

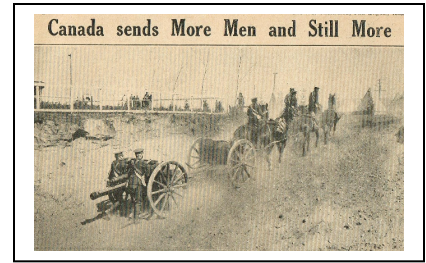
Private Harold Morris (Number 111333) of the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Menin Gate, Ypres (today *leper*): Panel reference 30-32.

(Right: The image of a cap badge of the 5th Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles, is from the Wikipedia Web-site.)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a student of Divinity, Harold Morris has left little behind him a propos his movements from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. It may well have been studies – he describes himself as a student of Divinity - that had taken him to Halifax, for it was there that he enlisted on either June 8 or 9 of 1915.

Both his first pay-records and a medical report provide the evidence of the date of his enlistment, while other records show that it was in the town of Amherst that he attested on June 19 before travelling to the military complex of Valcartier, Québec. There he was recorded as having undergone a medical examination two days later. By that time he had been attached to 'A' Squadron of the 6th Canadian Mounted Rifles Regiment.

On the day following his medical, June 22, the enlistment formalities of Trooper Morris' enlistment came to an official conclusion when the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Holden Ryan, declared – on paper – that *...Harold Morris...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

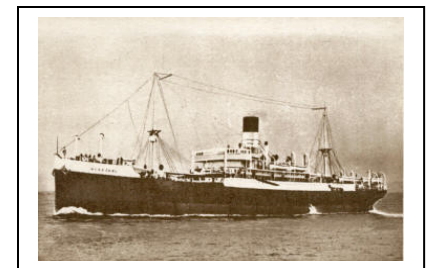


(Right above: *Canadian artillery being put through its paces at the Camp at Valcartier. In 1914, the main Army Camp in Canada was at Petawawa. However, its location in Ontario – and away from the Great Lakes – made it impractical for the despatch of troops overseas. Valcartier was apparently built within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

When the Canadian Mounted Rifles came into being, they were organized into regiments of between five-hundred and six-hundred men led by some thirty officers, about half the number of an infantry battalion. Later, when the CMR units were assigned to the 8th Infantry Brigade, this was to pose logistical problems as will be seen. But in the summer of 1915, this eventuality was still months distant and the 6th CMR Regiment was to undergo several months of training before being despatched overseas.

The order to embark was given less than a month after that June 22 and it was on the 17th day of July that Trooper Morris and the other five-hundred sixty-six – all told – personnel of the 6th CMR Regiment – with horses? – embarked in the port at Quebec City onto His Majesty's Transport *Herschel* for passage to the United Kingdom. There may have been other military contingents taking ship at the same time, but any details as to their identity appear not to be available.

Herschel weighed anchor on the morrow, sailed down the St. Lawrence River and, ten days later, on July 28, docked in the English south-coast naval harbour of Plymouth-Devonport.



(Right: *The image of a newly-built SS Herschel is from the <http://www.bluestarline.org/lampports/herschel3.html> website.*)

Upon its debarkation in southern England, the 6th CMR was transported by train to the area of the Dover Straits in the county of Kent. It was there, near to the coastal town and harbour of Folkestone that the Canadians were at the time busy establishing the large military complex known as *Shorncliffe* and it was there that the 6th CMR Regiment was now to train for the next number of months.



(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*)

Also at this time, Shorncliffe was busy not only with Trooper Morris' unit: the Canadian 2nd Division was in the throes of organization for its transfer to the Continent and in mis-September this exercise was accomplished, some twenty-thousand men plus horses and equipment being shipped across the English Channel in a matter of days. Only days were then spent in France before the entire formation was ordered north to take its place alongside the 1st Canadian Division already by that time serving in the Kingdom of Belgium.

Meanwhile the 6th and the other regiments of the Canadian Mounted Rifles had remained at *Shorncliffe*. There was soon to be a 3rd Canadian Division put into the field and these units were to be a part of it: in fact, the CMR regiments were to provide the infantry for an entire brigade.

