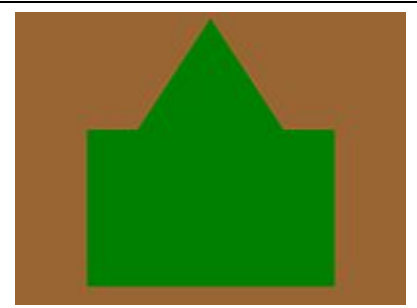




Private Kirby Bronson Hunt (Number 826706) of the 47th Battalion (*British Columbia*) is commemorated in La Chaudière Military Cemetery. Interred originally in another burial site, his grave was subsequently destroyed in later battles, as the stele pictured above confirms. Reference: Sumach Cemetery Memorial 19

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 47th Battalion (British Columbia) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force is from the Military Wiki web-site.*)



Kirby Bronson Hunt appears to have left behind him no records his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the city of Edmonton in the Canadian province of Alberta. All that seems to be known is that it was in or near to that city that he was working as a clerk for the *Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway Company* during the month of July of 1917, as that is where and when he enlisted.

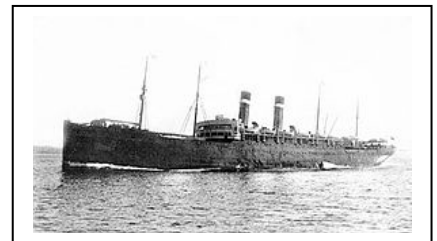
All his papers appear to agree that it was on July 3 of 1917 that: he presented himself for medical examination, enlisted to be *taken on strength* by the 143rd Battalion* of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, underwent attestation, and then saw his enlistment confirmed by Lieutenant Colonel A.B. Powley**, Commanding Officer of the 143rd Battalion who declared (on paper) that... *having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

**The 143rd was a 'Bantam Battalion', one that recruited men who measured less than the regulation height of five-foot-four-inches - a second source has three inches. It appears, however, that about fifty per cent of those accepted by the unit were to be of at least the standard height, as the recruiters were unable to find enough short men to join up. Private Hunt was just one half-inch below regulation.*

***Apparently already by this time Lt.-Col. Powley was a twice-wounded veteran.*

Although recruiting men from all across western Canada, the 143rd Battalion was based in Victoria, British Columbia. Thus from that July of 1916 when he enlisted, until October of the same year, he was training at Sydney Camp in the outskirts of Victoria; in October, these activities appear to have been curtailed. It was during the waiting-period of the late autumn then winter, that news filtered through from Ottawa that the unit was to become a Railway Construction Battalion – not much appreciated by Battalion personnel.

After a short ferry ride from Victoria Island to the mainland, and a somewhat longer journey by train to Halifax, Private Hunt's Battalion boarded the ex-Belgian ship *Vaderland* - by the time of Private Hunt's sailing she was *Southland* and flying a British flag – on February 2 of 1917.



(Right: *The pre-War photograph of Vaderland is from the Wikipedia web-site. On June 4 of that year 1916 she was torpedoed and sunk, four of her crew losing their life.*)

The 143rd Battalion was not to take passage alone for the United Kingdom: also on board *Southland* were the 218th Battalion of Canadian Infantry, a draft for the Number 8 Siege Battery and the Number 2 Special Draft of the Canadian Army Service Corps TD (Transport?). The ship sailed on the same February 17.

Southland docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on February 27, ten days after having sailed. Within days, the 143rd Battalion had been transported to the large Canadian military complex of Shorncliffe, on the Kent coast and just south of the English-Channel town at harbour of Folkestone. The journey may not have been direct: according to one source, the unit had been granted a few days of landing-leave in London while on its way there.

(Right: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



(Right below: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 2016*)



The rumours that had been heard in Victoria about the future of the Battalion were about to be proved true – perhaps worse. The personnel passed before a Medical Board soon after its arrival at Shorncliffe, and then in March were dispersed to the 1st and 24th (Reserve) Battalions and to the foreseen Canadian Railway Troops Battalions.



On March 23 of 1917, Private Hunt was one of those to be transferred to the 24th (Reserve) Battalion (*British Columbia*). Organized at the Canadian military establishment at Bramshott in the county of Hampshire on January 4, 1917, by the time of Private Hunt's transfer it had moved to a camp at Seaford on the East Sussex coast. Seven weeks later again, on May 10, he was once more transferred, on this occasion on paper to the 47th Battalion (*British Columbia*) which was already serving on the Continent, and by ship to the French port-city of Le Havre.

