



Private Patrick Murphy, Number 877146, of the Royal Canadian Regiment, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Ligny-St. Flochel British Cemetery, Averdoingt: Grave Reference II.D.1.

(Right: The image of the cap badge of the Royal Canadian Regiment is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of an *iron-worker*, Patrick Murphy appears to have left behind him little information as to his movements from Placentia in the Dominion of Newfoundland to Canada. All that may be said with any certainty is that he was a resident of Laurier Street, Whitney Pier, in the Cape Breton industrial city of Sydney, Nova Scotia, in March of 1916, for that is where and when he enlisted.

His first pay records indicate that it was on February 3, 1916, that the Canadian Army began to remunerate the by-then Private Murphy for his services. The unit by which he was then *taken on strength* on that same day was the 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

A month later, on March 7, he subsequently underwent a medical examination – which found him fit...*for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force...* - and also attestation later that same day.

However, it was then to be a further seven weeks, not until April 28, before the formalities of his enlistment were officially concluded: it was on that date that the commanding officer of the 185th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Parker-Day declared – on paper – that...*877146, Patrick Murphy...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

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

**Broughton had been a 'company town', developed towards the end of 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).*

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

Apart from this being a time of training, the period spent at Aldershot was also the occasion for Private Murphy, as of the first day of October, 1916, and just prior to departure, to allocate a monthly twenty dollars from his pay to his mother.

At seven o'clock in the evening of October 11, 1916, the one-thousand thirty-eight officers and *other ranks* of the 185th Overseas Battalion embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* in 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.

(continued)

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

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



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

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

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

**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 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 two months during which time it had suffered terrible 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)

This distribution of re-enforcements was, however, to take some time even though a number had already crossed the English Channel by the end of the year, 1916. In the case of Private Murphy the spring of the following year, 1917, had already arrived before he was to proceed to the Continent.

(continued)

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

It was on May 27 that he was *struck off strength* by the 185th Battalion to be immediately *taken on strength* by his new unit, the Royal Canadian Regiment.

At that same time, Private Murphy was travelling to France - likely passing via the English south-coast port of Southampton and the French industrial city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine - as he is documented as having reported on that same date to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Base Depot in the vicinity of the coastal town of Étapes. There he was to remain for the next eighteen days.



On June 14, 1917 – the Battalion War Diary records June 13 - Private Murphy was one of a draft to be despatched to the 3rd Entrenching Battalion*; two days following, he joined this unit which, at the time was serving in the rear area of Les Bois des Alleaux, Mont St-Éloi.



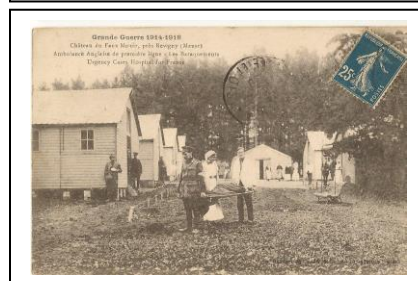
(Right and right below: *The village of Mont St-Éloi, adjacent to Écoivres, at an early period of the Great War and again a century later - The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – partly destroyed in 1793 and more so in the Great War – are visible in both images. – from Le Miroir and (colour) from 2016*)



**These units, as the name suggests, were employed in defence construction and other related tasks. They comprised men who not only had at least a fundamental knowledge and experience of such work but who also had the physique to perform it. However they also came to serve as reinforcement pools where men awaiting the opportune moment to join their appointed unit might be gainfully employed for a short period of time.*



(Right: *Canadian troops from an unspecified unit engaged in road construction, this also a task to which entrenching battalions were to be assigned. – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)



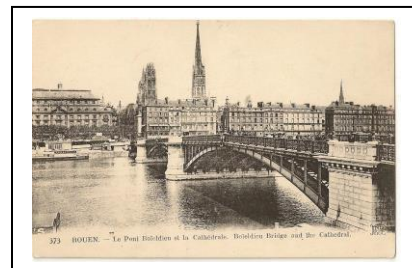
One month after beginning that period of service with the 3rd Entrenching Battalion, on July 12, Private Murphy fell sick. On the morrow he was admitted into the Number 1 Canadian Field Hospital in the area of Bruay from where, a week following, he was forwarded to the 5th General Hospital in the city of Rouen for a further seven days of medical attention.

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

Exactly what Private Murphy's complaint was is not recorded in his dossier. He was simply diagnosed as suffering from PUO – *Pain of Unknown Origin* – with nothing else subsequently reported.

