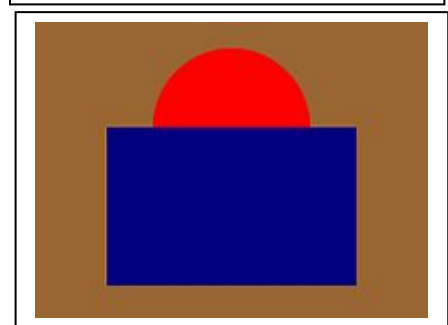




**Private Joseph Peter Kennedy, (Number 469506 of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on *Vimy Ridge*.**

**(Right: *The shoulder-flash of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Victoria Rifles)* is from the Wikipedia web-site.)**

**(continued)**



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, Joseph Peter Kennedy appears to have left the Dominion of Newfoundland only some nine months before the time of his enlistment. The passenger list of the Bowring Brother's SS *Florizel*, for the voyage from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, of December 2, 1914, lists among its passengers Mrs. M. Kennedy and sons James and Joseph.

The original intent of the trio was apparently to travel to the United States, to Boston, in order to stay with their daughter/ sister already established there (see further below). It would appear, however, that at least one of the brothers remained behind in Halifax, eventually to enlist there.

On August 26, 1915, Joseph Peter Kennedy underwent a medical examination in Halifax, a procedure which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. His first pay-record then confirms his enlistment on that day and also that he was immediately *taken on strength* by the 64<sup>th</sup> Battalion which was at the time recruiting throughout the Maritime Provinces.

Another three days were to pass before Private Kennedy was attested on August 30, and it was to be yet a further two, September 1, before the formalities of his enlistment were brought to a conclusion by the Commanding Officer of the 64<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel H. Montgomery Campbell, when he declared - on paper - that...*Jos Kennedy...Having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

As the magistrate presiding over the August 30 attestation documented that the exercise had taken place in Sussex, New Brunswick, it would seem apparent that Private Kennedy had travelled there during the preceding four days and, since the Headquarters of the 64<sup>th</sup> Battalion were located there, that he remained there for the formalities of September 1, and then likely for a period of training.

It was also at the military complex of *Camp Sussex* that Private Kennedy was presumably to *complete* his training with the 64<sup>th</sup> Battalion some six months later. During that time, however, it is certain that he was to return to Halifax, if for nothing else other than medical purposes - although there was seemingly a training program there as well.

His personal dossier indicates four separate medical episodes of which two were of a dental nature: From November 22, 1915, until November 25, Private Kennedy was a patient of the Military Hospital, Halifax, there to be treated for tonsillitis. Less than three weeks following, he was admitted, on December 13, into the *Rockhead Military Hospital for Infectious Diseases* where he remained for ten days before being discharged - the complaint remains anonymous, diagnosed simply as NYD (*Not Yet Determined*).

Towards the end of February of the New Year, 1916, Private Kennedy visited the *Camp Surgery, Halifax*, to have three cavities filled. He was back there again during the month of March to be fitted for a full upper denture\*.

*\*During the Great War, dental problems kept the Canadian Medical services very busy.*

(continued)



After this episode, only a single further month was then to pass before Private Kennedy was recorded as having embarked on March 31 of 1916 onto the requisitioned *White Star* liner *Adriatic* in the harbour at Halifax - for passage overseas to the United Kingdom.

(Right below: *The photograph of Adriatic is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

The officers and *other ranks* of the 64<sup>th</sup> Battalion were not the only military passengers crossing the Atlantic on the vessel: the 73<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of Canadian Infantry, an unidentified Draft of the Coburg Heavy Battery and the 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance – this latter undertaking the ship's medical services during the crossing – were to be Private Kennedy's fellow travellers, almost twenty-five hundred souls all told.



*Adriatic* sailed on April 1, one of a convoy of three troop transports – the others also ocean-liners now in the service of the King, *Baltic* and *Empress of Britain* – and escorted by the elderly cruiser *Carnarvon*.

The vessel docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool at three o'clock in the afternoon of April 9. While some of *Adriatic's* passenger-personnel – likely the artillery and medical units - were sent elsewhere, the 64<sup>th</sup> Battalion immediately left by train for the Canadian military establishment of *Camp Bramshott* – named for the adjacent village of that name - in the southern county of Hampshire.



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

On June 24, Private Kennedy was transferred to the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian (Reserve) Battalion based at *Shorncliffe* – just south of the Dover Straits and in the vicinity of the harbour and town of Folkestone in the county of Kent. There he was to prepare for a posting to *active service* on the Continent in the near future.



In fact, that *near future* was to be only days away.

(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*)

On June 28, 1916, Private Kennedy was bureaucratically *taken on strength* by the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) and during that night crossed the English Channel, likely from nearby Folkestone to Boulogne – although this is not confirmed - on the French coast, some two hours' sailing-time away.

