



Private Samuel (known as Sam) James\* Jeans (Number 715938) of the Royal Canadian Regiment, Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the stone of the Menin Gate, Ypres (today Ieper): Panel reference 10.

(Right: The image of the cap badge of the Royal Canadian Regiment is from Wikipedia.)

(continued)

According to the 1901 Canadian Census, Samuel James Jeans had emigrated from the Dominion of Newfoundland before the age of six. His parents, he, and of his four siblings had by that time moved from the south-coast community of Rose Blanche to South Bar, Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, where his father was employed as a fisherman.

By the time of his enlistment some fifteen years later, Samuel James Jeans was working as an ironworker. His address at that time is recorded simply as Sydney, NS, but in fact, in the month of February of 1916, he was in the area of the town of New Glasgow, for that is when and where he enlisted.

His first pay records show that it was on February 2, 1916, that the Canadian Army began to remunerate Private Jeans for his services, and that he had been *taken on strength* by the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) on the same date. A later medical record confirms the date and also that the enlistment had taken place in New Glasgow.

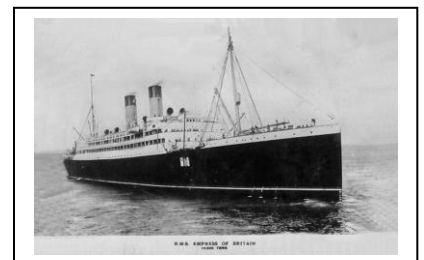
On February 26, more than three weeks later, he was attested in Pictou - likely the town rather than just the county. Three days later again, on the 29<sup>th</sup> – it was a leap year - Private Jeans then underwent the aforementioned medical examination which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force.*

These procedures all came to an official conclusion on March 11 – likely once more in Pictou on this occasion – when the commanding officer of the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Innes, declared – on paper – that...*Samuel James Jeans...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

Apparently the Battalion Headquarters as well as two of the four companies were based in the town of Truro, with a single company also in each of the towns of Springhill and Pictou. Whether much training was undertaken during the subsequent four months seems to be open to question, the personal diary of a young recruit from Truro recording the following: ... *no barracks, parade ground or firing range, the men were living in hotels, the YMCA, or at home... training consisted mainly of shovelling snow and marching.*

Maybe it was different in Pictou.

It was on July 15 of 1916 that the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Empress of Britain* in the harbour at Halifax for passage to the United Kingdom. Private Jeans' unit was not to travel alone: also on board ship were the 5<sup>th</sup> Draft of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, the 93<sup>rd</sup> and 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Canadian Infantry as well as the 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Regiment (*Halifax Rifles*), and the 8<sup>th</sup> Draft of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery.



(Right above: *The photograph of RMS Empress of Britain is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

(continued)

Sources seem to differ on the date of the vessel's sailing - it was on either July 15 or 16. But all documents agree that it was on July 25, after an apparently rough voyage, that the *Empress* docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool.

From there the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion was transported by train to *Dibgate Camp*, a subsidiary of the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe*, by that time already established on the Kentish coast in the vicinity of the town and harbour of Folkestone.

(Right: *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 1916)

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

(Right above: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century after the Great War as seen from the top of the white cliffs of nearby Dover: Through its harbour passed many thousands of Canadian troops during the Great War.* – photograph from 2009)

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

This was the fate to befall the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*): its personnel was eventually to be distributed to other units, primarily to the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion – *that* unit to suffer the same fate in January of 1917 when it was absorbed into the 26<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion.

Such also was to be the case with Private Jeans: on October 5, 1916, he was transferred to the 40<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion at *Cæsar's Camp, Shorncliffe*, and subsequently, on January 1 of 1917, to the newly-forming 26<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion back at *Dibgate Camp*.

However, it was during this period that he was to make himself known to the Battalion authorities. His personal documentation shows that he overstayed a pass for some thirty-nine hours, from midnight of December 3-4 until three o'clock in the afternoon of December 5. For this lapse of discipline Private Jeans was awarded ten days of *Field Punishment Number 2*, and also forfeited two days' pay.



