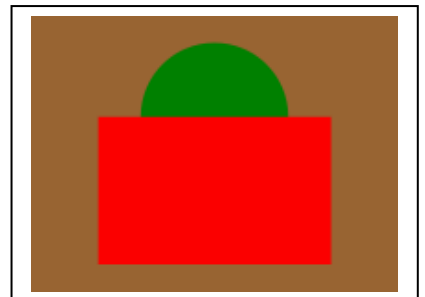




**Private Harold Payne (Number 270650) of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Eastern Ontario Regiment), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Sun Quarry Cemetery, Cherisy: Grave reference D.2.**

**(Right: The image of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion shoulder-flash is from the Wikipedia web-site.)**

**(continued)**



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of an Anglican clergyman, Harold Payne had graduated only the year before from *Huron College (University of Western Ontario)* where he had been studying theology – in fact he had done so with *Honours in Divinity and Arts*. At the time of his enlistment he cited his permanent residence as being the community of Preston.

Harold Payne had left the Dominion of Newfoundland on September 24, 1912, crossing from Port aux Basques to North Sydney in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia on board the steamship *Bruce*. By that time he was already a teacher, according to the ship's records, but was on his way to become a student once more, at the aforementioned *Huron College* in London, Ontario. While there, he was apparently to serve for two years in the *Western University Officers' Corps*.

Private Payne's first pay records show that it was on March 2 of 1917 that he enlisted, this being the date on which the Canadian Army first remunerated him for his services. There is, however, no mention of the unit to which he was attached immediately upon enlistment.

Three weeks later Private Payne presented himself at the Hamilton Mobilization Centre for a medical examination – which found him fit for overseas service – and for attestation. It was the commanding officer of the 215<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel H.E. Snider, who on the same day brought the formalities of his enlistment to a conclusion when he declared – on paper – that...*Harold Payne, having been approved and finally inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

It was on the following day that Private Payne was *taken on strength* by the 215<sup>th</sup> Battalion (2<sup>nd</sup> Overseas Battalion of 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment Dufferin Rifles) of Canadian Infantry.

He was to sail from Canada only thirty-six days later again, which apparently left Private Payne just enough time to get married. Cora Melinda White was a teacher in Downsview, York County, Ontario. She and (Reverend) Private Payne were joined in Holy Matrimony in Saint Alban's Cathedral in Toronto, on April 7, 1917. During this short time he willed his all to his new wife, on April 10, and arranged to allocate to her, as of May 1, a monthly twenty dollars from his pay.

The ship onto which Private Payne embarked in the harbour at Halifax was His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*. The sister ship to the ill-starred *Titanic* and also to *Britannic* which had been sunk by a mine in the eastern Mediterranean in November of the previous year, she was one of the largest ships afloat at the time, able to accommodate well over six-thousand passengers.



(Right above: *HMT Olympic*, on the right, lies at anchor along with *HM Hospital Ship Aquitania*, centre, at Mudros Bay in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph originally from the *Imperial War Museum, London*)

(continued)

The 215<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Canadian Infantry was not to sail alone. Also on board *Olympic* for trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom were nine further units, all but one of them infantry: there were the 141<sup>st</sup>, 153<sup>rd</sup>, 174<sup>th</sup>, 176<sup>th</sup>, 220<sup>th</sup>, 241<sup>st</sup>, and 253<sup>rd</sup> Battalions – although likely not at full strength; and also a draft of the 205<sup>th</sup> Battalion as well as one of the Number 5 Siege Battery.

The vessel sailed on April 29 of 1917 to dock in the west-coast port city of Liverpool just over a week later, on May 7. From there it appears that at least the majority of the military personnel on board was taken by train to the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe*, by that time established in the county of Kent, just down the Dover Straits from the harbour and town of Folkestone.

Upon its arrival at Shorncliffe, Private Payne's 215<sup>th</sup> Battalion was marched to the *Otterbury* subsidiary camp for temporary quarantine. At the same time it was *taken on strength* by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reserve Battalion\* of the 1<sup>st</sup> Reserve Brigade. Three weeks later again two-hundred fifty *other ranks* of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reserve Battalion were transferred – on May 27 – to the 125<sup>th</sup> Battalion which was stationed at *Witley Camp* in southern Surrey. Private Payne was among that number.



(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*)

*\*Not to be confused with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Eastern Ontario Regiment) which by that time had been fighting on the Continent for just less than three years.*

It was now to be some ten months before Private Payne was to be called to *active service*. During that time he remained with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reserve Battalion at Witley although the only details a propos his service there are of a promotion – and demotions: on October 24 he was appointed as acting corporal without pay; on the penultimate day of the year, December 30, he then reverted to a lower rank – lance corporal but *with* pay; then, on March 4 he apparently... *reverts to permanent grade on proceeding overseas with 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn.* (From his personal files)

Thus it was as Private Payne that he was *taken on strength* by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (*Eastern Ontario Regiment*) on that March 3, and also as Private Payne that he travelled overseas – likely through the ports of Southampton and Le Havre – a month later, on April 4, 1918.

