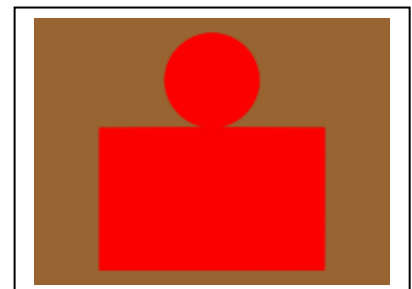


**Lance Sergeant James Moriarty, MM, (Number 441218) of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Western Cavalry*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on *Vimy Ridge*.**

**(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Western Cavalry\*) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)**

***\*Despite this designation, the unit was authorized in 1914 as a battalion of Canadian Infantry.***

**(continued)**



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, James Moriarty has left little documentation behind him *a propos* his move from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. All that may be said with certainty is that he was residing in or near to the community of Port Albert in April of 1915 – for that is where and when he enlisted - and that at some time previous to that he had served in the 52<sup>nd</sup> Regiment (*Prince Albert Volunteers*) of the Canadian Militia.

It was on April 24, his first pay-records amongst other papers providing the evidence, that James Moriarty presented himself for enlistment. He underwent a medical examination – a procedure which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force* - on that same day as well as his attestation, thereupon being *taken on strength* by the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

However, a further ten weeks were to pass before the formalities of his enlistment were brought to an official conclusion when, on July 2, the commanding officer of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel R.M. Dennistoun, declared – *on paper* – that *...James Moriarty...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

However, weeks before this last-mentioned event, by May 20 of 1915, the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion had been transferred for training to *Camp Sewell* (later re-named *Camp Hughes*) in Manitoba, a tented affair with a capacity for some twenty-seven thousand personnel. There Private Moriarty remained until he was designated to be a soldier of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of his Battalion and departed for *overseas service* on September 1, some three months later.

Strange as it may appear, two drafts from the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion left Canada before did the parent unit which did not finally sail until March of 1916, some seven months afterwards. This happened, in fact, because the Canadian forces already *overseas* were in need of reinforcements to bring their numbers up to strength. Even when the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion eventually reached the United Kingdom, it was not to be sent into service as a single unit but rather was used to supply other units with men. It was finally disbanded in 1917 having never fired a shot in anger.

Once having travelled by train from Manitoba to Montréal, Private Moriarty's 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of two-hundred fifty *other ranks* and five officers boarded His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* on September 4. This contingent from the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was not to travel alone: also taking passage on the vessel to the United Kingdom were the 3<sup>rd</sup> University Company reinforcing the PPCLI (*Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry*), and the Second Drafts of the 44<sup>th</sup>, 45<sup>th</sup>, 46<sup>th</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry.



(Right above: *The photograph of the SS Missanabie is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

*Missanabie* sailed on that September 4, crossing the Atlantic in ten days before putting into the naval harbour of Plymouth-Devonport on the south coast of England on September 14.

From there Private Moriarty and his comrades-in-arms were transported by train to the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* established in the east-coast county of Kent, and on the Dover Straits in the vicinity of the harbour and town of Folkestone.



(Right: *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*)

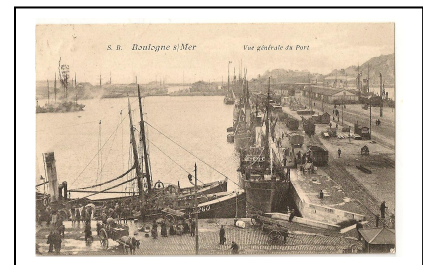
The day of his arrival at *Shorncliffe* was also the final day of Private Moriarty's service with the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (*Northern Saskatchewan*): he was transferred forthwith to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion for three further months of training.

Three months following, on December 13, Private Moriarty was twice more transferred: on paper to the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Western Cavalry*) and by ship to the Continent, likely journeying there with a draft through nearby Folkestone, to disembark hours later in the French port of Boulogne on the coast opposite, some two hours' sailing-time away.



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

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



Having landed in France, the detachment was transported by train to the Canadian General Base Depot in the vicinity of the French industrial port-city of Le Havre, situated on the estuary of the River Seine. There Private Moriarty was to stay for ten days until Christmas Eve when he was despatched to join his new unit in the field.

