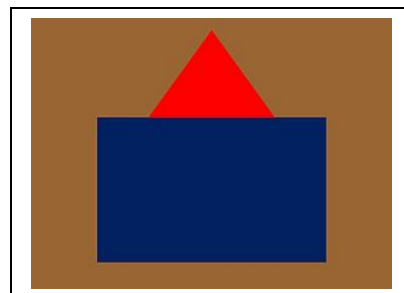




Private John Leo Keating (Number 877702) of the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, lies buried in Canada Cemetery, Tilloy-les-Cambrai: Grave reference II.A.26.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder flash of the 25th Battalion is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded on his attestation papers as that of a labourer – and of *miner* on the ship's passenger list - John Keating was possibly the young man who traversed the Cabot Straits from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland to North Sydney, Cape Breton, on board the SS *Bruce* on June 17, 1915. If that were he, John Leo was in the company of his younger brother, Patrick, both citing North Sydney as their destination.

By the first day of spring of 1916, John Leo Keating had made his way to the industrial city of Sydney where he was living at 6, Henry Street, Whitney Pier. It was also on that March 20 that his pay records confirm this as the time when the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services, services rendered to the 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) to which unit he had been attached on that same March 20. A medical examination and his attestation in Sydney are both recorded as then having been undergone on the following day, March 21.

It was not until April 25 that Private Keating was *officially... approved and inspected* for service and, on that same day, *officially* attached to the 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*). As it was the Officer Commanding the 185th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Parker Day, who inspected him, it must surely be that, by that time, Private Keating had already made the short journey after his enlistment some five weeks before to the town of Broughton*, some twenty kilometres distant to the south of the industrial centre of Sydney.

From there, on May 23, Private Keating's Battalion was ordered to Camp Aldershot, there to undergo training as part of the newly-constituted Nova Scotia Highland Brigade comprising not only his own Battalion, but also the 85th, the 193rd and the 219th. The Brigade was to spend its summer and early autumn at Aldershot before being transported to Halifax in early October for passage to the United Kingdom.

**Broughton had been a 'company town', developed towards the end on the nineteenth century by the Cape Breton Coal, Iron & Railway Company. Apparently too much money had been spent as the company went bankrupt in 1907 and the town was soon abandoned. At the outset of the Great War it was taken over by the Canadian Army and, more particularly, by the 185th Battalion (Cape Breton Highlanders).*

The 185th Battalion embarked for overseas service at seven o'clock in the evening of October 11, 1916, in the harbour at Halifax. The ship was His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*, sister-ship of *Britannic*, to be sunk by a mine in the Mediterranean a month later, and also of the ill-starred *Titanic*.



Olympic was to carry not only the one-thousand fifty-three personnel of the 185th Battalion to the United Kingdom, but also the 85th, the 188th, the 219th and the 193rd Battalions, plus one-half of the 166th Battalion, of Canadian Infantry. One of the largest vessels of her age, the requisitioned *White Star* liner was more than capable of – and would, during and after the Great War – carry well over six-thousand passengers on a single crossing.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor along with HM Hospital Ship Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay on the Greek island of Mudros in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London*)

With the addition of some three hundred other miscellaneous military personnel who also took passage on her, the vessel was to provide passage to the United Kingdom for about six-thousand five-hundred souls. *Olympic* eventually cleared the port of Halifax at eleven o'clock on the morning of that October 13. Six days later, on October 19 - a second source has the 18th - the ship docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool.

From Liverpool, Private Keating's Battalion was transported by train to the Canadian Camp by then established at Witley in the county of Surrey.

There he underwent further training during the next seven months before he was *struck off strength* by the 185th Battalion and transferred to the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*). This was on May 27, 1917, and Private Keating was now to cross the English Channel to the Continent on the same day, most likely – but unconfirmed - via Southampton to disembark in France at the port-city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine.



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

According to the records it was then on the morrow that Private Keating reported *to duty* to one of the very-recently-established Canadian Infantry Base Depots at Étaples. There he was apparently to languish for eighteen days before eventually being forwarded to the 25th Battalion on or about June 15, to report there *to duty* on the next day*.

