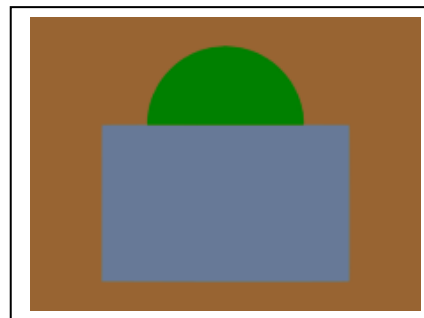




Private Edward Cole Peters (Number 475988), of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Battalion (*Eastern Ontario Regiment*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in White House Cemetery, St-Jean-les-Ypres, Belgium: Grave reference II.F.24.

(Right: *The image of the PPCLI Battalion shoulder-flash is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)



(continued)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a cashier with the *Canada Life Insurance Company* in Calgary Alberta, Edward Cole Peters is likely to have been the sixteen-year old student recorded on two passenger lists of the SS *Bruce* in the year 1907. The young man made the journey from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland to North Sydney in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia – on both occasions on his way to Sackville, New Brunswick - on January 15 and then September 19 of that year.

There it was that he concluded the schooling that he had begun at the Methodist College in St. John's - and then continued in Curling, Newfoundland - at the Mount Allison Academy in Sackville, New Brunswick, before then completing two years of studies there at the University of the same name.

Edward Cole Peters then moved temporarily in 1908 to Charlottetown where his father and his family were by that time residing – his father having been transferred there - but it was apparently not to be long before he was striking out on his own. He worked in Amherst, on the border of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, before then in Moncton, Kingston and Ottawa in succession. His father having once more been transferred - and he and his family having moved westward to Calgary – Edward also found employment there in 1914.

It was on August 4 of that year that Great Britain declared war on Germany, doing so also on behalf of the Dominions and of the other Imperial possessions overseas.

The dates provided among his papers lead to some confusion: On July 15 he was recorded as having passed a medical examination and also as having been attested. Almost two weeks later, on July 28, an officer responsible for the 3<sup>rd</sup> University Company\* brought the formalities to Private Peters' enlistment to a conclusion when he declared – on paper – that...*having been finally approved and inspected by me on this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this attestation.*

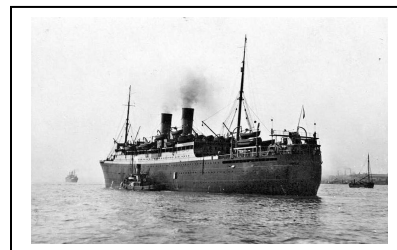
*\*It would appear that there were eventually to be five such companies, all to serve as reinforcements for the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.*

It would appear from his other papers that that July 28 was, in fact, the day on which he enlisted. This was also the day on which another official, a *Montreal* magistrate, certified his attestation of July 15\*. Apparently – despite the fact that a further single document has him enlisting on July 28 in Edmonton – he had by that date made the journey eastwards to Montreal in order to join his new unit.

*\*On these papers he also cites having served for five months as a private with the 103<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Canadian Militia (Calgary Highlanders).*

In 1905, Mc Gill University in Montreal had undertaken to create the first university officer training corps in North America. This policy had continued and, in fact, had increased during the time of the *Great War*, the number of University Companies that were eventually raised at McGill – five in all as seen above - bearing witness to this, even though, as the conflict progressed, fewer and fewer of the recruits – as of 1916 some were conscripts – were students from that institution.

Training was to continue for just over five weeks for Private Peters before he departed for *overseas service*. His *3<sup>rd</sup> University Company (reinforcing PPCLI)* was not alone for the trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom: also travelling on board His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* were to be Second Drafts of the 44<sup>th</sup>, the 52<sup>nd</sup> and the 55<sup>th</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry.



(Right above: *The photograph of Missanabie from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Embarkation was completed in the *Port of Montreal* by September 4, 1915, on which day the vessel sailed. Some ten days later, on September 14, *Missanabie* docked in the English south-coast naval harbour of Plymouth-Devonport at which point the *3<sup>rd</sup> University Draft*, upon disembarkation, was transported to the Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe*, established by that time on the Dover Straits in the vicinity of the harbour and town of Folkestone.



(Right above: *The harbour of Plymouth-Devonport as it was almost a century after the Great War – and a lot less busy nowadays - photograph from 2013*)

The 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion, originally intended to serve as a fighting unit of the *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, upon its arrival in the United Kingdom, was - as was the case with the majority of the two-hundred fifty battalions eventually raised in Canada and transported overseas - to serve only as a re-enforcement pool for the approximately fifty such units eventually to be despatched to *active service* on the Continent. On April 29, 1915, it was re-designated as the 11<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion.



