

Private Felix Napoleon LeBouffe (Number 793107) of the 2nd Battalion, Canadian Machine Gun Corps, 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 image of the badge of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps is from the canadiansoldiers.com Web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, Felix Napoleon LeBouffe leaves very little information behind him a propos his movement 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 community of Campbellton, County of Restigouche – that his given address - in November of 1915, for that was both where and when he enlisted.

Private LeBouffe's first pay records confirm that it was on November 29 of 1916 that the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services to the 132nd Battalion (*North Shore*) – Campbellton Detachment - by which unit he was *taken on strength* on that same date. The date is also re-confirmed by a medical examination that he underwent on January 14 of the New Year, 1916, a procedure which pronounced him...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*.

Five days later again, on January 19, Private LeBouffe was attested. The formalities of his enlistment were then brought to a conclusion on that same day when the Commanding Officer of the 132nd Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel G.W. Mersereau, declared – on paper – that...*Felix Napoleon LaBouffe...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

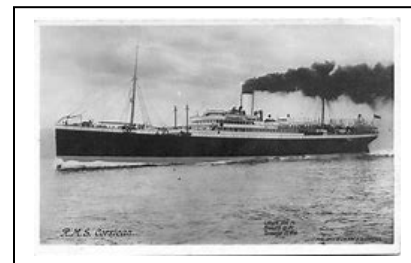
Private LeBouffe's 132nd Battalion was based in the New Brunswick town of Chatham. A school built in 1887 was to later be transformed into an armoury and used for military training. It may well be that recruits to the 132nd Battalion made use of it, although it is also recorded that the unit was subsequently ordered to *Camp Valcartier*, Québec, there to undergo exercises prior to departure overseas. A further medical report dated June 23, 1916, was issued at Valcartier, thus confirming his presence there.

(Right: *Canadian artillery being put through its paces at the Camp at Valcartier. In 1914, the main Army Camp in Canada was at Petawawa. However, its location in Ontario – but also at some distance from the Great Lakes – made it impractical for the despatch of troops overseas. Valcartier was apparently built within weeks after the Declaration of War. – photograph (from a later date in the War) from The War Illustrated*)



In neither case does there appear to be a great deal of information about that period of 1916.

It was the vessel *Corsican*, a trans-Atlantic vessel of the Allan Line, but requisitioned at this time by the British government as a troop carrier, that was to transport the 132nd Battalion (*North Shore*) to the United Kingdom. On October 26, Private LeBouffe's unit began to embark in the harbour at Halifax.



(Right: *The image of Corsican is from the Bing.com/ images web-site.*)

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Corsican sailed later on that same day, Private Lebouffe's 132nd Battalion to be accompanied during its passage by the 2nd Part of the 169th Battalion of Canadian Infantry and also a Cyclist Platoon designated **MD6**.

The ship made the crossing from Halifax to the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool in ten days, at which time Private LeBouffe and his Battalion were transported south by train to the recently-established Canadian military complex in the vicinity of the villages of Liphook and Bramshott – the latter community having lent its name to the camp – in the southern county of Hampshire.

Within a few weeks, on December 8, some of the personnel of the 132nd Battalion was to be transferred – this from his own papers although a number of sources appear to contradict the information – to the 104th Battalion, another New Brunswick unit. Private LeBouffe was apparently one of that number and was ordered to the Canadian Camp at **Witley Camp** where the 104th Battalion was stationed at the time.

Only weeks later again, on January 26, 1917, he was *taken on strength* from the 104th Battalion by the newly-formed 13th Reserve Battalion (*New Brunswick*) which had come into being only a week earlier back at **Camp Bramshott**. Also absorbed by the 13th Reserve Battalion at that time was the remainder of the 132nd Battalion, Private LeBouffe's former unit.



(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)

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

However, as it transpired, only some fifty of these formations were ever to be sent across the English Channel to the Western Front. By far the majority remained in the United Kingdom to be used as re-enforcement pools and they were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by units that had by then been designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions. This, as has been seen, was to be the fate of Private LeBouffe's 132nd Battalion.

Only three weeks after returning to **Camp Bramshott**, Private LeBouffe was advised of his imminent departure to the Continent when he was *taken on strength* of the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*) whose parent company was already serving in France.

