



Private Edward Nugent, Number 183791 of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Canadians) of Canadian Infantry, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Bruay Communal Cemetery Extension: Grave reference L.18..

(Right: *The image of the cap-badge of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Canadians), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is from the [bing.com/images](http://bing.com/images) web-site*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, Edward Nugent has apparently left behind him no available information of his movements from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Alberta. All that may be said with any certainty is that he was in the city of Calgary during the month of December of 1915, for that was where and when he enlisted.

All the relevant documents – pay-records, attestation papers and a first medical report – agree that it was on December 6 of that year that he enlisted. On that day he presented himself for a medical examination, a procedure which pronounced him as...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force...*, an exercise which was then accompanied by his attestation.

It was Captain Herbert Sawley, acting on behalf of the Commanding Officer of the 89<sup>th</sup> Overseas Battalion (*Alberta*), Lieutenant-Colonel William Wylie Nasmyth, who brought the formalities of enlistment to a conclusion when, on the same December 6, he declared – on paper – that...*Edward Nugent...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

Although nine Overseas Battalions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force are recorded as having trained at the large *Camp Sarcee* just outside the city of Calgary during the year 1916, the 89<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Alberta*) was apparently not one of them, and finding where in fact Private Nugent was based during the early months of that year has thus far proved to be difficult.

But one may speculate: Having contracted pneumonia, on February 23 of that 1916 he was admitted into the Military Hospital in the town of Red Deer for treatment. In those days before anti-biotics pneumonia was not cured in a short period, and Private Nugent was to spend almost two months, until April 18, receiving medical attention before being discharged *to duty*. The suggestion, of course, is that a detachment of the 89<sup>th</sup> Battalion was based at the time at Red Deer – but confirmation, as stated above, has been difficult.

Towards the end of May, well over six months after his enlistment, Private Nugent and his 89<sup>th</sup> Battalion entrained for the long cross-country railway journey to the east-coast port of Halifax where, on the final day of the month, it boarded His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* for the trans-Atlantic voyage.



(Right above: *Sister-ship to Britannic – that vessel to be sunk by a mine in the eastern Mediterranean a month later, in November of 1916 – and also to the ill-fated Titanic, HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor in the company of HM Hospital Ship Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay, Island of Lemnos, in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London*)

The 89<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to travel alone. Also taking passage on the vessel to the United Kingdom were the 88<sup>th</sup>, 90<sup>th</sup>, 95<sup>th</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry as well as the Number 7 Siege Battery. Two days after Private Nugent's embarkation, on June 2, *Olympic* cast her lines and cleared Halifax Harbour.

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Six days later, on June 8 and after an uneventful crossing, the vessel docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool. From there the unit was transported south-eastward to the county of Kent and to *Westenhanger Camp* for further training and to await a call to *active service* on the Continent, a call that was never to come.

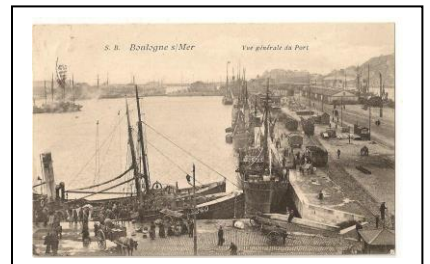
The Battalion's organizers had originally anticipated that the 89<sup>th</sup> Battalion would be despatched to *active service* on the *Western Front*, but this was not to be\*. The unit was to eventually be absorbed by the 9<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion in early 1917 and would ultimately be disbanded in May of that same year.

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

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



Private Nugent was one of the earlier personnel to be sent overseas – on this occasion, just across the English Channel. On August 27, 1916, he was transferred – on paper – to the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Canadians*) from the 89<sup>th</sup> Battalion and, on that night of August 27-28, took ship – likely via the English harbour-town of Folkestone and its French counter-part, Boulogne, just across the Dover Straits.



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

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

On that second date, August 28, he reported to the Canadian Base Depot located at Rouelles, close to the French industrial port-city of Le Havre situated at the estuary of the River Seine, one of one-hundred fifty arrivals on that day. It was now to be twenty-six days before Private Nugent was ordered despatched to his new unit.



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

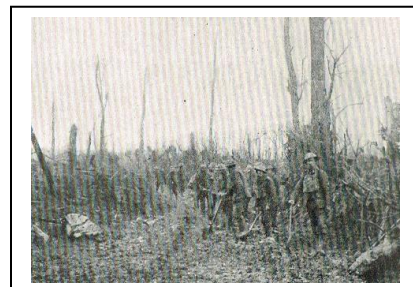
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The *new unit* in question, however, was not the one to which he had been attached on the day before he left England. On a temporary basis he was now to serve with the 1<sup>st</sup> Entrenching Battalion which he joined on September 23 in the area of Senlis – well away from the forward area to the west of the northern French town of Béthune - where the unit had been working for the previous two weeks.

*\*The Entrenching Battalions, as the name suggests, were employed in defence construction and other related tasks. They comprised men who not only had at least a fundamental knowledge and experience of such work but who also had the physique to perform it.*

*However they also came to serve as re-enforcement pools where men awaiting the opportune moment to join their appointed unit might be gainfully employed for a short period of time.*

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



On which day Private Nugent left the 1<sup>st</sup> Entrenching Battalion to report *to duty* with the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalions (*Canadians*) has not been recorded in his files, but it was on October 4 that his own dossier notes his arrival at either the Rest Camp, Val de Maison, or in the hutments at Vadet Wood, a three and a half-hour march away.

In either case, Private Nugent had arrived on *the Somme*.

\* \* \* \* \*

The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Canadians*) was a component of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – until the advent of the 2nd Canadian Division it had been simply the Canadian Division. The Battalion’s recruits had at first been mainly drawn from Canadian militia units in the cities of Calgary and Winnipeg, but the unit had eventually assembled in the new military complex at Valcartier, Québec, before it had then sailed to the United Kingdom in October of 1914.

The Canadian Division was to set foot on French soil in mid-February of 1915 when it had landed in the Breton port of St-Nazaire. However, for most of the first eighteen months of its service on the *Western Front* it had been Belgian soil on which it was to be stationed.



*(Right above: It was His Majesty’s Transport Kingstonian which transported the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion from the port in Bristol to St-Nazaire. The image is from bing.com/images.)*

The first of the two exceptions to this rule were to be the first two months – mid-February to mid-April – when it had been stationed in the *Fleurbaix Sector* in proximity to the northern French town of Armentières, a relatively quiet period.

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The second posting outside Belgium, indisputably *less* quiet, had been for some six weeks during May and June of that 1915 when the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had fought in the confrontations at Festubert and Givenchy in northern France. If it was in the *Fleurbaix Sector* that the Canadian Division had learned its trade, by the conclusion of Festubert and Givenchy, and after the *Second Battle of Ypres* (see below), its survivors were to be already battle-hardened veterans.

