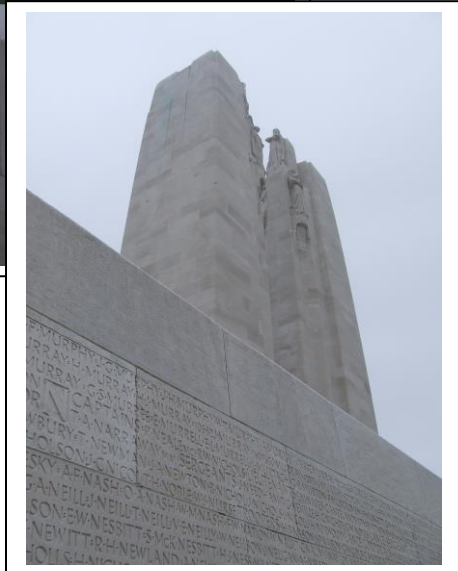


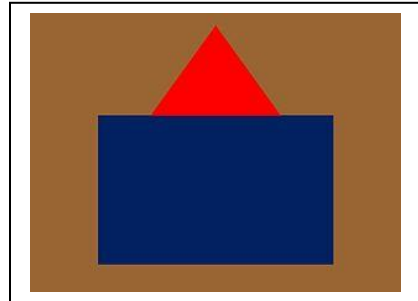


877860J-MURPHY



Private James Murphy (Number 877860) of the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles), 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 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) shoulder flash is from the Wikipedia Web-site.)



(continued)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *miner*, James Murphy has left few details behind him of his emigration from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. He may have been the young man documented on the passenger list of the SS *Home* who was travelling from Port aux Basques to North Sydney on September 27 of 1915 on his way to the industrial city of Sydney, Cape Breton, likely to seek work, but this is as yet to be confirmed.

By March of 1916 he was no longer in Sydney – if he ever *had* been resident there – but was recorded by then as living with his parents in the *Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation* town of New Aberdeen adjacent to Glace Bay, for that was when and where – in Glace Bay – James Murphy was to enlist.

His first pay records indicate that it was on March 7 of 1916 that the Canadian Army* began to remunerate Private Murphy for his services and that this was also the date on which he had been *taken on strength* by the 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*). Eight days were then to pass before he was attested on March 15, his oath witnessed by a local Justice of the Peace, that also being the day on which he underwent a medical examination, a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*.

**Curiously, perhaps, the term ‘Canadian Army’, despite frequent usage, was not to become official until the year 1940.*

After these initial undertakings, it is almost certain that Private Murphy was ordered to report *to duty* for training to the not-distant town of Broughton to the south of Sydney which had recently been transformed into a military camp*.

**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).*

April 28 of 1916 was then to be the moment on which the formalities of his enlistment were officially brought to a conclusion, likely at Broughton. On that date the commanding officer of the 185th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Parker-Day, declared – on paper – that...*877860 Pte. James Murphy...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

His posting to Broughton was to last altogether a little more than ten weeks. 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* in Kings County, Nova Scotia, where the *Brigade* then spent all that summer before receiving its colours on September 28, two weeks before its departure for *overseas service*.

Before that day arrived, however, Private Murphy had perhaps become a little better known to the Battalion authorities that had the majority of the unit’s soldiers:

On two occasions, on May 14 and on June 12, he had taken the opportunity to be *Absent Without Leave* – the details have not been recorded on his record – for which, for each offence, he had been ordered to forfeit three days' pay.

At seven o'clock in the evening of October 11, 1916, the one-thousand thirty-eight officers and *other ranks* of Private Murphy's 185th Overseas Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* in the harbour at Halifax. 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 below: *Sister-ship to Britannic – that vessel to be sunk by a mine in the eastern Mediterranean a month later, in November of 1916 – and also to the ill-fated Titanic, HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor in the company of HM Hospital Ship Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay, Island of Lemnos, 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 military personnel.



The vessel arrived in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on October 18, some five days later, and the troops disembarked on the following day again. Private Murphy's 185th Battalion was thereupon transported south-eastwards by train to *Witley Camp* in the English county of Surrey.

The 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) is documented as then having provided re-enforcements for Canadian forces already on the Continent. This role was to last until February of 1918, sixteen months later, when the remainder of the unit would be absorbed into the newly-organized Canadian 17th (*Reserve*) Battalion.

The Battalion's organizers had originally anticipated that the *Cape Breton Highlanders* 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*. Only the 85th Battalion would ever eventually proceed to serve in the trenches of the *Western Front*.

**Before the end of the Great War, Canada was to have despatched overseas two-hundred fifty battalions – although it is true that a number of these units, particularly as the conflict progressed, were below full strength. At the outset, these Overseas Battalions all had presumptions of seeing active service in a theatre of war.*

However, as it transpired, only some fifty of these formations were ever to be sent across the English Channel to the Western Front. By far the majority remained in the United Kingdom to be used as re-enforcement pools and they were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by units that had by then been specifically designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.

By the time of Private Murphy's arrival in England, the Canadian Corps had been involved in the *First Battle of the Somme* for some seven weeks during which time it had suffered horrific losses. It was to fill the depleted ranks of those battered units that three-quarters of the newly-arrived *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* were to be deployed.

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



Private Murphy was now to remain in the United Kingdom for well over seven months. While the much greater part of this time was to be undoubtedly spent undergoing further training, there was a period of seventeen days during which he was to be elsewhere: in hospital.

He was admitted into the Connaught Military Hospital, situated in the nearby British Army complex of Aldershot on April 23 of 1917, for treatment to a venereal problem. It had likely not evolved as yet into a serious complaint as he was discharged on May 10 and apparently was not to require any further medical attention. However, as a later pay-record shows, it was to receive further *monetary* attention*.

**The Canadian Army, at this time following the British example, did not take kindly to its personnel contracting a venereal disease – for both moral and pragmatic reasons. It thus obliged the delinquent personnel to contribute towards the cost of the treatment undergone in hospital.*

Quite often, however, as in other areas, officers and other ranks were treated differently, with the diagnosis of an officer being recorded simply as NYD (Not Yet Determined), an arrangement which avoided any financial penalty or social stigma.

Private Murphy's pay records contain the following entry: 28/4/17 to 10/5/17 13 day VD. He was to relinquish a total of seven dollars and eighty cents, fifty cents per day from his one-dollar pay, and the entirety of his ten-cent *per diem* field allowance*.

**The first day of April had also seen Private Murphy...Awarded 7 day F.P. (Field Punishment) No 2 & 28 days detention...for an otherwise unrecorded misdemeanour.*

Seventeen days after his release from hospital, Private Murphy was documented as having made the crossing of the English Channel to France on the night of May 27-28, having been *struck off strength* by the 185th Battalion on that former date. He likely travelled through the south-coast English port of Southampton and the French industrial port-city of Le Havre, located at the estuary of the River Seine.