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



There appears to be no record as to where and how his small detachment of only ten *other ranks* spent that Christmas Day of 1915; the documents show only that it reported *to duty* with the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Western Cavalry*) on December 26, Boxing Day, at a time when the unit was stationed in the Ploegsteert Sector of Belgian Flanders, in the area of the position of *Grand Monque Farm*.

\* \* \* \* \*

(continued)

Private Moriarty's new unit, the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Western Cavalry*), was an element of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade which was itself a component of the Canadian Division (later to be designated as the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division). The 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had traversed the Atlantic in the convoy which had left the Gaspé in early October carrying the Canadian Division for service in the United Kingdom after which the Division had then crossed the Channel to France in mid-February of 1915.

The first two months on the Continent were to be served by the Canadian Division in the *Fleurbaix Sector* of northern France, a relatively quiet posting where the newcomers had learned the practical side of their trade. Then, in mid-April, the Division had been ordered north into the *Kingdom of Belgium*, into the *Ypres Salient*, a lethal place at the best of times, where it had still been in the process of relieving French troops when the Germans had launched an offensive.



(Right: *Troops being transported to the front-line positions in busses: The majority, however, would make the transfer on foot.* - from *Illustration*)

Towards the end of April and into the month of May of 1915 was to be fought the *Second Battle of Ypres*, the struggle for the city of that name which had begun at five o'clock in the evening of the twenty-second day of that month with the coming of a yellow-green cloud of chlorine gas, its first recorded use in war-time. There the name *Gravenstafel* had become one of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion's first battle honours.

(Right: *The Memorial to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier – stands just to the south of the village of Langemark (then Langemarck) at the Vancouver Crossroads. It was in this area that the Canadian Division withstood the German attack – abetted by gas – to the north-east of Ypres (today Ieper) during the latter days of April of 1915. – photograph from 2010*)



(Right: *An artist's impression of Ypres in the summer of 1915. By the end of the war there was little left standing. – from *Illustration*)*

By the evening of April 28, a day which the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had spent in hastily-dug positions in a field, it had incurred a casualty list of seventeen *killed in action*, and two-hundred twenty-five *wounded or missing in action*. It was likely of little consolation to learn that its losses had been light when compared to several other Canadian units.

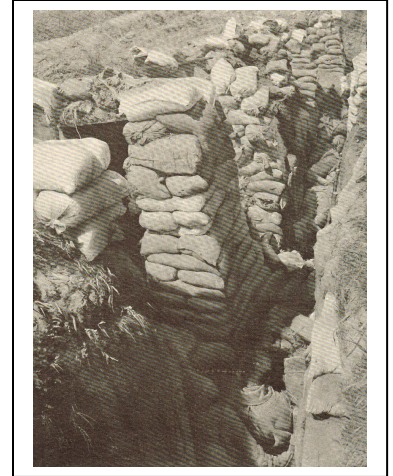


(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade were withdrawn to its western bank from Vlamertinghe – west is to the left – photograph from 2014*)



On the following day the Battalion had then retired to the west bank of the *Yser Canal* which runs through Ypres before turning northwards, there to be posted until May 4. On the two subsequent days the unit then had moved to the northern French community of Outersteene, there to rest, to re-organize and to re-enforce. All too soon, only days hence in mid-May, it was to be fighting once more.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion's next confrontation was to be in the vicinity of the French communities of Festubert and Givenchy. On this occasion it had been the British – and thus the attached Empire (*Commonwealth*) forces – who were to do the attacking. For a gain of some three kilometres, a further two-thousand casualties had been accumulated by the Canadian Division\*.



(Right above: *The Labyrinth* – French-held trenches just south of the area of Festubert in the summer of 1915, and after an attack, as witnessed by the dead in the fore-ground – from *Illustration*)

*\*The Indian Meerut Division also incurred some two-thousand casualties at this time and the British many more. The French, whose offensive further to the south had been supported by the British-inspired attacks at Festubert and Givenchy, were to count over one-hundred thousand killed, wounded and missing.*

As of mid-July there had followed some nine months to be spent by the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – and thus the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion - in the *Ploegsteert Sector* just on the Belgian side of the frontier with France.



During that time the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division – in mid-September of that year – and then the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division – as of New-Year's Day of 1916 – had joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division in the field.

