



Private Herbert Smith Peters, Number 540083 of the 10th Battalion (*Canadians*) of Canadian Infantry, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Haynecourt British Cemetery: Grave reference III.A.24.

(Right: *The image of the cap-badge of the 10th Battalion (Canadians), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is from the bing.com/images web-site*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of an accountant, Herbert Smith Peters had spent his younger years in the capital city of Newfoundland, St. John's, his birth-place. There he had already acquired some of his schooling at the Methodist College when his father had been transferred by his employer, the *Bank of Montreal*, to the community of Curling, on the west coast of the island.

From there his parents had subsequently moved to Charlottetown on Prince Edward Island and the still-young Herbert had accompanied them. In 1913 his father received a further promotion and was transferred to the Albertan city of Calgary. There the family took up residence at 1031 Prospect Avenue, the address that Herbert Smith Peters was later to cite on his attestation papers.

Perhaps following the example of his older brother Edward who, by the end of 1914, had also found his way to Calgary – although by a more convoluted route than had Herbert and his parents – Herbert Smith Peters presented himself for medical examination and enlistment on August 18, 1915, and on the morrow for attestation.

That attestation of August 19 brought to a conclusion the formalities of Private Peters' enlistment when the commanding officer of the Cyclist Depot, Lieutenant Colonel(?) G.B. Selway(?) declared – on paper – that...*Herbert S. Peters...having been finally been approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

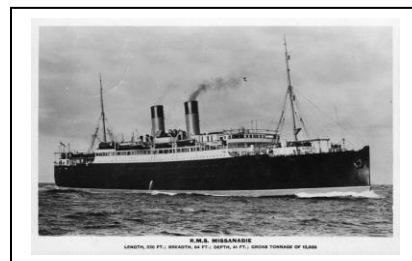
The presence of Lieutenant Colonel Selway notwithstanding, it does not appear, according to his pay records*, that Private Herbert Peters was *taken on strength* by the Cyclist Depot until August 28, nine days later. Where - or even *if* – he was serving until that latter date does not to be documented in his files.

**Which also appear to commence only on August 28.*

However, in a similar situation occurring at the same time to a Private Patten of Grand Bank, it may be that he was attached to the *Corps of Guides* for those few days, this unit apparently having become responsible for the training of the Cycle Companies in Canada.

What is more, the Cyclist Depot was situated in Toronto, at least some of its units being based in the city at *Exhibition Camp*. That interim between August 19 and 28, or at least a part of it, may well have been spent by Private Peters on the train from Calgary to Toronto.

By the time that he was to sail for *overseas service* Private Peters had been attached to the 3rd Reinforcing Draft*, Divisional Cyclists. It was on January 22 of 1916 that the eight officers and one-hundred ninety-three *other ranks* of *this draft* embarked onto the *Canadian Pacific Steamship* vessel *Missanabie*. They had begun their journey from Toronto by train four days before.



(Right above: *The photograph of His Majesty's Transport Missanabie is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

(continued)

**In some sources Private Peters is recorded as being a soldier of the Second Draft of Divisional Cyclists. However, the Second Draft, while also having travelled on Missanabie, had done so from St. John, New Brunswick, on the sailing date of December 18, a month prior to Private Peters and his draft who left from Halifax, this city recorded as having been Private Peters' port of departure.*

What is more, his name is recorded on the original nominal roll of the 3rd Draft of Divisional Cyclists which sailed on that January 22, 1916, from Halifax.

The 3rd Reinforcing Draft, Divisional Cyclists, was not to travel alone. Also taking ship for the trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom were several other Canadian military units: the 3rd Divisional Cavalry Squadron; the Second Draft of the 66th Battalion of Canadian Infantry; the First Draft of the 63rd Regiment (*Halifax Rifles*); a draft of the 66th Regiment (*Princess Louise Fusiliers*); the Fifth Draft of 'C' Section of the Second Canadian Field Ambulance; and the Canadian Second Tunnelling Company.

Missanabie docked in the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport on January 30 – a second source has the day following – whereupon Private Peters' unit was transferred to *Larkhill*, a subsidiary camp of the large British military complex established on the Salisbury Plain.

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



According to his personal records, he was to remain at *Larkhill Camp* until February 24 when he was then attached to the 3rd Divisional Cyclist Company which was based at *Chiseldon Camp* in the vicinity of the town of Swindon.

The 3rd Divisional Cycle Company – Private Peters among its number - was despatched on or about March 24, 1916, to the Continent on *active service* with the Canadian 3rd Division. Some two months later – officially on May 20, but for Private Peters on May 31 - ... *This unit will form part of the Can. Corps Cyclist Battn in the field.*

The problem for the personnel of the Canadian Cyclist units was that it was not until the summer of 1918 that the *Great War* once more became a war of movement. It had been that way during the opening weeks of hostilities, but by October of 1914, the trenches were being dug which would condemn the opposing armies to almost four years of conflict in a very restricted area to become known as the *Western Front*.

In such conditions there was little scope for the mobility offered by the bicycle, and the War Diary of the newly-organized Canadian Cyclist Battalion, for the months during which Private Peters was to serve in its ranks, show that the role of its three-hundred twenty-nine personnel – all ranks - was often reduced to that of a labour unit: in May and June of 1916 its working-parties were digging a reservoir and installing water pipes; then in June and July they were undertaking the construction of gun emplacements and trenches for British artillery units.

During the month of August, Private Peters and his bicycle were attached to the Military Police, to the Assistant Provost Marshal of the 4th Canadian Division. This secondment was not to be of a long duration: beginning on the 22nd day of that month, he was reported as having...*ceased to be attached to APM 4th Div 28/8/16*. By the following day Private Peters had been admitted into hospital.



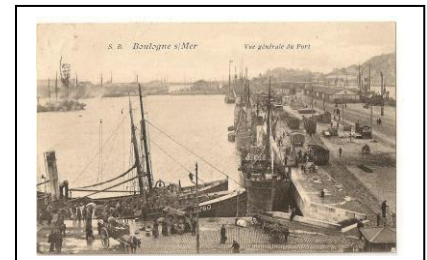
(Right above: *After years of inactivity, during the final months of the war both the cavalry and the cyclists were able to play the role that had originally been envisaged for them. – from Le Miroir*)

Apparently he had been already showing signs of illness as of August 16, before being assigned to the Military Police, thus it may well be this that accounted for the short term of that service for the Assistant Provost Marshal. The same document records him immediately admitted into the Number 3 Canadian General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers where he was to remain for treatment for seventeen days. There it was that Private Peters was diagnosed as suffering from *typhoid fever*.



(Right above: *The railway station serving the towns of Dannes and Camiers through which many thousands of sick, wounded and convalescent military personnel passed during the years of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

On September 14 he was forwarded to the (British) 14th Stationary Hospital in the coastal town of Boulogne where the original diagnosis was revised to one of *enteric fever*, a long-term problem. Ten days later again, the Belgian hospital ship *Jan Breydel* was to transport him across the English Channel to the English port of Southampton whence he travelled onwards to the Addington Park Convalescent Hospital near Croydon, a suburb to the south of London.



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

(Right: *The image of the cross-Channel Belgian steamer Jan Breydel is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries.*)



On the bureaucratic level, on that same day, Private Peters was transferred on paper from the Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion to the Folkestone office of the *Canadian Casualty Assembly Centre* where he was classified as an *Overseas Case**.

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***The CCAC offices were created to organize the sick and wounded while they received medical attention in the United Kingdom. It apparently made a poor job of it, one source claiming that the CCAC misplaced some twenty-thousand casualties during its short existence. About a year after its formation the CCAC was dissolved.**

A month after his admission into Addington Park, Private Peters was on the move once more, on this occasion to the small hospital at Wear Bay, Folkestone, which specialized in long-term convalescence for typhoid and enteric cases. Whether or not it was due to a relapse, Private Peters, after having spent some seven weeks there, was despatched once again to Addington Park through whose administration he now passed on his way to the *Enteric Depot* at nearby Woldingham.



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

On January 23-24, it was at the not-far-distant Canadian Convalescent Hospital of Woodcote Park, Epsom – a well-known horse-racing venue – that Private Peters now found himself for a final two weeks of rehabilitation. Discharged from Epsom on February 6, on the morrow he reported to the CCAC establishment at St. Leonards-on-Sea, Hastings, on the south coast of England.

Private Peters was now to spend the next twenty-four days undergoing a physical training program. Apparently then deemed as once more as...*fit for service*, he was *struck off strength* at Hastings to be *taken on strength* at Chiseldon at the Cyclists' Reserve Depot by the Canadian Reserve Cyclist Company.

It was likely because of the relative inactivity of the Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion on the Continent that it was now decided to transfer Private Peters to an infantry battalion. To that end he was posted on June 19, 1917, to the 9th Canadian Reserve Battalion, it also stationed at Chiseldon.