(continued)

There now followed medical problems, perhaps related to his above escapade. He was admitted on December 22 into Etchinghill, a Canadian Hospital specializing in venereal problems where he was to remain for a month under treatment for which he was required to pay fifteen dollars, fifty cents per day, from his pay\*.

*\*The Army did not look kindly on soldiers who contracted venereal disease; even though it was not always adhered to - less and less so as the war progressed - there was in place a policy to penalize men who found themselves so diagnosed – as much as half their pay plus the ten-cents per day field allowance was often forfeited.*

*Officers, however, were usually treated more kindly and often the diagnosis was documented as NYD (Not Yet Determined) or even PUO (Pain – or Pyrexia (fever) – of Unknown Origin), thus allowing those afflicted to avoid any penalty – or stigma.*

From Etchinghill, Private Jeans was discharged on or about January 22, 1917, to the 26<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion which had, by that time, been ordered from *Dibgate Camp* to the Canadian military establishment of *Camp Bramshott* in the county of Hampshire.

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



At *Bramshott* he was to remain for three months, some of which, however, was again to be spent receiving medical attention – and some more of which spent serving a further seven days of Field Punishment Number 2 for being, once again, absent without leave, on this occasion overnight on February 3-4.

It was to the Military Isolation Hospital in the nearby British Army complex at Aldershot that Private Jeans was to be evacuated on March 2 of that 1917. The complaint in this instance was diagnosed as *parotiditis (infectious): mumps*. He then developed a case of *orchitis* – a swelling of the testicle(s) – which is often related to mumps.

Private Jeans remained in hospital for three weeks less a day before reporting back to duty with his Battalion on March 22. He then waited another six days before getting himself into more trouble - apparently undocumented – for which he underwent a week's detention and three days of the now-familiar FP No. 2.

At this point Private Jeans was ordered to *active service* on the Continent and it was on the night of April 21-22 that he crossed the English Channel, likely through the English south-coast port of Southampton and the French industrial port-city of Le Havre, situated on the estuary of the River Seine. On the morrow, from the disembarkation area his draft would then have made its way to the nearby Canadian Base Depot.





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

Some three-thousand re-enforcements arrived at the Base Depot from England on that April 22, there to be organized before being despatched onwards. Only three days later, Private Jeans was one of a total of eleven-hundred four *other ranks* to be sent in drafts to their new units. And it was to be only two days later again, on April 27 – the Battalion War Diary records April 28 - that *his* draft of ninety-eight reported to *duty* with the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Royal Canadian Regiment, although having been the senior regiment in the Canadian Army at the outbreak of the *Great War*, had not been among the first units to be despatched overseas to the United Kingdom in October of 1914. In fact, it *had* been sent overseas, but in a different direction, to languish for a year on the British island possession of Bermuda.

After that posting, in the summer of 1915, the Royal Canadian Regiment had been brought home to Canada and had then taken the same ship onward to the United Kingdom where it had then been attached to the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the newly-forming 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division. The RCR\* had then been transferred to service with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division\*\* on the Continent on November 1 of 1915, before being sent to the Franco-Belgian frontier area with the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division and then, at the end of March of 1916, to the *Ypres Salient*.



(Right above: *Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, Ploegsteert Sector, where the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division served in the winter of 1915-1916, a mine crater from the time of the 1917 British offensive showing in the foreground* – photograph from 2014)

*\*The RCR was – and still is today – a regiment, a force which may comprise any number of battalions: today, in 2017, there are three. Some British regiments, for example, eventually sent twenty or more battalions to serve at the Front during the Great War. Only a single battalion - normally one-thousand strong but during the Great War oft-times comprising a lesser number - of the Royal Canadian Regiment ever served at the front during the Great War.*

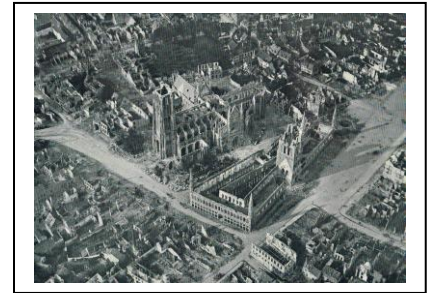
*\*\*The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. Unlike the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions and, later, the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division, it was not formed in the United Kingdom but, in an almost ad hoc fashion, of units already serving on the Continent at the time, and of others which were to arrive from England as late as February of 1916.*

The first months of 1916 had been relatively peaceful for the newly-arrived Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, also in the frontier area. It was in March, 1916, that the entire Division was transferred to the *Ypres Salient*, a lethal place at the best of times, in an area to the south-east and in the vicinity of such places as the village of *Hooge*, and those that now went by

English names such as *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Maple Copse* and *Mount Sorrel*.

