

**Private Leslie Adolphus Oldford, Number 466429 of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Canadians), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge.**

**(Right: The image of the 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 having been that of a farmer, it is for a large part thanks to a web-site dedicated to Leslie Adolphus Oldford and to the *Oldford Family* of the period – with much of it confirmed by the 1916 Alberta Census – that the following pre-War information is available.

He apparently left the Dominion of Newfoundland in 1904 – here the Census disagrees, citing 1906 – with his older sister Ada Hope and her husband Ronald Pye and travelled across the country to the District of Alberta, the year before it became a Canadian province in 1905. They settled in the area of Red Deer where they were joined two years later, in 1906, by their parents and also by a number of siblings.

One of these was Leslie's younger brother, John Ellis Caleb, with whom he began to work. By the time of Leslie's enlistment he and brother John were farming together at Horn Hill, Penhold, an area just to the south of Red Deer, having struck up a partnership with each other. As for any other activities, we know only that Leslie was a member of the local *Penhold Rifle Association* – but nothing more has been recorded.

All the relevant documents – his attestation papers, a first medical report, and his first pay-records – agree that it was on July 8 that Leslie Adolphus Oldford enlisted. On that day he presented himself before a doctor in the city of Red Deer – incorporated in only 1913 - for an examination which was to pronounce him as...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force*.

He then attested before a magistrate after which it was on that same date that the Commanding Officer of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (*Edmonton*), Lieutenant Colonel George Brown McLeod, brought the formalities of enlistment to a conclusion when he declared – on paper – that...*Leslie Adolphus Oldford...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

Private Oldford was thereupon *taken on strength* by Lieutenant Colonel McLeod's unit, the 63<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Overseas Battalion (*Edmonton*).

It was now to be some nine months before the 63<sup>rd</sup> Battalion departed for *overseas service* and it may have been that a number of its newly-recruited soldiers were allowed to return to work for the remainder of the farming season – although this has yet to be confirmed. Nor does it appear to be recorded where the unit may have trained and quartered for the winter months although Red Deer is recorded as having acquired – or was in the process of acquiring – an armoury in the year 1913.

It was to be on April 22 of 1916, after a lengthy train-ride across more than half the entire country, that the 63<sup>rd</sup> Battalion boarded the *Canadian Pacific Ocean Services* vessel *Metagama* in the harbour at St. John, New Brunswick\*.

(Right: *The image of the trans-Atlantic liner Metagama is from the Metagama – Great Ships web-site.*)



(continued)

*\*Metagama was not a troopship as such unlike her requisitioned sister, Missanabie, but the vessel often carried Canadian troops to the United Kingdom in her third-class quarters on her normal, commercial runs.*

Private Oldford's unit was not alone in taking trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom. Apart from civilian passengers there were also the personnel of the 4<sup>th</sup> Draft, Lord Strathcona's Horse; of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Draft, Fort Gary Horse; and of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft, Canadian Mounted Rifles Depot.

*Metagama* sailed on the day which followed Private Oldford's embarkation, April 23, to dock after an uneventful twelve-day voyage in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool. From there the 63<sup>rd</sup> Battalion travelled in a south-easterly direction to the vicinity of the garrison town of Lydd in the county of Kent\*. There Private Oldford was to spend the next month in final training and in awaiting his despatch to the Continent to active service.

*\*During the Great War it was also an important artillery centre.*

The order arrived during the first week of that June of 1916. On June 4 he was transferred to the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion at nearby *Shorncliffe*, from which unit he was *struck off strength* only two days later, on June 6, in order to be attached to the 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion (*Canadians*), already serving on the Continent.



(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*)

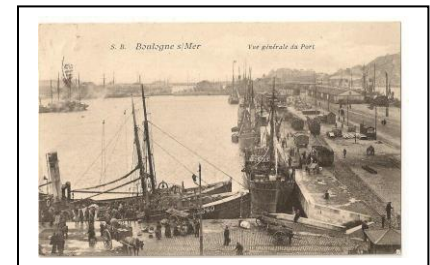
Private Oldford surely took ship to France on the night of June 7-8 as he is documented as having arrived at the Canadian base Depot on that second date. From *Shorncliffe* he had passed through the English town and harbour of Folkestone to disembark on the French coast in the port of Boulogne. From there he was transported south by train to the Canadian Base Depot at Rouelles, situated near the industrial port-city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine where he reported.



