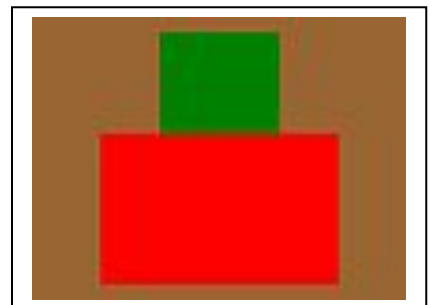




Private James Stanley Kennedy (Number 63525) of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Central Ontario*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Guards Cemetery, Windy Corner, Cuinchy: Grave reference IV.H.42.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Central Ontario) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

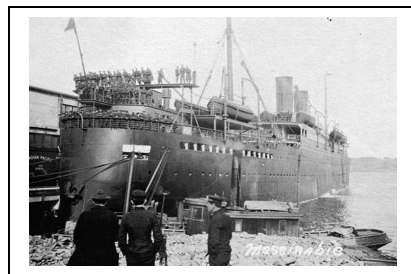
(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a waiter, James Stanley Kennedy may never have resided in the Dominion of Newfoundland. His connection appears to have been with Labrador, at a time, of course, when that territory was not officially associated with any other region or realm.

It was on November 11 of 1914 that he presented himself in the city of Québec to undergo a medical examination, to enlist and to attest; he did all three on that day and at the same time – as his first pay records confirm – he was taken on strength by the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion. The formalities came to an official end for Private Kennedy when, on January 19 of 1915, the Commanding Officer of the Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel F.W. Fisher, 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.*

Only a month later, on February 23, the nine-hundred seventy-seven officers and *other ranks* of Private Kennedy's 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion boarded ship in the harbour at Halifax. The vessel was the SS *Missanabie*, not requisitioned as a troop transport but carrying troops if and when possible, as part of her normal service. On this occasion, taking passage to the United Kingdom was not only the 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion but a part of the 30<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Canadian Infantry.



(Right above: *The photograph of the Canadian Pacific Steamship Company's SS Missanabie, seen here transporting troops, has been taken from the Old Ship Pictures Galleries Web-Site.*)

*Missanabie* docked in the English west-coast port of Avonmouth, Bristol, on March 7. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was thereupon transported by train to the fledgling Canadian complex of Shorncliffe, adjacent to the English-Channel town and harbour of Folkestone. There the unit continued to train at the new Canadian Training Depot, undoubtedly awaiting the call to serve on the Continent.



(Right above: *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*)

That call was not to come for the 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. Its personnel was to be used to re-enforce battalions already on the Western Front, particularly after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Ypres at the end of April during which the Canadian Division had incurred heavy losses\*.

*\*On April 29 of 1915 the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion was re-designated as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Battalion; as such it remained stationed in England for the remainder of the conflict.*

Private Kennedy was one of those to be chosen to re-enforce a unit already on the Continent. On April 26, just days after having completed a period of ten days' detention for drunkenness, he was recorded as having embarked for France – likely passing through nearby Folkestone and then Boulogne on the coast opposite.



For the next five days there no reports of Private Kennedy to be found. One possible answer is that the draft with which he would have been travelling was held in a rest camp – perhaps in the area of Boulogne or behind the lines in Belgium or northern France. As to be seen below, events were happening perhaps too fast for records to be one hundred per cent inclusive at this time.



(Right above: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the top of the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)

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

On May 2, Private Kennedy was reported as... *transferred to the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Central Ontario)*... of the Canadian Infantry which by that time that unit had withdrawn to billets in the northern French town of Bailleul. Nothing, however, in the Battalion War Diary confirms this. (Also see below.)



\* \* \* \* \*

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a component of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian Division. The Battalion had been among the first to sail from Canada to the United Kingdom in October of 1914 and, after four months in England, in February of 1915 had landed with the Canadian Division in France.



The Battalion had then, only days after its arrival in France, been posted to the area of the Franco-Belgian frontier, and had entered the trenches for the first time near the northern French town of Armentières. It had subsequently served in the Fleurbaix Sector just to the south of the border before having been posted to the *Ypres Salient*: it had been on April 18, at twenty-five minutes past ten in the morning, that the unit – in fact, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade - was to cross the border into the *Kingdom of Belgium*.