**Although the Battalion War Diarist records a re-enforcement draft of one-hundred forty-seven other ranks as having arrived on June 15 with no others reporting for the remainder of the month.*

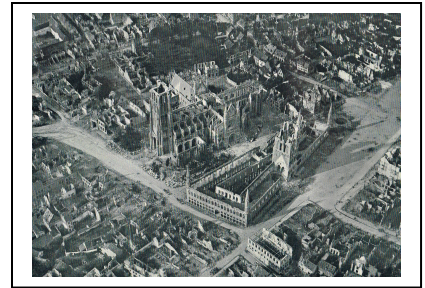
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The 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force had already been serving in France and Belgium for some twenty months by this time, since September of the year 1915. The Battalion was a unit of the 5th Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2nd Canadian Division, and had been in service on the Continent continuously since its arrival on the Western Front.

In early April of 1916, the 2nd Canadian Division had undergone its baptism of fire in a major infantry action. It was at a place to the south of Ypres, St-Éloi, where, at the end of March, on the 27th, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then attacked. The newly-arrived Canadian formation had been ordered to follow up on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.

(continued)

(Right: 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*)



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

Towards the end of that confrontation the 25th Battalion had relieved another battalion and subsequently had incurred a total of some eighty-five casualties, a greater toll than the unit had known on any single occasion up until that date.



(Right above: *The occupation of a crater in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps in the St-Éloi Sector – from *Illustration)**

Then six weeks afterwards, in June, the Battalion had been involved in the fighting in the area of *Hooge, Mount Sorrel, Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60* and *Maple Copse*, all just to the south-east of the city of Ypres. The Canadian 3rd Division had been the main recipient of the enemy's offensive thrust which had begun on June 2, but the 25th Battalion of the 2nd Canadian Division had played a role sufficiently important for the name *Mount Sorrel* to become the first battle honour won by the unit during the Great War.

(Right below: *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)

From the middle of June up until August 27 of 1916, 20, the 25th Battalion had been in reserve well to the rear, so well to the rear, in fact, that it had been deemed safe enough for His Majesty the King and his son the Prince of Wales to pay a visit on August 14. Some two weeks later, the unit was withdrawn into northern France to the vicinity of Steenvoorde, and to the village of Moule.



The following week at Moule was spent in becoming familiar with the British Lee-Enfield Mark III rifle which was replacing the Canadian-made Ross rifle, and also in training for a Canadian role in the British summer campaign of 1916, an offensive which to that date had not been proceeding exactly to plan.

(continued)

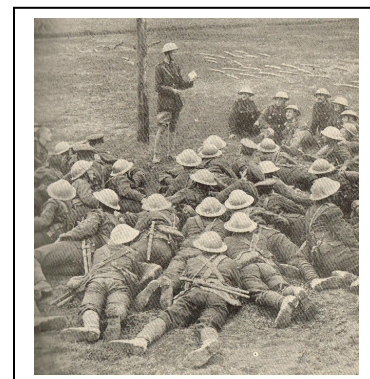
By that September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault having cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

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



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

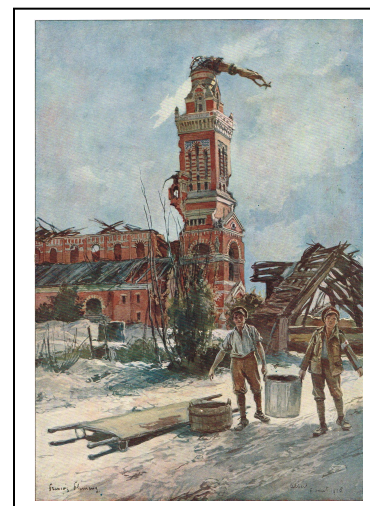
As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), had been brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23), before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their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



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

Meanwhile, on the evening of September 10 the *25th Battalion* had arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the Brickfields (*La Briqueterie*) in the proximity of the provincial town of Albert. On the *11th*, *12th* and *13th* the unit trained – at times in co-operation with aircraft – and provided working-parties.

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



On the afternoon of October 14 the Battalion had been ordered forward into dug-outs in assembly areas. On the next morning, September 15, the Canadians were to be going to the attack.

