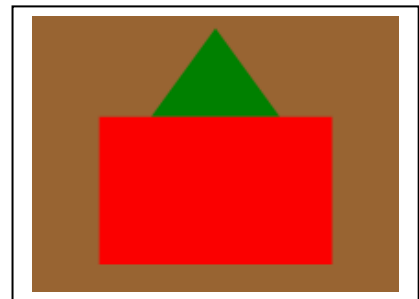




Private William Charles Norman, Number 669305 of the 3rd Battalion (*Toronto Regiment*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Bahus Churchyard, the sole Commonwealth soldier within the cemetery's bounds: Grave reference – in north-eastern part.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder flash of the 3rd Battalion (Toronto Regiment) is from Wikipedia.*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a carpenter, William Charles Norman may have been the young man – a self-described labourer on his way to the industrial city of Sydney - included on the passenger list of the steamship *Bruce* which arrived from St. John's, Dominion of Newfoundland, in North Sydney, Canadian province of Nova Scotia, on April 4 of 1912. However, this much is speculation which requires more information.

All that seems may be said with certainty of William Charles Norman's presence in Canada prior to January 25, 1916, is that he had been living in the area of Toronto since at least June of 1914, and that, by that January of 1915, he was a resident of 1466, Dufferin Street, in the city – this information forthcoming from his attestation papers.

January 25 of 1916 was the day on which William Charles Norman presented himself for enlistment, for a medical examination – which found him fit for *overseas service* – and for attestation. He had prior to this date been a soldier of the *Queen's Own Rifles of Canada*, a Canadian Militia regiment, for some twenty months, this unit then recruiting him for service with the 166th (Overseas) Battalion (*Queen's Own Rifles*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force*.

**The Canadian Militia had been organized primarily for the defence of the nation and, by law, its units were interdicted from operating outside the frontiers of the country. However, this was not to prevent those same units from enlisting recruits who would then be subsequently transferred to - and taken on strength by - the new Overseas Battalions which had started organizing since the outbreak of hostilities in Europe.*

The formalities of Private Norman's enlistment were brought to a conclusion some two months later when, on March 24, an officer representing Lieutenant Colonel W.G. Mitchell, the commanding officer of the 166th Battalion, declared – on paper – that... *William Charles Norman...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation**.

**The inscribed signature is far from being compatible with the name of any officer listed on the 3rd Battalion's nominal roll – or that of the 166th or 83rd.*

By the time of that declaration, Private Norman was already hard into training at the *Exhibition Camp* in Toronto. In fact the newly-forming Battalion was posted there from January 3 until July 1 of 1916, at which time it was transferred to *Camp Borden**, some hundred kilometres to the north-west of Toronto, until the date on which it was to leave Canada for service overseas.

**Camp Borden had apparently been constructed since only the beginning of May of that same year. The 166th Battalion was therefore likely one of the first occupants. Only a year later it was transformed into a military aerodrome and flying station.*

By that time, however, Private Norman was already in England. On April 12 of that spring of 1916, he had been transferred and *taken on strength* by the 83rd (*Queen's Own Rifles of Canada*)*

(continued)

**The 83rd, 95th, 166th, and 255th Battalions were all designated as 'Queen's Own Rifles of Canada' since the parent militia unit had recruited on behalf of them all – and also for the 3rd Battalion (Toronto Regiment) as well as the 198th Battalion (Canadian Buffs). All went overseas but only the 3rd Battalion ever saw active service on the Continent.*

Private Norman's 83rd Battalion was to sail from Canada well in advance of the 166th Battalion. It was on April 28, 1916, - a second source has the 24th - that the *Queen's Own Rifles of Canada* embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* in the harbour at Halifax. The unit was not to sail unaccompanied. Also on the vessel taking passage to the United Kingdom was a number of other units: the 4th Divisional Cyclists Company; the 3rd Draft of the 10th Regiment, Canadian Mounted Rifles; the 66th and 81st Battalions of Canadian Infantry; and the 2nd Draft of the 1st Canadian Pioneer Battalion.