On that second date he made his way to report *to duty* to the 2nd Canadian Infantry Base* Depot by that time re-established – and divided into four sub-Depots – in the vicinity of the coastal town of Étapes where he was *taken on strength* by the 25th Canadian Infantry Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*)**.



(continued)

***Each Canadian Division had a Depot under the new system and thus the 25th Battalion of the 2nd Canadian Division was attached to the 2nd CIDB (see further below).**

****It was not until May 29 that nine-hundred fifty-four arrivals from England were recorded as having reported to the Base Depot – none on the day before.**

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

It is unclear on what date Private Murphy was then eventually despatched from Étaples to join his unit *in the field* but on his personal file is written...*arrived unit ex CBD 16/6/17*. Once again, his own records do not coincide with others, in this case those of the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) War Diary; these latter cite a re-enforcement draft of one-hundred forty-seven *other ranks* having reported *to duty* on June 15, the day before*.

Private Murphy's new unit was at the time undergoing training in an area behind the lines at Gouy-Servins, having been posted there on the second day of that month. The 25th Battalion and Private Murphy were to remain there for a further seventeen days.

* * * * *

The 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force had already been serving in France and Belgium for some twenty-one months by the time of Private Murphy's arrival, since mid-September of the year, 1915. The Battalion was by then a component of the 5th Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2nd Canadian Division, and it had been in service on the Continent continuously since its arrival on the *Western Front*.

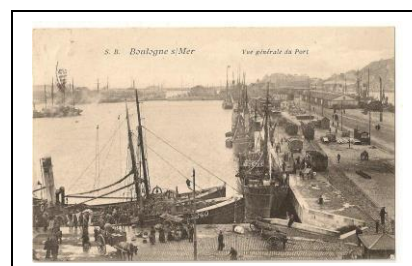


(Right above: *While the caption reads that these troops are 'English', this could indicate any unit in British uniform – including from the Empire (Commonwealth). This is early in the war as there is no sign of a steel helmet. – from a vintage post-card*)



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

Only days after having passed through the port of Folkestone and its French counterpart, Boulogne, on September 22 the 25th Battalion was to take over trenches from the 2nd Battalion of *The King's Own* in the *Kingdom of Belgium*. These had been in the areas forward from the communities of Locre and Kemmel, in that very small part of the country which had not by then been occupied by the Germans, and to the south of the already-battered medieval city of Ypres.



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

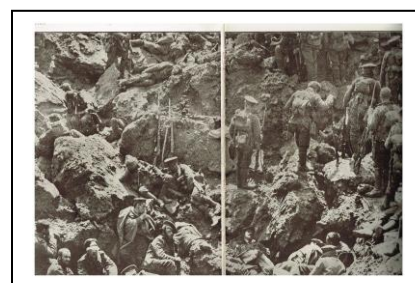
(Right: *A Belgian aerial photograph showing the devastation of Ypres as early as 1915 – the city is described as ‘morte’ (dead) – and before the arrival of Private Murphy – from Illustration*)



The 25th Battalion was to remain in these sectors until August of the following year, 1916.

In early April of 1916, the 2nd Canadian Division would undergo its baptism of fire in a major infantry action. It had been at a place named St-Éloi where, at the end of March, on the 27th, the British had detonated a series of mines beneath the German lines and then had followed up with an infantry attack. The newly-arrived Canadian formation had been ordered to follow up on the presumed British success, to hold and to consolidate the newly-won territory.

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which had turned the just-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, plus a resolute German defence, had greeted the newcomers who were to take over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.



(Right above: *The occupation of a crater in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps in the St-Éloi Sector – from Illustration*)

Towards the end of that confrontation, on April 13-14, the 25th Battalion had relieved another Canadian unit in craters and new trenches, and subsequently had incurred a total of some eighty-five casualties, a greater toll than the unit had suffered on any single occasion up until that date.

The next large-scale infantry confrontation to be contested between the Canadian forces and the German Army would come about in the south-eastern area of the *Ypres Salient* where the 3rd Canadian Division had been posted. The situation, however, had rapidly deteriorated to become serious enough so that units other than those of the 3rd Division were soon to be ordered into the fray.

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* remaining under British control. This had been just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse*, *Railway Dugouts* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.



(continued)

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

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, had overrun the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans had been unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were to re-organize their defences. But the subsequent precipitately-contrived counter-strike of the following day, June 3, delivered piecemeal and poorly co-ordinated, was to prove a costly experience for the Canadians.



(Right above: *The Canadian memorial which stands atop Mount Sorrel just to the south-east of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) whose spires and towers may be perceived in the distance – photograph from 1914*)



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

The infantry confrontation had continued until June 13, the final action having been a well-supported attack in the first hours of that morning. The Germans had retreated and by the end of the affair, both sides – apart from a small German gain at *Hooge* – were back much where they had started eleven days earlier: it was *status quo* but that the cemeteries were to be more numerous and that much more full.



(Right above: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 and 1917 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooge, Sanctuary Wood, Railway Dugouts and Maple Copse: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government. In the first week of June, 1917, a British mine detonated under its summit was to remove much of any similarity to a hill. – photograph from 2014*)



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

It had been the Canadian 3rd Division which was to be the main recipient of the enemy's full offensive thrust, but the 25th Battalion of the 2nd Canadian Division had apparently played a role sufficiently important to warrant the name *Mount Sorrel* becoming the first battle-honour won by the unit during the *Great War*.

From the middle of June up until August of 1916, the 25th Battalion had been in reserve well to the rear, so well to the rear, in fact, that it had been deemed safe enough for His Majesty the King and his son the Prince of Wales to pay a visit on August 14.

Some two weeks later, on the 27th, the unit had been withdrawn into northern France to the vicinity of Steenvoorde and to the village of Moulle.

The following week at Moulle would be spent in becoming familiar with the British Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifle which was to replace the Canadian-made Ross Rifle*, and also in training for a Canadian role in the British summer campaign of 1916, an offensive which to that date had not been proceeding exactly according to plan.

