

Private Kenneth George LeShane (Number 69512) of the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Menin Gate, Ypres (today Ieper): Panel reference 26-28.

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

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a miner, Kenneth George LeShane appears to have left behind him no information 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 by December of 1914, he had made his way to the city of Saint John, for that was when and where he enlisted.

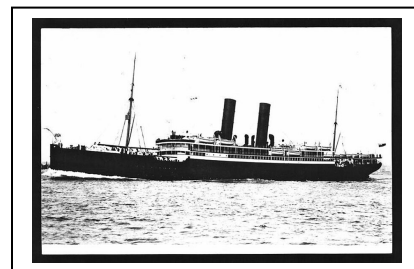
**A Kenneth LeShane is recorded as residing in Lower Island Cove, Newfoundland, in 1913.*

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His earliest pay records show that it was in Saint John on December 22 of 1914 that Kenneth George LeShane presented himself for medical examination, for enlistment and for attestation, all on the same day. On that same day he found himself *taken on strength* by the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*) of the Canadian Infantry.

Even the *official* conclusion to the formalities of Private LeShane's enlistment was brought about on that same December 22: a major, acting on behalf of the Officer Commanding the 26th Battalion 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.*

The 26th Battalion had been authorized only the month prior to Private LeShane's enlistment. It had begun training immediately in St. John – at Barrack Green Armouries - and continued to do so – with a week off during the Christmas period – until the time arrived for its embarkation for passage overseas. The ship that Private LeShane was to board was the requisitioned *Anchor Line* passenger vessel *Caledonia*.



(Right above: *The photograph of the Anchor Line vessel Caledonia is from the Old Ship Photo Galleries web-site.*)

A number of sources cite June 15 of 1915 as the date of Private LeShane's embarkation but this was apparently not so: the ship is documented as having sailed from Montreal on June 9 with "A" Squadron of the 7th Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles and the 2nd Divisional Remount Depot on board. Her next stop was St. John, New Brunswick, on June 13, where she welcomed not only the 26th Battalion, but also Section 1 and the Headquarters Company of the 2nd Divisional Ammunition Column, and a part of the 2nd Divisional Cyclists Company.

Caledonia sailed from St. John to next put into Halifax for the 1st Draft of the 40th Battalion and the No. 2 Heavy Battery of the Canadian Garrison Artillery. She finally set out to cross the Atlantic on June 15 to drop anchor in the English south-coast naval harbour of Portsmouth-Devonport nine days later, on June 24. From there it was a train ride to the coastal area of the county of Kent – in the vicinity of the Channel ports of Dover and Folkestone – where the Canadians were busy establishing Shorncliffe, a large military complex.



(Right above: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 2016*)

The 26th Battalion was encamped at East Sandling, one of the subsidiary camps, just down the coast from Folkestone.

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It was to be a relatively short wait for Private LeShane and his comrades-in-arms before they were called to *active service* on the Continent. However, he apparently passed some of his time outside the camp, as he was charged with being *absent without leave* on three occasions, forfeiting a total of four days' pay, and being *confined to barracks* for ten more. On September 15 the Canadian 2nd Division took ship to France, the 26th Battalion making the crossing as one of the components of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade. Private LeShane and his unit - following an inspection by the King on September 2 - sailed on that September 15 from Folkestone to the French port-town of Boulogne on the coast opposite, some two hours' sailing-time away.

On the afternoon of the next day the Battalion boarded a train which, after some six hours, eventually was to make its way some fifty kilometres eastward to the community of Wizernes. The War Diary then recounts that the men were obliged to march... *all night to Bivouac about three miles from Arque* (War Diary). By the evening of the 17th the unit had marched to the larger centre of Hazebrouck and, a week later again, it finally reached permanent billets near Scherpenberg, a small rise – there are no *big ones* - in Belgian West Flanders.