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

On the very next day Private Oldford was on the move once more as he left the Canadian Base Depot to join his new unit. He reported *to duty* with the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion just some twenty-four hours later again, on June 10, in Belgium.



The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary does not agree: its author has it as forty-eight hours later that, on June 11, two re-enforcement drafts – of two-hundred sixty-four and of six *other ranks* – arrived in the *Dominion Lines*. This was Brigade Reserve and the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had retired to there only the day before.

Whether the date of his arrival was on June 10 or 11 is likely of no major importance: it remains that Private Oldford had now reached the *Western Front*.

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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 would be Belgian soil on which it was 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 of 1915 – during which it had been stationed in the *Fleurbaix Sector* in proximity to the northern French town of Armentières, a relatively quiet introduction to the conflict.

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.

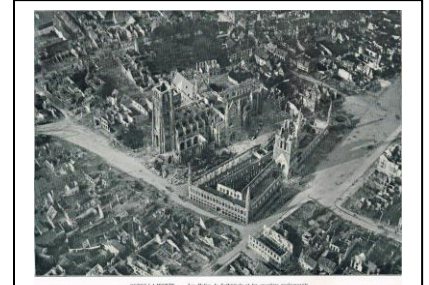




(Preceding page: *Troops being transported to the forward-area positions in busses: apparently some preferred to walk. – from Illustration*)

(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 Oldford – 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 – by anyone - 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 toxic 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.



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By 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 was to 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.

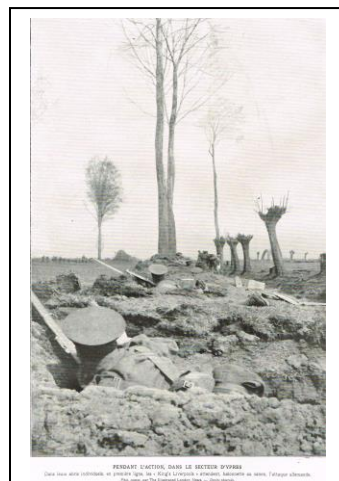
At about eight o'clock that evening the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, in co-operation with the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion, had launched a counter-attack against the German trenches. The attack had succeeded in carrying the objectives but a forewarned enemy had inflicted such losses on the force that the 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 serve under 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 – 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 morrow again it had been ordered to move back into positions on the western 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*.

It did so later that same evening, then 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.

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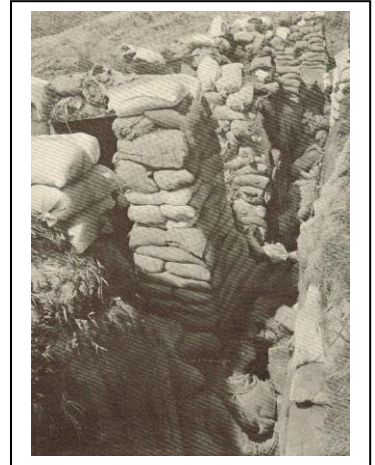


There had followed eight days of rest – perhaps as restful as it ever got during the *Great War* – before the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered south, on May 14, further down the line into France, there to fight in offensive actions near places by the names of Festubert and Givenchy.

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 by then 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: 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.***

***(Right above: 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.***

**(continued)**

***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 had been 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 was to 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.***

(continued)

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.

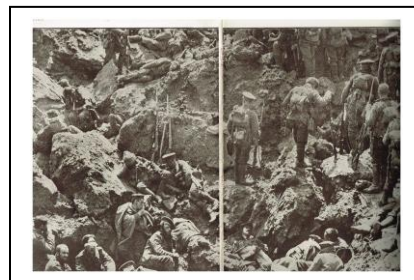
That *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* officially had taken place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it had been here that the British were to excavate a number of galleries under the German 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.



(Right above: *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 responsibility.

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 Canadian High Command had been preparing an attack of its 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*)



On June 2, once the German attack had been underway and once it had become clear that the enemy intentions had been much more than just a minor raid, the 10<sup>th</sup> 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.

(Right: *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)



And it was, of course, during this time in reserve, that Private Oldford and two-hundred sixty-nine other re-enforcements arrived to report to the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

\* \* \* \* \*

Private Oldford's new unit was not to participate in the final Canadian offensive of June 12-13 which would recapture most of the lost ground, but it was ordered moved forward on the afternoon of the 13<sup>th</sup> to consolidate and to hold those re-taken positions against the expected German response.