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



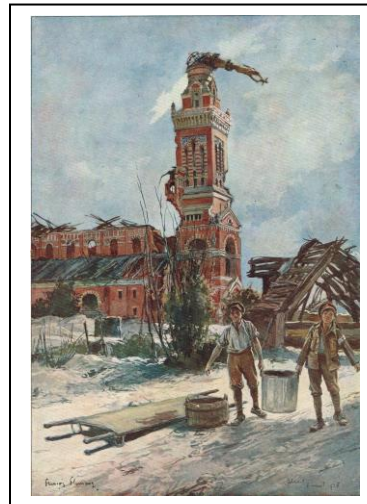
**The Canadian-produced Ross Rifle was an excellently-manufactured weapon; its accuracy and range were superior to that of many of its rivals, but on the battlefield it had not proved its worth. In the dirty conditions and when the necessity arose for its repeated use - and using mass-produced ammunition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



By the summer of 1916 the Canadian units were exchanging it for the more reliable British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III, a weapon that was to ultimately serve around the globe until well after the Second World War.

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

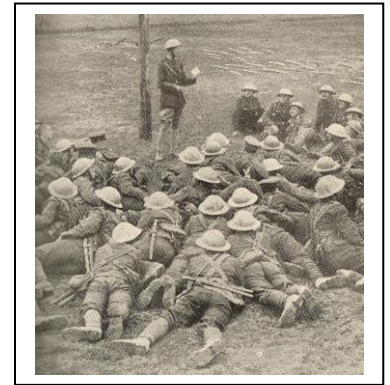


On that first day of *First Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions having been the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland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

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

(continued)

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 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 Courcellette.



Meanwhile, on the evening of September 10, the 25th Battalion would arrive at the large military camp which had been established at the *Brickfields (La Briqueterie)* in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

On September 14 the Battalion had been ordered forward into dug-outs in assembly areas. On the next morning again, September 15, the Canadians were to be going to the attack.

(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-Courcellette (see below), September 1916 – from The War Illustrated*)

Excerpt from the 25th Battalion War Diary entry for September 15, 1916: *5th Brigade attacked and captured the Town of Courcellette... the 25th Battalion moved forward as though on General Inspection the young soldiers behaving like veterans, going through very heavy artillery barrage without a quiver...*

(Right: *Seen from the north, the village of Courcellette just over a century after the events of the First Battle of the Somme – photograph from 2017*)



Of the six-hundred ninety personnel who had gone over *the top* on the day of the assault, the 25th Battalion War Diarist was to record thirty-six dead, one-hundred ninety-one wounded and seventy-seven as *missing in action**.

**It seems that some of the missing may have soon returned to duty as a later War Diary entry records two-hundred fifty-eight casualties all told.*

(Right: *One of the tanks* employed during the First Battle of the Somme, here withdrawn from the field and standing in one of the parks where these machines were overhauled and maintained – from Le Miroir*)



**Some of the first tanks ever to be used in battle had apparently been a positive element during the fighting of the day on the Canadians' Front. They were originally to be called land-ships, the word 'tank' invented as a code-name: the code-name name stuck.*

(continued)

On October 1 the Battalion – its operational strength by then apparently reduced to two-hundred (sic) all ranks and twelve machine-guns – *received orders to attack and capture “at all costs” enemy trenches known as KENORA and REGINA... “B”, “C” and “D” Companies... were to proceed over KENORA up to REGINA, which they did, but by the time they had got to the wire the casualties had been so heavy that only one officer was left... and about thirty men...*

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

The attack had been a failure and the survivors had been obliged to fall back to *Kenora Trench*. Total casualties during the action were to number a further one-hundred twelve.

(Right below: *Ninety-eight years later on, the land on which the action was fought, as seen from Regina Trench Cemetery – photograph from 2014*)

On the night of October 1-2 the 25th Battalion had retired from *the Battle* - and from the area of - *the Somme* and had made its way westwards and then northwards. It was to subsequently pass to the west of the battered city of Arras and beyond, to the region of the mining centre of Lens. There the unit would remain for the following six months, in the area and in the trenches of places such as Bully-Grenay, Angres and Bruay.

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

(Right below: *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*)

That winter of 1916-1917 was to be one of relative calm, allowing the 25th Battalion – and many others - to return to the everyday rigours and routines of trench warfare*; after *the Somme* it had perhaps been a welcome respite.

There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity by either side apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids.

The medical facilities during this period were to be kept much more busy by cases of sickness and a perhaps surprising number of dental problems than by the numbers of wounded in need of treatment.

(continued)



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



Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

(Right above: A photograph of Canadian troops in their support positions somewhere on the Somme during the autumn of the year 1916 - By that time they had been equipped with steel helmets and the less visible, British-made, Lee-Enfield rifles – from Illustration)



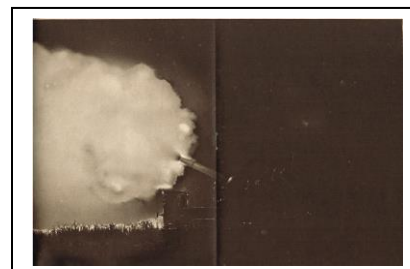
(Right: A detachment of Canadian troops moving up to forward positions during the winter of 1916-1917 – from Illustration)

Towards the end of the month of March, on the 23rd, the 25th Battalion had been ordered withdrawn well to the rear, to Maisnil-Bouche, where it was to undergo intensive training which was to be the eventual lot of most, if not all, of the battalions of the Canadian Corps before the upcoming British offensive. Some of it was to be quite novel: learning the topography of the ground to be attacked; the use of the enemy's weapons which, when captured, were to be turned against him; the by-passing and thus isolation of strong-points instead of the costly assault; the coaching of each and every soldier as to his role on the day; the increased employment of aircraft in directing the advance; the concept of a machine-gun barrage; and the exchange of information between the infantry and artillery so as to co-ordinate efforts...

...and at *Vimy Ridge* and elsewhere, the use of tunnels and underground approaches to mask from the enemy the presence of troops and also to ensure the same troops' security.

During the final five days, April 2-7, the unit had been sent to become familiar with ground that had been re-arranged so as to resemble the terrain to be attacked: then, in only two days' time, all that training was now to become the real thing.

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



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

****It must 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 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.***

On April 8... Battalion less 1 platoon per company moved from MAISNIL BOUCHE to concentration area at BOIS DES ALLEUX. In the evening the Battalion moved up to its position...via cross country route... (Excerpt from 25th Battalion War Diary). But it apparently was not to pass via those well-documented tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety.

