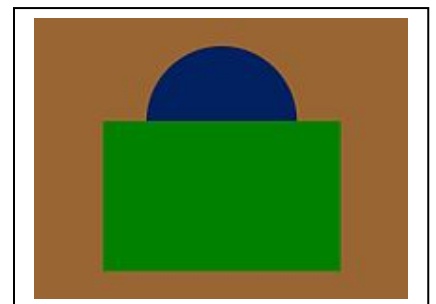




Private Cyril LeMessurier (Number 129424) of the 72nd Battalion (*Seaforth Highlanders of Canada*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Contay British Cemetery: Grave reference VII.A.2.

(Right: The image of the shoulder-flash of the 72nd Battalion (*Seaforth Highlanders of Canada*) is from Wikipedia.)

(continued)



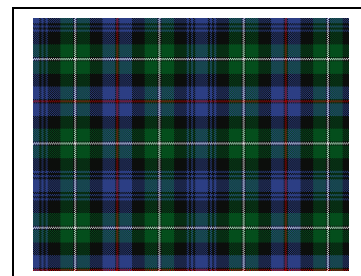
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a warehouseman, Cyril LeMessurier appears to have left behind him little if any information a propos his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of British Columbia. It appears, however, that some of the family - he, his parents and some of his siblings - were already resident there during or about the time of the *Great War*.

It was in Vancouver, on September 2 of 1915, that Cyril LeMessurier presented himself for enlistment. Pay records confirm that it was on this day that the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services to the 6th Regiment (*Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles*) of the Canadian Militia by whom he had been *taken on strength* on that same September 2.

That particular posting lasted a bare two weeks before Private LeMessurier, on September 15-16, was transferred to the 72nd Regiment (*Seaforth Highlanders*), also a unit of the Canadian Militia.

The Militia, however, had been organized for the defence of the nation and therefore it was forbidden to operate outside the borders of the country. While such units were permitted to recruit, and indeed were encouraged to do so, those who volunteered were often then transferred to the new Overseas Battalions which were being organized.

The case of the 72nd Regiment, however, appears to be unique: the entire unit was to be disbanded, then re-designated and its status at that time changed from that of a militia formation to one of an overseas battalion. Only two days after his transfer to the 72nd Regiment (*Seaforth Highlanders*), on September 18, this unit metamorphosed into the 72nd Battalion (*Seaforth Highlanders of Canada*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.



(Right above: *The image of the Seaforth McKenzie tartan, as worn by the Seaforth Highlanders of both the Canadian and British Armed Forces, is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

The official conclusion to the formalities of Private LeMessurier's enlistment was brought about on that same September 18. On that day, the Officer Commanding the 72nd Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel* John Arthur Clark, 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.*

**Perhaps only a major at this time.*

For the next seven months, until the time of their departure for *overseas service*, Private LeMessurier and his Battalion paraded and drilled at the Beatty Street Armoury in Vancouver. Then, in April of 1916, the unit would travel by train across the country to the east-coast port of Halifax.

The ship on which Private LeMessurier was to sail was the *Empress of Britain*, the 72nd Battalion embarking on April 23. Also taking passage on her to the United Kingdom were the 87th Battalion of Canadian Infantry as well as the Number 3 Party of the 224th Battalion, and a reinforcing draft for the 13th Brigade of the Canadian Field Artillery.

(Right below: *The image of the RMS (Royal Mail Ship) Empress of Britain is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site*)

The *Empress* sailed from Halifax on April 25. The crossing was apparently to take longer than usual as she reportedly did not dock in the English west-coast port of Liverpool until twelve days later, on May 7 – although a further source records May 5. From there the 72nd Battalion was transported by train to the Canadian military complex which had by then been established in the vicinity of the villages of Liphook and Bramshott, the latter after which the camp was named.



There was now to be a further waiting period before the unit was ordered to *active service* on the Continent. And while the 72nd Battalion continued to train, the 4th Canadian Division was undergoing its final organization.