Not quite three months later again – and over a year since his original hospitalization, on September 9, 1917, Private Peters' name was placed on the nominal roll of an infantry unit already serving on the *Western Front*, the 10th Battalion (*Canadians*) and he was transferred to *Camp Bramshott*, the large Canadian military complex established by that time in the county of Hampshire.



(Right above: Royal Canadian Legion flags amongst others adorn the interior of St. Mary's Church in the English village of Bramshott. – photograph from 2016)

Two days later Private Peters had crossed the Channel, had landed again in France – likely having travelled through Southampton and Le Havre - and had arrived at the No. 1 Canadian Infantry Base Depot in the area of the coastal town of Étapes.

The date of arrival on his personal records is cited as September 11 but, there being no arrivals recorded in the Base Depot War Diary entry of that date, he may well have been among the one-hundred twenty-nine who reported to duty from England on the next day.



(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)

It was to be a further two weeks before he was despatched – one of eleven-hundred fifteen on the day – to the nearby Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp from where, another two weeks having passed again, on October 11, he was ordered to report to the 10th Battalion *in the field*.

Private Peters' re-enforcement draft left the CCRC on that October 11 to arrive and report to his new unit later on that same day. The 10th Battalion at the time was withdrawn from the forward area and was undergoing training and inspections in the vicinity of the community of Gouy-Servins where it was billeted. The unit was to remain in that area for the following nine days.

* * * * *

The 10th Battalion (*Canadians*) was a component of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 1st Canadian Division – until the advent of the 2nd Canadian Division it had been simply the Canadian Division. The Battalion's recruits had at first been mainly drawn from Canadian militia units in the cities of Calgary and Winnipeg, but the unit had eventually assembled in the new military complex at Valcartier, Québec, before it had then sailed to the United Kingdom in October of 1914.



The Canadian Division was to set foot on French soil in mid-February of 1915 when it had landed in the Breton port of St-Nazaire. However, for much of the first eighteen months of its service on the *Western Front* it had been Belgian soil on which it had been stationed.

(Right above: *It was His Majesty's Transport Kingstonian which transported the 10th Battalion from the port in Bristol to St-Nazaire. The image is from bing.com/images.*)

The first of the two exceptions to this rule were to be the first two months – mid-February to mid-April – when it had been stationed in the *Fleurbaix Sector* in proximity to the northern French town of Armentières, a relatively quiet period.

The second posting outside Belgium had been for some six weeks during May and June of that 1915 when the 10th Battalion had fought during the confrontations at Festubert and Givenchy in northern France. If it was in the *Fleurbaix Sector* that the Canadian Division had learned its trade, by the time of Festubert and Givenchy, and after the *Second Battle of Ypres* (see below), its survivors were to be already battle-hardened veterans.

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It had been on April 14 of 1915 that the 10th Battalion had first crossed the frontier into the *Kingdom of Belgium*. Motor busses took the Battalion on that day from the French town of Steenvoorde to the Belgian village of Vlamertinghe, only a few kilometres to the west of Ypres.

From there the remainder of the transfer was to be made on foot, through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres to positions to the north-east where the unit relieved French troops in the area of Gravenstafel and St-Julien – both of which names today figure among the unit’s battle honours.

(Right: *Troops being transported to the front-line positions in busses – from Illustration*)



(Right below: *A Belgian aerial photograph showing the devastation of Ypres as early as 1915 – the city is described as ‘morte’ (dead) - before the arrival of Private Nugent – from Illustration*)

The march across Ypres to the vicinity of the village of Wieltje likely took the Battalion through the remnants of the already-battered medieval city of Ypres. From Wieltje, French guides led the unit to its positions, some fifteen-hundred yards (fourteen-hundred metres) of trenches that the 10th Battalion War Diary entry for April 15 then reported as having been readied with rations and ammunition brought in by half-past five on that morning.



Whether in fact the Canadian newcomers *were* ready for what was to come is highly improbable. It was to be only a week later, on April 22 of 1915, that the entire Canadian Division was then to be put to the test.

On April 19 the 10th Battalion had retired into Divisional Reserve at Ypres, the next few daily entries in the War Diary noting only sporadic enemy shelling by heavy artillery. It had perhaps offered a false sense of security.

The *2nd Battle of Ypres* was to see the first use of chlorine gas by the Germans during the *Great War*. Later to become an everyday event, with the advent of protective measures such as advanced masks, gas was to prove no more dangerous than the rest of the military arsenals of the warring nations. But on this first occasion, to troops without the means to combat it, the yellow-green cloud of chlorine had proved to be overwhelming.

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



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



The cloud had been noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left had wavered and then had broken, thus having left the left flank of the Canadians uncovered.

On the 23rd the situation had become relatively stable, the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan having been held until the morning of the 24th when a further retirement had become necessary. At times there had been gaps in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans had been unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or they had not had the means to exploit the situation.

And then the Canadians had closed the gaps.

(Right: *The Memorial to the 1st Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier – stands just to the south of the village of Langemark (at the time Langemarck) – at the Vancouver Crossroads - where the Canadians withstood the German attack – abetted by gas – at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915. It is also known as the St-Julien Memorial. – photograph from 2010*)



It would appear that - this according to the appendices in the 10th Battalion War Diary - on that April 22, the unit had already been moving into the forward area before the German attack where it had been ordered to supply working-parties. The enemy offensive, of course, was to change everything and by seven o'clock that evening the 10th Battalion had been ordered to move up into the area of responsibility of the 3rd Canadian Brigade, there to render any necessary assistance.

At about eight o'clock that evening the 10th Battalion, in co-operation with the 16th Battalion, had launched a counter-attack against the German trenches. The attack had succeeded in carrying the objectives but a forewarned enemy had inflicted such losses on the force that the Canadians were later to be obliged to withdraw.

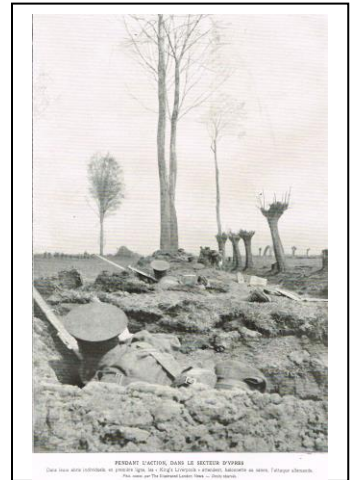
The following day had been quieter for the 10th Battalion but a renewed offensive by the enemy on the 24th had meant further crises and the 10th Battalion was again to be withdrawn before having been returned to the command of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade. It was to be a stressful day for all with orders, counter-orders and cancellations having added to an already confused and dangerous situation.

(Right below: *Troops – in this instance British – in hastily-dug trenches in the Ypres Salient. These are still the early days of the year as witnessed by the lack of steel helmets which only came into use in the spring and summer of 1916. – from Illustration*)

(continued)

It was on this April 24 that the enemy could have broken through, some Canadian sectors having been almost completely exposed to any attack and defended by only remnants of what only days before had been full battalions. Somehow the worst had never come to be.

By daybreak of April 25 the Canadians had by then been fighting for sixty continuous hours and the survivors of the 10th Battalion were now digging-in in front of Gravenstafel. There the unit was to remain for the day under heavy rifle, machine-gun and artillery fire. Finally, at three-thirty in the morning of the next day, April 26, it had been able to retire after having been relieved by units of the Hampshire Regiment. The other battalions of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade had been ordered withdrawn at about the same time.



By the following night, after a further day of confusion had been spent mostly marching for aimless reasons hither and thither, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade – and thus the 10th Battalion - had been withdrawn from the area of St-Julien to the western bank of the *Yser Canal* which runs north-south through the city of Ypres (today *Ieper*)* and which at times during the *Great War* was to become a part of the front line – although never in the city itself.



**The position of the 2nd Brigade on the Yser Canal was to the north of the city itself.*

(Right above: The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after elements of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade were withdrawn to its western bank from Vlamertinghe – west is to the left – photograph from 2014)

On April 28 the 2nd Brigade had continued its withdrawal, on this occasion to the south-west, but on the succeeding day again it had been ordered to move back into positions on the west bank of the *Yser Canal* where it was then to remain for the next number of days, there to endure the attention of the German artillery, heavy at times. There had also been the possibility of a move back to St-Julien area to counter an enemy attack but this move was never to come to pass.

In the meantime billeting officers had been at work in the area of the northern French town of Bailleul and at seven o'clock in the evening of May 5 the entire 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade had received orders to retire from the Yser Canal.

It did so later that same evening, having marched the sixteen miles (twenty-five kilometres) before having reached its newly-acquired quarters to the south-west of Bailleul at three-thirty in the morning of May 6.

