

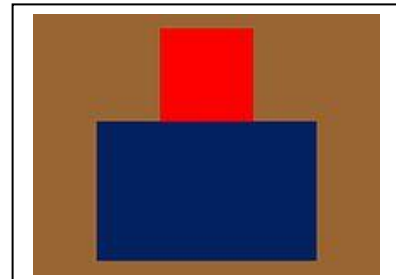
Lance Corporal Robert King (Number 709591) of the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*) Canadian Expeditionary Force, buried in Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery. It is only recently that his grave has been identified*, thus until the summer of 1917 he has been commemorated only in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick) is from the Wikipedia Web-site.*)

**Page preceding: Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery is also the site of the Australian National Memorial which harbours the names of some eleven-thousand dead – for the most part Australian – who have no known grave.*

Within the bounds of the Cemetery itself lie two-thousand one-hundred dead, some six-hundred of them unidentified.

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His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a tailor (but possibly *sailor*), Robert King appears to have behind him little few details, if any, a propos his migration from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of New Brunswick. All that may be said with any certainty is that he was present in the town of Sussex during the month of November of 1915, for that is where and when he *attested*.

While November 2 is cited in places as being the date of his enlistment, this is apparently not so. His first pay records are evidence that the Army began to remunerate Private King for his services on October 26, and it is also – according to the same small card – the date on which he was *taken on strength* by the 104th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force – but it does not inform us of *where* the enlistment took place.

The official conclusion to the formalities of his enlistment was brought about on the same November 2. At that time the Officer Commanding the 40th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel G.W. Fowler, 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.*

According to those attestation papers, Private King was not a stranger to the world of military discipline. He had apparently spent five years in the navy – although in *which* navy or even in which branch of it is not clear. If it had been in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve, he would have served for six weeks per annum during those years, but pre-War service files appear not to be available, neither does he appear on a list of Newfoundlanders having served in the Royal Navy*.

**The Royal Canadian Navy – named thus in 1911 – came into being only being in 1910.*

It was to be eight months after enlistment that Private King was to take passage for *overseas service* on the far side of the Atlantic. The 104th Battalion embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* on June 28, 1916.

Apparently just the second military unit to board her on this occasion, Private King's Battalion was to be accompanied on the voyage by the 91st, 94th and 101st Battalions of Canadian Infantry, a draft of the 57th Battery of the Canadian Field Artillery, the 3rd Draft of the Royal Canadian Regiment, the 13th Canadian Mounted Rifles, the 4th Divisional Train and the 4th Divisional Amb.(?) Workshop.



(Right above: *HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor along with HMHS Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay in the autumn of 1915, during the Gallipoli Campaign. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London*)

Olympic cleared the harbour at Halifax on June 29 and, six days later, was to dock in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool, Private King and his comrades-in-arms not landing perhaps until the next day. From Liverpool it appears that the 104th Battalion was transported by train to the military camp at Witley in the county of Surrey. It was now to be well over a year, some seventeen months, before he was to be ordered to the Continent on *active service*.

During that interlude, Private King was to spend two weeks in Connaught Military Hospital, serving the large British Army establishment of Aldershot. His problem was of a fairly common sort: venereal. Discharged from there on January 11 of the New Year, 1917, he returned *to duty* with the 104th Battalion for just a further two weeks.

On January 26, Private King was transferred: from the 104th Battalion to the 13th Canadian Reserve Battalion, and from the camp at Witley to the Canadian complex at not-so-distant Bramshott. There he was to recognize at least one familiar face, that of Lieutenant Colonel Fowler, CO of the 104th Battalion, who was now to take command of the 13th Reserve Battalion.

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



The 13th Reserve Battalion was not to be posted for a long period to Bramshott: on February 20, 1917, it moved to a camp now established at Shoreham, on the south coast of the country at a distance of some sixty kilometres. It was from there that Private King was granted leave to Scotland. Who, if anybody, he knew in Edinburgh or in Glasgow is not documented, but he spent six days there during the month of August, 1917.

On October 23 there was to be further displacement for the 13th Reserve Battalion. On this occasion it was to Seaford, thirty kilometres to the east along the coast. And it was there that Private King was soon to realize that he was on his way overseas - again.