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

* * * * *

In February of 1915, the Canadian Division* had landed in the French port of St-Nazaire. That September it had been the turn of the 2nd Canadian Division to cross the English Channel. Then at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916, the 3rd Canadian Division had officially come into being. All three formations had from the first, for the most part* served in the Kingdom of Belgium in the small southern area, the only part of the country not occupied by the Germans.

**The Canadian Division – logically re-designated as the 1st Canadian Division after the advent of the 2nd Canadian Division – had been the only exception, having fought at Festubert and Givenchy in the late spring of 1915.*

The 4th Division was to be the last such Canadian formation to be despatched to *active service* on the Continent*. In the middle of August of that 1916 it arrived in France to immediately be ordered north into Belgium. As it did, the first units of the 1st Canadian Division were withdrawing from the area to undergo training in north-western France before being ordered further south to serve in the ongoing British offensive.

**A 5th Division was to be formed in the United Kingdom, but it remained there during the remainder of the conflict, there to coordinate training and to act as a reserve pool.*



(Right: *Troops – said to be British, but the Canadians wore British Uniforms – on the march in the north of France during the early period of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

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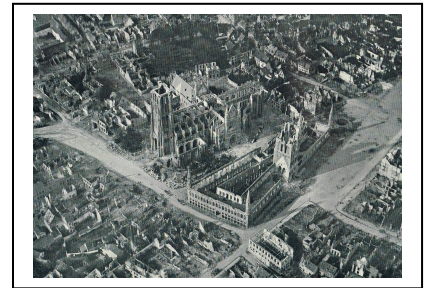
* * * * *

Private LeMessurier and the 72nd Division left Bramshott on or about August 12 and likely took ship in Southampton. On the following day the unit landed in the French port-city of Le Havre on that estuary of the River Seine. Three days later again it had traversed the Franco-Belgian frontier and reported to Erie Canadian Camp in proximity to the Belgian town of Poperinghe.



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

On August 18 the Battalion sent its first units to serve in the forward area – in the vestiges of the already shattered medieval city of Ypres.



(Right: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2nd Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)

The Highlanders remained in those same sectors for just over a month. Little by little the units of the 4th Division were being handed over some of the responsibility for the areas from which the Canadians of the three other Divisions were now withdrawing. They were, however, to have a somewhat limited opportunity to become acquainted with the rigours and routines of life in – and out of – the trenches*.

**During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, perhaps a hundred metres or so behind the front.*



The unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest 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 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 and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration*)

(continued)

Just over a month after having arrived in Belgium, the 72nd Battalion, on September 24, was leaving it – on foot. On successive nights it occupied billets in the French communities of Hazebrouck, Arques and Houille, this last to be the unit's base during the upcoming period of training of which the first exercises commenced on September 27.

Whereas the first troops to undergo training had in some cases spent almost two weeks at it, this preparation for the 72nd Battalion was to last but five days. At forty-five minutes past mid-night on October 3 the unit was beginning to march on its way back to Arques, there to board a train at ten minutes to seven in the morning, for the journey south to the community of Candas.

The agenda of the next several dates apparently were to comprise the following: training, two days of... *nothing to report* (72nd Battalion War Diary entries), the presentation of the MM to Private Chowne, stretcher-bearer, and five more days of marching. On October 12 the unit reported *to duty* at Tara Hill Camp, in the vicinity of the provincial town of Albert. It had arrived at *the Somme*.

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

By October of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for three 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.

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

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.

As the battle had progressed, other troops from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were brought in; at first 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 had been in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcelette, almost a month before the arrival of the 72nd Battalion.

(continued)



(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, in September 1916. – from The War Illustrated*)

Once having arrived, the Battalion and Private LeMessurier were put to work – a lot of it. For the next twelve days as many as six-hundred men from the unit were each day ordered to labour on... *communication trench, front line trench, and cable trench. On one occasion the War Diarist saw fit to add... and road making.*

Then there were two further days of... *nothing to report.*

It was on October 26 that the Battalion received orders to move up into the forward area, into Brigade Support. There a day was spent in improving trenches and two more in undertaking reconnaissance. On the penultimate day of the month, the unit moved into the front-line positions.

