



Private Timothy O'Neill, Number 3082337 of the 87th Battalion (Canadian Grenadier Guards), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in the Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery, Arras: Grave reference VI. F. 4.

(Right: The image of the Canadian Grenadier Guards cap badge is from the Regimental Rogue web-site.)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *locomotive fireman* – feeding the fire to produce the steam – Timothy O’Neill appears to have left behind him very little information a propos either: firstly, his move from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the United States of America where he was residing – at 40 Winthrop Street, Charlestown, Suffolk, Massachusetts – just prior to joining the Canadian Army; or secondly, his journey from there to the city of Montréal where he was by February 28 of 1918.

It was on that date that he presented himself at a mobilization centre for both enlistment and attestation and, on the morrow, March 1, for a medical examination – which found him... *“A” Fit for Overseas Service*. It was just as well that it did, for by that March 1 the enlistment process had already apparently come to its conclusion on the evening of that February 28, when the commanding officer of the 1st Depot Battalion, 1st Quebec Regiment, Major Charles M. McKeegan, declared – on paper – that... *O’NEIL (sic), Timothy...having been final approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*. He was then immediately *taken on strength* by the Major’s Battalion*.

Since the task of the Depot Battalions was to instil only a minimum of training and discipline in its incoming recruits before despatching them to the Canadian Reserve Battalions in the United Kingdom to complete the job, it is perhaps not surprising that Private O’Neill was to spend only some three weeks in uniform in Canada before being ordered overseas.

On March 24, 1918, the 6th Draft of the 1st Depot Battalion of the 1st Quebec Regiment embarked onto His Majesty’s Transport *Scandinavian* in the harbour at Halifax. Undoubtedly other units joined them on board for passage to the United Kingdom, but the pertinent files are incomplete and the information unavailable.



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

Scandinavian sailed on the following day to dock in the English west-coast port city of Liverpool some nine days later, on April 3. From there Private O’Neill’s Draft was transferred southward by train to the Canadian military complex by that time established in the county of Hampshire and close to the villages of Liphook and Bramshott, the latter having lent its name to the camp.



(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*)

Private O’Neill was now to spend the following four months and a half at *Camp Bramshott* undergoing the mandatory quarantine before the fourteen necessary weeks of training. To that end he was *taken on strength* by the 23rd Canadian Reserve Battalion on the day of – or after - his arrival there, April 4.

By mid-August he was prepared for his move to *active service* on the Continent and was nominally transferred to the 87th Battalion on the 17th of the month. This, Private O'Neill's new unit, had by that time had already been serving in France for two years.

Likely travelling via the south-coast port of Southampton and then the French industrial port-city of le Havre on the far side of the English Channel, by August 19 he had reported to the Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Étapes, apparently one of only five arrivals to the Depot on that day – the number was usually in the hundreds if not higher. Having undergone the formalities required, four days later, on August 23* he was forwarded to the *Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp* at Calonne-Picouart, some eighty kilometres to the east, his final stop before despatch to join the 87th Battalion.

**The Canadian Infantry Base Depot notes no departures on that August 23. Thus the date may well have been the following day when three-thousand eight-hundred fifteen reinforcements were sent from there to the Reinforcement Camp.*

The exact date on which Private O'Neill was eventually ordered on his way is not clear; however, it was within the next few days as, on August 29, 1918, the 87th Battalion War Diarist reported that... *Forty-three O.R.s joined the Battalion and were posted to different Coys.*

On that day the 87th Battalion had only just arrived in the area of Neuville Vitasse, to the south east of Arras. It had just completed its transfer from the *Amiens Sector* (see below) and was readying itself for the next imminent offensive.

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The 87th Battalion (*Canadian Grenadier Guards*) was an element of the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 4th Canadian Division, the last such Canadian formation to be despatched to *active service* on the Western Front during the Great War*.

**There was also a Canadian 5th Division but, once having been formed, it remained in the United Kingdom for the duration of the Great War, for training and re-enforcement purposes.*

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

The 87th Battalion had arrived in France some twenty-four months before Private O'Neill, on August 12 of 1916, landing in the French port-city of Le Havre. Three days later the unit and the entire 4th Canadian Division had been on their way north, to the area of the Franco-Belgian frontier and then beyond, to serve for six weeks in a sector to the south-west of the remnants of the medieval city of Ypres (today *Ieper*).