It had been on April 14 of 1915 that the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had first crossed the frontier into the *Kingdom of Belgium*. Motor busses had taken the Battalion on that day from the French town of Steenvoorde to the Belgian village of Vlamertinghe, only a few kilometres to the west of Ypres.

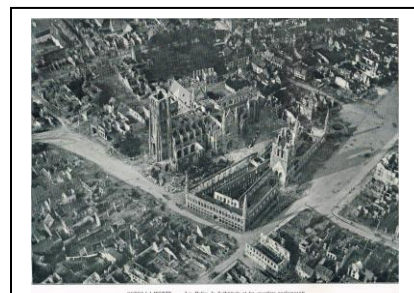
From there the remainder of the transfer was to be made on foot, through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres to positions to the north-east where the unit relieved French troops in the area of Gravenstafel and St-Julien – both of which names today figure among the unit’s battle honours.

(Right: *Troops being transported to the forward-area positions in busses – from Illustration*)



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

The march across Ypres to the vicinity of the village of Wieltje likely took the Battalion through the debris of the already-battered medieval city of Ypres. From Wieltje, French guides led the unit to its positions, some fifteen-hundred yards (fourteen-hundred metres) of trenches that the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for April 15 then reported as having been readied with rations and ammunition brought in by half-past five on that morning.



Whether in fact the Canadian newcomers *were* ready for what was to come is highly improbable. It was to be only a week later, on April 22 of 1915, that the entire Canadian Division was then to be put to the test.

On April 19 the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had retired into Divisional Reserve at Ypres, the next few daily entries in the War Diary having noted only sporadic enemy shelling by heavy artillery. It had perhaps offered a false sense of security.

The *2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Ypres* was to see the first use of chlorine gas by the Germans during the *Great War*. Later to become an everyday event, with the advent of protective measures such as advanced masks, gas was to prove no more dangerous than the rest of the military arsenals of the warring nations. But on this first occasion, to troops without the means to combat it, the yellow-green cloud of chlorine had proved to be 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*)



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



The cloud had been noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left had wavered and then had broken, thus having left the left flank of the Canadians uncovered.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the situation had become relatively stable, the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan having been held until the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> when a further retirement had become necessary. At times there had been gaps in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans had been unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or they had not had the means to exploit the situation.

And then the Canadians had closed the gaps.

(Right: *The Memorial to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier – stands just to the south of the village of Langemark (at the time Langemarck) – at the Vancouver Crossroads - where the Canadians withstood the German attack – abetted by gas – at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915. It is also known as the St-Julien Memorial. – photograph from 2010*)



It would appear that - this according to the appendices in the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary - on that April 22, the unit had already been moving into the forward area before the German attack where it had been ordered to supply working-parties. The enemy offensive, of course, was to change everything and by seven o'clock that evening the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered to move up into the area of responsibility of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Brigade, there to render any necessary assistance.

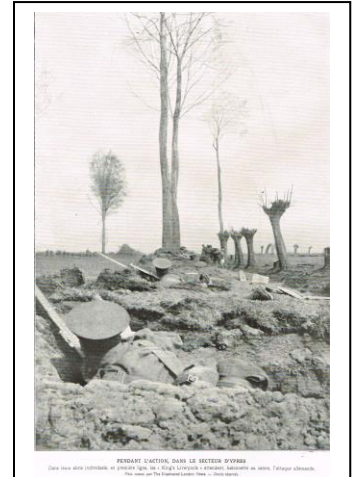
At about eight o'clock that evening the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, in co-operation with the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion, had launched a counter-attack against the German trenches. The attack had succeeded in carrying the objectives but a forewarned enemy had inflicted such losses on the force that the Canadians were later to be obliged to withdraw.

The following day had been quieter for the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion but a renewed offensive by the enemy on the 24<sup>th</sup> had meant further crises and the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was again to be withdrawn before having been returned to the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade. It was to be a stressful day for all with orders, counter-orders and cancellations having added to an already confused and dangerous situation.

**(Right below: *Troops – in this instance British – in hastily-dug trenches in the Ypres Salient. These are still the early days of the year as witnessed by the lack of steel helmets which only came into use in the spring and summer of 1916. – from Illustration*)**

It was on this April 24 that the enemy could have broken through, some Canadian sectors having been almost completely exposed to any attack and defended by only remnants of what only days before had been full battalions. But somehow the worst had never come to be.

By daybreak of April 25 the Canadians had by then been fighting for sixty continuous hours and the survivors of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion were now digging-in in front of Gravenstafel. There the unit was to remain for the day under heavy rifle, machine-gun and artillery fire. Finally, at three-thirty in the morning of the next day, April 26, it had been able to retire after having been relieved by units of the Hampshire Regiment. The other battalions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade had been ordered withdrawn at about the same time.



By the following night, after a further day of confusion had been spent mostly marching for aimless reasons hither and thither, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade – and thus the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion - had been withdrawn from the area of St-Julien to the western bank of the *Yser Canal* which runs north-south through the city of Ypres (today *Ieper*)\* and which at times during the *Great War* was to become a part of the front line – although never in the city itself.



***\*The position of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade on the Yser Canal was to the north of the city itself.***

**(Right above: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade were withdrawn to its western bank from Vlamertinghe – west is to the left – photograph from 2014*)**

On April 28 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade had continued its withdrawal, on this occasion to the south-west, but on the succeeding day again it had been ordered to move back into positions on the west bank of the *Yser Canal* where it was then to remain for the next number of days, there to endure the attention of the German artillery, heavy at times. There had also been the possibility of a move back to St-Julien area to counter an enemy attack but this move was never to come to pass.

In the meantime billeting officers had been at work in the area of the northern French town of Bailleul and at seven o'clock in the evening of May 5 the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade had received orders to retire from the *Yser Canal*.

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It did so later that same evening, having marched the sixteen miles (twenty-five kilometres) before having reached its newly-acquired quarters to the south-west of Bailleul at three-thirty in the morning of May 6.

As the War Diarist has recorded in his entry for May 5 - *This was very trying on the men who had been in trenches for 6 days and under the greatest strain from April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1915.*

(Right: *The re-built town of Bailleul almost a century after the visit by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade: Much of the damage to be done to it was the result of the later fighting in the spring of 1918. – photograph from 2010.*)



Thus the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Ypres was to come to a close for those of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion who had not been *killed, wounded* or reported *missing* during the preceding thirteen days.

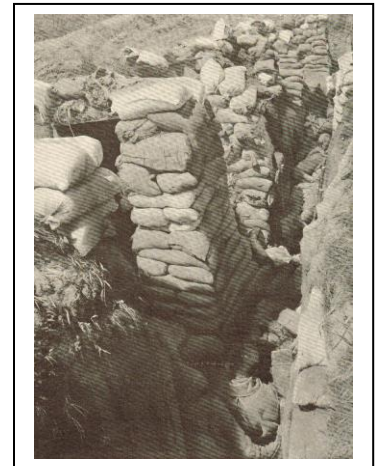
During that time it had incurred a casualty count of four-hundred eighty-five all ranks, almost fifty percent of full battalion fighting strength.