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



(continued)



He then reported to the Canadian Base Depot at Étaples on April 5 – six-hundred seventy-two arrivals were recorded on that day - where he stayed for two days while he and his draft were processed and organized prior to being despatched, one of eight-hundred forty-two on the day, to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp at Calonne-Ricouart – some eighty kilometres to the eastward - there to await posting to their new unit.

It was now to be a further four months, the date August 12, 1818, before Private Payne was reported as having left the CCRC to join his new unit *in the field*. His own papers record this union occurring three days later, on August 15, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was reinforcing and re-organizing in the area of Beaufort to the east of Amiens. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (*Eastern Ontario Regiment*) War Diary entry of that August 15 records... *53 reinforcements were taken on strength of the Battalion.*

\* \* \* \* \*

On the eighth day of February of 1915, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion – by now a component of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade of the Canadian Division – had boarded HMT *Blackwell* in the port of Avonmouth, Bristol, the ship then having sailed as part of the Canadian Division Armada later that day. It had apparently been a very rough and unpleasant voyage, the Battalion War Diarist to make but a single mention of it... *Men very sick*. Three days later, on February 11, the vessel had dropped anchor in the French port of St-Nazaire on the coast of Brittany, the Battalion had disembarked and, by five o'clock on that same evening, had been travelling northwards to the area of the Franco-Belgian frontier.

For the first weeks of its service on the Continent, the Canadian Division was to be posted to the Fleurbaix Sector in northern France and just southwards of the border town of Armentières. It had been in the area of Armentières that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was to be introduced to the rigours and routines of trench warfare\* by the North Staffordshire Regiment and by the King's Royal Rifles – and to the harsher realities of combat when the Battalion had suffered its first fatality on February 20.

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



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

*(Right above: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration)*

(continued)

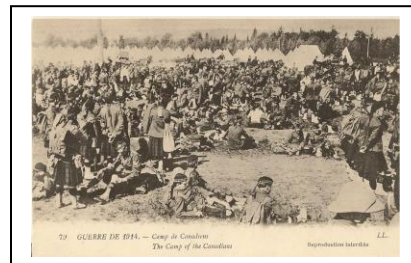
Two months later, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had then been posted to the *Ypres Salient* and it had been on April 18, 1915, at twenty-five minutes past ten in the morning, that the unit – in fact, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade - was to cross the border into the *Kingdom of Belgium*.

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

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



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



Up until that time, during what had been in fact only a few days of Canadian tenure, *the Salient* had proved to be relatively quiet. Then the dam had ruptured - although it was gas rather than water which, for a few days, was to threaten to sweep all before it. The date: April 22, 1915.

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



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

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



(continued)

The cloud had first been noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon of April 22. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left had wavered then had broken, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered. Then a retreat, not always very cohesive, had become necessary while, at the same time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade had been ordered forward to support the efforts of the French and of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade.



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

By the second day of the attack, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the situation had become relatively stable – at least temporarily - and the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan were to be held until the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> when a further retirement had become necessary.

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

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion had remained attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade in the north-eastern sector of *the Salient* until April 25 when it was to withdraw towards Vlamertinghe in order to re-join its parent 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade.



Having remained there to rest on the following day, the unit had then been ordered forward to occupy positions near a pontoon bridge on the Yser Canal. Heavily shelled on the morrow, the Battalion had subsequently returned to its billets at Vlamertinghe on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

(Right above: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade moved forward to occupy its western bank from Vlamertinghe – to the left – photograph from 2014*)

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



(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. – photograph from 2010*)

(continued)



On May 15, 1915, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had been ordered to move further down the line via Colonne and Hinges to Béthune from where it was to advance three days afterwards towards the areas of Festubert and Givenchy. The French were about to undertake a major offensive just further south again and had asked for British support.

There at Festubert, a series of attacks and counter-attacks had taken place in which the British High Command was to gain some three kilometres of ground but also had contrived to destroy, by using the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what had been left of the British pre-War professional Army. The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but – not having had the same numbers of troops to put in the field – would happily not participate to the same extent. It nonetheless was to suffer heavily\*.

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

The French effort – having employed the same suicidal tactics - had likewise been a failure but on an even larger scale; their efforts were to cost them just over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded and missing*.

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

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



On the final day of May the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion had been relieved from its posting at Festubert and on June 1 was to be in billets in Essars; in another nine days' time it had been ordered further south to Givenchy-les-la-Bassée\*, a small village not far distant to the south of Festubert. Despatched into the forward trenches from June 11 to 17 to support British efforts, the unit was to incur the same sort of results, although the casualties had been fewer – fourteen *killed in action*, seventy-nine *wounded* - from having repeated the same sort of mistakes as at Festubert.