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

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

On this occasion it was to be a crossing of hours, not days, likely from Southampton – although Seaford *is* close to Newhaven – to the French port-city of Le Havre situated on the estuary of the River Seine. To that end, on the day of his journey, November 15, he was once again transferred, the unit in question on this occasion the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*), a formation already serving on the Continent.



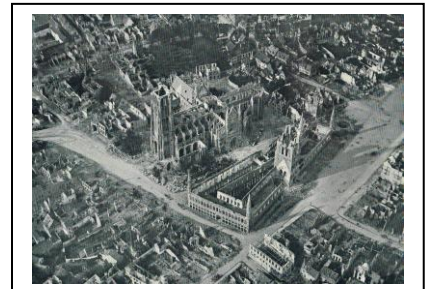
From Le Havre, Private King's draft was ordered to one of the four Canadian Infantry Base Depots – likely the 2nd as the 26th Battalion was attached to the 2nd Canadian Division – by that time in the vicinity of the coastal town of Étaples. There he reported *to duty* on November 16, one of just thirty-two re-enforcements to arrive on that day.

Private King left the Base Depot only three days after his arrival, having been subsequently despatched to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp, also in the proximity of Étaples. It must then have been soon afterwards again that he was forwarded to his new unit as his personal files record him joining the 26th Battalion on November 23*.

**It may well have been the day following: the 26th Battalion War Diary reports no arrivals on November 23, but the following day's entry cites: '104 Other Ranks arrived as Reinforcements thids (sic) date, but remained at the Detail Camp'.*

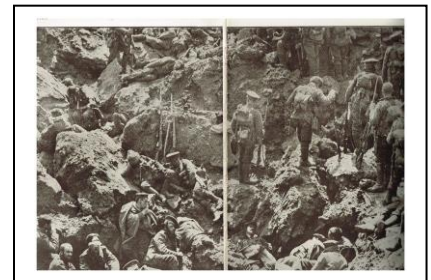
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The 26th Infantry Battalion (*New Brunswick*) was an element of the 5th Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 2nd Canadian Division, and it had been serving in the *Kingdom of Belgium* since September of 1915. After having landed in - and transported through - France, the Division had immediately been posted to a sector in-between the by-then battered city of Ypres and the Franco Belgian frontier.



(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*)

From March 27 up until and including April 17, 1916 – these the *official* dates - the unit had been involved during the *Action of the St-Éloi Craters*. The craters had been formed when, on that March 27, the British had detonated a series of explosives placed in tunnelled underground galleries. The explosions had been immediately followed with an assault by British infantry units.



The Canadians were to take over from the British to occupy the *presumed* newly-won territory; however, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which 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.

(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*)

This had been the first major encounter with the enemy that the Canadian 2nd Division was to experience and it likely came as a shock to the new-comers. After some three weeks of fighting in mud and water, at first the British – and then the Canadians who had relieved them – had been held in check by the German defenders and had incurred a heavy casualty list.

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It appears from the Battalion War Diary, however, that the 26th Battalion had been only very *marginally* involved. During the period of the Canadian action, the unit was... *standing by*, was... *in camp*, or for five days in a row... *Battalion in trenches, Large working parties working on trenches. Weather fine.* Apart from casualties incurred due to his artillery, the Battalion appears to have had no contact with the enemy.

Some six weeks later, from June 2 to 13 was fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the areas of *Sanctuary Wood, Railway Dugouts, Maple Copse, Hooge and Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps. The Canadians had been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans delivered an offensive, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity which, fortunately, they never exploited.



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

For eleven days there had been some desperate fighting, at first involving mainly units of the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division*, but soon the critical situation had drawn in troops from other Canadian formations.

**Officially coming into service at midnight of December 31, 1915 and January 1 of 1916, the 3rd Canadian Division had trained for a period in the Ploegsteert Sector before, in March and April of 1916, becoming responsible for a south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

The 26th Battalion had been engaged in relieving other battalions during the course of the encounter and it had been heavily shelled on occasion. However, it had not been in the forward area during much of the infantry activity and had been withdrawn altogether by the time of the final Canadian counter-attack.

By the time that the 26th Battalion moved up to the front again on June 14, the action at *Mount Sorrel* and its vicinity was all but over. During the night of June 12-13 the Canadians had once again attacked and, thanks to better organization and a good artillery barrage, had taken back almost all of the lost ground. Both sides were now back much where they had been just eleven days earlier.