As the War Diarist has recorded in his entry for May 5: *This was very trying on the men who had been in trenches for 6 days and under the greatest strain from April 22nd 1915.*

(Right below: *The re-built town of Bailleul almost a century after the visit by the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade: Much of the damage to be done to it was the result of the later fighting in the spring of 1918. – photograph from 2010.*)

Thus the 2nd Battle of Ypres was to come to a close for those of the 10th Battalion who had not been *killed, wounded* or reported *missing* during the preceding thirteen days.

During that time it had incurred a casualty count of four-hundred eighty-five all ranks, almost fifty percent of full battalion fighting strength.

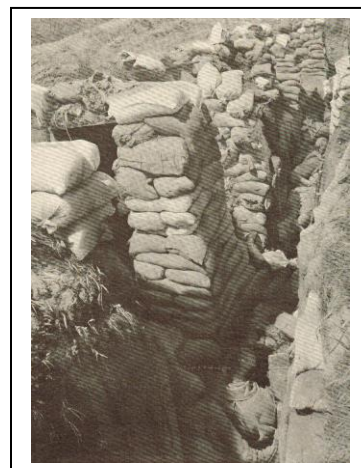
There had followed eight days of rest – perhaps as restful as it ever got during the *Great War* – before the 10th Battalion had been ordered south, on May 14, further down the line into France, there to fight in offensive actions near places by the names of Festubert and Givenchy.



The French were about to undertake a major campaign just further to the south again and had asked for British support to discourage the Germans from re-enforcing the sectors opposite the French front.

Having arrived in the town of Robecq on that May 14, two days later, on the 16th, the Battalion...*orders received to be ready to move on one and one-half hours notice.*

It was not, however, until the next morning that the Battalion had been ordered on its way, and two days later again, on May 19, that...*Took over trenches at RUE DE L'EPINETTE, 3 companies in fire trenches one in support. These trenches had just been captured from the ENEMY a few days before, the line was a prolongation to the SOUTH for 300 paces thence SE to the vicinity...to the SW (of) the village of FESTUBERT.* (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of May 19)



(Right above: *Captured German positions – some of the dead still lying where they fell - in the French-occupied area just down the line from Festubert and Givenchy: The trenches are still primitive compared to the complex labyrinths which they would soon become. – from Illustration)*

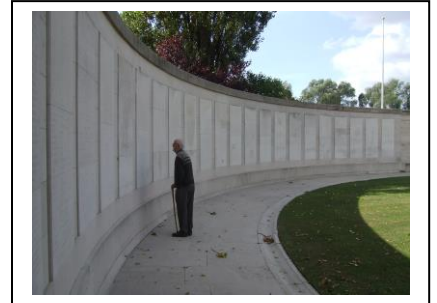
There at Festubert a series of attacks and counter-attacks were to take place during which the British High Command had managed to gain three kilometres of ground but had also contrived to destroy, by using the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what had now been left of the British pre-War professional Army.

The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but – not providing the same numbers of troops – was not to participate to the same extent. It would nonetheless suffer extensively.

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The 10th Battalion was to attack enemy positions on both May 20 and 21. The former assault had proved to be a failure and heavy losses had been incurred; that of the 21st had captured certain enemy positions some of which, however, were to be lost on the morrow to an enemy counter-attack and to his artillery which had killed or wounded all the occupants of a forward trench, thus having forced its abandonment.

The unit had spent the next three days holding the other captured positions and serving as a target for the enemy artillery. The War Diarist has noted details of the eighteen officer casualties during this tour and estimated that some two-hundred fifty *other ranks* had also been *killed, wounded* or reported *missing*.



On May 26 the 10th Battalion was to be relieved and had gone into billets. Next, on May 31, the Commanding Officer and the Company Commanders...went to *GIVENCHY* and looked over trenches held by the *LONDON DIV.*

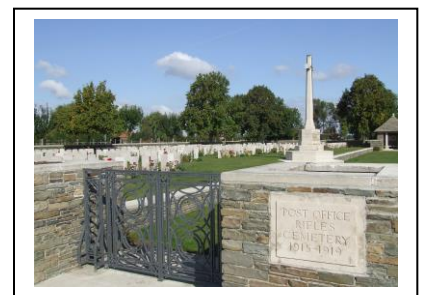
(Right above: *A one-time officer who served in the Indian Army during the Second World War, pays his respects at the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle to those who fell. – photograph from 2010(?)*)

The Canadian Division and Indian troops, the 7th (*Meerut*) Division* also having been ordered to serve at Festubert, had fared hardly better than had the British, each contingent having incurred over two-thousand casualties before the offensive was to draw to a close.

The French effort – having employed the same murderous tactics – was to likewise be a failure but on an even larger scale; it was to cost them just over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded* and *missing*.

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

On May 26 the 10th Battalion had marched away from Festubert to billets in or near to the community of Le Hamel. The reprieve was to last for but five days, until June 1, when the unit was ordered further south to Givenchy-les-la-Bassée*, a small village not far distant from Festubert. There it relieved the 17th Battalion of the City of London Regiment in the front trenches.



**Since the place is oft-times referred to simply as Givenchy it is worthwhile knowing that there are two other Givenchys in the region: Givenchy-le-Noble, to the west of Arras, and Givenchy-en-Gohelle, a village which lies in the shadow of a crest of land which dominates the Douai Plain: Vimy Ridge.*

(Right above: *The Post Office Rifles Cemetery at Festubert wherein lie some four-hundred dead, only one-third of them identified. – photograph from 2010*)

After five days in the line followed by a further eight in billets in the community of Hinges – during which time the unit’s Canadian-made Ross Rifles were to be discarded for the more suitable Short Lee-Enfield Mark III weapon*, on June 15...orders were received to be prepared to move in an hours notice as an attack was being made in the vicinity of LA BASSE (La Bassée). In fact it was eventually on the night of June 17-18 that the 10th Battalion moved into reserve positions in the vicinity of La Préol before taking over trenches on the 19th.

**The Canadian-produced Ross rifle was an excellently-manufactured weapon; its accuracy and range were superior to that of many of its rivals, but on the battlefield it had not proved its worth. In the dirty conditions and when the necessity arose for its repeated use - and using mass-produced ammunition which at times was less than perfect - it would jam, leaving its user defenceless at a critical moment.*

By the summer of 1916 the Canadian units were exchanging it for the more reliable British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III, a rifle that was to ultimately serve around the globe until well after the Second World War.

There the unit remained until June 23. There had been no attack and the casualties which had been incurred during that time one must presume to have been largely due to the enemy’s artillery and to his snipers: twelve *killed in action* and twenty-six *wounded*.

On that June 23, the 10th Battalion was relieved and had thereupon retired from the area and from the battle. Commencing at about the same time, and over a number of days, *all* the units of the Canadian Division were to retire.

As a part of that withdrawal from Givenchy, the 10th Battalion was to march to billets in the area of Essars. From there it had moved northwards and back into Belgium, to the *Ploegsteert Sector*, just across the frontier.

Having reached the *Ploegsteert Sector* on July 5, there the 10th Battalion was to remain – headquartered at Petit Pont – as was to be the entire Canadian Division. In the next months it had come to be well-acquainted with the Franco-Belgian area between Armentières in the east – any further east would have been in German-occupied territory – Bailleul in the west, and Messines in the north.

(Right: *Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, a mine crater from the time of the 1917 British offensive in the foreground – photograph from 2014*)

It was to be almost another year before the 10th Battalion had then become involved in a further major altercation. Of course, local confrontations – in raids and during patrols - were to be fought from time to time, and artillery duels plus the ever-increasing menace of snipers would ensure a constant flow of casualties.

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In the *Ploegsteert Sector* the unit was once more to be subject to those everyday routines of trench warfare – perhaps by then quite welcome to those who had just served during the confrontations of April at Ypres and of May-June at Festubert and Givenchy – routines that were to continue for more than eleven months.

During those eleven months the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions had made their appearance – in September and December-January respectively - in the *Kingdom of Belgium*, the 2nd Division infantry having received its baptism of fire in the *Action at the St-Éloi Craters** in April of 1916. Some two months later it was to be the turn of the 3rd Division – at *Mount Sorrel*, a fierce confrontation into which units from the other Canadian Divisions were also to be drawn.

**Not to be confused with the village of Mont St-Éloi, France, to the north-west of Arras, in a sector with which many Canadian troops were to become familiar during 1917 and 1918.*

For the 2nd Canadian Division, the first weeks of April were not to be as tranquil as those being experienced during the same period by the personnel of the 10th Battalion and the other units of the Canadian 1st Division.