On June 17 the Canadian Division had begun to retire from the area, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion among the first of its units to do so.

*\*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.*

(continued)

As a part of that withdrawal from Givenchy, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was to march to billets in or near to the community of Oblinghem, two kilometres removed from the larger community of Béthune. From there on June 25, it had then begun to move towards and into Belgium, to the *Ploegsteert Sector*, just to the north of the frontier.

Having reached the *Ploegsteert Sector*, there the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion had remained – as indeed had the entire Canadian Division.

In the next months it was to become well-acquainted with the Franco-Belgian area between Armentières in the east – any *further* east would have been in German-occupied territory – Bailleul in the west, and Messines in the north; given the route marches enumerated in the War Diary and the itineraries used, it would have been surprising had it been otherwise.

(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*)



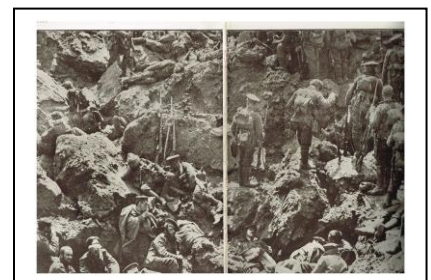
The Canadian Division had remained in that border area of Belgian West Flanders until March and April of the following year when its services were to be required in the southern area of the *Ypres Salient*.

During those autumn and winter months neither side had made much of a concerted attempt to dislodge the other from its muddy quarters in the trenches. As with all the other units at the front, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion's time had been divided – as seen on a previous page - between postings to the front-line trenches, to the support positions, and into reserve. Casualties had been caused mostly by artillery fire\*, by snipers, and by the occasional raid on the enemy lines.

*\*It is estimated that some sixty to seventy percent of the casualties of the Great War on the Western Front were due to artillery-fire.*

In mid-September of 1915 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had landed on the Continent and had immediately moved into Belgium to take its place in an adjacent sector just to the north of the now-designated 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division. It too had then spent a relatively-calm autumn and winter in the trenches, but as the first day of spring, 1916, had come and gone, the Division had been preparing to undertake its first major infantry operation of the conflict.

It had been at a place named St-Éloi where, at the end of March, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the British were to detonate a series of mines under the German lines and then had followed this with an infantry assault. The units of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had been ordered to be prepared to follow up on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.



(continued)



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

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which had turned the just-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and a resolute German defence, were all to greet the newcomers who had taken over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.

That of course was in the sector for which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had been responsible.

As for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion, during April and May more often than not, and on every day from May 19 until the end of that month, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion War Diarist had seen fit to begin his entry of the day with the words... *Day quiet*. The single exception to this rule was May 24 when the report commenced... *Day exceptionally quiet*.

All of that was about to change.

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* remaining under British control\*. This had been just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area having included the village of *Hooze*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse*, *Railway Dugouts* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.

*\*This sector was at the time the responsibility of the newly-arrived Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. However, so rapidly evolved the seriousness of the situation that units from other formations were called upon to repel the German onslaught. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division was to be one of those.*

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

The enemy, having been preceded by an intense barrage, had overrun the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans were to be unable to exploit their success and the Canadians would be allowed the time to patch up their defences. But the hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, June 3, delivered piece-meal and poorly co-ordinated, had then proved to be a horrendous and costly experience for the Canadians.

(Right above: *The Canadian memorial which stands atop Mount Sorrel just to the south-west of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) whose spires and towers may be perceived in the distance – photograph from 1914*)

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



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for June 3, 1916, reads as follows: *Received orders at 3 AM and moved to Dickebusch Huts. In evening moved up to trenches and relieved the 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> Battalions in front line. Practically no trenches. Each man had dug himself in. Heavily shelled coming through Zillebeke.*

(Right: A century later, reminders of a violent past 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. – photograph from 2014)

Although no infantry action is recorded as having been undertaken by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion up until and including June 7 when it had been relieved and had withdrawn from the forward area, by that time it had been heavily shelled on all four days. It had then stood to in rain and mud in an exposed area and, once again, according the War Diarist in his entry for June 6... *The men are suffering from exposure.*



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

On the day of the unit's retirement, June 7, he had also reported... *Suffered 122 casualties during 4 day tour.*

On June 11, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had once more moved up to the forward area and into the front lines to relieve the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The War Diary entries for the two succeeding days read as follows: *Trenches – 12/6/16 – Still holding trenches. 1:30 AM 13<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> Battns moved through on front & made attack (13 June) on enemy's position. During this attack losses were very heavy. Raining all day.*

*13/6/16 - Still holding line. Heavy bombardments all day by enemy. Trenches completely wiped out. Rained all day. Very heavy casualties. Commenced to relieve the 13<sup>th</sup> Battn who were at this time holding the newly-won positions.*

The confrontation having drawn to its close, life in the *Ypres Salient* had reverted to the everyday grind of existence at the front or behind it. There was to be little infantry activity by either side apart from the constant patrolling and the more and more occasional raids – particularly by the British-led forces whose High Command thought it was good for the troops - not *exactly* how the troops in question felt about them, it would appear.