There had followed eight days of rest – perhaps as restful as it ever got during the *Great War* – before the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered south, on May 14, further down the line into France, there to fight in offensive actions near places by the names of Festubert and Givenchy.

The French were about to undertake a major campaign just further to the south again and had asked for British support to discourage the Germans from re-enforcing the sectors opposite the French front.

Having arrived in the town of Robecq on that May 14, two days later, on the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Battalion...*orders received to be ready to move on one and one-half hours notice.* It was not, however, until the next morning that the Battalion had been ordered on its way, and two days later again, on May 19, that...*Took over trenches at RUE DE L'EPINETTE, 3 companies in fire trenches one in support. These trenches had just been captured from the ENEMY a few days before, the line was a prolongation to the SOUTH for 300 paces thence SE to the vicinity...to the SW (of) the village of FESTUBERT.* (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of May 19)

(Right: *Captured German positions in the French-occupied area just down the line from Festubert and Givenchy: The trenches are still primitive compared to the complex labyrinths which they would soon become. – from Illustration*)



There at Festubert a series of attacks and counter-attacks were to take place during which the British High Command had managed to gain three kilometres of ground but had also contrived to destroy, by using the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what had now been left of the British pre-War professional Army.

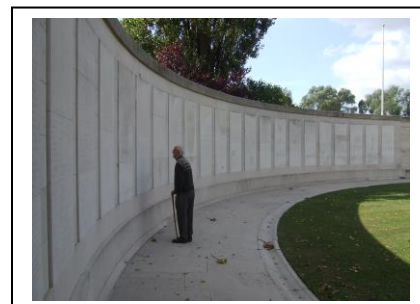


The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but – not providing the same numbers of troops – was not to participate to the same extent. It would nonetheless suffer extensively.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to attack enemy positions on both May 20 and 21. The former assault had proved to be a failure and heavy losses had been incurred; that of the 21<sup>st</sup> had captured certain enemy positions some of which, however, were to be lost on the morrow to an enemy counter-attack and to his artillery which had killed or wounded all the occupants of a forward trench, thus having forced its abandonment.

The unit had spent the next three days holding the other captured positions and serving as a target for the enemy artillery. The War Diarist has noted details of the eighteen officer casualties during this tour and estimated that some two-hundred fifty *other ranks* had also been *killed, wounded* or reported *missing*.

On May 26 the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be relieved and had gone into billets. Next, on May 31, the Commanding Officer and the Company Commanders...went to *GIVENCHY* and looked over trenches held by the *LONDON DIV*.



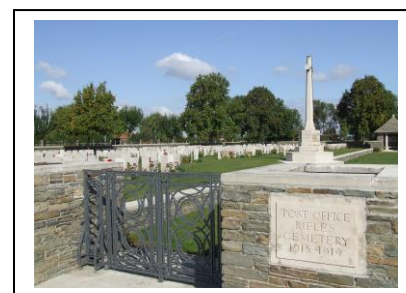
(Right above: *A one-time officer who served in the Indian Army during the Second World War, pays his respects at the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle to those who fell. – photograph from 2010(?)*)

The Canadian Division and Indian troops, the 7<sup>th</sup> (*Meerut*) Division\* also having been ordered to serve at Festubert, had fared hardly better than had the British, each contingent having incurred over two-thousand casualties before the offensive was to draw to a close.

The French effort – having employed the same murderous tactics – was to likewise be 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.*

On May 26 the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had marched away from Festubert to billets in or near to the community of Le Hamel. The reprieve was to last for but five days, until June 1, when the unit was ordered further south to Givenchy-les-la-Bassée\*, a small village not far distant from Festubert. There it relieved the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the City of London Regiment in the front trenches.



*\*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.*

**(Preceding page: *The Post Office Rifles Cemetery at Festubert wherein lie some four-hundred dead, only one-third of them identified.* – photograph from 2010)**

**After five days in the line followed by a further eight in billets in the community of Hinges – during which time the unit’s Canadian-made Ross Rifles were to be discarded for the more suitable Short Lee-Enfield Mark III weapon\*, on June 15...orders were received to be prepared to move in an hours notice as an attack was being made in the vicinity of LA BASSE (La Bassée). In fact it was eventually on the night of June 17-18 that the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved into reserve positions in the vicinity of La Préol before taking over trenches on the 19<sup>th</sup>.**

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

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

**There the unit remained until June 23. There had been no attack and the casualties which had been incurred during that time one must presume to have been largely due to the enemy’s artillery and to his snipers: twelve *killed in action* and twenty-six *wounded*.**

**On that June 23, the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was relieved and had thereupon retired from the area and from the battle. Commencing at about the same time, and over a number of days, *all* the units of the Canadian Division were to retire.**

**As a part of that withdrawal from Givenchy, the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to march to billets in the area of Essars. From there it had moved northwards and back into Belgium, to the *Ploegsteert Sector*, just across the frontier.**

**Having reached the *Ploegsteert Sector* on July 5, there the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to remain – headquartered at Petit Pont – as was to be the entire Canadian Division. In the next months it had come 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.**

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

**It was to be almost another year before the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had then become involved in a further major altercation. Of course, local confrontations – in raids and during patrols - were to be fought from time to time, and artillery duels plus the ever-increasing menace of snipers would ensure a constant flow of casualties.**



In the *Ploegsteert Sector* the unit was once more to be subject to those everyday routines of trench warfare – perhaps by then quite welcome to those who had just served during the confrontations of April at Ypres and of May-June at Festubert and Givenchy – routines that were to continue for more than eleven months.

During those eleven months the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions had made their appearance – in September and December-January respectively - in the *Kingdom of Belgium*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division infantry having received its baptism of fire in the *Action at the St-Éloi Craters*\* in April of 1916. Some two months later it was to be the turn of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division – at *Mount Sorrel*, a fierce confrontation into which units from the other Canadian Divisions were also to be drawn.

*\*Not to be confused with the village of Mont St-Éloi, France, to the north-west of Arras, in a sector with which many Canadian troops were to become familiar during 1917 and 1918.*

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian 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 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the other units of the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division.

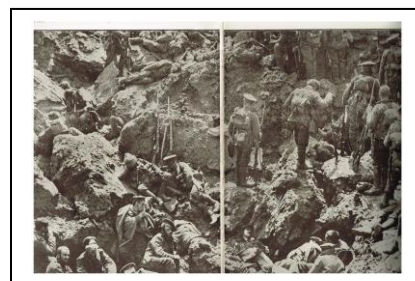
That *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* officially had taken place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it had been here that the British were to excavate a number of galleries under the German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

(Right: *The remains of a construction built at Messines in 1916 by the Germans to counter-act the British tunnellers: they sank twenty-nine wells – one seen here – from which horizontal galleries were excavated to intercept the British tunnels being dug under the German lines. – photograph from 2014*)

After a brief initial success the attack had soon become bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were to be replacing the by-then exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than had had the British, and by the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the month, when the battle had eventually been called off, both sides had found themselves back where they had been some three weeks previously – and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.