And it had been only six days prior to that New Year's Day, that on December 26 of 1915 Private Moriarty had reported *to duty* with his new unit.

(Right above: *Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, Ploegsteert Sector, with a mine crater from the time of the June, 1917, British offensive in the foreground* – photograph from 2014)

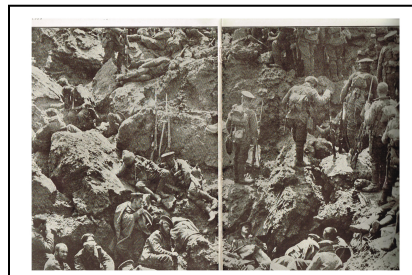
\* \* \* \* \*

After having spent a quiet autumn and winter in the southern sectors of Belgium – the winters of the *Great War* on the *Western Front* were *all* to be relatively quiet – the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was the first Canadian force to undertake an offensive operation during the spring of 1916, this venture to be in tandem with British units.

(continued)

The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* officially took place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it had been here that the British had excavated a number of galleries under the German lines, there to place explosives which they were then to detonate on that March 27.

After a brief initial success the attack had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were to be replacing the exhausted British troops. The Canadians had thereupon enjoyed no more success than had the British, and by the seventeenth day of the month, when the battle had been called off, both sides were to be back where they had been some three weeks previously – and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.



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

Meanwhile, during the months of March and April, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions had been ordered from the *Ploegsteert Sector*, now to take up positions in the *Ypres Salient*. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division had been the first to do so, moving by a semi-circular itinerary to a sector to the south-east of the battered city. In early April the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division had followed suit, moving into a southern sector of the *Salient* to the immediate right of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division and to the immediate left of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division.

Thus the Canadian Corps was now to be fighting on a united front.

The fight for *Mount Sorrel* in June of 1916 had been the next major confrontation between the Canadians and the German Army. The Canadian High Command at the time had been considering a limited offensive of their own when the enemy had attacked the sector of the *Ypres Salient* which was at the time the responsibility of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division.

But the situation had deteriorated so rapidly and to such a degree – the line had been ruptured and a German breakthrough had been feared - that units from the adjacent 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – and even from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division serving farther afield – had been given notice to prepare to assist in stabilizing the situation.

After eleven days of sometimes horrific fighting, the opposing forces had ended back much where they had started. Little had changed, except that the cemeteries on both sides were by then that much fuller.

During this period the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had spent the first days not only standing-by but also absorbing a great deal of attention offered by the opposing artillery. By the time that the unit had retired to 'D' Camp in the rear area, it had incurred – from June 1 until June 6 inclusive – totals of sixty-one *killed in action* and one-hundred eighty-five *wounded in action*.



**(Preceding page: Vestiges of Canadian trenches of 1915-1916 – some admittedly restored – at Sanctuary Wood – photograph from 2010)**

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

The Battalion then was apparently to remain in the rear area until the evening of June 13 by which time other troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions had attacked and re-captured much of the ground lost in the opening days of the affair. As other units were being relieved, the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had moved up into support positions in the areas of *Railway Dugouts* and of *Hill 60*.

Two days afterwards, while most of the unit had by then been withdrawn to *Camp 'F'* in the area of Poperinghe, certain personnel seconded for task were still bringing out the wounded of June 13.

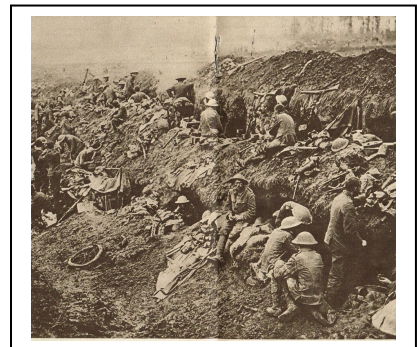


**(Right above: A century later, reminders of a violent past are to be found close to the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres, an area today protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature. Apparently the hill was much higher until the first week in June of 1917 when a the detonation of a British mine removed much of the summit on the opening day of the Battle of the Messines Ridge. – photograph from 2014)**

It was not until July 1 – Dominion Day – that the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had found itself back in the forward trenches and, in fact, once more in the area of *Hill 60*. On this occasion there was to be no ongoing infantry activity apart from the eternal patrolling – by both sides – and the usually short-lived engagement when the two parties had met; the few casualties incurred each day had been mostly due to the enemy's artillery. Thus the unit was to return to the daily routines, rigours and perils of life in the trenches of the Great War\*.