And there had been the constant stream of casualties, still usually due to artillery fire and, less often to be sure, but always a deadly threat, the enemy's snipers.

The remainder of June, then July and August had been relatively quiet in *the Salient*, the Canadians having been subjected only to what had by then become the everyday drudgery of life in the trenches.

(continued)

But things had been happening elsewhere on the *Western Front* and by the middle of August the personnel of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion had been ordered into training in anticipation of another move southward into France, on this occasion to the area of *the Somme*. By the end of the month - after two weeks of exercises, lectures and drilling - they had already made the transfer there and on August 31<sup>st</sup> had relieved some Australian units in the front-line trenches near Bapaume.

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

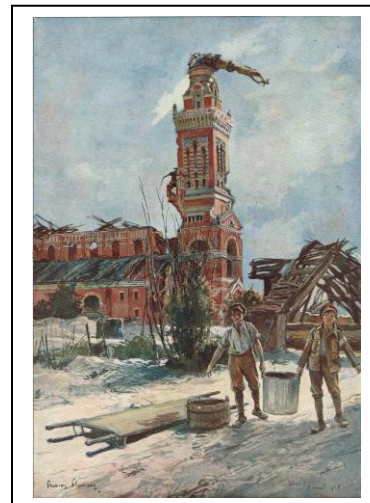
(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which stands by the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcelette* – photograph from 2015)



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

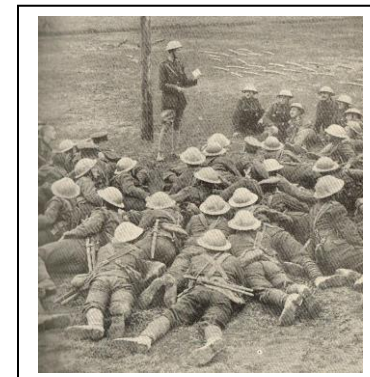
On that first day of *First Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 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* contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcelette.



(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 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division had been the first to arrive on *the Somme* and September 1 had been the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion's second day in the trenches. By as early as September 4 it had incurred twenty-five *killed* and ninety *wounded*. After a period in reserve at La Boisselle\* it was sent forward again and on September 9 had attacked German positions near Martinpuich: seventy-eight *killed* or *died of wounds* and one-hundred seventy-seven *wounded*.





Perhaps not surprisingly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was not to participate in that major general offensive of September 15 with the Canadians and other forces at Flers and Courcellette.

*\*La Boisselle was the site where, on the morning of the attack of July 1 of that same 1916, the British detonated the largest of the nineteen mines that they had excavated and set under the German lines. The crater, now a century old, is still impressive, even today.*



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

The unit was to do more tours in the trenches before having retired from the campaign, on one further occasion having reported nineteen *killed* in action and ninety-nine *wounded*, victims not of any infantry action but solely of the Germans' artillery and of their snipers. And there was also to be a further attack on October 8.



This confrontation had been deemed as successful by the Battalion War Diarist in his entry of the day but on this occasion he appears not to have made any record of the casualties involved.

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



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

On October 15 the unit had begun an eleven-day march, at first to the west, then in a semi-circular manner northwards behind the city of Arras and beyond. Its destination was to be Villers au Bois where it had then spent three days in Brigade Reserve before having returned to the trenches – but not to those of *the Somme*.



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

The late autumn of 1916 and then the winter of 1916-1917 was once more that every-day drudgery of life in and out of the trenches – but preferable to *the Somme*.

(continued)

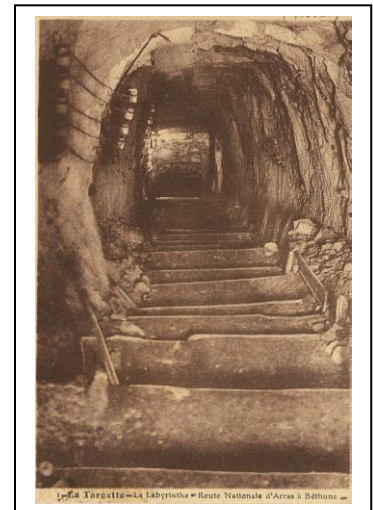
There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides. Casualties were to be few and, in fact, it was sickness and, perhaps surprisingly, dental problems that had kept the medical facilities busy during that time.



