



Sergeant Samuel Newell, MM & Bar, Number 55261, 'A' Company of the 19th Battalion (*Central Ontario*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Valley Cemetery, Vis-en-Artois: grave reference, A. 10.

(Right: *The image of the cap-badge of the 19th Battalion (Central Ontario) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded on his attestation papers as that of a machinist, it is a twelve-year old Samuel Newell who is named on the passenger list of the SS *Bruce* which sailed from Port aux Basques, Dominion of Newfoundland, to the port of North Sydney, Cape Breton, on November 21, 1907. Also travelling on that day - the Newell family on its way to Toronto - were his parents and six sisters.

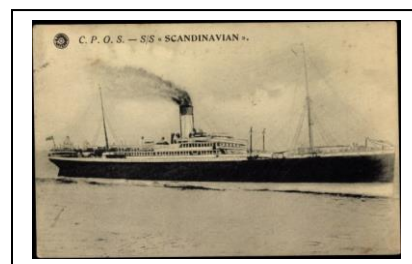
Samuel Newell apparently presented himself in Toronto for medical examination – which found him fit for overseas service – and enlistment on November 19 of 1914. He also underwent attestation on that same day, at the end of which the formalities on enlistment were brought to a conclusion by the commanding officer of the 19th Battalion (*Central Ontario*), Lieutenant-Colonel John Inglis McLaren, who declared – on paper – that... *Samuel Newell... have been approved and inspected by me on this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

While *taken on strength* by the newly-mobilized – on October 19, 1914 – 19th Battalion, his papers suggest that for the briefest period – no dates are recorded – he was a soldier of the Queen’s Own Rifles of the Canadian Militia. This formation, because it was a Canadian Militia unit, was forbidden by law to operate outside the borders of the country, thus its function at this time was to enlist recruits and to hold them until such time as they could be transferred to one of the newly-forming overseas battalions.

Such appears to have been the case with Private Newell. On November 7, the 19th Battalion (*Central Ontario*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force had been formed in Toronto and had forthwith concentrated at *Exhibition Park*. It is likely that he was posted to there immediately upon his attestation.

Private Newell’s new unit was to be quartered in buildings on the *Exhibition Park* site itself where training was also now becoming a part of the daily routine and equipment was beginning to arrive for the novice soldiers. And thus things remained until six-thirty in the evening of May 12 of the following spring.

At that time on that date, the one-thousand six-hundred seven officers and *other ranks* of the 19th Battalion boarded two trains for the almost twelve-hour journey to Montreal* where the unit was to take ship. Immediately upon arrival early on the morning of Thursday, May 13, it boarded His Majesty’s Transport *Scandinavian*, a requisitioned vessel of the *Allan Line*. Private Newell and his battalion were not to travel alone to the United Kingdom: also taking passage for the Atlantic crossing was the 2nd Divisional Reserve Park.



**Some of the sources suggest that the unit took ship in Quebec, but whether that signifies the Port of Quebec or merely the province is not clear. The Battalion War Diary cites Montreal.*

(Right above: *The image of the SS Scandinavian is from the bing.com/images web-site.*)

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Having sailed later on either that same day or early the next – when it may have stopped in the port at Quebec City - it was some nine days later, on May 22, that *Scandinavian* put into the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport, and a further twenty-four hours before the Battalion disembarked ...when it was taken ashore in Ferry Boats, and entrained for WESTENHANGAR Station, Kent (19th Battalion War Diary)... its destination being reached at 8.30 p.m.

The Battalion thereupon detrained and subsequently marched to the camp of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade, to which it was now attached, at WEST SANDLING, about two miles distant.

West Sandling was a subsidiary camp of the then-being-established Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe*. The ensemble was on the Dover Straits to the south of the town and harbour of Folkestone through which many of the Canadian units were, from this time onwards, to pass on their way to the Continent. At the time of Private Newell's arrival there, the units of the newly-formed Canadian 2nd Division were amassing there for final training and for despatch, during the month of September, to France and thence to Belgium and the *Western Front*.



(Right above: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 2016*)

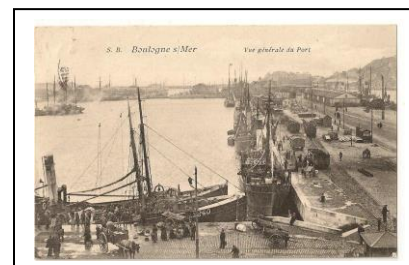
It was thus, as a unit of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian 2nd Division, that the 19th Battalion (*Central Ontario*) was to depart from *Shorncliffe* in mid-September.

On the evening of September 13, the Brigade marched from *West Sandling Camp* to the docks at Folkestone before boarding a cross-Channel ferry – one of many requisitioned for the War – to arrive in the French port of Boulogne at a quarter to three in the morning of the next day and from there to march to nearby *Ostrohove Camp*.



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

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



Only hours later, at noon, Private Newell's Battalion then marched to Pont du Briques to be re-united with an advance party which had travelled via the ports of Southampton and Le Havre.

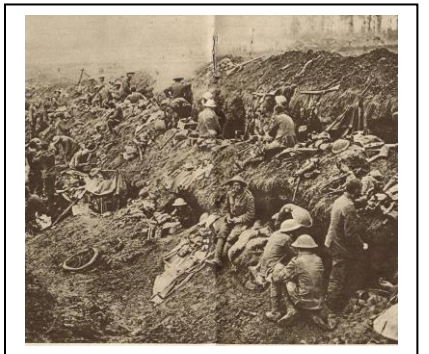
The entire Battalion then proceeded to St-Omer by train before continuing on foot to Arques, to Eblinghem and finally to its bivouacs in the vicinity of Wallon Cappel. These were eventually reached by midnight.

Private Newell's unit was now to march during the course of the next five days into the *Kingdom of Belgium* and to the area which the Canadian 2nd Division was to take over from the British, a sector which lay to the south of the battered city of Ypres, about half-way between it and the Franco-Belgian frontier, in the area of the communities of Dranoutre and Kimmel. It was to remain in this area for the next eleven months, for the most part enduring the rigours, routines – and perils – of life in the trenches*.



(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*)

**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 support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets – from Illustration*)

It was during that winter of 1915-1916 that Private Newell ran afoul of the Battalion authorities: Likely on February 14, while in billets at La Clytte, he had been... *Absent without leave from rest billets from roll call 8:15 Pm to 10:15 Pm (2 hours).* For this misdemeanour he was awarded three days of Field Punishment Number 1.

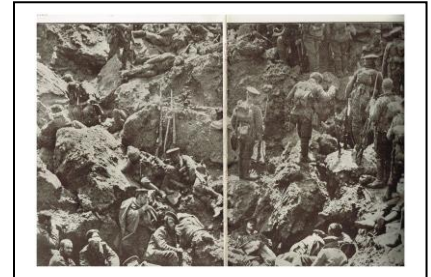


(Right: *La Clytte Military Cemetery as it is a century after the 19th Battalion was posted to the area – photograph from 2017*)

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Some seven weeks after this unfortunate episode, in early April of 1916, the 2nd Canadian Division underwent its baptism of fire in a major infantry operation. It was at a place called St-Éloi where, on the 27th day of March, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then followed up with an infantry attack. The role of the newly-arrived Canadian formation was to then pursue the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the often putrid weather which turned the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and then a resolute German defence, greeted the 2nd Canadian Division newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on April 3-4.



Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.

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

It appears that it had not been until April 6 that the 19th Battalion was ordered to a *...state of readiness...* and had been ordered to relieve a battalion of the 6th Brigade in the area of Voormezele, there to remain. Early the following morning it had then been ordered to a rest camp before, only hours afterwards, being *...warned that services probably required tonight for a bombing attack.* Just after seven o'clock that evening the *...19th Battalion instructed to clear up front line from 24 (a trench) to Canal* (Both excerpts from 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary). This was accomplished later on that evening.

On April 8 the 19th Battalion *...was in the trenches Numbers 18 to 20; 18th, 19th and 21st Battalions attack Craters No. 2 and No. 3.* That evening the 19th relieved the 31st Battalion.

Still in the trenches on April 12, Private Newell's Battalion was *itself* relieved on that day to withdraw into Divisional Reserve where it remained until April 22. Both the 19th Battalion's participation at St-Éloi and the number of ensuing casualties appear to have been minimal.

The next major altercation in which Private Newell and his unit were to be involved came about in early June in the south-east sector of the *Ypres Salient* where the newly-formed Canadian 3rd Division* were by that time holding the line.

**The 3rd Division officially came into being on the Continent at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of the New Year, 1916. At first incorporated into the area where the Canadian 1st Division was serving, in March and April it moved into the Ypres Salient – as did the 1st Division just afterwards.*

Six weeks after the confrontation at St-Éloi, on June 2, the Germans attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under Canadian – and therefore British - control.

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This area was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooze, Railway Dugouts, Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60, Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.

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

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, overran the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans were unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences.



In the meanwhile, Private Newell's 19th Battalion was still in the rear area of Reninghelst, serving in *Divisional Reserve*.

There the unit was to then be '*standing to*', in the same place, for the following two days; thus it took no part in the counter-strike of the day following the German attack, June 3, an operation which was to prove to be a costly disaster for the Canadians.

It was not until June 4 that the Battalion was ordered forward, to the area of Dickebusch and to the nearby so-named *Railway Dugouts*.



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

From that date of June 4 until June 11 the Battalion War Diarist merely reports the unit as being ...*In trenches...* until June 11 when it withdrew into support. No mention is made of either any infantry action undertaken by the unit nor of any casualties incurred due enemy action. On the eve and the day of what proved to be the final attack by the Canadians, June 12 and 13, on the next when the German artillery was reported elsewhere as having been particularly heavy, and up until June 17 by which time things were becoming quieter, the daily entry reads simply as ...*In support as above*.



(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*)



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

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The result of the confrontation was to be stalemate: by the end of the engagement, apart from a small German gain in the vicinity of *Hooge*, both sides were back much where they had been eleven days previously - and the cemeteries were that much fuller.

(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 protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature.* – photograph from 2014)

Thus the Canadian troops returned 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 – was once more to be withdrawn, on this occasion for training in ‘*open warfare*’. After the interim of July and August, the Canadians were to be ordered south into France to play a role in the British summer offensive of 1916.



The early days of the summer of 1916 passed quietly for the Canadian Corps as it awaited the arrival of the Canadian 4th Division in August. On August 8 the 19th Battalion returned to the forward area in close proximity to Vierstraat Village. There the unit was to remain for a week; in doing so it was not *in situ* to see His Majesty King George V as he passed through the Corps area on the morning of August 15.

That morning of August 15 was, however, to be Private Newell’s Battalion’s final moment of service in the trenches of Flanders until some fourteen months later, in the autumn of 1917. It withdrew once more to Reninghelst that afternoon, to remain there until August 23.

On that day ...*the 2nd Canadian Division was withdrawn from the line, and ordered to proceed to the Second Army Training Area near ST OMER.*

It was on September 4 that the 19th Battalion left its billets in the village of Nordausques and the nearby training area whereupon it marched to the railway station at Audruicq and entrained for the eleven-hour journey southwards to the area of *the Somme*.

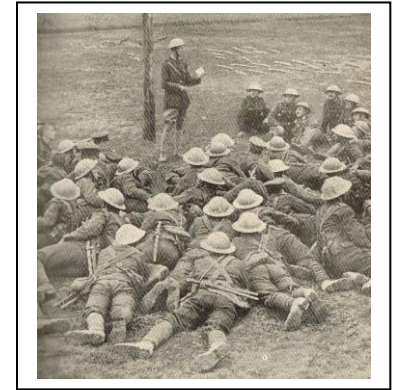
Meanwhile, in the ten days prior to their departure, Private Newell and his comrades-in-arms had had a busy time: route marches; communication drill; musketry; bombing; lectures; section and platoon drill; machine-gun classes; stretcher-bearer classes; clothing and equipment inspections; even training in co-operation with aircraft.

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 *1st 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at Beaumont-Hamel.

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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 19th Battalion left the train which had brought them to *the Somme* at three-thirty in the morning of September 5. After a further three hours on foot, the unit took up billets in the village of Agenville.



A further four days of marching was in store for the Battalion as it passed through – on occasion halting for a meal, a rest or to spend the night in the vicinity of – the communities of Bonneville, Teutencourt, Vadencourt.

On the last day, September 9, it reported to the large *Brickfields Camp*, adjacent to the provincial town of Albert, where it bivouacked.

On the following day again, the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade – of which the 19th Battalion was a unit – was ordered into the line to relieve the 1st Infantry Brigade of the 1st Canadian Division. Each man carried with him apart from his personal equipment ...*2 MILLS bombs, 2 sandbags, and two extra bandoliers of ammunition. 4 LEWIS guns* with 3,000 rounds SAA (small-arms ammunition) were taken into each sub-sector, 4 Colt and 1 Vickers machine gun at Battalion H.Q.*



**A light machine-gun requiring a crew of two*

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

The following days were spent in preparing for the offensive planned for September 15 and, as reported in the Battalion War Diary, driving back small parties of German infantry intent on entering the Canadian positions.

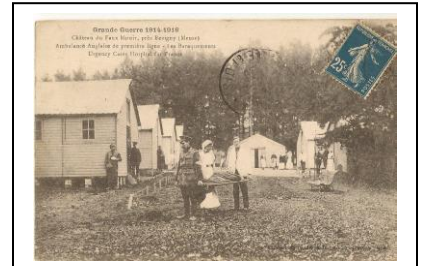
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The preparations for the most part comprised digging saps – approach trenches to the German positions – work that reportedly went on day and night all during this period. The enemy artillery barrage *also* went on all day and night: on September 12 it was heavy enough to result in forty-three *killed and wounded* in the 19th Battalion positions – on the next day the toll was thirty-four all told – on September 14 the count was eighty-eight (also see further below).