Thus it was at seven-thirty in the morning of October 24 that the 6th CMR took ship in nearby Folkestone to land only hours later after an apparently stormy crossing, in the French port of Boulogne on the coast opposite.

(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*)

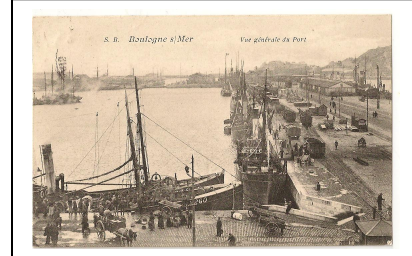
(Right: *An image of the French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

Trooper Morris et al then marched to St. Martin's Camp, not far distant, where he and they were to remain until four-thirty in the morning of the 26th when it was time to march to the railway station. Two hours later the 6th Regiment boarded a train to take it eastward to the town of Hazebrouck after which there was a further fifteen-kilometre march to the vicinity of the community of Meteren. At Meteren billets, further orders and two days of heavy rain awaited its arrival.

(Right above: *A column of troops on the march in northern France or in Belgium. While the caption reads that these troops are 'English', this could mean any unit in British uniform – including Empire (Commonwealth) units. This is early in the war as there is no sign of a steel helmet. – from a vintage post-card*)

It was not until November 2 that the unit was stirred into activity once more: on that day it marched eastward along the Franco-Belgian frontier for more than two hours before crossing it in the area of Nieppe and taking up quarters at Aldershot Camp*. Two days after their arrival the different squadrons began to take up positions in the trenches for instruction; two days later again the unit suffered its first fatality: a horse killed in the transport field**.

**This is sometimes confusing as at the time there were at least three Aldershot Camps: one in Nova Scotia and one in England as well as the one in Belgium mentioned above.*



*****By this time the Regiment was undoubtedly beginning to realise that there was to be no future in the trenches for horses. Soon there would remain only the title of 'Mounted' as a reminder of the original purpose of the various units.***

During this period of late 1915, the area at or in the proximity of Aldershot in which CMR Regiments were serving was a part of the *Ploegsteert Sector* which, since the summer of that 1915, had been the responsibility of the Canadian 1st Division. It was this formation which was aiding in the instruction of the newly-arriving units which were to comprise the Canadian 3rd Division.



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

Officially, the Canadian 3rd Division came into being at mid-night of December 31 of 1915 and January 1 of 1916. At the same time, although preparations had been already going on for some time, the Canadian Mounted Rifle Regiments were now to undergo a radical transformation.

And Trooper Morris was now, as of January 2-3 of the New Year, 1915, to be transferred to the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles Battalion*.

****In the month of December of 1915 it had been decided to dismount the Mounted Regiments. Cavalry was finding less and less of a role to play in the conflict – despite the biases of the High Command – thus the CMR units lost their horses and became regular infantry.***

However, as previously seen, the strength of a CMR regiment was little over fifty per cent of a bona fide infantry unit and so the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th CMR Regiments were chosen to remain intact and to become the four infantry battalions of the Canadian 3rd Division's 8th Infantry Brigade. The remaining CMR formations were then used as re-enforcements to bring the four fore-mentioned CMR regiments up to battalion strength*. Thus the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th CMR Regiments became the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th CMR Battalions.

****Trooper Morris' 6th CMR provided personnel for both the 4th and 4th CMR Battalions.***

From that October of 1915 until mid-March of 1916, the 5th CMR had been stationed in Belgium, in the *Ploegsteert Sector* at the southern end of the front there, just before the trenches crossed over the frontier into France - Messines in the forward area, with Meteren and Locre to the rear, are three place names which often appear in the Battalion War Diary - and then, latterly, as of March of 1916, had been ordered into the *Ypres Salient*, just south-east of Ypres (today *Ieper*) itself.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *A block-house of Great War vintage today still stands in a farmer's field at Messines.* – photograph from 2015)

It was in these two sectors that the 5th CMR Battalion personnel were to learn about the rigours, the routines – and the perils - of life in – and out of – the trenches*.