(Right: HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor along with HMHS Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay in the autumn of 1915. Olympic was sister ship to Britannic, to be sunk by a mine in the eastern Mediterranean in November of 1916, and also of the ill-starred Titanic. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London)



Olympic sailed on May 1 and six days following - on May 7, although a further source has the 6th - was to dock in the English west-coast port city of Liverpool. From there Private Norman's Battalion was sped south-eastward by train to the large Canadian military complex of Shorncliffe, established on the Dover Straits just to the south of the Kentish harbour and town of Folkestone.

Immediately upon its arrival at Shorncliffe, the 83rd Battalion was assimilated into the 12th Infantry Reserve Battalion, CEF, at the subsidiary camp at West Sandling. There, five months of training awaited the newcomers before they were deemed to be suitable as re-enforcements for units that had recently served on the Continent during the still-ongoing 1st Battle of the Somme.



(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)

During his posting to West Sandling, Private Norman was to be in need of medical attention. On July 31 he was admitted into the Shorncliffe Military Hospital; some two weeks later, on August 8, he was transferred to the Cheryhinton Hospital at Cambridge, an institution which specialized in venereal problems. He was released from there on the 30th of that month, to spend a single day in the Military Hospital at West Sandling while on his way back to join his unit*.

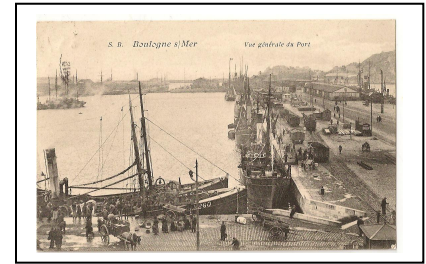
**His pay records show that, as was often the case but not universally so – particularly for officers – a portion of his pay was deducted for the time that Private Norman spent in receiving treatment.*

On October 4 Private Norman was transferred on paper to the 3rd Battalion (*Toronto Regiment*). By the following day he had traversed the English Channel through Folkestone and its French counterpart, Boulogne, on the opposite coast and some two hours' sailing-time distant.



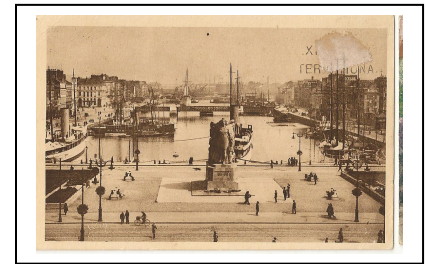
(Right: A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the top of the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009)

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



A short train-journey south from Boulogne had brought him to the Canadian Base Depot, already established by then in the vicinity of the port-city of Le Havre, situated on the estuary of the River Seine.

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



After ten days spent at the Base Depot awaiting orders for despatch, Private Norman was sent on October 15 to report to duty to his new unit. His papers record that he did so two days later, on October 17.

* * * * *

The 3rd Battalion (*Toronto Regiment*) of Canadian Infantry had, by the time of Private Norman's arrival to duty, been serving on the Continent for more than eighteen months. After a stormy passage from the west coast of England, it had disembarked in the French port of St-Nazaire on February 11 of 1915. The 3rd Battalion was a component of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian Division*.

**The Canadian Division was designated thus until the formation of the Canadian 2nd Division when, logically, it then became the Canadian 1st Division.*

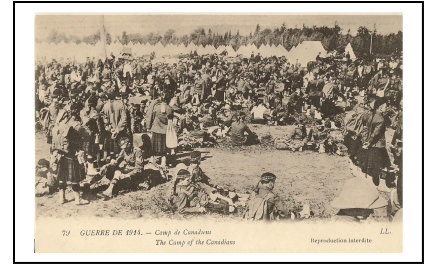
By February 17 the Battalion had reached the northern French town of Armentières on the Franco-Belgian frontier where it was to spend a week. During the month which followed, the unit had then served in and about the *Laventie Sector*, to the south of Armentières and it was not to be until April 18, at twenty-five minutes past ten in the morning, that the unit – in fact, the entire 1st Infantry Brigade - was to cross the Franco-Belgian frontier into the *Kingdom of Belgium*.



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

The Brigade had crossed the frontier to the west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe where it was then to remain for two days before advancing eastwards to Vlamertinghe for two more. It was at that moment that the Germans had decided to launch their attack in an effort to take the nearby city of Ypres.