On July 27, he was discharged from hospital to the 2nd Convalescent Depot also in Rouen and then, four days later again, on August 1, sent on to the 11th Convalescent Depot at Buchy, some hundred kilometres inland.

(Right: *The River Seine flows through the city of Rouen and past its venerable cathedral at or about the time of the Great War.* – from a vintage post-card)



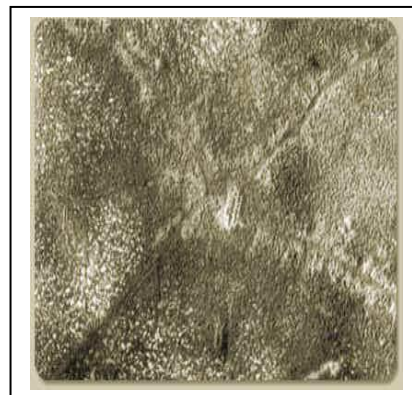
Whatever that PUO might have been, it was still to be a further two months and a-half before Private Murphy would be declared as *Class A* - fit for *active service*. He was thereupon, on October 15, 1917, returned to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Base Depot where he was to await another eight days until ordered to the 3rd Division Wing of the nearby Canadian Corps Reinforcement Depot. From there he was despatched on November 3 to the Royal Canadian Regiment to which he had been attached – but never joined - some five months before.



Private Murphy likely reported *to duty* with his new unit as one of the small draft of thirteen *other ranks* which arrived at Watou, a community on the Franco-Belgian frontier to the west of Poperinghe and also west of the *Ypres Sector* and *Salient*, on November 7.

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

In that summer and autumn the area was in the throes of being the theatre of some of the most horrendous fighting of the entire *Great War*. The Royal Canadian Regiment parent unit had been relieved on the night of November 3-4, having been involved in offensive operations during its latest tour in the trenches. Its casualty count during this period had numbered two-hundred fifty-eight *all ranks*.



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

Private Murphy was about to be introduced to *Third Ypres: Passchendaele*.

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The Royal Canadian Regiment, although having been the senior regiment in the Canadian Army at the outbreak of the *Great War*, had not been among the first units to be despatched overseas to the United Kingdom in October of 1914. In fact, it *had* been sent overseas, but in a different direction, to languish for a year on the British island possession of Bermuda.

After that posting, in the summer of 1915, the Royal Canadian Regiment had been brought home to Canada and had then taken the same ship onward to the United Kingdom where it had then been attached to the 7th Infantry Brigade of the newly-forming 3rd Canadian Division. The RCR* had then been transferred to service with the 3rd Canadian Division** on the Continent on November 1 of 1915, before being sent to the Franco-Belgian frontier area with the 1st Canadian Division and then, at the end of March of 1916, to the *Ypres Salient*.



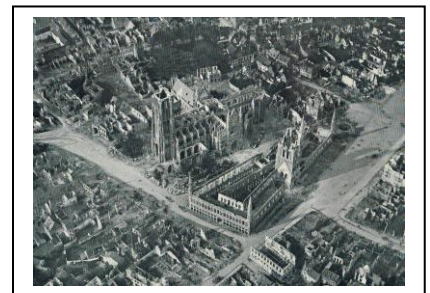
(Right above: *Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, Ploegsteert Sector, where the 1st Canadian Division served in the winter of 1915-1916, a mine crater from the time of the 1917 British offensive showing in the foreground – photograph from 2014*)

**The RCR was – and still is today – a regiment, a force which may comprise any number of battalions: today, in 2017, there are three. Some British regiments, for example, eventually sent twenty or more battalions to serve at the Front during the Great War. Only a single battalion - normally one-thousand strong but during the Great War oft-times comprising a lesser number - of the Royal Canadian Regiment ever served at the front during the Great War.*

***The 3rd Canadian Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. Unlike the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions and, later, the 4th Canadian Division, it was not formed in the United Kingdom but, in an almost ad hoc fashion, of units already serving on the Continent at the time, and of others which were to arrive from England as late as February of 1916.*

The first months of 1916 had been relatively peaceful for the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division, also in the frontier area. It was in March, 1916, that the entire Division was transferred to the *Ypres Salient*, a lethal place at the best of times, in an area to the south-east and in the vicinity of such places as the village of *Hooge*, and those that soon went by English names such as *Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60, Railway Dugouts, Maple Copse* and *Mount Sorrel*.

In April it was the 2nd Canadian Division, in a neighbouring sector to the south of Ypres, which was to receive the attention of the German Army for a few days. This period was not to be as tranquil as that being experienced elsewhere during the same period by the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion and the other units of the Canadian 3rd Division.