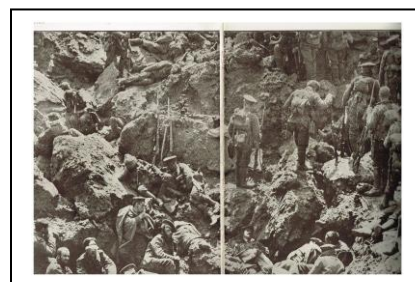
That *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* officially had taken place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it had been here that the British were to excavate a number of galleries under the German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

(Right: *The remains of a construction built at Messines in 1916 by the Germans to counter-act the British tunnellers: they sank twenty-nine wells – one seen here – from which horizontal galleries were excavated to intercept the British tunnels being dug under the German lines. – photograph from 2014*)



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

However, as previously noted, this confrontation had been a 2nd Division affair and the personnel of the 10th Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the German artillery. But by this time it had been decided that the three Canadian Divisions should serve side by side – the three divisions were now to be posted in adjoining sectors.



(Preceding page: *A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines, possibly at St-Éloi but likely staged – from Illustration*)

Even as the 2nd Canadian Division troops had been fighting at St-Éloi, the *entire* 1st Canadian Division had been ordered from – and was transferring from - the *Ploegsteert Sector* to the south of Ypres once more into *the Salient*, there to be stationed between the 2nd Canadian Division to its right and the 3rd Canadian Division which had already moved into the south-east sector, this to the 1st Canadian Division's immediate left.

By April 8 the 10th Battalion (*Canadians*) was to be serving in the forward trenches of its new sector.

From June 2 to 13 the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the area of the village of *Hooge, Railway Dugouts, Sanctuary Wood, Maple Copse* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps* was to be played out. The Canadians had been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans had delivered an offensive, had then overrun the forward areas and, in fact, had ruptured the Canadian lines, an opportunity of which fortunately they were never to take advantage.

****While it was the newly-arrived 3rd Canadian Division which was to bear the brunt of the German onslaught, the situation had soon become critical enough for other units to be ordered to engage the enemy.***

Then the hurriedly-contrived Canadian counter-strike of the following day, June 3, having been ordered by their British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Julian Byng, had been delivered piece-meal. It had also been poorly co-ordinated, poorly organized and poorly supported by artillery and had proved to be a horrendous and expensive experience for the Canadians.

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



The War Diary of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade cites June 1 of 1916 as having been...*A very quiet day with nothing to report.* The 10th Battalion was in Brigade Reserve at Swan Chateau at the time, having retired there from the area of *Hill 60* just days before.

(Right: *A century later, these reminders of a violent past are to be found close to the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres, an area today protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature. Apparently the hill was much higher until the first week in June of 1917 when a the detonation of a British mine removed much of the summit on the opening day of the Battle of the Messines Ridge. – photograph from 2014*)



(continued)

On June 2, once the German attack was underway and once it was clear that the enemy intentions had been much more than just a minor raid, the Battalion had been ordered forward according to a pre-arranged plan, to man trenches in the second line of defence in the vicinity of *Railway Dugouts* and the village of Zillebeke.

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

The fiasco of the Canadian counter-attack of June 3 has been briefly recounted in a previous paragraph. The 7th Canadian Infantry Battalion, a sister unit to the 10th Battalion, had been ordered to advance against the Germans on that second day of the confrontation, the role of the 10th Battalion having been to support that advance. The 7th Battalion had been cut to shreds by enemy artillery and by his machine-gun and rifle fire; the survivors had finally been ordered to retire.



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

The 10th Battalion had been left awaiting news all that day. When it had become evident that the overall counter-attack had failed - and the effort by the 7th Battalion in particular - the 10th Battalion had been ordered to remain *in situ*, for most of the night having sheltered as best as possible from an artillery barrage which the Germans were to maintain until the morrow.



At four o'clock in the morning of June 4, the unit had been relieved by the 1st Canadian Battalion and had retired to *Dickebusch Huts*. Nothing had been gained at the price of one-hundred forty-nine casualties.

Having been retained in reserve for two days and then having been ordered into the trenches again for the next - apparently relatively quiet - tour, on June 10 the Battalion had found itself once more in reserve. It was not to participate in the final Canadian offensive of June 12-13 which would recapture most of the lost ground, but it had been moved forward on the afternoon of the 13th to consolidate and to hold those positions against the expected German response.

Surprisingly perhaps, no counter-attack had been forthcoming. Nevertheless, all that afternoon, all night, during all the following day, again all during the night and into June 15 when the unit again was to retire, the personnel holding those trenches and dugouts had been subjected to a constant bombardment.



(Right: *Maple Copse Cemetery, adjacent to Hill 60, in which lie many Canadians killed during the days of the confrontation at Mount Sorrel – photograph from 2014*)

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

**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 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)

The subsequent summer period had again been quiet, at least in the *Ypres Salient*, although some one-hundred twenty kilometres further to the south in France, important events had been occurring, events into which the Canadians Corps was soon to be drawn. Then, in the middle of August of that 1916, the 4th Canadian Division* had arrived in the rear area of the Canadian sector to take its place alongside the already-established 1st, 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions.

**This was the last such Canadian formation to serve on the Continent. A 5th Canadian Division was organized but it was to remain in the United Kingdom, there to provide training for newcomers from home who would then be despatched to the four Divisions serving on the Western Front.*

It was just a single day before the August 14th disembarkation of the 4th Canadian Division in Le Havre and thus just prior to its subsequent move toward the *Kingdom of Belgium*, that the 10th Battalion had begun its withdrawal from Flanders back into northern France. Two days later it was to arrive in the community of Mouille where it would be billeted for eleven days and in the vicinity of which it was to undergo training.

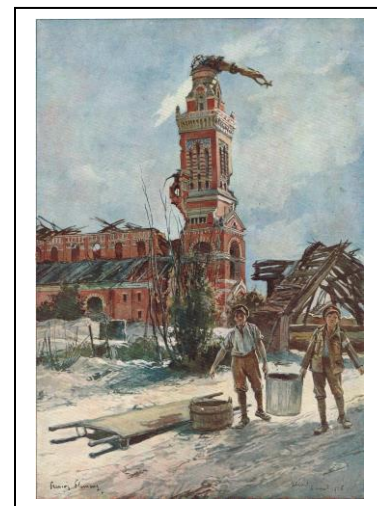


(Right above: Canadian troops likely in trenches built for training purposes – they are too prim and proper to be the real thing – and here equipped with Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles, during the late summer or early autumn of 1916 – from The War Illustrated)

(continued)

On August 27, after a five-hour march to the railway station at Arques, the Battalion had entrained for a further nine-hour train-journey south to Candas. Even then the unit's day was not to be ended, not until it had marched to its billets five long kilometres away.

On September 3, having by that time passed through the communities of Rubempré and Vadecourt on the way, the 10th Battalion arrived at *Brickfield Camp* and thence to billets in nearby Albert on the next day. There it had remained until September 7, then from there to La Boisselle* - the remnants of a village just to the east - for three days, having been gainfully employed during all that period supplying working-parties and carrying-parties for various tasks.



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

**Today the village of La Boisselle is known for the huge crater which remains there a century after the detonation of the largest of the nineteen mines exploded just prior to the attack of July 1. At the time it was perhaps history's largest man-made explosion. The crater, now more than a hundred years old, is still impressive, even today.*



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

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

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

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



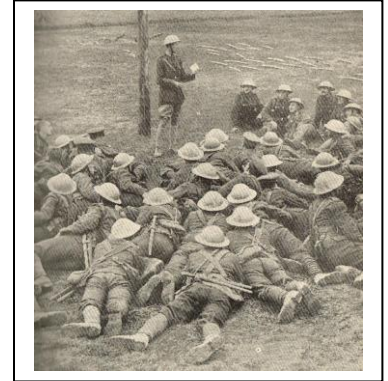
(continued)

As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were to be brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive.

Their first collective major action was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette on September 15 – but not for the 10th Battalion.

In fact, on that day, the unit had been spending its time quite some distance away, in Army Reserve, and in the village of Rubempré through which it had passed only some two weeks previously.

(Right: *An image purporting to be that of a Canadian officer giving instructions to those under his command prior to the attack at Flers-Courcellette (see below), September 1916. – from The War Illustrated*)



The move to Rubempré was to prove of short duration. By September 16 the unit had been bussed back to *Brickfields*, there, and also once more in Albert, to remain until the 22nd when it had been ordered to move up to the forward area. The move had been completed on September 24 when the 10th Battalion had found itself serving as Brigade Support in an area known as the *Chalk Pits*.

Two days later it was to go to the offensive.

Perhaps of interest to the reader would be a list of all that a soldier of that era was expected to carry into battle – at least on that September 16, 1916: in addition to his own equipment, a rifle, steel helmet and rudimentary first-aid kit, was to be added two Mills Bombs (hand grenades), two sandbags (fortunately unfilled), one-hundred seventy rounds of small-arms ammunition, a shovel or pick, two days' rations, emergency rations and a full water-bottle.