(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*)

Almost immediately after having arrived at *Shorncliffe*, Private Peters' unit was to be absorbed by the above-mentioned Canadian 11<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion for further training and organization. It was then to be only another ten weeks hence, on November 24, that a re-enforcement draft which counted Private Peters among its ranks was transferred – at least bureaucratically – to the PPCLI.

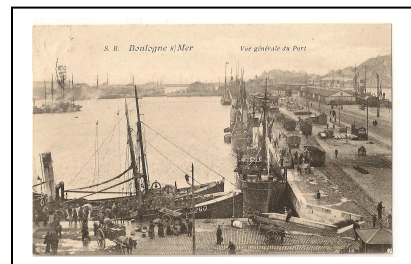
Likely having passed through nearby Folkestone and its French counterpart, Boulogne, by November 27, three days later again, Private Peter's was reported as having been *taken on strength* by the Canadian Base Depot, established only some two months prior, in the vicinity of the French industrial city of Le Have, on the estuary of the River Seine.



(continued)

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

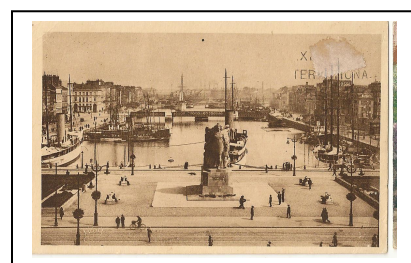
**There may have been a little bureaucratic mishandling of the transfer as documented in the Base Depot War Diary of September 25, the pertinent excerpt of which reads as follows: *Draft of 272 from Shorncliffe. 130 men of the P.P.C.L.I. were apparently sent on up to Rouen by mistake\**.**



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

***\*It may have been because the British had a large Base Depot at Rouen and the PPCLI had until very recently been serving in a British brigade (see further below).***

**Private Peters was to languish\* in Rouelles Camp at Le Havre for next several days before being despatched on December 4, one of a detachment of one-hundred eight re-enforcements, to join his new unit *in the field* on the following day.**



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

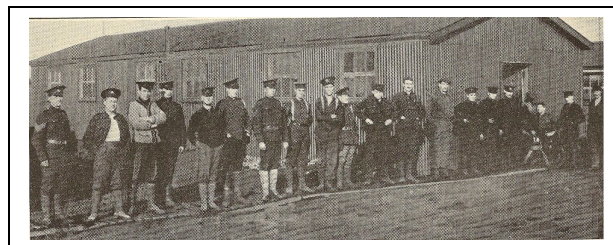
***\*Maybe the term ‘languish’ is inappropriate: at the time the Canadians were exchanging their unsatisfactory Canadian-produced Ross rifles for the British-manufactured Short Lee-Enfield Mark III, and the newcomers arriving at the time at Le Havre were obliged to undergo days of familiarization with the new weapon.***

**An excerpt from the PPCLI War Diary entry of December 5 confirms this as being the date on which Private Peters reported *to duty* at Flêtre in northern France, some ten kilometres from the Franco-Belgian frontier: *Draft of 138 men arrived from Base and were posted to Companies making our parade state 31 Officers and 1008 other ranks.***

\* \* \* \* \*

**The Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry Battalion was not to serve with other *Canadian* forces on *active service* until November of 1915 when it became a battalion of the then-forming 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division. This would be more than a full year after its arrival in the United Kingdom in October of 1914.**

**It had thereupon spent the first weeks of its service in the United Kingdom at *Bustard Camp* on the Salisbury Plain, the unit having then been transferred to Winchester on November 16, there to be attached to the British 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 27<sup>th</sup> Division.**



**(Right above: *Canadian troops during the autumn of 1914 at Bulford Camp, Wiltshire – from The War Illustrated*)**

Only five days before that Christmas of 1914, the PPCLI Battalion\* had marched from Winchester to Southampton where it had embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Cardiganshire* and had sailed to the French port-city of Le Havre.