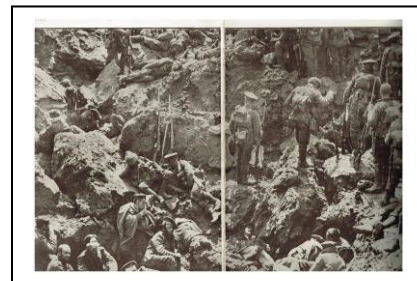
(Right above: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)

(continued)

The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* had *officially* taken place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi* was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it was here that the British had excavated a series of galleries under the German lines, there to place explosives which they detonated on that March 27, having then followed up with an infantry assault.

**Not to be confused with the French community of Mont St-Éloi which has already been introduced on an earlier page.*

After a brief initial success the attack had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than had had the British, and by the 17th of the month, when the battle was called off, both sides were back where they had been some three weeks previously – 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 – from Illustration)

However, as previously noted, this confrontation was a 2nd Canadian Division affair and the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the artillery duels some kilometres away.

Its *own* first major action, some seven weeks later, was to be the confrontation with the Germans at *Mount Sorrel*, in the south-east area of the *Ypres Salient*.

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Salient* which remained under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, in the areas of the village of *Hooge* and those other places of English-sounding names as listed in a closely-previous paragraph. They are still referred to by the local people as such today.



(Right: 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 able to patch up their defences. The hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, delivered piece-meal and poorly co-ordinated, had been a costly experience for the Canadians.



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

Ten days later the Canadians had again counter-attacked, on this occasion better informed, better prepared and better supported. The lost ground for the most part had been recovered, both sides were back from where they had started eleven days before – and the cemeteries, inevitably, were a little fuller.



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

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



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



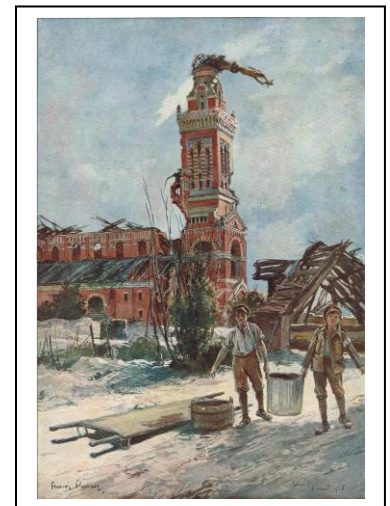
The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had been caught in the maelstrom of June 2 and had remained in the forward area until the night of June 5-6 when it had been relieved and had retired to Camp “B” well to the rear. The unit was not to serve again during the action at *Mount Sorrel* where it had by then incurred some one-hundred forty-five casualties.

Thus it was back to the everyday routines of trench warfare for some two months after which time the unit – as was to be the case of most of the other Canadian Battalions – had been once more withdrawn, on this occasion for special training in ‘*open warfare*’. The Canadians were about to travel south into France to play a role in the British summer offensive of 1916.

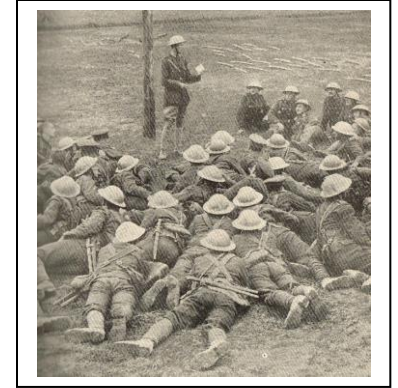
By September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of just four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

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

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



As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians had entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette.



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

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



The RCR had arrived in the area of the provincial town of Albert in the late evening of September 13 and just two days later, on September 15, had been ordered to move forward in order to attack a German strong-point, the *Zollern Graben*, on the following day. By four o'clock in the morning of September 17, when it withdrew, the RCR had incurred some two-hundred eighty casualties and the *Zollern Graben* was still in German hands.



Three weeks later, another major action was to follow: the attack of October 8-9 on the *Regina Trench* system was not a success but, on the contrary, a further expensive failure; the German positions would not be definitively taken until November 11. By that latter date, however, the RCR was to be in the *Lens Sector*, some fifty kilometres to the north. In fact, the unit was to be moving in that direction within days of having fought at *Regina Trench* on October 8.



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

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

During the five weeks of its sojourn at *the Somme* the Battalion had lost, *killed* and *wounded*, about four-hundred fifty all ranks. Over two-hundred more had been reported as *missing in action*, the War Diarist having optimistically predicted that most of them would be later found in field ambulances and casualty clearing stations. The accuracy of that forecast does not appear to have been documented.