**\*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.**

**(continued)**

**(Preceding page: 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)**

**\*The Canadian-produced Ross rifle was an excellently-manufactured weapon; its accuracy and range were superior to that of many of its rivals, but on the battlefield it had not proved its worth. In the dirty conditions and when the necessity arose for its repeated use - and using mass-produced ammunition which at times was less than perfect - it jammed, leaving its user defenceless at a critical moment.**

**During this lull during the summer of 1916, Private Moriarty had been ordered on two occasions to undergo a Grenade Course: the first was from July 9 to 15 and the second – this one organized by the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division – from August 6 to 10.**

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had then been withdrawn on August 13 – as had the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division at that same time - and had been moved into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Training Area in north-west France. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division would be followed in their turn by units of the other Canadian Divisions – by August of 1916 the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division was arriving on the Continent – whose postings in Belgium were to be taken over by troops, mostly from the British Isles\*, who were being withdrawn from the *First Battle of the Somme*.**

**\*But including the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment.**

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had begun its training as of August 15 before then being transported by train from Arques to Candas in the rear area of *the Somme* on August 28. It had then marched for the next five days towards the sound of the guns, to end at the military camp of *Brickfields (la Briqueterie)* in close proximity to the town of Albert – and within artillery range of the longer-ranged German guns.**



**(Right above: Canadian troops likely in trenches built for training purposes – they are too prim and proper to be the real thing – and here equipped with Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles, during the late summer or early autumn of 1916 – from *The War Illustrated*)**

**By that September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which was to cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.**

**(Right: Canadian soldiers working, carrying water in the centre of Albert, the town's already-damaged basilica in the background – from *Illustration*)**



**(continued)**



On that first day of *First Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were to be brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians had entered the fray at the end of August 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*)

But whereas most of the now - and soon-to-be - arriving Canadian units – the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was hard on the heels of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division - were to fight their first major engagement of *the Somme* during that British-led offensive of September 15-17, the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to wait until September 26 and 27 before *going over the top*.

*\*1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division troops had been involved as early as the final days of August.*

Up until that time, even though it had moved up to the forward area and into the front lines during the intervening period, its losses, by comparison with other battalions, had been light: fifteen *killed in action* and ninety *wounded*. In addition to that it was to be sent on a route march from September 13 to 16 inclusive before having been at first billeted at the *Brickfields Camp* and then in Albert for a total of eight days.



(Right above: *Canadian wounded being bandaged on the field before being evacuated to the rear after the fighting at Courcelette – from Le Miroir*)

All of that was to change during two days in late September. On the twenty-fourth day of the month the Battalion had moved forward into positions by then known as the *Chalk Pits*. On the evening of the morrow the unit had moved forward again, now to front-line positions where it had then relieved the 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion: *We have received orders to attack at an hour to be named, on the 26/19/16. Everyone is keyed up, for it is what many have put in 18 months waiting for.* (Excerpt from the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for September 25, 1916)

(Excerpts from the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for September 26 of 1916) *...there was very little Artillery fire until about 11.30 a.m. when quite a lot of heavy stuff was fired into REGINA TRENCH\*. The men had taken up their positions during the night in the kick-off trenches and numerous shell holes...and sharp at 12.35 p.m. the Artillery opened up an intense barrage...and the attacking force...advanced close behind it.*

***The first Objective...ZOLLERN TRENCH...was reached, taken, cleared and consolidated with very little trouble...***

***By the time the First wave had reached the first Objective they had been thinned down considerably, but by the time the third wave...reached the trench, the first and second waves had united and went forward as one to the second Objective...the HESSIAN TRENCH. As the barrage was moving forward very slowly the men would advance a short distance and then lie down and wait till it again lifted.***

***The casualties between the first and second Objectives were very heavy and the number of men who reached HESSIAN TRENCH were few indeed but by 2. p.m. we had occupied and were consolidating this trench\*.***