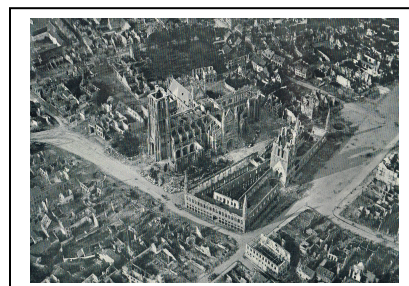
**During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then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

Trooper Morris was to spend just over three months in the service of his new unit on this first occasion. Thus he had still been with it when the transfer had been made by the 5th CMR Battalion from the southern *Ploegsteert* Sector to the south-eastern area of the *Ypres Salient* on or about March 20. Places bearing such names as *Hooge*, *Maple Copse*, *Mount Sorrel*, *Railway Dugouts* and *Hill 60*, soon to become a part of Canadian history, were now the responsibility of the 3rd Canadian Division.



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

However, Trooper Morris was to spend only nineteen days in the *Ypres Salient* with the 5th CMR before he once more became attached to another unit. On April 8 he was *taken on strength* by the 3rd Canadian Divisional Train which was at that time centred at Busseboom just to the south-east of the Belgian town of Poperinghe.

Napoleon's comment that *...an army marches on its stomach...* was just as relevant during the time of the *Great War*, but to the daily mountain of food needed to feed huge numbers of both men and animals was now to be added the myriad equipment that was by that time necessary for an armed force to operate.

(continued)

And while it was true that infantry personnel were at times required to carry up to some seventy pounds of equipment – even while going into battle – everything that the British and Commonwealth troops required in order to survive and to fight had to find its way from the Atlantic and Channel ports to the rear and forward areas, and to the front lines.

The four Canadian Divisions' supply lines were operated by the Canadian Army Service Corps, each Division having its supply train – not necessarily of the railway variety – and also its ammunition train. From the ports and railheads, everything was brought to the main dumps from where it was dispersed to subsidiary dumps and from there to the dumps of individual units.



The problems of logistics were enormous: even in the relatively static *First World War* the placements of these supply areas were always changing as were the needs of the troops being served. The roads and railways were often in a state of disrepair or temporarily unusable; troop movements, the evacuation of the wounded, and the arrival and retirement of guns all ensured the over-use of the oft-times too few lines of communication and the exhaustion of both men and beasts, a situation often exacerbated by the inclement weather.

(Right above: *Bringing supplies to the forward area, in this case ammunition - Although the British and Commonwealth forces were the most mechanized of all the belligerents during the Great War, they still relied heavily on horses and mules. – from Le Miroir*)

This, then, was the environment into which the now-Private Morris was thrust on April 8, 1916, although only some six weeks or so later, on May 14, he was granted a nine-day period of leave which he was to spend in the United Kingdom – no further details are to be found among his papers.

Although the nature of their duties were such that the personnel of the CASC rarely found their way into the forward area, it is obvious that Private Morris would have been aware of the events at the Front. The 3rd Divisional Train* was servicing units of the 3rd Division, including the 5th CMR, thus he would have likely followed news of his former Battalion's fortunes.

Thus this file will do likewise until such time as Private Morris' personal story takes precedence*.

**In the case of the 3rd Divisional Train, its War Diary appears to contain little other than the petty politics of the unit and the state of the horses, particularly those of the officers. Little seems to relate to Private Morris' side of the story.*

* * * * *

The fight for *Mount Sorrel* in June of 1916 had been the next major* confrontation between the Canadians Corps, in particular the Canadian 3rd Division, and the German Army.

(continued)

****The Canadian 2nd Division may have disagreed: Its first action had been at the end of March and beginning of April of 1916 when it and British forces had been involved in the Action of the St. Eloi Craters.***

The British had detonated a series of craters under the German lines and followed up with an infantry assault. Their exhausted troops had then been relieved by Canadian units who had enjoyed no more success than had their British counterparts. When the battle was called off on April 17, the enemy was back where he had been on March 27 and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.



(Above right: A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps at St-Éloi – from Illustration)

At Mount Sorrel the Germans had attacked a sector of the Ypres Salient which was at the time the responsibility of the Canadian 3rd Division.

But the situation had deteriorated so rapidly and to such a degree that units from the adjacent 1st Canadian Division – and even from the 2nd Canadian Division serving farther afield – had been called for support.