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



The RCR Battalion had begun to withdraw from *the Somme* on October 10. The Battalion War Diarist makes no mention of any motor transport or train having been employed so it may be assumed that the unit, as did many others, had retired from there on foot. The route had taken it westward at first, then to turn northward so as to pass to the west of the by-now shattered city of Arras and beyond.

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

It was on the 24th of that October of 1916 that the unit had arrived in the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector* to the north-west of Arras. The War Diarist on that date was to report Battalion strength as being three-hundred eighty-six *all ranks*, less than forty per cent of regulation battalion numbers. *The Somme* had taken its toll.

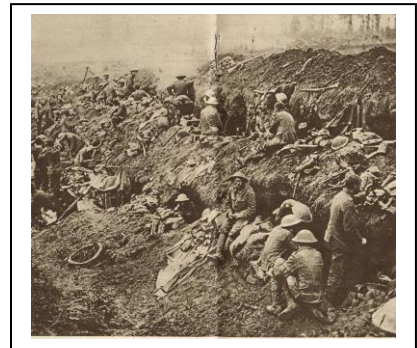


The RCR, in its new quarters in the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector*, once more had begun the daily pattern of life in and out of the trenches*, a routine which had then lasted until the middle of February of the following year, 1917.

(Right: *Canadian soldiers while off-duty perusing the program of an upcoming concert 'somewhere on the Continent' – from Le Miroir*)



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



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

(continued)

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

Thus the winter of 1916-1917 was to pass in that manner for the Royal Canadian Regiment. The Battalion War Diary is fairly repetitive in its entries: little in the way of infantry action except patrols and the occasional raid – by both sides: all local activity; and most casualties due to German artillery and snipers.



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

Then in February the unit had been ordered into Divisional Reserve at Bruay where it had begun five weeks of training for the upcoming British offensive; not that it had been all work: the War Diary reports sports events and concerts among the litany of parades, lectures, marches, drills, work-parties and visits from military and political personages.

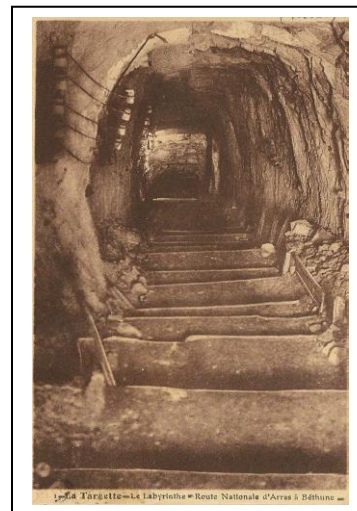


(Right above: A Canadian carrying-party loading up before moving up to the forward area, one of the many duties of troops when in support or reserve – from Le Miroir)

On March 21 the RCR had moved forward into the trenches once again; after five weeks in reserve perhaps the change was to be a bit of a shock to the Battalion's collective system: the War Diarist notes that the new quarters... *LA MOTTE Camp, is composed of Bivouacs, with nine tents for officers. We are its first occupants. It can be greatly improved.*

But he also enters that... *“C” Company relieved the right Company of the 58th Battn. taking over the exact frontage from which we are expected to jump off.* Such an observation illustrates the recent policy of informing junior officers and senior NCOs of the plans of intended actions, knowledge that these personnel were to pass down to the men under their command.

And it must have been becoming clear to the men of the RCR that there were intended actions; the forward and rear areas in the Neuville St-Vaast were hives of ongoing activity for which the unit was supplying working-parties and carrying-parties each day: dumping-areas were being cleared, bivouacs were being sand-bagged, stone laid for walks, new trenches dug and old ones deepened, troops familiarized with the newly-excavated tunnels and other positions, water-pipes and communication lines buried, artillery and machine-guns sited...



(Right above: Just one of the network of tunnels, this one in the area of Neuville St-Vaast–La Targette, which became known as the Labyrinth – from a vintage post-card)

On April 1 the RCR Battalion had retired to Villers-au-Bois for a week, there to organize for the first day of the offensive. On April 7, the first of the unit's Companies had moved into one of those tunnels which had been hewn out of the chalk; it was hoped that these galleries would reduce the number of casualties with the men sheltering there until the last possible moment, and that it would also nurture the element of surprise.

The men of the RCR were to remain underground for well over twenty-four hours.

