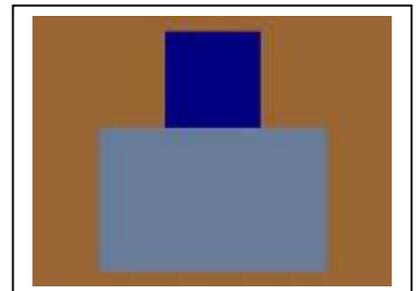




**Private Edward Perks, Number 3106172 of the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Ontario County), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Dury Crucifix Cemetery: Grave reference II.A.46.**

**(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Ontario County), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)**

**(continued)**



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *machine-hand*, Edward Perks was documented as being resident in the United States, at 143, Buger Street, Newark, New Jersey, at the time of his enlistment. There appears to be no information a propos his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to New Jersey\* before this time, nor seems there to be any record in his documents – or other sources – of his crossing the Canada-United States border at the time of his enlistment; all that may be gleaned from his service records is the following:

Edward Perks presented himself at the British Recruiting Mission in New York, New York, for medical examination on December 11 of 1917 where three doctors – McDonald, Bugden(?) and McWilliams – found him to be fit for *overseas service*. Three days afterwards he had made the journey from there to Toronto where he enlisted on that December 14, attesting later on the same day.

*\*There is, however, the possibility that he was the eighteen-year old E. Perks recorded on the passenger list of the SS Bruce on August 22 of 1912. This young man made the crossing from Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, on that day to North Sydney, Nova Scotia, and was reported as being en route for Toronto. (The name Perks is extremely rare among the records of that time.)*

He was thereupon *taken on strength* by the 1<sup>st</sup> Depot Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Central Ontario Regiment. A conclusion to the formalities of his enlistment then took place five days later, on December 19, when a major of the Battalion declared – on paper – that...*Private Edward Perks...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation\** - although for no recorded reason he was to undergo a second medical examination of December 27.

*\*Although compulsory military service – conscription - had already been introduced in Canada by this time, Edward Perks was a volunteer.*

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 Perks was to spend only some seven weeks in uniform in Canada before being ordered overseas.

Exactly to where Private Perks was posted at this time is not recorded, although during the Great War there was a large training area at the site of *Exhibition Park* in Toronto. His file next cites him as being at dockside in the devastated city of Halifax\*, embarking on February 2, onto His Majesty's Transport *Scandinavian* as a soldier of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of his unit, still the 1<sup>st</sup> Depot Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Central Ontario Regiment.



There were likely other units and military personnel taking passage for the United Kingdom on board the vessel, but they appear not to be recorded.

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

**\*An ammunition ship, the 'Mont Blanc', had exploded on December 6, 1917, reducing much of the harbour and surrounding city to rubble. The image below shows part of downtown Halifax days after the catastrophe. The 'Imo', one of the ships directly involved is to be seen beached on the opposite side of the harbour. Apparently, according to the caption on the original picture, the heap of wreckage in the middle represents much of what remained of the 'Mont Blanc'. – from Illustration)**

**Scandinavian arrived in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool on February 15-16. Apparently, two days before the ship sailed from Halifax, Private Perk's 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft had been bureaucratically transferred to the 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian (Reserve) Battalion which itself was to be posted, only days prior to the arrival of the Draft in Liverpool, to the area of *East Sandling*.**



***East Sandling* was a subsidiary camp of the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* established on the Kentish coast on the Dover Straits in the vicinity of the harbour and town of Folkestone.**



**Thus it was to *East Sandling* that Private Perk's detachment was transported by train immediately after landing.**

**(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)***

**Some seven weeks later, on April 9, the 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian (Reserve) Battalion was itself transferred westward to the county of Surrey, south of London, to *Witley Camp* to continue training. Weeks later again, on June 1, Private Perks was *struck off strength* by his reserve unit, to be *taken on strength* at that time by the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Ontario County*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, already serving on the Continent.**

**On that same June 1, he took ship to France, likely passing overnight through the English port of Southampton and its French counterpart, Le Havre.**

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

**Upon his arrival in France on June 2, Private Perks reported to the Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Étapes. It was on that June 2 that the Canadian Infantry Base Depot, by then established in the French coastal town of Étapes, reported having received seventeen-hundred ninety-four *other ranks* from England to re-enforce units of the Canadian forces already serving on the Continent. Private Perks was but one of them.**



**(continued)**

Five days later, two-thousand six *other ranks* were despatched to the nearby Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp from the CIBD\*, arriving there on the same day. This was to be the last stage before being ordered to a particular battalion although, for Private Perks, *this* stage was to last more than two months.