(Right: *The caption reads merely ‘Camp of Canadians’ but it is from the early days of the Great War, thus likely in either northern France or in Belgium. The troops are from a Canadian-Scottish unit. – from a vintage post-card*)



Other units of the Canadian Division had only been serving in the *Ypres Salient* for a short space of time. During these few days of Canadian tenure *the Salient* had proved to be relatively quiet. Then the dam broke - although it was gas rather than water which, for a few days, threatened to sweep all before it. The date was April 22, 1915.



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

The *2nd Battle of Ypres* had seen the first use of chlorine gas by the Germans during the *Great War*. It was later to become an everyday event and, with the introduction of protective measures such as advanced gas-masks, the gas was to prove no more dangerous than the rest of the military arsenals of the warring nations. But on this first occasion, to inexperienced troops without the means to combat it, the yellow-green cloud of chlorine proved overwhelming.

(Right: *The very first protection against gas was to urinate on a handkerchief which was then held over the nose and mouth. However, all the armies were soon producing gas-masks, some of the first of which are seen here being tested by Scottish troops. – from either Illustration or Le Miroir*)



The cloud was noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon of April 22. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left wavered then broke, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered.

Thus a retreat, not always very cohesive, became necessary while, at the same time, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 1st Infantry Brigade were moved forward to support the efforts of the French and of the Canadian 3rd Infantry Brigade.

(Right: *Entitled: Bombardement d'Ypres, le 5 juillet 1915 – from Illustration*)



(continued)

By the second day, the 23rd, the situation had become relatively stable – at least temporarily - and the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan held until the morning of the 24th when a further retirement became necessary.

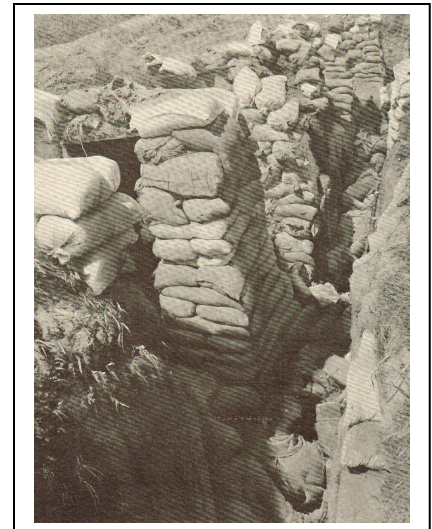
At times there had been breaches in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans were unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or else they did not have the means to exploit the situation. And then the Canadians closed the gaps.

The 3rd Battalion remained attached to the 3rd Brigade to the north-east of the Salient until April 26 when it withdrew to Vlamertinghe and re-joined the 1st Brigade. Remaining there to repose on the following day, the unit was next ordered forward to the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan to dig trenches. By that evening some twelve-hundred yards had been excavated whereupon the Battalion returned to Vlamertinghe.



There it was to remain until May 3 when it was withdrawn to the northern French centre of Bailleul, there to re-enforce and re-organize.

(Right above: The Memorial to the 1st Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier – stands just to the south of the village of Langemark (then Langemarck) at the Vancouver Crossroads where the Canadians withstood the German attack – abetted by gas – at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915. – photograph from 2010)



On May 15 the 3rd Battalion was ordered to move down the line to the south into France and into the areas of Festubert and Givenchy. The French were about to undertake a major offensive just further south again and had asked for British support.

(Right above: A French photograph of some German trenches – complete with dead defenders and perhaps attackers - captured in the area south of Givenchy before it was to become an area of British responsibility. – from Illustration)

There at Festubert a series of attacks and counter-attacks took place in which the British High Command managed to gain three kilometres of ground but also contrived to destroy, by the use of the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what was left of the British pre-War professional Army. The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but – not possessing the same numbers of troops – was not to participate to the same extent. It nonetheless suffered heavily.

The Canadian Division and Indian troops - the 7th (*Meerut*) Division* also having been ordered to serve at Festubert - had hardly fared better than the British, each contingent – a Division - incurring over two-thousand casualties before the offensive drew to a close.

(continued)

The French effort further south – using the same tactics - was likewise a failure but on an even larger scale; it was to cost them just over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded and missing*.