However, as previously noted, this confrontation had been a 2<sup>nd</sup> Division affair and the personnel of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the German artillery. But by this time it had been decided that the three Canadian Divisions should serve side by side – the three divisions were now to be posted in adjoining sectors.

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**(Preceding page: *A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines, possibly at St-Éloi but likely staged – from Illustration*)**

Even as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division troops had been fighting at St-Éloi, the *entire* 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division had been ordered from – and was transferring from - the *Ploegsteert Sector* to the south of Ypres once more into *the Salient*, there to be stationed between the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division to its right and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division which had already moved into the south-east sector, this to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division's immediate left.

By April 8 the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Canadians*) was to be serving in the forward trenches of its new sector.

From June 2 to 13 the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the area of the village of *Hooge, Railway Dugouts, Sanctuary Wood, Maple Copse* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps\* was to be played out. The Canadians had been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans had delivered an offensive, had then overrun the forward areas and, in fact, had ruptured the Canadian lines, an opportunity of which fortunately they were never to take advantage.

***\*While it was the newly-arrived 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division which was to bear the brunt of the German onslaught, the situation had soon become critical enough for other units to be ordered to engage the enemy.***

Then the hurriedly-contrived Canadian counter-strike of the following day, June 3, having been ordered by their British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Julian Byng, had been delivered piece-meal. It had also been poorly co-ordinated, poorly organized and poorly supported by artillery and had proved to be a horrendous and expensive experience for the Canadians.

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



The War Diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade cites June 1 of 1916 as having been...*A very quiet day with nothing to report.* The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was in Brigade Reserve at Swan Chateau at the time, having retired there from the area of *Hill 60* just days before.

**(Right: *A century later, these reminders of a violent past are to be found close to the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres, an area today protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature. Apparently the hill was much higher until the first week in June of 1917 when a the detonation of a British mine removed much of the summit on the opening day of the Battle of the Messines Ridge. – photograph from 2014*)**



**(continued)**

On June 2, once the German attack was underway and once it was clear that the enemy intentions had been much more than just a minor raid, the Battalion had been ordered forward according to a pre-arranged plan, to man trenches in the second line of defence in the vicinity of *Railway Dugouts* and the village of Zillebeke.

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

The fiasco of the Canadian counter-attack of June 3 has been briefly recounted in a previous paragraph. The 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion, a sister unit to the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, had been ordered to advance against the Germans on that second day of the confrontation, the role of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion having been to support that advance. The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been cut to shreds by enemy artillery and by his machine-gun and rifle fire; the survivors had finally been ordered to retire.



*(Right below: 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 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been left awaiting news all that day. When it had become evident that the overall counter-attack had failed - and the effort by the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion in particular - the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered to remain *in situ*, for most of the night having sheltered as best as possible from an artillery barrage which the Germans were to maintain until the following day.



At four o'clock in the morning of June 4, the unit had been relieved by the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Battalion and had retired to *Dickebusch Huts*. Nothing had been gained at the price of one-hundred forty-nine casualties.

Having been retained in reserve for two days and then having been ordered into the trenches again for the next - apparently relatively quiet - tour, on June 10 the Battalion had found itself once more in reserve. It was not to participate in the final Canadian offensive of June 12-13 which would recapture most of the lost ground, but it had been moved forward on the afternoon of the 13<sup>th</sup> to consolidate and to hold those positions against the expected German response.



Surprisingly perhaps, no counter-attack had been forthcoming. Nevertheless, all that afternoon, all night, during all the following day, again all during the night and into June 15 when the unit again was to retire, the personnel holding those trenches and dugouts had been subjected to a constant bombardment.

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

But those enemy barrages were to herald the end of the *Battle of Mount Sorrel* as they eventually had begun to subside. Gradually the forward area once again was to become relatively calm, and life in – and out of - the trenches had reverted to that daily grind of routines, rigours and oft-times perils\*.

*\*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 being the 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 posting 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)*

The subsequent summer period had again been quiet, at least in the *Ypres Salient*, although some one-hundred twenty kilometres further to the south in France, important events had been occurring, events into which the Canadians Corps was soon to be drawn. Then, in the middle of August of that 1916, the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division\* had arrived in the rear area of the Canadian sector to take its place alongside the already-established 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions.

*\*This was the last such Canadian formation to serve on the Continent. A 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division was organized but it was to remain in the United Kingdom, there to provide training for newcomers from home who would then be despatched to the four Divisions serving on the Western Front.*

It was just a single day before the August 14<sup>th</sup> disembarkation of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division in Le Havre and thus just prior to its subsequent move toward the *Kingdom of Belgium*, that the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had begun its withdrawal from Flanders back into northern France. Two days later it was to arrive in the community of Mouille where it would be billeted for eleven days and in the vicinity of which it was to undergo training.

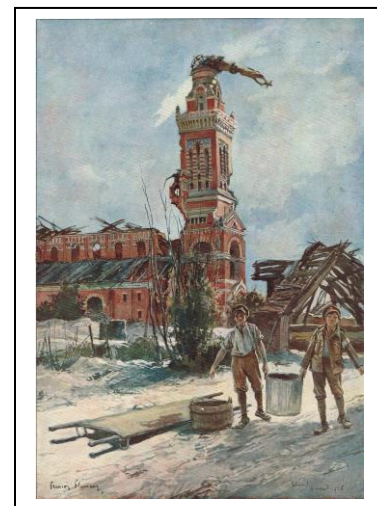


*(Right above: Canadian troops likely in trenches built for training purposes – they are too prim and proper to be the real thing – and here equipped with Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles, during the late summer or early autumn of 1916 – from The War Illustrated)*

(continued)

On August 27, after a five-hour march to the railway station at Arques, the Battalion had entrained for a further nine-hour train-journey south to Candas. Even then the unit's day was not to be ended, not until it had marched to its billets five long kilometres away.

On September 3, having by that time passed through the communities of Rubempré and Vadecourt on the way, the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion arrived at *Brickfield Camp* and thence to billets in nearby Albert on the next day. There it had remained until September 7, then from there to La Boisselle\* - the remnants of a village just to the east - for three days, having been gainfully employed during all that period supplying working-parties and carrying-parties for various tasks.



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

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



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

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

(Right below: *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 the *First 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 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.



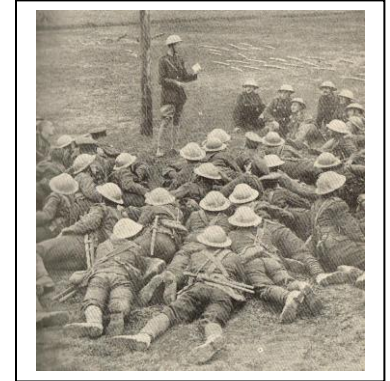
(continued)

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

Their first collective major action was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette on September 15 – but not for the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

In fact, on that day, the unit had been spending its time quite some distance away, in Army Reserve, and in the village of Rubempré through which it had passed only some two weeks previously.