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

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



(Right: Maple Copse Cemetery, adjacent to Hill 60, in which lie many Canadians killed during the days of the confrontation at Mount Sorrel – photograph from 2014)



After the action at Mount Sorrel, the situation in the Ypres Salient had become relatively stable, and even quiet, for the Canadian units posted there; it was to remain thus until the Corps had been completely withdrawn by early October.

* * * * *

By that time the Canadian Corps – by now numbering four divisions – had been ordered to play a role in the still-ongoing British summer offensive on *the Somme*. They withdrew from Belgium to northern France during the last part of August until early October, in successive order, Number 1 to 4, to undergo training for what was to come.

Progressively their places in the Ypres Salient were taken for the most part by troops from the British Isles who had been fighting at *the Somme*, some since July 1, the first day.

In the case of Private Morris' 3rd Divisional Train, the withdrawal to the west and into France in the vicinity of the community of Steenvoorde began on August 24. Preparation for the move south began; these included a Gas School, the arrival of supplementary wagons and the preparation of animals and equipment.

Two weeks were spent in the area before the Divisional Train moved again – on this time taking a railway-train – on September 7 at half-past ten in the morning. The train must have had some sort of priority for, whereas infantry units often took some ten to twelve hours to make the journey, and frequently overnight, the 3rd Divisional Train took but four and a-half – reportedly fast enough to have killed a dog on the way.

On September 12 at least some of the Divisional Train personnel were to be found in the area of Senlis-le-Sec, but this was the commanding officer and he had travelled by car. It may well have been a day or two later before the main body of the unit arrived in the same area of Albert and the large *Brickfields Camp* established there.

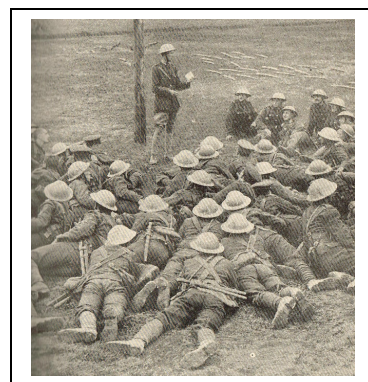
By that September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

On that first day of *1st Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been comprised of 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at Beaumont-Hamel.



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

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), and 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.

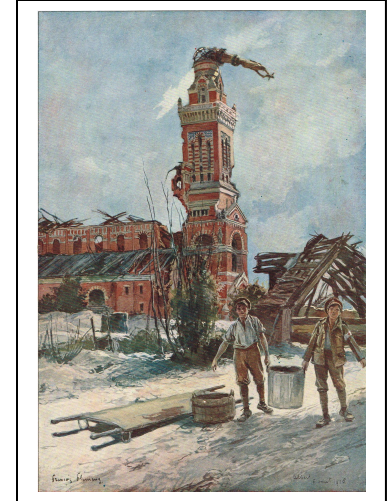


Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcelette.

(Right above: *An image purporting to be that of a Canadian officer giving instructions to those under his command prior to the attack at Flers-Courcelette (see below), September 1916. – from *The War Illustrated**)

(continued)

It appears to have been towards the middle of October that the 3rd Divisional Train, as component of the entire 3rd Canadian Division, began to retire from the area of *the Somme*. On or about October 29, units of the Train were reported to be in the areas of Acq and Écoivres, communities to the north-west of the battered city of Arras.



(Right: *Canadian soldiers at work in the town of Albert during the autumn of 1916, its well-known basilica in ruins already by then. – from Illustration.*

* * * * *

Private Morris' previous – and future – unit, the 5th Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles, was also to play a role at *the Somme*.

The 5th CMR had been withdrawn to the area of North Steenvoorde in north-western France where it was to remain until September 7. The area had been transformed into a training-zone for what was optimistically termed by its planners as *open warfare* and myriad drills were performed, from the section and platoon level up to - and including - that of both battalion and brigade.

On that September 7, the thirty-seven officers and eight-hundred ninety *other ranks* of the 5th Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles, were taken by bus to board a train at Bavinghove for the journey south.