**The Indian troops also served – and lost heavily – in other battles in this area in 1915 before being transferred to the Middle East.*

(Right: *A one-time officer who served in the Indian Army during the Second World War, pays his respects to those who fell - at the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle. – photograph from 2010(?)*)



On the first day of June the 3rd Battalion had been relieved from its posting at Festubert; in a few days' time, however, it was ordered further south to Givenchy-les-la-Bassée*, a small village not far distant south of Festubert. Ordered into the forward trenches on two occasions during that month to support British efforts – and with the same results, although less numerous, from repeating the same mistakes – on or about June 24 the Canadian Division was retiring from the area.

**Since the place is oft-times referred to simply as Givenchy it is worthwhile knowing that there are two other Givenchys in the region: Givenchy-le-Noble, to the west of Arras, and Givenchy-en-Gohelle, a village which lies in the shadow of a crest of land which dominates the Douai Plain: Vimy Ridge.*

As a part of that withdrawal from Givenchy, the 3rd Battalion was to march to billets in or near to the community of Oblinghem, two kilometres removed from the larger community of Béthune. From there it was to move towards and into Belgium, to *the Ploegsteert Sector*, just across the frontier.

Having reached the area of Ploegsteert, there the 3rd Battalion remained – as did the entire Canadian Division. In the next months it came to be well-acquainted with the Franco-Belgian area between Armentières in the east – any further east would have been in German-occupied territory – Bailleul in the west, and Messines in the north; given the route marches enumerated in the Battalion War Diary and the itineraries used, it would have been surprising had it been otherwise.



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

The 3rd Battalion, when out of the forward area, was often to be found billeted in or in the vicinity of the Belgian community of Dranoutre (today *Dranouter*) at some two kilometres distant from the frontier itself.

(continued)

It was now to be a further nine months before the 3rd Battalion was to be involved in a further major altercation. Of course, local confrontations – brought about by raids and patrols - were fought from time to time, and artillery duels and the ever-increasing menace of snipers ensured a constant flow of casualties. But by far the greatest part of that period, however, was to be spent submitting to the routines, to the rigours and to the perils of that daily grind in the trenches*.

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



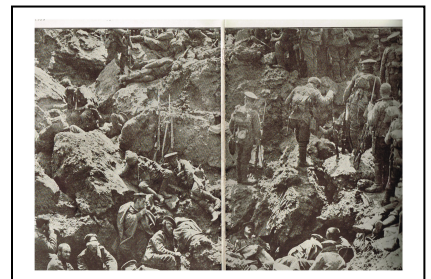
Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

(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 and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration)

In the meantime, in September of 1915 it had been the turn of the Canadian 2nd Division to land on the Continent and to also immediately be posted north into Belgium. It was not to be stationed in the *Ypres Salient* as had been - or on the frontier itself, as were - the units of the Canadian now-1st Division, but in-between, down the line south of Ypres in the area of St-Éloi. It was there, after some seven months of that thankless life in and about the trenches, that the 2nd Division was to fight its first major action of the *Great War*.

For the 2nd Division, the first weeks of April were not to be as tranquil as those being experienced during the same period by the personnel of the 3rd Battalion.

The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* officially took place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St. Eloi 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. That detonation had been followed up by an infantry assault.



(Right above: A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps in the area of St-Éloi – from Illustration)

(continued)

After a brief initial success the attack soon bogged down – due to those very mine-craters which, filled with water, were to prove impassable - and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than 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.

However, as previously noted, this confrontation was a 2nd Division affair and the personnel of the 3rd Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the German artillery.

In fact, during the first days of April the 3rd Battalion was transferred closer to Ypres and, more precisely, to the area of Dickebusch, a village just to the south-west of the city. Then it was posted to the forward area further to the east. Thus the unit was well placed to be of service on June 2.

From that date until June 14 was fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the area of *Hooge, Sanctuary Wood, Maple Copse, Railway Dugouts* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps.

The Canadians had been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans delivered an offensive, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity of which they never took advantage.



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

(Right: *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*)



The Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, reacted by organizing a counter-attack on the following day, an assault intended to, at a minimum, recapture the lost ground. Badly organized, the operation was a dismal failure, many of the intended attacks never went in – those that did went in piecemeal and the assaulting troops were cut to pieces - the enemy remained where he was and the Canadians were left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.