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



The move to Rubempré was to prove of short duration. By September 16 the unit had been bussed back to *Brickfields*, there, and also once more in Albert, to remain until the 22<sup>nd</sup> when it had been ordered to move up to the forward area. The move had been completed on September 24 when the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had found itself serving as Brigade Support in an area known as the *Chalk Pits*.

Two days later it was to go to the offensive.

Perhaps of interest to the reader would be a list of all that a soldier of that era was expected to carry into battle – at least on that September 16, 1916: in addition to his own equipment, a rifle, steel helmet and rudimentary first-aid kit, was to be added two Mills Bombs (hand grenades), two sandbags (fortunately unfilled), one-hundred seventy rounds of small-arms ammunition, a shovel or pick, two days' rations, emergency rations and a full water-bottle.



There were also to be stretchers, full water-tins and extra bombs issued on a platoon or company basis and which had to advance with the attacking troops.

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

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade objectives for that day, according to the issued Operation Order Number 107, had been two German trenches, *Zollern*, *Hessian*, with a third, *Regina*\*, also having been listed but seemingly not to be mentioned afterwards.

Apparently by the time that the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been relieved on September 27, the War Diarist had already been pleased with the results of the day's events: *Zero Hour* having been set for thirty-five minutes past mid-day, by late afternoon both the *Zollern* and *Hessian* trenches had been taken.



***\*Regina Trench was to prove to be a harder nut to crack. Attacked with varying success on several occasions, it was not to be until the night of November 10-11 that it was finally taken by Canadian forces.***

It would appear that the episode of September 26-27 was to be the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion's only major engagement during the *First Battle of the Somme*. It was then to serve in the reserve area and the front-line trenches for a total of five or six days during subsequent tours – but without incident - and by October 17 it was ready to retire to a quieter sector further north.

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



This period had been, of course, the period during which Private Nugent had joined his unit from the 1<sup>st</sup> Entrenching Battalion. If the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary is correct, he was subsequently to spend only two days serving in the front-line trenches of *the Somme* before retiring with his battalion on October 17.

\* \* \* \* \*

Warloy, Val de Maison, Candas – there was to be no train on this occasion – Mezerolles and Denier were all stages along the semi-circular route to be taken by Private Nugent's 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion which passed to the westward then northward behind the city of Arras and beyond it until the unit reached the area of La Comte on October 28. There it was to spend five days in training and even playing sports before moving off towards Estrée-Cauchy.



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

By November 2 the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion once more was back in support and front-line trenches, on this occasion in the area of Carency and Givenchy-en-Gohelle, the latter to be found in the aforementioned shadow of a long crest of land running more or less north-south: la Crête de Vimy – *Vimy Ridge*.

(Right: *Seen from what would have been the German point of view, this is Vimy Ridge with the Canadian Memorial in the centre of the frame. The re-constructed village of Givenchy-en-Gohelle is just out of the picture to the right, standing on and at the bottom of, the slope. In the autumn of 1916 the Germans occupied the summit of Vimy Ridge as well as Givenchy itself. – photograph from 2015*)



(continued)

The following months of the autumn of 1916 and then the next winter were to be spent in the routines of trench life. The Canadian Corps units – once having served at *the Somme* - were all posted during this time in very much the same sectors, between, to the south, the city of Arras and, to the north, the town of Béthune.



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

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

Casualty figures were low during this period: once again it was the enemy's guns and his snipers which were responsible for the majority of them. In fact it was the numerous cases of sickness and the even greater number of dental problems which kept the medical services busy at this time.

Then, during the month of March the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion and, indeed, most if not all the infantry battalions and the other units of the Canadian Corps began to organize and to train for the rumoured upcoming British offensive.

(Right and right below: *The village of Mont St-Éloi, adjacent to Écoivres, at an early period of the Great War and again a century later - The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – partly destroyed in 1793 and further again in the war – are visible in both images. This St-Éloi is distinct from the village of the same name in Belgium mentioned on an earlier page. – from Le Miroir and (colour) from 2016*)

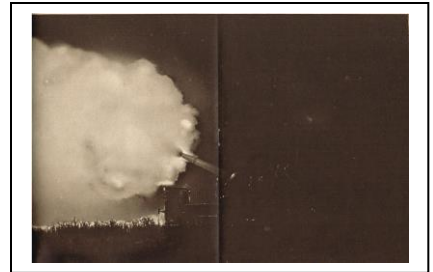


Among the multitude of exercises undertaken were to be some novel developments: use of captured enemy weapons; each unit and each man to be familiar with its and his role during the upcoming battle; the construction of ground layouts built, thanks to aerial reconnaissance, to show the terrain and positions 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.



On March 30 the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved back to the area of Écoivres and of St-Éloi for the days leading up to the attack\* and it was from there that the unit moved forward into its assembly areas on the night of April 8-9. According to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade War Diary, by the morning of April 9...3.30 a.m...All troops reported ready in Assembly trenches.

***\*On April 8 a raiding-party carried out an attack in the early morning on German positions.***



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

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



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

On April 9 of 1917 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the 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 very few positive episodes being the Canadian Corps assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

While the British campaign proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive of *le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity – with even a British brigade under 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division command – had stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

***\*It should be said that a great deal of the artillery used in the assault on Vimy Ridge was British and that a British Division – only a single Brigade, mentioned immediately above, employed on April 9 – also participated. Almost fifty per cent of the personnel who had been employed for that day were British, not to mention those whose contribution – such as those who dug the tunnels - allowed for it to happen.***

The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions had been handed responsibility for the *Ridge* itself; to their immediate right had been the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, attacking in the area of the village of Thélus on the southern slope, and to the right again, the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division which had been ordered to clear the area lower down the slope in the direction of the village of Roclincourt and the city of Arras itself.

On April 10 the Canadians finished clearing the area of *Vimy Ridge* of the few remaining pockets of resistance and continued to consolidate the area in anticipation of the expected German counter-attacks.

(continued)

**(Right: Canadian troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, equipped – perhaps burdened - with all the paraphernalia of war, advancing across No-Man’s-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration)**



There had on that day been the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on the previous day’s success proved to be impossible. Thus the Germans closed the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.