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

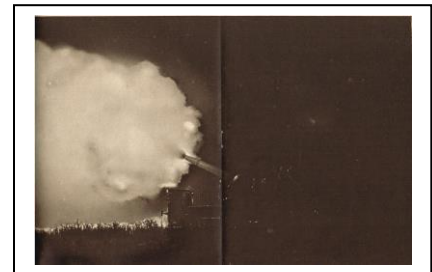
The next major confrontation between the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion and the German Army had then taken place some five months later, after the *official* conclusion of *First Somme* in mid-November of 1916 and after that winter of 1916-1917 spent by the Canadians in the sectors to the north of Arras and south of Béthune.

During the month of March it surely had been becoming clear to the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion – and to the personnel of *all* Canadian battalions - that there was a major operation in the offing; the forward and rear areas had been hives of ongoing activity for which the unit had supplied working-parties and carrying-parties each day: dumping-areas had been cleared, bivouacs had been sand-bagged, stone had been laid for walks, new trenches had been dug and old ones deepened, troops familiarized with the newly-excavated tunnels and other positions, water-pipes and communication lines buried, artillery and machine-guns sited...



(Right: *Just one of the network of tunnels, this one in the area of Neuville St-Vaast–La Targette, which became known as the Labyrinth – from a vintage post-card*)

And as the days had passed the artillery barrage had grown progressively heavier, on April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion describing it as...*drums*. By this time, of course, the Germans were to be 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 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.*

(continued)

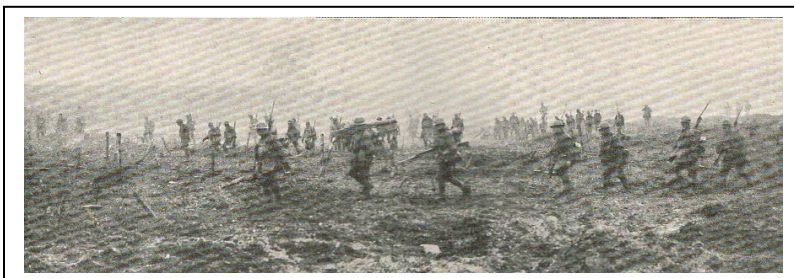
On April 9 of 1917 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the War for the British, one of the few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign had proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive of *Le Chemin des Dames* was to be an absolute 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 – as seen above, there was even a British Brigade under 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division Command – had stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.



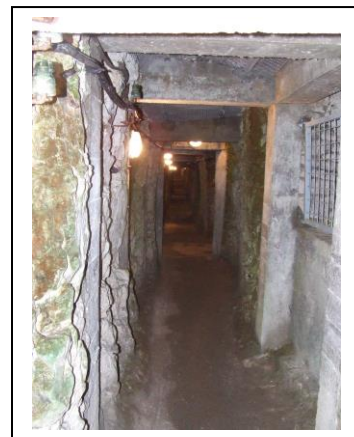
(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>d</sup> Division, burdened with all the paraphernalia of war, on the advance across No-Man's-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration*)

The role of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division on that first day had not been to attack the heights of *Vimy Ridge* itself, but to advance and secure the far right of the slope where it descended southwards towards the city of Arras. The action of the day is related in the entry of that April 9 by the Battalion War Diarist:

*At 7.30 a.m. the Battalion advanced in Artillery Formation keeping at a distance of about 500 yards in rear of the preceding Battalion...under cover of our artillery barrage. Enemy's retaliation was light, no difficulty was encountered in maintaining our position.*

*Battalion H.Q. was established... At night our No. 2 Company moved forward and assisted the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalion in digging the Main Resistance Line. Enemy's shelling normal.*

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



(continued)



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

By April 11, the Germans had succeeded in damming the breach and the conflict once more had reverted to one of inertia.

(Right: *Canadians under shell-fire occupying the third line of trenches on Vimy Ridge: the fighting of the next few days was to be fought under the same conditions. – from Illustration*)



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.

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



By the beginning of June, much of the Canadian Corps had been transferred back to the sectors just to the north of the recent fighting, from Neuville St-Vaast as far north as Béthune.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion itself had remained for much of the month of June in the area of Mont St-Éloi\*. After the efforts of that campaign, units were to be reinforced, re-organized and were to undergo further training in areas to the rear.

This relative calm was to last until the middle of August.

(Right and right below: *The village of Mont 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*)



*\*Not to be confused with St-Éloi in Belgium where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had fought in the spring of 1916.*

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

The Canadians were to be major contributors to this effort.



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



(Right below: *A Canadian carrying-party – some of the work done by troops when in support and reserve – on the Lens front during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

Those expecting *Hill 70* to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear. Yet it was high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than the city of Lens itself.