There were also to be stretchers, full water-tins and extra bombs issued on a platoon or company basis and which had to advance with the attacking troops.

(Right above: *Wounded troops being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the First Battle of the Somme – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)

The 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade objectives for that day, according to the issued Operation Order Number 107, had been two German trenches, *Zollern*, *Hessian*, with a third, *Regina**, also having been listed but seemingly not to be mentioned afterwards.

Apparently by the time that the 10th Battalion had been relieved on September 27, the War Diarist had already been pleased with the results of the day's events: *Zero Hour* having been set for thirty-five minutes past mid-day, by late afternoon both the *Zollern* and *Hessian* trenches had been taken.

****Regina Trench was to prove to be a harder nut to crack. Attacked with varying success on several occasions, it was not to be until the night of November 10-11 that it was finally taken by Canadian forces.***

It would appear that the episode of September 26-27 was to be the 10th Battalion's only major engagement during the *First Battle of the Somme*. It was then to serve in the reserve area and the front-line trenches for a total of five or six days during subsequent tours – but without incident - and by October 17 it was ready to retire to a quieter sector further north.

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



Warloy, Val de Maison, Candas – there was to be no train on this occasion – Mezerolles and Denier were all stages along the semi-circular route which passed westward then north behind the city of Arras and beyond it until the unit had reached the area of La Comte on October 28, there to spend five days in training and even playing sports before moving off towards Estrée-Cauchy.

By November 2 the 10th Battalion had once more been back in support and front-line trenches, on this occasion in the area of Carency and Givenchy-en-Gohelle, the latter to be found in the aforementioned shadow of a long crest of land running more or less north-south: la Crête de Vimy – *Vimy Ridge*.

(Right: *Seen from what would have been the German point of view, this is Vimy Ridge with the Canadian Memorial in the centre of the frame. The re-constructed village of Givenchy-en-Gohelle is just out of the picture to the right, standing on and at the bottom of, the slope. In the autumn of 1916 the Germans occupied the summit of Vimy Ridge as well as Givenchy itself. – photograph from 2015*)



The following months of the autumn and then winter were to be spent in the routines of trench life. The Canadian units all during this time – once having served at *the Somme* – had posted in very much the same sectors, between, in the south, the city of Arras and, to the north, the town of Béthune.

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



The winter of 1916-1917 was to be very much one of the everyday grind of life in and out of the trenches. There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides.

(continued)

This latter activity was encouraged by the High Command who felt it to be a morale booster which also kept the troops in the right offensive frame of mind – the troops who were ordered to carry them out in general loathed these operations.

Then, during the month of March, the 10th Battalion and, indeed, most if not all the infantry battalions and the other units of the Canadian Corps had begun to organize and to train for the upcoming British offensive.

(Right and right below: *The village of Mont St-Éloi, adjacent to Écoivres, at an early period of the Great War and again a century later - The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – partly destroyed in 1793 and further again in the war – are visible in both images. – from Le Miroir and (colour) from 2016*)



Among these exercises were to be some novel developments: use of captured enemy weapons; each unit and each man to be familiar with his role during the upcoming battle; the construction of ground layouts built, thanks to aerial reconnaissance, to show the terrain and positions to be attacked; the introduction of the machine-gun barrage; and the excavation of kilometres of approach tunnels, not only for the safety of the attacking troops but also to ensure the element of surprise.



On March 30 the Battalion had moved back to the area of Écoivres and St-Éloi for the days leading up to the attack* and it was from there that the unit had moved forward into its assembly areas on the night of April 8-9. According to the 2nd Brigade War Diary, by the morning of April 9...3.30 a.m...All troops reported ready in Assembly trenches.

**On April 8 a raiding-party carried out an attack in the early morning on German positions.*

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



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

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

(continued)

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

**It should be said that a great deal of the artillery used in the assault on Vimy Ridge was British and that a British Division – only a single Brigade, mentioned immediately above, employed on April 9 – also participated. Almost fifty per cent of the personnel who had been employed for that day were British, not to mention those whose contribution – such as those who dug the tunnels - allowed for it to happen.*

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

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



On April 10 the Canadians were to finish clearing the area of *Vimy Ridge* of the few remaining pockets of resistance and to continue to consolidate the area in anticipation of the expected German counter-attacks.

There had on that day been the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on the previous day's success was to prove impossible. Thus the Germans had closed the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.



(Right above: *The caption which accompanies the photograph says merely that these are Canadian soldiers and their prisoners on the battlefield of Vimy Ridge. – from Illustration*)

The following are excerpts from Appendices of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary entry for April 9, 1917:

At 5.30 a.m. our barrage was opened...

...At 5.40 a.m. our O.P's reported that the barrage was excellent on our front, and on Right and Left, and they could see our troops advancing behind it in good order...*

**Observation Posts*

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

...The enemy's Artillery barrage was wild and scattered...His machine guns, however, were active and caused us many casualties amongst our leading wave... It was noticed that both machine gunners and snipers appeared to be picked men...and in many cases fought to the last.

All three Assaulting Battalions suffered considerably from machine gun and rifle fire: on the left, "A" and "B" Companies of the 10th Can. Inf. Battalion came under particularly heavy fire...

...By 5.50 a.m., our men were reported to have reached the LENS-ARRAS Road...

...On the Left, the 10th Can. Inf. Battalion had only one Officer left unwounded, with their Third and Fourth Waves...

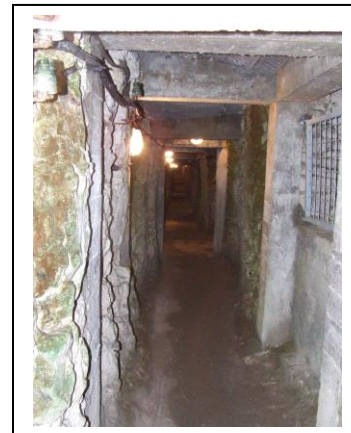
However, despite any and all difficulties, the resistance in front of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade had eventually been overcome. The objectives had been reached and taken by nine-thirty that morning and the advance had been halted to allow for consolidation of the newly-captured positions. During that evening the 10th Battalion had retired to its original front line and support positions.

(Right: *The memorial to the fallen of the 1st 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*)

The following days were to be spent for the most part by the 10th Battalion in support positions. Then on April 15 the unit had been ordered withdrawn once more to the vicinity of *Écoivres-St-Éloi*, there to remain for eleven days refitting, reorganizing, bathing, finding new clothing, playing football, enjoying – one supposes - a concert by the Battalion Band and even, on occasion, having taken the opportunity to rest.

Having lost almost exactly fifty per cent of its effective strength – the numbers to be seen immediately below - on April 9 at Vimy Ridge, the Battalion, of course, had now also taken the opportunity to re-enforce.

The casualties that had been sustained by the 10th Battalion, as recorded by the 2nd Brigade War Diarist – from mid-night of April 8-9 until mid-night twenty-four hours later – had been as follows: *killed in action*, eighty (*all ranks*); *wounded*, three-hundred seven (*all ranks*). The unit had gone into its assembly areas on that early morning, seven-hundred sixty-three strong (*all ranks*).



(Preceding page: Canadian personnel and German prisoners undertake the evacuation of the wounded from Vimy Ridge on a light railway which is still in the process of being constructed. – from Illustration)

Having moved out of the forward area in mid-April, the 10th Battalion was to remain in the area of Écoivres-St-Éloi before then having moved on May 5 further northwards to the vicinity of Ruitz. The unit had still been there when the *Battle of Arras* had officially drawn to a conclusion on May 15, and it in fact had remained there until the end of the month before having moved once more – for only a single day after having marched for more than twenty kilometres – back to *St-Éloi* on June 1.

From there on June 2 it had been ordered posted to the south of nearby Neuville-St-Vaast to the Brigade Support Area before having then been returned to *St-Éloi* once more on the ninth day of the month.

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 in the sectors of the front running north-south from Béthune down to Lens.

The Canadians were to be major contributors to this effort, and the 10th Battalion was to play an important role in one of the hardest fought of the campaign's actions: *Hill 70*.

(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 had been high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – the key feature in the entire area and its capture perhaps more important than that of the city of Lens itself.



