which equipped some twenty-five per cent of British and Commonwealth artillery during the Great War. It is seen here in the Royal Artillery Museum – today unfortunately closed - at the Woolwich Arsenal. – photograph from 20012(?)*)

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Otherwise, during the day-light hours, the artillery engaged any perceived movement or visible targets on the other side of the lines, or put down harassing fire at night on roads, railways and cross-roads. There was also the occasional artillery duel – fire and counter-fire – and retaliatory fire on the trenches opposite when the enemy saw fit to target Canadian infantry – or other – positions. And at times it was the Canadians who were the aggressors.

But despite this, during the winter months, the Brigade War Diarist often employs the word...*quiet*...in his reports – although of course, everything is relative.

And then came March 21, the first day of spring of 1918.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in that spring of 1918. Having transferred the divisions no longer necessary on the *Eastern Front* because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, the enemy launched a massive attack, Operation 'Michael', on March 21, that first day of spring.



The main blow was to fall at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops stationed there.

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

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

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



(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

For the week following this attack on *the Somme* the Brigade War Diarist exhibits no sign of any concern on the part of the Canadian High Command of what had become by then a critical situation. It is true that on March 25 things were in readiness for an expected attack in the area of Loos-Lens but on the morrow it was reported that...*the enemy alert but not aggressive...and that...very little news from Somme region has reached us.*

On March 29, while Gunner Hill's unit was behind the lines...*All surplus kits stored and batteries ready to move out at two hours notice... And then on the next day...Orders to move at 8.45 a.m. received at 11.45 p.m. last night.*

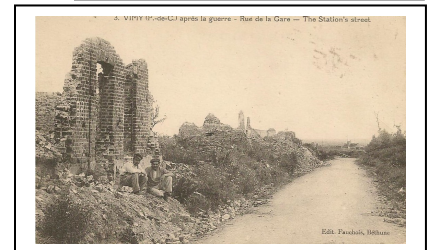
**BRIGADE moved to vicinity of MARŒUIL arriving at 1.15 a.m. at wagon lines, or rather fields... Batteries went into action near THÉLUS...Very little enemy activity.**

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

Thélus, adjacent to *Vimy Ridge*, is about a dozen kilometres to the north of Arras. The northernmost German attacks of their spring offensive in the area of *the Somme* were to fall in the area of that city. However, the Allies were not to know this and one of the reasons for the transfer of Canadian troops to the area was to forestall any German advance. The other reason was to release British troops stationed in the *Arras Sector*, thus allowing them to be sent south to the difficult fighting to the south.



The 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade was to move no further to the south than nearby Roclincourt. The following month of April to be served in the area of Thélus and Arleux-en-Gohelle, La Targette and Vimy, much of the time apparently spent in the construction of gun-pits and accommodation for ammunition, men and beasts, still in the anticipation of – although less and less as time passed – of a German attack just north of Arras.



**(Right above: *The French village of Vimy, overlooked by the Ridge of the same name some four kilometres distant, as it was just after the cessation of hostilities – from a vintage post-card*)**

After March and April of that 1918, the month of May was spent in relative calm further north, in places with which the personnel of the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, were already familiar. At the end of the month, the unit was back at Roclincourt, just north of Arras.



**(Right above: *Within the bounds of Roclincourt Military Cemetery lie the remains of more than nine-hundred Commonwealth dead of the Great War as well as four of their German adversaries. – photograph from 2017*)**

Thus a relative calm descended on the front as the German threat faded – the enemy had won a great deal of ground, but had gained nothing of any military significance on either of the two fronts. Nor was the calm particularly surprising: both sides were exhausted and needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to re-enforce.



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

The Allies from this point of view were a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were belatedly arriving on the scene.

An overall Allied Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

(Right below: *Le Maréchal Ferdinand Jean-Marie Foch, this photograph from 1921, became Generalissimo of the Allied Armies on March 26, 1918.* – photograph from the Wikipedia web-site)

The routines of the *Western Front* once more took hold. In the earlier days of the conflict there had often been problems of ammunition supplies – as well as quality. Now, however, the quantity of shells available appear to have been prodigious, hundreds of rounds being expended by each battery at night in nothing other than *harassing fire*. Whereas British artillery had supported the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division during its early months, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions during its first year on the Continent, the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diarist was now recording that Canadian artillery was supporting *British* raiding efforts during this spring of 1918.