For whatever the reason, those orders for Private LeBouffe were cancelled on the day of his intended travel and he was instead ordered to the New Brunswick Regimental Depot which had just come into being at Shoreham on England's south coast and to where the 13th Reserve Battalion (*New Brunswick*) had been ordered from **Camp Bramshott** only days before.

It was immediately at the outset of this period to be spent at Shoreham that Private LeBouffe was admitted into hospital at Southampton for attention to a case of diphtheria. It was apparently serious as he remained under care for almost two months, from February 21, 1917, until April 19 of the same year.

After this hospitalization a further five months were to pass before his services were finally to be required on the Continent; it was the night of September 5-6 that Private LeBouffe was again *taken on strength* by the 26th Battalion and transferred across the English Channel – likely via Southampton and Le Havre - to the Canadian Base Depot which had by that time been re-established in the vicinity of the French coastal town of Étaples.



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

After then having spent a further three weeks at the Base Depot, on September 26 Private LeBouffe was ordered to the nearby Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp where he reported *to duty* on the morrow.

On or about this date it appears that Private LeBouffe was transferred once more; in fact, it does not appear to be certain he was ever to serve with the 26th Battalion in the field.

His records document that while he was posted to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp he was to be attached to the Number 2 Tramway Construction Company of the Canadian Engineers where his old habits of indiscipline took over: *Sentenced to 14 days F.P. No.1 for Absent without leave from 8.30 am to 10.30 AM 8-12-17*



(Right above: *Canadian troops constructing a tramway of a light railway 'somewhere in France'* – from *Le Miroir*)

It was also during the latter part of this period – one source cites November 11, unlikely as it conflicts with the information of the above paragraph – that he returned to the Reinforcement Camp where he was now to remain until February 26 of 1918 when he was *taken on strength* by the Canadian Corps Machine Gun Company – although this may have been a bureaucratic exercise only, as Private LeBouffe appears to have remained at the Reinforcement Camp for a further thirty-three days.

Those thirty-three days having passed, on the last day of the month of March he was despatched to report *to duty* with the newly-forming 2nd Canadian Machine Gun Battalion. Private LeBouffe was one of two-hundred seven personnel to be sent from the CCRC to the unit on that day.

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By this stage of the Great War the use of the machine gun had evolved almost beyond recognition to what it had been less than three years earlier when each infantry battalion in the Canadian Army – and the British whom the Canadians at the time emulated – was equipped with just two of the weapons. In fact, at the outset of the war, many of those in the High Command were not in favour of the weapon and were oblivious to its potential.

By 1915, the Machine Gun Companies had been created, each Company to support the Canadian infantry brigade with which it was now to share the numerical designation i.e. the 3rd Canadian Machine Company was under the command of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade. It was, however, not to be until 1916 that these units became functional.

At the same time the weaponry was changing: the Lewis (light machine) Gun was introduced in 1916, each infantry battalion now being equipped with fourteen of the weapons, as well as with two of the heavier – and obsolescent – Colt machine guns; the newly-formed Machine Gun Companies were to receive the British Vickers medium machine gun, a weapon that would still be in service during the Second World War and for a further twenty years after that.



(Right above: *Canadian machine-gunners undergoing training, perhaps at the newly-created Machine-Gun School at Floringhem in the spring of 1917. They are using their newly-acquired Vickers machine guns. – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)

To accompany the new weapons were changes in tactics with the two-men Lewis-Gun crews of the infantry battalion being created. At the Machine Gun Company level, by early 1917, the machine-gun barrage had come into being in time for the Canadian assault at *Vimy Ridge*, and harassing fire, with its now-possible high expenditure rate of ammunition, was becoming a nightly event.

And, ever-increasingly, a new use for the weapon was now coming into being: anti-aircraft fire. The enemy's incursions into Allied air-space and aerial bombing were becoming more frequent and the machine-gun was now turned against these intruders who were still flying at a relatively low altitude.