He was not to join his new unit, the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Ontario County*), until mid-August.

*\*This number, of course, was not destined to join a single company, battery or battalion. Most of the Canadian forces in the field at this time were now re-enforcing for the upcoming summer offensive (see further below).*

The exact date on which Private Perks left the CCRC to report to the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion appears not to be recorded. However, as will be seen later in this dossier, such were the happenings at this time that it was likely to have been a move requiring a number of days. His detachment of five officers and one-hundred *other ranks* was reported by one source as having arrived to join the Battalion on August 15 but also, in another, on August 17. Perhaps both are correct – Private Murphy et al reporting to the rear echelons on that first date, then being sent forward to be posted, each man to his Company, two days later.

\* \* \* \* \*

The 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion had arrived in France from England on February 11 of 1917, to become an element of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division. Having disembarked in England from Canada the previous summer, until its transfer to the Continent, the Battalion had provided reinforcements for other Canadian units. Now it was to play a direct role – more or less.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division already had its full complement of four battalions in each of its three brigades, thus the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion was, at least temporarily, a superfluous entity. After some preliminary training and organization its personnel had been divided among the four already-existing battalions of the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade – one platoon being assigned to each company.

For the next while, not only was training undertaken in this fashion, but so were operations, using the same arrangement of personnel. However as the time for the impending British spring offensive for that 1917 drew ever closer, the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion once again became a unit unto itself, ordered to ready itself for its role in that confrontation – a role, however, that appears not to have existed.

On April 9 of 1917 the British Army 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 daily 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.



(continued)

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

(Preceding page: *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 – with a British Brigade under Canadian command - stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

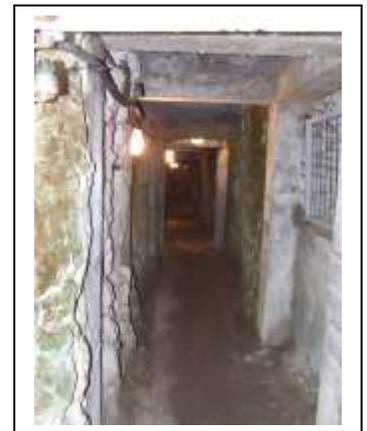


The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions had been handed responsibility for the Ridge itself; to their immediate right had been the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, attacking in the area of the village of Thélus on the southern slope; and, to the right again, the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup>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

(Right above: *Canadian troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, equipped – or perhaps 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*)

(Right below: *Grange Tunnel - one of the few remaining galleries which remains open to the public at Vimy a century later – photograph from 2008(?)*)

On April 10 the Canadians finished clearing the area of Vimy Ridge of the few remaining pockets of resistance and began to consolidate the area in anticipation of the expected German counter-attacks – which, somewhat surprisingly, were never to amount to very much.



There had on those first two days 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, the weather having been at least partly responsible. Thus the Germans closed the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

The part played on April 9 by the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion *also* appears to have been one of inertia, the orders issued to the unit having been those of... *bringing scheme of consolidation after attack, into effect*. On April 10 it supplied a working-party of one-hundred fifty men: on the next, April 11, it moved into support positions and sat there all day to be targeted by the enemy artillery.

(continued)

It must have been with mixed feelings that the Battalion War Diarist entered the casualty count for those three days on Vimy Ridge: eight dead and twenty-four wounded.

Orders were now to come, on April 17, from the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade Headquarters: the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to become a Canadian Pioneer Battalion\* - in fact, working-parties from the Battalion had just days before completed some road-building - and to be attached to the 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade.