Then on July 29 the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, having been serving in the forward area, was relieved and withdrew. Three days later Gunner Hill's unit was to be on the move. On the night of July 31 and August 1...*Orders for march and entrainment received at 1.45 a.m. Brigade H.Q. to entrain at AUBIGNY...* (Excerpt from 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary entry for July 31, 1918)

By mid-day of that August 1, all four batteries of the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, and the Headquarters personnel had disembarked and reached their destination to the south of the city of Amiens. The following day was to be spent establishing wagon lines, arranging billets...and sheltering from the rain.

Even though the British and Commonwealth Forces were the most mechanized of all the belligerent armies of the Great War, by far the greatest part of the supply system was undertaken by animal power. A great deal of effort and time was expended to co-ordinate the logistics of an army on the move and to assure the well-being of not only the humans but also that of the thousands of horses, mules and donkeys that served – and also suffered and died – during that conflict.



(Right above: *These are not draught horses but Royal Horse Artillery mounts with their handler just prior to the Great War.* – from a vintage post-card)

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***August 3 was devoted to...arrange details of ammunition supply to new positions. Each 18 pdr. Battery takes up 600 rounds by pack animal each night and D.A.C. (Divisional Ammunition Column) are arranging forward dumps near battery positions. Batteries will draw 600 rounds to these dumps each night, making a total of 1200 rounds per night to be placed at positions. 4.5" Hows. (howitzers) are similarly placing 1000 rounds per night at position.***

***Positions will be only camouflaged and silent until zero hour... All transportation is being done by pack animal; 50 horses and mules per battery to be used each night, making one trip of approx. 8 miles and another of about 2000 yards and return 8 miles to wagon lines each night\*... All batteries took up ammunition as above tonight... (Excerpt from 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary entry for August 3, 1918)***

***\*Not to forget the conditions of the roads and tracks...if any...***

**The guns themselves were not to be moved forward into position until the night of August 6-7, just twenty-four hours before the assault was to take place.**

**The 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Canadian Field Artillery was not alone to undertake this change of sectors. In fact the entire Canadian Corps was on the move. In the space of about two weeks, the four Canadian Divisions\*, infantry, artillery and others, were to be transferred from their areas of responsibility around and to the north of Arras, to the new front to the east of Amiens where the German offensive of April and May had been brought to a halt some three months before.**

***\*A few units, making themselves very visible, had moved in the opposite direction, north into Belgium, to give the impression that any upcoming offensive was to be once more in the area of the Ypres Salient - and that the Canadians were anywhere but facing them in front of Amiens.***

**The first stages of this huge and complex operation had for the most part been undertaken by motor transport and by train. However, once the troops had reached an area north of Amiens they passed to the west, encircling the city of Amiens to the west and south in order then to move eastwards into their new positions.**

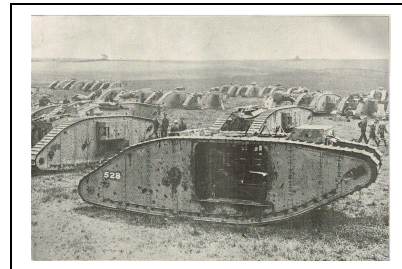
**And these latter movements had been made on foot and at night so as to give the German reconnaissance planes with their observers no indication whatsoever of anything happening. Given the immensity of the venture, it is perhaps somewhat surprising to learn that it worked.**

**The enemy was apparently to be caught entirely by surprise.**

**For the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the two days of August 6 and 7 were to be busy: (14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, War Diary entry for August 6, 1918) *Four guns per Battery and 600 rounds to complete dumps per Battery were brought up before dawn. Two guns per Battery were put in action and two in L'ABBE WOOD on account of lack of camouflage. All movement in vicinity of battery positions kept down. Enemy quiet and preparations for our attack are proceeding rapidly.***