(Excerpt from *25th Battalion War Diary* entry for September 15, 1916): *5th Brigade attacked and captured the Town of Courcellette... the 25th Battalion moved forward as though on General Inspection the young soldiers behaving like veterans, going through very heavy artillery barrage without a quiver...*

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

Of the six-hundred ninety personnel who went over *the top* on the day of the assault, the War Diary recorded thirty-six dead, one-hundred ninety-one wounded and seventy-seven as *missing in action**.

**It seems likely that some of the missing later returned to duty as a later Diary entry records two-hundred fifty-eight casualties all told.*

On October 1 the Battalion – its operational strength by then apparently reduced to two-hundred all ranks and twelve machine-guns – *received orders to attack and capture “at all costs” enemy trenches known as KENORA and REGINA... “B”, “C” and “D” Companies... were to proceed over KENORA up to REGINA, which they did, but by the time they had got to the wire the casualties had been so heavy that only one officer was left... and about thirty men...*

The attack was a failure and the survivors had been obliged to fall back to *Kenora Trench*. Total casualties during the action had been a further one-hundred twelve.

(Right above: *Ninety-eight years later, the land on which the action was fought, as seen from Regina Trench Cemetery – 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*)

On the night of October 1-2 the 25th Battalion had retired from *the Battle* - and from the area of - *the Somme* and made its way westwards and then northwards, passing to the west of the city of Arras to the region of the mining centre of Lens.

It remained in the area and in the trenches of places such as Bully-Grenay, Angres and Bruay for the next four months or so before returning southward to Neuville St-Vaast. One of the neighbouring communities, in German hands at the time, was the village of Vimy.

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

(continued)



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

Towards the end of the month of March, on the 23rd, the Battalion was withdrawn well to the rear, to Maisnil-Bouche, there to undergo intensive training. The exercises were to last until, and including, April 7, only two days before the training was to become the real thing. On the final five days, the unit had been sent to become familiar with ground that had been re-arranged so as to resemble the terrain to be attacked.



On April 8... *Battalion less 1 platoon per company moved from MAISNIL BOUCHE to concentration area at BOIS DES ALLEUX. In the evening the Battalion moved up to its position...via cross country route...* (Battalion War Diary).

It apparently did not pass via those well-documented tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety.

(Right below: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

On April 9 in that spring of 1917, the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the Great 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.



The British effort was to be an overall disappointment - the French offensive a disaster.

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity, stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

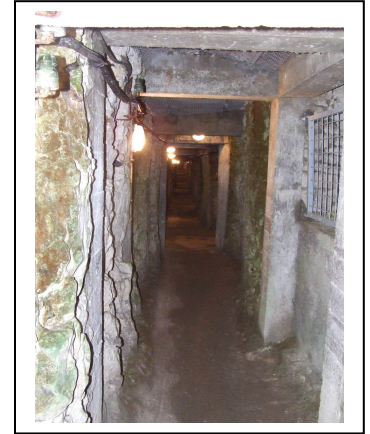
(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, burdened with all the paraphernalia of war, on the advance across No-Man's-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration*)



(continued)

The Canadian 2nd Division was not responsible for the taking of Vimy Ridge itself, but for the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the southern slope and therefore on the right-hand side of the attack. The Battalion's objectives were apparently soon captured and much of the remainder of the day was spent in consolidating these newly-won positions.

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



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

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

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

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



Nor was the remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* to be fought in the manner of the first two days and, by the end of those five weeks, little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success – which was the situation into which Private Keating reported *to duty* on or about that June 16, 1917.

* * * * *

At the time of Private Keating's arrival* the 25th Battalion was in reserve, resting and training – if that is not a contradiction – in the vicinity of the community of Gouy-Servins, in the mining area of the city of Lens.

Having then spent the entire month of June in the *Rest Area*, on July 1 the 25th Battalion was ordered to move forward once more and by July 3 it had relieved two battalions of the British Leicestershire Regiment in the forward area.



(Preceding page: *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*)

The British High Command had 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 this area, it had also ordered operations to take place at the sector of the front running north-south from Béthune to Lens.

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

One of the primary objectives was to be the so-named Hill 70 in the outskirts of the mining centre of Lens.

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

Those expecting Hill 70 to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear. Yet it was high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than the city of Lens itself.