*\*Pioneer Battalions were responsible for the construction and repairing, and also the improvement of such things as trenches, dugouts, wiring, drainage, sanitary facilities, roads and the like\*. It was hard work and undoubtedly the personnel was chosen, from amongst other attributes, each man for his physique and also for his experience in such work.*



*In the case of the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion it would seem that expediency also had had a part to play.*

*(Right above: The caption to the image, translated, reads: Canadian sappers building a road somewhere... 'in liberated territory' – from Le Miroir or Illustration)*

*\*In fact, much of the work done was also the responsibility at times of the Engineers.*

It would seem that the eventual solution chosen by the High Command had an aura of iniquity about it. The 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, of a strength of more than eleven hundred, was to be disbanded, its personnel distributed to other units – twenty-six to the 116<sup>th</sup> - and the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion was then to replace the 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade.

This replacement was effected during the period of April 28 to 30 – leaving, perhaps not surprisingly, a somewhat bitter taste in the mouths of some of the personnel – particularly officers - of the now-defunct 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

Thus on May 1, 1917, the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion became a *bona fide* unit of the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Brigade. Yet it would seem - from an admittedly *superficial* scan of the Battalion War Diary - that a great deal of *pioneer* work still came the way of the 116<sup>th</sup> to go along with the other routines, rigours and perils of life in the trenches of the Great War\*.

*\*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.*



(continued)

*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.*

*(Preceding page: 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 five-week *Battle of Arras* having terminated in mid-May, the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the other units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division were now to face a long period of the grind of trench warfare\*. This was not to be the case for many of the other units of the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions which were serving in sectors from Vimy in the south to Béthune to the north: the Canadian Corps High Command had some offensive work planned for them.



*\*During some of the early days of its service with the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, the Battalion was again in the area of Vimy Ridge and was, in fact, residing in Grange Tunnel. (see above).*

*(Right above: The village of Souchez, just to the north of Vimy, already looked like this in 1915 when the French passed control of the area over to the British. – from Le Miroir)*

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



*(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)*

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

*\*It should be remembered that during the Great War the British High Command was in control of not only its own troops but also those from all the British Dominions, colonies and territories.*

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



On July 11 of this as yet routine summer the Battalion... *formed up on the Gouy Road for the reception of His Majesty, King George V, on his recent tour through France.*

(continued)

(Right: *George V... By the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India* – from the [bing.com/images](http://bing.com/images) web-site)



Eleven days later, the 116<sup>th</sup> was to be involved in a raid on enemy positions which was undertaken during the night of July 22-23, its objective being the destruction of enemy positions and also the taking of prisoners for intelligence purposes. This was to be the biggest operation – and the most costly – to date for the unit.

The War Diary reports a success on both counts, against which was to be weighed the price of twelve – *all ranks - killed in action, forty-five wounded, and seventeen missing in action.*



(Right: *Canadian troops in the forward area during the summer of 1917* – from *Illustration*)

Elsewhere on the Canadian front, on August 15, a major attack\* was launched by troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions in the suburbs of the city of Lens and just to the north, in the area of a small rise known as *Hill 70*.



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

The 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion, however, was not to play a part in this particular offensive and on that day was in fact busy marching to billets in Auchel and being inspected on the way by Major-General Lipsett\* of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division. On the three days following, cleaning-up, training and baths were the primary topics of the War Diary entries.

*\*Major-General Lipsett was one of the few officers of this rank to be killed in action during the Great War – on October 14, 1918.*

The Canadian efforts in their sector had been expected 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 then the Canadians were ordered to prepare to move north; thus the Canadians were obliged to abandon their 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*)

(continued)

It was on October 15, that a still-undermanned 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion\* began to make its way on foot and by train, to the area of the Franco-Belgian border. Later that day the unit was being billeted in the northern French town of Cæstre where it was to remain and train for the next week.