***\*It was later to be lost to a German counter-attack.***



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

***The toll had amounted to fifty-six killed, three-hundred three wounded and one-hundred twenty-two missing in action. Some of these latter had lost their way on the battlefield and would later return; others would report to duty after treatment in a medical facility; but some would never be found, after some six months to be officially...presumed dead.***



***\*Regina Trench was to prove to be a hard nut to crack. Attacked with varying success on several occasions, it was not to be until the night of November 10-11 that it was finally taken by Canadian forces.***

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

***It was on that September 27 that Private Moriarty received promotion *in the field* directly to the rank of corporal, likely due to the number of casualties which had been incurred among the non-commissioned officers of the Battalion.***

***The 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had not played any further such attacking role at *the Somme* although it was to remain in service there, again at times in the front line, for another three weeks.***

***On October 17, even as new units of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division had been arriving at the front, the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been beginning to retire from the area. It had at first marched in a westerly direction, then had turned northwards so as to pass behind, in semi-circular fashion around to the west of, the shattered city of Arras and beyond.***



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

On October 23, only six days after having marched out of Albert, the Battalion had arrived at its destination, Bajus, a commune some thirty kilometres to the north-west of the previously-cited Arras. The unit was now in an area whose sectors were to subsequently become more and more the responsibility of the Canadian Corps for much of the remainder of the *Great War*, a region which extended from the town of Béthune in the north down almost as far as Arras in the south.

It was during this time of the late autumn of 1916, on December 1, while the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion was working behind the lines in the area of Berthonal Wood, that Corporal Moriarty received further promotion, to the rank of Lance Sergeant, a corporal undertaking the duties of a sergeant – and likely receiving only corporal's pay\*.

*\*Unfortunately, his pay records are not available to confirm or to contradict this.*

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



The winter of 1916-1917 had been one of the everyday grind of life in and out of the trenches. There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids undertaken by both sides.

From early on in the conflict, this latter activity had been encouraged by the British High Command which had continued to consider it to be a morale booster which also kept the troops in the right offensive frame of mind: the troops who were ordered to carry them out in general apparently loathed these operations.

The casualty numbers diminished during this time and a glance at the War Diaries of some of the different Canadian Medical units shows that they were kept more busy by the numbers of sick and, perhaps a bit surprisingly, particularly by the thousands of dental problems which they were expected to treat, than they were by those *wounded in action*.

For the first twenty-four days of the month of January the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been stationed behind the lines in camps at Houdain and Bully-Grenay. There its personnel were to indulge in such things as lectures, classes, training and inspections; there had also been instruction in bombing, wiring and the use of machine-guns; moreover, during that period everyone was treated to a bath.

There was also leave awarded to certain personnel of the Battalion. Lance Sergeant Moriarty is reported in his papers as having received ten days of it – enough time to visit Paris perhaps; but the dates documented are from January 18 to February 3, a sixteen-day period which usually implied fourteen days back in the United Kingdom with two additional days granted for travel. There appear to be no further details in his file.

(continued)

Towards the end of the month there had been time spent in the trenches, a six-day tour. But it had been very quiet, the rare war-like activities to be reported had been enemy artillery-fire, and the Canadian response with rifle-grenades. The casualty count for the entire tour reflects the relative calm: *four wounded*.

All of February and the first nine days of the month of March had likewise been spent in the same forward areas; the number of casualties were to be similarly low; four *killed* and fifteen *wounded*, many of the latter only slightly; one of the fatalities had also been classified as an *accident* and another as *self-inflicted*.

On or about March 10 the unit had retired to the area of Écoivres-St-Éloi, there to provide working-parties for various tasks as directed from above, but also to be instructed in the use of enemy weaponry, particularly his machine-guns.