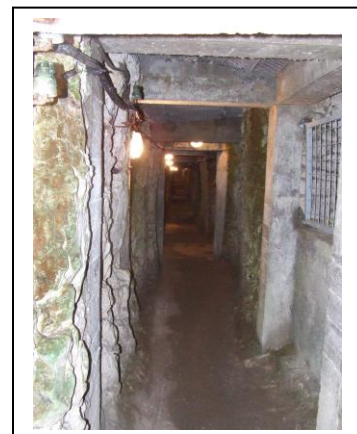
On April 9, Easter Monday, in that spring of 1917, the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day,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



The British campaign would prove an overall disappointment, but that French offensive of *le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

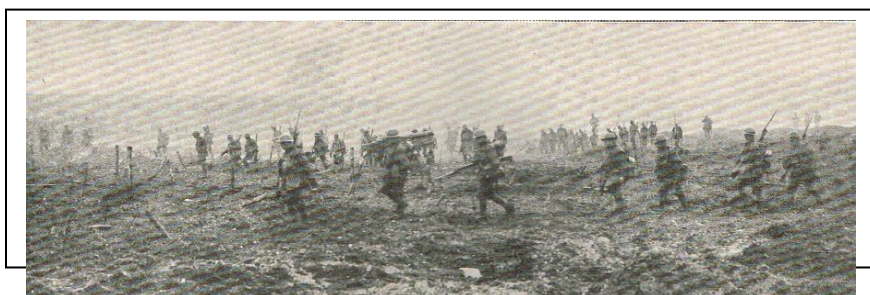
(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, has stood on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time 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 above: *One of the few remaining galleries – Grange Tunnel - still open to the public at Vimy Ridge 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*)



(continued)

The 2nd Canadian Division had not been responsible for the taking of *Vimy Ridge* itself, but for the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the southern slope and therefore on the right-hand side of the attack.

The Battalion's objectives had apparently soon been captured and much of the remainder of the day had then been spent in consolidating these newly-won positions.

(Right below: *Canadians under shell-fire occupying the third line of trenches on Vimy Ridge, anonymous dead lying in the foreground: The fighting of the next few days was to be fought under the same conditions. – from Illustration*)

The Germans, having lost *Vimy Ridge* and the presumed advantages of the high ground, had retreated some three kilometres into prepared positions in front of the Canadians whose further offensives were to be less successful than that of Easter Monday; while some progress at times would be made – at Arleux-en-Gohelle, for example - German counter-attacks were also to reclaim ground from the British and Canadian troops – as at Fresnoy-en-Gohelle in early May.



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

There had been, on those first days of April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted, but highly unlikely, *breakthrough* – however, such a follow-up of the previous day's success had proved to be logistically impossible, the weather having prevented any swift movement of guns and material – and in any case, the orders had been...*to consolidate*.



Thus the Germans had been gifted the time to close the breach and the conflict once more was to revert to one of inertia.

Nor was the remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* 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. By the time that the *Battle of Arras* had officially drawn to its conclusion, the 25th Battalion had been withdrawn into reserve, to rest and to train – if that is not a contradiction – in the vicinity of the community of Gouy-Servins, to the west of the city of Lens.

It had been during this period, of course, that Private Murphy's re-enforcement draft of one-hundred forty-seven *other ranks* had reported *to duty* with the 25th Battalion from the 2nd Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Étaples.

* * * * *

(continued)

Now there were to be several weeks before a return to the forward area. Excerpts from 25th Battalion War diaries of July 2 and 3, 1917: *Battalion at BOUVIGNY HUTS. Preparations to relieve 46th British Division, 138th. and 137th. British Brigades, 1/5 Battalion Leicesters and 1/4 Battalion Leicesters. Casualties, 1 Other Rank killed, 9 Other Ranks wounded.*

Relief completed about 2 a.m. – No further casualties were to be documented for the remainder of the day.

Thus it was back to business as usual.

The British High Command by that time, indeed long before, had decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention – and also his reserves - from this area, it had ordered other operations as well to take place at the sector of the front running north-south from Béthune down to Lens.



The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort and one of the primary objectives was to be *Hill 70* in the outskirts of the mining centre of Lens.

(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*)

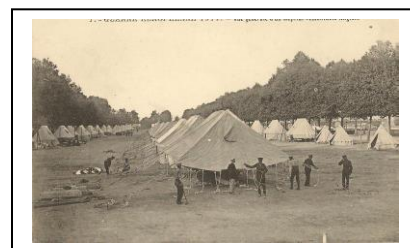
However, Private Murphy was not to be present for the confrontation at *Hill 70*. He was once again to be in hospital.

* * * * *

For the first thirteen days of the month of August of 1917, the 25th Battalion and Private Murphy had been in reserve, posted to the area of the *Bouvigny Huts* and, as the Battalion War Diarist has recorded...*training carried out*. In fact...*Battalion in reserve, training carried out*...is the entire War Diary entry for August 6; the five days following have been simply annotated as...*ditto...ditto...ditto...etc.*

Yet there apparently occurred on August 9 an incident which proved the *Bouvigny Huts* to be within range of at least some of the German artillery: Private Murphy was struck by shrapnel in the left arm, neck and leg.

He is recorded as having been at first evacuated to the 6th Casualty Clearing Station at Bruay before being forwarded from there on that same August 9 to the 23rd CCS at not-far-distant Lozinghem. On the following day Private Murphy was again transferred, on the night of August 10-11, to the 22nd General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers, there to remain for but a single day.



It would finally be at the 1st Australian General Hospital in Rouen that he was to receive further treatment for three weeks less a day, having being admitted there on August 12.

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

From the 1st Australian General Hospital, on September 1, 1917, Private Murphy was discharged. It is not clear where he was to spend the three succeeding days, but on September 4 he is documented as having been once more at the 2nd Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Étaples and, due to his recent injuries, as having been assigned...*temporary duties*. On the 13th day of the month, he was deemed by the medical authorities to be fit for service – *Class A* – and was despatched – the date is not recorded* – to the *Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp*, temporarily located at Villers-au-Bois.

**At the very earliest it may have been on September 15 as that was on that date that the facility began to operate.*

(Right below: Villers Station Cemetery, Villers-au-Bois, was used primarily by medical facilities in the area during the years 1916-1918. Today within its bounds lie over twelve-hundred Commonwealth dead – the majority Canadian – and also thirty-two former adversaries. – photograph from 2017)

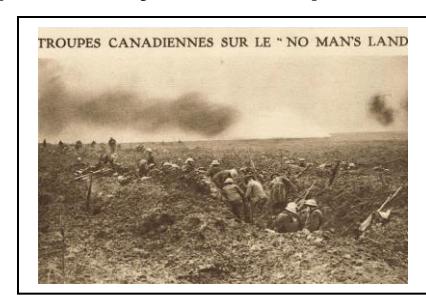
It was on September 25 that Private Murphy was next to be on the move, on this occasion back to his 25th Battalion which he re-joined on the following day. By that time the new *Reinforcement Camp* had become a busy place: from its opening until the end of that month, eight-thousand two-hundred thirty-five reserves had arrived there, of which one-thousand four-hundred fifteen had been despatched to divers units – of which number Private Murphy had been one.