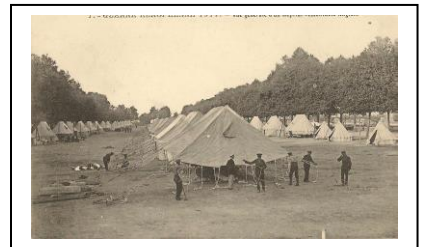
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Among the injured of that last day was Private Newell who had incurred... *gun-shot wounds to the left chest, thigh and arm.* He was thereupon evacuated to the 4th Canadian Field Ambulance which at the time was established in tents in the vicinity of Albert. From there on the next day he was forwarded to the 49th Casualty Clearing Station at Contay.

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



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



From there, after further treatment, he was transported on board the 17th Ambulance Train to the 8th General Hospital at Rouen. Arriving there on September 16, he was to remain in hospital for five days, until September 21, when his condition was deemed to be satisfactory enough for a transfer to the 2nd Convalescent Depot, also in close proximity to Rouen.



(Right above: *The River Seine flows through the centre of the Norman city of Rouen under the watchful eye of its venerable cathedral. – from a vintage post-card*)

Another eighteen days were to pass before he was again on the move, on this occasion to Harfleur in the outskirts of Le Havre, likely to serve there at Base Details attached to the Canadian Base Depot. Private Newell is reported as having served there until November 2.

On that date, his rehabilitation considered to be at an end, he was despatched to re-join his unit... *in the field.* By that time the 19th Battalion had been withdrawn from *the Somme* battlefields (see below) and on November 9 was in Brigade Reserve in the area of Bully-Grenay. This is the date on which his documents record Private Newell as having reported back *to duty* with the 19th Battalion.

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During the time of Private Newell's absence, the 19th Battalion (*Central Ontario*) had been busy on *the Somme*, beginning on the day following his wounding with the planned attack at Courcellette.

(Excerpt from the 19th Battalion War Diary entry for September 15, 1916) *In conjunction with our Fourth and the French Armies, the Canadian Corps attacked the German position. The 4th Canadian Infantry Bde. took part in the attack in conjunction with the 6th Canadian Infantry Bde. on our left, and the 15th Division (British) on our right.*

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



(Extract from the 4th Canadian Brigade Operational Order Number 70)

The 4th Canadian Infantry Bde will capture, consolidate, and hold a portion of the main objective...including Strong Point at SUGAR FACTORY...

The 19th Battalion was to act *in support*, that is to say, as a sort of immediate reserve.

The attack of September 15 on Courcellette by the Canadian 2nd Division was one of the few successes of an otherwise less-than-conspicuous day for the Allied forces. At six minutes to eight in the morning, little more than ninety minutes after the first assault, the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade was reporting that it had taken its final objective, the sugar factory; at eight o'clock the 2nd Canadian Pioneer Battalion had begun carrying out its orders and was in the process of consolidating the gains made.



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

More ominously, perhaps, was the report of a quarter to four in the afternoon that the ... 19th (Battalion) *report their left is being heavily shelled and have had to vacate some trenches, they are badly in need of parties to carry out wounded.* In fact, it appears that the enemy bombardment was the precursor to a number of German attacks which came close to disrupting the British and Canadian efforts*.



**It was likely during this attack that Private Newell had been wounded as it was reported that his injuries were due to a bomb (grenade) blast.*

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

(continued)

Seven hours later again, the 19th Battalion had been ordered to withdraw. And, of course, the success at Courcelette had come at a price: more than two-hundred fifty *killed, wounded and missing**.

**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 19th Battalion's Front.*

While it been withdrawn from the front line after the capture of the sugar factory at Courcelette, the 19th Battalion had remained in the forward area to once more serve *in support* while the attack continued on September 16. On the following day again, it returned with other units of the 4th Brigade to *Brickfields Camp**.



**While the number of casualties incurred on the 15th had been - as has been seen - about two-hundred fifty all told, for the eight-day tour of September 10 until 17 (inclusive) the count had totalled three-hundred forty.*

(Right above: *One of the tanks employed during the 1st Battle of the Somme, here withdrawn from the field and in one of the parks where these machines were overhauled and maintained – from Le Miroir*)

There was yet to be a further British offensive several days later but that effort would be undertaken by fresh troops who were in the process of arriving on the scene. In order to accommodate this influx, it was necessary to liberate billets and other living quarters in the area. Private Newell's Battalion was just one of many units to be sent on a walking-tour of the surrounding country-side.

On September 18 the remnants of the 19th Battalion marched to Vadencourt, then to Val de Maison, Bertaucourt, Val de Maison and again Vadencourt before returning to Tara Valley in the vicinity of Albert on October 25. The fighting for Flers and Courcelette had concluded by then, on September 22 but the three-day Battle of Morval was to begin on the 25th and that of the Thiepval Ridge a day later.



(Right above: *From Courcelette British Cemetery, within its bounds almost two-thousand dead, more than half of them unidentified, may be perceived the nearby Adanac Military Cemetery with its more than three-thousand graves, again half of whose dead remain unknown. – photograph from 1917*)

The 19th Battalion moved forward from Tara Valley to a position known as the Chalk Pits on September 27 and, from there, on the next day, pushed forward towards the enemy defences in the area of Le Sars. A history of the 19th Battalion suggests that the advance was of about one thousand yards and was made against... *increasingly heavy machine gun and artillery fire*. If so, the casualties of the day were extremely light and the Battalion War Diarist made no particular mention of what would have been a notable feat of arms.

This tour, which the War Diary entry records as being from September 25 until October 3 inclusive, was to cost the 19th Battalion ninety-nine battle casualties plus a further twenty-nine sick. On that latter date the unit, relieved by the 52nd Canadian Infantry Battalion, withdrew from the forward area and moved back to *Usna Valley*.

That October 3 was the final day on which Private Newell's Battalion was to play a role in the *First Battle of the Somme*. On the morrow it would begin a march which would terminate some twelve days and one-hundred kilometres in the trenches near Hersin, to the north-west of Arras. The Battalion's itinerary was to take it on a semi-circular route well to the west of the battered city of Arras before it then turned in a north-easterly direction toward the area of its new posting.



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

This area – from just north of Arras in the south to the town of Béthune in the north was now to become more and more a Canadian responsibility. As the Canadian troops departed from *the Somme* in their turn, the last in late November and early December, they all followed much the same itinerary northwards. The Canadian Corps was to remain in these sectors for the best part of – and in some cases, more than – a year.

From the time when, on October 17, the 19th Battalion relieved the 13th Battalion of the King's Royal Rifles in the trenches, until January 20 when it was ordered to the Canadian Corps Training Area near not-far-distant Maisnil-les-Reitz, it was to remain in the forward, intermediate and rear positions of the area of Hesdin, Bully-Grenay, Bruay and of Calonne.

The late autumn of that 1916 – after the *First Battle of the Somme* - and the winter of 1916-1917 was a time for the remnants of the Canadian battalions to re-enforce and to re-organize. There was to be little concerted infantry action during this period apart from the everyday patrolling and the occasional raid - sometimes minor, at other times more elaborate – against enemy positions.

There was of course, the constant trickle of casualties, for the most part occasioned by the enemy artillery and snipers. However, it was mostly sickness and dental work that kept the medical services busy during this period.