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

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

Thus the 26th Battalion arrived in Belgium, to the south of the already-shattered medieval city of Ypres, a sector which it would come to know well as it was to remain there for the best part of a year. It was there that Private LeShane was to become familiar with life in the trenches*.

(Right: *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*)

**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.

(Previous page: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, a year later, having by that time been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration)

From time to time, during the quieter periods of their postings, units would grant periods of leave to their personnel. For the Canadian troops this was often the opportunity to return to the United Kingdom or to visit Paris, the French capital. On March 22 Private LeShane was allowed eight days, likely not long enough for the return journey back across the Channel – but exactly where this time was spent is not documented.

What is sure is that when he reported back to duty on March 31, things were a lot less quiet than on the day he had left.

In early April, 1916, the 2nd Canadian Division underwent its baptism of fire in a major infantry operation. It was at a place called St-Éloi where, on the 27th day of March, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then followed up with an infantry attack. The role of the newly-arrived Canadian formation was to later pursue the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the often putrid weather which turned the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and then a resolute German defence, greeted the newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on April 3-4. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.



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

However, the 26th Battalion, albeit a part of the 2nd Canadian Division, had found itself playing only a peripheral role: while other units had at times been fighting up to their waists in water and mud, the Battalion War Diarist could find time to comment on the weather for twenty-two days in a row.

The next major altercation in which Private LeShane and his 26th Battalion were to be involved came about in early June in the south-east sector of the *Ypres Salient*.

Six weeks after the confrontation at St-Éloi, on June 2, the Germans attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under British (and thus also Canadian)



control. This area was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.

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

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, overran the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans had been unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences.

In the meanwhile, Private LeShane's 26th Battalion was still in the area of St-Éloi, serving in the left sub-sector. There the unit was to then be '*standing to*', in the same place, for the following four days, thus to take no part in the counter-strike of the day following the attack, June 3, an operation which proved to be a costly disaster for the Canadians. In fact, on June 7, the Battalion found itself retiring to a camp in the rear rather than advancing towards the fighting.

(Right below: *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)

On only the next day, however, June 8, Private LeShane's unit was sent forward to relieve troops in support positions in the area of *Railway Dugouts*, just to the rear of the places of the heaviest fighting – but still a favourite target of the German guns. There it remained until June 12 when, once more, it retired to the rear area.



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

By the time that the 26th Battalion moved up to the front once more, on the following day again, the action at *Mount Sorrel* and 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, on this occasion had taken back almost all of the lost ground.



At the end of the confrontation, both sides were back much where they had been eleven days previously.

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

There was little infantry action during the next week – nothing mentioned in the War Diary – apart from the routine patrolling,



but the same Diary notes exceptionally heavy enemy artillery fire for five of those days. The Battalion was relieved and withdrew to Camp "D" on June 20.

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(Right: A century later, reminders of a violent past close to the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres, an area today protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature. – photograph from 2014)



The day after the unit's arrival in the camp at Dickebusch, Private LeShane was seconded by the Camp Commandant to be attached to his staff. Whatever was the reason, this secondment was of short duration: he was released back to the Battalion just six days later, on June 27.

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.

It was on August 18 that Private LeShane was again attached to another unit; in this case the unit was the 2nd Canadian Division Salvage Company.

The Canadian Corps Salvage Company came into official being on September 1 of 1916, at the same time that the Canadian Corps first moved to *the Somme*. It comprised a Salvage Company from each of the four Canadian Divisions – although these Companies were only small detachments, in the case of the 2nd Division just a single officer and thirty-nine *other ranks* – plus one-hundred thirty-five men of the Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion.

As its designation implies, during the *1st Battle of the Somme*, after any advance, this unit scoured the forward areas for salvage and returned it by light railway, by General Supply Wagons or by motor lorries (trucks) to a large central dump at Albert. By the end of the Canadian involvement in November, the Corps Salvage Company had recuperated some three-hundred lorry-loads of materials.