* * * * *

During the interim of Private Murphy’s hospitalization, his 25th Battalion had not idle. The 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions had been entrusted with the responsibility for the capture of the aforementioned *Hill 70*.

Therefore, on those days during which Private Murphy had been receiving medical treatment in the 1st Australian General Hospital in Rouen, the 25th Battalion had been moving forward to the northern outskirts of the city and mining-centre of Lens and then fighting to take and retain what is a seemingly-innocuous piece of territory.



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

(continued)

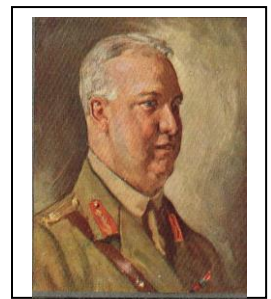
Those expecting *Hill 70* to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear.



(Right: *This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15th Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. – photograph from 1914*)

Yet *Hill 70* had been high enough to have been considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – as the key feature in the area, its capture more important than that of the city of Lens itself.

(Right: *The portrait of Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie is from Illustration.*)



Objectives had been limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it had been expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it had proved; on the 16th several strong counter-attacks had been launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.

These defences had held firm and the Canadian artillery, by then employing newly-developed procedures, was to inflict heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* had thus remained in Canadian hands.



(Right: *Canadian troops in the vicinity of Hill 70 a short time after its capture by the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions – from Le Miroir*)

Of course, the Germans had not been the only ones to have incurred casualties: by the time that the 25th Battalion was to retire on August 17, the unit had recorded some one-hundred fifty *killed, wounded and missing in action*, fifty of which were apparently to have been incurred on that August 17.



(Right above: *The spoils of war: Canadian officers and men on some of the terrain on which they had recently fought – and captured – from Le Miroir*)

While it may have retired temporarily into support from front-line positions on August 17, the unit's respite was to last not even a day – and the unit had incurred casualties even while withdrawing into those support positions. On August 18 the Battalion War Diarist was to report a unit *trench strength* of just fifteen officers and three-hundred seventy-five *other ranks* – establishment battalion *trench strength*, it will be remembered, was about one thousand.

On the night of August 20-21, the 25th Battalion had relieved the 22nd Battalion in the front line, still in the area of the Cité St-Laurent*. Relieved on the night of August 21-22, the depleted ranks of the unit had retired on foot and by bus to the afore-mentioned community of Gouy-Servins. To the casualty count of August 17, a further seventy could by this time now be added.

**The many pit-heads and their neighbourhoods surrounding the mining-centre and city of Lens were often designated by the term Cité followed by the name of a saint.*

After the weeks of relatively little infantry activity during the early days of that summer of 1917, the attack on August 15 in the area of *Hill 70* and the city of Lens had apparently been intended as the precursor to further weeks of an entire campaign to be spear-headed by the Canadian Corps.

However, the British offensive of that summer, further to the north, in Belgium, had been proceeding less well than had been anticipated and the Canadians, the Australians and the New Zealanders were to be needed there. Offensive activities in the *Lens Sector* had been suspended in early September and thus for a short period the 25th Canadian Infantry Battalion was to revert to those rigours and routines, the everyday grind, of existence in – and out of - the trenches.

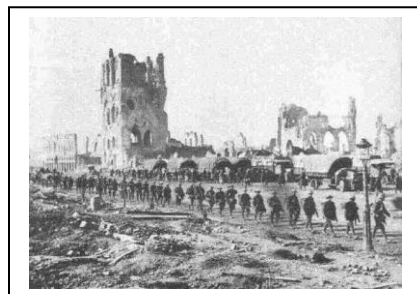
Private Murphy returned on the 27th of that month on a day when his unit was *out of* the trenches and, having just arrived at its billets at Camblain l'Abbé, was preparing for a few short days of training.

(Right: *The village of Camblain l'Abbé almost exactly a century after Private Murphy was to be billeted there in 1917 – photograph from 2017*)



* * * * *

It was not to be until the final weeks of the month of October that the Canadians were to become embroiled in the British summer – and then autumn - offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign has come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, having taken that name from a small village on a ridge that had been – at least *ostensibly* - one of the British High Command's objectives.



(Right above: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres and the historic Cloth Hall on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

From the time that the Canadians were to enter the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. From the week of October 26 until November 3, the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions in reserve.

(continued)

From November 5 until the *official* end of the affair the reverse was to be true with troops of the 2nd Canadian Division having finally entered the remnants of the by-then non-existent Passchendaele village itself.

(Right: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)



The *trench strength* of the 25th Battalion on that November 5 was at the time reported as twenty-one officers and five-hundred seventy-six other ranks, even with re-enforcements perhaps some sixty per cent of establishment unit numbers.

(Right: *The Canadian Memorial standing on Passchendaele Ridge, at the south-western outskirts of the re-constructed village – photograph from 2015*)



During the three days that the unit was to spend at the front at this time, the casualties sustained by the 25th Battalion were, by comparison to those incurred by other units, fairly light: seventeen *killed in action*, sixty-seven *wounded* and six *missing in action*.

(Right: *Canadian soldiers on the Passchendaele Front, 'faute de mieux', using a shell-hole to perform their ablutions – from Le Miroir*)



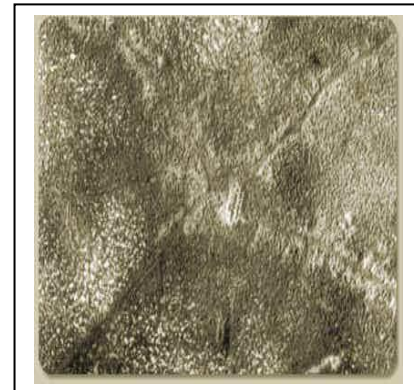
During the late evening of November 8 the 25th Battalion was ordered withdrawn from the area of the front line and eventually moved to the west of Ypres itself, to the area of the village of Vlamertinghe. On November 13 it retired back across the frontier into France and southwards to the area of Neuville St-Vaast, adjacent to *Vimy Ridge*.

(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war – from Illustration*)



(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)

Private Murphy's Battalion was to remain in this area until, a month later again, on or about December 6, it was ordered back to the area of Villers-au-Bois, not many kilometres distant from where the *Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp* had been, and from where it would now move up into *support* and the *front-line* – and back again - during the next three weeks of the month.



(continued)

Although the 25th Battalion War Diarist appears to have neglected it in his entries of the time, the month of December, 1917, held a special interest for the Canadian Forces serving overseas: the Canadian National Election.