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It was four weeks after Private Newell's return *to duty* with the 19th Battalion that, on December 7, he was granted a ten-day period of leave to the United Kingdom. It is not recorded where he was to spend those days, only that he returned to his unit on December 20 – he was also granted travelling-time – as anticipated.



(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*)

It was then some five weeks later that Private Newell received a first promotion: it was on January 26, during the Battalion's posting to the Canadian Corps Training Area (see both above and immediately below), that he was appointed to the rank of lance corporal.

By January 20 the 19th Battalion had endured three months of the routine of trenches, support and reserve, and being ordered to withdraw to the Training Area likely came as a welcome respite.

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

A 2nd Divisional Sports Day on February 8 was the last event of a three-week agenda, the range of activities being distinctly martial in nature: boxing, bayonet fighting, bombing (grenade throwing), scouting and an officers' revolver completion. The Battalion was not to cover itself with glory during the day; however, neither did it entirely disgrace itself, earning one gold-medal finish and two bronze.



Lance Corporal Newell's role in all of this – alas! – is not to be found among his documentation.

The area of Thélus was in the southern area of the Canadian zone of responsibility and also perhaps some dozen kilometres to the south of the 19th Battalion's former postings. There it was that those routines of life in and out of the trenches recommenced.

About a month later there was a notable – at least to the War Diarist – increase in activity as the Canadian units were in turn retired from the forward areas to undergo more intensive training and exercises for what was obviously to be an offensive operation.

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

It was not until April 7 that the 19th Battalion was finally prepared to play its part in the imminent confrontation, a battle which was to commence just two days later.

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

On April 9 in that spring of 1917, the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere.



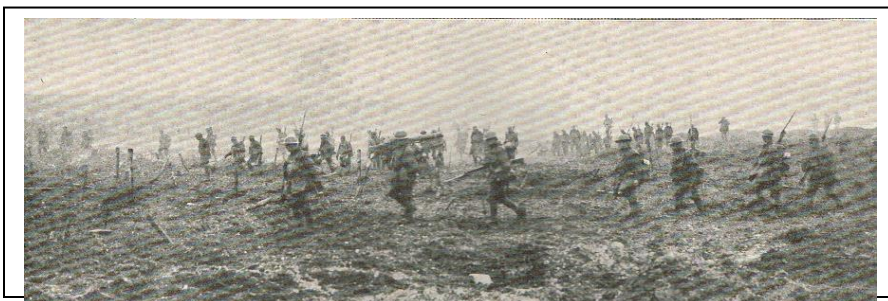
In terms of the daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, one of the few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

Even so, while the British effort at Arras proved an overall disappointment - the French offensive of *Le Chemin des Dames* was to be a disaster.

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

**In fact, a British Brigade was also placed under Canadian command.*

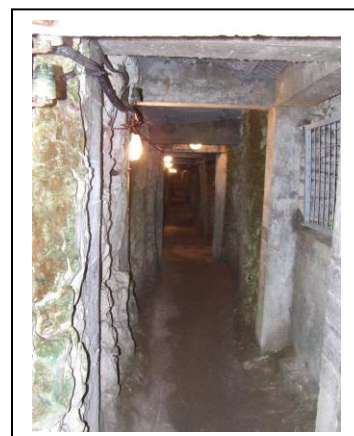
(Right: Canadian troops of the 4th or 3^d Division, burdened with all the paraphernalia of war, on the advance across No-Man's-Land during the attack at *Vimy Ridge* on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration)



The Canadian 2nd Division was not 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 Division's objectives were apparently captured on schedule and much of the remainder of that day and the next was to be spent in consolidating these newly-won positions.

The Germans, having lost *Vimy Ridge* and the supposed advantages of the high ground, retreated some three kilometres in front of the Canadians whose further offensives were less successful than that of Easter Monday; while some progress at times was made – at Arleux-en-Gohelle, for example - German counter-attacks often re-claimed ground from the British and Canadian troops – as at Fresnoy (see below) in early May.

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



There had been, on the first days, April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted, and highly unlikely, *breakthrough* – but such a follow-up of the previous day's success proved to be logistically impossible.

Thus the Germans were gifted the time to close the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

(continued)

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



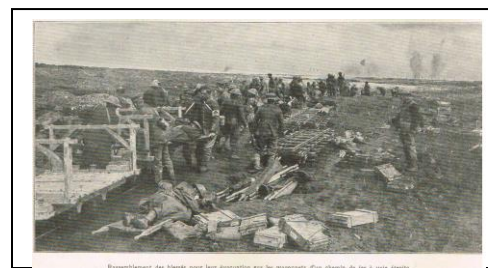
Nor was the remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* to be fought in the manner of the first two days and, by the end of those five weeks, little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success.

Excerpts from *A History of the 19th Battalion, CEF*, presented by the *Argyll Regimental Foundation*, and pertinent to the preparations prior to - and the execution of - the attack by Lance Corporal Newell's 19th Battalion on April 9, 1917:

The 19th Battalion would be in the first wave, advancing alongside 18th Battalion. After moving through the German front and support trenches, the 19th Battalion would advance to their final objective, code-named the Black Line... Both 19th and 18th Battalions would halt and dig in...

At precisely 5:30 a.m., 9 April 1917, the artillery opened up with a stupendous roar as the infantry rose from their trenches, filed out of assembly tunnels, and trudged behind the creeping barrage... At 6:07 a.m. Lt-Col Millen received word that his men had captured their assigned portion of the Black Line...

...In addition to the territory they had seized, the 19th Battalion captured five machine guns, five German 'Fish Tail Bomb Carriers', two light trench mortars and at least 120 prisoners...



19th Battalion casualties for the day amounted to thirty-five *killed in action* or *died of wounds*, one-hundred sixty *wounded* and twenty-seven *missing in action*.

(Right above: *Canadian troops and German prisoners organize the evacuation of wounded of both sides from Vimy Ridge on a light railway still being constructed by Pioneer troops following close behind the attacking infantry. – from Illustration*)

While it is the attack of April 9 that has captured much of the attention of Canadian historians and of the Canadian public in general, there were other actions fought during the month of the *Battle of Arras* that followed, although none as spectacular as the storming of *Vimy Ridge*, and not all resulted in success.

The Germans had been taken by surprise and had been badly beaten at *Vimy Ridge* on that first day, but elsewhere they had mauled the attackers* and had mounted some counter-attacks of their own. Such was to be the case at *Fresnoy* on May 8 when enemy artillery mauled Canadian – including Corporal Newell's 19th Battalion - and British units and forced them out of ground that had been won only days previously (see below).

(continued)

****For example, at Monchy-le-Preux on April 14 where the Newfoundland Regiment had lost almost five-hundred killed, wounded, missing and taken prisoner on the second-worst day in the Regiment's history.***

(Right: A reconstructed Monchy-le Preux seen – a century after the Great War – from its western side: on April 14, 1917, the Newfoundland Regiment was fighting on the eastern side of the village. – photograph from 2015)



The Germans, their assault heralded by ...a terrific bombardment, attacked our Right Company Front and the Imperial* Troops holding Fresnoy. This caught our men at a very great disadvantage as this was a new part of the line, also on account of the Mist and Rain it was impossible for our Artillery to see the S.O.S. signals which were being sent up...

