



Private John Moriarty (Number 877675) of the 85th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension: Grave reference III.B.46.

(Right: *The image of the 85th Battalion emblem, worn as a head-dress cap badge, is from the Wikipedia web-site*)

(continued)



His place of residence at the time of enlistment cited as the Atlantic Hotel, Whitney Pier, Sydney, Cape Breton, John Moriarty appears to have left no other record of his movements from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. His occupation prior to military service documented as that of a labourer, it was in Sydney that he presented himself for enlistment on March 14 of 1916. He was thereupon attached to the 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*).

While his pay records indicate that this March 14 was the date on which the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services, his medical examination and his attestation came about only two days later, on March 16. It was then to be almost a further six weeks, on April 24, before the formalities of his enlistment were officially concluded: it was on that date that the commanding officer of the Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Parker Day declared – on paper – that... *John Moriarty...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

By this time, Private Moriarty would have already spent the intervening weeks undergoing training in the town of Broughton*, only some twenty kilometres distant, to the south of Sydney.

**Broughton had been a 'company town', developed towards the end on the nineteenth century by the Cape Breton Coal, Iron & Railway Company. Apparently too much money had been spent on it as the company went bankrupt in 1907 and the town was soon abandoned. At the outset of the Great War it was taken over by the Canadian Army and, more particularly, by the 185th Battalion (Cape Breton Highlanders).*

However, this posting to Broughton was not to last longer than just over two months: By that time, the authorities had decided to create a Nova Scotia Highland Brigade to comprise the 185th, the 85th, the 193rd and the 219th Battalions. On May 23 of 1915 these four formations were assembled to train together at Camp Aldershot, Nova Scotia, where the Brigade then spent all summer before receiving its colours on September 28, two weeks before its departure for overseas service.

Apart from being a time of training, the period spent at Aldershot was also the occasion for some to write a will before leaving for overseas service in the United Kingdom. Private Moriarty did so on August 25, in a document in which he left everything to his father. It was then in October, also prior to departure, that he began to allocate a monthly twenty dollars from his pay, also to his father.

At seven o'clock in the evening of October 11, 1916, the one-thousand thirty-eight officers and *other ranks* of the 185th Overseas Battalion embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* in Halifax harbour. Earlier that day the 85th and the 188th Battalions had gone on board, to be followed on the morrow by the 219th and the 193rd.



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

On October 13th - at about eleven o'clock in the morning - it was the turn of the half-battalion of the 166th – five-hundred three *all ranks* - the final unit, to march up the gangways before *Olympic* cast her lines and sailed towards the open sea. For the trans-Atlantic passage she was carrying some six-thousand five-hundred military personnel.

The vessel docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on October 19, six days later, and the troops disembarked on that same day. The 185th Battalion was thereupon transported south-eastwards to Witley Camp in the county of Surrey.

The 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) is documented as then having provided reinforcements for Canadian forces on the Continent. This was to last until February of 1918 when the unit was absorbed into the newly-organized Canadian 17th (*Reserve*) Battalion.

The Battalion's organizers had originally expected that it would be sent – with the other three units of the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade – into *active service* on the Continent, but this was not to be.

By the time of Private Moriarty's arrival in England, the Canadian Corps had been involved in the *First Battle of the Somme* for two months during which time it had suffered terrible losses. It was to fill the depleted ranks of those battered units that the newly-arrived Highland Brigade was to be deployed.



(Right: *Dead of the Somme awaiting burial* – an unidentified photograph)

The 85th Battalion was to be the exception to this rule as it *alone* of the Highland Brigade was despatched to France - in February of 1917. Serving with the 11th and then the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigades of the 4th Canadian Division, it was to distinguish itself at first at Vimy Ridge and then during the remainder of the conflict.

Private Moriarty was to spend but seven weeks less a day in the United Kingdom. On December 5 he was *struck off strength* by the 185th Battalion in England to be *taken on strength* on the morrow, December 6, in France by the 73rd Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*) which was already serving on the Continent.