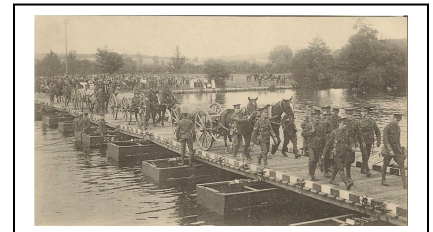
The vessel had docked in the early afternoon, the Battalion personnel then spending the night in a nearby camp before boarding a train on the following evening. The Battalion War Diarist describes the event in his entry of the day:

*...The whole Battalion had to entrain in one train of 48 trucks. Officers 1, Men 24, Horses 10, VEHICLES 13. Very tight fit, some of the men being unable to sit down.*

*\*The PPCLI was – and still is today – a regiment, a force which may comprise any number of battalions – today, in 2017, there are three. Only a single battalion of the PPCLI Regiment ever served as a fighting unit at the front. A battalion normally comprised four companies each two-hundred fifty men strong plus a further five hundred reserves and otherwise designated personnel, but during the Great War off-times this was reduced to a much lesser number.*

The Battalion had then travelled northward, to have finished detraining at Arques at half-past mid-night on December 23 before then having marched for a further two-and-a-half hours to its billets in and in the vicinity of the village of Blaringhem. This community was to be its home for the following two weeks before a two-day march\* into Belgium found the PPCLI in the area of Dickebusch (today *Dikkebusch*), just to the south-west of the already-battered medieval city of Ypres.

*\*Some of the Canadian equipment in the early stages of the conflict left much to be desired – apparently both in quality and quantity. The War Diarist wrote of the march that... Lack of boots much felt, many men marching with no soles at all to their boots.*



(Right above: *Troops – said to be British, but the Canadians by then wore British Uniforms due to the poor quality of their own – on the march in the north of France during the early period of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The Battalion took its place in the line on the evening of that same day, January 6, 1915. Its personnel was soon to learn about the rigours, routines and perils of life – and death\* - in the trenches\*\*.

*\*The first to be killed in action, on January 8, 1915, according to the War Diary, were Number 252, Corporal W. Fry and Number 1284, Lance Corporal H.O. Bellinger, likely victims of the heavy enemy shelling reported during the early morning – although Wikipedia names a Private Guy Dwyer from Hanover, New Brunswick, as having been the Battalion's first combat casualty of the war on February 4, 1915.*



(continued)

**(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 – which the PPCLI had already adopted on November of 1914 – from Illustration)**

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

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

**(Right below: An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2<sup>nd</sup> Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the Great War there was to be very little left standing. – from Illustration)**

The PPCLI remained stationed in the vicinity of Dickebusch while in the forward area, at Westoutre while in reserve, and near to the town of Poperinghe when withdrawn further back into Divisional Reserve. At the beginning of April it moved forward again so that by April 14 it was replacing troops of the Rifle Brigade on the eastern side of the *Ypres Salient*, in trenches in *Polygon Wood*.



At the same time, French troops in the adjacent sectors counter-clockwise were being replaced by the Canadian Division. Some of the Canadian units were still in fact only in the process of establishing themselves in their new positions when the Germans attacked on April 22, for the first time using chlorine gas as an overture to their infantry onslaught.

Close though the positions held by the PPCLI were to the ruptured Canadian and French lines, the Battalion War Diarist of the time has noted little activity on the part of Private Peters' unit; by the end of the month, by which time the situation had been somewhat stabilized, the PPCLI Battalion was still lodged in *Polygon Wood*. From April 22 to 30 (inclusive), in contrast to casualties elsewhere, those of the PPCLI were to be light: sixty *killed, wounded and missing* all told.

However, eight days later, the unit was to be called upon to resist a further German attack. In an action designated among its battle honours as *Frezenberg*, on May 8 the PPCLI Battalion held the new, hastily-prepared positions of the *Bellewarde Ridge* all day until its relief at mid-night by the King's Royal Rifles. By then the unit had incurred - different sources disagree upon the exact numbers - some four-hundred casualties of which one-quarter were reported as having been *killed in action*.

(continued)

**(Right below: A former non-commissioned officer of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry stands in front of the monument to the Battalion to be found in the area of the Bellewarde Ridge. It commemorates the action of May 8, 1915. – photograph from 2013(?))**

The following months, during which the Battalion underwent re-organization and re-enforcement, were spent at first in the area just outside the *Lille Gate* – the southern entrance to the city of Ypres – then later, south again and across the Franco-Belgian frontier, in the vicinity of the town of Armentières.



Then, after a lengthy period in the area of Hazebrouck, withdrawn well away from the forward positions, at the end of September the unit was returned to the front in the vicinity of the city and mining-centre of Lens, there to spend the two following months.