(Right above: *While the caption reads that these troops are ‘English’, this could designate any unit in British uniform – including Empire (Commonwealth) units. This is early in the war as there is no sign of a steel helmet. – from a vintage post-card*)

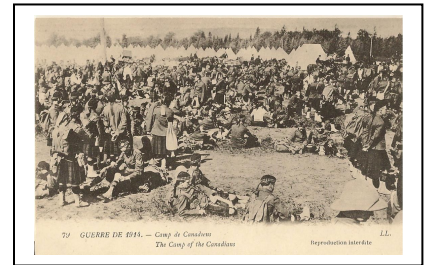
The Brigade crossed the frontier to the west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe where it was then to remain for two days before advancing eastwards to Vlamertinghe for a *further* two days. It was at that moment that the Germans had launched their attack in an effort to take the nearby city of Ypres.

The other units of the Canadian Division had only been serving in the *Ypres Salient* for a short space of time. During these few days of Canadian tenure *the Salient* had proved to be relatively quiet. Then the dam broke - although it was gas rather than water which, for a few days, threatened to sweep all before it.

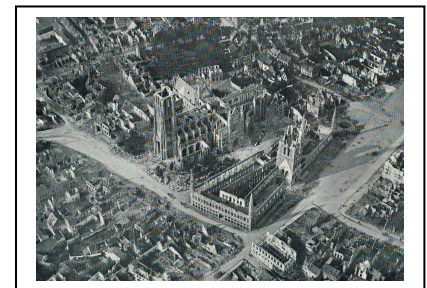
(Right below: *The caption reads merely ‘Camp of Canadians’ but it is from the early days of the Great War, thus likely to be in either northern France or in Belgium. The troops are from a Canadian-Scottish unit. – from a vintage post-card*)

The date was April 22, 1915.

(Right below: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2<sup>nd</sup> 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*)



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Ypres saw the first use of chlorine gas by the Germans during the Great War. Gas was later to become an everyday event and, with the introduction of protective measures such as advanced masks, the gas was to prove no more dangerous than the rest of the arsenals of the warring nations. But on this first occasion, to inexperienced troops without the means to combat it, the yellow-green cloud of chlorine proved overwhelming.



(Right: *The very first protection against gas was to urinate on a handkerchief which was then held over the nose and mouth. However, all the armies were soon producing gas-masks, some of the first of which are seen here being tested by Scottish troops. – from either Illustration or Le Miroir*)



The cloud was noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon of April 22. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left wavered then broke, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered. At that moment a retreat, not always very cohesive, became necessary while, at the same time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade were moved forward to support the efforts of the French and of the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade.

At the time, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was reported as still being at Vlamertinghe, a village to the west of Ypres and at least ten kilometres distant. There was also the city of Ypres to be traversed. The unit began to march towards the fighting at thirty minutes past mid-night on April 23. By the evening of the same day the Battalion War Diarist was recording just over a total of five-hundred casualties.



(Right above: *Entitled: Bombardement d'Ypres, le 5 juillet 1915 – from Illustration*)

By the second day, April 23, the situation had become relatively stable – at least temporarily - and the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan held until the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> when a further retirement became necessary.



At times there had been breeches in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans were unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or else they did not have the means to exploit the situation. And then the Canadians began to close the gaps.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion continued to retreat before digging-in in the area of Wieltje. There it remained until being relieved on the evening of April 25. Retiring through the village of St-Jean the unit took up positions in reserve trenches on the east bank of the Yser Canal.



There it remained during the night in the company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Canadian Infantry. Early the following morning, April 26, it took up positions on the west bank of the waterway where it remained for the next three days.

(Right above: *The Memorial to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier – stands just to the south of the village of Langemark (at the time Langemarck) at the Vancouver Crossroads where the Canadians withstood the German attack – abetted by gas – at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915. – photograph from 2010*)

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion returned to its billets at Vlamertinghe on April 29. There the unit was greeted by a re-enforcement draft of fifteen officers and five-hundred twenty-three other ranks – was Private Kennedy possibly among that number?