*\*It had been operating at some two-thirds regulation strength since August until some reinforcements – still insufficient - arrived on unrecorded dates just prior to departure.*

It was then to be on October 22, at fifteen minutes to four in the morning, that the Battalion entrained for Ypres, likely alighting at the shattered railway station just outside the southern ramparts of the city. From there the unit marched through the rubble to the north-east until it reached *Camp X* near to the village of Wieltje.



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

*(Right: The railway station at Ypres (Ieper) in 1919, a year after the War – from a vintage post-card)*



Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign into which the Canadians were about to be thrust – already ongoing since the last day of that July of 1917 - came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions in reserve.

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

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



For the forthcoming three days the Battalion supplied working-parties before, on the 26<sup>th</sup>, moving forward into close support and providing stretcher-parties for an attack on that day. Its casualties were mercifully light – two *killed in action* and ten *wounded*.

The succeeding days, some spent in the front line before relief permitted a retirement back to Wieltje, were uneventful. They were *all* spent by the Battalion personnel serving in carrying-parties – mostly of ammunition - and working-parties.

(Right: *Part of the battle-field as it is today, just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the monument on the previous page. – photograph from 2010*)



(Right below: *A Canadian carrying-party delivering the trappings of war somewhere on the Western Front in 1917, although likely not in the forward area – and likely not at Passchendaele: Apparently the use of the head-band had been adopted in the Canadian forces from its use by the indigenous peoples at home. – from Le Miroir*)



On November 1 to 4 the unit was shuttled, again piecemeal, up to the forward area and then, on the 5<sup>th</sup>, back again to Wieltje, by far the majority of casualties during that tour having been caused by artillery fire.

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



On October 31 the unit was despatched back to the forward area where its duties were once more those of working-parties. On November 2 it was then withdrawn and was not to return to the front again during the battle. Nonetheless, it remained active in the neighbourhood of Ypres itself until the 19<sup>th</sup> of the month when it was ordered to return to France.

The 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion had fared a lot better than had many of the units which had fought at *Passchendaele*. By November 24 it was in the area the northern French community of Lillers, in more or less the same sector(s) that it had left a month before.

The month of December offered something a little different – perhaps a reminder of home - to all the Canadian military personnel who were serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army were open during that period and the participation, in at least *some* units, was in the ninety per cent range\*. Although the Battalion War Diarist does not mention the statistics for the 116<sup>th</sup>, he *does* note that voting was carried out on December 1.

*\*Apparently, at the same time, the troops were given the opportunity to subscribe to Canada's Victory War Loan. Thus the soldier fighting the war was also encouraged to pay for it as well.*

Now, for the first time, the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Ontario County*) was to experience the relative calm of a winter – the fourth – of the *Great War*. Once again the medical services were to report more admissions from sickness than from all other causes – except perhaps dental problems. And once again enemy artillery and snipers were the greatest enemy of the men in the trenches – rivalled by only the lice\*.

(continued)

***\*Although it is true that the High Command persisted in encouraging raids on the enemy. It was felt that it was good for troop morale and for the soldier's offensive spirit. Needless to say, the soldier in question – the British 'Tommy' earning but his single shilling per day and his Canadian counterpart his one dollar and ten cents – was not always in complete agreement with his superiors.***

***(Right: Canadian soldiers, while off-duty, perusing the program of an upcoming concert 'somewhere on the Continent' – from Le Miroir)***



**This *relative calm* allowed for the more frequent withdrawal of units to the reserve areas, for the most part out of the range of all but the most powerful artillery pieces.**

**For the troops there were of course the inevitable training, physical exercises, musketry, gas drills, familiarization with their new equipment and also that of the enemy, inspections, route marches, lectures, baths, foot inspections, bombing (grenade) routines, parades, awards of decorations, more working-parties and carrying-parties, ad infinitum so at times it must have seemed... but there were also *some* periods of rest, at times concerts, inter- and intra-unit competitions and increasingly...sports.**

***(Right: A photograph, from 1917, of a Canadian soldier during training in the use of his 'gas-helmet': As may be imagined, it was difficult for the wearer to perform the duties of a soldier, particularly in the event of an attack. – from Le Miroir)***