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

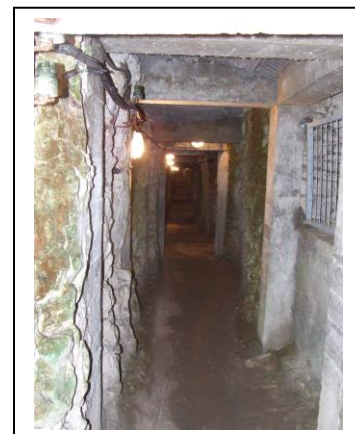


While the British campaign had proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive was to be yet a further disaster.

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

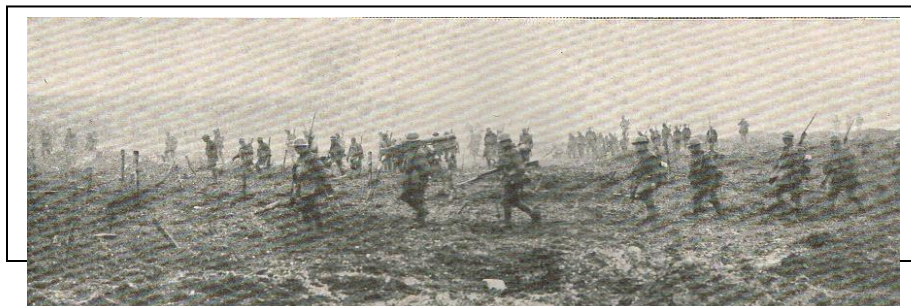


(Right below: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, burdened with all the paraphernalia of war, on the advance across No-Man's-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration*)

For no reason other than that it is one of the more legible entries to follow, an extract of the experience of "A" Company during the opening of the attack of April 9 is here included as being representative of the events of the assault as undertaken by the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion.

(Excerpts from the Battalion War Diary entry of April 9, 1917) 3.12 a.m. "A" Company under Captain Munn reports Co. in Assembly trenches.

(continued)



5.30 a.m. Raining. Barrage opens.

While the other three Companies were in communication with Headquarters at a relatively early hour, apparently not so "A" Company, not until... 1.40 p.m. Message from "A" Co. delivered by wounded runner stated that they had captured four machine guns, were in touch with Units on both flanks... and that they had sent a patrol over the Ridge.

2.15 p.m. "A" Co. (left Co.) is in its objective. Strength 1 Officer and approximately 50 other ranks with no N.C.O.'s. It is in touch with "C" Co (right) who's (sic) approximate strength is 1 Officer and sixty other ranks... "A" Co. has sent a patrol over the ridge from which as yet no report has been sent. There is a small gap between "A" Co. and the P.P.C.C.L.I. owing to the shortage of men. We command the whole situation at present, but unless reinforcements and supplies of every sort, more especially S.A.A. (small-arms ammunition) available, machine Guns, shovels etc., are sent up at first opportunity, it will be difficult to withstand another counter attack.

It was the 3rd Canadian Division – of which the Royal Canadian Regiment was an element - and also the 4th Canadian Division whose objective had been *Vimy Ridge* itself, the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions having had objectives on the right-hand side of the main slope*.

**This was the first occasion on which the four Canadian Divisions were to act in concert as an autonomous Canadian Army Corps rather than as a constituent of a British formation. In fact, on this occasion, British forces were to operate under Canadian command.*

Of the some ten thousand Canadian casualties of the day, the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had incurred fifty-six *killed in action*, one-hundred sixty-five *wounded*, and sixty-five *missing in action*.

The five-week *Battle of Arras* having sputtered to a halt in mid-May, the Royal Canadian Regiment was once again to face a long period of trench warfare. However, for many of the other units of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions which were serving in sectors from *Vimy* in the south to *Béthune* to the north this monotonous work was going to be spiced up: the Canadian Corps High Command had some offensive work planned.



(Right above: *The village of Souchez, just to the north of Vimy, already looked like this in 1915 when the French passed control of the area over to the British. – from Le Miroir*)

The British High Command* had long since by this time decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention – and also his reserves - from *that* area, it had also ordered operations in the sectors of Canadian responsibility running north-south from *Béthune* to *Lens*.



The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort.

(Preceding page: *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*)

****It should be remembered that during the Great War the British High Command was in control of not only its own troops but also those from all the British Dominions, colonies and territories.***

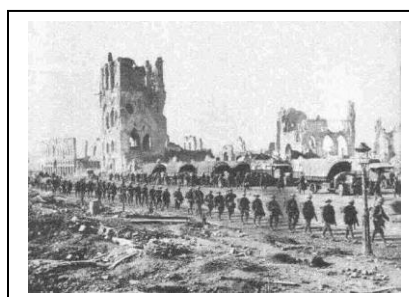


(Right above: *Canadian troops under fire advancing across No-Man's Land in the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

On August 15, a major attack* had been launched by Canadian troops in the suburbs of the mining-centre and city of Lens and just to the north, in the area of a small rise known as *Hill 70*. The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion, however, was not a part of this particular offensive and on that day was in fact busy in training at LaPugnoy. As far as anything of military importance on that day was concerned, the Battalion War Diarist was sparing with his ink: *Nil*.