****The Canadians often referred to British troops as Imperials.***

While the Canadians apparently at first repelled the enemy attacks, the British troops were obliged to retire in the face of superior numbers – and a lack of reserves – and the 19th Battalion, finding itself enfiladed from the flanks, was itself obliged to withdraw, having incurred heavy casualties.

The numbers of the killed, wounded and missing during this confrontation, according to the War Diarist, was two-hundred fifty, many of them having fallen victim to the numerous enemy bombardments. It was a greater toll than that suffered on April 9 at Vimy Ridge.

(Right: Canadian troops operating in the forward area during the spring or summer of 1917 – from Illustration)



On May 9, the remnants of the 19th Battalion, by then organized into only two companies, withdrew from the front lines, relieved by the 18th Battalion, and moved into new support positions. There was, however, to be little - if any - reprieve for the unit as it was now ordered to supply working-parties to wire these new trenches as well as others in the reserve area, and it was not to be until May 13 that Lance Corporal Newell and his comrades-in-arms were to withdraw from the forward area into Divisional Reserve.

The following ten weeks followed the routines of trench warfare with which Lance Corporal Newell was already familiar. However, it would seem that during the months of June and July, the Canadian units were more frequently in reserve, resting and training – and playing sports – than they had been in prior periods.

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

(continued)

(Right below: *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*)

The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort, one of the primary objectives of which was to be the so-named *Hill 70* in the northern outskirts of the mining-centre and city of Lens.

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



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. Yet it was high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than the city of Lens itself.



(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*)

Objectives were 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 was expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it proved; on the 16th several strong counter-attacks were launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.



These defences held and the Canadian artillery, which was employing newly-developed procedures, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* remained in Canadian hands.

(Right: *A Canadian 220 mm siege gun, here under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action by its crew – from Le Miroir*)



However, Lance Corporal Newell was apparently to play no role in this engagement, even though it had been his 2nd Canadian Division, in tandem with the 1st Canadian Division, to whom the responsibility for the attack had been given. On August 1 he had been seconded to the 2nd Divisional Burial Party and it was not until September 3, almost five weeks later, that he returned *to duty* with his unit.

(continued)

(Right: *La Pugnoy Military Cemetery, in the rear area of where Lance Corporal Newell was serving during the time of his secondment to the 2nd Divisional Burial Party: It is the last resting-place for many Canadian fallen of this period of the War. – photograph from 2015*)



It appears to have been originally planned that the Canadian Corps would continue its campaign in the sectors from Arras to Béthune during the autumn of that 1917. But to the north, in Belgium, the British offensive was proceeding less well than had been hoped for and the casualty toll had been horrendous.

Thus the British High Command, having called a halt to the battle at the end of August and during most of September, was by now looking for re-enforcements to make good the losses and to continue the confrontation. There being a shortage at the time of recruits from the British Isles, the gaze now fell upon the troops from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), notably from Australia, New Zealand and from Canada.

It was the former-mentioned formations which were called upon first to be transferred from France to Belgium. The Canadian Corps, its operations for the most part now defensive in nature, remained where it was, its time consumed by the daily routines in the trenches and, when in the rear areas, by training and by preparation for things to come.



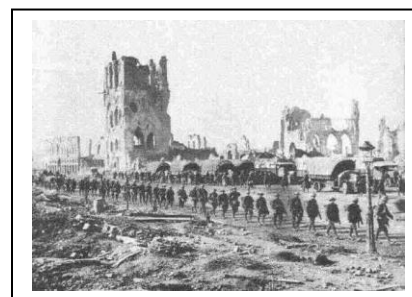
Although, of course, very few people were ever prepared for what *did* come.

(Right above: *A Canadian carrying-party – some of the work done by troops when in support and reserve – on the Lens front during the summer of 1917: The use of the head-band to facilitate carrying had by that time been adopted from the indigenous peoples of North America – from Le Miroir*)

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

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

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. From the week of October 26 until November 3 it was to be the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair the reverse was true with the 2nd Division finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.



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



Meanwhile, while awaiting orders to move northwards, from the end of August until mid-October, the 19th Battalion was stationed in the area of Neuville St-Vaast, the *village* of Vimy and of Camblain l'Abbé.

Much of the time was spent in training away from the forward area. Even the time that was served in the trenches relieving other units was to be one of the calmest periods of the entire war for Lance Corporal Newell's unit. The casualty numbers for the entire month of September as found in the Battalion War Diary are evidence of this: *Killed in Action, Nil – Wounded, One – Accidentally wounded, Three.*

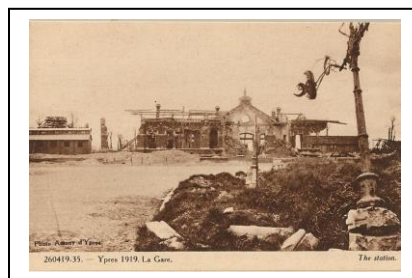


(Right: *Camblain l'Abbé, the village today a little less busy than it was a century ago – photograph from 2017*)

The first move north came about on October 15 when the Battalion began a march of several days' duration towards the area of Ligny St-Flochel. By that time, Lance Corporal Newell had received a further promotion, on October 9, to the rank of corporal – it was an *acting* rank, in the case of Corporal Newell, a *paid* acting rank*.

**It was apparently not uncommon for acting ranks not to be remunerated until the recipients had been confirmed as such; nor was there any such thing as retroactive pay on these occasions.*

It was then on the night of October 23-24, at half-past three in the morning, that the Battalion boarded a train – one of several taken during those thirty or so hours - for a journey that was to end in the remnants of the railway station at Ypres on October 25.



(Right: *The vestiges of the railway station at Ypres (Ieper) in 1919, the year after the conclusion of the conflict – from a vintage post-card*)

From there we marched in single file past the Cloth Hall – (as per the picture of the previous page) - and out through the Menin Gate to POTIJZE, a small part of the huge machinery of the offensive. Tents were pitched in an open field amongst the heavy batteries, and all ranks settled down to the first real sleep in some days. Our duty for the time being was to supply working parties... (Excerpt from the 19th Battalion War Diary entry for October 25 and 26)



(continued)

(Preceding page: *Canadian soldiers on the Passchendaele Front using a shell-hole to perform their ablutions – from Le Miroir*)

Three days later the Battalion was relieved and retired to the west of the shattered city of Ypres to the village of Vlamertinghe. Once again the casualty numbers had been light, sixteen in all for that month of October, 1917.

Corporal Newell's unit remained in Vlamertinghe until November 2 when it was ordered forward once more, on this occasion to relieve the 78th Canadian Infantry Battalion that evening. This it had done by ten o'clock, and had settled into its muddy quarters for the night when an enemy bombardment started up at twenty minutes to five in the morning, a heavy shelling followed up by an infantry attack.

It initially had made some headway, particularly against the Canadian battalion to Corporal Newell's left and against the Australians to his right, but had been rebuffed by them by the afternoon of that day.

It was on that November 3 that Corporal Newell was confirmed in his rank: under the circumstances of the day, his celebrations were likely somewhat muted.