Up until this time the machine guns had been under the command of the Brigades and ultimately, therefore, the four Divisions of the Canadian Corps. Now it was felt that the Machine Guns should operate under an independent command: thus the Canadian Machine Gun Corps was to come into being, its forces divided into machine gun battalions numbered to correspond to the Canadian Division it was intended to support i.e. Private LeBouffe's 2nd Machine Gun Battalion was to support the 2nd Canadian Division.

In fact, the 2nd Machine Gun Battalion had for practical purposes come into being on March 21 – and its War Diary had come into being three weeks before - on the first day of March of 1918.

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By the time of the arrival of Private LeBouffe's Re-enforcement Draft on March 31, the unit was serving at Basseux, some fifteen kilometres to the south-west of the city of Arras. It had also just spent the morning avoiding the bombs which had been delivered by hostile aircraft.

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



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The new 2nd Machine Gun Battalion which Private LeBouffe had joined comprised a Headquarters Staff and two Companies. Each of these Companies consisted of four batteries and each of these batteries was to command eight guns, a force of thirty-two weapons to which was almost immediately added – on April 18 - a third company, it also of a further thirty-two guns*.

Thus the 2nd MG Battalion was a force of sixty-four guns, soon to be ninety-six – this to be compared to the total of only two guns per infantry battalion of 1914. And it should not be forgotten that these same infantry battalions had also then augmented, as the war had progressed, their own machine gun fire-power as seen above.

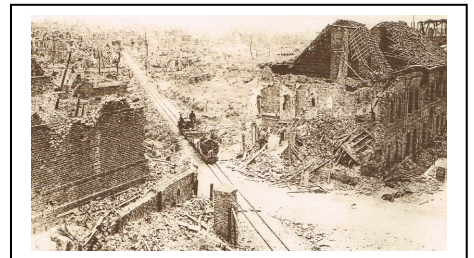
The machine-gun by 1918 had become a formidable weapon.

**In the case of the 2nd CMG Battalion, this addition actually came into physical being in mid-April. It seems that when the crisis of March 21 had come about, it had been decided to temporarily revert to the organizational system of the Machine-Gun Companies as it had been before the creation of the Battalions.*

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Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans were to come to victory in that March and April of 1918. Certainly many of the Canadian infantry battalions' war diaries exhibit no knowledge of the ongoing crisis for several days. But it was to be a serious matter.

Having transferred the divisions no longer necessary on the *Eastern Front* because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, the Germans launched a massive attack, designated as Operation '*Michael*', on March 21. The main blow was to fall at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it had fallen for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops stationed there.



(Right above: While the Germans were not to 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 to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir)

The German advance was to continue for just over a month before petering out 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 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*)



In the meantime, as noted above, several days passed before news of the German success filtered down to many Canadian units. In the case of the 2nd CMG Battalion it was just two days before the first revelation that all was not as well as might be wished for. On March 23...*Orders received by 'phone to be all packed up and ready to move at short notice...to VILLERS-AU-BOIS to embus there...Trip was made by Battalion fairly easily but it was rendered slow by great amount of traffic on roads...* By the evening of March 26 the first elements of the Battalion were moving into the area of Basseux where the unit would still be at the end of the month.

The area into which the 2nd Canadian Machine Gun Battalion had been ordered was to prove to be the northern extremity of the German offensive – although of course no-one on the Allied side could have known that. There was apparently some information forthcoming from German prisoners but this was as much *misinformation* as anything else. In the meantime there was plenty of enemy artillery activity to keep the British, Canadians, Australians et al guessing at their adversaries' intentions.

The 2nd Canadian Machine-Gun Battalion remained in the area of Basseux for the first three weeks of April. On the 12th day of that month six-hundred new personnel arrived who were destined to form the new Company of thirty-two guns: five days later, on April 17, after some intensive final training, this new unit relieved one of the two original companies in the front lines.

Only four days later, on April 21, the Battalion Headquarters moved from Basseux to La Rivière, only some three kilometres distant, but it may well be that this transfer made little difference to Private LeBouffe and his comrades-in-arms as they appear to have simply continued their prior work of repairing and rebuilding defensive positions.

The German offensive in this area by this time appears to have been reduced to the occasional raid on the Canadian positions and the eternal artillery fire. In return, the 2nd Canadian Machine Gun Battalion resumed a routine of harassing fire at night and anti-aircraft and support work during the day-time. The infantry on both sides by the end of the month appears to have limited its action to the occasional raid, and this supporting fire was required in the case of an attack by us – offensive – or them - defensive.