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

(Right: *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*)



(Right below: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooze, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government – photograph from 2014*)

Thus, after having played its roll at *Mount Sorrel*, the 26th Battalion was relieved and withdrew to Camp “D” on June 20.

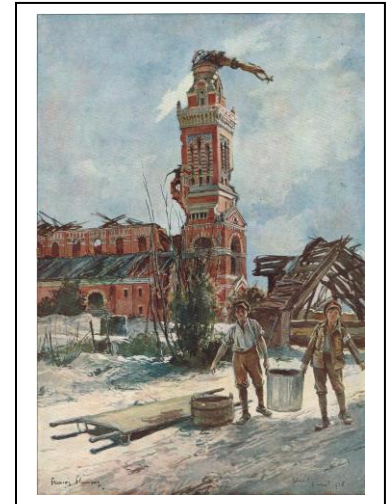
The second half of that following month of July was spent at first in *Alberta Camp* and then further back again, at Brigade Reserve in the Vierstraat Sector. To compensate for this likely monotonous period, the Battalion was then posted back into the trenches for twenty-two of the first twenty-four days of August.



Having retired to Alberta Camp near Reninghelst on August 25, the 26th Battalion prepared to leave Belgium. The Regimental War Diarist noted in his entry of that day: *All ranks in the best of spirits anticipating the move and eager to effect all details in the number of days training, SOMME OPERATIONS.*

The training area for the 26th Battalion was to be at Tilques, back over the border in northern France and in the vicinity of the larger centre of St-Omer. It had required three successive days of marching for the unit to reach its billets at Éperlecques by August 28 before then having commenced training on the morrow. One of the first items on the agenda of December 29 was the replacement of the Canadian-made Ross rifles by its British counterpart, the short Lee-Enfield Mark III.

A week later the Battalion marched to the railway-station in Arcques to entrain for the journey south to Conteville. A day spent resting in billets was followed by five more on foot *not* resting, a march which terminated on September 11 at the Brickfields (*la Briqueterie*), a large military camp in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.



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

The 1st *Battle of the Somme* had by that September been ongoing for some 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 only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

On that first day 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at Beaumont-Hamel.

As the Battle had progressed, 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 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 the two villages of Flers and Courcellette.

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



The 26th Battalion had arrived in the area four days prior to the attack at Flers-Courcellette – other units had reported there on only the day before – thus those interim days were spent in preparation. For the attack of September 15, the 26th Battalion was in reserve at the outset and, as such, did not move forward until five o'clock in the afternoon, twelve hours after the initial assault, at which time it re-enforced the efforts of the 22nd and 24th Battalions.

On the following day the 26th Battalion, according to its War Diary, was moved to the relative safety of a succession of shell holes, apparently staying there all day and... *where the most intense shelling was endured by the battalion throughout this entire day.*

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



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

On the 17th the unit was moved once more and took up positions in a sunken road, to once again remain there all day. The only exception was that of 'B' Company which assisted in an attack delivered by the 24th Battalion before also it moved to the sunken road. The attack in question... *met with considerable opposition and rifle and machine gun fire was very heavy.*

On September 27 the Battalion had been ordered forward once again, on this occasion to play a role in *the Battle of Thiepval Ridge*, more specifically on the right flank, in the area of *Regina Trench*. The operation had proved to be a further costly failure for the price of one-hundred eighty-two more casualties.

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

On October 10 the unit was withdrawn from the *1st Battle of the Somme*.

The Battalion retired towards the north-west, then turned northwards to pass behind, to the west of, the battered city of Arras. By October 15 it was in the *Angres II Sector*, in the area of Lens, moving up into the front lines. On the next day, the 16th, the Battalion War Diarist entered simply: *Battalion in trenches Conditions quiet, weather wet*.