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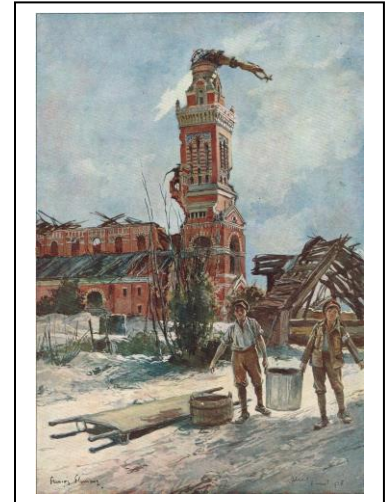
(Preceding page: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2nd Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)

On October 3, 1916, having been withdrawn from Belgium only days before to undergo training in north-western France, the 87th Battalion had been ordered by the British High Command to move south, to the area of *the Somme*, where the wretched British summer offensive had by now become a murderous campaign of the autumn as well.

Having travelled from the north at first by train and then on foot, the unit had arrived in the vicinity of the provincial town of Albert a week later. There the Battalion bivouacked, at *Brickfields Camp*.

Meanwhile, by early September of 1916, when Canadian troops had first made their appearance in that particular theatre of the War, the *First Battle of the Somme* had already 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 space of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

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



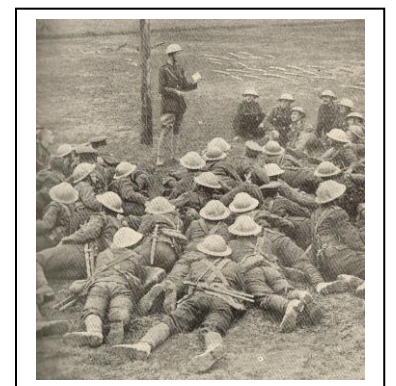
On the first day of *First Somme* all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1, 1916, at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

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



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 at the end of August and beginning of September to become part of a third general offensive.

Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette, a confrontation which was to occur some seven weeks before the arrival of the 87th Battalion on the scene.



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(Preceding page: *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 87th Battalion had been ordered into the forward trenches on October 17, but it was not to be until six minutes past mid-day on October 21 that the unit had put its attack and had captured the *Regina Trench* strong-point, an objective which had previously proved to be impregnable.

This success was unfortunately to be short-lived and *Regina Trench* had subsequently been ceded back to the Germans following a counter-attack.

The Battalion had then retired but had remained in the area of Pozières until October 30 when it was to move into billets, further to the rear, in the town of Albert itself.



In November the unit had moved back into the area of *Regina Trench* on two further occasions: the first was to pass with little incident; however, during the second tour, the Battalion had been part of a further attack on November 18. *Regina Trench* having been definitively captured by that time, the objective on this date had been to occupy a number of adjacent German positions. The operation had been only partially successful and the unit had incurred a total of another two-hundred thirty-two *killed, wounded and missing in action*.



(Right above and right: *Some of the remnants of the village of Pozières as it was after the Great War, in 1919 – and as it is a century later. The Australian War Memorial may be seen in both images. – colour photograph from 2016*)

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

Relieved on the day following the attack, November 19, it was to be three days later again, on November 22 that the 87th Battalion had begun to march away from *the Somme*. By December 4 the unit had marched in a semi-circular itinerary – to the westward and then to the northward - to the community of Fréwillers, some twenty-five kilometres north-west of the city of Arras.



From that time until the last week in March of the following year, 1917, the unit – as with most other Canadian units – had been posted in the sectors of the line between Béthune in the north and Arras in the south. There, during that winter of 1916-1917, they had settled into the daily routines, rigours and perils of life in the trenches*.

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

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

(Right: 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 winter of 1916-1917 had been 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 apparently loathed these operations.