On the night of December 5-6 he had made the crossing of the English Channel; through which ports Private Moriarty travelled appears not to be recorded among his papers although many troops from Witley embarked in Folkestone and landed in Boulogne, some two hours' sailing-time distant. Whichever the case, on December 6 he was reported as being at the large Canadian Base Depot in the area of the French port-city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine.



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

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On December 7 a re-enforcement draft was despatched from Le Havre to seek out the parent unit of the 73rd Battalion. Among the draft was Private Moriarty whose papers document him as having reported *to duty* on the following day again. The 73rd Battalion War Diary records the occasion as being on December 9: *A draft of 150 other ranks received from 185th Highland Battalion from Nova Scotia. Men were all of good physique, intelligent and had a smart appearance...*

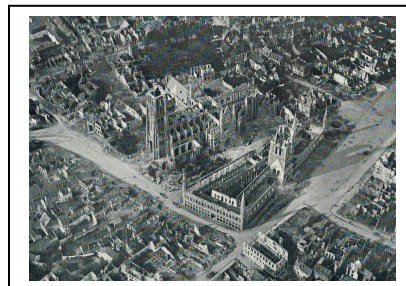
At the time the 73rd Battalion was billeted some eight kilometres to the south-west of the larger centre of Béthune, in the community of Ruitz, there to rest, to reorganize and to re-enforce. Only a single week previously it had been... *the last Battalion in the last Brigade of Canadians to leave the SOMME* (Excerpt from 73rd Battalion War Diary).

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The 73rd Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*) was an element of the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 4th Canadian Division. The Division had been transferred from England to the Continent in August of 1916, passing through, as Private Moriarty was to do, the Base Depot at Le Havre. The 73rd Battalion had then spent two days at the Canadian Infantry Base Depot there before travelling northward on two trains.

Journeying through the larger northern French centres of Arras and Amiens, Boulogne and Saint-Omer, the unit had de-trained on Belgian soil in the town of Poperinghe.

The 73rd Battalion had arrived in the rear area of the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most lethal theatres of the Great War, and where the by-now veteran Canadian 1st Division was to play a role in the formation of the new-comers.



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

The 73rd Battalion had subsequently – and briefly – experienced the daily routines, rigours and perils of life in the trenches of the Western Front. After a final tour in the forward area, it had been relieved on September 23 and the unit's short experience of the *Ypres Salient* had thus drawn to a close. The Battalion's casualties for the month had been three killed and twenty-three wounded – extremely light for *the Salient*.

The troops which arrived to take the place of the Canadians on that day had been Irish; they had only recently been withdrawn from the area of *the Somme* where they had, for the previous two months, been fighting, in the first battle to be designated by that name.

After several days of changing billets, the 73rd Battalion spent a week at Hellebroucq in training for upcoming operations in the cauldron from which its Irish acquaintances had just retired.

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On October 3 the Battalion marched to nearby Arques where it entrained. On the following day it arrived in the rear area of *the Somme*, at Candas, from where it marched in pouring rain to Beauval where billets had been prepared to receive it. On succeeding days the unit marched again: to Bonneville, to Toutencourt, to Warloy-Baillon where it underwent a period of training, then on the 13th through the provincial town of Albert to the camp at *Tara Hill* where it... *Bivouaced (sic) in a muddy field (War Diary)*... and provided various working-parties for the next dozen or so days.

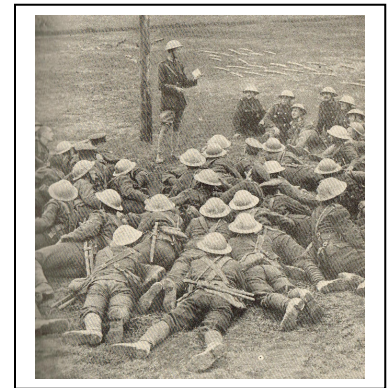
(Right: *Canadian soldiers at work carrying water in Albert, the already-damaged basilica in the background – from Illustration*)



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

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.