The amounts of small-arms ammunition now shot in a typical twenty-four hour period were becoming prodigious: on April 27 the Battalion War Diarist noted an expenditure of thirty-six thousand, two-hundred fifty rounds*. Two nights afterwards, during which a particularly ambitious program of harassing fire was undertaken, the count was sixty-thousand, five-hundred.

**The British Vickers medium machine-gun with which the 2nd CMG Battalion was equipped used .303 rimmed ammunition, the same cartridge as used by the Lewis-Gun and the Lee-Enfield Mark III rifle.*

On the last day of that month, Private LeBouffe found himself sentenced to seven days of *Field Punishment Number 1*. This penalty involved being shackled or handcuffed before being tied to an immobile object for up to three hours per day. Hard labour could also then be imposed upon the miscreant. Private LeBouffe's misdemeanour on this occasion: *Conduct to prejudice of good order and military discipline in that he appeared on parade with dirty rifle and equipment.*

In the mean-time, the number of casualties incurred by the unit was becoming lighter; the Battalion War Diary for the month of May, all of it spent in the vicinity of La Rivière, documented two *killed in action*, two having *died of wounds*, twenty-four *wounded* and one *gassed*, all of them *Other Ranks*; for June, while still at La Rivière, the Diarist reported two *Other Ranks* having *died of wounds*, twelve *Other Ranks* having been *wounded*, and a single *Other Rank gassed*.

Thus a relative calm had descended on the front as the German threat faded – the enemy had won a great deal of ground, but had gained nothing of any military significance on either of the two fronts. Nor was the calm particularly surprising: both sides were exhausted and needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to re-enforce.

(Right: *The venerable 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(?)*)



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 belatedly arriving on the scene.

An overall Allied 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.

(Right: *Le Maréchal Ferdinand Jean-Marie Foch, this photograph from 1921, became Generalissimo of the Allied Armies on March 26, 1918. – photograph from the Wikipedia web-site*)



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During the last days of June, Private LeBouffe's Battalion moved from La Rivière where it had been stationed since the final week of April, 1918, the twenty kilometres or so being undertaken by light railway and on foot. Liencourt was further removed to the north-west from the forward area and...*The area was found to be a good one with regards to billets and all were comfortably settled within a few hours of arrival.* (Excerpt from 2nd CMG Battalion War Diary entry for July 1, 1918)

A week was to be then spent in organizing, cleaning of equipment and the care of the Battalion's animals, before the unit was inspected. Then on July 7, training began for three days before word was received that the unit was to move forward. By July 17 the 2nd CMG Battalion had moved up to be based in the area of Warlus, closer to the front – and for those posted even further forward in the area of Beaurains, near enough to the enemy positions to be shelled.

However, this posting was to be for but a few days before the unit was to be withdrawn to the vicinity of Étrun for yet another period of training. Then, by July 24, Private LeBouffe's Battalion had returned to Liencourt for more of the same.

LIENCOURT July 29 1918 – During the morning a message was received from the 2nd Canadian Division cancelling all training in the Battalion, and warning the unit to be ready to move from here at short notice. In the afternoon and evening, all ranks were busy with preparations. (Excerpt from 2nd CMG Battalion War Diary entry for July 29, 1918)

FERRIERES July 30th 1918 – About 1.30 a.m. this morning the orders arrived from Headquarters. The Battalion is to move to the CAVILLON Area on the SOMME. The orders involved the unit entraining at LIGNY ST FLOCHEL, a point distant some fifteen kilometres from our billets...