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

Casualties were to be few during this entire period and, as ever, it was the enemy artillery to which those that occurred were mainly due – some two-thirds of all *Great War* casualties were the result of shell-fire. It was to be sickness and, perhaps surprisingly, a great deal of dental work which were to keep the medical facilities busy during the winter of 1916-1917.

On March 26 the 87th Battalion had been relieved from its then-current tour in the front-line positions and had been withdrawn to a rest area at Chateau de la Haie. From the next day until April 2 the unit had undergone extensive training for the upcoming British offensive, so whether there was much *rest* to be enjoyed is to be speculated – but then, no-one had been shot at.

On April 3, the 87th Battalion had moved to the front area.

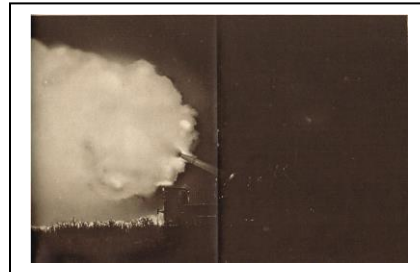
On April 4, 5 and 6 it had supplied working parties and dug trenches.

On April 7, the final elements of the Battalion had moved forward to the front area.

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By ten o'clock on the evening of April 8, the 87th Battalion had reported itself to be in its battle positions.

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



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

**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 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.

On April 9 of 1917 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be 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 War for the British, one of the few positive episodes having been the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

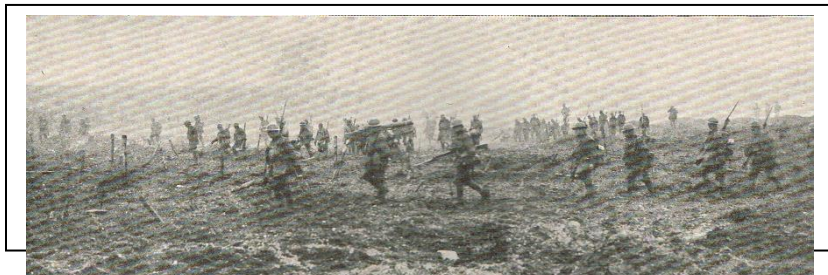


While the British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive of *Le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

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

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

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



Excerpt from the 87th Battalion War Diary of April 9, 1917: *Easter Monday, zero hour 5.30 A.M. The Battalion, 520 strong all ranks, went “over the top” supported by a strong artillery barrage.*

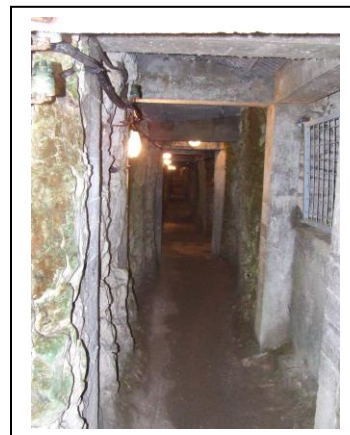
Excerpts from 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary entry for April 9, 1917:

12.25 p.m. - 87th Battalion report that a party of 75th Battalion who were out in front of BASSO (Trench) were counter attacked by the enemy, and believe that some of our men were taken prisoners.

12.55 p.m. – The 87th Battalion advise that they are sending out a Lewis Gun Officer, with 4 guns, and 20 men to clean up the situation around the Old German Front Line & proceed on to BASSO after this is accomplished.

2.00 p.m. – O.C., 87th Battalion reports one Machine Gun of the 11th Machine Gun Coy. operating sixty yards left of crater where LIEUT. Hannaford and his party are established.

(Right: Grange Tunnel - one of the few remaining galleries still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years later on: They were hewn out of the limestone to ensure secrecy and, at the same time, the security of the attacking troops – photograph from 2008(?))



The 87th Battalion assault had enjoyed only mixed results at first, even some of the successful attackers having been forced to retire because their flanks had become vulnerably exposed. Eventually, however, the advance had continued, one of the last actions having gone in at a quarter to seven in the evening to clear two more trenches of the enemy.

By the late evening of April 10 the Canadian Corps had cleared the area of *Vimy Ridge* of the few remaining pockets of resistance and had begun to consolidate the area in anticipation of the expected German counter-attacks – which, in fact, were never to amount to very much.