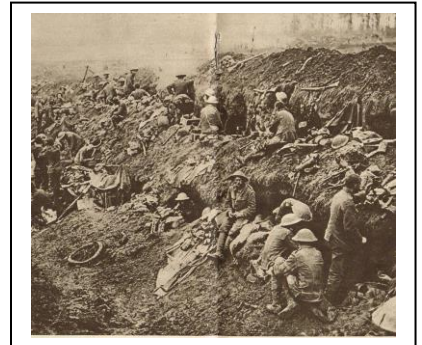


(Right above: *The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'Place) in Arras which had already been steadily bombarded for two years by the end of the year 1916. – from Illustration*)

The conditions were not to be quiet for long: On the morrow the enemy exploded a mine opposite a trench held by 'D' Company of the Battalion. The day was spent repairing damage and consolidating the defences. There were no casualties reported on that day but the incident may have reminded some of the troops that things could still be bad, even away from *the Somme*.

The next five months or so must have started to seem rather monotonous – and uncomfortable – for a great deal of the time, with a few instances of terror thrown in every now and then. For the most part the 26th Battalion had been in that same *Angres II Sector*, in theory spending one week in the front line, a second week in the support lines, and a third week in reserve – although, of course, it never worked out exactly that way. And sometimes there was even a bath and a bed.

In reserve one could count on everything from a variety of inspections from those higher up the military ladder – and every now and then from a leading politician or a member of a royal family – to being seconded into working-parties. While in support there were more working-parties, route marches, training on new equipment, inspections from lesser lights on that military ladder, more inspections for trench foot and other medical problems, and carrying ammunition and the like from the rear to the front.



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

(Right above: *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 – from Illustration*)

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During this period of the winter of 1916-1917 there was little in the way of concerted infantry action by either side. There were at least two large raids conducted locally by the 26th Battalion, and patrols and wiring parties were an everyday part of life, but this seems to have been the extent of offensive operations in all that time.



(Right above: *A carrying-party loading up – one of the duties of troops when not serving in the front lines: The head-strap was an idea adapted from the aboriginal peoples of North America. – from Le Miroir*)

Most casualties were due to the ever-present enemy artillery fire, but snipers were also a constant danger and disease and living conditions – perhaps particularly the ubiquitous lice – were to take an additional toll.

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



Then it was spring and the time for the campaigning season to begin. On March 24 the Battalion left Bois des Alleux where it had been spending five days in Brigade Support. It thereupon marched to Grand Servins... *Poor billets...* recorded the War Diarist.

The reason for the move was to undergo special – and in some cases novel – training for an upcoming British attack in the area of Arras. The Canadian Corps was to advance in a sector close to where the 26th Battalion had recently been operating, in an area where the ground sloped upwards to the top of a German-occupied rise which dominated the entire Douai Plain.

The crest of the rise was known as *la crête de Vimy – Vimy Ridge*.

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

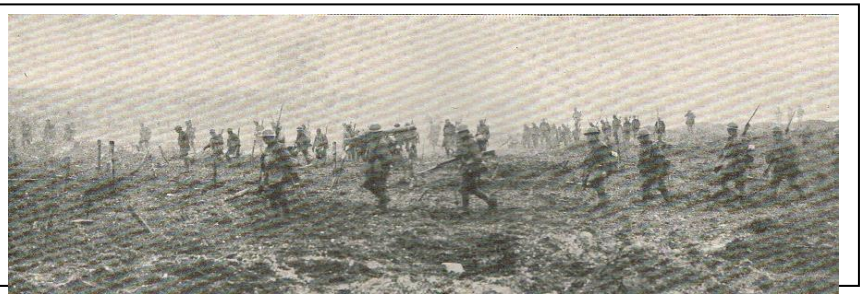


While the British campaign proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive was to be a disaster.

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

(continued)

(Right: Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, equipped – or 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)



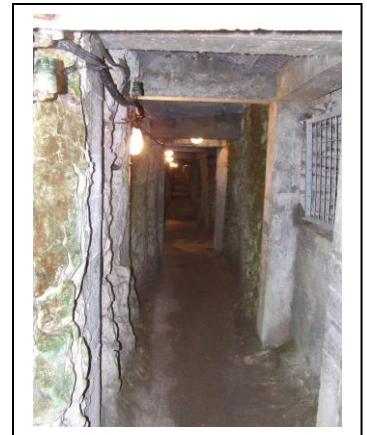
On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, on this occasion acting as a single, autonomous entity, stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

Several kilometres of tunnel had been hewn out of the chalk under the approaches to the front lines of *Vimy Ridge*, underground accesses which afforded physical safety and also the element of surprise during the hours – and in some cases, days – leading up to the attack.