No action was reported for the rest of the Battalion's posting to the front lines, a tour which lasted only until the following day, November 4, when in turn the unit was relieved to withdraw to the rear lines at Potijze. Casualties for that short period had been heavier than the unit had known for a while: a total of eighty-five, of which eleven were reported as having been *killed in action*.



(Right above: *The Canadian Memorial which today stands on Passchendaele Ridge – photograph from 2015*)

Having retired as far back as the small community of Brandhoek, half-way between Ypres and Poperinghe, on November 5, it was to be a further three days before Corporal Newell's Battalion was ordered forward once more.

For the 19th Battalion, the *Passchendaele* campaign was, overall, to be a relatively short affair; on only one more occasion was it to be ordered into the forward area. At twenty-five minutes past seven on the morning of November 8 the unit left Brandhoek to be transported by train to Ypres. Thirty-five minutes later it left there to march to Potijze and by two o'clock in the afternoon it had been despatched on its way to the line – accompanied on the way by an enemy barrage. Late that evening, by quarter to eleven, the Battalion had taken its place in the front line at Zonnebeke, the village in front of Passchendaele itself.

And on the morrow while in the trenches of the... *right front line sector of the Divisional front*... Corporal Newell received another promotion, to the rank of lance sergeant* - paid.

(continued)

****This rank was created to give to corporals the responsibilities of a sergeant, but to have them on probation and answerable to their commanding officer. Since a regular sergeant at the time could not be relieved of his rank without appearing before a court-martial, any demotion could be a long and drawn-out process, not something that the urgencies of war called for.***

On November 10 there was an attack made by the Canadian battalion to the left of the 19th Battalion's positions. Lance Sergeant Newell's unit appears not to have been directly involved but *stood by* just in case. During that time... *rain commenced to fall and increased the amount of water in the trenches and shell holes until in some places the men were standing in water up to their thighs. The heavy shelling continued throughout the day...* (Excerpt from the Battalion War Diary entry for November 10, 1917)



(Right above: *Just a few hundred to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the monument pictured on the previous page – this ground lies in the direction of Zonnebeke – a kilometre or so away - where the 19th Battalion was positioned on and about November 10, 1917. – photograph from 2010*)

On the following day the 19th Battalion marched back to Potijze, its casualties for that three-day tour in the forward area having numbered one-hundred seventeen of whom, by the time of the War Diarist's writing, twenty-two had either been recorded as *killed in action* or *died of wounds*.

(Right: *In the stone of the Menin Gate at Ypres (today Ieper) there are carved the names of British and Empire (Commonwealth) troops who fell in the Ypres Salient during the Great War and who have no known last resting-place. There are almost fifty-five thousand remembered there; nevertheless, so great was the final number, that it was to be necessary to commemorate those who died after August 16 of 1917, just fewer than thirty-five thousand, on the Tyne Cot Memorial. – photograph from 2010*)



The Battalion did not remain in Potijze for long. On November 13 it withdrew to Brandhoek where that day and the next were devoted to... *Pay Parade, reorganization and rest*. On the 15th... the battalion commenced its move back to France: via Robeck and Auchel and travelling for the most part in lorries (trucks), two days later the unit was back in the area of Lens, to the rear at Villers-au-Bois.

After twelve days spent in Divisional Reserve in the vicinity of Villers-au-Bois, on November 29, Lance Sergeant Newell's 19th Battalion relieved the 20th Battalion and thus found itself serving in the front-line trenches in the Acheville Sector. The routines of trench warfare were about to begin yet again for the twelve officers and four-hundred seventy-one other ranks of the depleted unit.

(continued)

(Right: Villers Station Cemetery, Villers-au-Bois, is the last resting-place for just over one-thousand two-hundred Commonwealth military personnel and thirty-two former adversaries. – photograph from 2017)



After some sixteen days of duty in the forward area – front line and support – the Battalion made its way back to Brigade Reserve at Neuville St-Vaast. There, on December 19, it was learned that the entire Canadian 2nd Division was... *being withdrawn from the line for one month's training.* The news was likely a welcome Christmas present.

There had been another Christmas present of sorts during that month of December, 1917: the Canadian forces overseas had participated in the national election. The War Diarist of the 19th Battalion appears to have chosen not to make mention of the event, but others did, and in some cases they reported a ninety per cent participation in the vote*. On a more personal note, Lance Sergeant Newell also received glad tidings in time for the festive – such as it was – season: he was appointed as a full sergeant on December 3.

**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 help pay for it as well.*

The winter of 1917-1918 had been spent in the same area; little if any confrontational military activity for that period is reported in the Battalion War Diary. That month of training, mid-December to mid-January, was spent in the area of Westrehem, west of the town of Béthune. Thereafter the 19th Battalion was posted successively to areas such as Méricourt, Lens, Liévin and Noeux-les-Mines, this last-named the area where it was stationed on the first day of spring, March 21, of that year 1918.

A sense of urgency was felt two days later, on March 23, when the unit and indeed the entire Canadian 2nd Division was ordered to move further south, to the west of Arras and to the vicinity of Gouy Servins. Having arrived there on the same March 23, Sergeant Newell's unit was then moved to the area of Écurie on the next day, March 24, ready to move on... *one hour's notice.*

On the following day again, and still at Écurie... *all available men were employed on fatigue party digging trenches. The Battalion was organized on a three platoon basis per company and equipped for active operations.* (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry for March 24, 1918)

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in that 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, that first day of spring.



(continued)

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 fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops stationed there.

(Preceding page: While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they did bombard it heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir)

The German advance had then 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 perhaps the most significant.

**A second but lesser such offensive, ‘Georgette’, fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in Flanders, the area where the by-then Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It too was 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)



The 19th Battalion had been moved to the area of Arras and then to Wailly as part of a response to the German attack. While Canadian forces were not to be engaged in the fighting of March and April, their presence now allowed more British troops to move to the new battle-fields. And as Arras was the northern limit of the German offensive, the Canadians also served as a defence against any further enemy incursions.



(Right above: The city of Arras was to endure four years of bombardment during the Great War; the Grand'Place (Grande Place) (to compare with the earlier picture of Arras in 1916) looked like this by March of 1917 and more was to follow. – from Le Miroir)

The 19th Battalion remained in the same area, moving to positions near Neuville-Vitasse on April 1. The Germans may have had no intention of launching any major operation in the Arras Sector, but this did not prevent them from undertaking raids – such as those mounted against the Battalion on April 5 and 16 – to keep the British in doubt as to where he might strike next.

The Battalion War Diary entry for April 16, the date of the second afore-mentioned raid, notes the following: *No. 402848, L. SGT. T.W. THATCHER and No. 55261, SGT. S. NEWELL, who took charge of counter attacking platoon on their officer being killed, did exceptionally good work...**

**This is surely the episode for which Sergeant Newell was awarded his first Military Medal, although there appears to be no accompanying date or citation.*

(continued)

The Germans were not to be the only ones to initiate these local operations of course; April 29 was one such successful occasion which netted several prisoners and two enemy machine guns for the unit. Battalion losses on the day were light: eleven *wounded*.