(Right: *A number of the public London busses were requisitioned as troop transport during the Great War. Here one is being used by some lucky troops while others, to the right, are obliged to continue on foot. – from Illustration)*

The train pulled out of Bavinghove Station at nine minutes to ten on that evening and pulled *into* the station at Candas at eight o'clock the next morning. After breakfast in a field there began a march which was to last some five days and which would end on September 12 in Brigade Reserve at La Boisselle*, the remnants of a village just to the east of the provincial town and centre of Albert.

**Today the village of La Boisselle is known for the huge crater which remains there a century after the detonation of the largest of the nineteen mines exploded just prior to the attack of July 1. At the time it was perhaps history's largest man-made explosion. The crater, now more than a hundred years old, is still impressive, even today.*



(Right: *The aforementioned Lochnagar Crater caused by the mine – apparently the largest man-made explosion in history up until that date – detonated at La Boisselle – photograph from 2011(?)*)

It was early on the morning of September 14 that the 5th CMR Battalion finished relieving the 4th CMR whose place it was to take in the lines and from where it had been ordered to advance on the next morning.

The Battalion had been... *ordered to attack and consolidate, with two companies, the German trenches...and to bomb down...the trenches and establish blocks. These trenches to be held by Infantry Posts as they were cleared by the bombers (8th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary).*

During the time of the relief and the remainder of that September 14, the Germans had reacted violently to the movement and to the obvious preparations ongoing on the Canadian side of No Man's Land. The unit incurred a number of casualties during the day.

By 4.00 a.m. all assaulting troops were in positions, and all details in regard to the attack completed... 6.20 a.m. As soon as the barrage lifted the 5th CMR BATTALION attacked in two waves and two full Sections of Battalion bombers...

Objective was reached with few casualties. The trenches were found to have been well manned. Twenty prisoners and three machine guns were taken, about 250 Germans were bayoneted and a large number retreated overland to FABECK GRABEN and were caught by our Machine gun fire (8th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary)...

This somewhat optimistic appraisal of events by the War Diarist notwithstanding, the *few casualties* that the Battalion had incurred totalled two-hundred seventy-seven *killed, wounded and missing* during the day. The 5th CMR Battalion remained in its newly-won positions until the following evening when it was relieved under cover of darkness and was able to retire to the large military camp at the *Brickfields (La Briqueterie)* in the outskirts of Albert.



(Right above: *Wounded at the Somme being transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from Le Miroir*)

From then until the end of the month Private Morris' former unit was kept in reserve, largely in the area of Bouzincourt. Nevertheless, even though it was out of range of most German ordnance, there was little rest and the personnel was kept busy, much of the time undertaking road construction; even while the Canadian 1st and 2nd Divisions were once more on the offensive and the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade was in reserve, its services were not called upon.

It was finally on September 27 that the 5th CMR Battalion was ordered up to the forward area once more, whereupon it moved its way to relieve the 1st CMR Battalion in the front line on September 30.

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Further orders were awaiting the unit: *Tomorrow afternoon at about 3 pm we are to attack, capture and consolidate a line of German trench known as REGINA TRENCH. As the front of our objective is well wired the artillery have been heavily engaged today endeavouring to cut the wire. Patrols are to be pushed out as far as possible after dark and report on the cutting. All ranks keyed up and in fine spirits, very eager to attack* (5th CMR Battalion War Diary – excerpt from entry of September 30).

On October 1 the 5th CMR Battalion attacked as planned and initially achieved some success, certain German positions being overrun and captured. However, much of the wire that the artillery had been engaged the day before in destroying still remained uncut; *this* and several enemy counter-attacks put increasing pressure on those in the captured German positions.



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

Much of the newly-won terrain was re-taken by the enemy, the Canadian survivors obliged to retreat to their former positions... and *Regina Trench* itself was to remain – apart from a few hours later during that month, on October 27 – in German hands until November 11.



At about ten o'clock on that evening of October 1, the Battalion was relieved by the Royal Canadian Regiment and fell back to Albert where it was billeted. The efforts of the day had cost another two-hundred twenty-four casualties.