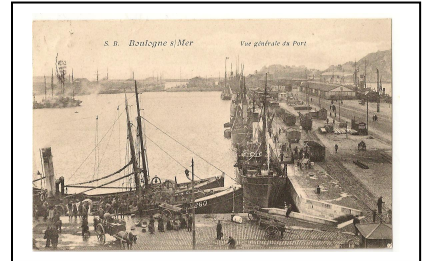


(continued)

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

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

From the ship on which he had taken passage, Private Kennedy was transported to the Canadian General Base Depot in the vicinity of the French industrial port-city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine\*. He was to remain there for two weeks awaiting further orders.



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

**\*According to the Base Depot War Diary there were no arrivals on June 29, but on the following day the...‘The largest draft that ever marched into Camp arrived from England’... four-thousand two-hundred fourteen.**

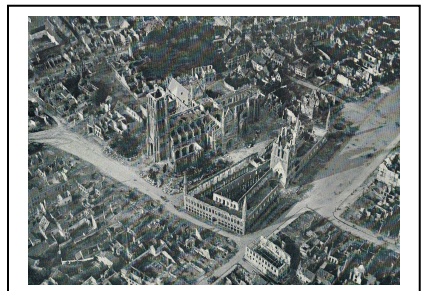


The orders came some two weeks afterwards and Private Kennedy was thereupon despatched, on July 12, to seek out the parent unit of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion. He was one of just thirty-six re-enforcements to depart from the Depot on that day – not necessarily all being destined for the same unit, of course.

His dossier then goes on to document that he reported to the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion two days afterwards, on July 14. No details of this event appear to be recorded elsewhere, least of all in the War Diary. However, the Battalion and its War Diarist were not to move into the rear area in proximity to Reninghelst until a day later and it was likely to *that* area that any re-enforcements would have reported.

\* \* \* \* \*

A component of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) was a Montreal-based unit with a history which dated back to 1862. After mobilization it had sailed to Great Britain from Canada in May of 1915, and had been transferred with the Division to France, then to the *Kingdom of Belgium*, in September of the same year. There it was to serve with the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade to the south of the *Ypres Salient* in a sector between the already battered city of Ypres and the Franco-Belgian border.



**(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)**

**(continued)**

It was not to be until early April of 1916, more than six months following its arrival on the Continent, that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was to undergo its baptism of fire in a major infantry operation. It was at a place called St-Éloi where, on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of March, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then had followed up with an infantry attack. The role of the newly-arrived Canadian formation had then been to capitalize on the presumed British successes, to hold and to consolidate the newly-won territory.

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the often putrid weather which was to turn the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and then a resolute German defence, had greeted the Canadian newcomers who were to begin to take over from the by-then exhausted British on April 3-4.



Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.

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

The *Action of the St. Eloi Craters* had not been a happy experience for the novice Canadians. The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion, however, according to its War Diary, had not been heavily involved and the majority of its casualties at the time had been due to artillery fire. Apart from repelling a German bombing party on April 15, the unit had been engaged in very little of the infantry action.

Six weeks following the episode at St-Éloi there had then been the confrontation at *Mount Sorrel*. This had involved principally the newly-arrived Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division\* but a number of other units from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions, since the situation at times was to become critical, had also subsequently played a role.

*\*The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. However, unlike its two predecessors, it was formed on the Continent, some of its units having already been on active service there for months. Others did not arrive until the early weeks of 1916, thus it was not until March of that year that the Division was capable of assuming responsibility for any sector. When it eventually did, it was thrust into the south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This was in a sector to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.



(Right: *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 had been unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences.



Sir Julien Byng's\* hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, however, delivered piece-meal, poorly supported by artillery and badly co-ordinated, had proved a costly experience for the Canadians.

*\*The British-appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Corps.*

(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*)

The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to play a leading part in the action at *Mount Sorrel*. Uninvolved during the early days, the unit moved forward into the front-line trenches in the area of *Maple Copse* on June 7, there to remain until relieved on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Thus neither did it participate in the closing stages of October 12-13.

The Battalion was not to escape without casualties however. Once again these were caused mostly by German gun-fire, particularly at the time when it was moving forward towards *Maple Copse* on June 7, one platoon incurring twenty-three casualties in a single extremely heavy bombardment and thus almost ceasing to exist.



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

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

From the time of its withdrawal from the area of *Mount Sorrel* until the final week of August the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion had passed the early summer submitting to the rigours, routines and perils of life in - and out of - the trenches\*. Often the war diaries of this period refer to *quiet days...front quieter than normal* – although, of course, everything is relative.



After the exertions of *Mount Sorrel*, any infantry activity was to be on a local level and limited to patrols and raids, and most casualties were due to artillery and to sniping.

(continued)



**(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 protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature – photograph from 2014)**

***\*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)**



These, as described above, were the conditions into which Private Kennedy and his Re-enforcement Draft marched on July 7 – although, as already seen, the Battalion War Diary makes no mention of the event. At the time his new unit was serving as Brigade Reserve and was posted in what remained of the village of Dickebusch, furnishing working-parties for myriad duties and tasks.