Later that same day Sergeant Newell's Battalion was relieved in the line whereupon it pulled back to where it was billeted in the communities of Basseux and Bailleulval, to the south-west of Arras, and once more in the vicinity of Wailly. It remained there for the entire month of May, the War Diarist reporting a total of ninety-five casualties and sick during that period.



(Right: *Wailly Orchard Cemetery is the last resting-place for three-hundred sixty-six dead of the Great War. – from a vintage post-card*)

On June 10, on the day after the four Companies of the Battalion relieved those of the 28th Battalion of Canadian Infantry in the support area, Sergeant Newell was seconded to the 2nd Canadian Division Staff. What his exact role was to be during the four weeks of his service does not appear to be recorded among his papers; nothing is documented other than that he returned to the 19th Battalion on July 2.

By the time of Sergeant Newell's return *to duty*, his unit was in General Headquarters Reserve at Habarcq, west of Arras. He had missed the events of the day before when... *The Battalion attended the Canadian Corps Sports at TINGUES. Busses were available to convey personnel to and from the sports. The weather being very fine all ranks thoroughly enjoyed the day and the sports were carried off in excellent style...* (Excerpt from the Battalion War Diary entry for July 1, 1918)

The first two weeks of that month were spent at Habarcq, most of those days reported as occupied with *training* and *recreation*. On July 13 the Battalion marched to billets in Berneville where it received further orders to move into Brigade Reserve in Arras where the daily report of the situation habitually employed the word *quiet*.

This *relative* calm allowed for the more frequent withdrawal of units to the reserve areas, for the most part out of the range of all but the most powerful German artillery pieces. For the troops there were of course the inevitable training, physical exercises, musketry, gas drills, familiarization with new equipment and that of the enemy, inspections, route marches, lectures, baths, foot inspections, bombing (grenade) routines, parades, awards of decorations, more working-parties and carrying-parties, ad infinitum so at times it must have seemed... but there were also *some* periods of rest, at times concerts, inter- and intra-unit competitions and, as has been seen, increasingly... sports.



(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*)

It certainly *appeared* to be quiet over the entire front during the months of both June and July. By the end of May the German hopes for a decisive victory had ground to a halt as had their offensives on both fronts. Now it was to be the turn of the Allies – now commanded by Foch – and the now-arriving American troops to prepare to take the initiative – and the Germans were readying themselves for the inevitable confrontation.

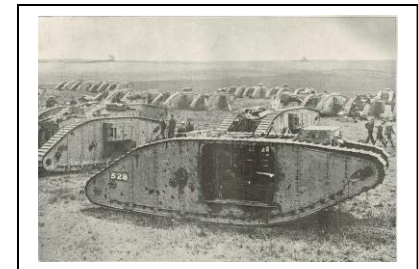


(Right above: *Canadian soldiers stand in front of a temporary theatre and peruse the attractions of an upcoming concert. – from Le Miroir*)

On July 18 the 19th Battalion began a move which would eventually take it from the *Arras Sector* to the chosen fields of battle some eighty kilometres to the south, in front of the city of Amiens, to where the German offensive of that spring had been brought to a halt. The unit moved westward to Étrun then to Gouves and, by July 23, to Ambrines where a halt was called for a week until July 30.

On that day the Battalion was transported by train from Houvin to Hangest, a community to the north-west of Amiens from where the rest of the transfer was to be made on foot. The march began later on that same day, a dozen or so kilometres southwards to the vicinity of Briquemesnil where it was to spend the following three nights and days.

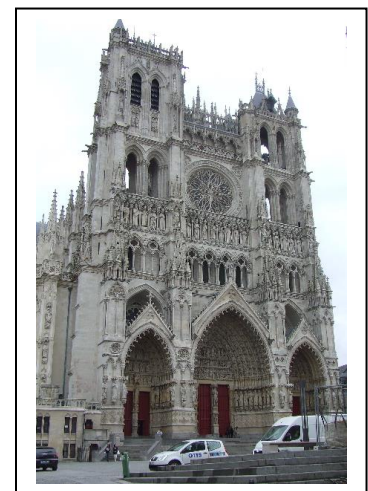
On August 1... *the Battalion marched to the neighbourhood of Cavillion...to attend Tank demonstration, which clearly illustrated the co-operation between tanks and infantry.* (Excerpt from 19th Battalion War Diary entry of August 1, 1918)



(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 19th Battalion was not alone in this change of sectors. In fact the entire Canadian Corps was on the move. In the space of about two weeks, the four Canadian Divisions*, infantry and artillery, were to be transferred from their sectors of responsibility around and to the north of Arras, to the new front to the east of Amiens where the German offensive of April and May had been brought to a halt.

(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(?)*)



(continued)

****A few units, making themselves very visible, had moved in the opposite direction, north into Belgium, to give the impression that any upcoming offensive was to be once more in the area of the Ypres Salient - and that the Canadians were anywhere but facing them in front of Amiens.***

The first stages of this huge and complex operation had for the most part been undertaken by motor transport and by train. However, once the troops had reached an area north of Amiens they passed to the west, encircling the city to the west and south in order then to move into their new positions eastwards.

And these latter movements had been made on foot and at night so as to give the German reconnaissance planes with their observers no indication whatsoever of anything happening. Given the immensity of the venture, it is perhaps somewhat surprising to learn that it worked.

The enemy was apparently to be caught entirely by surprise.

It would *also* seem that many of the Canadian troops were also to be caught by the same surprise: it was not until the morning of August 3, while on his way marching towards Amiens that the Battalion War Diarist of the 116th Battalion noticed that... *increasing evidence of an offensive was to be seen...A large number of tanks were passed, moving up the road.*

On the night of August 3-4 Corporal Newell and his 19th Battalion were on their way again, a five-and-a-half-hour march to Cagny. After resting all day the unit undertook a further overnight march which was to bring it to the east of Amiens, to a point just to the west of Villers-Bretonneux.

(Right: *Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery is also the site of the Australian National Memorial. Within the Cemetery's bounds more than thirteen thousand Commonwealth military personnel – mostly Australian – are commemorated. – photograph from 2015*)



Some thirty-six hours later, again at night, another move brought it into positions identified only by points on the officers' maps. There were now only twenty-four hours remaining before the offensive barrage was scheduled. *Battalion remained in same locality until 0.00 P.M. when they moved forward to assembly positions for the attack on the morning of the 8th inst...* (Excerpt from 19th Battalion War Diary entry for August 7, 1918)

The 19th Battalion War Diarist continues his story in the entry of the morrow, August 8, 1918: *The Battalion...moved to assembly areas...on Zero day, August 8, 1918. The 19th Battalion were all reported in their assembly positions at 3.30 A.M. which were composed chiefly of shell-holes. Shortly afterwards the enemy put down a heavy barrage on our positions, causing several casualties. This barrage lasted practically through up to Zero hour but did not have the slightest effect on the morale of our men.*

(continued)

At 4.20 A.M. Zero hour, the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade attacked on the left of the 2nd Canadian Divisional Front, with the 19th Battalion on the left... The 19th Battalion was supported by 2 Sections of the 14th Battalion Tanks, 4 guns of the 4th Canadian Trench Mortar Battery, and attacked under cover of a machine gun barrage and 18 pdr creeping barrage...