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

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion on this occasion had been posted to the nearby area of Les Brébis and... *held themselves in readiness to go forward if necessary to assist in impending operations.*



On the day of the assault, August 15, two of the Battalion's companies had been seconded to the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade and they had proceeded to the area of the once mining-village of Loos, only for that single day. On the following day, the 16<sup>th</sup>, all four Companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had been ordered forward to relieve elements of other Canadian battalions in the front line area.



The unit had retired on August 18; casualties during this period had been twenty-four *killed or died of wounds* and one-hundred five *wounded*.

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

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

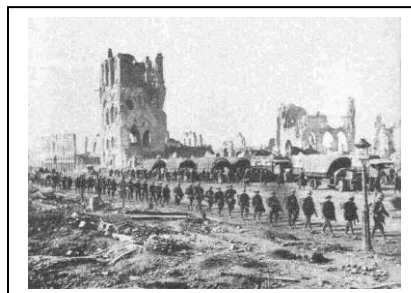


(continued)

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

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

The Lens-Béthune campaign thus having been obliged to draw to a close, it was to be only some six weeks hence that the Canadians were to be ordered to join the ongoing battle in Belgium, to the north-east of Ypres. Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign was later to become better known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that – at least ostensibly – had been one of the British High Command's objectives.



(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*)

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

*\*The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps*

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



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

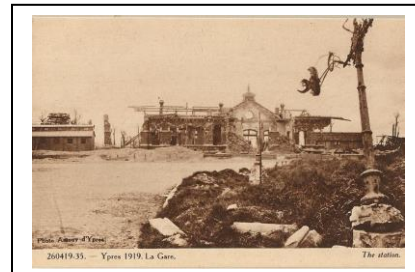
On October 19 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion had begun its transfer from the northern French mining area back into the *Kingdom of Belgium* which it had left over a year before in August of 1916. For three days the unit was to march until it halted in the vicinity of Ste-Marie Cappel, just on the French side of the Franco-Belgian frontier. There for the next ten days it was to undergo intensive training.

On November 2 it had boarded a train at nearby Bavinghove at nine o'clock in the morning, to arrive three hours later in the ruins of the railway station, just outside the southern ramparts of the by-now shattered city of Ypres. From there the unit had marched in a north-easterly direction through the ruins of the place to 'C' Camp, in the area of Wieltje.

(continued)



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



**On November 3... Battalion drew Battle Equipment during the day and at night supplied working parties...detailed to carry bath-mats, digging gun-pits, etc. to and in the forward area.**

**On the following day the Battalion had moved forward again and had relieved the Centre Sector of the Brigade Front Line.**

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



**The attack of November 6 was to be the only infantry action in which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was engaged during Passchendaele.**

***Promptly at 6.00 a.m. our barrage opened and the attack launched. Very few seconds elapsed before the enemy opened a barrage on our back area and roads leading to the front line... Our 1<sup>st</sup> Objective was taken by 6.15 a.m. and in a message...timed 7.55 a.m., our 2<sup>nd</sup> Objective was reported taken. Unconfirmed reports were received at different times that the Final Objective had been taken but this was finally confirmed by Runner at 9.30 a.m. Estimated casualties wired to Brigade – 300. Work on consolidating the position was carried on rapidly... (Excerpt from the Battalion War Diary for November 6, 1917)***

**On the night of November 7-8 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was to be relieved and had withdrawn to Wieltje. By November 10 it had been transported back into northern France.**

**Three weeks after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion's return to France, its personnel was engaged in reflecting upon how to vote. The Canadian Federal Election was to take place and the Armed Forces were to submit their ballots. The last day on which to vote had apparently been December 17 after which life had reverted back to what it had been in every interlude between campaigns.**

**The winter of 1917-1918 had passed in much the same manner as had the previous winters of the war on the Western Front. For the Canadians the venue was to be the same as it had been during the winter twelve months earlier: the sectors between Arras and Béthune.**

**But quiet though the winter was, on the first day of that spring, things were to change.**

**Perhaps not many people – apparently including the Battalion War Diarist - realize how close the Germans were to come to victory during that March and April of 1918. On March 21 the Germans had undertaken a raid on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion positions but had been driven off. For the rest of the day the sector was subject to more attention than usual from the enemy guns, but no mention was to be made in the War Diary of the dramatic events elsewhere – nor would there be any sense of urgency - for another six days.**

**(continued)**

Elsewhere however, having transferred the Divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the *Great War*, the Germans then had launched a massive attack, designated as Operation '*Michael*', on March 21. The main blow was to fall at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it had fallen for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops there, at the juncture with the French forces.

(Right below: *While the Germans were not to attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and to oblige the High Command to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir*)

The German advance had continued for a month before petering out just in front of the city of Amiens.

The ultimate failure of the offensive were to be the result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British were the most significant.