**(continued)**

14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, War Diary entry for August 7, 1918: *Remaining two guns per battery and personnel were brought up last night and all guns put into action. Tanks have come up and infantry coming in tonight. Enemy did considerable harassing fire during the night, but no casualties in this Brigade. Brigade H.Q. moved forward...during afternoon. Communications tested and everything ready.*



(Right above: *In 1917 the British formed the Tank Corps, a force which was to become ever stronger in 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again 'somewhere in France' – from Illustration*)

On the morning of August 8 the attack began. There had been no preparatory barrage, thus that of *Zero Hour*, 4.20 a.m., was the first indication that many of the opposing forces had of the offensive that was then commencing to roll towards them.

The advances made by the attackers – British, Anzacs\*, French and Canadians – of that first day were to be the largest gains made by the Allies in four years of fighting: eleven kilometres in some cases. The guns now had to keep up with the infantry: at seven o'clock in the evening the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved its guns into the area of Hangard Wood to then receive orders some ten hours later, at four in the morning of August 9, to re-locate further ahead again, in the area of Beaufort.



*\*The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps*

(Right above: *Hangard Wood British Cemetery holds the mortal remains of one-hundred forty-one British and Commonwealth dead – of which fifty-nine Canadian (including 445312 Croak, John Bernard, VC) – and also fourteen French soldiers. – photograph from 2015*)

By now the enemy was recovering from his initial surprise and his resistance was stiffening: German machine-gunners, with their habitual tenacity were making things difficult for the infantry, their artillery was taking a toll on not only the infantry but also on everything else.

Certainly by August 11, the enemy infantry was appearing to be organizing for counter-attacks and on several occasions that day the artillery support of the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade was called upon – by the means of SOS flares – to lay down barrages on suspected German infantry assembly points.

(Right below: *Unidentified gunners working their 18-pounder field guns - in dry weather – from Le Miroir*)



The Allied offensive, by August 12, was still making headway but not in the manner of the first days; the advance was now about fifteen hundred yards – perhaps a kilometre and a half – on that part of the front on which the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade was serving.

On occasion, such as on August 14, progress in places was repulsed by local counter-offensives and some ground lost.

Enemy artillery activity was increasing, as was that of the Canadians as a greater number of shells per gun was now being brought forward. The German artillery was now back in prepared positions, some of them having been constructed prior to the *First Battle of the Somme* of 1916.

The offensive was still to continue; in fact it would come to a final halt only at eleven o'clock on the morning of November 11, three months hence. However, the Canadian units in front of Amiens were now to be replaced by French formations as the Canadian Corps retired to fight another battle in another theatre.

On the morning of August 21 it was the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, to withdraw from the forward area and to be replaced by a French artillery unit. By six o'clock the following morning Gunner Hill's unit had... *moved...back to Wagon lines occupied afternoon of 8<sup>th</sup> August near HANGARD WOOD... Very quiet all day.*



During these few days, the Canadian Corps in its entirety was to retire in much the same manner and using the same itineraries by which it had arrived in front of Amiens – and this move was to be as secret as had been the first.

(Right above: *British forces were not withdrawn as were the Canadians from in front of Amiens in August of 1918. In tandem with French troops they continued the offensive, as here in the attack against St-Quentin. – from Le Miroir*)

On August 24 the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, arrived in the community of Saleux to the south-west of Amiens. From there several trains during the day transported the entire unit to the north-east whence it had come just over three weeks earlier and, by noon of the following day, it had returned to the station at AUBIGNY, to the north-west of Arras, where it had entrained on August 1.

Only fourteen hours later, at one-thirty in the morning of August 26, the Brigade's guns, by then in position, were in readiness on the eastern side of Arras to support the attack which was to begin in ninety-minutes time.



*Zero Hour* had been set for three o'clock.

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

This was the outset of the *Battle of the Scarpe* which, on the Allied side, involved the British First Army and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions of the Canadian Corps, elements of which, mostly units of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions, were still being transferred from the Amiens Front even as the opening barrage at *the Scarpe* was taking place.