There the Battalion was to remain for three days at which time it was withdrawn further, to the northern French centre of Bailleul, there to re-enforce and re-organize.



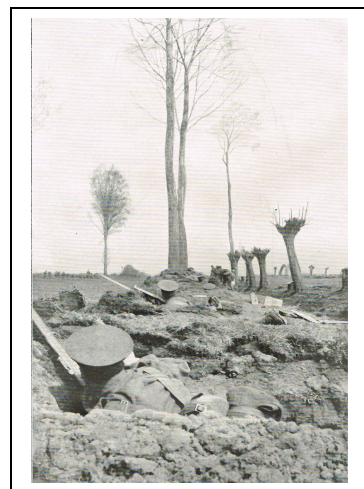
(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion retired to its western bank – to the left – photograph from 2014*)

\* \* \* \* \*

At nine o'clock in the evening of May 2 the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion began to march to the French northern town of Bailleul on just the other side of the Franco-Belgian frontier. There it was to spend the next number of days. There is no report of any further arrival of reinforcements.

It was not to be too long before Private Kennedy was once again endearing himself with Battalion authorities: absenting himself from billets on or about May 7 earned him a loss of three days' pay – the rate for a private soldier was a dollar per day plus a ten-cent per day field allowance.

(Right: *Troops in hastily-dug trenches at Ypres. In the early days of the Great War soldiers were yet to be equipped with steel helmet. – from Illustration*)



On or about May 16 the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered to move down the line, further into France via St-Floris and Essars, towards the areas of Festubert and Givenchy. The French were about to undertake a major offensive just further south again and had asked for British support.

There at Festubert, a series of attacks and counter-attacks were to take place in which the British High Command managed to gain three kilometres of ground but also contrived to destroy, by using the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what was left of the British pre-War professional Army. The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but – having a lesser number of troops – would not participate to the same extent. It nonetheless, proportionally, suffered heavily.

The Canadian Division and Indian troops - the 7<sup>th</sup> (Meerut) Division\* also having been ordered to serve at Festubert – were to fare hardly any better than the British, each contingent – a Division - incurring over two-thousand casualties before the offensive drew to a close.

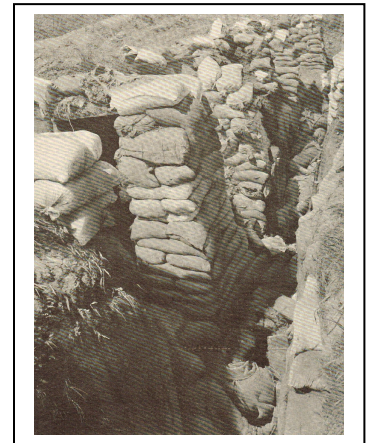
The French effort – using the same tactics - was likewise a failure but on an even larger scale; it cost them just over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded and missing*.



*\*The Indian troops also served – and lost heavily – in other battles in this area in 1915 before being transferred to the Middle East.*

(Right above: A one-time officer who served in the Indian Army during the Second World War, pays his respects to those who fell, at the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle. – photograph from 2010(?))

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion entered into the reserve trenches at Festubert on May 22. It was still there three days later, on May 25, when the War Diarist entered the following into his journal: *In reserve trenches at Festubert, heavy shelling all day and night at frequent intervals. Have had all the time considerable trouble to keep up our communications as the shrapnel cuts our wires. The signalling section are doing excellent work...*



(Right above: German trenches nick-named the Labyrinth captured by the French at their Pyrrhic victory at Notre-Dame de Lorette – Over one-hundred thousand French troops died during this campaign in the Artois. – from Illustration)

The son of Sylvester Kennedy, sailor, and of Ellen Cunningham Kennedy (née Cullen), of Convoy House, Agwonies River, Labrador, he was also brother to Walter-Sylvester, to Annie and to Napoleon. Private Kennedy was reported as having been *killed in action* on May 25, 1915, during the fighting at Festubert.

(continued)



James Stanley Kennedy had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-six years and two months: date of birth in the city of Québec, September 21, 1888.

Private James Stanley Kennedy was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to [criceadam@yahoo.ca](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 27, 2023.