The PPCLI would later return to the same area as a unit of the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and the Canadian Corps.



**(Right: The mining village of Loos-en-Gohelle just to the north of Lens as it was already in 1915 – from *Le Miroir*)**

These preceding months had seen little concerted action by either side, confrontations being rather of a local nature. There had been, of course, a constant stream of casualties, mostly due to the enemy's artillery and also to his snipers. The British and Empire (*Commonwealth*) contribution to the war effort was now growing with the Territorial Army and the battalions of the New Army starting to make their way to the Continent; and further units from the Dominions were also arriving from around the globe to serve in the various theatres of the conflict.

In September of 1915 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, after months of training in the United Kingdom, had landed in France to take responsibility in Belgium for sectors where, only months before, the PPCLI had been serving. And then, units of the soon-to-be 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division began making their way across the English Channel, some serving at the front on an *ad hoc* basis, until the new parent unit officially came into being – which it did at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of the New Year, 1915.



**(Right above: The French port of Boulogne – through which the great majority of the personnel of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division passed on its way to the Western Front in September of 1915 - at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)**

In November the 27<sup>th</sup> Division received orders to prepare for transfer to the new theatre of war being established in Macedonia to fight against the forces of Bulgaria, recently declared for the Central Powers. Its first units began embarking for this enterprise on November 17.

The PPCLI Battalion, however, was not to contribute to this venture in Salonica, as the new front came to be known. On November 8 there was a farewell parade at which time the Commanding Officer of the 80<sup>th</sup> Brigade, as spokesman for all of the Canadian unit's comrades-in-arms, paid his compliments and offered the Brigade's best wishes in all its future endeavours.

The PPCLI Battalion was to remain at Flixecourt - where it had been posted for the farewell ceremonies and courtesies - until the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month when it marched – accompanied by a fife and drum band - to Pont-Rémy, some fifteen kilometres distant, from where it entrained for the northern French community of Cæstre. It was there greeted by Lieutenant-General Alderson, Commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, and by the welcoming Band of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division before marching to its billets some two kilometres away.

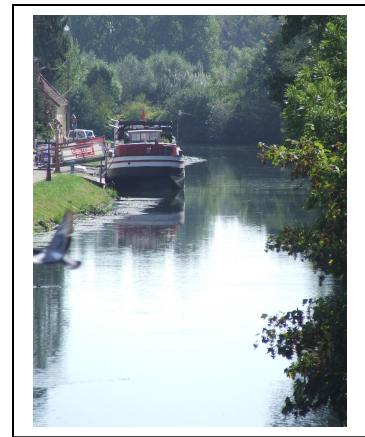
(Right below: *The 'pont' at Pont-Rémy, a stone's throw from the railway station, here traverses the River Somme, another name in both Canadian and Newfoundland history. – photograph from 2010*)

On the morrow morn, that of November 26, the weather gods welcomed the new-comers in their own fashion: with a heavy snow-storm.

It was to be a further seven weeks before the PPCLI battalion was then posted to the forward area once more. In the meanwhile it was posted to the rear areas of Flêtre, La Clytte and back to Flêtre again. In both of these encampments the unit underwent training, paraded, attended courses, was inspected, went to church, took infrequent baths, marched, was photographed, played football, welcomed re-enforcements, furnished working-parties, had three men wounded by long-range artillery... in fact, did just about everything except fire a rifle in anger.

And it was at Flêtre, of course, that Private Peters' re-enforcement draft had reported *to duty* on December 5.

(Right above: *La Clytte (today Klijte) Military Cemetery in which are buried one-thousand twenty-eight dead of the Great War. Two-hundred thirty-eight of them are unidentified. – photograph from 2017*)



\* \* \* \* \*

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division officially came into being at mid-night on the night of December 31 of 1915 and January 1 of the New Year, 1916. The PPCLI Battalion was to be a unit of the 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, in the company of the 42<sup>nd</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Battalions as well as of the Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment. Its first tour in the trenches as a Canadian unit under Canadian command began on the evening of January 12.

(continued)



The first months of that winter of 1916-1917 were to be a quiet time. Thus the month of February, all twenty-nine days of it – and the first three weeks of March were to pass in that manner, the tranquil situation having been deemed as *normal* on perhaps the majority of occasions by the War Diarist. The weather, cited from the same source, was – also normally - poor.