This offensive was to follow along the axis of the main road from Arras to Cambrai and after five days and an advance of some eight kilometres, was to bring the attackers up to the defences of the *Drocourt–Quéant Line*, these prepared positions and an important component of the *German Hindenburg Line*.

(Right: *Some of the ground on which fighting took place at the end of August and beginning of September of 1918: The Arras to Cambrai road – looking in the direction of Cambrai – may be perceived just left of centre on the horizon. – photograph from 2015*)



This having been accomplished, there was to be a respite of only forty-eight hours before the assault on the *Drocourt–Quéant Line* by the just-arrived 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions.

The operation was to last two days during which the fighting proved extremely heavy and the casualties high but, by the evening of September 3, the Germans were retiring to – and in some cases withdrawing across – the Canal du Nord, the crossing of which would be achieved by the Canadian Corps twenty-four days later.

In the mean-time, on the morning of August 26, Gunner Hill's unit was busy, and by eight o'clock that morning the unit was moving forward in support of the attack. As has been noted previously, the guns of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division were used in a free-lance manner, being meted out where, when and to whomsoever it was deemed necessary.

In this instance it may well have been working in support of troops of the 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, one of the objectives of which was the village of Monchy-le-Preux\*, taken on that morning by the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles.

*\*On April 14, 1917, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had been ordered into an attack which was militarily untenable. It had failed and the enemy had organized a counter-attack. The remnant of the Battalion, its commanding officer, and a single soldier of the Essex Regiment – ten men in all – had held off this attack until re-enforcements arrived. All ten had subsequently been decorated.*



*Although sources differ somewhat, the Newfoundland unit incurred losses of some four-hundred sixty on that day – killed in action, wounded, missing in action and taken prisoner – a count second only to that on the field at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916.*

(Right above: *Seen from the west from the British point of view, and also from the Arras-Cambrai Road, this is the re-constructed village of Monchy-le-Preux almost a century after the events of 1917 and 1918. – photograph from 1914*)

Some sources report that the advance of that August 26 was relatively easy; yet, while the villages of Guémappe and Wancourt were taken, the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary also reports that by the end of the day the enemy still held the village of Pelves as well as *Jigsaw Wood*.

Likewise the morrow, September 27, was also a day of mixed results – and, for the infantry, of heavy casualties. September 28 saw the Germans on the retreat yet they were still fighting hard and the retreat was far from being a rout. One of the Canadians' main objectives had been the enemy's defensive Fresnes-Rouvroy Line and – despite the best efforts of the foot-soldiers, and of the artillery which was to labour day and night – on August 30, parts of it were still in German hands.

However, these isolated areas were soon recognized by the enemy as being untenable and, as mentioned above, a general retreat was the only realistic alternative.

The *Battle of the Scarpe* having officially concluded on that August 30, the infantry battalions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions began to be withdrawn, to be replaced in the forward areas by troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions. For the artillery, however, there appears to have been no respite in the immediate future, the upcoming operations requiring a maximum of fire-power in support of the attack on the *Drocourt-Quéant Line* positions.



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

Thus the orders received by the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, Headquarters on the afternoon of August 30 read as follows: 4.45 p.m. – *Orders received that three guns per Battery would be placed ion position...tonight and that 450 rounds per 18 pdr. and that 400 rounds per 4.5" How. would be dumped at gun positions to join in attack on DROCOURT-QUEANT LINE on Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>.*

5.10 p.m. – *Verbal order received that guns and hows would not be taken up tonight, but would be held until further orders. The ammunition to be taken forward tonight. This amount of ammunition entails a great deal of work, the time given being very short and orders late in reaching us.*

At least some of the guns were sent forward on the following day, August 31, as well as supplementary ammunition. The remainder plus the Brigade Wagon Lines were brought forward on September 1.

Total casualties for all the month of August, 1918, had numbered two *killed in action* and twenty-nine *wounded*.