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

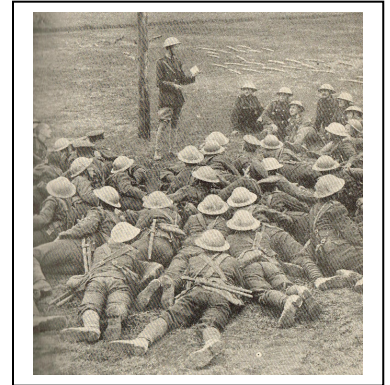
November 1 was for Private LeMessurier, as it surely was for many of his comrades-in-arms, the first day on which he had experienced the ambiance of a battle-field – although on *that day* it was relatively placid.

The 13th Battalion War Diary entry for that day reported the following: *Offensive patrol sent out...at 6.50 p.m. to gain information of enemy's wire. Patrol worked out to within about 50 yards of enemy's front line, discovering sniper's pit and bombing post; unable to get to enemy's wire on account of rifle and machine gun fire, and also the number of bombs the enemy flung*. After working along the front for about 250 yards and without encountering any of the enemy's patrols or working parties, patrol worked back to our own lines, coming in about 10 p.m.*

**Known as hand-grenades these days*

On the following day the Battalion was relieved and moved back to the rear area into Brigade Reserve where it was to remain until November 11. On that date the unit moved up again to the front for an uneventful two-day period, after which it moved back and well away from the danger areas.

November 19 saw Private LeMessurier's Battalion making its way back up to the front line yet again. There it had been ordered to relieve two battalions, one of which... *had just carried out an attack. A patrol was found from a party who had been reconnoitring the country some distance to the west. This patrol went forward and found one battalion, but was unable to establish communication with the other... The patrol then...guided our battalion into position.*



The position in question was the notorious Regina Trench which had finally, after several expensive attempts, had been stormed and finally captured from the Germans on the night of November 10-11.

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



The following day, November 20, was spent by most of the Battalion personnel in digging some three-hundred fifty yards of a new trench. However, for at least some of that time, Private LeMessurier had been ordered to perform another task.

Casualty Report: While returning to Regina Trench, along the Pys-Miraumont Road on November 20th 1916, after having taken a wounded man to the dressing station at Courcelette, he was severely wounded in the side and thumb by shrapnel. His comrades rendered first aid and he was taken to a dressing station and later evacuated to No. 49 Casualty Clearing Station where he died the following day.



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

He was the son of John Henry LeMessurier, draper, and Margaret Jane LeMessurier (née *Campbell*) – to whom he had allocated a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay as of May 1, 1916, and to whom, on June 17 of 1916, he had willed his all – of Darling Street and later Duckworth Street, St. John's, Newfoundland. As previously reported, (some of) the family apparently then moved to 2722, 6th Avenue West, Kitsilano, Vancouver, British Columbia*.

**There were other addresses to follow: Suite 104, Alma Court, 2224 Alberta Street, Vancouver; and 3510, Prince Edward Street (in the vicinity of son Herbert and his wife, Alice), Vancouver.*

Cyril LeMessurier was also brother to Flora-Morry, William-Percie-Victor (also served: Number 646242, 158th Battalion), Herbert-Stanley (also served: Number 338980, 68th Overseas Depot Field Battery), to Elizabeth-Header (Header?), and to Margaret-Campbell.

Private Cyril LeMessurier was reported as having *died of wounds* on November 21, 1916, by the Officer Commanding the 49th Casualty Clearing Station at Contay.



Cyril LeMessurier had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-six years and eight months: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, December 10, 1888.

(Right above: *The photograph of Cyril LeMessurier – and much of the family information – is from ancestry.ca.*)

Private Cyril LeMessurier 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 27, 2023.