There being no further transfer of Private LeShane entered on his Active Service Form until the autumn of 1917, it may be inferred that he served with the Corps Salvage Company until that time. However, where the Canadian Corps – and thus the 26th Battalion - moved, so did the Salvage Company; it may therefore be of some interest to follow the fortunes of the 26th Battalion up until that same autumn, 1917.

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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.*

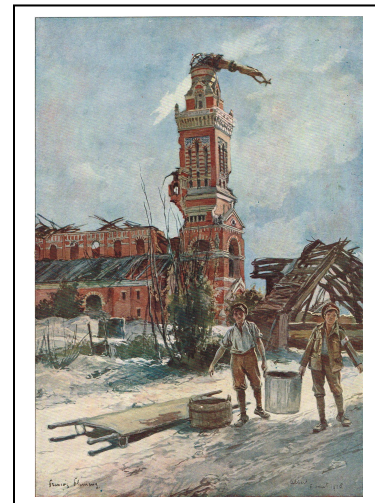
The training area for the 26th Battalion was to be at Tilques, back over the border in northern France and in the vicinity of the larger centre of St-Omer. It had required three successive days of marching for the unit to reach its billets at Éperlecques by August 28 before then having commenced training 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: *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 day 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 Courcelette.

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



The 26th Battalion had arrived in the area four days prior to the attack at Flers-Courcelette – 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.*

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

(Right: *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.*

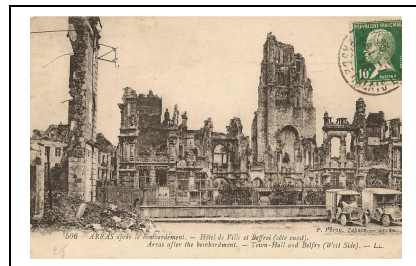
On September 27 the Battalion had been ordered forward once again, on this occasion to play a role in *the Battle of Thiepval Ridge*, more specifically on the right flank, in the area of *Regina Trench*. The operation had proved to be a further costly failure for the price of one-hundred eighty-two more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



(Right above: *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 City Hall of Arras and its venerable bell-tower were later to look like this after nearly four years of bombardment by German artillery. – from a vintage post-card, the photograph taken just after the conflict*)

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*.

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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 was 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, as previously said, it never worked out exactly that way. And sometimes there was even a bath and a bed.

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.

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Having retired from the battle-fields of 1916 at the same time as had the last troops of the Canadian Corps... *in the interval between the SOMME and VIMY operations, very little was done in the way of organized Salvage operations. LIEUT. JUDD*, who had been performing*

the duties of Canadian Corps Salvage Officer, was appointed Town Major at HOUDAIN, which appointment he held until reorganizing the Corps Salvage Company on March 24, 1917, before the VIMY operations (Canadian Corps Salvage Company War Diary).

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**The appointment of an officer of such junior rank attests to the size of the Salvage Company. From the War Diary entry of March 8, it appears that the total of personnel, all ranks, was eighty-eight plus two horses.*

As for Private LeShane, there is nothing to suggest other than that he was one of the relatively few *other ranks* seconded from various formations of the 2nd Canadian Division who remained in the employ of the Corps Salvage Corps during this winter period.

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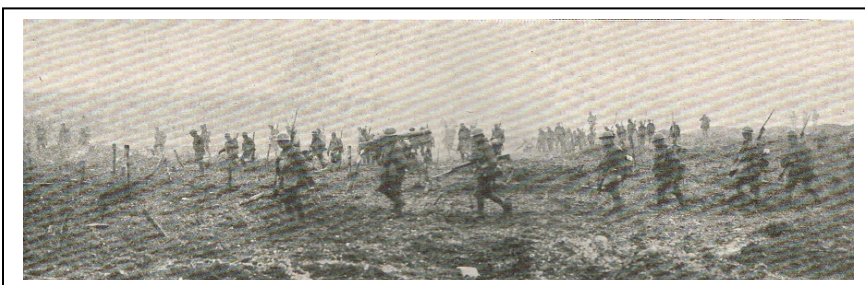
On April 9 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation 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 to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive was a disaster.