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

Upon his arrival on the Continent, Private Hunt – one of two-hundred seventy-four to report on that day - was *taken on strength* temporarily at the Canadian Base Depot at Le Havre. In existence since September of 1915, the Depot organized troops from the United Kingdom and despatched them in drafts to the units to which they had been attached.



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

Thus he was one of the one-thousand thirteen individuals ordered to various units on May 14, two days later. A further two days later again he reported *to duty* with the 47th Battalion, at the time withdrawn to St. Lawrence Camp – to the west of the Lens and Béthune sectors – where it was undergoing training.

Private Hunt was about to become acquainted with the realities of life in the trenches of the *Great War*.

(continued)

**During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, perhaps a hundred metres or so behind the front. The unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.*

Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

(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)

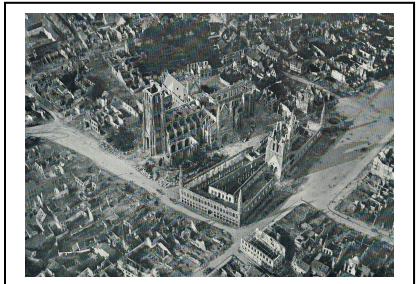


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The 47th Battalion (*British Columbia*) was a component of the 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 4th Canadian Division, and it was as a unit of that 4th Canadian Division that it had landed in France in August of 1916, some nine months prior to Private Hunt's arrival. The 4th Division was the last such formation to arrive on the Continent, having been preceded by three others.

**There was also to be a Canadian 5th Division but, once having been formed, it remained in the United Kingdom for the duration of the Great War.*

From the time of the arrival of the Canadian (1st) Division* on the Continent in February of 1915, it and the succeeding Divisions had spent much of their time on the Western Front in the *Ypres Salient** - one of the most lethal theatres of the entire *Great War* - and also in that part of the front leading from there to the Franco-Belgian frontier area. By the summer of 1916 there were four Canadian Divisions serving there, a fourfold increase on the numbers which had fought in the 2nd *Battle of Ypres* in April of the previous year.



**The 1st Canadian Division – until the arrival of the 2nd Division logically designated as just the Canadian Division – had also served on two occasions in northern France, from February to April of 1915 in the Fleurbaix Sector, and also in May and June of the same year, at Festuberg and Givenchy.*

(Right above: An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2nd Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration)

(continued)

It was not to be until the summer of 1916, during the month of August, that the majority of the elements of the Canadian 4th Division landed on the Continent. They *also* were despatched to the Kingdom of Belgium, there learning their trade, being used in tandem with the Canadian 1st Division, learning in and about the Ploegsteert Sector.

This arrangement did not last long. The British High Command was about to call on the Canadians to supply troops to replace those who had fallen in battle on fields one-hundred kilometres to the south. By the end of September, most of the Canadian troops remaining in Belgium were of the 4th Division.

One month earlier, by the end of August, a number of units of the 1st and 2nd Divisions had *already* been ordered on their way. The 47th Battalion, soon to be undergoing intense preparatory training, in little more than a month's time, on October 3, was also to be making that journey to *the Somme*.

Meanwhile, by that date, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for three months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault costing the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short space of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

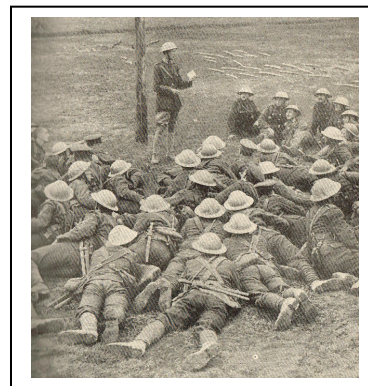
On first day of *1st Somme* all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment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



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

As the battle had 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 entered the fray on August 30 to be part of a third general offensive.

The first major collective contribution of the newly-arrived Canadians was to be in the area of two villages, Flers and Courcellette, a confrontation which was to occur five weeks before the arrival of the 47th Battalion on the scene.



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

By the beginning of October the 47th Battalion was preparing for its move to *the Somme*. At mid-day of October 3, the unit began a four-and-a-half-hour march to the railway station at St-Omer.

There it boarded a train which was to leave at half-past five on that afternoon, and to arrive twelve hours later in the town of Doullens. An hour-long wait followed by an hour-long march saw the unit in its billets at seven-thirty on the morning of October 4.

(Right: *Almost a century after the 47th Battalion passed through it on the way to the 1st Battle of the Somme, the once-splendid railway station in St-Omer is today in dire need of renovation* – photograph from 2015)



(Right below: *The small, country town of Doullens at or about the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

The remainder of the transfer to the area of *the Somme* was now to be made on foot. Stopping in places such as Hérissart and Warloy during a long and circuitous march, at half-past mid-day on October 8, 1916, the 47th... Battalion arrives at **BRICKFIELDS*** having marched via **SENLIS** and **BOUZINCOURT** and bivouacs on area allotted (from the 47th Battalion War Diary).