(Right above and right: *The village of St-Éloi, adjacent to Écoivres, at an early period of the Great War and again a century later: The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – partially destroyed in 1793 and further again in the war – are visible in both images. – from Le Miroir and (colour) from 2016*)

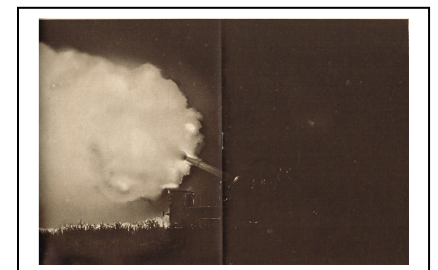
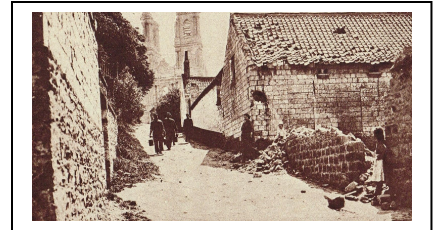
(Right below: *A carrying-party loading up – one of the duties of troops when not serving in the front lines: The head-strap – the ‘tump’ - was an idea adapted from the aboriginal peoples of North America. – from Le Miroir*)

There had followed a further nine days in the trenches, just as non-belligerent as before, before a return to training at Écoivres. The work assigned to the Battalion appears at this point to have increased in its intensity – at least the War Diarist seems to have thought so – much of it not just the manipulating of stores and munitions, but also the excavation of trenches and tunnels. And by that time word had been making the rounds of an upcoming attack.

As the days had passed the artillery barrage had grown progressively heavier, on April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion having described it as...*drums*. By this time, of course, the Germans would have been aware that something was in the offing and their guns in their turn had thrown retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft had also been very busy.

(Right above: *A heavy British artillery piece continues its deadly work during a night before the attack on Vimy Ridge. – from Illustration*)

(continued)



On April 8... *In the evening 'A' and 'B' Companies special carrying party, 27 O.Rs. strong, stretcher-bearing party, 57 O.Rs. strong...and remainder of H.Q. details arrived in the trenches. A hot meal was given to all, and they then proceeded to get into the assembly positions.* (Excerpt from War Diary entry of April 8)

On April 9 of 1917 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, one of the few positive episodes having been the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign had proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive of '*Le chemin des Dames*' was to be yet a further disaster.

(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, has stood on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time having acted as a single, autonomous entity – with a British Division under Canadian command – had stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants\*.

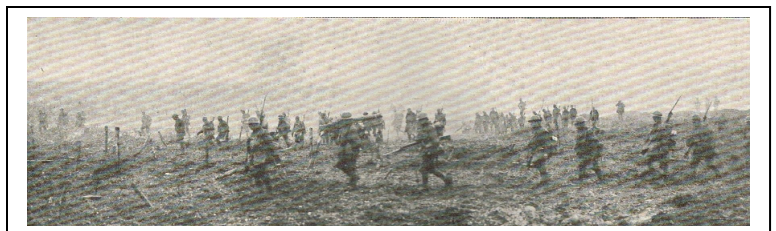


*\*It should be said that a great deal of the artillery used in the assault on Vimy Ridge was British and that a British Division – only a single Brigade to be employed on April 9 – also participated. Almost fifty per cent of the personnel who had been employed for that day were British, not to mention those whose contribution – such as those who dug the tunnels - allowed for it to happen.*

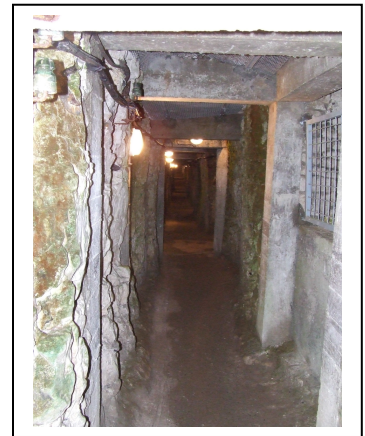
The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions had been handed responsibility for the *Ridge* itself; to their immediate right had been the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, attacking in the area of the village of Thélus on the southern slope; and to the right again the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – of which the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a component - had been ordered to clear the area lower down the slope again towards the village of Roclincourt.

(Right above: *The monument to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division which stands just outside the village of Thélus: It was placed there during Christmas of 1917. – photograph from 2017*)

(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> 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*)



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



On April 10 the Canadians had finished clearing the area of *Vimy Ridge* of the few remaining pockets of resistance and had begun to consolidate the area in anticipation of the expected German counter-attacks. There had on that day been the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on the previous day’s success had proved impossible, due as much to the inclement weather as to anything else. Thus the Germans had closed the breach and the conflict was once more to revert to one of inertia.