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

There had, on that second 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 had proved logistically impossible. Thus the Germans were to close the breach and the conflict had once more reverted to one of inertia.



The remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* was not to be fought in the manner of the first two days and by the end of those five weeks little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success.

The 87th Battalion had reverted to that routine of life in the trenches in the *Lens Sector*. June had been fairly active, particularly the evening of the 8th when three battalions had fairly successfully raided the enemy lines. The 'Brass' was pleased: on the debit side had been a count of one-hundred thirty-nine casualties.

In contrast to June, much of July was to be spent in reserve in the area of Chateau de la Haie. Parades, lectures, drills, inspections, visits from Brigade and Divisional Commanders as well as from the High Command, sports and working parties had all been the order of those days. The 87th Battalion had even lined the sides of the road on one particular date when His Majesty King George V was passing by.



(Right above: *A further photograph of a Canadian working-party carrying supplies of all kinds to the troops in forward positions – from Le Miroir*)

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



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

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

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



Those expecting *Hill 70* to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear.

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



(Right above: *The portrait of Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie is from Illustration.*)

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

Objectives of the attack had been limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of the first day, August 15. Due to the dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it had been expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it was to prove; on the 16th several major counter-attacks had been launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by that time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.



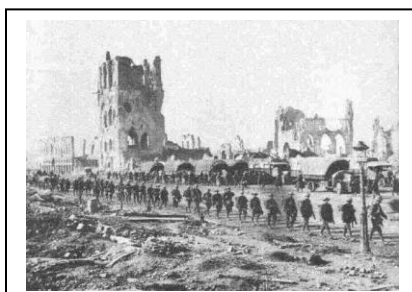
These defences had held and the Canadian artillery, which had been by then employing newly-developed tactical procedures, was to inflict heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* had remained in Canadian hands.

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



The assault on *Hill 70* had been made the responsibility of several formations of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions. The 87th Battalion of the 4th Canadian Division, was therefore not to be directly involved in any part of this operation but, nonetheless, it had been active elsewhere in the outskirts of Lens during that same period, partially in the area of the Lens-Lievin Road where it today still crosses the Béthune to Lens railway line, and partially in the western outskirts of the city of Lens itself.

This Canadian-led offensive campaign had been scheduled to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium was proceeding less well than expected and the High Command was looking for reinforcements to make good the exorbitant losses.



The Australians and New Zealanders, and then the Canadians, were ordered to prepare to move north: thus the Canadian Corps was obliged to abandon its plans.

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

In the middle of October the Canadians had been ordered to move north into Belgium and into the *Ypres Salient*. Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign – ongoing since the end of that July – has since then come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, having usurped that name from a small village on a ridge that had been – at least *ostensibly* - one of the British High Command's objectives.

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



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

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

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



(Right below: *Just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the above monument – this, according to the 87th Battalion War Diary, is where the unit was in trenches on October 30 of 1917. – photograph from 2010*)



Meanwhile, October 11 had been the first day of the transfer of the 87th Battalion, a move which was to bring it, after a year's absence, and for a second occasion, into the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. By the 22nd of the month the unit was to be in *Toronto Camp* in the area of Brandhoek, a village to the west of the city of Ypres itself and half way along the road from there to Poperinghe.



On the 27th, thirty-two officers and six-hundred eighteen *other ranks* of the 87th Battalion had been ordered moved to the vicinity of Potijze, to the north-east of Ypres where they were to be quartered in shelters and dugouts. There, for a further six days, they had been mostly engaged in providing working-parties and, at least on one day, were to furnish one-hundred men in order to stretcher or otherwise carry some of the many wounded to the rear.

(Right above: *Canadian troops performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir*)

Back at Brandhoek on November 2, the unit had entrained on the following day for the journey to Cæstre in northern France. After further days of training and inspections, the 87th Battalion had found itself back in *Toronto Camp*, Brandhoek, on November 10.

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From there it had been ordered to Ypres, from Ypres to Potijze, from Potijze to *Abraham Heights*, and from there to *Crest Farm* on the outskirts of the no-longer existent community of Passchendaele itself, all in the space of two days: there at *Crest Farm* the 87th Battalion had relieved the depleted companies of three other Canadian units.