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

Objectives were limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the dominance of Hill 70 over the entire area, it was expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it proved; on the 16th several strong counter-attacks were launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.

These defences held and the Canadian artillery, which was employing newly-developed procedures, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. Hill 70 remained in Canadian hands.

(Right above: *A Canadian 220 mm siege gun, here under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action – from Le Miroir*)

Of course, the Germans were not the only ones to incur casualties: by the time that the 25th Battalion retired on August 17, the unit had recorded some one-hundred fifty *killed, wounded and missing in action*. The Battalion was nevertheless soon back in the forward area, to be relieved on the 22nd by which time a further fifty *killed, wounded and missing* had been added to the preceding total. What Private Keating's role had been during either engagement appears not to be recorded.



After weeks of relatively little infantry activity during the early period of that summer of 1917, this attack on August 15 in the area of Hill 70 and the city of Lens had been intended to be the precursor of weeks of an entire campaign spear-headed by the Canadians.

However, the British offensive further to the north was proceeding less well than intended and the Canadians were to be needed there. Activities in the *Lens Sector* were suspended in early September and for a short period, the 25th Battalion was to revert to the rigours and routines of life in the trenches*.

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

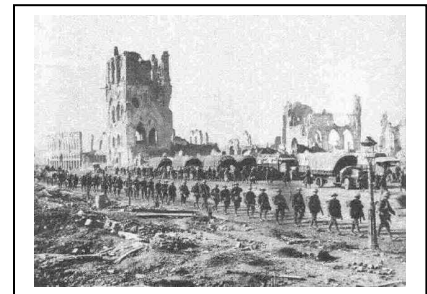
Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

(Right: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of the that year 1916, by that time equipped with steel helmets and the less visible, British-made, Lee-Enfield rifles – from Illustration)



It was not until the final weeks of October that the Canadians became embroiled in the offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the 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: 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 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair the reverse was true with the 2nd Division finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

The strength of the 25th Battalion on that November 5 was reported as being twenty-one officers and five-hundred seventy-six other ranks, perhaps just over fifty per cent of regulation battalion numbers.



(continued)

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

During the three days that they were to spend at the front at this time, the casualties sustained by the 25th Battalion were, by comparison to others, fairly light: seventeen *killed in action*, sixty-seven *wounded* and six *missing in action*.

(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which today stands on Passchendaele Ridge – photograph from 2015*)



In the late evening of November 8 the 25th Battalion was withdrawn from the area of the front line, to the westward of Ypres itself. Days later, on or about December 12, the unit was moved out of Belgium and further south again, to Camblain l'Abbé, not many kilometres distant to the west of Vimy, and in much the same area where Private Keating had first reported to the Battalion five months previously.

The month of December offered something a little different to all the Canadian formations which were serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army were open from December 4 until 17, and participation, in at least *some* units, was in the ninety per cent range*.

****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.***

(Right: *A Canadian carrying-party – some of the work done by troops when in support and reserve – on the Lens front during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

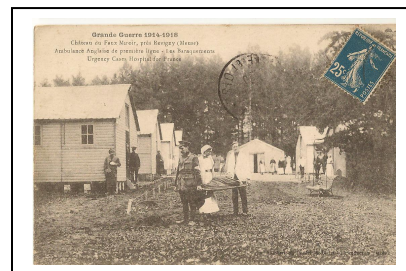


The winter of 1917-1918 was spent by the 25th Battalion in the same area; little if any confrontational military activity for that period is reported in the Battalion War Diary. The opportunity thus arose for leave to be granted and, on February 25, Private Keating left for a fourteen-day absence to the United Kingdom – although where he spent it appears not to be recorded.



(Right above: *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*)

He reported back to his unit on March 14 and five days later was admitted into the 13th Canadian Field Ambulance at the time established at Aix Noulette. There he was treated for a venereal problem for eight days before being transferred to the 4th Casualty Clearing Station at Pont Rémy. There he is recorded as having remained for medical attention until the first week in May.