From December 1 (some sources suggest December 4) of the month until December 17, Canadian military personnel were to vote. While Private Murphy's Battalion's journal does not, other war diaries *do* record the event, and in most cases those having participated reached and at times surpassed the ninety per cent mark. At the same time the soldiery was encouraged to purchase *Government War Bonds* which allowed the troops to not only *fight* in the conflict but to also directly help to *pay* for it as well.

The 25th Battalion was not to spend Christmas of 1917 in the trenches as it had done the previous year, but in the rear area at Enquin-les-Mines. Church services were arranged for at least two of the Christian denominations – Roman Catholic and Church of England - and...*all ranks enjoyed a special Christmas dinner in the afternoon.* What was on Private Murphy's menu, however, we have not been given to know.

The winter of 1917-1918 was now to be spent in the same area. As had been the case during the previous winters of the *Great War*, little concerted confrontational military activity for that period was to be reported in the 25th Battalion War Diary – or in any other battalion war diary. There was the habitual patrolling, by both sides, and in the case of Private Murphy's unit several raids were planned, all except one of which were later to be cancelled or postponed indefinitely because the artillery had been unable to cut the wire.

The 25th Battalion was to remain at Enquin-les-Mines until mid-January when it moved in stages to the sector forward of Villers-au-Bois. Once again the routine became one of *front, support* and *reserve*, although for Private Murphy there was to be a welcome break – one presumes it to have been so - from it all.

March 18 was the first day of a fourteen-day period of leave which had been granted to him to be spent in the United Kingdom. Where this time was to be enjoyed by the fortunate recipient is not recorded; all that is further documented is that he arrived back to his unit after seventeen days, not fourteen, on April 4. However, since there is no corresponding entry on a charge sheet, it may be presumed that problems with travel had arisen and that, at least on this occasion, Private Murphy was blameless.



(Right above: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

By the time of his return, on March 23, two days following the first day of spring - the unit had moved further south once more, on this occasion to the area of St-Aubin on the outskirts of Arras, to arrive there on the 24th.

The Battalion was then to be '*standing-by*', ready to move on short notice, owing to expectations of an attack by the enemy.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans were to come to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the Divisions no longer necessary on the *Eastern Front* because of the Russian withdrawal from the war, the enemy launched a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21 – the first day of spring. The main blow was to fall at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it was to descend for the most part on the British Fifth Army troops stationed there, particularly where its forces were serving adjacent to French units.

(Right: *While the Germans did not attack Lens – some sources say that this is neighbouring Liévin - in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it very heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and thus to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir*)



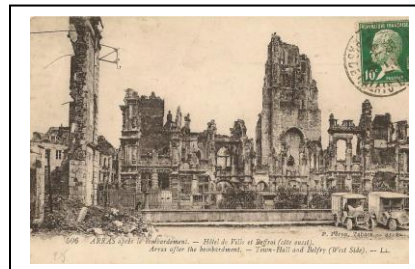
The German advance continued for some two weeks, petering out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was a result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and a great deal of French co-operation with the British were the most significant.

**A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', later fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It also was to be successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.*



(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

Its War Diary suggests, however, that the 25th Battalion was not involved in the heaviest – if any - of the related fighting. The unit was posted mostly near Wailly*, just to the south-west of the city of Arras, where the majority of the casualties incurred were due – as they often were - to enemy artillery activity rather than to infantry action.



**The area just to the south and west of Arras was at the northern extreme of the German offensive. Unsure as to what the enemy's intentions were, the High Command moved the 2nd Canadian Division into the area to forestall any attack if and when it occurred to protect the avenue to the Channel ports and also the coal-fields in the area of Béthune.*

In the event, the offensive in that direction was stopped cold by the British Third Army before it reached Arras, but during the period of the crisis the Germans had stayed active enough to keep the British and Canadians wondering.

(Right above: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery – from a vintage post-card*)

(continued)

As for the situation to the north, it apparently was never deemed serious enough to warrant any Canadian movement in that direction*.

****And the Germans were also busy elsewhere on the Western Front; the offensives launched against British and Commonwealth forces were not the only battles to be fought. During this period Ludendorff, up until late spring, also attacked the French.***

By the end of April the Battalion officers appear to have had nothing more important to discuss than whether or not to adopt the kilt as part of the regimental uniform.



By that time a relative calm had descended on the front as the German threat had faded – the enemy had won a great deal of ground, but had gained nothing of any military significance on either of the two fronts.

(Right above: A Canadian carrying-party loading up before moving up to the forward area, one of the many duties of troops when in support or reserve: the head-bands - called 'tumps' - was an idea which had been adopted from the North American aboriginal peoples – from Le Miroir)

Nor was the calm particularly surprising: both sides were exhausted and needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to re-enforce. The Allies from this point of view were a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were belatedly arriving on the scene*.

****The arrival of those troops from the Russian Front was to represent the final substantial reserves available to the German High Command. On the other hand, as seen above, their adversaries would soon see not only a superiority but a supremacy in numbers. It was to be only a matter of time.***

An overall Allied Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing – some sources feel the term to be a bit flattering - a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

The 25th Battalion and Private Murphy remained in the same area to the south of Arras after the crisis, the months of May and June to be spent in relative calm in the vicinity of Neuville-Vitasse; July was likely to have been even calmer as the unit was withdrawn further, to the back area to Bellacourt.



(Right: Le Maréchal Ferdinand Jean-Marie Foch, this photograph from 1921, became Generalissimo of the Allied Armies on March 26, 1918. – photograph from the Wikipedia web-site)

From time to time, of course, that relative calm was to be punctuated by local operations, apart from the eternal – so it must have seemed – patrolling; raids by both sides were at times undertaken. One of the more ambitious, by the 25th Battalion, was on June 14.

On that day, according to the Battalion War Diarist...*Weather fine. Situation quiet. The Army Commander, General Sir Julian BYNG wired his congratulations on the successful raid.* On the night preceding, a party of one-hundred forty-six *all ranks* had raided an enemy outpost line, an operation which not only Sir Julian but the War Diarist felt to have been a complete success. But whether Private Murphy had participated in the venture or otherwise is not recorded among his documents.

The War Diary entry for June 14 continues: *The usual patrols were out, but nothing unusual to report. The garrison worked hard on the trenches, deepening and repairing, during the night.* Thus things had soon been back to normal.

Private Murphy had, however, by that time participated in another venture and since he was on the Continent on *active service*, the penalty awarded was likely more serious than it might have been otherwise, and certainly more so than it had been when it had occurred in Canada two years before: *Sentenced to 7 days F.P. (Field Punishment) No 1 – 1/6/18 When on active service Absent Without Leave from 9.0 am 31/5/18 to 3.30 pm 31/5/18 Forfeits one days pay under RW.*

Seven weeks later there was more to follow: *Sentenced to 10 day F.P. No 1 24/7/18 for when on active service Absent Without Leave from 6.0 pm 20/7/18 until 2.0 am 21/7/18 Forfeits one days pay under RW.*

Days before August 8, the intended date of the start of the Allied offensive in front of Amiens, the 25th Battalion was transferred to the Bois de Blangy, just to the east of Amiens itself and on the main road from there to St-Quentin, from which locale it was then to be ordered forward into the trenches.