(Right: *Ligny-St-Flochel* was later to be the locale of a medical centre as witnessed by the attendant graveyard. – photograph from 2017)



...The Battalion arrived at the point of entraining at 7.45 a.m. and three hours later, the train pulled out of the station, arriving at the detraining point LONGPRE at 2.30 p.m. A march of 20 kilometres followed...the Battalion...arriving at FERRIERES at 9.00 p.m. where they were billeted... (Excerpt from 2nd CMG Battalion War Diary entry for July 30, 1918)

FERRIERES, July 31st 1918 – We find FERRIERES a nice town with first-class billets, beautiful surroundings and hospitable inhabitants. In fact the people of this district appeared glad to see the Canadians come. All along the road we were welcomed with friendly smiles. The town folk on our arrival were glad to welcome the Battalion and made us comfortable. (Excerpt from 2nd CMG Battalion War Diary entry for July 31, 1918)

The 2nd Canadian Machine Gun Battalion was now on its way to that part of the forward area, in the countryside in front of Amiens, where the German spring offensive had been halted some four months earlier. Ferrières, however, was to be temporarily home for five days, a not unpleasant arrangement if the above War Diary excerpt is to be believed.

In having been transferred in this manner, Private LeBouffe's Battalion had not been alone: a large number of other Canadian units – indeed, the entire Canadian Corps – had, at the end of July and the beginning of August, begun to move in a semi-circular itinerary to the west of Amiens, then south, then east again to finish in front of the city.

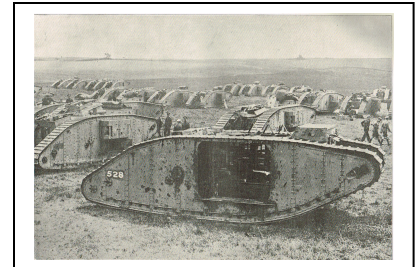
This movement was to be effected in only a matter of days, all of the latter stages on foot and also all during the hours of darkness.

It was intended to surprise the enemy – and it did.

On the night of August 5-6 the Battalion moved towards the area of Longeau in the south-eastern outskirts of Amiens and on the next days received orders to take over positions held at the time by two Australian machine-gun companies and an American unit*.

**The upcoming offensive of the Third Battle of Amiens was not to be a uniquely Canadian effort: fighting alongside would be British, Australians and New Zealanders, French and some American forces.*

During the same night hundreds of tanks, Squadrons of Cavalry, Whippets (small, mobile tanks), Guns big and small and lorry loads with material and men went forward. The weather being favourable and the sky obscured prevented observation by the enemy. (Excerpt from 2nd CMG Battalion War Diary entry for August 6, 1918)



(Right above: *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*)

On August 7, those troops to be employed as assault and support units were ordered forward to their assembly areas. Numbers 1 and 2 Companies of the 2nd CMG Battalions moved ahead, while Number 3 Company, to be in the spearhead of the attack by the 2nd Canadian Division, moved even further, from forward positions where it had already been for two days, up into jumping-off places.

At 4.20 a.m. our Artillery and Barrage Machine-Guns opened up a destructive fire, silencing the enemy's batteries and under cover of this barrage and the mist, the Infantry, closely followed by 'M' & 'J' Batteries, went forward with the first wave. ...a faithful attempt was made to keep the 'diamond formation' but this was frustrated by the thick mist. The ground was largely defended by machine gun nests distributed in depth and the mist at once hampered and aided them.

Our troops could not see very far ahead of them and these strongpoints were often over-run by them, allowing them to open a destructive fire upon our Infantry and our Machine Gun formations coming closely behind. (Excerpt from 2nd CMG Battalion War Diary entry for August 8, 1918)

The mist, however, soon dispersed, as did much of the German resistance on that first day. In some places Canadian troops advanced some eleven kilometres, a feat unheard of since the early days of the war, before the stagnancy of trench warfare had set in*.

Most objectives were taken early, allowing the support and then the reserve troops to pass through to continue the advance. At times the machine guns were hard pressed to both keep up with the offensive and to offer support.

**About the only two exceptions to this rule were the first day – November 20 of 1917 – of the Battle of Cambrai when tanks were first used en masse, and the early days of the German advance at the end of March of 1918.*

By the end of the second day, August 9, the War Diarist was reporting...*three miles and half (almost six kilometres) of depth with several villages was added to our capture and the Corps boundary was also widened...many prisoners and trophies were taken while our casualties were still very light.*

(Right: *Canadian soldiers consolidate newly-won positions while others cross a river – the Somme? - on an improvised bridge. – from Le Miroir*)



The enemy resistance was by this time beginning to harden and, paradoxically, was assisted by the Canadian and Allied success. The advance had been so rapid – despite the occasional reverse – that the logistics were at times finding it difficult to keep apace. And there was soon to be a further factor playing a role in the equation: the Canadians were about to withdraw from the battle.