(Preceding page: a *British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some* – from a vintage post-card)

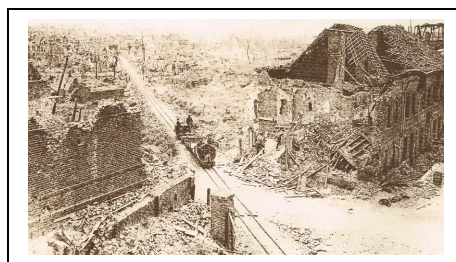
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Meanwhile, the 25th Battalion's war was temporarily to change from the cadence that it had been enjoying since the unit had retired from Passchendaele. On March 23 the unit was moved further south to the area of St-Aubin on the outskirts of Arras, arriving there on the 24th. There the Battalion was ordered '*standing-by*', ready to move on short notice, owing to expectations of an attack by the enemy.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the Divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, they delivered a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', launched on March 21. The main blow fell 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 there.

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

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

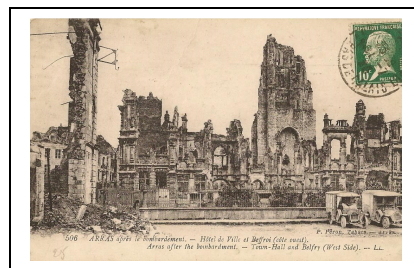


**A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in Flanders, the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It also was successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.*

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



The War Diary suggests, however, that the 25th Battalion was not involved in the heaviest of the fighting. Posted mostly near Wailly, just to the south-west of the city of Arras, the majority of the casualties incurred were due – as they often were – to enemy artillery activity rather than to infantry action. By the end of April the Battalion officers appear to have had nothing more important to discuss than whether to adopt the kilt as part of the regimental uniform.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The City Hall of Arras and its bell-tower looked like this by the spring of 1918 after nearly four years of bombardment by German artillery. – from a vintage post-card*)

It was during the first few days of *Operation Michael* that the 25th Battalion was at St. Aubin... *“standing-by”, ready to move at short notice, owing to expected attack by the enemy (Battalion War Diary)....* That expected enemy attack never came to pass.

* * * * *

Private Keating was discharged from the 4th Casualty Clearing Station on May 4 and reported *to duty* at the Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Étaples two days later, on May 6. He apparently remained there for sixteen days before being forwarded to the nearby Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp on May 22. He was despatched from there on the 28th of the same month to re-join his unit in the field two days later again.

The Battalion remained in the area of St-Aubin for some days until the end of the crisis and then spent the months of May, June in relative calm in the area of Neuville-Vitasse, also south of Arras; July was likely even calmer as the unit was withdrawn further back to Bellacourt.

That is not to say, however, that the war was not to continue, and Private Keating was to be reminded of this on June 9. The 25th Battalion War Diary for that day reads as follows:

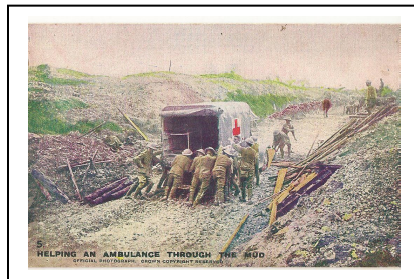
Situation quiet, weather fine but cooler. Visibility very poor.

The Battalion relieved the 24th Canadian Battalion in the Right Front Line, NEUVILLE VITASSE Sector, marching off at 9.30 p.m... Relief completed at 12.00 midnight...

Reconnaissance patrols were out, but have nothing of interest to report.

Casualties – 2 O.R. wounded and 5 O.R. gassed.

Private Keating was one of the wounded. Having incurred gunshot wounds to the upper lip and to his neck, he was evacuated on the next day through 4th Canadian Field Ambulance facilities to the 19th Casualty Clearing Station at Frévent. He remained there until June 18 when he was transported by the 61st Ambulance train to Rouen where he was taken into the 1st Australian General Hospital for further treatment.



(Right above: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)

On the following day he was released to an unidentified convalescent depot before being sent onwards on the next day again to the Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Étaples. From there it was not to be for a further eight days until Private Keating was ordered for this second occasion, to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp where he arrived on July 3.

(continued)

What Private Keating did for the following month is not recorded; however, whatever it was, he apparently was to do it at the Reinforcement Camp since he was not despatched from there until August 3. By that time his unit was on the march (see below) and thus, so was he. He did not report back *to duty* with the 25th Battalion until four days after leaving Camp, on August 7. On the morrow he and the 25th Battalion were to be a part of a major offensive.