Ten days later the Canadians had again counter-attacked, on this occasion better prepared and better supported. The lost ground for the most part had been recovered, both sides were back where they had started – except for a small German gain at *Hooge* - and the cemeteries were that much fuller.

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

On June 2 the 3rd Battalion had been ordered to stand to and at three o'clock the next morning had been ordered forward from the *Dickebusch Huts* in the support(?) area. By mid-day of June 3 the unit was at the *Railway Dugouts* – having sustained twenty casualties on the way in - in the south-east sector of *the Salient* and some two kilometres behind *Maple Copse*. From there the 3rd Battalion had supplied working-parties and burial-parties for the remainder of the day.

The unit had remained at *Railway Dugouts* until the early morning of June 9 when it was relieved by the Canadian 25th Battalion. Not having been directly involved in any infantry activity while at *Railway Dugouts*, the 3rd Battalion had nonetheless continued to provide working-parties for the area of *Hill 60* and had been almost constantly subjected to bombardment by a very active German artillery during this period.



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

The relief had lasted for two days. On June 11, the 3rd Battalion had been ordered back into the same area, close to the village of Zillebeke. On the following day the unit moved up towards the forward area: the *Battle of Mount Sorrel* was about to come to its violent conclusion.

In their jumping-off trenches by ten o'clock on the evening of June 12, the personnel of the 3rd battalion were witness to the intense forty-five-minute barrage undertaken by the Canadian artillery just after midnight.

At one-thirty in the morning the curtain of fire lifted towards the rear of the German front lines which were then rushed by the infantry. The succeeding German lines were attacked and carried, again using the same co-operative tactics between the artillery and infantry.

(Right: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 and 1917 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooge, Sanctuary Wood, Railway Dugouts and Maple Copse: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government – photograph from 2014*)



By eleven o'clock that evening when the 3rd Battalion was relieved, the unit had incurred forty-four *killed in action* or *died of wounds*, two-hundred eighteen *wounded* and ninety-three *missing in action*. Thus ended the *Battle of Mount Sorrel*: status quo.

(continued)

The remainder of the month of June, that of July and the first days of August were a reversion to the routines of trench warfare, the 3rd Battalion apparently remaining in much the same area. Then on August 9 it marched west and to the vicinity of the northern French town of Steenvoorde. It was to be a further fourteen months before the unit would return to the *Kingdom of Belgium*.

Three days later, and after a march of some fifty kilometres towards the west again, the 3rd Battalion reached its destination and its billets at Tournehem. The unit was to remain there for the following two weeks, time that would be occupied by training and by route marches. It was then to be ordered southwards and to the area of the British offensive of that summer, *the Somme*.

It was ten o'clock in the evening of August 27 when the 3rd Battalion marched out of Tournehem on its way to the railway station at Audvieuq. Apparently, according to the unit's War Diary... *Civilians extremely sorry to see battalion go*. Having then arrived at the station at one-thirty in the morning, the Battalion was obliged to wait a further ninety-five minutes before the train departed.

Travelling at first by train, then by bus, and finally on foot, the Battalion arrived in the provincial town of Albert in the French *Département de la Somme* on the penultimate day of August.

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

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

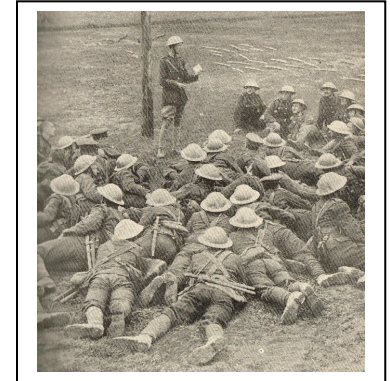


On that first day of *1st Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland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

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

Meanwhile, on August 30, the 3rd Battalion had marched to the large military encampment which had been designated as *Brickfields Camp (La Briqueterie)* in the near proximity of the provincial town of Albert. A few hours later the unit had been allotted billets in the town itself, accommodations which at least the War Diarist found to be... *quite comfortable*.

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



On the following day, August 31, the newcomers found themselves in likely less luxurious quarters as they moved to the forward area to relieve an Australian unit in *Sausage Valley*.