The morning was very misty, making observation very difficult, and only a few yards ahead could be seen. The Battalion advanced steadily...

Two hours after the troops had climbed out of their jumping-off positions, the 19th Battalion was in possession of the village of Marcelcave and had seized a number of prisoners and a quantity of ordnance. The War Diarist noted that most resistance had, as ever, been offered by the German machine gunners, many of whose weapons had been captured, but not before they had been responsible for a goodly number of the one-hundred fifty-eight casualties that were also recorded on that day.



(Right above: Wood Cemetery, Marcelcave, wherein lies at least one Newfoundlander who was wearing a Canadian uniform – photograph from 1916)

And apparently it had all happened before eight o'clock in the morning by which time the Battalion's transport and logistics were following up the fighting companies*.



***On the first day the advance had been some eleven kilometres, a feat unheard of since the opening months of the Great War in 1914 – although the opening day of the Battle of Cambrai, 1917, may have been a harbinger.**

(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)



(Right: The caption records this as being a photograph of German prisoners taken by the Canadians, some of them carrying a wounded officer – Allied or German officer is not documented. Also to be noted is one of the newer tanks. – from Le Miroir)

As had been planned, after the first waves of the assault had achieved their objectives, other units passed through to take up the pursuit. The 19th Battalion itself also moved forward, but in the wake of other units, until it moved to relieve... **elements of the 44th and 47th Canadian Battalions in the Right Front Line section of the 2nd Canadian Division on the night of the 12th/13th August. (Excerpt from the 19th Battalion War Diary entry of August 13, 1918)**

(continued)

A brief contact was made with the enemy on the following day but no casualties resulted and the unit stayed *in situ* for that day and the next... *holding the same line. Day was quiet.*

The morrow, by contrast, was to be less tranquil: *About noon August 16th, orders were received from G.O.C. 4th Infantry Brigade that the 19th Canadian Battalion under cover of a bombardment which would lift at 3.15 P.M. would push forward and occupy the area up to and including the line...keeping in touch with the 3rd Canadian Division. (Excerpt from 19th Battalion War Diary entry of August 16, 1918)*

The objectives were eventually reached despite some delays due to other units' attacks being less successful in their opening stages. Total casualties for the day were seventy-three, of which fifteen were reported as either *killed in action* or *died of wounds*.

Relieved at six o'clock in the morning of August 17, Corporal Newell's Battalion retired from the field and, on both that day and the next, indulged in baths, clean clothes, pay, a further clothing parade and a voluntary church service.

The 19th Battalion was now about to return whence it had come less than three weeks previously: *On the evening of the 19th Orders were received that Battalion would move on the night of the 19th/20th to the neighbourhood of BOVES... Battalion arrived in new area at 3.- - a.m. 20th inst. Men were very tired and had a good rest and sleep in the open field... (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of August 19, 1918)*

During the next few days, the Canadian Corps in its entirety was to retire in much the same manner and using the same itineraries by which it had arrived in front of Amiens – and this move was to be as secret as had been the first. The place of the 19th Battalion and the place of those other Canadian units now being withdrawn were to be taken by French forces. The advance was to continue.



(Right above: *British forces were not withdrawn as were the Canadians from in front of Amiens in August of 1918. In tandem with French troops they continued the offensive, as here in the attack against St-Quentin. – from Le Miroir*)

The move of the 19th Battalion was to be undertaken on foot, by motor transport and by train. By August 24 Corporal Newell and his comrades-in-arms were resting in Warlus to the west of Amiens...resting, that is, until orders were delivered for the Battalion to march to Arras later that same evening to go... *into reserve*. On the day following, the unit moved up into the trench system which had been prepared for an offensive operation to be delivered on the next day again, August 26*.

**It appears that the attack of the August 26 was to be launched by the 19th Battalion from the area of Les Fosses Farm in the direction of Monchy-le-Preux. Both of these areas had been fought over by the Newfoundland Regiment in April of 1917, Monchy on the 14th of that month having cost the Regiment just fewer than five-hundred casualties – including those taken prisoner. After July 1 at Beaumont-Hamel it had been the worst day of the Newfoundlanders' war.*

Zero hour for the offensive was three o'clock in the morning, the 19th Battalion not advancing into the fray until one hour after the initial advance. During the morning the early objectives were taken and Monchy-le-Preux appeared to have been captured. The afternoon, however, proved to be less successful as the enemy's defences and resolve stiffened, particularly in front of the village of Guemappe where the German machine gunners were once again causing serious problems.



(Right: *Tank Cemetery, Guemappe, commemorates two-hundred nineteen military personnel of the Great War. Despite the Canadian losses there of 1918, all those within are from British regiments: save one – Private Olsen of the 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment. – photograph from 2010(?)*)

Sergeant Newell's Battalion was thus obliged to curtail its advance and, in co-operation with other Canadian Battalions, to revise and devise its plans for the continuation of the attack on the following morning.

If the end of the first day of the *Battle of the Scarpe* on the 19th Battalion front had ended in less than total success, the second day, also having begun in a promising fashion, was not to conclude in any better manner. The first objectives had been attained after... *a very successful advance...* and men and materials captured.

But then the War Diarist continues: *Just beyond the first objective the Battalion was held up by severe machine gun fire from a strongly organized system of trenches and from the flanks. The Brigade on the right had never been in touch with it, there was no artillery support, so no attempt was made to consolidate a line in shell-holes just west of the Sensee River...*

Throughout the advance the artillery advance was very poor, the line of barrage was very irregular, and some guns were about 30 seconds after others in lifting, which caused many casualties. These operations were very costly to the Battalion, casualties were severe and at the end there were only five Company officers left.

There was also at least one fewer corporal.

Circumstances of casualty: *Whilst taking part in the advance from Guemappe to Vis-en-Artois he was hit in the head and instantly killed by an enemy rifle bullet*.*

**Corporal Newell was far from being the only casualty of the day: The 19th Battalion's losses for that tour of August 26-28, had been thirty killed in action, one-hundred eighty-seven wounded, twenty-seven gassed, forty missing in action and one wounded and missing in action.*

The son of William Newell, fisherman and labourer, and of Mary Jane Newell (née *Metcalf*) of Burnt Head, District of Port de Grave, Newfoundland, then later of 29, Redwood Avenue, Toronto, he was also brother to six sisters: Emma, Ethel, Annie-Gertrude, Rebecca, Alfreda and Esther.

Corporal Newell was reported to have been *killed in action* on August 27 of 1918.

Samuel Newell had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-one years: date of birth at Burnt Head, Newfoundland, June 28, 1893.

Corporal Samuel Newell was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



War Office
6th August, 1918

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Military Medal for bravery in the Field to the under-mentioned Non-commissioned Officers and Men:-

55261 Sjt. S. Newell C. Ontario R.



War Office
18th December, 1919

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of a Bar to the Military Medal to the under-mentioned Non-commissioned Officers and Men:-

55261 Sjt. S. Newell, 19th Battalion, 1st C. Ontario R.
(M.M. gazetted 6th August, 1918)



The Bar, in effect a second Military Medal, is worn attached to the ribbon above the original decoration.

References: London Gazette, copies 30830 (page 9255) and 31695 (page 15723).

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.