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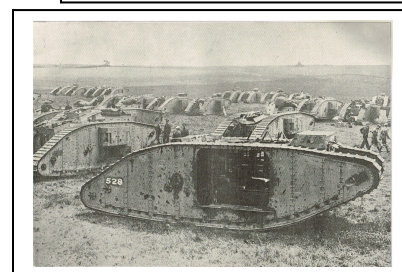
Days before that August 8 of 1918, the intended date of the start of the offensive, the 25th Battalion had been transferred to Bois de Blangy, just to the east of the city of Amiens – to where the German offensive of four months prior had been brought to a halt - on the main road from there to St-Quentin, and had moved into prepared trenches. To arrive at this assembly point, Private Keating's unit had begun its transfer on foot and by bus from Fosseux, twenty kilometres to the south-west of Arras, on July 30.

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



Its itinerary had taken the 25th Battalion west of the city of Amiens where on August 2 and 3 it had spent the best part of two days in training with tanks, then around to the south before eastward to arrive facing the enemy where he had been stopped in his advance four months earlier. The latter stages of the route had been accomplished on foot – and for the sake of secrecy, during the hours of darkness*. The 25th Battalion had arrived at the Bois de Blangy on August 6.

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



At 4.30 in the morning on that August 8, the advance began – *the Hundred Days* as it later became known - which was to bring the Great War to a close on November 11.

The Canadians were to move forward some twenty kilometres in the first three days of the offensive.

(Right: *On August 8, captured positions on the Somme being consolidated by Canadian troops against any German counter-attack – from Le Miroir*)



**Within a matter of days it had been the entire Canadian Corps which had been transferred from the sectors north of and around Arras to face the Germans on the front which they had established at the time of their offensive four months earlier.*

The majority of the Canadian forces had passed behind the city of Amiens, marching during the hours of darkness, to ensure surprise. This it had succeeded in doing.

However, after the overwhelming success of this offensive, the 25th Battalion, having played its role, now retired from that southerly front and returned towards the north, at first by bus, but then on foot, until, not long after mid-night on August 26, it marched into the community of Beaurains, just to the south of the city of Arras*.



(Right above: A group of German prisoners, some serving here as stretcher-bearers, being taken to the rear after their capture by Canadian troops: a tank may be seen in the background – from Le Miroir)

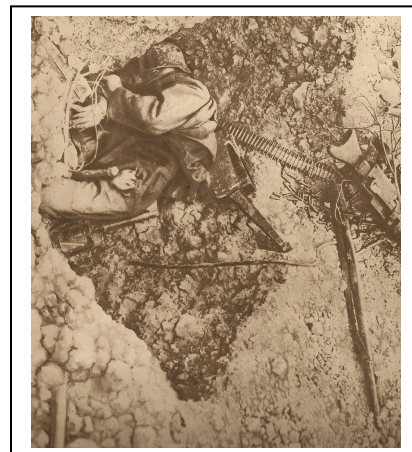
****It was not only the 25th Battalion but, once more, it was the entire Canadian Corps which was involved. Following in reverse much the same system and the same itineraries of three to four weeks before, and again in only a matter of days, the four Canadian Divisions were back on the Arras Front before the end of August – in time for a further offensive.***

On the Amiens Front, French forces were to replace the now-vanished Canadians.

Ferdinand Foch - since earlier that year the Supreme Commander of Allied (French and British) Forces on the Western Front - was intent on keeping pressure on the Germans by attacking on several fronts. After the assault to the east of Amiens, now a French responsibility, there was straightaway to be another along the Arras-Cambrai road axis – and the same Canadian Corps again was to be heavily involved. The commune of Beaurains had been chosen as the assembly point for the Canadian 5th Infantry Brigade, one of whose four battalions was Private Foote's 25th.

Later on during that day of August 26, the 25th Battalion moved forwards into a reserve position, perhaps because the unit's numbers were by then only one-half of regular battalion strength. The attack had already gone in at several sectors at three o'clock in the morning of that August 26, but the assault by the 5th Brigade was not due to be delivered until the morning of August 27.

For the next two days the unit moved forward, individual companies supporting other units as and when events necessitated. Progress at times was slow, German snipers and machine-gunners proving to be, as ever, formidable opponents, and the enemy artillery very active.