According to the Battalion War Diary entry for November 16... *The total casualties for the tour were 4 Officers and 172 O.R. which is exceedingly heavy for four days in holding the line, and shows the intenseness of the situation in the vicinity of Passchendaele.* It had been an almost- ceaseless enemy artillery bombardment which had inflicted the vast majority of these losses on the unit.

On the next day, November 17, the 87th Battalion had been relieved and had begun to retire to France – on foot and by motor transport. Six days again, on the 23rd, after a march of some twenty-eight kilometres from Cantrainne, it was to be billeted in the proximity of La Thieuloye, to the north-west of Arras and well away from the forward area. By December 21, however, the Battalion had once more been posted to the front, on this occasion to the *Chaudière Sector* - and Christmas Day of 1917 turned out to be just another day served in the trenches*.

**On December 3 and 4 the personnel of the Battalion was encouraged to exercise their right to vote in the Canadian National Election ongoing at the time. Also offered was the opportunity to invest in War Bonds, thus allowing those fighting in the conflict the opportunity to pay for it as well.*

(Right: *The Canadian National Monument on Vimy Ridge as seen looking southwards from the Chaudière Sector: On April 9, 1917, this area lay behind the German lines – photograph from 1914*)



In contrast to Christmas, New Year’s Eve had been celebrated by everyone taking the train to Neuville St-Vaast for a bath!

Much of January, most of February and the first two weeks of March, 1918, had been for the most part a quiet time, not only for the 87th Battalion but indeed for the greater part of the Canadian 11th Infantry Brigade. On March 12 the unit had been preparing to leave *Alberta Camp* to return to the Front. They were now to once again be posted to the *Lens Sector*.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans were to come to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the Divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the war, they had delivered a massive attack, Operation ‘*Michael*’, launched on March 21.

The main blow had fallen at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it had descended for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops stationed there* in the areas adjacent to French forces.



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

The German advance had continued for a month, having then petered out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive had been a result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British were to be the most significant.

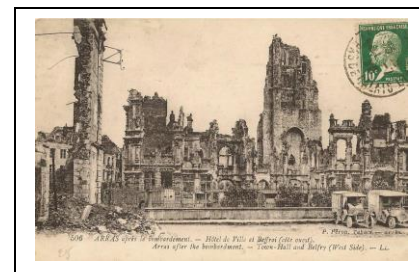
**A second but lesser such offensive, ‘Georgette’, fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It also was successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.*

(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)



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

It would appear that the 87th Battalion had remained *in situ* in the *Lens Sector* until the end of the month of March when it had been transferred some kilometres south to the *Arras Sector*, before then having been moved back and forth in the area to the north of the city itself. The 87th Battalion was not to be posted to *the Somme* to staunch the German onslaught of that spring; the unit had remained in the region to the north and north-west of Arras.



But its transfer there to Arras – and the similar transfer of other Canadian units – had allowed the British troops previously stationed there to move south to the area of the battle, and it had also ensured the defence of Arras in the event of a German decision to switch their attack further to the north.

May of 1918 had marked a return to the normal grind of life in – and out of - the trenches, the unit having served at first in the forward area and then having undergone training at Mingoval before, in the final week of that month, the 87th Battalion had been ordered to be withdrawn to the security of Valhuon – well to the west and far removed from the Front - for a period of some six weeks.

Those weeks must have been as close to a holiday as it ever was to be in any army during the *Great War*: Training there was to be, inspections there were to be, drills at platoon, company, battalion and brigade level there were to be, as well as lectures and courses on such things as new weaponry and the latest in gas warfare; but there had also been regular baths, changes of clothing and, of course, meals. To this had also been added concerts, inter-unit competitions in military skills and sports of divers kinds.

And short though it might have been, there was a regular night's sleep - luxury indeed.