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

(continued)

The 10th Battalion had passed through the area of Les Brébis on August 13 on its way to battle, and had there...*picked up a supply of Grenades and 48 hours rations.*

August 14...Battalion in Front Line Positions, in Right of Left Sub-Section, LOOS SECTOR... Enemy's artillery was comparatively quiet... (Excerpts from the 10th Battalion War Diary entries for August 13 and 14)

(Excerpt from the Appendices of the 2nd Brigade War Diary relative to the Canadian attack by the 1st and 2nd Divisions on Hill 70) *At midnight on the 14th/15th August the Canadian Infantry ...moved forward. The 10th Canadian Infantry was much harassed in moving to its assembly positions by a bombardment of gas shells but succeeded in assembling and getting ready for the attack at 3.50 a.m. on 15th August, having sustained some casualties...*



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

(Right: *The mining village of Loos-en-Gohelle as it was already in 1915, before the arrival of the Canadians to the area: the structures atop the pit-heads in the centre of the photograph became known to the British troops – and thus later to the Canadians – as Tower Bridge. – from Le Miroir*)



...As laid down in 2nd Infantry Brigade Operational Order...our Artillery and machine gun moving barrage opened at Zero Hour (4.25 a.m.), and Zero plus two minutes, the assault was launched (by the 5th and 10th Battalions), the troops advancing from their assembly positions...

On the left-hand side of the attack the 10th Battalion had eventually captured the German front-line positions, having sustained severe casualties in hard fighting. Next to fall had been the enemy support positions and the objective designated as the BLUE LINE, once again the fighting being described as...*bitter...*and in many cases as...*one to the death**. At this point the 5th and 10th Battalions had ceased their forward progress to allow the 7th and 8th Battalions to pass through their lines.

**Unfortunately, the Appendix provides no chronological order of events. All that may be surmised is that it was still relatively early in the morning as the 7th Battalion was already reporting its progress by five minutes after nine.*

A further attack was to be made later in the day after several delays before, at seven in the evening, the Germans had launched an assault of their own. It had not been particularly successful as the Canadian Artillery fire had been well directed and had anticipated the enemy's movements. Such was apparently to be the case on a number of further occasions during the evening and night.



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

Another attack had then been made, *zero hour* having been set at four o'clock in the afternoon of August 16. Once again the 5th and 10th Battalions were to be the first to move forward, the 10th eventually – despite heavy fighting once more – having been led by a...*party along a communication trench, bombing out the enemy, then placing a block as far forward as our barrage would permit...the position consolidated by digging a trench...* This captured ground had then been retained during all the following hours despite several attempts having been made by the enemy to dislodge the Canadians.

As on the previous evening, the Germans were to mass for a counter-offensive on several occasions. And again, as on the previous evening, a well-prepared Canadian Artillery, once apprised of the situation, had been able to forestall the enemy intentions.

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



Later that night the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade had relieved the battalions of the 2nd Brigade, the 10th Battalion having then fallen back to the BLUE LINE at about 2.30 on the morning of August 17.

The unit had spent the entire next day in that position, having incurred the intermittent attentions of the German artillery. The enemy barrage, latterly including gas shells, was to continue into the next day, August 18, during the morning of which both the 5th and the 10th Battalions had been withdrawn – wearing their anti-gas respirators - further afield, to the area of Les Brébis.

The 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade had gone into the action with a total of thirty-three hundred seventy personnel. Of this number sixteen-hundred fifty-one were subsequently to be reported as *killed in action, wounded or missing in action* – a casualty rate of just under fifty per cent.

The Battalion was to be on the move again later on the same August 18, to withdraw into the reserve area in the vicinity of Bruay, Barlin, Caucourt and Aix-Noulette where it had remained until September 13. Eight days then followed during which the 10th Battalion had found itself serving in support and front-line positions in the *Lievain Sector* just outside Lens. A number of brief infantry actions had taken place on the final day of that tour, September 21, resulting in a total of twenty-one casualties, but of course, it was hardly to be compared to the confrontation of a month earlier at *Hill 70*.

The Canadian-led operations in the Lens-Béthune Sector had still been 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 were short of men.

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Thus the Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians were to be called upon to remedy that shortage.

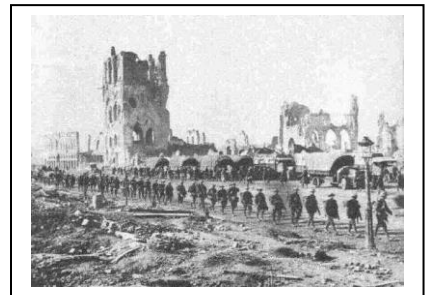
**This did not, however, preclude raids – still encouraged and still a favourite of Haig and the British High Command.*

In the meantime, the 10th Battalions had still been rotated into and out of the trenches: Liévin in the forward area and Gouy-Servins when in reserve, which was where Private Peters personal files have him reporting *to duty* – although the Battalion War Diary makes no mention of the event - with the 10th Battalion on October 11.

* * * * *

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

(Right: *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 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which spear-headed the assault, with the 1st and 2nd 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 2nd Division finally entering the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.



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

The first two days of Private Peters' service with the 10th Canadian Infantry Battalion had been spent at Gouy-Servins undergoing routine training, inspections and parades. The unit had then moved several kilometres to the north-west to Houdain, there for much of the same before, on October 20, moving northwards, through Busnes and Steenbecque, to Le Nieppe, to the west of the larger centre of Hazebrouck, where it was billeted.

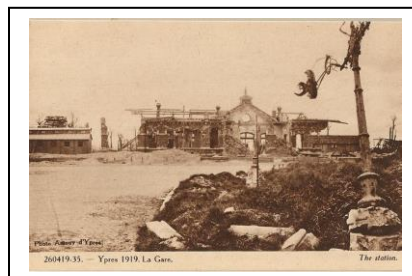
Private Peters' unit stayed in the vicinity of Le Nieppe* until November 4 when at eight o'clock in the morning it marched to the station in Erlingham.

(continued)

From there a train took the battalion into Belgium, to the community of Brandhœk – about halfway between Ypres and Poperinghe – where it was billeted in *Derby Camp*. During the following three days the War Diarist was to report the presence of a number of enemy aircraft which dropped a number of bombs in the area. There was apparently no damage to either personnel or equipment of the Battalion.

**Not to be confused with the much larger French community of Nieppe, to be found almost astride the Franco-Belgian frontier just to the west of Armentières.*

On the third day of its arrival in Belgium, the 10th Battalion boarded another train for the short journey to the area of embattled Ypres where further billets awaited it, both in the city and in the north-east suburb of St-Jean, already known to those veterans still in the unit of the *Second Battle of Ypres*, fought by them in 1915. The Battalion War Diary reported that November 7 as having been yet another day on which the unit was bombed by enemy aircraft, although again no casualties seem to have been incurred.



(Right above: *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*)

The Canadian Corps by this time, after a week of rest following its efforts of late October and early November, was again to take the offensive on November 10. To this end the 10th Battalion withdrew into reserve on November 9 to prepare for the role that it had been ordered to play.

Excerpts from 10th Canadian Infantry Battalion Order No. 88 of 8-11-18:

...9. On the night of ZERO DAY, the 10th Battalion will relieve the 7th...

10. This unit (the 10th Battalion) will be equipped as if they were going to make the initial assault and will be prepared to make an attack from a flank or do any other work that may be required...

11. The 10th Battalion will at all times be ready to assist in the relaying of casualties toward the rear and the carrying forward of material and supplies...

12. The area allotted to the 10th Battalion is subjected to very heavy enemy shelling. Company Commanders will take all possible means of protecting their personnel, and where no protection exists, no time will be lost in entrenching or utilizing some sort of shelter...

13, At one hour after ZERO Hour, Companies will be fully equipped and prepared for any emergency that may arise, keeping in shelters until the necessities of the operation call for action...

19. If the 10th Battalion is called upon to make an assault, selected men will be told off to act as snipers...

Excerpts from the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary entry for November 10, 1917:

At 6.10 a.m. our barrage opened and the attack commenced. On the left section the enemy put down a heavy barrage...and also opened a heavy fire upon the whole forward area, the fire increasing throughout the morning... The barrage was maintained by the enemy throughout the evening... As the attack progressed, white lights showed that our objectives were won.

At 7.00 a.m. (the following morning) the rain started and gradually increased to a heavy and soaking storm, increasing further the awful conditions under which communications were maintained.

The casualty numbers show the ferocity of the fighting: the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade reported twelve-hundred sixty-nine casualties all told for the two-day operation; the 10th Battalion, having been held in reserve, incurred just under fifty percent of the numbers incurred by the three other battalions of the Brigade, a total of one-hundred sixty-four killed, wounded or missing.