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

During the following two weeks the unit was to again serve in the same area of the front lines: from October 9 to 11 (inclusive) and then, on a final occasion, on October 13 and 14. No concerted infantry action was reported and casualties were relatively light. By midnight of the 14th, the 5th CMR had been relieved and was in billets in Albert.

For Private Morris' former unit, as for his present 3rd Divisional Train, *First Somme* was over and, in concert with the entire 3rd Canadian Division, it began to move into the area to the north-west of Arras, this sector – from Béthune in the north to Arras in the south - now to become more and more a Canadian responsibility.

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(continued)

As for Private Morris himself, it was during this period of service at *the Somme* that he had received promotion on two occasions: September 21 had seen him appointed to the rank of lance corporal; just over a month later, on October 24 and apparently towards the end of the Train's withdrawal from *the Somme*, Lance Corporal Morris was further elevated to the rank of (acting) corporal.

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



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

The late autumn of 1916 and the winter of 1916-1917 was to be 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 by both sides. This latter activity was encouraged by the High Command who felt 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 loathed these operations.

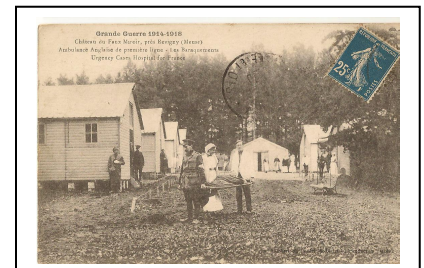


For the 3rd Divisional Train, this reduced activity allowed the time for the personnel and beasts of burden of the unit to rest and recuperate after the efforts of the preceding summer and fall. It also permitted the depleted numbers in both of these categories to be made good and for equipment to be repaired if possible - and to be replaced if not. And of course the wintry conditions presented different complications to which solutions had necessarily to be found*.

**One of the major problems of that winter was the lack of fuel available for heating. The 3rd Divisional Train War Diary notes on several occasions the problem with coal supply. Perhaps even more serious was the shortage of fodder available for the horses and mules which were put on rations even though their work load was not to be diminished.*

And this as early as mid-November of 1916 – before the winter really set in.

February and March of the New Year, 1917, were to be memorable for Corporal Morris: while his unit was still in much the same area as it had been for the months preceding, he was admitted at first into the 9th Canadian Field Ambulance stationed at that time at Camblyneul.



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

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However, this medical unit was to move on the following day to Bruay to replace the 5th CFA; thus Corporal Morris found himself transferred to the 5th CFA which arrived on that day – from Bruay - to take over the responsibilities of the departing 9th CFA. Presumably there was a good – if not obvious - reason for this apparently quixotic move.

The problem had been influenza; however, in Corporal Morris' files there are papers which record *acute nephritis*. Perhaps this was a misplaced diagnosis as no further details appear to be documented and only two days after having been admitted into the 5th CFA, he was discharged back to *duty* with his unit.

Only some two weeks later again there is to be found in his records the following: *28-2 Sentenced to be reprimanded for when on Active Service not complying with an order in that he did not render the tattoo report to the orderly sergeant 27/2/17.*

Then on March 31, 1917: *Sentenced to revert to the ranks on Active Service. Neglect of duty as N.C.O. in charge of Piquet & failed to waken all ranks after being ordered to do so (at Reveillé).*

He was thus once again a private soldier.

Meanwhile both the 3rd Divisional Train and the 5th CMR were preparing for the imminent British offensive of that spring. In fact, the work of the former unit, stock-piling such things as medical resources, rations, wire and piquets, the list goes on... was to be more strenuous in the days prior to the attack than during the aftermath.

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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 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.

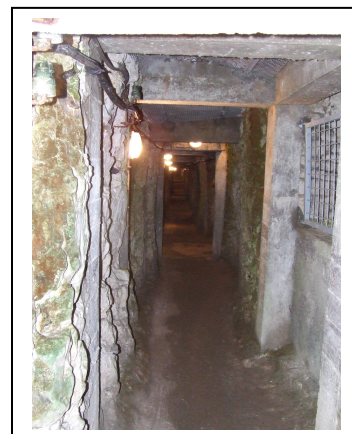


While the British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive was a disaster.