Private Peters', on February 12, had apparently been admitted into an unidentified isolation hospital. It was apparently a false alert: he was discharged from hospital back *to duty* with his unit on the same day.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division up until the middle of March had been working much in tandem with the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, learning the ropes in the *Ploegsteert Sector* just north of the border with France. On March 21, however, it relieved the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the (British) Rifle Brigade at the *Railway Dugouts* in the south-east area of the *Ypres Salient*, not very far removed from where the unit had distinguished itself in May of the previous year.



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

The German artillery was apparently more active in this sector – through a superficial examination of various war diaries - than had been previously experienced, at least by units other than the PPCLI, but there was little infantry activity other than the incessant patrolling and the occasional raid by both sides.

This artillery activity may have been due to the confrontation ongoing at the time in the *St. Éloi Sector*, now at least partially the responsibility of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division. Private Peters and his unit would likely have been aware that something was happening in that area if only because of the noise of the guns.

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

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



(Right above: *A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines* – from *Illustration*)

The whole affair floundered to a conclusion – an unsatisfactory one from a Canadian point of view – before any units other than those of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had needed to become involved.

But then, almost seven weeks later, at the beginning of June, it was to be the turn of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division to undergo its *own* baptism of fire.

On June 2 the Germans attacked the only high ground in the *Salient* which remained under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, in the areas of the village of *Hooge* and other places of English-sounding names such as *Maple Copse*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60* and the afore-mentioned *Railway Dugouts*. They are still referred to by the local people by their English names one hundred years later.



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

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, overran the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans were unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences.

The hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, delivered piece-meal and poorly co-ordinated, was to prove a costly disaster for the Canadians.



(Right: *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*)

Ten days later the Canadians again counter-attacked, on this occasion better informed, better prepared and better supported. The lost ground for the most part was recovered, both sides were back where they had started eleven days before – and the cemeteries were a little fuller.



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

(Right: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooge, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government – photograph from 2014*)



(continued)

The following is taken from the PPCLI Battalion's War Diary of the time:

*June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1916.*

*At 8.30 a.m. the enemy began shelling our front line and supports. This gradually increased to an intense bombardment from H.E. shells and trench mortars. The bombardment lasted for five hours when it was lifted and an infantry attack followed. The enemy succeeded in capturing the front line of our right company No.1. The garrison having been almost annihilated. Our left Company No. 2 succeeded in holding their trench and stopped an enemy bombing attack... Our casualties were heavy. (Excerpt from the PPCLI War Diary entry for June 2, 1916.)*

The PPCLI Battalion was relieved on June 4 after having been submitted to almost constant artillery fire during the intervening period. The War Diarist on June 4, however, reported that on that day at least... *our casualties were not severe.*

Private Peters had by that time, however, already played his role at *Mount Sorrel*. A casualty report of June 2, reads as follows: *While on duty in a bombing post in advance of our front line trench at Sanctuary Wood, he was killed by shell fire by a heavy bombardment\*.*

*\*The following is an account of Private Peters' death as provided by Sergeant A.J. Barlow who was a friend of the dead soldier: It was on the second morning\* of the battle when he received a gunshot wound in the arm, and was on his way to the dressing station, when he received another which proved to be fatal.*

*\*This would have been June 3 which would contradict the official version above as do also some of the other details.*

The eldest son of Alfred Mayne Peters - former clerk of the Union Bank, St. John's; afterwards clerk with the Bank of Montreal in St. John's and in Curling, Newfoundland; then Charlottetown, P.E.I., before Calgary, Alberta, in 1913 - to whom as of May 1 of 1916 Private Edward Cole Peters had allotted a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay, and of Alice Emily Peters (née *Smith*), he was also brother to Gertrude, to John-Edgar and to Herbert-Smith (see below).

The family had formerly resided on Monkstown Road and Rennie's Mill Road in St. John's before moving to Curling on Newfoundland's west coast in 1902, and then on to Canada.

Private Peters was officially reported as having been *killed in action* on June 2, 1916, during the first day of the fighting at *Mount Sorrel*.

Edward Cole Peters had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-four years and nine months: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, October 22, 1890.

(continued)



His brother, Private Herbert Smith Peters, was to die on 28/9/18, during the fighting on the day of the crossing of the *Canal du Nord*. He lies buried in Haynecourt British Cemetery – his grave being the second from the right as shown on the preceding page.



*(Right: The photograph of Edward Cole Peters and much of the personal and family information about him is to be found in the ‘Gower Remembers’ web-site created by members of the congregation of Gower Street Church in St. John’s, Newfoundland.)*

Private Edward Cole Peters was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



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 26, 2023.