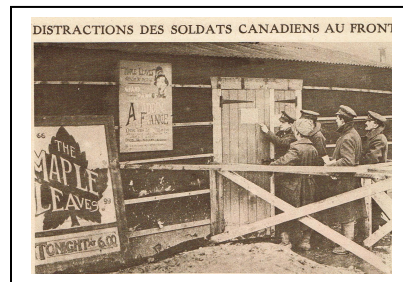
(Right above: A German machine-gunner who also gave his all – from Illustration)

(continued)

Despite all their efforts, several objectives of the 2nd Division still remained contested as this offensive, the *Battle of the Scarpe*, drew to its conclusion. It had cost the Canadian Corps some fifty-six hundred casualties.

On August 29 the 25th Battalion withdrew all the way to Achicourt, there to be treated with hot meals, dry socks and, on the evening of the 30th, a concert.

(Right: *Canadian soldiers stand in front of a temporary theatre and peruse the attractions of an upcoming concert. – from Le Miroir*)



The first five days of the offensive had succeeded in overcoming the German defences to a depth of eight kilometres – overrunning the battlefields of 1917 - and thus, despite the several set-backs, was to be considered a great success. It had laid the foundation for the next operation. After a two-day respite the advance would be re-launched to reduce the enemy positions on the Drocourt-Quéant Line, but on this occasion by troops of different Canadian and British divisions.

It was not until September 14 that the services of the 25th Battalion were once more required in the forward area. Until then the unit had remained withdrawn, mostly undergoing training, although at times not so far back as to escape injuries from enemy artillery.

September 27 was the date on which the Canadians attacked and crossed the Canal du Nord, then pursued the Germans through the area of Bournon Wood in the direction of the historic town of Cambrai.

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



(Right: *Two German field-guns of Great War vintage stand on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City, the one in the foreground captured during the fighting at Bournon Wood – photograph from 2016*)



Extract of Operational Order 275 as pertaining to the 2nd Canadian Division and as issued on October 8, 1918: *The 2nd Canadian Division has been ordered to secure the passage of the Canal de L'ESCAUT between RAMILLIES and MORENCHIES, both inclusive, and to advance its Right Flank to gain touch with troops of the XVII Corps East of CAMBRAI ANNEXE Station.*

This operation will not be begun until information has been received from Canadian Corps that the XVII Corps has secured the whole of the NIERGNIES-AWOINGT Spur...

(Right: German prisoners, some wounded, taken during the advance in October of 1918, in the company of their Canadian captors – from Le Miroir)



However, the prerequisite objective had not been captured in time for the attack to be delivered on that day and thus October 8 was to pass relatively peaceably for the personnel of the 25th Battalion. The Battalion entry for the day reads as follows:

At 0430 our Artillery opened heavy fire on the enemy lines and back country, increasing to a bombardment and lasting until 0630. Enemy artillery retaliation fairly heavy.

A party of one Officer and 50 Other Ranks were supplied to the Brigade Evacuation party. Casualties – 1 O.R. killed and 7 O.R. wounded.

The son of Paul Keating, fisherman, and Josephine (elsewhere *Mary Joseph*) Keating (née *Wall*) – to whom on August 24 of 1916 he had willed his all – of the community of Harbour Main, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Jane-Francis (sic), John*, Michael, to Patrick-Ronald, to Margaret (later married to *Doyle*), and to Mary (later married to *Harte*)**.



Private Keating was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 8, 1918.

(Right above: The sacrifice of Private John Leo Keating is commemorated on a family memorial in Avondale Cemetery. – photograph from 2015)

****The Parish Records document this John as having been born on January 24, 1900. Whether he died young is not recorded in available documentation.***

*****The information a propos his sisters Margaret and Mary has been included in the database thanks to the contribution of Private Keating's grand, grand-niece, Ms. Danielle Doyle, who resides in Carbonear.***

John Leo Keating had enlisted at the *apparent* age of nineteen years and eleven months: date of birth at Harbour Main, Newfoundland – according to his attestation papers – April 25, 1896. However, Harbour Main Parish Records and the monument in Avondale Cemetery record the year of his birth as 1893.

Private John Leo Keating 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 26, 2023.