Having moved up from tunnels and dug-outs, the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been in position in its assembly trenches by one o’clock in the morning of April 9. Four hours and thirty minutes later the creeping barrage had opened and the attacking forces had left their trenches and then advanced towards the enemy positions. Forty minutes later the Battalion’s first objective – the so-called *Black Line* – had been taken.

The advance was to continue and by nine o’clock that morning the *Red Line* had been reached and occupied. There the Battalion was to remain until six in the evening at which time it had been relieved and had retired as far as the *Black Line*, there to consolidate.

The War Diarist was to later estimate the number of casualties by that time as having been fourteen officers and three-hundred fifty *other ranks*.



(Right: *Canadians under shell-fire occupy the third line of trenches on Vimy Ridge; the fighting of the next few days was fought under the same conditions. – from Illustration*)

Three days later the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion had still reportedly been in the *Black Line*. The momentum of the first day had not been followed up on the days following: orders had been to consolidate any gains in the expectation of German counter-attacks; not only that, the ground had been transformed into a morass such that it had proved more than difficult to move guns, munitions and material from the rear and up to the forward areas.

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



Thus the remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* was not to be fought in the manner of the first two days and by the end of those five weeks little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success.

(continued)

During the *Battle of Arras*, the success at *Vimy Ridge* had been almost the sole exception to the rule\*, the rule being costly engagements more often than not accomplishing little or nothing. At Arleux-en-Gohelle on April 28 some ground had been gained by the Canadian attackers but at great sacrifice. The confrontation at Fresnoy was to be otherwise; the losses there had also been heavy – and the Germans had eventually retained the village.



*\*This was so not only for the Canadians. The British and Australians experienced bloody reverses, not to forget the Newfoundland Regiment and its four-hundred eighty-seven casualties on April 14 at Monchy-le-Preux.*

*(Right above: The re-built village of Arleux-en-Gohelle almost a century after the events of April 28, 1917 – photograph from 2015)*

Lance Sergeant Moriarty's 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to play a major role in above-mentioned confrontation at Arleux-en-Gohelle: it had returned from the rear area to the front on April 26 when and where it had relieved the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion in the trenches. On the morrow, April 27, a reportedly *...relatively quiet day...* it had been re-enforced and *...Received orders to attack at 4.25 a.m. on 28-4-17.*

*28-4-17 Weather – fine and warm. wind – n.w.*

*Battn. attacked at 4.25 a.m. and gained objective which was a sunken road to the North of Arleux running S.W... Casualties 10 Officers 230 O.Rs. (Excerpt from 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for April 28, 1917)*

While objectives had been gained in many cases, it had been with great difficulty: the wire in several instances had not been cut, and the paths available to the attackers had thus been limited and well-defended by the Germans. Nor had the neighbouring battalion to the left advanced far enough, thus the enemy had been able to mount machine-guns on the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion's flank and cause numerous casualties.

Among the two-hundred thirty casualties, *other ranks*, had been Lance Sergeant Moriarty.

The son of Thomas Moriarty, farmer and fisherman, and of Mary Theresa Moriarty of Turks Gut (today *Marysvale*), Newfoundland, he was also brother to John\*, Mary, Richard, Alice, Michael and perhaps to Thomas.

Lance Sergeant Moriarty was reported as having been *killed in action* on April 28, 1917, during the fighting of that day at Arleux-en-Gohelle.

James Moriarty had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-one years and two months: date of birth at Brigus, Newfoundland, December 4, 1894.

(continued)



*\*His brother, Private John Moriarty, (Number 877675) of the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders) was to die of wounds in the 6<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Bruay on May 24, 1917, less than a month later. He is buried in Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension: Grave reference III.B.46 (see preceding page).*

Lance Sergeant James Moriarty 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).



*\*In the London Gazette Supplement of July 9, 1917, the following decoration was announced: His Majesty the KING has been pleased to award the Military Medal to the under-mentioned Non-Commissioned Officers and Men: 441218 Sjt. J. Moriarty, Inf.*

On a Canadian Military Honours and Awards Citation Card is found the following: **MILITARY MEDAL** *This N.C.O led his platoon with great skill and determination during the attack on VIMY RIDGE, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1917. His Platoon was held up by an enemy machine gun, bombing out the crew and put the gun out of action.*

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