The 25th Battalion was not alone: a large number of other Canadian units – indeed almost the entire *Canadian Corps* – had at that same time moved in a semi-circular itinerary to the west of Amiens, then south, then east again to finish in front – to the east - of the city.

This immense – and complicated - movement was to be effected in only a matter of days, all of the latter stages of it on foot and these also during the hours of darkness.

(Right: *The venerable gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the leading German troops had apparently been able see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918 – photograph from 2007(?)*)

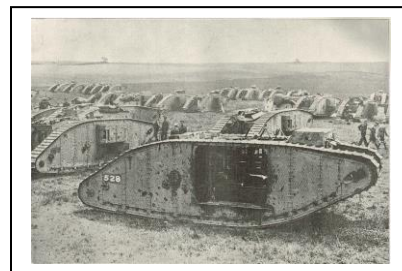


It was intended to surprise the enemy – and it did.

At 4.30 in the morning on that August 8, the advance began – *the Hundred Days* as it became known – one of the multiple offensives which were to bring the *Great War* to a close on November 11. The Canadians were to move forward some twenty kilometres in the first three days of the attack, a feat unheard of since the autumn of 1914 after which the opposing forces had settled into four years of trench stalemate*.

(continued)

(Right: *In 1917 the British formed the Tank Corps, a force which became ever stronger in 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again 'somewhere in France' – from Illustration*)



**The only exceptions to this rule having been the opening day of the First Battle of Cambrai, November 20, 1917, and the German advance in that March of 1918.*

(Excerpt from the 25th Battalion War Diary entry of August 8, 1918) *The weather was greatly in our favour, a thick mist hung over the ground. At 4.20 a.m. our Artillery opened as one gun, our counter-Battery work was especially good, the enemy artillery being forced to cease in half an hour, scarcely a shell falling in our trenches. The plan of the attack was as follows:- ...the 5th Cdn. Inf. Bde. moved up at ZERO plus 1 hour, in artillery formation and formed up on the consolidated line with the 24th Canadian Battalion on the left, 26th Cdn. Battalion on the right, 25th Canadian Battalion in support and the 22nd Canadian Battalion in reserve, the objective being about 1000 yards in advance of GUILLACOURT, which was successfully reached and consolidated about noon, the general line of advance was parallel to the AMIENS-CHAULNES Railway...*

The mist was so thick that it was impossible to proceed other than by compass, this method was also difficult at times owing to the obscurity of all land marks. Strong opposition from enemy machine gun nests encountered...but were all attended to in quick time... The work of the tanks was also especially good in destroying enemy machine gun nests... At 6 p.m. the 6th Cdn. Inf. Bde. passed through us, together with Cavalry Patrols, exploiting the success. The Battalion remained on the consolidated line until next day.

The casualties incurred by the 25th Battalion on this first day of the *Battle of Amiens* were to be eight *killed*, one-hundred seven *wounded* and three *missing* – all ranks.

(Excerpts from the 25th Battalion War Diary entry for August 9, 1918) *...Some slight shelling of "A" Coy's position, causing two casualties.*

...Just after nine o'clock on the following morning orders were received by the Battalion to continue the attack in conjunction with other troops... The Battalion rapidly moved to the assembly position – the heights S.E. of Caix – and crossed the British front line...at 1 p.m..

(Right: *French dead in the communal cemetery at Caix, just to the west of Rosières, the French having relieved Canadian troops towards the end of the second week of the battle: Caix also hosts a British Commonwealth cemetery as well as a German burial ground. – photograph from 2017*)



As the Battalion moved over the ridge in front of CAIX, they were met by a light artillery barrage, and strong enemy machine gun fire. Pushing through this, the British front line was soon crossed and a party of about 250 Germans...were taken prisoners.

The advance continued towards VRELY, the only opposition being large numbers of enemy machine gun posts...Tanks came up and gave assistance in the taking of the village...some hard fighting in a wood on the right...

At Caix the unit had passed the morrow, and most of the day following, in...*cleaning up and resting. Clothing, pay and bathing parades were also held during the day... Rifle and respirator inspections were held during the morning (of the 19th). At 9 p.m. the Battalion formed up and marched to BLANGY WOOD, arriving at 4.10 a.m. and settled in bivouacs* (Excerpts from 25th Battalion War Diary entries for August 18 and 19, 1918).

Not only were the itineraries of the Canadians' coming in early August to the field in front of Amiens to be used for their return to the front at Arras, but so also was to be the same cloak of secrecy, troop movements again having been made under cover of darkness.

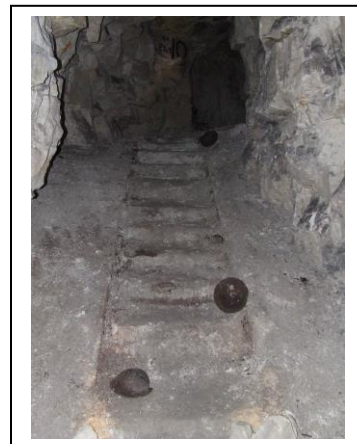
Busses were to take Private Murphy's unit on the following evening, August 20, to Herlin-le-Sec from where it had marched the remaining three kilometres on that same night to Maisnil-les-Saint-Pol. It had rested there all the next day before having moved again on the morrow, August 22: the War Diary records that the journey was made on foot from Hauteville to Petit Houvain; from Petit Houvain(?) by train to Marœuil; and again on foot from Marœuil to Fosseux.

A further march to Warlus on August 23 was followed by yet another just two days later, a trek which would see the 25th Battalion arrive just after midnight of August 24-25 at Beaurains in the outskirts of Arras where the other three battalions of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade were also to assemble.

Seeking its next orders...*the Commanding Officer and the Adjutant proceeded to Bde. H.Q. at RONVILLE CAVE...at 2 a.m. but could get no definite information re attack, except that ZERO HOUR would be 3 a.m.* (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of August 26, 1918).

As it transpired, this information – but only that of the *timing* of *Zero Hour* - was to prove to be incorrect: the offensive was still to go ahead.