****The Canadian efforts had been expected to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium was proceeding less well than expected and the High Command was looking for reinforcements to make good the exorbitant losses. The Australians and then the Canadians were ordered to prepare to move north; thus the Canadians were obliged to abandon their plans.***

It was just over seven weeks after the capture of *Hill 70*, on October 6, that the Royal Canadian Regiment had begun to make its way on foot and by train, to the area of the Franco-Belgian border. Later that day the unit was being billeted in the northern French town of Bailleul.



But it was not to be until October 23, having travelled in a circuitous route on foot and by train that the RCR was to find itself in the war zone of the *Ypres Salient*.

(Right above: *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*)

Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign into which the Canadians were about to be thrust – already ongoing since the last day of that July of 1917 – was to come to be better known to history as *Passchendaele*, having taken that name from a small village on a ridge that was – ostensibly - one of the British Army's objectives.



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

(continued)

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



From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was true with troops of the 2nd Canadian Division finally entering the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.

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

From October 23 until the end of the month the RCR had been in reserve in the area of Sin Jaan (St-Jean), contributing to carrying-parties, working-parties and stretcher-parties. On October 30 it had been ordered forward and was to be involved peripherally in an attack by the 3rd Division.



The unit then had remained in the lines until having been relieved on November 4 – all of this at a cost of two-hundred fifty-eight casualties.

(Right above: *Just a few hundred to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the above monument. – photograph from 2010*)

It was at this point, while the RCR was withdrawn to the area of Watou, that the draft of thirteen reinforcements which included Private Murphy reported *to duty* with the unit.

* * * * *

It was not until November 14 that the Royal Canadian Regiment was back in the trenches where they intersected what in peace-time had been the road leading north from Passchendaele (today *Passendale*) to the community of Westroosebeke*.

There it was almost continually shelled for three days, having incurred fifty casualties before then having withdrawn from its positions – and from the *3rd Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele* – on the morning of November 18.

**The Battalion's positions were also atop the Passchendaele Ridge.*

Two days later again, on November 20, the unit was back in northern France, at Rely, a community some eighteen kilometres to the west of Béthune. There it was to remain, both resting and training, for a month, until December 21 when it was bussed back to the *Lens Sector*.

That daily grind of life in the trenches now began once more.

(continued)

The month of December, even though the Battalion War Diarist appears to have neglected it, had nevertheless offered something a little different – and a reminder of home - to all the Canadian formations which were serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army were open during that month and participation, in at least *some* units, was in the ninety per cent range*.

**Apparently, at the same time, the troops were given the opportunity to subscribe to Canada's Victory War Loan. Thus the soldier fighting the war was also encouraged to pay for it as well.*

After that, the winter of 1917-1918 was to be a quiet period, calm enough for Private Murphy to be granted ten days' leave – plus an allowance of travel-time - to return to the United Kingdom; he left France on or about January 20, to return back to his unit on February 2. However, of his whereabouts or exploits during this time there appear to be no recorded details.



(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*)

A month after his return, Private Murphy is documented on March 4 as having been sick. Once again, however, there are no accompanying details – which suggests that it was perhaps a minor incident.

The tranquillity of the winter was to continue until the very end of the season, but no further. The first day of spring of 1918, with the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion still stationed in the area of the city and mining centre of Lens, was to bring to a close this relative calm.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came 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, they launched a massive attack, Operation 'Michael', on March 21. The main blow fell at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops stationed there*.



(Right above: *While the Germans did not attack the city of Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily during the time of their spring 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 a month, 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 French co-operation with the British were the most significant.

****A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', 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 successful for a while, but petered out towards the end of the month.***

(Right: The City Hall of Arras and its bell-tower looked like this by the spring of 1918 after nearly four years of bombardment by German artillery. – from a vintage post-card)



However, despite, at times, the critical situation in the areas of both *the Somme* and *Flanders*, the services of the Royal Canadian Regiment were apparently not required during either *Operation Michael* or *Operation Georgette*.

That entire period was spent by the unit in the sector of Lens, in the southern suburb of Avion and then, latterly, withdrawn to the vicinity of the commune of Cambigneul, sixteen kilometres north-west of Arras.