(Right below: *Canadian soldiers peruse the program of an upcoming concert somewhere behind the lines of the Western Front. – from Le Miroir*)

On July 10 the personnel of the 87th Battalion had left all this behind and had moved on foot and by train to the community of St. Aubin north of Arras. On the next morning they had been ordered to an area close to Roclincourt, a village situated half-way between Vimy village and the city of Arras from where, after a meal, the unit had advanced into front-line trenches. The transfer had taken place in daylight hours, an unusual procedure, yet the enemy had remained docile and the move had been completed by five o'clock on that afternoon of July 11.



The following six days had comprised little infantry activity apart from patrols and working parties and as a consequence few casualties had been reported: according to the Battalion War Diarist in his entry after the unit's relief on July 17...*Casualties for the tour, 2 O.R. slightly wounded.*

The first experience of front-line trench warfare for the reinforcements who had recently reported *to duty* had been an easy one – perhaps even a misleading one.

Five days later again the 87th Battalion had returned to the front near Roclincourt - on this occasion to take part in two raids to inflict casualties and to obtain information – until it again in turn had been relieved on the final day of the month. Notwithstanding the infantry incursions into enemy territory, casualties during this last week of July were still to be reported as...*light.*



(Right above: *Arras Road Cemetery, Roclincourt, in which lie a number of Canadian dead and at least one Newfoundlander who wore a Canadian uniform – photograph from 2014(?)*)

All this, however, was to soon change during the month of August. Under the new Allied Generalissimo, Foch, an immense offensive was being prepared to push the Germans back whence they had come some four months previously – and beyond*.



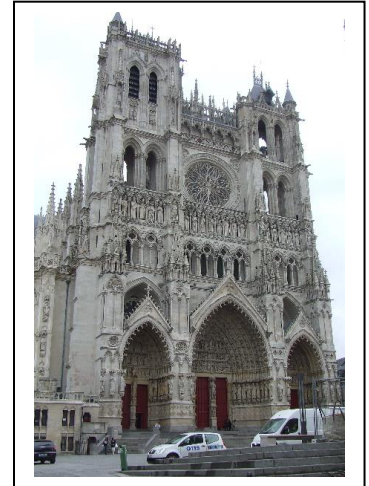
(Above right: *Le Maréchal Ferdinand Jean-Marie Foch, this photograph from 1921, became Generalissimo of the Allied Armies on March 26, 1918. – photograph from the Wikipedia web-site*)

**In fact, multiple offensives were being prepared, one of which, a French effort, had already begun.*

Nobody knew it at the time, of course, and perhaps, after four years of static warfare, no one dared to think it, but this campaign - to become known as the Hundred Days – was to end with the Armistice of November 11 of 1918. (Although by that time there would be several such agreements as the Central Powers one by one were to leave the field.)

In the previous April the German spring offensive had almost reached the gates of Amiens in the south and had advanced towards the Channel ports in the north before being stopped. That area in front of Amiens was to be the jumping-off point for the Allied attack of August 8*, thus the early days of August had seen a great transfer of Canadian troops from the area north-west of Arras to the new theatre of battle some ninety kilometres to the south. The move was to be rapid – and to be cloaked in secrecy.

(Right: The great gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the leading German troops had been able to see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918 – The edifice houses a flag and other commemorations of the sacrifice of the Dominion of Newfoundland – photograph from 2007(?))



****It was to be the end of September before the Allied counter-attack would commence in the north on the front in Flanders where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving.***

The 87th Battalion had left its quarters in the proximity of Écoivres and Mont St-Éloi on the evening of August 3, 1918, and had been bussed some one-hundred twenty kilometres before it had dismounted at four-thirty on the following morning in, or close to, the community of Oisemont – still at a distance of forty-seven kilometres from Amiens.