(Right: *One of the several entrances into the Ronville Cave system, Arras, almost a century after its use by Commonwealth and British troops. It was used at different times by personnel of thirty-six different Army Divisions. – photograph from 2012(?)*)



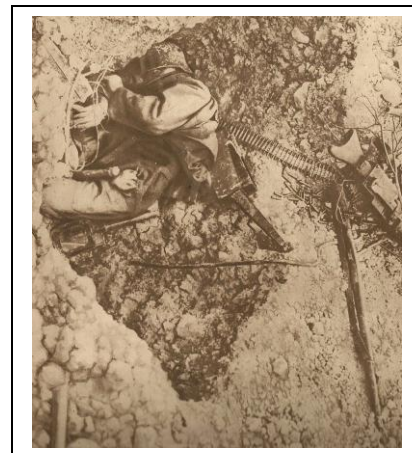
Later on during that day of August 26, the 25th Battalion moved forwards into a reserve position, perhaps because the unit's numbers were by then only one-half of regular battalion strength. The attack had already gone in at several sectors at three o'clock in the morning of that same day, but the assault by the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade was not due to be delivered until the morning of August 27.

(continued)

For the next two days the unit moved forward against stiffening opposition, individual companies supporting other units as and when events necessitated. Progress at times was to be slow, German snipers and machine-gunners proving to be, as ever, formidable opponents, and the enemy artillery was still very active. Despite all their efforts, several objectives of the 2nd Division still remained contested as this offensive, the *Battle of the Scarpe*, drew to its conclusion.

The operation was to cost the Canadian Corps some fifty-six hundred casualties.

(Right: A German machine-gunner who also gave his all – from *Illustration*)



On August 29 the 25th Battalion withdrew all the way to Achicourt, there to be treated with hot meals, dry socks and, on the evening of the 30th, a concert.

(Right: A group of German prisoners, some serving here as stretcher-bearers, being taken to the rear after their capture by Canadian troops: a tank may be seen in the background – from *Le Miroir*)



The first five days of the offensive had succeeded in overcoming the German defences to a depth of eight kilometres – overrunning the battlefields of 1917 - and thus, despite the several set-backs, was to be considered a great success. It had laid the foundation for the next operation.

After a two-day respite the advance was to be re-launched to reduce the enemy positions on the Drocourt-Quéant Line, but on this second occasion the attack was to be delivered by troops of different Canadian and British divisions. The 25th Battalion rested.



(Right above: Douglas Haig, C.-in-C. of British and Commonwealth forces on the Western Front inspects Canadian troops after their successful operation of September 2 against the German Drocourt-Quéant Line – from *Le Miroir*)

It was not until September 14 that the services of Private Murphy's 25th Battalion were once more required in the forward area. Until then the unit had remained withdrawn, mostly to undergo training, although at times not so far back as to escape injuries from enemy artillery. Things remained relatively quiet while preparations continued to be laid for the assault on, and the crossing of, the *Canal du Nord*.



(continued)

September 27 was the date on which units of the four Canadian Divisions attacked and traversed the *Canal du Nord*, then pursued the Germans through the area of *Bourlon Wood* in the direction of the historic town of Cambrai.



(Preceding page: *German prisoners evacuating wounded out of the area of the unfinished part of the Canal du Nord which the Canadians crossed on September 27, thus opening the road to Cambrai – from Le Miroir*)

(Right above: *The same area of the Canal du Nord shown in the previous photograph, as it is almost a century after the Canadian operation to cross it – photograph from 2015*)

(Right below: *Two German field-guns of Great War vintage stand on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City, the one in the foreground captured during the fighting at Bourlon Wood. – photograph from 2016*)

Private Murphy and his 25th Battalion were not to be called upon for the storming of the *Canal du Nord*. In fact his unit did not cross the waterway until two days later, on September 29, to support the left-hand side of the attack which was to advance towards Cambrai from the north-west. At half-past eleven in the evening of October 1 it moved into the front line at Sailly, relieving the 54th Canadian Battalion.



The unit remained entrenched at Sailly for the next number of days, receiving two reinforcement drafts of *other ranks* for a total of fifty-one newcomers. Otherwise it supplied working parties to dig new – and to repair old – trenches. The enemy's artillery was active as were his bombing planes but casualties were light.

(Right below: *German prisoners, some wounded, taken during the advance in October of 1918, in the company of their Canadian captors – from Le Miroir*)

Extract of Operational Order 275 as pertaining to the 2nd Canadian Division and as issued on October 8, 1918: *The 2nd Canadian Division has been ordered to secure the passage of the Canal de L'ESCAUT* between RAMILLIES and MORENCHIES, both inclusive, and to advance its Right Flank to gain touch with troops of the XVII Corps East of CAMBRAI ANNEXE Station.*



This operation will not be begun until information has been received from Canadian Corps that the XVII Corps has secured the whole of the NIERGNIES-AWOINGT Spur...

...The objectives of the 5th C.I. Bde. shall include MORENCHIES Wood, the road junction at A.6.a.O.2., the CAMBRAI-IWUY Railway...the village of ESCAUDOEUVRES and the chateau in T.19.c.

(continued)

Extract from the 25th Battalion War Diary entry of October 9, 1918: *Oct. 9th At 0130 in accordance with O.O. No.295, the Battalion attacked the CANAL DE L'ESCAUT. "C" and "D" Companies establishing bridgeheads at 3.24.d.6.7. and 3.30.a.8.5. "A" and "B" Coys. continued the attack and reached their objective in short time and consolidated their positions.*



Patrols were sent out to exploit the success and later the Cavalry went forward. The ground exploited by the Cavalry was consolidated by the Battalion during the afternoon and evening.

Weather fair. Casualties – 15 O.R. killed and 85 O.R. wounded.

**The Canal de L'Escaut, upon reaching the outskirts of the town, runs north-south through the western side of the town, perpendicular to the direction of the Canadian advance.*

(Right above: Canadian cavalry, little used during the war up until this period, escorting German prisoners towards the rear as infantrymen look on – from Le Miroir)

Casualty report – "Killed in Action" Whilst with his Company advancing to the attack North of Escaudœuvres, he was hit in the left side of the head and instantly killed by a piece of shrapnel from an enemy shell.

There exists no later Burial Report in the Archives.

The son of Thomas Murphy and of Elizabeth Murphy – to whom on August 28, 1916, he had willed his all and to whom, as of October 1 of the same year, he had allocated a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay – of St. John's, Newfoundland, then later of New Aberdeen, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, he appears to have left behind him no other available family information*.

**The above has been gleaned from his personal papers; it has been impossible up until now to find any other information elsewhere.*

Private Murphy was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 9, 1918, during the advance on Cambrai.

James Murphy had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-one years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, October 13, 1894 (from attestation papers).

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



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to *criceadam@yahoo.ca*. Last updated – January 23, 2023.