(continued)

In April it had been the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, in a neighbouring sector to the south of Ypres, which was to receive the attention of the German Army for a few days. This period was not to be as tranquil as that being experienced elsewhere during the same period by the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion and the other units of the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division.

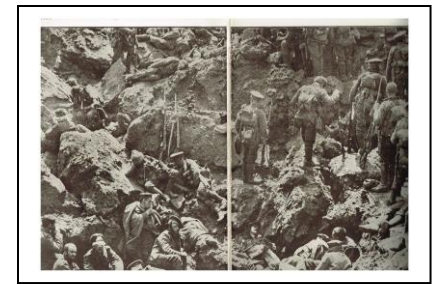


(Right above: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)

The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* had officially taken place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi\* was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it was here that the British had excavated a series of galleries under the German lines, there to place explosives which they detonated on that March 27, having then followed up with an infantry assault.

*\*Not to be confused with the French community of Mont St-Éloi with which many Canadian soldiers became familiar during the Great War.*

After a brief initial success the attack had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than had had the British, and by the 17<sup>th</sup> of the month, when the battle was called off, both sides were back where they had been some three weeks previously – and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.



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

However, as previously noted, this confrontation was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division affair and the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the artillery duels some kilometres away.

Its own first major action, some seven weeks later, was to be the confrontation with the Germans at *Mount Sorrel*, in the south-east area of the *Ypres Salient*.

On June 2 the Germans attacked the only high ground in the *Salient* which remained under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, in the areas of the village of *Hooge* and those other places of English-sounding names as listed in a closely-



previous paragraph. They are still referred to by the local people as such today.

(continued)

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

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, had overrun the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans were unable to exploit their success and the Canadians had been able to patch up their defences. The hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, delivered piece-meal and poorly co-ordinated, was to prove a costly disaster for the Canadians.



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

Ten days later the Canadians had again counter-attacked, on this occasion better informed, better prepared and better supported. The lost ground for the most part had been recovered, both sides were now back where they had started eleven days before – and the cemeteries, inevitably, were a little fuller.



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

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



(Right below: *A century later, reminders of a violent past at the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres: The area today is protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature.* – photograph from 2014)

The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had been caught in the maelstrom of June 2 and had remained in the forward area until the night of June 5-6 when it had been relieved and had retired to Camp "B" well to the rear. The unit was not to serve again during the action at *Mount Sorrel* where it had by then incurred some one-hundred forty-five casualties.



Thus it was back to the everyday routines of trench warfare for some two months after which time the unit – as was to be the case of most of the other Canadian Battalions – was



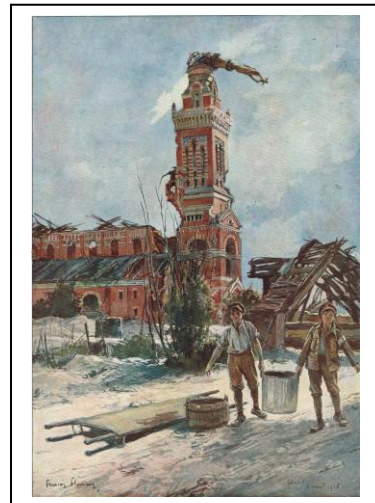
once more withdrawn, on this occasion for training in '*open warfare*'. The Canadians were about to travel south into France to play a role in the British summer offensive of 1916.