*Zero Hour* for this next phase of the British-Canadian offensive was set for five o'clock on the morning of September 2, 1918. Only two hours later, at seven o'clock, it was being reported that the much-vaunted *Drocourt-Quéant Line* had been broken. Thirty-seven minutes later the first battery of the Brigade was moving forward, to be followed in quick succession by the others, and was in action once more by eleven o'clock a.m..



(continued)

(Preceding page: *Douglas Haig, C.-in-C. of British and Commonwealth forces on the Western Front inspects Canadian troops after their successful operation of September 2 against the German Drocourt-Quéant Line – from Le Miroir*)

It was to prove a day of numerous casualties, particularly – as usual – among the attacking infantry, but also by the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade itself – a total of fourteen - when targeted and hit by a number of shells which also put a gun out of action.

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

Despite the infantry losses, by the next day the Canadians were following the retiring Germans so rapidly that in places the Canal du Nord was being reached and – worse – in some instances the foot-soldiers had outpaced their artillery support. The 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade was obliged to send out reconnaissance parties on that afternoon of September 3 to see how far forward the guns had to be moved in order to be of any further use\*.



*\*Given the previous years of static warfare, this problem must have been something of a novelty when it first occurred.*

On September 4, the situation now quiet all along the newly-formed front and the fighting having abated, the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division, whose efforts the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, CFA, had been supporting, was relieved by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division – more precisely, the 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade withdrew, to be replaced by the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade...and the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, which had been supporting the former, was to remain *in situ*, now to support the latter.

This was now to pose a problem for those whose job it was to position the Brigade's guns to good effect. The infantry was now closing up to the Canal du Nord and to give support, the Guns had to be at a range of less than fifty-five hundred yards. Yet all the ground now sloped down towards the Canal and thus towards the enemy who held the much higher ground on the other side of the waterway. The 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade's guns – and those of all the other similar brigades' guns – were exposed to the view of the German gun-layers.



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

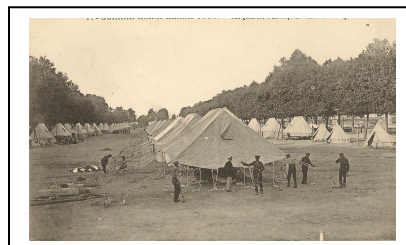
(Right: *The same area of the Canal du Nord as it is almost a century after the Canadian operation to cross it – photograph from 2015*)



The guns were taken forward over the course of the next two days, only for most of them, frustratingly, to be taken towards the rear area again when the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade was relieved by a British unit on September 7. Not only that, but there had been five personnel wounded during the time when the guns were being taken forward.

The majority of the relieved officers and other ranks now moved back into the area of the Wagon Lines. During the next few days the War Diarist reported that as well as rain, bombs and high-velocity shell were falling. There were aerial combats to be seen during attacks on – and the defence of – the observation balloons of both sides and the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade's rest area at night was – for a change - the recipient of some of that harassing fire.

Excerpt from 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, War Diary entry of September 17, 1918: *60<sup>th</sup> Battery Wagon Lines were shelled this afternoon. 15 casualties in men and 30 horses. Wagon Lines were moved...*



Gunner Hill was one of those wounded and was evacuated from the Wagon Lines to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Casualty Clearing Station established at the time in the vicinity of Agnez-les-Duisans.

(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 the Reverend Anthony Hill, Methodist minister, and of Harriet Sophia Hill (née Rorke) - possibly resident in the area of Topsail at the time of John Goodison's birth in St. John's, Newfoundland – he was also brother to Florence, to Charles Rorke, to Winnifred and to an un-named baby born in 1881.

Gunner Hill was reported to have *died of wounds* on Thursday, September 19, 1918, by the officer commanding the 23<sup>rd</sup> Casualty Clearing Station.

John Goodison\* Hill had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-five years and eleven months: date of birth at St. John's, Newfoundland, February 4, 1890 (from attestation papers) but the birth itself recorded also in Topsail Parish Records.

*\*Named for the minister who officiated at the marriage of his parents in Fogo on July 17, 1879*

Gunner John Goodison Hill 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,



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