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

The second day of September saw the Battalion move forward again, on this occasion into the front-line trenches in the area of *Mouquet Farm*. There appears to have been no co-ordinated infantry action during this period but enemy planes put in an appearance and the 3rd Battalion was shelled almost incessantly for the duration of the six-day tour.



Even without there having been any infantry action, the unit had incurred a casualty count of twenty-two killed and one-hundred forty-five wounded.

The Battalion retired to the *Brickfields Camp* on September 8 but apparently not too far away from the front for one company to be ordered to mount a reportedly successful raid on enemy positions on the morning of the 10th.

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

On the following day again the entire 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade began a five-day circular march in the region which saw it arrive back in the *Brickfields Camp* on September 16. Only the day before, of course, Canadian units had attacked in the area of Flers-Courcelette as part of a larger general offensive. The assault by the Canadian 2nd Division on Courcelette had been perhaps the only successful venture on a day when most of the news was again bad.



It was on the evening of September 17 that the 3rd Battalion was ordered to move forward to the trenches in front of Courcelette, there to relieve the 25th Battalion of the Canadian 2nd Division. They were withdrawn from that forward area again on September 20, the tour having cost a total of ninety-four casualties, many of them, according to the War Diarist, unfortunately caused by *friendly* artillery fire falling short.



(Preceding page: *The village of Courcellette just over a century after the events of the 1st Battle of the Somme* – photograph from 2017)

Back in the trenches for but a single day on September 24, the unit had to contend with three local counter-attacks by the Germans. These were beaten off but, of course, at a price: eight killed and sixty-five wounded all told. Relief came at midnight.

Then there was another march undertaken by the entire 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade – of eight days' duration on this occasion, commencing on September 26. Upon its return to Albert the 3rd Battalion received re-enforcements and began to prepare for an upcoming operation. On October 7 it moved from the town and proceeded to its assembly points in the appropriately-named *Death Valley*. The numbers of the attacking party, even counting the newly-arrived ninety re-enforcements, amounted to only fourteen officers and four-hundred eighty-one *other ranks*.

The Battalion War Diarist has dedicated over three pages to the events of October 8 during the attack by the 3rd Battalion on the enemy *Regina Trench* system. The following is a resume based upon excerpts from the War Diary of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade:

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



Zero hour (4.50 a.m.) – The 3rd Canadian Battalion advanced straight to their objective and found little trouble in passing through the enemy's wire which had been fairly well cut by the artillery. They met with some resistance from the enemy but soon overcame this and succeeded in taking their objectives which they at once began to consolidate...

...in front of the Quadrilateral many gaps were found which allowed the troops (of the 4th Battalion to) enter the German trenches. Some congestion was caused by mixing with the 3rd Canadian Battalion until a bombing party had worked along the front line trench...

...the enemy commenced very strong bombing attacks against both Battalions. The force of these attacks was against the Quadrilateral and apparently came along the trenches leading to it from the northeast and northwest. An extremely heavy artillery bombardment was opened about the same time on our newly captured trenches and on our jumping off trenches.

The bombing posts were driven in at the Quadrilateral and the enemy forced our men along the trenches to the southwest and southeast. The local commanders reorganized bomb sections and led them forward but could not relieve the pressure and our men were finally forced to retire to the jumping-off trenches.

A few of the 3rd Canadian Battalion remained in the left of the German trenches but these men were withdrawn at dark...

(continued)

(Right: *Wounded troops being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the 1st Battle of the Somme – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)



By the end of the day the casualty count, all ranks, was as follows: *Killed in action* – thirty-four; wounded – one-hundred-fifty three; *missing in action* – one-hundred fifty-two (Source: 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary).

Out of the four-hundred ninety-five personnel of the 3rd Battalion (*Toronto Regiment*) who had attacked on that morning of October 8, 1916, one-hundred fifty-six remained to be counted – the Battalion War Diary says... *1 officer and about 85 O.R. were left: Terrible... whichever version one chooses to believe.*



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

On October 13 a draft of fifty re-enforcements arrived in Albert to bolster the strength of the 3rd Battalion. They were just in time to march from there with the remnants of the unit... away from *the Somme*. In fact it was the entire 1st Brigade which passed the starting point at eight o'clock on that morning of what was apparently... *a fine day* - from the point of view of the weather as well.