(continued)

By September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of just four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

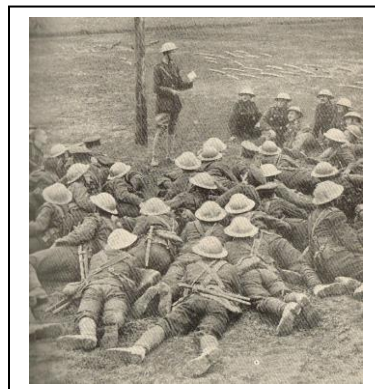
On that first day of *First Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so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

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



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

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



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

The RCR arrived in the area of the provincial town of Albert in the late evening of September 13 and just two days later, on September 15, was ordered to move forward in order to attack a German strong-point, the *Zollern Graben*, on the following day. By four o'clock in the morning of September 17, when it withdrew, the RCR had incurred some two-hundred eighty casualties and the *Zollern Graben* was still in German hands.



Three weeks later, another major action was to follow: the attack of October 8-9 on the *Regina Trench* system was not a success but, on the contrary, a further expensive failure; the German positions would not be definitively taken until November 11. By that latter



date, however, the Royal Canadian Regiment was to be in the *Lens Sector*, some fifty kilometres to the north. In fact, the unit was to be moving in that direction within days of having fought at *Regina Trench*.

(continued)

(Right: *Regina Trench Cemetery and some of the surrounding area, ground which was finally wrested from the Germans by Canadian troops in November of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)



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

During the five weeks of its sojourn at *the Somme* the Battalion had lost, *killed* and *wounded*, about four-hundred fifty *all ranks*. Over two hundred more had been reported as *missing in action*, the War Diarist optimistically predicting that most of them would be later found in field ambulances and casualty clearing stations. The accuracy of that forecast does not appear to have been documented.



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

The RCR Battalion had begun to withdraw from *the Somme* on October 10. The Battalion War Diarist makes no mention of any motor transport or train having been employed so it may be assumed that the unit, as had many others, retired from there on foot. Its itinerary had taken it westward at first, then to turn northward so as to pass to the west of the by-now shattered city of Arras and beyond.

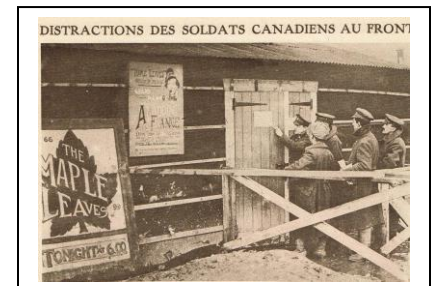


(Right: *The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'Place) in Arras had already been steadily bombarded for two years by the end of the year 1916 – from Illustration*)

It was on the 24<sup>th</sup> of that October of 1916 that the unit had arrived in the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector* to the north-west of Arras. The War Diarist on that date was to report Battalion strength as being three-hundred eighty-six *all ranks*, less than forty per cent of regulation battalion numbers. *The Somme* had taken its toll.



The RCR, in its new quarters in the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector*, had once more begun the daily pattern of life in and out of the trenches\*, a routine which was to last until the middle of February of the following year, 1917.



*(Right above: Canadian soldiers while off-duty perusing the program of an upcoming concert 'somewhere on the Continent' – from Le Miroir)*

(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)*



Thus the winter of 1916-1917 was to pass in that manner for the Royal Canadian Regiment. The Battalion War Diary is fairly repetitive in its entries: little in the way of infantry action except patrols and the occasional raid – by both sides: all local activity; and most casualties due to German artillery and snipers.

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



Then in February the unit had been ordered into Divisional Reserve at Bruay where it had begun five weeks of training for the upcoming British offensive; not that it was all work: the War Diary reports sports events and concerts among the litany of parades, lectures, marches, drills, work-parties and visits from military and political personages.