(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*)



As the battle had progressed, other 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 had been 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 73rd Battalion had arrived in the area of *the Somme* at a later stage of the offensive than had many other Canadian units; indeed, by the middle of October, many of those first on the scene were being withdrawn, in several cases necessitated by the high incidence of casualties.



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On October 26, the 73rd Battalion, by now ready to fill the void, moved forward to an area between the once-villages – now mounds of debris - of Pozières and Contalmaison.

(Right and right below: *The remnants of Pozières just after the conflict, with the Australian Memorial in the gloom - and also as it is almost a century later – from a vintage post-card and from 2016*)



There it remained in Brigade Reserve until October 30 when it moved forward once more, 'A' Company being *in support* at a junction of two trench systems. This was to prove to be a short tour which terminated on the night of November 2-3; there had been no infantry action to report, although the enemy artillery was apparently active at times.



Casualties for that period had been eight killed, forty-three wounded with twenty-six others evacuated to hospital for divers reasons.

(Right below: *Wounded soldiers at the Somme being evacuated to the rear area in hand-carts – from Le Miroir*)

During the following week while behind the lines... *Special training carried on in conjunction with the rest of the Brigade, in practising for a general attack with the whole Brigade involved, 72nd and 73rd to lead in this attack...*



On the late evening of November 11 the... *Regiment proceeded into the trenches...*

In fact, according to the Battalion War Diary, the attack by the Canadians was not to be delivered as planned. Instead, the various units were ordered to dig new trenches and to consolidate older positions in expectation of an enemy counter-attack, a fear re-enforced by information elicited from German prisoners.

It would appear that neither side moved, and thus the Canadians spent two days preparing for something that never came about. Maybe the extremely heavy artillery-fire delivered by both sides had influenced the decision not to attack.

On the night of November 13-14, the 73rd Battalion was withdrawn, its place to be thereupon taken in the line by the 47th Battalion. The numbers of casualties incurred during this two-day period were, all told, fourteen *killed in action* and thirty-eight *wounded*.



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

Two more weeks were to pass before the 73rd Battalion left behind it the 1st Battle of the Somme and a casualty count to which had been added at least a further sixty during those final days. The withdrawal itself had been made on foot, commencing November 29 with the unit marching to the west before turning northwards to pass behind the battered city of Arras. The trek continued beyond Arras, to Ruitz, which was arrived at on December 5.



There the Battalion was to remain for the next seventeen days, in billets which were reportedly – at least at the outset – ...*in poor condition* – this the opinion of the Battalion War Diarist.

This then, was when and where Private Moriarty reported *to duty*.

(Right above: *A detachment from a Canadian-Scottish regiment, proceeded by its pipe band, marches toward the front. – from Le Miroir*)

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It was not to be until Christmas Eve that Private Moriarty likely received his first taste of life in the front-line trenches* – or in the support trenches a few hundred metres to the rear - as it was on that day that the 73rd relieved the 46th Canadian Battalion in the area of Souchez.



(Right: *The village of Souchez in 1915, before the arrival of the British and Canadians in the sector – from Le Miroir*)

**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, a hundred metres or so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest the forward area, the latter 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.

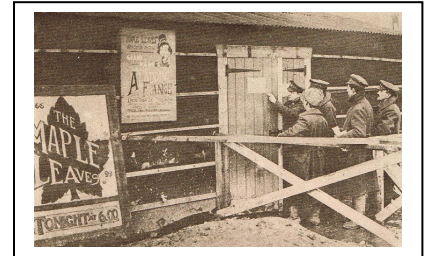
(Right above: *A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration*)

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The occasions spent in reserve were opportunities for training, lectures, inspections by the upper echelons – usually the further away from the front, the more important was the visitor – route marches, sports, with perhaps the odd concert or other entertainment being brought in to support the troops.

(Right below: Canadian soldiers perusing the upcoming program at a make-shift theatre in a camp somewhere behind the lines – from Le Miroir)

In the forward areas life was both hard and monotonous, if also inevitably at times dangerous: there were parties of the construction, wiring and carrying variety; and patrolling and raiding on a local scale were often the norm, as were rat-catching and lice hunts. Most casualties were caused by enemy artillery - and occasionally one's own – although snipers were also a constant peril.