Surprisingly perhaps, no counter-attack was to be 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 troops holding those trenches and dugouts were subjected to a constant bombardment.

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

The subsequent summer period was to again be quiet, at least in the *Ypres Salient*, although some one-hundred twenty kilometres further to the south in France, important events were occurring, events into which the Canadians Corps was soon to be drawn.

(continued)

***\*During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, perhaps a hundred metres or so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former 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: 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 midst of August of that 1916, the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division\* began to arrive 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 arrive 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.**

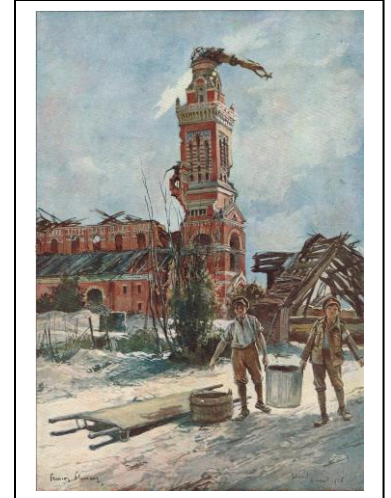


***(Right above: Canadian troops likely in trenches built for training purposes – they are too prim and proper to be the real thing – and here equipped with Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles, during the late summer or early autumn of 1916 – from The War Illustrated)***

**On August 27, after a five-hour march to the railway station at Arques, the Battalion 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 then 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 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: *Canadian soldiers at work carrying water in Albert, the town's already-damaged basilica to be seen 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 below: *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 was to cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.



(Right below: *The Canadian Memorial which stands by the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcelette – 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.



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.

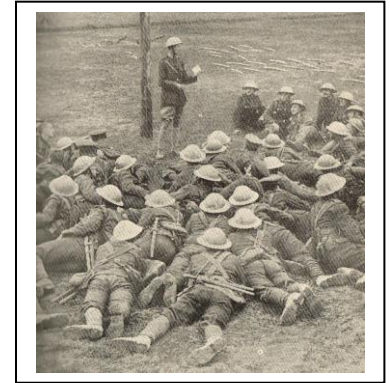
Their first collective major action was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcelette on September 15 – but this was not so for the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

In fact, on that day, the unit was 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.

(continued)



(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*)



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 was ordered to move up to the forward area. The move was completed on September 24 when the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to find itself serving as Brigade Support in a forward 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.*

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



(continued)



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 to the north.

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



But Private Oldford was not to accompany the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion on its withdrawal. He had fallen during the fighting of September 26<sup>th</sup>, the opening day of the *Battle of the Thiepval Ridge*. There were apparently no witnesses to his death and his remains were never found.

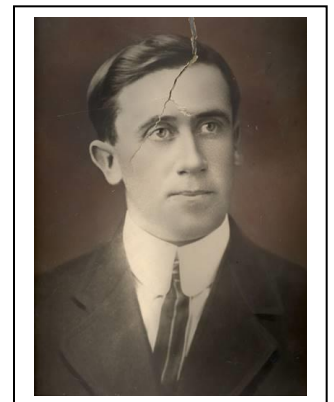
The son of John Ellis Oldford, fisherman and perhaps owner of the schooner *Cherub*, and of Amy Brown Oldford (née *Reader*), of Musgrave Town, Newfoundland, then later of Penhold, Alberta (see above), he was also brother to Arthur-Daniel, Laura Isabel, Tryphena, Mary Blanche, to Samuel Snowden, Ada Hope, Viola, John Ellis Caleb, to Nellie and apparently half-brother to Minnie.

As of May 1, 1916, he had allotted a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay to brother John Ellis Caleb Oldford. He had also penned a will on June 7, 1916, in which he had left his livestock, grain and cash to brother John Ellis Caleb, then bequeathed the remainder of his everything to his father.

Private Leslie Adolphus Oldford was reported as *missing in action* on September 26 of 1916. Some seven months later, on April 20, 1917, his record was amended: *Previously reported Missing, now for official purposes presumed to have died on or since 26/9/16*.

Leslie Adolphus Oldford had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-eight years: date of birth in Musgrave Town, Newfoundland, June 24, 1887 (from attestation papers and also Methodist parish records).

(Right: *The photograph of Leslie Adolphus Oldford is from the Oldford Family web-site which bears his name.*)



Private Leslie Adolphus Oldford 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.