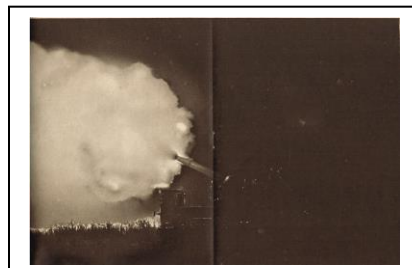


*(Right above: A Canadian carrying-party loading up before moving up to the forward area, one of the many duties of troops when in support or reserve – from Le Miroir)*

On March 21 the RCR had moved up into the forward area once again; after five weeks in reserve perhaps the change was to be a bit of a shock to the Battalion's collective system: the Diarist has noted that the new quarters... *LA MOTTE Camp, is composed of Bivouacs, with nine tents for officers. We are its first occupants. It can be greatly improved.*

But he has also noted that... *“C” Company relieved the right Company of the 58<sup>th</sup> Battn. taking over the exact frontage from which we are expected to jump off.* Such an observation illustrates the recent policy of informing junior officers and senior NCOs of the plans of intended actions, knowledge that these personnel were to pass down to the men under their command.

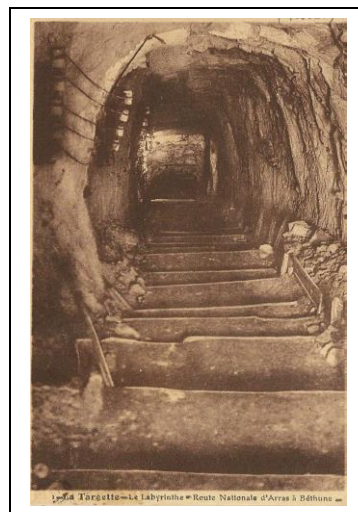
And it must have been becoming clear to the men of the RCR that there were intended actions; the forward and rear areas in the Neuville St-Vaast sector were now hives of ongoing activity for which the unit was supplying working-parties and carrying-parties each day: dumping-areas were being cleared, bivouacs were being sand-bagged, stone laid for walks, new trenches dug and old ones deepened, troops familiarized with the newly-excavated tunnels and other positions, water-pipes and communication lines buried, artillery and machine-guns sited...



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

On April 1 the RCR Battalion had retired to Villers-au-Bois for a week, there to organize for the first day of the offensive. On April 7, the first of the unit's Companies had then moved into one of those tunnels which had been hewn out of the chalk; it was hoped that these galleries would reduce the number of casualties with the men sheltering there until the last possible moment, and that it would also nurture the element of surprise.

(Right: *Just one of the network of tunnels, this one in the area of Neuville St-Vaast–La Targette, which became known as the Labyrinth – from a vintage post-card*)



The men of the Royal Canadian Regiment were now to remain underground for well over twenty-four hours.

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



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

(Right above: *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, had stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

(continued)

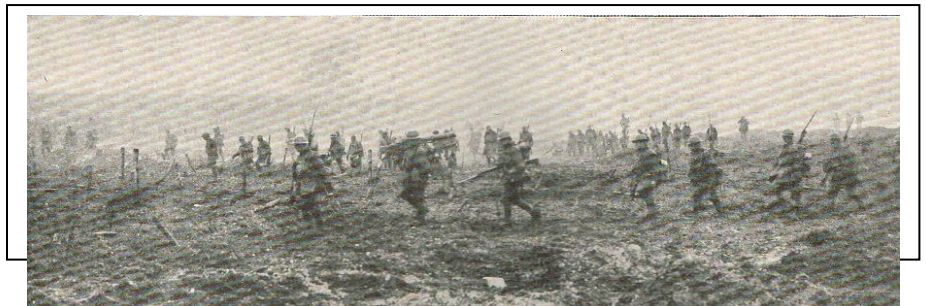
(Right: *Grange Tunnel* - one of the few remaining galleries still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years after the attack – photograph from 2008(?))

For no reason other than that it is one of the more legible entries to follow, an extract of the experience of “A” Company during the opening of the attack of April 9 is here included as being representative of the events of the assault as undertaken by the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion.

(Right below: *Canadian troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, burdened with all the paraphernalia of war, on the advance across No-Man’s-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration*)

(Excerpts from the Battalion War Diary entry of April 9, 1917) 3.12 a.m. “A” Company under Captain Munn reports Co. in Assembly trenches.

5.30 a.m. Raining. Barrage opens.



While the other three Companies were in communication with Headquarters at a relatively early hour, apparently not so “A” Company, not until... 1.40 p.m. Message from “A” Co. delivered by wounded runner stated that they had captured four machine guns, were in touch with Units on both flanks... and that they had sent a patrol over the Ridge.