***(Right: The caption cites this as being an Official Canadian Photograph of a... 'violinist playing traditional music near Lens'. - from Le Miroir)***



**And what is more, during those activities, one presumes, no-one was shooting at them. Thus the winter of 1918-1919 passed. Then came the spring.**

**Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came 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 launched a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21, that first day of the spring. The main blow fell at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops stationed there\*.**



**(continued)**

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

**The German advance continued for a month, petering out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was a 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’, fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division. It also was successful for a while, but petered out towards the end of the month.***

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



**(Right: *The 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)**



**However, despite, at times, the critical situations in the areas of both *the Somme* and *Flanders*, apparently neither the services of the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion, nor those of any unit of the entire Canadian Corps, were required during either *Michael* or *Georgette*.**

**The next months were once again ones of relative calm after the turmoil of the early spring as now the Allies and the newly-arriving Americans began in their turn to prepare for an offensive campaign – and therefore as the German forces began to gird themselves for the inevitable retribution which was soon to burst upon them.**

**The newly-appointed Generalissimo of the Allied and Associate forces on the Western Front was the Frenchman, Ferdinand Foch. His plan was to strike not only hard, but to strike often and ubiquitously, thus eventually overwhelming an already stretched enemy defence. Any retirement by the enemy was to be closely followed up, the pressure to be unrelenting.**

**The calm continued into the month of July and there appears to be no indication in the Battalion War Diary of anything grand in the offing, only the routine of everyday existence in the trenches – and the seemingly-inevitable working-parties.**

**However, things were about to change: On July 29 the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered to parade in battle order and to vacate its current billets. Moving on foot and also by bus, by August 1 the Battalion had arrived in Aumont, to the west of the city of Amiens and some ninety kilometres to the south-west of where it had been encamped only days previously.**

**(Right: *The venerable 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 – photograph from 2007(?)*)**

The 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not alone in this change of sectors. In fact the entire Canadian Corps was on the move. In the space of about two weeks, the four Canadian Divisions\*, infantry and artillery, were to be transferred from their sectors of responsibility around and to the north of Arras, to the new front to the east of Amiens where the German offensive of April and May had come to a halt.

*\*A few units, making themselves visible, had moved in the opposite direction, north into Belgium, to give the impression of any upcoming offensive was to be once more in the area of the Ypres Salient.*



The first stages of this huge and complex operation had for the most part been undertaken by motor transport and by train. However, once the troops had reached an area north of Amiens they passed to the west, encircling the city to the west and south in order then to move into their new positions eastwards.

And these latter movements had been made on foot and at night so as not to allow the German reconnaissance planes with their observers any indication of something happening. Given the immensity of the venture, it is perhaps surprising to learn that it worked.

The enemy was apparently to be caught entirely by surprise.

It would also seem that many of the Canadian troops were also caught by the same surprise: it was not until August 3, while on his way marching towards Amiens that the Battalion War Diarist noticed that... *increasing evidence of an offensive was to be seen...A large number of tanks were passed, moving up the road.*



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

August 4 and 5 were spent by the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion – and by many others – in two forested areas, the *Bois de Boves* and the *Bois de Gentelles*, as they all moved closer to their assembly and jumping-off points. On the night of August 7-8, the troops of the first waves of the attack were in position.

**(Right: *Canadian and German wounded from the first days of the battle – some cases more serious than others - waiting to be evacuated to the rear – from Le Miroir*)**



**(continued)**

**(Excerpt from the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of August 8, 1918) *In the line: the Battalion attacked in conjunction with troops on the right and left, zero hour being at 4.20 a.m. The attack was highly successful, the Unit bivouacking for the night at the final objective. Weather fine. Our casualties were 2 officers and thirty-nine other ranks killed, 10 officers and 148 other ranks wounded or missing.***

**From August 8 until August 15 the Battalion – as did the other Canadian units - moved steadily forward\*, the only exception having been during the early morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> when an enemy counter-attack had necessitated a temporary retirement. On the night of August 15-16 the Battalion was relieved and withdrawn, moving back into support as far as Le Quesnel.**