During that winter of 1917, there was little concerted infantry activity undertaken by either side; nevertheless, in the case of the 73rd Battalion, a major enemy raid was repulsed on January 7th, and the unit undertook a costly large-scale operation of its own on March 1.

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

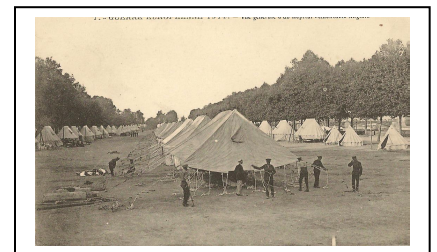


Excerpt from the 73rd Battalion War Diary entry for the above-mentioned March 1, 1917: *At five minutes past mid-night...code message was received from the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade to the effect that the Gas Attack and consequent Infantry Attack, which had been postponed for several days, would take place that morning.*

Excerpt from the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary entry for March 1, 1917: *A Gas Raid was carried out by 15 Officers and 300 Other Ranks of 72nd Canadian Bn. and 18 Officers and 460 Other Ranks of the 73rd Canadian Bn. with the co-operation of the 10th and 11th Cd. Inf. Bdes. A large enemy bomb dump was blown up and part of his F.L.T. (front-line trench) systematically destroyed. Several Machine Guns were destroyed and approximately 22 dugouts were bombed or treated with mobile charges. A large number of the enemy were killed.*

The 73rd Battalion War Diary recorded the unit's casualties as – all ranks - twenty-seven killed in action or died of wounds, one-hundred three wounded and thirty-one missing in action. More were later to die of wounds.

(Right: A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War. Other such medical establishments were of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card)



After that latter exercise, the Battalion was withdrawn into reserve from March 4 to 16; then it was back in the line for three days before moving back into support positions at Cabaret Rouge*.



**The British Cemetery of the same name, Cabaret Rouge, is the one from which the body of the Canadian Unknown Soldier was exhumed on May 16 of the year 2000, to lie in Ottawa, in front of the National War Memorial.*

(Above right: *Some of the more than three-thousand dead of Cabaret Rouge British Cemetery, Souchez – photograph from 2010*)

Parades, inspections, training – bayonet-fighting, bombing, musketry – sports (particularly football), lectures, route marches, medal presentations – with the occasional bath and concert added to the mix on occasion: this was the syllabus offered to the Battalion during those twelve days of training in March.

To these preparations were to be added some novel developments: use of enemy weapons; the familiarization of each unit and of each man with his role during the upcoming battle; the construction of ground layouts built, thanks to aerial reconnaissance, to show the terrain and positions to be attacked; the introduction of the machine-gun barrage; and the excavation of kilometres of approach tunnels, not only for the safety of the attacking troops but also to ensure the element of surprise.

It was not until March 30 that the Battalion was then ordered into Brigade Reserve at Chateau de la Haie. There it began – as did many other Canadian units – a further week of intensive exercises and preparation. The *Battle of Arras* was in the offing.

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.



The British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment: the French offensive was to be a further disaster.



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

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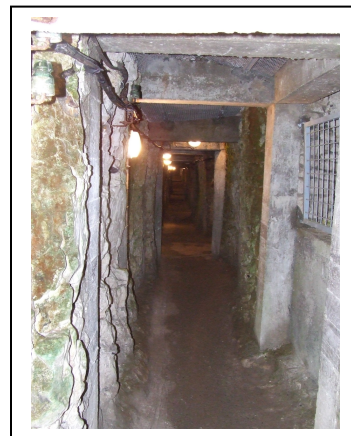
(Preceding page: Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division equipped with all the paraphernalia of war on the advance across No-Man's-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration)

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, 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 73rd Battalion War Diary records that the unit had already been in the area of the front line for three days when 'A' and 'C' Companies entered *Coburg Subway (Tunnel)* at eleven o'clock in the morning of April 8. They were to remain there for the time preceding the moment of the early-morning attack some eighteen-and-a-half hours later.