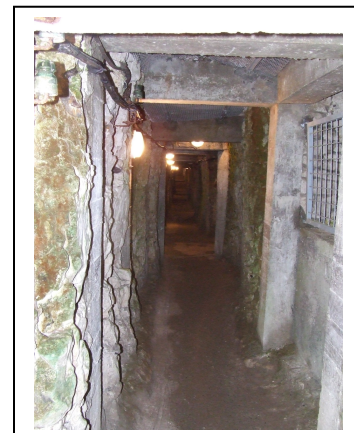
(Above right: *the Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

(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.

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

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.

**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, British forces were now placed under its command.*

The objectives of the 26th Battalion – indeed, of the 2nd Canadian Division - were in the Thélus 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)

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)

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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*.

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Logically it was not until after a battle that a Salvage Company would come into its own. The first days after the assault of April 9 and afterwards were spent organizing a new system of bureaucracy, training incoming personnel and, of a perhaps more practical nature, deciding the positioning of the main and subsidiary dumps – those to be closed and those to be opened - during the upcoming weeks of the ongoing offensive.

So that the reader may have a clearer view of the action work undertaken in the field, the following is a report of that... *done during VIMY OPERATION...*by the Salvage Company of the...2nd., *Canadian Division and Private LeShane*:

The personnel for the Divisional Salvage Co., was divided into 4 Sections, their total strength during the period under review averaging 1 Officer & 57 O.R's. Three of these sections worked in the Forward Area, from AUX REITZ, to the front line, and the fourth section was employed in sorting, de-detonating, loading &c., at the Main Dump, and also in clearing the back Area. Each section in the forward area, worked over a definitely defined Area, collecting material, and hauling it to the dumps in the vicinity. These dumps were situated on the Light Lines, and whenever possible, supplementary use was made of G.S. Wagons and Limbers, moving to the rear empty. At certain times daily, a petrol tractor with 2 trucks were available on the Light Lines; they proceeded forward to the limit of the line clearing the dumps on the return journey.

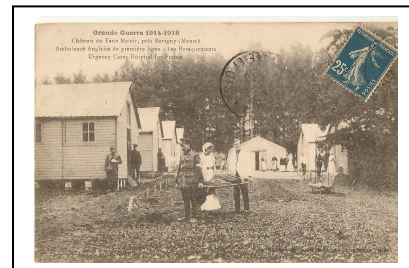
As regards heavy Ammunition, and Shell Cases, these were collected by empty lorries returning to Ammunition Dump and Rail head. The average transport consisted of G.S. Limbers, of which 6 to 8 were available daily. The MAIN DUMP was located at AUX REITZ corner, where there was a 'spur' from the Light Railway, on which trucks could be side tracked for loading, without interfering with the Main line traffic. Railhead for shipment of Salvage to the Base was at ECURIE, so that the minimum distance was necessary for hauling. Further, it was possible to dispose of a large number of Bombs, S.A.A., and Trench Mortar Ammunition, to the various re-filling points in the vicinity.

Some of the numbers of various articles retrieved during the Vimy operation might also be of some interest; the following are articles to be worn: *Jackets, 3055; Trousers, 2980; Great Coats, 5902; Cardigans, 2537; Helmets; 6558.*

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By the middle of May the total of *all ranks* attached to the Corps Salvage Company was two-hundred twenty-five of which forty-seven – including Private LeShane - were from the 2nd Division.

During the last days of May the Salvage Company War Diary shows that a number of men were required to pass before a medical board: about one in three. Whether this was the result of the nature of their work, or whether the men chosen in the first place for service with the Company were less than physically or medically fit is not clear but, only days later, Private LeShane, on May 28, was admitted into the 1st Canadian Field Ambulance at Fresnicourt.



There he was diagnosed as suffering from *general debility*.