**(Right above: The caption which accompanies the photograph says merely that these are Canadian soldiers and their prisoners on the battlefield of Vimy Ridge. – from Illustration)**

The following are excerpts from Appendices of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade - of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division - War Diary entry for April 9, 1917:

**At 5.30 a.m. our barrage was opened...**

**...At 5.40 a.m. our O.P’s\* reported that the barrage was excellent on our front, and on Right and Left, and they could see our troops advancing behind it in good order...**

**\*Observation Posts**

**...The enemy’s Artillery barrage was wild and scattered...His machine guns, however, were active and caused us many casualties amongst our leading wave... It was noticed that both machine gunners and snipers appeared to be picked men...and in many cases fought to the last.**

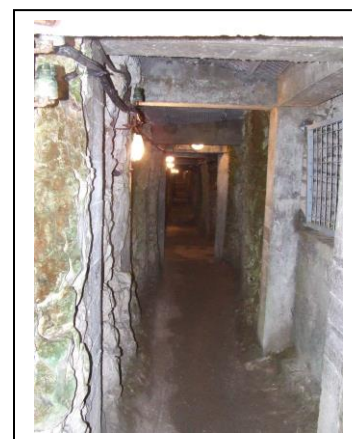
**All three Assaulting Battalions suffered considerably from machine gun and rifle fire: on the left, “A” and “B” Companies of the 10<sup>th</sup> Can. Inf. Battalion came under particularly heavy fire...**

**...By 5.50 a.m., our men were reported to have reached the LENS-ARRAS Road...**

**...On the Left, the 10<sup>th</sup> Can. Inf. Battalion had only one Officer left unwounded, with their Third and Fourth Waves...**

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

**(continued)**



However, despite any and all difficulties, the resistance in front of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade was eventually overcome. The objectives of the first day had been reached and taken by ninety-three that morning and the advance had thereupon been halted to allow for consolidation of the newly-captured positions. During that evening the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion retired to its original front line and support positions.



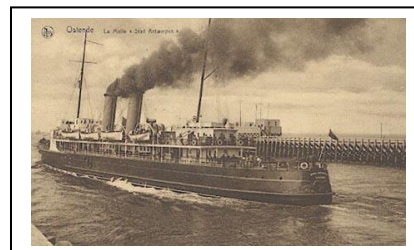
(Right: *The memorial to the fallen of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division at Vimy Ridge stands in a field on the outskirts of the reconstructed village of Thélus. It was set there during Christmas of 1917. – photograph from 2017*)

By that time, however, Private Nugent was on his way to hospital and on April 10 was admitted into the 7<sup>th</sup> General Hospital situated in or near the coastal town of Étapes.

\* \* \* \* \*

His wound upon admission judged to be severe, Private Nugent, according to his medical files, had incurred a bullet wound to the right thigh... *Bullet passing through fleshy part of right thigh, some slight haemorrhage.*

Private Nugent was now to spend seven days in the 7<sup>th</sup> General Hospital where during that time it was decided to return him to the United Kingdom for further treatment and convalescence. To that end, on April 17, he was placed on board the Belgian hospital ship *Stad Antwerpen* for the cross-Channel return journey and, two days later, he was receiving care in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Western General Hospital in Manchester.



(Right above: *A peace-time image of the Belgian ship (later hospital ship) Stad Antwerpen is from the Simplon – Passenger Ship Website.*)

The treatment apparently continued in hospital in Manchester until Private Nugent was considered to be well enough to be transferred to the Mechanics' Institute Auxiliary Hospital at Aston-under-Lyne on May 24, to a second such hospital on a certain Princess Street – the remainder of the address appears not to be recorded – on May 29, and then to the Canadian Military Convalescent Hospital at *Woodcote Park* in the horse-racing town of Epsom, Surrey, on June 1.

Private Nugent was released from *Woodcote Park* on June 8, to be then *taken on strength* by the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian (*Reserve*) Battalion at the time stationed at *Camp Bramshott*, a Canadian military complex in the county of Hampshire. However, he was likely not to report to *Bramshott* for a further ten days.

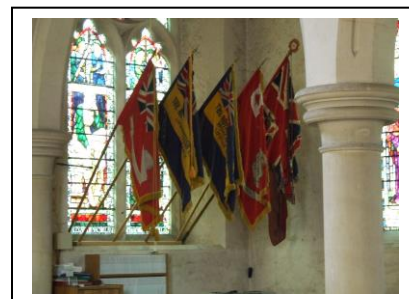
Military personnel discharged from hospital in the United Kingdom – this likely excluded venereal disease cases - were thereupon granted a ten-day furlough before being required to report for duty to their units.

(continued)

This, of course, allowed British soldiers the time to visit their families. For troops from the Dominions, however, such was not always possible; and the distances involved meant that many soldiers were to spend years away from home.

Private Nugent was to spend his leave at a Rest Station in the vicinity of the town of Stockport, near Manchester, his address during this time recorded as: *c/o Mrs. Higdon, Highfield Hall, Bradbury near Stockport.*

His furlough terminated, he then reported to the 9<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion at *Camp Bramshott* with which unit he was to serve for only a matter of days. On August 21 he was transferred temporarily to the nominal roll of the *Alberta Regimental Depot*, it also at *Bramshott*, before, three days later, being *struck off strength* by it to be *taken on strength* – bureaucratically – by his former unit in France, the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Canadians*).



(Right above: *Royal Canadian Legion flags amongst others adorn the interior of St. Mary's Church in the English village of Bramshott.* – photograph from 2016)

It was likely on that same night, August 24-25, that he once more crossed the English Channel, on the next day to report to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Base Depot, established in proximity to Étapes. On this occasion he likely travelled via the English south-coast port of Southampton as well as Le Havre on the French side.



(Right above: *The Graveyard of St. Mary's Church in which lie Canadian Protestant and Church of England soldiers, one of whom is a Newfoundlander* – photograph from 2017)

The Base Depot authorities despatched Private Nugent to re-join the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion on August 30. Two days later, he was one of a re-enforcement draft of ninety-eight *other ranks* to report *to duty* in Caucourt, a community some twenty kilometres to the north-west of the city of Arras, where his Battalion had withdrawn nine days before.

\* \* \* \* \*

The days following the one on which Private Nugent had been wounded were to be spent for the most part by the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion in support positions. Then on April 15 the unit had withdrawn once more to the vicinity of *Écoivres-St-Éloi*, there to remain for eleven days refitting, reorganizing, bathing, finding new clothing, playing football, enjoying – one supposes - a concert by the Battalion Band and even, on occasion, having taken the opportunity to rest.

Having lost almost exactly fifty per cent of its effective strength – the numbers to be seen immediately below - on April 9 at *Vimy Ridge*, it was, of course, also the time for the unit to re-enforce.



The casualties that had been sustained by the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, as recorded by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade War Diarist – from mid-night of April 8-9 until mid-night twenty-four hours later – had been as follows: *killed in action*, eighty (*all ranks*); *wounded*, three-hundred seven (*all ranks*). The unit had gone into its assembly areas on that early morning, seven-hundred sixty-three strong (*all ranks*).

(Preceding page: *Canadian personnel and German prisoners undertake the evacuation of the wounded from Vimy Ridge on a light railway which is still in the process of being constructed.* – from *Illustration*)

Having moved out of the forward area in mid-April, the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to remain in the area of Écoivres-St-Éloi before having moved on May 5 further north to the vicinity of Ruitz. The unit was to still be there when the *Battle of Arras* officially had drawn to its conclusion on May 15, and it in fact was now to remain there until the end of the month before having moved once more – for a single day after having marched for more than twenty kilometres – back to *St-Éloi* on June 1.