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

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity, had stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

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



(Right: Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, 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)



(Extract from 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary, Appendix D): 5th CMR Bn. in Reserve with two Companies in GOODMAN TUNNEL, and two Companies in PYLONES DUGOUTS. H.Q. with Bde. H.Q...

5.48 a.m. A Coy. 5th C.M.R., detailed to support 1st C.M.R. reported to have deployed clear of the Tunnel and be advancing in rear of the 1st C.M.R...

6.10 a.m. A Coy...bayoneted or captured about 40 Germans who emerged from PRINZ ARNOLF TUNNEL and attempted to shoot our troops in the rear.

7.05 a.m. A Coy...reported to have reached SWISCHEN STELLUNG in support of 1st C.M.R.

9.05 a.m. D. Coy., subsequently followed by B. Coy...ordered to move forward to SWISCHEN STELLUNG in support of our front line troops, and H.Q. and C. Coy...ordered to move forward to head of GOODMAN TUNNEL...

April 10th Noon The 5th C.M.R., less one Coy...were held in readiness to push through VIMY to the line of the railway running through VIMY Station, in the event of their not being held...

The 5th C.M.R. ordered to stand down...

The four Battalions of the Bge. were relieved...during the night April 11/12th

April 12th. 12 noon Casualties sustained during the above operations were:- ...5th C.M.R. Battalion 2 Officers 90 O.Rs.



(Right above: German prisoners being escorted to the rear by Canadian troops during the attack on Vimy Ridge – from Illustration)

There had been, on and just after April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on those days' successes proved logistically impossible. Thus the Germans closed the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

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)

After Arras the situation had slowly reverted again to that of everyday trench warfare. Until the end of June the 5th CMR Battalion when in reserve was withdrawn to Villers-au-Bois; then, when on support and front-line duty, the Companies of the unit were to find themselves in an area designated *Vimy Defences*.

With the advent of the month of July, the unit was withdrawn from the forward line for almost the entire month to prepare for upcoming events.

(Right: *It was not only the Divisional Trains responsible for the provision of supplies; close to the front the ordinary infantryman also became involved. A Canadian carrying-party – some of the work done by troops when in support and reserve – this photograph taken on the Lens front during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)



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 his reserves - from that 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 Le Miroir*)

(Right: *Canadian troops advancing across No-Man's Land in the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

On August 15, a major attack was launched by Canadian 2nd Division troops in the suburbs of Lens and just to the north, in the area of a small rise known as *Hill 70*. The 8th Brigade was not a part of this offensive, but at the same time was moving forward from the rear area to take advantage of any retreat by the Germans.



It was on August 18 that the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade took over billets from the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade at Les Brebis, just to the south of Mazingarbe. On the night of August 19-20 the 5th CMR Battalion moved forward into support positions and, on the 21st-22nd, into the front line.

The 5th CMR Battalion War Diary entry for August 24, 1917, reads partially as follows: *...Our right front and communication trenches were shelled at intervals during the day. The enemy subjected our front line...to a short bombardment at about 2.00 am...*

(continued)

Then on August 27th: *The total casualties for the tour are as follows – Killed 11 other ranks, Died of Wounds 3 other ranks, Wounded 3 officers 25 other ranks*



(Right: *Canadian troops in the Lens Sector in the summer of 1917 working under shell-fire in the trenches – from Le Miroir*)

* * * * *

Just how it came to pass that Private Morris was re-attached to the 5th Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles is not clear. While the British were beginning to suffer from a lack of available man-power, this does not appear to have been an overall problem for the Canadian forces. It is true, however, that the British were in need of support in the offensive underway in Belgium, thus Canadian units were being brought up to strength*.

**Some sources suggest that the Canadian-led campaign of that summer had been intended to continue into the month of September and even beyond. Despite some promising results in the Canadian sectors, however, the British High Command was to decide otherwise: the affair at Passchendaele was not going well, casualties were high and there was now a shortage of reserves. Thus the Canadians were ordered to prepare to move into Belgium and the fighting in the Lens-Béthune Sectors came to a premature end.*

Nevertheless, for whatever the reason, on September 8, 1917, while the Train was stationed in the area of the communities of Bruay and Barlin, Private Morris was once again *taken on strength* by the 5th Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles. This was on a day on which the unit's fighting Companies were in support positions in the vicinity of Petit Vimy and it likely comes as no surprise to learn that his arrival went un-noted by the Battalion War Diarist*.