(Right above: *A group of German prisoners, some seen 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*)

The offensive was to continue, although rarely at the pace of those first days, to cease only on November 11, some three months hence, when the final Armistice came into effect. The Canadians were to now return whence they had come only three weeks or so earlier, to the sectors in the area of Arras.

In the case of the 2nd Canadian Machine Gun Battalion, its retirement was to begin on August 17 when it was ordered back into the...*Reserve area...of the woods in proximity to the community of Caix, the move accompanied by German shells.* There the unit, once congregated, cleaned its weapons, ammunition and equipment, readied itself for a further transfer and, on August 19, underwent a muster parade, a pay parade and a bath.



(Right above: *French dead in the communal cemetery at Caix, just to the west of Rosières. Caix also hosts a British Commonwealth cemetery as well as a German burial ground. – photograph from 2017*)

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That night the unit was on the move once more.

(Right: *British forces were not withdrawn as were the Canadians from in front of Amiens in August of 1918. In tandem with French troops they continued the offensive, as here in the attack against St-Quentin. – from Le Miroir*)



Once withdrawn - their places in the line to be taken by French troops - the forces of the Canadian Corps left the *Amiens Front* by the same itineraries as by which they had arrived. What is more, the same discretion and secrecy was now practiced once more. Only days later, by the 26th of August, the first Canadian units were ready for offensive operations in tandem with British forces astride the axis of the main road leading from Arras to Cambrai.



And once again, it appears that the Germans had not been prepared for the appearance of the Canadian Corps.

(Right above: *Some of the ground on which fighting took place at the end of August and beginning of September of 1918: The Arras to Cambrai road – looking in the direction of Cambrai – may be perceived just left of centre on the horizon. – photograph from 2015*)

Meanwhile, on August 20, Private LeBouffe's Battalion had boarded three trains during the evening at Longeau and had proceeded to Frévent, thirty-two kilometres to the west of Arras. The trains had been slow and it had not been until four o'clock in the morning that the entire force had disembarked at its destination.

It was to spend the next four days moving slowly forward through the several communities towards the larger centre of Arras itself. Orders were received on August 24 that the planned attack would take place on the morrow. These plans were later amended by orders to postpone the operation by twenty-four hours but by then the first elements of the 2nd CMG Battalion were already moving up to take their places among the attacking forces. Thus the following day, August 25, was spent in waiting for the time to pass: *The line was very quiet and enemy artillery activity practically nil.* (Excerpt from 2nd CMG Battalion War Diary entry for August 25, 1918)

At fifteen minutes past one o'clock the last parties of Private LeBouffe's Battalion had relieved its counter-parts of the 3rd CMG Battalion and was awaiting the moment of the assault. There was but one hour and forty-five minutes left until that time: *Zero Hour* was to be at three o'clock on that morning of August 26, 1918.

Despite a stiffening German defence, abetted as ever at this late stage of the conflict by the machine-gunners who gave no quarter and rarely asked for it, the majority of the Canadian and British objectives were taken. One of them was the village of Monchy-le-Preux which had fallen on the first morning of the attack.

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****This was where, on April 14 of 1917, the Newfoundland Regiment had lost four-hundred eighty-seven killed, wounded and missing in a failed attempt to take the place. After July 1 of 1916, Monchy-le-Preux was to be the worst day of the conflict for the Newfoundland Regiment.***

(Right: The re-constructed village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen from the western side: A bronze Newfoundland Caribou stands in its centre to commemorate the events and sacrifices of April 14, 1917. – photograph from 2014)



Once again, as in front of Amiens, there was a division of labour for the batteries of the 2nd CMG Battalion: four of them were to participate in the planned machine-gun barrage* before following the assaulting troops; a further four were to take up positions on high ground so as to be in position to fire in support over the heads of the advancing infantry; and two were to be available to act either offensively or defensively as required.