From there on June 2 it had been ordered just to the south of nearby Neuville-St-Vaast to the Brigade Support Area before having been told to return to *St-Éloi* once more on the ninth day of the month.

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

The Canadians were to be major contributors to this effort, and the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to play an important role in one of the hardest fought of the campaign's actions: *Hill 70*.

(Right: *An example of the conditions under which the troops were to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)



(Right below: *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 – 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 had been high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – to be the key feature in the entire area and its capture perhaps more important than that of the city of Lens itself.



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

**The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had passed through the area of Les Brébis on August 13 on its way to battle, and had there...picked up a supply of Grenades and 48 hours rations.**

**August 14...Battalion in Front Line Positions, in Right of Left Sub-Section, LOOS SECTOR... Enemy's artillery was comparatively quiet... (Excerpts from the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entries for August 13 and 14)**

**(Excerpt from the Appendices of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade War Diary relative to the Canadian attack by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions on Hill 70) At midnight on the 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> August the Canadian Infantry ...moved forward. The 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry was much harassed in moving to its assembly positions by a bombardment of gas shells but succeeded in assembling and getting ready for the attack at 3.50 a.m. on 15<sup>th</sup> August, having sustained some casualties...**

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

**(Right: The mining village of Loos-en-Gohelle as it was already in 1915, before the arrival of the Canadians to the area: the structures atop the pit-heads in the centre of the photograph became known to the British troops – and thus later to the Canadians – as Tower Bridge. – from Le Miroir)**

**...As laid down in 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade Operational Order...our Artillery and machine gun moving barrage opened at Zero Hour (4.25 a.m.), and Zero plus two minutes, the assault was launched (by the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Battalions), the troops advancing from their assembly positions...**

**On the left-hand side of the attack the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had eventually captured the German front-line positions, having sustained heavy casualties in hard fighting. Next to fall had been the enemy support positions and the objective designated as the BLUE LINE, once again the fighting having been described as...bitter...and in many cases as...one to the death\*. At this point the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Battalions ceased their forward progress to allow the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Battalions to pass through their lines.**

**\*Unfortunately, the Appendix provides no chronological order of events. All that may be surmised is that it was still relatively early in the morning as the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was already reporting its progress by five minutes after nine.**

**(continued)**





A further attack had been made later in the day after several delays before, at seven in the evening, the Germans had launched one of their own. It was not to be particularly successful as the Canadian Artillery fire had been well directed and had anticipated the enemy's movements. Such was apparently to be the case on a number of further occasions during that evening and night.

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

Another attack had then been made, *zero hour* having been set at four o'clock in the afternoon of August 16. Once again the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Battalions had been the first to move forward, the 10<sup>th</sup> eventually – despite heavy fighting once more – having been led by *a...party along a communication trench, bombing out the enemy, then placing a block as far forward as our barrage would permit...the position consolidated by digging a trench...* This captured ground was to be retained during all the following hours despite several attempts made the enemy to dislodge the Canadians.

As on the previous evening, the Germans were to mass for a counter-offensive on several occasions. And again, as on the previous evening, a well-prepared Canadian Artillery, once apprised of the situation, had been able to forestall the enemy intentions.

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

Later that night the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade had relieved the battalions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion having fallen back to the BLUE LINE at about 2.30 on the morning of August 17. The unit had then spent the entire next day in that position, all the while having incurred the intermittent attentions of the German artillery.



The enemy barrage, latterly including gas shells, was to continue into the next day, August 18, during the morning of which both the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalions had been withdrawn – wearing their anti-gas respirators - further afield, to the area of Les Brébis.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade of four battalions – of which the 10<sup>th</sup> was one - had gone into the action with a total of thirty-three hundred seventy personnel. Of this number sixteen-hundred fifty-one were subsequently reported as *killed in action, wounded or missing in action* – a casualty rate of just under fifty per cent.

The Battalion had been on the move again later on the same August 18, to withdraw into the reserve area in the vicinity of Bruay, Barlin, Caucourt and Aix-Noulette where it had remained until September 13. And it was during the time spent at Caucourt that a re-enforcement draft of ninety-eight *other ranks* – Private Nugent one of that number – had reported *to duty* on September 1.

\* \* \* \* \*

(continued)

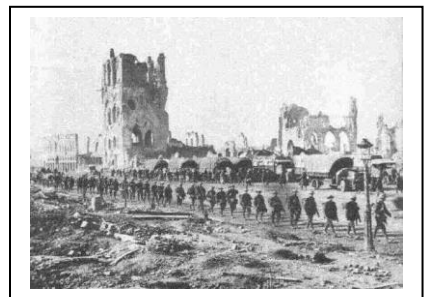
Eight days followed during which the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion found itself in support and front-line positions in the *Lievin Sector* just outside the city of Lens. A number of brief infantry actions were to take place on the final day of that tour, September 21, inflicting a total of twenty-one casualties, but of course, this was hardly to be compared to the confrontation of a month earlier at *Hill 70*.

The Canadian-led operations in the Lens-B ethune Sector had still been incomplete towards the end of August when the British High Command decided to cancel any further actions there other than defensive ones\*. Things were not going altogether as had been planned in that summer campaign further north and the British were short of men. Now the Australians, New Zealanders – the Anzacs - and Canadians were to be called upon to remedy that shortage.

*\*This did not, however, preclude raids – still encouraged and still a favourite of Haig and the British High Command.*

The Lens-B ethune campaign thus having been drawn to a close, it was to be only some six weeks hence that the Canadians were next to be ordered to join the ongoing battle in Belgium, to the north-east of Ypres. Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was to become better known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that - ostensibly - was one of the British Army’s objectives.

(Right: *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 - after the *Anzacs\** - it was they who were to shoulder a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions which spear-headed the assault, with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions in reserve.

*\*The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps*

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



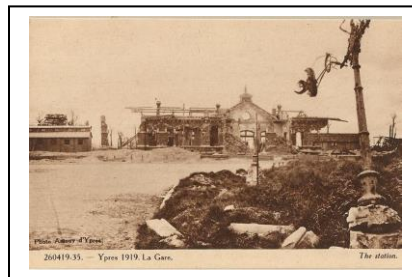
(Right: *Somewhere, perhaps anywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the dreadful autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

The final days before Private Nugent and his 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion began the transfer towards Belgium had been spent at Gouy-Servins undergoing routine training, inspections and parades. The unit had then moved several kilometres to the north-west to Houdain, there for much of the same, before, on October 20, travelling northwards, through Busnes and Steenbecque, to Le Nieppe, to the west of the larger centre of Hazebrouck, where it was billeted.

Private Nugent's unit stayed in the vicinity of Le Nieppe\* until November 4 when at eight o'clock in the morning it marched to the station in Erlingham. From there a train took the battalion into Belgium, to the community of Brandhœk – about halfway between Ypres and Poperinghe – where it was billeted in *Derby Camp*. During the following three days the War Diarist reported the presence of a number of enemy aircraft which on several occasions dropped bombs in the area. There was apparently no damage reported to either personnel or equipment of the Battalion.