**He likely reported to the back area – the transport lines of a unit were often used to welcome incoming troops.*

On October 15 the Canadians of the 5th CMR Battalion were transferred north by train to St-Sylvestre Cappel in the area of the French town of Hazebrouck. From there it was to be ordered to Belgium and, once more, into the *Ypres Salient*.



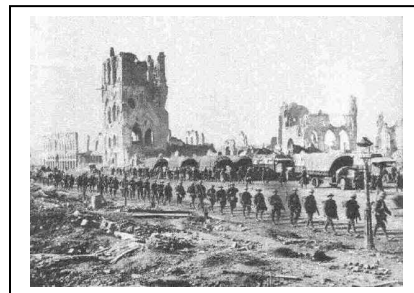
(Right: *Hazebrouck in the period between the wars – from a vintage post-card*)

It was not until those final weeks of October that the Canadian Corps became embroiled in the offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – ostensibly - one of the British Army's objectives.

(continued)

(Right below: *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*)

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 the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions who 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 finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

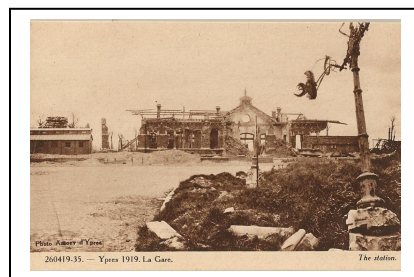


(Right: *Somewhere, perhaps anywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917. – from Illustration*)

It was not until October 22 that Private Morris' Battalion left the relative comfort of the billets in St-Sylvestre-Cappel to march and then take a train to the battered remnants of Ypres. From the station the unit then continued, once more on foot, to the north-east outskirts of the city and to a new reserve camp at Wieltje.



There Private Morris' Battalion remained – on occasion being shelled and also bombed by enemy aircraft – before moving forward to a reserve area on the 26th. The period from then until the 29th was spent firstly... *pumping water out of the trenches to make them habitable...* and then in preparation for an attack to be delivered.



(Right: *The railway station at Ypres (Ieper) in 1919 – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right below: *Canadian soldiers using a shell-hole and its contents as a wash-basin to perform their ablutions during the period of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir*)

October 29 was apparently also spent in patrolling to determine the state of the opposition defences.

The attack went in early on the morning of the 30th but even before it began, the 5th CMRs had already suffered heavily. By mid-morning it was being reported that 'A' Company had failed to reach its objectives and that it had incurred many more casualties during the intervening period. By mid-day its losses were termed as *severe* and of the survivors, ordered to re-enforce another unit... *only six or eight men reached this objective.*



(continued)

Total casualties for that operation which took place over the two final days of October were three-hundred fourteen all ranks.

(Right: *The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians which today stands in the south-western outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele (today Passendale) – photograph from 2010*)



It was during the course of this confrontation that Private Morris was... *Reported Wounded and Missing between following dates, October 30th and 31st - 1917*

The son of William Morris, fisherman, and of Mary Morris (née *Moore*), he was also brother to Maria, to Walter-Herbert, Amy-Frances, to Arthur and to Joseph, of Trouty (other sources have Trinity, although this may well signify the District).

Private Morris was also husband to Muriel, native to the Cape Breton Island town of Baddeck, although she was residing in the military town of Windsor at the time of Harold Morris' enlistment. She was then later recorded as living at 110, Queen Street, in Halifax, then at 92, Barrington Street in the same city, before lastly being recorded in 1920 as resident in Hantsport.

Private Morris had willed his everything to her on a paper dated September 22, 1915, and as well had allocated to her a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay as of December 1, 1915.

It was not until May 22 of 1918 that Private Morris was *officially* presumed dead by the authorities – *presumed to have died on or since 31/10/17.*

Harold Morris had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-three years: his date of birth in the District of Trinity, Newfoundland, recorded as simply the year 1892. But other records show it to have been November 30, 1891.

Private Harold Morris 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.