The following two months were spent well to the rear, in an area where games, parades and concerts were also a part of the routine of army life, although maybe not quite as frequent as the seemingly-everyday working-parties and carrying-parties.

(Right: A Canadian carrying-party delivering the trappings of war somewhere on the Western Front: Apparently the use of the head-band had been adopted in the Canadian forces from its use by the indigenous peoples at home. – from Le Miroir)



(Right below: Cited as being an Official Canadian Photograph of a... 'violinist playing traditional music near Lens' - from Le Miroir)

It was to be the end of July before Private Murphy's Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion was to see action at the front again, except on certain occasions when training exercises were held in areas, activities that were of necessity made to be as realistic as possible.



It may well have been that Private Murphy and his comrades-in-arms at times asked themselves not only why there was this very welcome and quiet period, but also what the purpose could be of all the drills, marches, exercises, study and use of German weapons, familiarization with new tactics, lectures, bayonetting, grenade-throwing, gas evasion and divers manoeuvres.

The period of relative quiet after the efforts of the German spring offensives, *Michael* and *Georgette*, was due of course – certainly in the earlier stages - to the exhaustion of both sides by the end of that April of 1918.

(continued)

(Right: A photograph, from 1917, of a Canadian soldier during training in the use of his 'gas-helmet': As may be imagined, it was difficult for the wearer to perform the duties of a soldier, particularly in the event of an attack. – from *Le Miroir*)



But then it was to continue that way as the Allies and the newly-arriving Americans began in their turn to prepare for an offensive campaign – and therefore also as the German forces began to gird themselves for the inevitable retribution which was soon to burst upon them.

The newly-appointed Generalissimo of the Allied and Associate forces on the Western Front was Ferdinand Foch. His plan was to strike not only hard, but to strike often and ubiquitously, thus eventually overwhelming an already stretched enemy defence. Any retirement by the enemy was to be closely followed up, the pressure to be unrelenting.

(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*)



The month of July was quiet as well, although Private Murphy was soon aware of the dangers of the forward area: that he could be shelled and shot at. But there also appeared to be the same continuous preparations for something grand in the offing. On July 30 the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion was ordered to parade...*in battle order*.

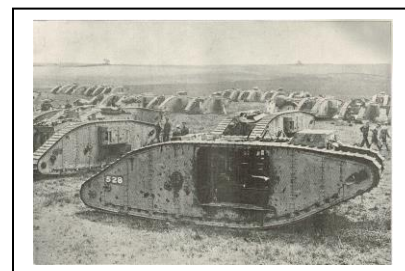
Then: on foot to LeSouich; by train to Doullens; from there to the cathedral city of Amiens by train on the first day of August; on the evening of the 2nd to billets in Sains en Amienois some four kilometres distant - and within enemy artillery range as several casualties, including fatalities, were to prove.



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

At Sains en Amienois Private Murphy likely spent three days in cleaning-up and in drying clothes, in training, in meeting French comrades-in-arms and also, on two of the three evenings given unto him, attending a concert given by an unidentified – at least to the War Diary reader – band.

On August 6 the RCR Battalion was ordered to move: *GENTELLES WOOD* full of troops. *Whole Division and tanks* – recorded the War Diarist. From there three days later, on the 9th, it moved forward yet again, to *LeQuessel Wood* on the Roye Road, expecting to attack on the next day*.



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

**The first attack had already been delivered by then, in the early – and foggy – morning of August 8. But as the offensive had been planned as a continuous advance, it was necessary to have troops which were fresh and ready to continue the operation, allowing the previous units the time to regroup, refresh, re-enforce and to prepare for a yet further assault a few days hence.*



(Right above: *Canadian and German wounded from the first days of the battle – some cases more serious than others - waiting to be evacuated to the rear – from Le Miroir*)

Things, however, apparently went somewhat awry on this occasion as the Battalion sat awaiting orders all the following day and, in fact, it was not until the early morning of the 14th that Private Murphy and his unit moved into the positions at Brigade Reserve recently vacated by the PPLCI* Battalion which had moved in order to deliver its assault from another quarter.

**Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry was named for the daughter of the Duke of Connaught, Governor General of Canada at the time.*

That attack eventually *did* go in and by four o'clock of the next morning, August 15, the Brigade had captured the village of Parvillers. It was then relieved and... *Brigade moved by march route and lorry to LEQUESNEL AREA into bivouacs. In the late afternoon the Brigade moved to VALLEY WOOD AREA* (From the 7th Brigade* War Diary).