**La Briqueterie (Brickfields), scene of a large British camp at the time, was very close to the provincial town of Albert.*

The 4th Battalion remained on the site at Brickfields for only two nights before the majority of its personnel was moved to nearby Tara Hill Camp for a further five days; this is not to say, however, that the officers and men of the unit were inactive. Apart from the day on which they moved camp, they supplied as many as four-hundred personnel per day to act as working-parties, not always a safe job, as several casualties were to testify.



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

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

On October 16 there was a short tour in the trenches but at this time no reported infantry activity, the several casualties being due to enemy artillery fire. Thereafter, life for the 47th Battalion reverted to the routine of the trenches that it had known in the *Ypres Salient* in August and September – although it was surely now even less pleasant than on that former occasion. This relative calm was to last for just under a month.



Excerpt from 47th Battalion War Diary entry of November 10: 7 P.M. *Battalion leaves Brigade Reserve to occupy trenches for the purpose of carrying out a minor operation. It was scheduled for that night of November 10-11.*

The *minor operation* in question was to be an attack on the Regina Trench system. This German strongpoint and defensive system had already resisted several attempts to take it, all but one of these previous efforts having been both costly and futile*. The Battalion War Diarist recorded the following:

...The attack which was made at 12 midnight was completely successful, its objective being captured and held in spite of heavy enemy barrage and machine gun fire, a considerable number of prisoners and two machine guns were captured...

Unfortunately he was also able to record forty-two *killed in action*, fourteen *missing in action* and one-hundred ten *wounded*.

(Right above: *Regina Trench Cemetery – Regina Trench was adjacent to another strong-point, Kenora Trench – and some of the ground on which the Canadian battalions fought in the autumn of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)



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



**And, in fact, on the single successful occasion – also costly - the Germans had been able later to recapture the position. The strong-point was not to be definitively taken by the Canadians until on that November 11, some three weeks afterwards.*

Once more it was life in – and out of - the forward area, with reinforcements arriving to fill the depleted ranks. The Battalion was still serving in the area of Le Sars in the trenches as late as November 24, and incurring casualties - of which two dead - on the previous day; thus the unit had apparently been little affected by the decision that *officially* the 1st Battle of the Somme was considered to be concluded on November 18 – other sources cite other dates.

On that November 24 the unit was relieved – by another Canadian battalion - and withdrew from the field. On the next day again the 47th Battalion began to march away from the area.

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



(continued)

The Canadian forces retired from the Somme – some were leaving the area before others had even arrived – over a period of the two months of October and November. They left by a semi-circular route: at first in a westerly direction before then wheeling northward. Passing to the west of the battered city of Arras and then beyond, the Canadians found themselves posted in sectors just to the north of the aforementioned Arras and south of the town of Béthune, roughly a thirty-kilometre front running north to south, and comprising most of the coal-mining area of northern France.

Winters on the Western Front during the *Great War* tended to be rather dormant affairs, there being little concerted infantry activity except on a local level. There was the inevitable patrolling and the in-favour raiding – the 47th was involved in a number* - the raid a favourite of the British High Command who felt it was good for morale – although those who were ordered to undertake these actions apparently were not in agreement.



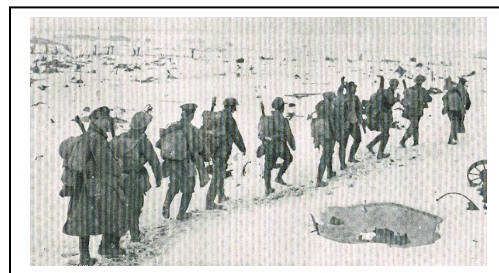
And most casualties during these winter months were inflicted by the enemy artillery – at times particularly active - and his snipers.

(Right above: *Arras had already been badly damaged before this photograph was taken towards the end of 1915; there was yet more to come.* – from Le Miroir)

**On two occasions incurring at least fifty casualties.*

Battalion War Diaries – including that of the 47th - during this period of December to March of the following spring, for days in a row, even with the unit posted to the front area, report things as *quiet*.

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



During the month of March many of the Canadian Battalions had spent much of their time in intensive training. The 47th Battalion, on the other hand, had spent a lot of it in the trenches at the front and it was not until the April 2 entry of the War Diary noted... *Rest and preparation for training*. Apparently on April 6 there was held a Sports Day.

On the early morning of April 9 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.



(continued)

The British campaign overall was to be another disappointment: the French offensive was to be a disaster.