'B' Company was moved into trenches and was kept in Brigade Reserve. Later in the day it was to support the 78th Battalion whereas 'D' Company was to re-enforce the 72nd Battalion. There appears, unfortunately, to be no indication as to the Company in which Private Moriarty served at *Vimy Ridge*.



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

As related above, this was the first occasion on which the Canadian Divisions were to act in concert as the Canadian Army Corps rather than being attached to a British force. In fact, a British brigade, was now fighting under its command at *Vimy Ridge* with others being held in reserve.

At five-thirty on the morning of April 9, mines were detonated under the German lines and the creeping barrage commenced, followed immediately by the infantry close behind.

The Canadian 3rd and 4th Divisions had been given the responsibility for the capture of the *Ridge* itself and, while in places the enemy resistance had posed problems, for the most part, the operation had been – perhaps unexpectedly – successful. The War Diary reported that the first objectives of the day had been in the hands of the 73rd Battalion only ten minutes after zero hour, at five-forty, and also that the first prisoners were being sent back at the same time.



(Right above: German prisoners being sent on their way back under escort through the Canadian lines – from Illustration)

For the remainder of that day and the next, Private Moriarty's unit consolidated its gains against the expected enemy counter-attacks. Surprisingly, they never came to pass, and on the few occasions where an assault seemed likely, the enemy was countered by the Canadian artillery. But, by the evening of April 10, the Battalion had apparently incurred sufficient casualties* – and with a lack of replacements exacerbating the problem – for the High Command to decide to dissolve the unit and to disperse its personnel to other formations.

**Ironically enough, suffered during the first attacks on Hill 145 (see 85th Battalion below). Apparently, however, the 73rd Battalion authorities were to dispute this.*

Thus the 73rd Battalion retired from the line on April 13 and, three days later, was disbanded. Private Moriarty was to be despatched to the 85th Battalion, to be taken on strength by that unit on April 18-19.

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Much of the early history of the 85th Battalion is already known to us as it is inter-twined with that of the 185th Battalion into which John Moriarty had been recruited. Thus the reader is asked to pardon those repetitious moments which may occur in the following paragraphs.

The 85th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Highlanders*) had been organized in Canada in late 1915. The unit had taken passage to the United Kingdom in October of the following year – travelling on *Olympic* – and had been despatched to France in February of 1917 to be a future element of the 4th Canadian Division which had disembarked in France as late as August of 1916.

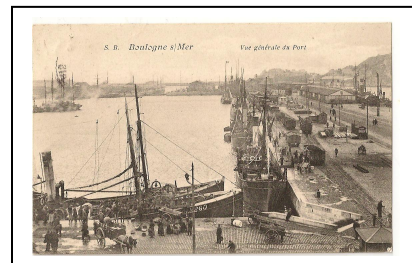
The unit, having been stationed at Witley, had passed through the English-Channel port of Folkestone on February 10 to embark onto His majesty's Transport *London* for passage to the Continent. The Battalion had disembarked at noon that day in the French port of Boulogne to march to the nearby St. Martin's Rest Camp.



By February 14 it had travelled inland to report to Gouy-Servins where it had remained until the second day of March.

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



A goodly number of sources at this point in the 85th Battalion's history appear to err, often by *omission* it must be said, rather than by *commission* - the author pleads guilty of having originally made the same mistake. While these sources record the Nova Scotia unit as being with the 12th Brigade of the 4th Division, this omits the fact – confirmed by the 11th

Brigade War Diary – that it was as an element of *this* formation that the 85th Brigade served until after the action of April 9 at Vimy Ridge:

Excerpt from 11th Brigade... *Operational Order No. 51 issued at 11.15 a.m., 12.IV.17 – On relief the 85th Bn will pass to command of G.O.C. 12th Brigade...*

It appears that the 85th Battalion as an entity moved forward to the front line for the first time only on April 8. It apparently had been officially designated as a *working unit*, to be employed in reserve. However, due to its Commanding Officer's insistence, it had been undergoing exercises for several weeks before, training on prepared sites at Bouvigny Huts - *in meticulous fashion* – and its officers briefed on the upcoming operation.