(Right above: *Hillside Cemetery, Le Quesnel, within whose bounds lie at least two Newfoundlanders – photograph from 2015*)

Battalion casualties *all told* for the period of August 8-16 inclusive were: ten *killed in action*; sixty-five *wounded*; and three *missing in action*.

**The 7th Brigade comprised the 42nd, 49th, RCR and PPCLI Battalions.*

By the evening of August 19 the entire 7th Brigade was withdrawing from the recent battle-field and on its way back whence it had come only three weeks before. It was not alone: by August 27 the final units of the Canadian Corps were moving back to the area to the east of Arras, their places in front of Amiens having been progressively taken over by elements of the French Army. The Canadians were to depart in much the same manner as they had arrived: at first on foot, then by motorized transport and by rail; they also moved rapidly and discreetly.

(continued)

By the time that the last Canadian troops arrived back in the area of Arras, the first had already gone to the offensive – an operation to become known to history as the *Battle of the Scarpe* - on a new front. As early as the evening of August 25... *a very wet and dirty night...* the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had moved forward into its assembly areas... *trenches 1500 yards EAST of ARRAS.*

The attack was to follow the axis of the main road from Arras to Cambrai. By mid-morning on the following day the neighbouring 8th Brigade had already attacked and was reported as having captured Monchy-le-Preux.

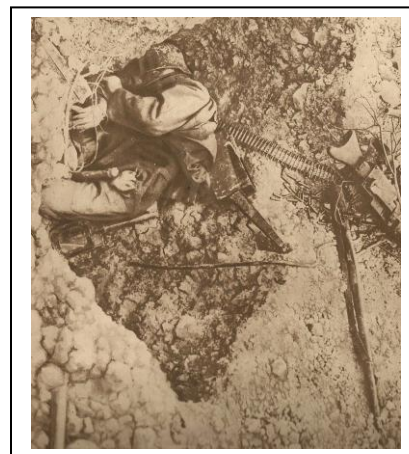
**Of interest to Newfoundland readers may be that on August 26 Monchy-le Preux was captured by troops of the 3rd Canadian Division. More than sixteen months earlier, on April 14 of 1917, the Newfoundland Regiment had been ordered forward into a battle that should never have been. While a desperate defence later in the day had earned ten men – nine from the Regiment – a medal each, the unit had suffered some four-hundred fifty killed, wounded, missing or prisoner.*



After Beaumont-Hamel, April 14, 1917, was to be the costliest day of the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment's war.

(Right above: The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the south-west. In 1917 the Newfoundlanders, already in the village, had advanced out of the ruins of the village to the east, away from the camera; in 1918 the Canadians, attacking from the west, encircled the place. – photograph from 2014)

The 7th Brigade – and thus the RCR, now accompanied by tanks – was ordered forward. By the late afternoon of August 29, after three days of fighting, most objectives had been secured and the Germans had been driven back some eight kilometres. The Battalion was withdrawn to billets in Arras while the *Battle of the Scarpe* officially drew to its close on August 30.



As the fighting had progressed the German resistance had become more pronounced and as usual, his machine-gunners gave and asked no quarter. Casualties from August 25-29 were as follows: thirty-two *killed in action* or *died of wounds*; one-hundred fifty-seven *wounded*; seven *missing in action*.

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

But by that time, Private Murphy had also made his sacrifice. While there appear to be few specific details of his wounding, his files document that he was admitted into the 10th Canadian Field Ambulance – likely an advanced dressing station – on August 26, having incurred shrapnel wounds to the left leg, right arm and also to an eye.

(continued)

From there he was immediately evacuated further back, to the 7th Casualty Clearing Station at Ligny-St-Flochel.

He was the son of William Murphy (deceased before the time of enlistment) and of Hannah Murphy* – to whom in a will dated November 27, 1916, he had bequeathed his all, and to whom as of October 1, 1916, he had allocated a monthly twenty dollars from his pay – of Placentia, Newfoundland**.

**Hannah Murphy was also living on Laurier Street (Number 95) in Sydney at the time of her son’s enlistment; she then later moved to 226, Henry Street, also in the same Sydney neighbourhood of Whitney Pier.*

***There appears to be no other family information in any source available: the family name Murphy appears to be preponderant in the St. Mary’s area of the District.*

Private Murphy was reported by the commanding officer of the 7th Casualty Clearing Station as having *died of wounds* on the same August 26, 1918.

(Right: *The War Memorial in Placentia honours the sacrifice of Patrick Murphy.* – photograph from 2014



Patrick Murphy had enlisted at the apparent age of thirty-two years: date of birth in Placentia, Newfoundland, December 10, 1884.

Private Patrick 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 25, 2023.