(Right above: a *British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some* – from a vintage post-card)

Private LeShane was discharged to duty back to the 2nd Division Salvage Company on June 3, a week after his admission into the 1st CFA*. By this time it would appear that the Divisional Salvage Companies were up to a point autonomous, and the 2nd Division Salvage Company had its Headquarters at Bruay, to the north-west of Lens – company by that time increased to fifty.

**He may have been at a rest station administered by the 1st CFA.*

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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.

(Right above: *An example of the conditions under which the troops were ordered to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917* – from *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, 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.*

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.

(continued)

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.

* * * * *

In the meantime, Private LeShane was continuing his salvage work. It may have been of some interest to him to know that the value of *all* the articles recovered at Vimy – not restricted to clothing – had been valued at £220,027/19/9½. The British private earned one shilling a day – much less than either the Canadian or Newfoundland soldier. At that rate Tommy Atkins could have stood in the trenches for the next four million, four-hundred thousand, five-hundred sixty days...and up until tea-time on the next (that's the ninepence-ha'penny, there being twelve pennies in a shilling)!

In September of 1917 it was the recent battle-fields and forward areas that had seen fighting during that summer which were then scoured for salvage. These were the sectors between Béthune in the north and Arras in the



south, with the majority of the actions having taken place in the vicinity of Loos, Lens, Avion and Lievin.

(Right above: *A suburb of the Canadian-held city of mining-city of Lens in the late summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

But in the middle of October the Corps Salvage Company was to accompany the Canadian Corps as it moved north again, after a year's absence, into the Kingdom of Belgium. There its Headquarters were to be established in the town of Poperinghe, to the west of Ypres.

However, much of Private LeShane's work was to be on the ground being fought over that summer and fall, the *Ypres Salient*, which was to the east of Ypres.

* * * * *

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.

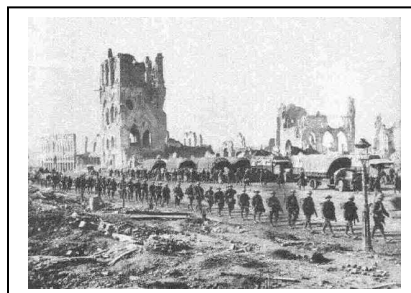
It was not until the 24th day of that October of 1917 that the 26th Battalion entrained in or near the community of Tinqes to begin the transfer north into Belgium and once more to the *Ypres Salient* which the unit had left some thirteen months before.

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: *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



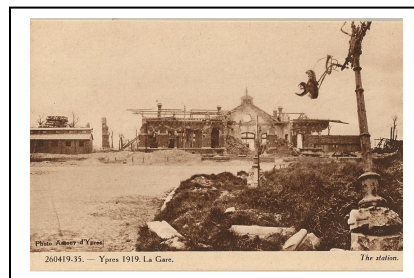
official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was true with the 2nd Division (see below) finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

(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)

(continued)

The unit arrived in the vicinity of the northern French commune of Cæstre on the evening of the same day. Although having been designated as a rest area, the War Diary entries record numerous activities, lectures and training exercises undergone in preparation for the unit's subsequent move to the Passchendaele Front.

The 26th Battalion was on its way again from Cæstre on November 3, boarding a train which crossed the Franco-Belgian Frontier to transport its charges to the ruins of what once had been the railway station at Ypres. The station being just outside the southern ramparts of the city, the Battalion then traversed the remnants of Ypres in a north-easterly direction to arrive in the vicinity of Potijze.



(Right above: The remnants of the railway station just outside the ramparts of Ypres where the Battalion detrained – the image is from 1919 – from a vintage post-card)

On November 4, the 26th Battalion was to move closer to the forward area. Before the unit moved forward, it had drawn supplies and ammunition to carry up to the front line. On the following day it moved forward again, by eleven o'clock in the evening having reached the assembly areas.