This insistence by the unit's commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Borden, and all those preparations, were to stand the Battalion in good stead for what was to follow.

What followed, of course, was to be the Canadian attack of April 9, 1917 on *Vimy Ridge*, an operation in which the 85th Battalion was to play a conspicuous role late in the afternoon.

However, prior to this as yet unforeseen duty, the tasks of the 85th Battalion on that day had been ordered as follows: *Construction and filling Dump at Strong Points 5 and 6; Construction of deep dug-out...; Digging C(ommunication) T(rench) from front Assembly Trench...; Party to carry wire and assist Brigade wiring party on construction...; Party to carry forward ammunition for Stokes Guns; Prisoners of War Escort Party; Battle Police...*

The fundamental history of the attack on *Vimy Ridge* of April 9, Easter Monday, 1917, as well as the role of the 73rd Battalion, have already been narrated in these pages: but that of the 85th Battalion has not.

The attack on *Vimy Ridge* had taken place on the opening day of the five-week-long *Battle of Arras*. The days and weeks that followed were to be less auspicious than had been April 9 and 10, and the realities of life in the trenches were to take hold once more.

As seen, the 85th Battalion had not been assigned a place in the initial assault but had been designated as a reserve force. However, the caprices of war were about to play a role in the unit's history: At three o'clock on the afternoon of April 9, the C.O. of the 85th battalion had been ordered to despatch two of his four Companies, one to each of the 87th and 102nd Battalions whose assault was being jeopardized by the enemy from positions on top of the crest. He was also ordered to be in position with the remainder of his command, at half-past four, in two of those well-known tunnels, there to await further orders.

Those orders had arrived thirty minutes early: *BATTER trench...is strongly held by fresh enemy... Will attack it with 2 companies of 85th...*

4.15 p.m. – G.O.C. (General Officer Commanding) *arranges assault on BATTER...by 85th Battalion...*

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(Preceding page: *The battle-field of Vimy Ridge on April 10, two unidentified fallen in the fore-ground – from Illustration*)

6.30 p.m. – 85th Battalion attacked without a barrage, and reached their objectives without much opposition.

(Excerpts from the 85th Battalion War Diary entry for April 9, 1917)

Apparently the objectives in question were known collectively as *Hill 145* which, once taken, was consolidated into a strong-point by the 85th Battalion.

Today the Canadian National Memorial at stands atop that same *Hill 145*.



(Right above: *A part of Vimy Ridge and the Canadian National Memorial as seen from La Chaudière - on April 9 of 1917, in what was at the time German-occupied territory – photograph from 1915*)

On the days following, the Battalion had been involved in a general advance but there was not to be the same success as on April 9. On April 13 the 11th Brigade had been relieved and the 85th Battalion moved back to the *Bouvigny Huts* where it had been quartered in March. From this time forward, until the end of the *Great War*, having earned its place with the capture of *Hill 145*, it was to serve as a component of the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade.

By April 18 the Battalion had moved from the *Bouvigny Huts* to not-so-distant La Targette (also referred to as *Aux Reitz*). As has been already seen, the 73rd Battalion was to be disbanded on or about April 16. Two days later, on April 18, the War Diarist of the 85th Battalion made the following entry in his journal: *Transport of 73rd Bn. transferred to this unit.* On the next day again he added: *More...personnel of 73rd transferred to this unit.*



Thus Private Moriarty was *taken on strength* by the 85th Battalion.

(Right above: *French and British Commonwealth dead lie in cemeteries at La Targette – photograph from 2014*)

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Private Moriarty's new unit was not to enjoy its respite for long. On April 21 the 85th Battalion moved from La Targette to *Canada Camp* at Chateau de la Haie; there, on the following day, it was ordered to form part of a composite Canadian brigade which was to support a British attack. The unit was *...to be ready to move forward on half hours notice any time after 6 a.m. 23/4/17.*

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The Battalion was left...*standing to*...all that April 23 and presumably then all night before it moved forward at eleven o'clock on the next morning. The move was not completed until three o'clock in the morning of the next day again, April 25, when it found itself in positions fronting the Lens to Vimy railway line.