*\*A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', was to fall in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in Flanders, the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division. It also had been successful for a while, but was struggling by the end of the month.*

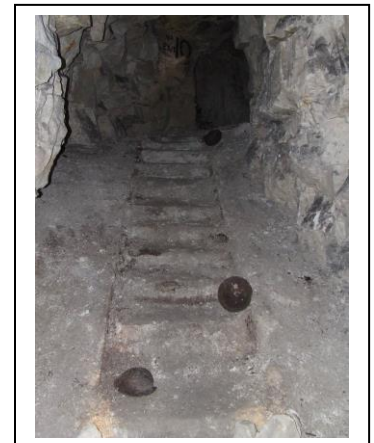
(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

It was as late as March 27 that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had received a wire from the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade ordering it to recall men who were at the time working in agriculture. On that day, on the next, and also on the one afterwards, the unit was on the move southwards until, on the 29<sup>th</sup>, it took over a forward area from the Gordon Highlanders in front of Arras.



On March 31 and April 1, having been relieved by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Battalion, the unit had moved into caves in the area of Arras. Already partially existing prior to the *Great War*, these shelters had been greatly enlarged during the years of the conflict for the use of British and Commonwealth troops.

(Right: *One of the several entrances into the Ronville Cave system, almost a century after its use by Commonwealth and British troops - It was used at different times by personnel of thirty-six different Army Divisions. – photograph from 2012(?)*)



(continued)

A week later the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had been ordered back northwards, to the rear area at Villers au Bois. Further south the German spring offensive had been held and was coming to a halt, as so was to be 'Georgette' in Belgian Flanders.

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



Thus a relative calm had descended on the front as the German threat had faded – the enemy had won a great deal of ground, but had gained nothing of any military significance on either of the two fronts. Nor was the calm particularly surprising: both sides were exhausted and needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to re-enforce.

The Allies from this point of view were a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were belatedly arriving on the scene.

(Right below: *The venerable gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the leading German troops had been able see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918 – photograph from 2007(?)*)

An overall Allied Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

But before this time, during the months of May and June, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had undergone long periods of training, before in July having been ordered to move to the area of Neuville-Vitasse, just southwards of the city of Arras.

On the final day of the month, July 31, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of Canadian Infantry had been ordered on its way to that part of the lines in front of the city of Amiens where the German offensive had been halted in April, almost four months earlier.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was not to be alone: a large number of other Canadian units – indeed the entire Canadian Corps – had at that time begun to move in a semi-circular itinerary to the west of Amiens, then south, then east again to finish in front of the city. This movement was to be effected in only a matter of days, much of it on foot, and all of the latter stages during the hours of darkness.

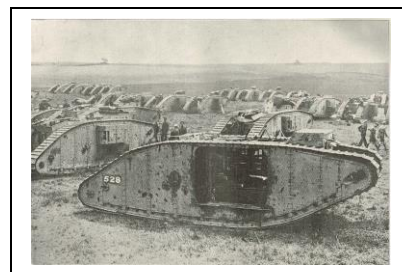
It had been intended to surprise the enemy – and thus it was to prove.



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



On August 6 the Battalion had encamped in the Bois de Boves and later on the same day, had moved into the Bois de Gentelles. It there had stayed until the night of August 7-8 when it had then moved into its jumping-off positions: the Allied attack - well supported by tanks - was to commence on the morrow morn.



(Right above: *In 1917 the British formed the Tank Corps, a force which became ever stronger in 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again 'somewhere in France' – from Illustration*)

The next morning, August 8, was to be foggy when the barrage had descended upon the German defenders. The Battalion had pressed its attack during the day and by nine o'clock that evening it had taken its objective, the village of Ignaucourt. On that day the enemy – particularly the machine-gunners – had fought hard at times but the pursuit, albeit sometimes slowed, had never stopped.

(Right: *A group of German prisoners, some serving here as stretcher-bearers, being taken to the rear after their capture by Canadian troops: A tank may be seen in the background. – from Le Miroir*)



2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for August 9, 1918: *Transport and nucleus reached IGNAUCOURT between 2.00 and 3.30 A.M. and occupied various billets and standing vacated by the enemy.*

*Orders were received at 4.00 A.M. for the Battalion to take up fresh assembly positions. For these, the Battalion moved off at 8 a.m. and later in the day, leap-frogged and attacked BEAUFORT and ROUVROY-en-Santerre. The two villages were taken after stiff fighting. In the evening the Battalion was relieved by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Can. Bn., and on completion of relief, moved back to BEAUFORT and vicinity.*

And it had been at Beaufort, as has already been seen, that Private Payne and his reinforcement draft had reported to duty with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion on that August 15 of 1918.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the day following Private Payne's arrival to join the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the unit moved forward to the vicinity of Folies. But Folies was apparently no longer in the forward area since on Sunday, August 18, both Protestants and Roman Catholics were able to hold their Church Parades in the surrounding fields.