(Right above and right below: The village of St-Éloi at an early period of the Great War and a century later - The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – destroyed in 1793 – are visible in both images. – from Le Miroir and (colour) from 2016)

The 87th Battalion had then been billeted in or about the villages of Heucourt and Prouzel on successive days having marched by night, before, on August 6... *The Brigade Group began its move to concentration area BOIS DE BOVES. At five o'clock on the afternoon of the next day again the Brigade began a further, final movement into the BOIS DE GENTELLES.*



Excerpt from the 87th Battalion War Diary entry of August 8, 1917: *Notification received that zero hour was to be 4.20 A.M. and at 5.30 A.M. the Battalion started to move. It moved around the south end of the GENTELLES WOOD and then south and parallel to the ROYE Road, crossing the RIVER LUCE and taking up a position along Old German trench system... From here it could be seen that our attack was progressing favourably and many prisoners were being sent back. The Battalion moved again at 9.20 A.M...*

(Right below: *The remnants of the community of Roye, this picture taken in 1917, even before the events of 1918 – from a vintage post-card*)

The attack of August 8 was for the most part a great success – the Canadians having advanced an unheard-of eleven kilometres. The 75th Battalion, however, had had difficulties in attaining its objectives, and the 87th Battalion, having been held in reserve on August 8, was now ordered to act in conjunction with the 75th Battalion during the night of August 8-9 and the next morning: the 75th was to make a frontal attack while two companies of the 87th Battalion were to outflank the enemy positions.



The fighting was now to become fiercer as the Germans began to recover from their initial surprise and his artillery and his machine-gunners were to make this advance of August 9 a difficult venture. Nevertheless, by mid-day they had been retiring and the Canadians of the 75th and 87th Battalions had taken possession of their objectives.



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



(Right: *Hillside Cemetery, Le Quesnel, within the bounds of which lie many dead of the opening days of the 3rd Battle of Amiens, including at least two Newfoundlanders wearing Canadian uniforms – photograph from 2015*)

On the evening of the 11th, the unit had made its way to the village of Rosières before being relieved. A week later, by August 19, it was reported as having advanced as far as the community of Hattencourt. There it had involved in an action which had as its objective to advance the line some five-hundred yards... *Line was secured without difficulty on left but strong resistance was met with on the right in vicinity of FRESHCOPSE where heavy bomb fighting took place... Our casualties reported to be light.* (Battalion War Diary)

In his entry of the following day, August 20, the War Diarist was to write... *Our artillery continue to be very active carrying out harassing fire and destructive shoots. Special attention is paid to the bridges across the SOMME.* The attacks were to continue and, as the objective of the current offensive had been to advance to the River Somme, it would appear that this goal was about to be realized. On that same August 20, the 87th Battalion had retired into reserve.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *Canadian soldiers consolidate newly-won positions while others cross a river on an improvised bridge. – from Le Miroir*)

On the night of August 24-25 the entire 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade had been withdrawn into reserve and had been replaced in the line by elements of the French 34th and 35th Divisions. The Canadians were now to leave the area as they had come: quickly and discretely.



(Right: *French dead in the communal cemetery at Caix, just to the west of Rosières: Caix also hosts a British Commonwealth cemetery as well as a German burial ground. – photograph from 2017*)

Only days hence they would be fighting another battle on another front to the east of Arras, the area that they had left just over three weeks previously.

As for the 87th Battalion, during the evening of August 27, it had boarded a train at Longeau Station and at sixteen minutes past eleven of that same evening, had begun the railway journey from there to Acq from where the personnel then had taken busses to Berneville.

Two days later again, the unit was organizing in the area of Neuville-Vitasse, to the south-east of Arras – which is, of course, where Private O'Neill and his re-enforcement draft reported *to duty* on August 29.

* * * * *

The following is from Appendices to be found in the 87th Battalion War Diary for the month of September, 1918:

87th Battalion Canadian Infantry (Canadian Grenadier Guards)

Operational Order No. 138

a) The Canadian Corps will attack DROCOURT-QUEANT LINE and enemy positions in rear, on a date and at a time to be notified later*.

****The date was to be September 2.***

b) 1st Canadian Division on the right, 4th Canadian Division in the centre...

c) The 10th and 12th Canadian Brigades will carry out the initial attack, objective the "RED LINE".

d) ...11th Canadian Brigade will pass through and continue the attack to the "BLUE LINE".

e) The 87th Battalion... will carry out the first advance to the "GREEN LINE"...

(continued)

The 87th Battalion moved to the assembly area on the night of September 1-2, 1918, and – not being a part of the first wave - at zero *plus* one hour moved forward to its *jumping off* positions. The four Battalion Companies were formed up in the order of advance. “B” on the right, “D” on the left, “A” in support and “C” in reserve.