(Right above: *Canadian troops under fire in the Lens Sector of the front during the spring or summer of 1917 – from Illustration*)

By that time, plans had apparently changed: for the remainder of that day and the next the unit spent most of its time digging a new front-line trench. A few spare hours were spent in simulating an attack on the German positions opposite in order to divert the enemy's attention from the adjacent sector where the Canadian 1st and 2nd Divisions were going to put in a real attack on April 28. For its troubles on that April 26, the 85th Battalion received much unwelcome artillery attention which resulted in a number of casualties.

This exercise in deception was repeated on April 28 before the unit retired into support positions on the following day, to an area where it remained until May 2 when it moved forward once more. On May 6 Private Moriarty and his Battalion withdrew entirely from the forward area into reserve.

During that four-day tour the 85th Battalion had not been involved in any infantry action but it had not been inactive – the Battalion War Diary records: *Work done during tour:- BADDECK TRENCH was completed – GRENADIER TRENCH was deepened – HALIFAX TRENCH improved – Block advanced – BORDEN TRENCH deepened and completed across the whole front. Casualties during tour – from 2nd the 6th inclusive – 2 OFFICERS and 20 Other Ranks*

The following days and weeks were to be spent in much the same manner: back and forth from reserve to the front-line trenches with time spent in-between the two in support. Casualties were relatively light, almost all caused by enemy gun-fire. When not in the firing-line the Battalion personnel supplied man-power for working-parties and carrying-parties.



And the weather for the most part was apparently ...*fine and warm*.

(Right above: *A Canadian carrying-party loading up before moving up to the forward area, one of the many tasks allocated to troops when they were not manning the front lines – from Le Miroir*)

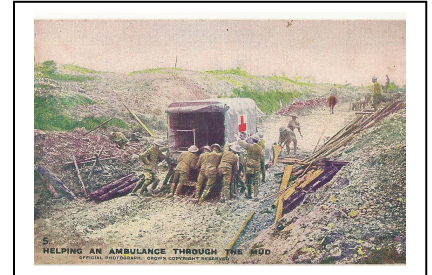
It was, however, to rain on April 23, the Battalion War Diarist making mention in his entry for the day: *Weather. Rainy & warm. Companies had representatives going over front line today reconnoitring preparatory to taking over the front line tomorrow night from the 78th Canadian Infantry Battalion. Working parties were out at night digging trench in rear of Railway Switch...*

(continued)

The enemy shelling heavily during the evening with Minenwerfers on the left and H.E. on the right. 4 killed in 'D' Coy party on the left and 5 killed in 'A' Company on the right.

There appears to be no record of in which Company Private Moriarty was serving.

Casualty Report:- Whilst on duty in the front-line trench an enemy shell exploded a few feet from the parapet where he was standing and he was severely wounded about the body by shrapnel. He was taken to the Regimental Aid Post where his wounds were dressed, and was later sent through a Field Ambulance to No. 6 Casualty Clearing Station* where he died.



***The 6th CCS was located in the rear area at Bruay.**

(Right: Transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card)

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



(Right: The Memorial to the 85th Battalion, Nova Scotia Highlanders, in a field between the villages of Zonnebeke and Passchendaele – photograph all from 3013)

Private Moriarty was reported as being dangerously ill on May 24, 1917, and then later by the commanding officer of the 6th Casualty Clearing Station as having died of wounds on that same day.

John Moriarty had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty years: date of birth at Turks Gut, Newfoundland, March 2, 1896.

Private John Moriarty was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



***His brother, Number 441218, Lance Sergeant James Moriarty MM, of the 5th Battalion, Canadian Infantry, had died a month earlier on April 28. Having no known last resting-place, he is among those honoured on the Canadian National Memorial on Vimy Ridge.**



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