2.15 p.m. “A” Co. (left Co.) is in its objective. Strength 1 Officer and approximately 50 other ranks with no N.C.O.’s. It is in touch with “C” Co (right) who’s (sic) approximate strength is 1 Officer and sixty other ranks... “A” Co. has sent a patrol over the ridge from which as yet no report has been sent. There is a small gap between “A” Co. and the P.P.C.C.L.I. owing to the shortage of men. We command the whole situation at present, but unless reinforcements and supplies of every sort, more especially S.A.A. (small-arms ammunition) available, machine Guns, shovels etc., are sent up at first opportunity, it will be difficult to withstand another counter attack.

It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division – of which the Royal Canadian Regiment was an element - and also the 4<sup>th</sup> Division whose objective had been *Vimy Ridge* itself, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions having had objectives on the right-hand side of the main slope\*.

***\*This was the first occasion on which the four Canadian Divisions were to act in concert as an autonomous Canadian Army Corps rather than as a constituent of a British formation. In fact, on this occasion, British forces were to operate under Canadian command.***

Of the some ten-thousand Canadian casualties of the day, the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had incurred fifty-six *killed in action*, one-hundred sixty-five *wounded*, and sixty-five *missing in action*.

\* \* \* \* \*

By April 12 the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had withdrawn to the rear to Villers Camp. From there it had gradually begun to move up to the forward area: from Villers Camp to Quarries Line, from there to Fort George, and then into the *La Folie Sector* where it had...*relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> C.M.R. Battalion in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> lines of resistance.*

Here it was that Private Jeans and his ninety-seven comrades-in-arms reported *to duty* on April 27-28 of 1917, whereupon he was attached to “B” Company.

The positions in which Private Jeans now found himself serving appears to have been a busy place: the troops were still close enough to incur casualties each day, although mostly due to the continuous enemy artillery activity; yet, since it was not manning the front-line trenches, the unit was parcelled-out into salvage-parties, carrying-parties, wiring-parties and construction-parties.

While the still-ongoing battered stuttered towards its official end, the RCR Battalion one more retired to the rear to again advance in stages: to Villers-au-Bois where numerous intra-Brigade sports were played, to the area of *Grange Tunnel* (see above) where working-parties and Regimental Band concerts were the order of several days, and from there to Vimy village – some four kilometres distant from the *Ridge* – where front-line positions were thereupon manned, a reminder that there was still a war ongoing.



(Right above: *The village of Vimy, shelled by both sides at different times during the Great War, as it was just after the conflict – from a vintage post-card*)

The five-week *Battle of Arras* having terminated in mid-May, the Royal Canadian Regiment was once again to face a long period of trench warfare. However, for many of the other units of the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions which were serving in sectors from Vimy in the south to Béthune to the north this monotonous work was going to be spiced up: the Canadian Corps High Command had some offensive work planned.



(Right above: *The village of Souchez, just to the north of Vimy, already looked like this in 1915 when the French passed control of the area over to the British. – from Le Miroir*)

The British High Command\* had long since by this time decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention – and also his reserves - from *that* area, it had also ordered operations to take place in the sectors of Canadian responsibility running north-south from B  thune to Lens.



The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort.

(Right above: *An example of the conditions under which the troops were ordered to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

*\*It should be remembered that during the Great War the British High Command was in control of not only its own troops but also those from all the British Dominions, colonies and territories.*



(Right above: *Canadian troops under fire advancing across No-Man's Land in the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

On August 15, a major attack was launched by Canadian troops in the suburbs of the mining-centre and city of Lens and just to the north, in the area of a small rise known as *Hill 70*\*. The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion, however, was not a part of this particular offensive and on that day was in fact busy in training at LaPugnoy. As far as anything of military importance on that day was concerned, the Battalion War Diarist was sparing with his ink: *Nil...*wrote he.