****A machine-gun barrage took advantage of the rate of fire of the weapon, up to six-hundred rounds per minute and was able to sustain fire for well over ten-thousand rounds per hour – although a high rate of fire necessitated a frequent change of barrel. The barrage using the best cartridges had a range of just over four kilometres. Thus when a large number of these guns was used in concert, the opposition was well-advised to seek shelter – thus being kept out of the action.***

The advance of the attacking forces during this, the *Battle of the Scarpe*, was again to be impressive, some eight kilometres before the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions were, on August 29, withdrawn from the field of battle, to be replaced immediately by the 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions for the next phase of the offensive, the assault on the German defensive *Drocourt-Quéant Line*.



(Right above: In one of the many villages liberated from the Germans, Canadian and enemy wounded await evacuation to the rear. – from Le Miroir)

Whereas the tired infantry battalions of the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions were to remain in the reserve area for a longer number of days, it was on September 3 that the 2nd CMG Battalion was ordered forward once more, on this occasion to the area of Chérisy, just south of the Arras-Cambrai Road and in the vicinity of Vis-en-Artois, scene of fierce fighting only days before.

(Right: Douglas Haig, C.-in-C. of British and Commonwealth forces on the Western Front inspects Canadian troops after their successful operation of September 2 against the German Drocourt-Quéant Line – from Le Miroir)



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(Right below: *Vis-en-Artois British Cemetery: The cemetery contains 2,369 soldiers of the Great War – originally mostly from 1918 - of whom only 885 have been identified. – photograph from 2010*)

The Canadian assault on the *Drocourt-Quéant Line* had gone well and the system had been breached. On September 3, Chérisy had not been far behind the front, but that front was advancing all the time as the Germans were now beginning to pull back behind the barrier of the *Canal du Nord**. By September 7 it appears from the War Diary entry of the day that the Battalion had moved as far forward as Buissy, a community only two kilometres to the west of the *Canal*.



**The waterway was still under construction at this time and in places was devoid of any water. Thus it was perhaps not quite as formidable an obstacle as its name implies.*

But once the advancing formations had arrived at the *Canal*, there was no immediate attempt to force a crossing. In fact there were still German forces on the western side who were putting up a strong resistance as was, as ever, the enemy artillery. And, as at Amiens, the advance had begun to outrun a stretched logistics service.

A halt was thus called while plans were being conceived for an attack across both the flooded and the waterless parts of the waterway.

(Right: *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*)



It was not until three weeks after its retirement that the Battalion, on September 25, began to venture forward again. On the next day the unit's various Batteries began to report to the Battalions to which they had been attached. That same afternoon and evening, the Brigades of the 4th Canadian Division began the march to their assembly areas. The attack on the *Canal du Nord* was to go in on the morrow morn, September 27.



(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*)

During this waiting period Private LeBouffe's Battalion maintained its pressure on the enemy forces with its harassing and indirect fire, at the outset expending some five-thousand to eight-thousand rounds per days. This increased as the day of the attack approached, the eve of the operation seeing more than ninety-two thousand rounds fired. And up until this time the infantry units in the area were occasionally mounting local offensives against the German forces, some of which still remained on the west bank, actions which required machine-gun support.

The casualties incurred by the 2nd CMG Battalion during this period were for the most part caused by the incessant German artillery activity, not only the habitual shrapnel and high-explosive. Shelling with gas was frequently recorded by the War Diarist.

September 27, 1918, was the day on which the Canadians crossed the Canal du Nord. Seen in retrospect, it appears to have been undertaken with fewer difficulties than might have been expected, the Battalion War Diary recording, for example: *The enemy retaliation was not heavy... No damage was caused to transport... Advance gained all objectives on scheduled time...*

By noon on that day it was reported that the follow-up forces were now making the crossing completely unopposed. By late afternoon the Canadians had cleared *Bourlon Wood* at a distance of four-five kilometres to the east of the Canal, and had then turned to the high ground north-east of Cambrai. From there on the next day patrols were being sent to the outskirts of Cambrai itself and as far as the next watery obstacle: the *Canal de l'Escaut*.