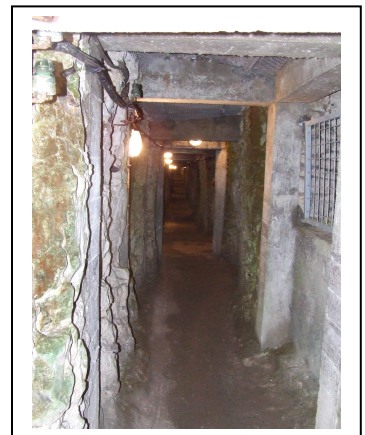
(Preceding page: *the Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands on Vimy Ridge* – photograph from 2010)

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity 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. The 3rd and 4th Divisions attacked the Ridge itself, the 1st and 2nd were to deal with other objectives on the right-hand, and southerly, slope of the summit.

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

The 47th Battalion appears not to have taken a leading role during the operation at Vimy. The Canadian 10th Infantry Brigade of which the 47th Battalion was a unit, had been issued orders to capture a promontory known as the PIMPLE. Originally an objective of the first day, April 9, the attack was postponed due to problems in the area of nearby Hill 145 – on which the Vimy Memorial stands today.

Even when the assault went in successfully on the following day the 47th Battalion was to serve *in support* and was called forward only during the evening of April 10 to relieve the 44th Battalion.



(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*)



There had been, on those first two days, April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on the previous days' successes had proved logistically impossible. The Canadians contented themselves with consolidating the captured positions and awaiting the expected counter-attacks.



By April 11, the Germans were damming any possible breach and constructing new defences. The conflict was thus once more to revert to one of inertia.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *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*)

The official conclusion of the *Battle of Arras* is recorded as May 16, 1917, but well before that date the offensive had lost the momentum of the first few days. British interest was already turning northwards to Belgium and the *Ypres Salient*, and to a summer offensive that was to become one of the most murderous of the entire *Great War: Passchendaele*.

* * * * *

May 16, of course, was also the date on which his papers document Private Hunt reporting to *duty* with his new unit. His introduction to that life in the trenches of the *Great War* perhaps as pleasant as it ever got as the 47th Battalion remained behind the lines for the next twelve day, training but also indulging in sports, parades and inspection and – for some personnel – leave granted, often back to the United Kingdom.

It was not until the night of May 28-29 that the unit returned to the forward area, the march into position being noted in the War Diary as having been one of... *very little activity*. Two hours later that changed as a heavy German artillery barrage welcomed the newcomers to the front. Not many casualties appear to have resulted from the shelling of that night but during the following days, until June 4 when the 47th Battalion in turn was relieved, a further thirty-three were counted.



(Right above: *Canadian troops under artillery fire in the area of Lens at some time during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

It was not to be until the night of June 19-20 that the Battalion made its way forward again to relieve the 78th Battalion. And if no-one else was too happy about the change of venue, at least the Battalion Headquarters Staff appeared to be, as the War Diarist saw fit to report... *the dugouts are very deep and by far the best we have been in*. How those other than the Headquarters Staff were faring was not recorded.

On the final day of this six-day tour in the area of Givenchy (*Givenchy-en-Gohelle*), on June 25, a *minor offensive operation* was undertaken by the 47th Battalion against German positions: *Objectives; Canada, Toronto and La Coulotte trenches as far south as La Coulotte Road*.

Casualty report: He was with his Company making a daylight advance on enemy positions in front of La Coulotte on the evening of June 25, 1917, and it was while advancing to this attack that he was instantly killed by an enemy shell.



(The photograph of Private Hunt is from the *Ancestry.ca* website.)

(continued)

The son of William Hunt and Elizabeth Hunt (née *Fisher*) – to whom, on October 20 of 1916, he had willed his all – of Bonavista, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Frederick-John-Weston-Carter, to William-Lewis, Victor-Eugene, Eveline-Portland and also to George Montgomery**.

He had also requested that a Miss Clayton of 808, Craigflower Road, Victoria, British Columbia, be notified of news about him.

***The Ancestry.ca website has recorded Eveline-Portland as born in 1871 – two years before her parents' marriage – and as deceased on October 10, 1881 – this last date recorded in Bonavista Church of England Parish Records as having been the date of her birth. Ancestry.ca also has mother Elizabeth dying in 1898; however, she is recorded as a widow on the will which her son made out to her in 1916. Details of the death of father William have proved difficult to find.*

Kirby Bronson Hunt had enlisted at the apparent age of nineteen years and nine months: date of birth at Bonavista, Newfoundland, September 15, 1896.

Private Kirby Bronson Hunt 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. Last updated – January 27, 2023.