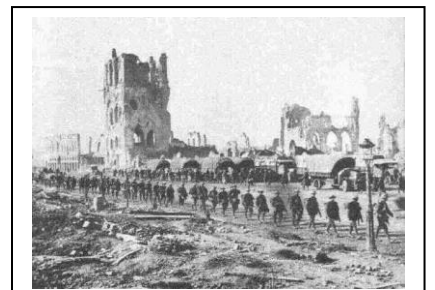


(Right above: *This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. – photograph from 1914*)

*\*The Canadian efforts had been expected to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium was proceeding less well than expected and the High Command was looking for reinforcements to make good the exorbitant losses. The Anzacs\* and then the Canadians were ordered to prepare to move north; thus the Canadians were obliged to abandon their plans.*

*\*The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps*

It was just over seven weeks after the capture of *Hill 70*, on October 6, that the Royal Canadian Regiment began to make its way on foot and by train, to the area of the Franco-Belgian border. Later that day the unit was being billeted in the northern French town of Bailleul.





(Right above: *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*)

But it was not to be until October 23, having travelled in a circuitous route on foot and by train, that the RCR was to find itself in the war zone of the *Ypres Salient*.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *Somewhere, perhaps anywhere or everywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign into which the Canadians were about to be thrust – already ongoing since the last day of that July of 1917 – was to come to be better known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was 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> Canadian Divisions in reserve.

From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was true with troops of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division finally entering the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.

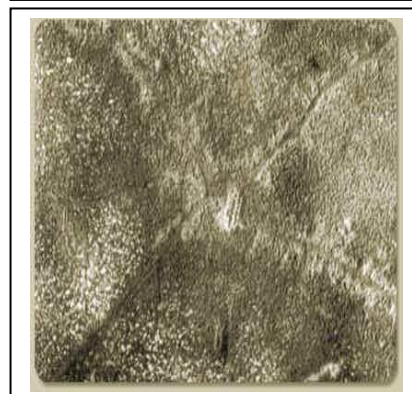
(Right above: *The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians standing in the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele (today Passendale) – photograph from 2010*)

From October 23 until the end of the month the RCR was in reserve in the area of Sin Jaan (St-Jean), contributing to carrying-parties, working-parties and stretcher-parties. On October 30 it was ordered forward and was involved peripherally in an attack by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division.

(Right above: *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*)

The unit then remained in the lines until relieved on November 4 – all of this at a cost of two-hundred fifty-eight casualties.



(Right below: *Just a few hundred to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the above monument. – photograph from 2010*)

The entire entry of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion for October 31, 1917, reads as follows: *St JEAN AREA – Day fine and fairly quiet. The following moves and reliefs were carried out. Battalion Headquarters moved to WATERLOO Pill Box...½ “A” Company and “C” Company moved from reserve to POMMERN CASTLE AREA taking over from the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion. “B” Company moved from the front line to old jumping off trench.*



*Lieut. H. SYKES wounded in action (Gassed). 2 other ranks killed in action. 2 other ranks evacuated C.C.S..\* 19 other ranks wounded in action.*

#### *\*Casualty Clearing Station*

The son of James Jeans, former fisherman, deceased November 16, 1909, and of Elizabeth Jeans (née Curry?), deceased February 6, 1914, he was also brother to William, to Elder-Edith, to Harriet-Jane, to George-Arthur, to Fanny-Maud\* and perhaps also to Olive\*\*.

(Right: *The photograph of Private Jeans is from the website...Beaton Institute – 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion: A short history and Photographic Record of the 106<sup>th</sup> Overseas Battalion C.E.F. Nova Scotia Rifles*)



*\*She was twin sister to Samuel but died at the age of eight months.*

*\*\*Ancestry.ca has her as the daughter of James and Elizabeth Jeans, and who died in 1900 at the age of two years. She was buried in the Baptist Cemetery at South Bar, Cape Breton.*

Private Jeans was reported as *missing in action* on October 31, 1917, in...*Trenches north-west of Passchendaele*. It was apparently to be some eight months later, on or about July 13, 1918, that...*For official purposed presumed to have died on or since 31/10/1917.*

Samuel James\* Jeans had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty years and five months: date of birth at Rose Blanche, Newfoundland, September 2, 1895 (from attestation papers and original birth records).

*\*His original birth records document his name as Samuel John Jeans.*

Private Samuel James Jeans 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 25, 2023.