(Right above: *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 Bourlon Wood* – photograph from 2016)

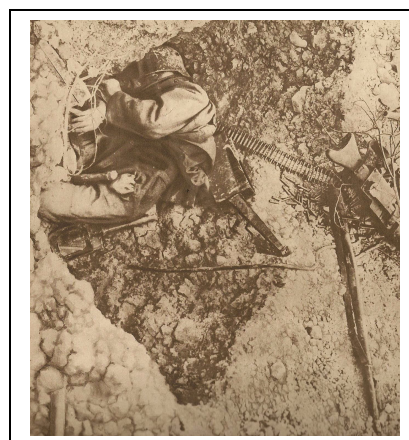
(Right: *Bourlon Wood Cemetery is the last resting-place of two-hundred thirty-five soldiers of the Great War of whom two-hundred twenty-one wore a Canadian uniform.* – Photograph from 2017)

Then the advance was slowed – and at times stopped - by a combination of factors: the enemy had re-organized his resistance and, once again, his machine-gunners were able to hold off the Canadian infantry attacks; the British forces with whom the Canadians had worked in tandem since the *Battle of the Scarpe*, suspended their operations; flooded ground and unexpected wire was encountered; and the casualty count was rising to some twenty per cent.

(Right: *A German machine-gunner who also gave his all, dead at his post* – from *Illustration*)

The Canadian attack, however, may have been slowed and even temporarily halted but it was not over: At three o'clock on the afternoon of September 30 the... *Order received from Division that unit is to be ready to move at one hours notice.*

The Canadians were now about to set about the capture of the town of Cambrai the key to which was to be the crossing of the *Canal de l'Escaut*. In the meantime, on October 2, an enemy counter-attack was successfully dealt with, but it had delayed the Canadian operation. A further German assault occurred on October 4, with more delay the result.



On the following day it was necessary to mount four guns as anti-aircraft weapons necessitated by enemy aircraft intrusions. On the same day it was noticed that the Germans had begun to set fires in the town of Cambrai, presumably to destroy what remained there, in preparation for a hasty general withdrawal*.

**Cambrai during the Great War was an important German supply centre as it was served by several railway lines.*

(Right: At this stage of the Great War the Canadians were fighting in territory inter-laced by a network of canals. The work of the Canadian Engineers in constructing and repairing bridges became invaluable. – from Le Miroir)



It was not until October 9 that a concerted attack on Cambrai was undertaken by Canadian forces, Zero Hour being at half past one on that morning.

It was all a bit anti-climactic. The Battalion War Diary records...*There is no enemy in sight...*and the advance went ahead except in one area...*where we are held up by our own shell-fire.* By October 10, the Canadian troops following-up found the town to be deserted: it had been captured, apparently at a cost of fewer than twenty casualties.

(Right: The 'Monument aux Morts' 1914-1918, Cambrai – photograph from 2015)



Whether the...*night of October 9th*...referred to in the following casualty report is that of October 8-9 or of October 9-10 is not clear. Neither does either of the War Diary entries for those two days make any reference to the incident: *While moving to new gun positions on the night of October 9th, 1918, an enemy aeroplane dropped a bomb amongst the party instantly killing Private LeBouffe.*

The son of Richard LeBouffe, fisherman – originally of Restigouche* – and of Eliza LeBouffe** (*née Gudyer/ Goodyear*) – to whom as of November 1, 1916, he had allotted a monthly twenty dollars from his pay - of Hall's Bay, Newfoundland, he was brother to at least Martha-Emmeline-Cordelia, to Eliza-Jane and to Robert-Wakeham.

**Either the County of Restigouche, New Brunswick, or the community of Ste-Anne-de-Restigouche or St-André-de-Restigouche, Québec.*

***Despite a note to the contrary among his papers, his parents are recorded as having been married on November 7, 1883.*

Private LeBouffe was recorded as having been *killed in action* on October 9, 1918, during the attack on Cambrai. While it was also reported that his body had been left on the site – *Positions north-west of Cambrai* - for burial, it was not later found, nor had any grave been located as of May 1, 1920.

(continued)

Felix Napoleon LeBouffe had enlisted at the *apparent* age of sixteen years: date of birth at Springdale, Newfoundland, February 21, 1897*.

**These confusing data are from his attestation papers.*

Private Felix Napoleon LeBouffe was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



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