The Battalion War Diary notes that the objectives of the 26th Battalion were not on the Ridge itself, the prising of which from the grasp of the Germans had been made the responsibility of the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions.

The War Diary also notes that, as was the case with many other units, the advance of the 26th Battalion to the... *Jumping Off Trenches*... was made over-ground, not through any of those well-known tunnels.

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



**This was the first occasion on which the Canadian Divisions were to act in concert as a Canadian Army Corps rather than being individually attached to a British force. In fact, a British brigade was now placed under its command.*

The objectives of the 26th Battalion – indeed, of the 2nd Canadian Division - were in the *Thelus Sector*. Thélus was – and is – a small village further down the slope and to the right-hand side – south in the direction of Arras - of the attack.

The creeping barrage having come down at 5.30 am, the first wave of the assault jumped off... *at Zero plus 32 minutes the light signal (3 white Very lights (flares)) was fired showing that Bn. had reached and occupied their objective. The casualties in the attack were slight and during the rest of the days the Coys. spent the day in clearing the trench and making shelter for the men.* (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of April 9, 1917)

(continued)

Little further progress was made after the successes of that first day, the terrain proving too difficult for the advance of guns and the necessary equipment – and, as usual, the Germans were quick to recover, although no serious attempt was made by them to retake *Vimy Ridge*. The Battalion remained in the forward area consolidating its position until relieved on April 15.



(Right above: *Canadian sappers, having just laid a narrow-gauge railway line across the battle-field, use it immediately to evacuate the wounded of both sides. This photograph taken on the field at or in the vicinity of Vimy. – from Illustration*)

Towards the end of April the 26th Battalion was employed in digging new trench positions so as to be in a position to support Canadian attacks going in at Arleux-en-Gohelle and later at Fresnoy.

These costly operations went ahead – the first a relative success, the second a lot less so - but apparently the 26th Battalion was not heavily involved. Once again, most of its casualties were apparently due to enemy artillery action.



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

After the five-week Battle of Arras had stuttered to its conclusion – officially on May 15 - the remainder of the month of May and most of June were spent by many Canadian units, including the 26th Battalion, withdrawn from the line, the time partially to be used for reinforcement and for further re-organization.

On July 1, Dominion Day, however, the 26th Battalion was on its way to the forward area and by the following day was in Brigade Reserve, once again in the *Angres Sector* in the vicinity of the mining centre of Lens. On the 6th the unit was once more in – or in the area of - the front lines and by the 20th the Battalion War Diarist was recording preparations being made for... *the coming show*.

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.

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(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*)

For the 26th Battalion, the end of July and the beginning of August of 1917 were to be a succession of days of training. The Canadian Corps, since *Vimy Ridge*, was from now on always to fight as an autonomous entity; its now-apparent military capability was also to be exploited to a much greater extent than had been the case in earlier days.

One of the primary objectives was to be the so-named *Hill 70* in the outskirts of the mining centre of Lens. On August 14, the 26th Battalion and other 1st and 2nd Canadian Division units moved to assembly areas. On the 15th the attack went in.

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 that of Lens itself.

(Right above: *The monument to commemorate the capture of Hill 70 by the Canadians stands some hundred metres or so from its apex, this point just to the left from where the roads intersect. – photograph from 2014*)

Objectives were limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the seeming 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: *A Canadian 220 mm siege gun, under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action – from Le Miroir*)



As far as the actions of the 26 Battalion at *Hill 70* are concerned, excerpts from Appendix Number 5 of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary give a general idea: *At 4.25 a.m. on Wednesday, 15th August the Artillery opened up and the 25th Battalion on the Right and the 22nd Battalion on the Left advanced to the attack, closely followed by the 24th and 26th Battalions respectively. The objective...was the BLUE Line. ...the 24th and 26th Battalions, which were to pass through the 24th and 26th Battalions...would also advance at Zero hour until clear of the German Front Line so as to avoid the enemy barrage. This proved most successful and the casualties...were very light.*

(continued)

The Blue Line was captured on scheduled time, namely, at 4.51 a.m.

At 5.24 a.m. the 24th and 26th Battalions passed through...and advanced on the GREEN Line which they captured at 5.42 with the exception of the Left Company of the 24th Battalion which was held up...by Machine Gun fire and Bombers. ...this Company, however, captured their objective by 7.15 a.m. The whole of the GREEN objective was now in our hands...