(Right: *Some of the ground on which fighting took place at the end of August and beginning of September of 1918: The Arras to Cambrai road – looking in the direction of Cambrai – may be perceived just left of centre on the horizon. – photograph from 2015*)



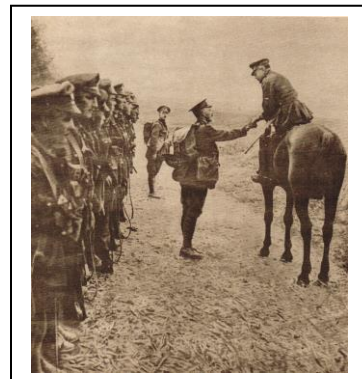
Unfortunately there appears to be no record of in which Company Private O'Neill was serving.

Excerpts from Battalion War Diary entry of September 2: *At 5.30 A.M. heavy barrage opened. Enemy's reply did not reach our assembly position. At 6.20 A.M. the Battalion moved forward... We were to attack at 8 A.M. but the situation was still obscure. The C.O. consulted with the O.C. of the 75th Battalion and then hoping that by advancing on the left the situation on the right might be eased, decided to push on. According at 8.30 the Battalion went forward...*

On reaching the crest of the ridge just east of the sunken road, the leading Coys came under heavy Machine Gun and shell fire, frontally and on both flanks... At 1.30 P.M. the C.O. advised Brigade that we could not hope to get further without artillery and tank support and shortly after the G.O.C. stated that we could hold on to what we had and await orders...

(Right: *After the successful operation of breaking the Hindenberg Line at Drocourt-Quéant, Canadian troops are here being inspected by the Commander-in-Chief of the British and Commonwealth Forces in Europe, Douglas Haig. – from Le Miroir*)

This the Battalion did, on the understanding that the advance would continue on the following morning. Apparently casualties had been fairly heavy, particularly for ‘B’ Company but, unfortunately, the War Diarist decided to record only the losses among the officers.



The action was to continue on September 3... *Credit is due to officers and men for their behaviour. The fighting on top of MOUNT DURY and on the forward slope was extremely heavy and not withstanding very heavy casualties the made made (sic – but probably ‘men made’) ground and held their position under very heavy shell and machine gun fire and with the left flank quite exposed.*



(Right above: *The Canadian Memorial to those who fought at the Drocourt-Quéant Line in early September of 1918: It stands to the side of the main Arras-Cambrai road in the vicinity of the village of Dury and also of Mount Dury. – photograph from 2016*)

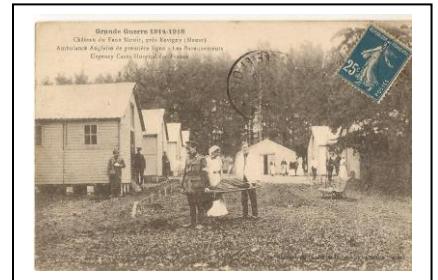
But by September 3, Private O'Neill was dying. His war was to last five days.

Circumstances of Casualty:- *Died of wounds Whilst with his Company near the “jumping off” trench, during the attack South West of Dury, on September 2nd 1918, he was wounded in the abdomen by shrapnel from an enemy shell. He was taken to the No 3 Canadian Field Ambulance where he died the next day.*

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

The son of Michael O'Neill, labourer and fisherman, and of Mary O'Neill (née Moore) – to whom on March 1, 1918, he had willed his everything, he was also brother to at least Bernard.

Private O'Neill was reported as having *died of wounds* on September 3, 1918, by the officer commanding the 3rd Canadian Field Ambulance at Arras.



(Right: *The War Memorial in the community of Holyrood honours the sacrifice of Private Timothy O'Neill.* – photograph from 2010(?))

Timothy O'Neill had enlisted at the *apparent* age on twenty-nine years and six months: date of birth at Woodford's Station, Holyrood, Newfoundland, August 20, 1888 (from his attestation papers).



Private Timothy O'Neill was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 25, 2023.