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

On the following day again the Battalion was to be relieved, not by another Canadian or even British unit, but by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 55<sup>th</sup> Regiment, of the French 126<sup>th</sup> Division.

This was a first for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion and it rose to the occasion with the Battalion Band meeting the French troops and playing them in. Private Payne's unit then retired to the area of Rosières.

(Right below: *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*)

The next six days saw the Battalion withdraw on foot to the area of Vers, to the south-west of Amiens. From there on August 25 it entrained and proceeded north to Tinquies where it arrived early the following morning. There was to be little rest, just a cup of hot tea, before, at a quarter past six that morning of August 26, busses transported the unit as far as Wailly, to the south-west of Arras. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was back much where it had been less than four weeks previously.



And so, by now, was most of the Canadian Corps. Having been withdrawn, their places in the line taken by French troops, the Canadians had left the Amiens Front by the same itineraries as by which they had arrived. What is more, the same discretion and secrecy was now practiced once more. By the end of August the Canadian Corps was ready for offensive operations in tandem with British forces astride the axis of the main road leading from Arras to Cambrai.

In fact this offensive had already begun on August 26 when British and Canadian troops had fired the opening rounds of the *Battle of the Scarpe*. By the following day more Canadian Infantry battalions had joined the fray and, two days later again, units of all the Canadian Divisions had seen action on this new front.



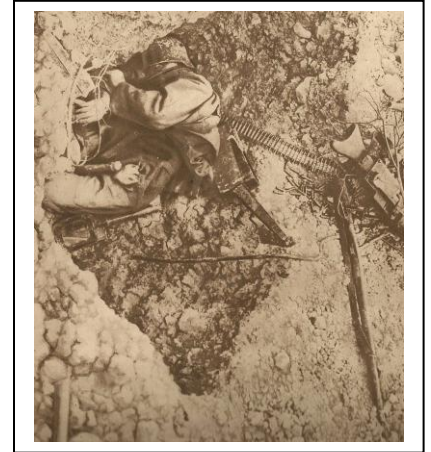
And once again, it appears that the Germans had not been prepared for the appearance of the Canadian Corps.

(Right above: *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*)

(Excerpts from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of September 29, 1918) *Morning chiefly spent in making final preparations for the pending attack by 1<sup>st</sup> Can. Inf. Bde... About 10.00 a.m. a Warning Order was received from Brigade ordering units of the brigade to be ready to be prepared to move forward and to go into action by 2.00 p.m... the objective...would be taken by a flanking movement instead of a frontal attack... Battalion fell in and marched to Assembly Area at 11.30 p.m...*

(continued)

(Excerpts from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of September 30, 1918) *Battalion arrived at Assembly Area at about 1.00 a.m. and were in position by 2.30 a.m. heavy enemy whizz-bang was concentrated in close proximity... A small amount of gas shelling by the enemy was carried out... At 4.40 a.m., ZERO HOUR, the attack commenced supported by a heavy and very effective barrage from our guns. The attack was successful and by 6.00 a.m. all our objectives were taken and work of consolidation had commenced...*



(Right: A German machine-gunner who also gave his all – from *Illustration*)

*This (consolidation) was very difficult owing to the harassing fire carried out by enemy machine-gunners... In spite of several determined counter-attacks all our newly captured positions were maintained... Our casualties during these operations on this day were 2 officers killed, 9 officers wounded and 175 (estimated) other ranks killed and wounded.*

Circumstances of casualty: “Killed in Action” – *While advancing with his Company in an attack from north-west of Hendecourt to South-East of Vis-en-Artois, and when about half way to the objective, enemy machine gun fire became heavy, causing many casualties. Private Payne continued to go forward but was later hit in the head with a bullet and instantly killed.*

The son of James Payne, fisherman, and of Dinah (also found as *Dina*) Payne (née *Oake/Oak*) of Fogo, Newfoundland, and husband of Cora Melinda\*, he was also brother to at least Sarah-Susan, Elizabeth-May, Bertha, Elsie-May, Frederika, John-Henry (deceased aged one month) and to Kenneth.



*\*Her later address recorded as 162 Rose Avenue, Toronto, Ontario*

(Right above: *The photograph of Private(?) Payne is from the Waterloo Region Generations web-site.*)

Private Payne was reported as having been *killed in action* on August 30, 1918, while fighting with his unit along the Arras-Cambrai road axis.

Harold Payne had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-six years and five months: date of birth in Fogo, Newfoundland, October 7, 1890.



(Right above: *The sacrifice of Harold Payne is honoured on the War Memorial which stands in the community of Fogo, Newfoundland. – photograph from 2014)*

(continued)



Private Harold Payne 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.