At this point the enemy counter-attacked the positions held by the 24th Battalion but were driven off.

The remainder of the day was spent in consolidating the positions gained and clearing the battle-field. The consolidation was carried out...and Machine Guns were placed in Strong Points.

Having repulsed several further German attempts to re-gain the lost ground, attacks accompanied by heavy bombardments and hostile aeroplane activity on both August 16 and 17, the 26th Battalion was relieved, retiring into the area of the former British front line.



(Right: *Canadians soldiers in the captured rear area of Hill 70 during the days after the battle – from Le Miroir*)

This Canadian-led campaign had apparently been scheduled 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 its by-then exorbitant losses. The Australians and New Zealanders – further to the south than the Canadians – and then the Canadians themselves, all were ordered to prepare to move north; thus the Canadian Corps was obliged to abandon its plans.

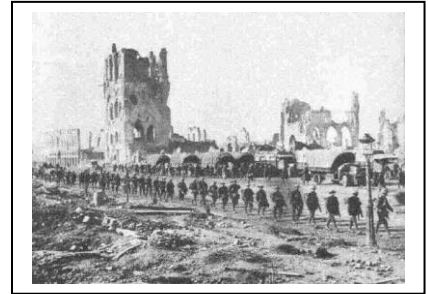
There were therefore to be no further major Canadian-inspired actions in the Lens-Béthune sectors and the troops yet again were to settle back into that monotonous but at times precarious existence of life in – and behind – the forward area. On most days, according to the Battalion War Diary, it was the artillery which fought it out – but, of course, the infantry was usually the target.

Even though it was known that the Canadians were to be transferred north into Belgium, for the 26th Battalion there was to be a more-than-nine-week interlude between the action at *Hill 70* and the transfer to its next theatre of operations. During this time the daily grind of life in the trenches was still the rule – with several exceptions when the unit was retired to areas behind the lines, particularly for training, although the War Diary shows that sports were being considered more and more to be a morale booster among the troops.

It was not until the 24th day of that October of 1917 that the 26th Battalion entrained in or near the community of Tinquies to begin the transfer north into Belgium and once more to the *Ypres Salient* which the unit had left some thirteen months before.

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Officially designated to be the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign – ongoing since the last day of that July – was to come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – at least was latterly *professed* to have been - one of the British Army's main 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*)

(Right below: *Somewhere, possibly anywhere or almost everywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917. – from Illustration*)

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 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 – November 10 - the reverse was true with troops of the 2nd Division (see below) finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

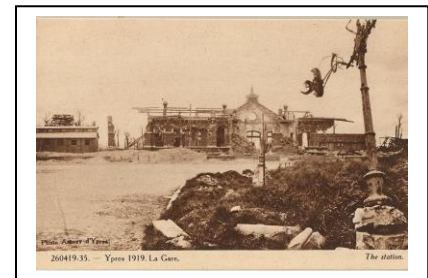


(Right: *The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians which stands in the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele (today Passendale) – photograph from 2010*)

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(Right: Just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the Passchendaele monument – this is the ground up which the Canadians fought during those weeks of October and November of 1917. – photograph from 2010)



Casualties during the operation incurred by the 26th Battalion had been forty-two *killed in action* and two-hundred seven *wounded*, all ranks.

(Right: Canadian troops – not having proper bathing facilities - performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir)



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Three days later again, the 26th and 24th Battalions moved to the rear area at Mont St-Éloi. There they apparently remained for the succeeding six days at which time, on November 22, the unit was ordered into support at La Chaudière. There it remained until November 28 when it was relieved by the 27th battalion and retired to *Villers Camp*, in the vicinity of Villers-au-Bois.



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**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.*

The winter of 1917-1918 was to pass much in the manner of the previous winters of the Great War, in stagnation. Any infantry activity tended to be local: ever-present patrols and the occasional raid – that activity much in favour with the British High Command; apparently loathed by those whose duty it was to undertake them. And most casualties were, as usual, still due to the enemy's artillery-fire and to his snipers.

Some of the time that the 26th Battalion spent in the forward area was in the vicinity of Lievin, to the west of Lens, at other times further to the south, in the Neuville St-Vaast Sector. The days, for the most part, were reported as... *quiet* – the exceptions to the rule being described as... *very quiet*.