*\*Not to be confused with the much larger French community of Nieppe, to be found almost astride the Franco-Belgian frontier just to the west of Armentières.*

On the third day after its arrival in Belgium, the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion boarded another train for the short journey to the area of embattled Ypres where further billets awaited it, both in the city and in the north-east suburb of St-Jean, already known to any veterans in the unit of the *Second Battle of Ypres*, fought by them in 1915. The Battalion War Diary reported November 7 as having been yet another day on which the unit was bombed by enemy aircraft, although again no casualties seem to have been incurred.



(Right above: *The remnants of the railway station just outside the southern ramparts of Ypres where the Battalion detrained – the image is from 1919 – from a vintage post-card*)

The Canadian Corps by this time, after a week of rest following its efforts of late October and early November, was again to take the offensive on November 10. To this end the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion withdrew into reserve on November 9 to prepare for the role that it had been ordered to play.



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

Excerpts from 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion Order No. 88 of 8-11-18:

**...9. On the night of ZERO DAY, the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion will relieve the 7<sup>th</sup>...**

**10. This unit (the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion) will be equipped as if they were going to make the initial assault and will be prepared to make an attack from a flank or do any other work that may be required...**

**11. The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion will at all times be ready to assist in the relaying of casualties toward the rear and the carrying forward of material and supplies...**

**12. The area allotted to the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion is subjected to very heavy enemy shelling. Company Commanders will take all possible means of protecting their personnel, and where no protection exists, no time will be lost in entrenching or utilizing some sort of shelter...**

(continued)

**13, At one hour after ZERO Hour, Companies will be fully equipped and prepared for any emergency that may arise, keeping in shelters until the necessities of the operation call for action...**

**19. If the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion is called upon to make an assault, selected men will be told off to act as snipers...**

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

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

**Excerpts from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary entry**

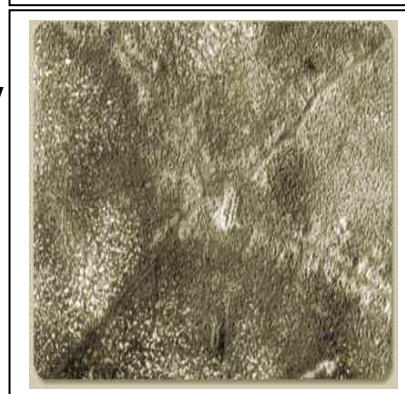
**At 6.10 a.m. our barrage opened and the attack commenced. On the left section the enemy put down a heavy barrage...and also opened a heavy fire upon the whole forward area, the fire increasing throughout the morning... The barrage was maintained by the enemy throughout the evening... As the attack progressed, white lights showed that our objectives were won.**

**At 7.00 a.m. (the following morning) the rain started and gradually increased to a heavy and soaking storm, increasing further the awful conditions under which communications were maintained.**

**The casualty numbers show the ferocity of the fighting: the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade reported twelve-hundred sixty-nine casualties all told for the two-day operation; the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, having been held in reserve, incurred just under fifty percent of the numbers incurred by the three other battalions of the Brigade, a total of one-hundred sixty-four killed, wounded or missing.**

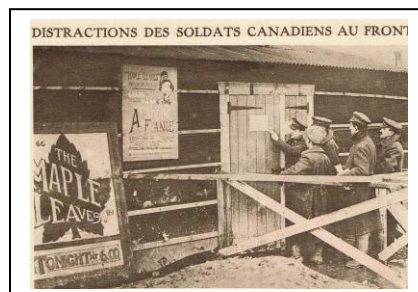
**(Right: In the stone of the Menin Gate at Ypres (today Ieper) there are carved the names of British and Empire (Commonwealth) troops who fell in the Ypres Salient during the Great War and who have no known last resting-place. There are almost fifty-five thousand remembered there; nevertheless, so great 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)**

**At the end of the second day of the fighting, November 11, Private Nugent's Battalion withdrew to the relative shelter of "C" Camp in the vicinity of Wieltje where it was reported as... "Settled in Bilets" by 10.30 P.M. Enemy planes again interrupted the entire day and evening in the whole area and the unit suffered casualties among both the personnel and the horses of the Transport Section.**



The following days were to witness the retirement of the Battalion from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Ypres: it returned to Brandhoek by train and from there marched back to billets in *Derby Camp*. Having remained there for two days, the unit was then taken by bus as far as the northern French community of Fouqueroeuil – south-west of Béthune – where a bath and a change of clothing were likely the highlights of the next day, November 16.

Two days later again, Private Nugent and his comrades-in-arms undertook a four-hour march to arrive in *Vancouver Camp* in the area of Château-de-la-Haie. Four days there and then the unit was ordered to serve an extended tour of nineteen days in front-line positions in the *Lens Sector* and support trenches at Lievin.



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

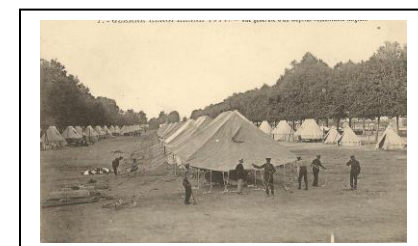
(Right: *The city and mining-centre of Lens as it was by the end of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



(Excerpt from 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary for November 27, 1917)  
*Battalion in Front Line Positions LENS*

*The enemy's Artillery was normal throughout the day. During the evening he threw a few heavies into LIEVIN and rear area. Our Artillery was fairly active shelling Fosse 1 and vicinity. At 5.50 PM a light barrage of 18 pounders was put down... Our Stokes guns fired on enemy strong points at intervals during the day. Our planes were very active...*

It was on this day, November 27 - his 'B' Company having relieved 'D' Company in the forward trenches on that previous night - that Private Nugent was wounded and eventually evacuated from the front to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Bruay.



Casualty report:- *"Died of Wounds"* (Shrapnel Wounds penetrating Abdomen, Back, Right Arm and Legs) at No. 22 Casualty Clearing Station.

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

Brother to John - cited as his next-of-kin - in or about 1916 resident of 72, Water Street, St. John's, and of Richard, his address at about the time of enlistment *c/o Mrs. M.A. Breen of Kilbride Road, St. John's West*, he appears to have left behind him no family information other than this.

(continued)

Private Nugent was reported by the Officer Commanding the 22<sup>nd</sup> Casualty Clearing Station as having *died of wounds* on November 28, 1917.

Edward Nugent had enlisted at the *apparent* age of thirty-eight years and five months: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, July 5, 1877 (from attestation papers)\*.

*\*The birth of an Edward Nugent in St. John's, son of William James Nugent and of Elizabeth L. Nugent (née Mahoney), on July 5, 1877, is documented in Ancestry.ca. However, he is also recorded as having died in the United States in 1945.*

Private Edward Nugent 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 25, 2023.