(Right: *In the stone of the Menin Gate at Ypres (today Ieper) there are carved the names of British and Empire (Commonwealth) troops who fell in the Ypres Salient during the Great War and who have no known last resting-place. There are almost fifty-five thousand remembered there; nevertheless, so great was the final number, that it was to be necessary to commemorate those who died after August 16 of 1917, just fewer than thirty-five thousand, on the Tyne Cot Memorial. – photograph from 2010)*



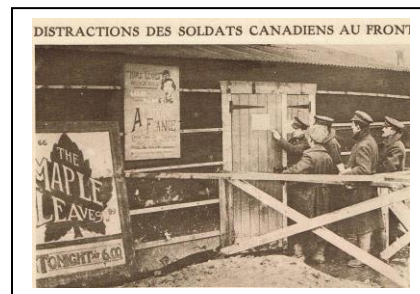
At the end of the second day of the fighting, November 11, Private Peters' Battalion withdrew to the relative shelter of "C" Camp in the vicinity of Wieltje where it was reported as...*"Settled in Billets"* by 10.30 P.M. Enemy planes had again interrupted the entire day and evening in the whole area and the unit had suffered casualties among both the personnel and the horses of the Transport Section.

The following days were to witness the retirement of the Battalion from the 3rd Battle of Ypres: it returned to Brandhoek by train and from there marched back to billets in Derby Camp. Having remained there for two days, the unit was then taken by bus as far as the northern French community of Fouqueroëuil – south-west of Béthune – where a bath and a change of clothing were the highlights of the next day, November 16.

Two days later again, Private Peters and his comrades-in-arms undertook a four-hour march to arrive in Vancouver Camp in the area of Château-de-la-Haie. Six days there and then the unit was ordered to serve an extended tour of nineteen days in front-line positions in the Lens Sector and support trenches at Lievin.

On December 11 the Battalion returned to Château de la Haie – enjoying a concert on their second evening there - where, three days later, polling booths were erected and opened from nine in the morning until five in the afternoon.

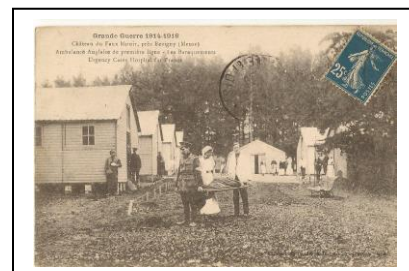
(Right: *Canadian soldiers stand in front of a temporary theatre and peruse the attractions of an upcoming concert. – from Le Miroir*)



On that December 14* the personnel of the 10th Battalion (*Canadians*) were encouraged to exercise their right to vote in the Canadian National Election ongoing at the time. Also offered was the opportunity to invest in War Bonds, thus allowing those fighting in the conflict the opportunity to pay for it as well.

**During much of that month, all Canadian military personnel serving overseas were encouraged to vote.*

On the day after he had voted, Private Peters was sent to report to the 1st Canadian Field Ambulance at Grand Servins. There he was diagnosed as suffering from *callosity* – a painful hardening of the skin in areas subject to constant friction – and thence forwarded on that same day to the 15th Canadian Field Ambulance. Six days later he was discharged *to duty* back with his unit.



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

He had been released just in time to enjoy the Christmas festivities, probably the most appreciated of which were the two days, Christmas and Boxing, in honour of which any and all training had been cancelled.

On the following day, however, Private Peters was receiving further medical attention – for conjunctivitis. For this he was evacuated to the 2nd Canadian Field Ambulance at Vieil Fort Château at Divion. Two days later he was passed along to the 23rd Casualty Clearing Station at not far-distant Lozinghem where two further days of treatment were succeeded by another forty-eight hours of convalescence back in the 2nd CFA. At the end of this medical circuit he was discharged to the 10th Battalion.

It was not to be until the 26th day of January that the Battalion was once more called upon to serve in the forward area when it was posted to the *Loos Sector*, to an area which all but the newest personnel of the unit knew well: *Hill 70*.

In the intervening time the Battalion had moved to a number of rear-area postings such as Houdain, Bully-Grenay and Mazingarbe for training and also to be re-organized, re-equipped and re-enforced. This period was very quiet and even the time which was then to be spent in the front-line trenches at Loos, followed by days in support at *Fosse 10**, were marked militarily by only sporadic shelling by the enemy artillery and the occasional fly-over by a few of his aircraft, none of which activity apparently did much damage.

**The word 'fosse' in French signifies not only a ditch but also the pit-head of a mine of which there were a number in the area.*

In that same manner also passed the month of February, 1918, and the first three weeks of March, the Battalion rotating from front-line to support to reserve and back to front-line, more or less as described on an earlier page. The latter days of that period were once more spent in positions at *Hill 70*, until March 21 when Private Peters and his unit retired to *Fosse 10*.

But on that March 21, the first day of spring, 1918, things were about to change.

Perhaps not many people – certainly the 10th Battalion War Diarist appears not to have done so - realize how close the Germans were to come to victory in that March and April of 1918. On the night of March 21 the enemy had sent aircraft over to drop a few bombs – but there was nothing unusual in that. 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 five days. Training and sports went on as had been planned.

Elsewhere, however, having transferred the divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, the Germans 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 stationed there.



(Right above: *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 thus oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir*)

The German advance was to continue for just over a month before petering out in front of the city of Amiens.

The ultimate failure of the offensive was 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.

It was as late as March 26 before the 10th Battalion received an order from the 2nd Brigade ordering it to...*stand to and be ready to move at one hours notice after 5.30 a.m.* Cancelled once, the order was re-instated later that same evening and preparations continued for a hasty departure if necessary.



It apparently *was* necessary – at least felt to be so by the High Command: at eight o'clock the next day the Battalion marched across country to Écoivres in the area of St-Éloi. There it was held pending orders to be moved into the 3rd Army area: those orders received later that day, the unit left its temporary camp-site and marched to its arranged rendezvous with busses around about mid-night.



(Preceding page: *Écoivres Military Cemetery seen twice: at the time of - or just after – the Great War, and as it is a century later – from a vintage post-card and (colour) from 1915*)

Several transfers were to follow before the Battalion found itself remaining at the No. 1 Camp at Warlus for some eight consecutive days before then, on April 5, being ordered to relieve the 16th Canadian Infantry Battalion in Divisional Support in the Ronville Caves, underneath the city of Arras and its surrounds. 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 to be used at various times by personnel of thirty-six different Army Divisions. – photograph from 2012(?)*)

It would seem from the 10th Battalion War Diary entries for the few succeeding days, that the Battalion's different sub-units, Companies, Headquarters, Transport, Details – even the Battalion Band – were variously despatched to different locales. It would also seem, however, that these sub-units were ordered to hold the defensive positions to which they had all been posted...*at all costs...to counter an expected enemy attack**.

**Arras was at the very northern end of the German spring offensive and the British High Command had no option but to expect the worst, a change of direction in the German advance. The enemy artillery was to be active during much of this time at this northern end of his attack but there was almost no infantry activity.*

It appears that the 10th Battalion became a single re-united entity once again on April 11 when the unit relieved the 44th Canadian Infantry Battalion in its positions astride the Blangy-Gavrelle Road, an exchange that was completed ninety minutes after mid-night – of April 11-12 – on a reportedly quiet night.

By this time, even though there was much hard fighting to come on the southern front, and despite the opening by the enemy of a second offensive in Flanders, the situation appears to have been stabilizing, particularly on the Amiens Front. Later that month the same could be said of the northern front*.

**The 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 29th 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*)

(continued)

Private Peters' unit now remained in this area just north of Arras itself and in the vicinity of the village of Roclincourt. There was to be no more of the hither-and-thither of the early days of the crisis and although extra precautions were taken to respond to any immediate German threat, the personnel of the 10th Battalion – and of all the other Canadian units in those sectors – were reverting more and more to the routines of the everyday existence of soldiers of the *Great War*.

On May 5, having been relieved by units of a British brigade, the 10th Battalion had been ordered withdrawn to the area of Marœuil, some few kilometres to the rear and north-west of Arras. Later that month Private Peters' unit was to retire even further to the west, to the vicinity of Liencourt.

Thus a relative calm had descended on the front as the German threat 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.



(Right above: *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(?)*)

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.

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.



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

In the meantime, the 10th Battalion, while not having been very active militarily, had nevertheless not been entirely passive otherwise. On May 25 it marched north-eastwards to its next encampment at Caucourt, still situated well to the west of the forward area. There at Caucourt inspections, lectures, visits from the upper echelons, and the inevitable training were a part of the daily schedule; but so – more so and more so, it appears – were sports, intra-battalion and also extra-battalion: and to add a bit of spice perhaps, the officers at times pitted themselves against their men.

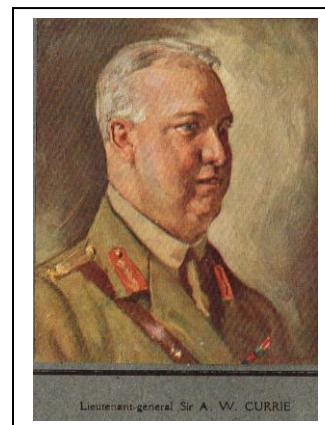
Nor were the sports limited to the favourites of baseball, football – played with the round ball – or cricket, but prowess in military skills also provided for competition: they included shooting – the men with rifles, the officers with pistols - semaphore, wiring, tent-pegging and skills with a Lewis-Gun (a light machine-gun) – but whatever those skills may have been is not documented in the War Diary of the 10th Battalion.