***\*On the first day the advance had been some eleven kilometres, a feat unheard of since the opening months of the Great War in 1914.***

**(Right: *Hillside Cemetery, Le Quesnel, wherein lie at least two Newfoundlanders who wore Canadian uniforms, Private Pugh and Lieutenant Goodyear – photograph from 2017*)**



**It was on that August 15 (or the 17<sup>th</sup>) that the documents of Private Perks (and the Battalion War Diary) record his reporting *to duty* with the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion.**

\* \* \* \* \*

**After its latest withdrawal, Private Perks' unit was not to return to the forward area during the remainder of this, the *Battle of Amiens*. After some days of rest, on August 19, it was ordered to withdraw entirely from the field and to return whence it had come some dozen days previously.**

**Its place – and the place of other Canadian units now being withdrawn – was to be taken by French forces.**



**(Right above: *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 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion – and during the next few days, the Canadian Corps in its entirety – retired in much the same manner and by the same itineraries as it had arrived in front of Amiens. By August 25 Private Perks was camped in a field on the Arras to St-Pol road, listening to the band of the Royal Canadian Regiment and awaiting orders.**

**The orders in question were received at one o'clock in the morning of the next day... *to be ready to move at thirty minutes' notice*. Thus, during that morning the Battalion moved to a point east of Arras from where, at twenty minutes past mid-night of August 26-27 it was moved forward to its assembly points.**

**(continued)**

The strategy of Marechal Foch has already been outlined above. On this occasion he was now planning to strike the enemy along the axis of the main road from Arras to Cambrai even while the attack of less than three weeks earlier in front of Amiens was still being pursued. And once again the Canadian Corps was to be used in a major role; the Germans, having been deceived once about its whereabouts – and believing it still to be stationed somewhere on the Amiens Front – were about to find themselves mistaken for on this second occasion.

(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)*



(Excerpt from the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for August 27, 1918) *Zero Hour was at 4:55 a.m... the objectives being Boiry-Notre Dame and Artillery Hill... Considerable opposition was encountered from machine guns, and further progress being impossible after the capture of these two woods it was found necessary to re-organize, the whole under the command of Major Pratt, Major Sutherland\* having been killed by machine gun fire. It was found necessary to withdraw the line somewhat to complete re-organization...*



*\*At the time acting commanding officer of the Battalion*

(Right: *A German machine-gunner who fought to the last – from Illustration)*

The attack by the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion continued on August 28 after which, during that night, the unit was ordered to be relieved. During those two days of fighting the unit had incurred the following casualties – all ranks: forty-five *killed in action*, two-hundred twenty-seven *wounded*, and twenty-three *missing in action*.

The son of Henry Perks of the Newfoundland Constabulary, deceased August 6, 1901, and of Mary Perks – to whom he had willed his all on January 8, 1918, and also to whom he had allotted, as of February 2 of 1918, a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay – he was also brother to at least John, Ambrose, James and likely Henry\*.

*\*The senior Henry Perks was originally from England and served as police constable in the community of Trinity where the first three of the above-listed brothers originated according to the 1921 Census. After Constable Henry Perks' passing, the family apparently moved to St. John's, residing at first on Goodview Street before moving to Central Street where the same 1921 Census finds Mary, John, Ambrose and James.*

Private Edward Perks was reported as having been *killed in action* on August 27, 1918, in fighting in the area of Boiry Notre-Dame to the east of Monchy-le-Preux.

(continued)

Edward Perks had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-four years and four months: date of birth according to his attestation papers, October 2, 1893\*.

*\*The same papers cite his place of birth as St. John's but there appears to be no record of any Perks baptism in the Church of England files of the time. Unfortunately the baptismal records of the Church of England, Trinity, do not include the relevant years – all that can be referred to are the records of the 1921 Census which document his above-mentioned brothers as having apparently been born in Trinity.*

(Right: *This family memorial, to be found in the Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Cemetery in St. John's, commemorates and honours the sacrifice of Private Edward Perks. – photograph from 2022, with thanks for same to my wife, Claire*)

Private Edward Perks 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 19, 2023.