The itinerary of the march took the 1st Brigade at first well to the west before it turned northwards to pass behind – again to the west of – the battered city of Arras. At five o'clock in the evening of October 16 the unit halted to spend four days in the area of Bonneville. It was there on the day following, October 17, that the 3rd Battalion War Diarist welcomed the arrival of Private Norman's detachment with the short, curt entry:

...Draft of 50 O.R.

* * * * *

By October 24, having left Albert ten days earlier, Private Norman's new unit had turned eastward to end its trek in the vicinity of Camblain l'Abbé – fifteen kilometres to the north-west of Arras - and in Divisional Reserve.

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



This was the area – from Arras in the south to Béthune in the north - to which all the Canadian units withdrawing from *the Somme* were sooner or later to find themselves and where they were to remain – even including the *Battle of Arras* the following spring - until October of 1917.

(continued)

The winter of 1916-1917 was one of the everyday business of life in - and out of - the trenches. There was to be little, if any, concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides. This latter activity was encouraged by the High Command who felt it to be a morale booster which also kept the troops in the right offensive frame of mind – the troops who were ordered to carry them out in general apparently loathed these operations.

There was of course the daily trickle of casualties, for the most part due to the enemy’s artillery and to his snipers. To this should be added, it should not be forgotten, the daily count of those sick – particularly with dental problems - who also helped to keep the field ambulances and the casualty clearing stations busy.



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

On January 6 there was to be an accident during the morning at the Battalion School in the vicinity of the community of Bajus.

Casualty report: “Killed” (Accidentally)

He was one of a party from his Platoon, who were being instructed in throwing hand grenades at about noon on January 6th 1917. A Mills No. 5 grenade thrown by one of the party exploded prematurely, killing Private Norman and wounding several others...

Private Norman was to be the only fatality from the accident; ten officers and other ranks in total were wounded and were subsequently passed through the 2nd Canadian Field Ambulance in the *château du Vieil Fort* at nearby Divion.


Witness report: # 404085 Sergt G.A. Gibson states that... about 12.10 P.M. (Noon) I was standing about 200 yards away from trench from which bombs were being thrown acting as guard when I saw a bomb thrown out of the trench towards the sunken road which exploded before it had got more than 5 yards away from the thrower’s hand. There was immediately a call for help and going down I saw several wounded men in the trench...

Court of Enquiry finding: *The Court was unable to have the evidence of Lieut McQueen and PTE Bradshaw on account of there (sic) wounds and I can only find from the evidence presented to it that the accident was caused by the premature explosion of a No 5 Mills Hand Grenade taken from a box labelled Birmingham Engineering Co Limited and dated July 20, 1916. The court finds that all necessary precautions were taken and does not attach any responsibility for this accident to any person at the battalion School.*

(Right: The obituary is from the NLunexplained.ca web-site.)

(continued)

PTE. W. C. NORMAN KILLED.



Pte. Wm. C. Norman, who formerly lived at 1466 Dufferin street, is officially reported killed in action. He was a native of Newfoundland and the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Norman, of Clark's Beach, Nfld. He was 25 years of age and unmarried, and was by trade a carpenter. He went overseas last May with a draft of the 82nd, and was only in the trenches about three weeks when killed.

Toronto Star - January 20th, 1917

The son of Robert James Norman, fisherman, and of Emma Jane Norman (née *Dawe*) – to whom, on October 15 of 1916 he had willed his all - of Clark's (also *Clarke's*) Beach, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Elsie (also see below), to Bessie Maud and to Mary.

Private Norman was reported to have been killed accidentally (see above) on January 6 of 1917, while serving in France.

William Charles Norman had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-four years and four months: date of birth – from attestation papers – in Clark's (also *Clarke's*) Beach, Newfoundland, September 23, 1890*.

**However, Methodist parish records also appear to show that he had a sister Elsie born on November 1, 1890; and while these documents also show the birth years of his other sisters as 1898 and 1901, there is no apparent record of the birth of William Charles.*

Any relevant information would be appreciated.

Private William Charles Norman 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 26, 2023.