Excerpts from Operational Order, Number 180 – issued 2nd Nov. 1917: 1) *The 2nd Canadian Division has been ordered to attack and capture PASSCHENDAELE on “Za” day.*

2) *The attack will be carried out by the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the Right and the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the Left: the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade will be in Divisional Reserve...*

...5) *The 26th Battalion will assault on a 2 Company front with one Company in Support and one Company in Reserve.*

...9) *Consolidation...a) The forward slope should be held by posts in shell holes or short lengths of trench; these posts must be well scattered...in order that the enemy may have no good target for his artillery...*

b) *A main line will be dug just behind the crest of the ridge and so sited as to escape direct observation while denying the crest to the enemy should he succeed in breaking through our advanced posts.*

This main line will also serve as the jumping off line for counter attacks.



Excerpts from Appendix 3 of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary:

(Right above: *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*)

(continued)

6) *On this occasion...At 6 a.m on the 6th of November the barrage opened and the 26th Battalion advanced to the attack...*

The whole of the 5th Brigade objectives were gained on schedule time, namely, by 6.58 a.m., and consolidation commenced.

By 10 a.m. the ground won by the Brigade had been well consolidated...

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*)



* * * * *

Of course, it is not at all sure that, once having been attached to the Salvage Company, Private LeShane was in any way aware of the events that had overtaken the 26th Battalion – on whose nominal roll he still figured. There is, on his Active Service Form, the entry filed by the Commanding Officer of the 26th Battalion which records that he, Private LeShane, had ceased to be attached for salvage work as of October 13, but there is no subsequent documentation of his re-joining his former unit - so whether or not he served with the Battalion during these last few days, we are not advised.

And, in fact, there is a second record of that cessation of attachment – retroactive - to the Salvage Company; it is dated November 6, 1917, and the reason it cites is the death of Private LeShane.

The casualty report simply reports: *killed in action*. One may only guess at the circumstances: if he had returned to the 26th Battalion by that time, the preceding War Diary narrative tells us all that appears to be known; if he was still in service with the 2nd Division Salvage Company all that can be surmised – apart from long-range gun-fire - is contained in the following lines.

On several previous occasions the Salvage Company War Diarist had reported complaints pertaining to the collection and handling of live ammunition, perhaps particularly that of German manufacture with which the salvage teams were at times less than familiar.

On that November 6, the War Diary entry records that forty-five other ranks had been ordered to work at the ammunition dump – then again the Diarist explains that the orders given had been such that the ammunition was not to be salvaged, but that the officer in command instructed simply to arrange for its disposal.

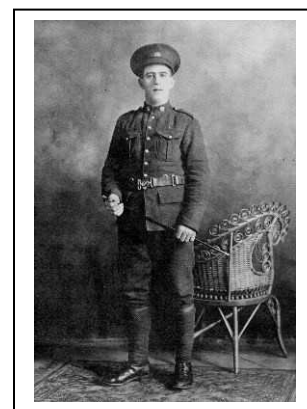


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(Preceding page: *A Canadian salvage team working amongst the debris of abandoned German positions in the autumn of 1918 – from Le Miroir*)

(Right below: *The photograph of Private Kenneth George LeShane is from the ancestry.ca web-site*)

The son of Newman LeShane, fisherman – possibly deceased by the time of his son’s enlistment, and of Mary Ann LeShane (née Cooper – deceased 1895) of Lower Island Cove, Newfoundland, he was brother to Ishmael, Alfreda*, to Alexander**, to Rhoda-Jane and to Charles***.



**In November of 1915 he sent fifty dollars to a Mrs. William Sellars Wheeler of New Aberdeen, Cape Breton; she was his sister, Alfreda, married in 1909.*

***He named his brother Alex as his next-of-kin and had allotted to him a monthly fifteen dollars, as of April 1, 1916 – later twenty dollars as of April 17 – from his pay.*

****Charles received his brother’s medals.*

Kenneth George LeShane had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-three years and ten months: date of birth in Lower Island Cove, Newfoundland, February 28, 1891.

Private Kenneth George Leshane was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



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 26, 2023.