On the day following in was to move even further back to the rear area; thus Private Kennedy's landing into a war zone proved to be a soft one. It was soon to get a lot harder.

On August 25 the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion withdrew westward, entirely away from the Ypres Salient and the forward area, to the region of Steenvoorde, back in France, where new training grounds had been established. Further to the south, the British summer offensive was not progressing as well as planned and losses had been heavy: help in the form of troops from the Commonwealth was already being ordered by the High Command.



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

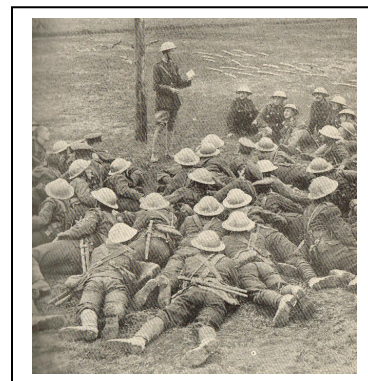
**(continued)**

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 space of only 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 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

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 the New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major 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 (see below), September 1916. – from The War Illustrated*)



Meanwhile, on September 4, ten days after its retirement from Belgium, the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion had left its billets at Éperlecques and marched to the railway station at Arques. There it had boarded a train that evening for the journey to Conteville, just over one-hundred kilometres distant, arriving at its destination at five-thirty on the following morning.

Later on during that same September 5, the Battalion had started to march, to arrive some five days later at the large military encampment at the *Brickfields (La Briquetterie)*, in the proximity of the provincial town of Albert.

There it was to remain, providing working- and wiring-parties, until midnight of September 14 when it had moved forward to positions in the *Chalk Pits* for the attack of the morrow.

During the first two days of that offensive the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion was as involved as was any other Canadian Battalion – it just was not shooting or bombing anyone. It was, however, carrying small-arms ammunition and bombs (*grenades*) to the forward areas for others to use, as well as Bengal Lights, flares, stretchers, rations...



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

(continued)



On September 17, the unit was ordered to deliver an attack on the German front line, an assault which had commenced at five-thirty in the afternoon. The operation had enjoyed mixed results – and heavy casualties - and the War Diarist wrote the following scathing paragraph in his entry of that day: *With regard to this attack, if the Artillery preparation had been in any way adequate, there is no doubt but that the objective would have been obtained along the whole line. As it was, a barrage was put up approximately 500 yards in rear of the German front line, which merely served to warn the enemy that an attack would probably be launched, and they were able when our men advanced, to stand up on their parapets and shoot them down.*

By the 18<sup>th</sup> the Battalion was back at *Brickfields Camp*: total casualties during the preceding days of *all ranks*, three-hundred twenty.

(Right: *Wounded soldiers at the Somme being evacuated to the rear area in hand-carts – from Le Miroir*)



On September 28, the unit was back in the line once more, on this occasion having been ordered to make an attack on the so-called enemy *Regina Trench* system. The attack had been one of several to fail and *Regina Trench* was not to be taken definitively until November 11, six weeks later. The 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion's operation had cost a further two-hundred four casualties all told.

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



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



On October 2, the remnants of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) were to begin their withdrawal from the *First Battle of the Somme*. They would march westward before turning northward, passing in a semi-circular fashion behind the city of Arras, and perhaps also passing on the way, those Canadian units arriving to take their place in the maelstrom of the *Somme*.

But they were marching without Private Kennedy.

Casualty Report: - *Previously reported Missing, now for official purposes presumed to have Died. – He went forward with his Company in an attack on the enemy's positions, and after the action was reported "Missing". Searching enquiries have failed to elicit any further information concerning him.*



***The attack was reported as having taken place ‘North of Courcelette’.***

***(Preceding page: The French village of Courcelette, Somme, as seen from fields to the north of the community, the scene of the fighting in which Private Kennedy died. – photograph from 2017)***

**The son of James Kennedy, former labourer (deceased, perhaps as early as January, 1894), and of Mary Anne Kennedy\*, nurse (née *Puddister*), of St. John’s, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Jennie\*\*, Thomas-Joseph and to James-Joseph.**

***\*At the time of enlistment living at 83, Silver Street South in Boston, then by 1919 at 214 Arlington Street, Lawrence, Massachusetts.***

***\*\*She was later Mrs. Jennie Saunders of 133, Elliott Street, Boston, to whom on April 29, 1916, Private Kennedy had willed his all.***

**Private Kennedy was at first reported as *missing in action* on October 1, 1916, then later, on September 21, 1917...*presumed to have died on or since 1-10-16.***

**Joseph Peter Kennedy had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-four years and seven months: date of birth in St. John’s Newfoundland, February 22, 1892 (from attestation papers). Roman Catholic Parish Records cite the date as June 25, 1891.**

**Private Joseph Peter Kennedy was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**



**The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to [criceadam@yahoo.ca](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 25, 2023.**