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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.*



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The War Diary suggests, however, that the 26th Battalion was not involved in the heaviest, if any, 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 to incessant enemy artillery activity rather than to any infantry action.



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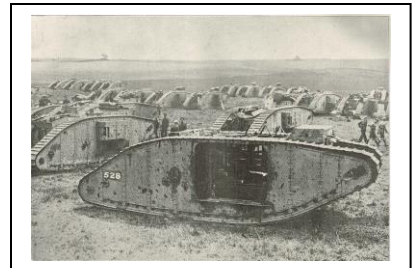
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The Allies from this point of view were a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were by now belatedly arriving on the scene. An overall Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

It was at the outset of this period of calm, that Private King received promotion: on April 27, 1918, the day after his birthday, he was appointed to the rank of lance corporal.

Towards the end of July, the 26th Battalion – and a large number of other Canadian units - began to move in a semi-circular itinerary - to the west of, then south of, and finally east of - to finish *in front of* the city of Amiens, there to face the German forces where they had remained since the attacks of the previous March and April. On August 2, while en route, the Battalion underwent two days of tactical training in co-operation with tanks. On the evening of August 3 it received orders to move forward once more – on foot as usual*.

(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*)



**While, at the outset, this huge transfer of troops had been under-taken by train and motor transport, the later stages had been accomplished on foot, in marches during the hours of darkness. The strategy had worked, for the attack of August 8 apparently took the Germans completely by surprise.*

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(Right: 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*)



By the time that the unit had been relieved and placed in reserve on August 11, it had incurred approximately forty personnel *killed in action* and a further two-hundred six *wounded in action*.

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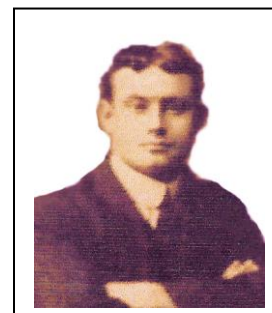
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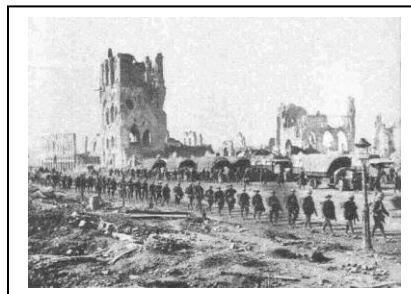


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I also here append my sincere thanks to Lieutenant Commander St-Amant for his most generous and gracious help. - Alistair R.

Officially designated to be the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign - ongoing since the last day of that July - was to come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was - at least was latterly *professed* to have been - one of the British Army's main objectives.



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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 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 - November 10 - the reverse was true with troops of the 2nd Division (see below) finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

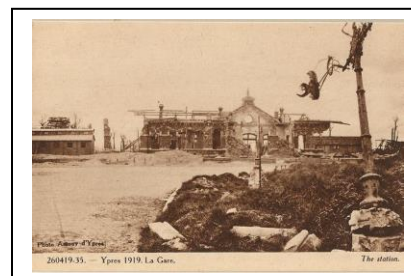


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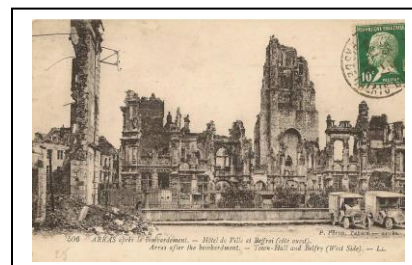
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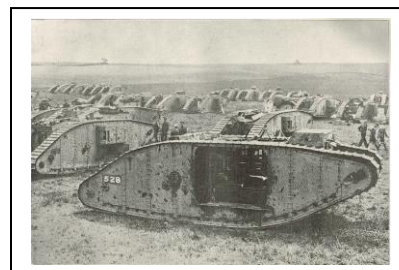
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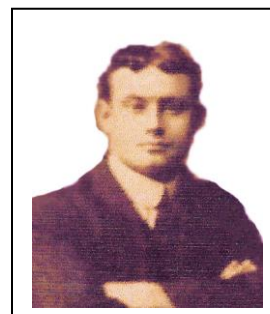
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The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated - January 23, 2023.