At the beginning of June the Battalion moved back to Écoivres. Judging from the War Diary entries of those days, the venue may have changed but the same diet of activities was on offer to the personnel. The only amendments to the agenda appear to have been, firstly, the addition of working-parties which were now required to dig trenches for a defence system in the vicinity of Arras and, secondly, the necessity to shelter from enemy shells, Écoivres being within range of the German guns.



(Right above: *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: the use of head-straps was apparently adopted from a practice of the indigenous Canadians – from Le Miroir*)

On June 16 Private Peters and his unit were once more on the march, to la Thieuloye, some thirty kilometres distant away from the front. The syllabus remained again much the same – except that the only gun-fire was now confined to the rifle range. The visits by high-ranking officers included, on the final day of the month, one by the Canadian Corps Commander, Sir William Arthur Currie; and a high-ranking non-officer paid a call on July 1, Dominion Day – the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden.



(Right above: *Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur William Currie, Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Corps – from Illustration*)

On July 12 the 10th Battalion began to move once more towards the forward area in the Arras Sector, to Anzin just north of the city. Three days later the unit had relieved some of those serving in support and front-line positions.



(Right above: *The city of Arras was to endure four years of shelling during the Great War; the Grand'Place (Grande Place) (to compare with the earlier picture of Arras in 1916) looked like this by March, 1917, and more was to follow. – from Le Miroir*)

Apart from a raid undertaken on July 26 in concert by the 10th and 5th Battalions – with mixed results – the War Diarist had little to report out of the ordinary: that is, until the evening of the last day of the month.

Excerpt from the 10th Battalion War Diary entry for July 31, 1918: *...the 10th CANADIAN INFANTRY BATTALION was relieved tonight... Relief complete...at 12.45 a.m. ...the 10th Cd. Inf. Battalion proceed to ARRAS to embark on the Light Railway. Their destination was given as FOSSEUX in the...Operation Order, but instructions received prior to entraining stated that the Battalion would proceed to LATTRE ST. QUENTIN: the train pulled out at 3.00 A.M., and detraining point was reached about 5.30 A.M.*

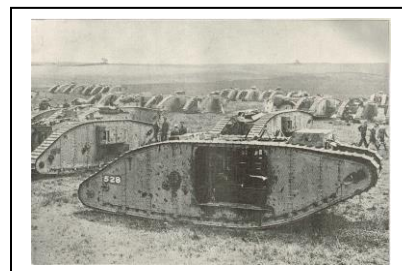
Companies were marched to their various Billets after detraining, and a guide proceeded to FOSSEUX to direct the Cook Wagons to the new destination...

Private Peters and his unit remained in much that same area, to the west of Arras, until the morning of August 4 when the Battalion again took a train and was transported south-westwards to the community of Senarpont, well to the west of Amiens. The 10th Battalion of Canadian Infantry was now on its way to that part of the forward area, in front of the city of Amiens, where the German spring offensive had been halted some four months earlier.

In doing this, the 10th Battalion was not 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, all of the latter stages on foot and also all during the hours of darkness.

It was intended to surprise the enemy – and it did.

On August 6 the Battalion was bussed from Lincheux to the outskirts of Amiens – arriving at one-thirty in the morning of August 7 - from where it was now to proceed on foot into the Blangy trench system. It remained there during the remainder of the daylight hours when it moved forward into the trenches at Gentelles which were to be its jumping-off point: 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)

While the major offensive to be launched on August 8 was to deceive the enemy, it surely also caught the Allied troops by surprise as well. Some of the War Diarists first make mention of an Allied offensive only a day or two before the opening of the attack.

The next morning, August 8, was foggy when the barrage had first descended upon the German defenders at twenty minutes past four in the morning, the first engagements fought against an invisible enemy until the fog lifted.

The War Diary of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade continues the story in a few concise lines: ***...3rd Brigade leading the assault for the 1st Canadian Division. The 1st Brigade reached the GREEN LINE at Zero plus 4 hours and passed through to their objective – the RED LINE – reaching same at Zero plus 6½ hours. The 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade then passed through them to exploit their success, the 7th Battalion attacking on the right, and the 10th on the left, and at 2.50 p.m. 10th Battalion reported all objectives gained.***



(continued)

(Preceding page: A group of German prisoners, some seen 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*)

On that day the enemy – particularly the machine-gunners – had fought hard at times but the pursuit, albeit sometimes slowed, had never stopped. In some places the Canadians were to advance some eleven kilometres, something almost unheard of during the preceding four years of almost static warfare, the exceptions having been the first day of the *Battle of Cambrai* on November 20 of 1915, and the outset of the German offensive in that March only months previous.

The 10th Battalion had reached the Brigade's final objective at about one-thirty in the afternoon on that day. Known to the attackers as the *Amiens Defence Line*, it lay in front of the village of Caix; there the Battalion stopped and began to consolidate its gains, also sending out patrols and creating observation posts as precautions against any impending German counter-attacks. However, despite giving the impression that he might do so, the enemy did nothing more than use his artillery against the Canadians.

On August 9, after having spent the morning in the newly-captured positions, the Battalion was relieved, then pulled back before advancing again to follow those other Canadian battalions which were to continue the attack on that day.



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

The casualty count of Private Peters unit for both August 8 and 9 had been light, the lightest of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, the War Diarist recording but a single *killed in action* and seventy-five *wounded*. No more were to be added to that number on the following day, August 10, a day that the unit spent *in situ...cleaning and resting after the action*.

This inactivity continued on the following day again, partially because of the success of the advance: logistics were having a hard time keeping pace with the infantry. In the meantime the enemy resistance was hardening and the advance, although to continue, was not again to emulate the overall success of the first day.

It was finally not to be until August 16 that the services of the 10th Battalion, by that time re-enforced, were to be required in the front-line again. On the evening of that day it moved forward into forward positions - trenches and outposts - in the area of Le Quesnoy, there relieving the 58th Canadian Infantry Battalion.

August 17 and 18 were spent in the same positions now being made uncomfortable by increased German aerial activity and by a greater artillery bombardment than had previously been experienced. The first infantry action was to take place on the next day again when two patrols were sent out, the first...*to investigate the enemy's Front Line...*, the second made mention of for...*inflicting casualties upon the enemy and doing good work generally*.

Remaining in those front-line positions until August 21, the 10th Canadian Infantry Battalion was thereupon relieved, not by another Canadian unit, but by the Boussey (1st) Battalion of the French 173rd Regiment. It was not the only Canadian battalion to be so replaced, as the entire Canadian Corps was now to retire from the Amiens Front.



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

Once withdrawn - their places in the line to be taken by French troops - the Canadians 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. Only days later, 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.

The seven days after August 21 saw the 10th Battalion withdraw on foot to the area of Guillaucourt, just to the rear, then to Salouël to the south-west of Amiens. From there on August 25 it entrained and proceeded north to Savy-Berlette where it arrived early the following afternoon. There was to be little rest, just an hour for something to eat, before, at three o'clock on the afternoon of the same August 26, busses transported the unit as far as Ste-Catherine, on the northern outskirts of Arras.

By this time the 10th Battalion was back much where it had been less than four weeks before. And within days it would be playing its role in the opening days of this new campaign based on Arras.

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 next day more Canadian battalions had joined the fray and, within the next two days 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*)

After a day spent in preparation in Ste-Catherine the 10th Battalion had moved to spend the next night, August 27-28, in the *Schramm Barracks* located in Arras itself. Late on that August 28, Private Peters' unit was ordered forward once more, on this occasion to move into support positions, thus relieving troops of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade.

(continued)

It was an overnight job as the positions were not occupied by the 10th Battalion until... *the early hours of the morning of August 29th.*

After three days of occupying those support positions, sheltering from enemy shells and watching his aeroplanes fly overhead, the 10th Battalion was ordered to attack and move in the direction of Chérisy, further to the east along the Arras-Cambrai.

The Battalion War Diary entry of that September 2 provides few details, making mention only that... *the 10th CANADIAN INFANTRY BATTALION, as part of the 2nd Brigade, attacked this morning, leaving the Jumping-Off Line at 8.00 AM. A temporary halt was made from 4.00 to 6.00 PM., and the advance then continued the Final Objective being reached about 11.00 PM., after a very heavy day's fighting.*

(Right: *Douglas Haig, C.-in-C. of British and Commonwealth forces on the Western Front inspects Canadian troops after their successful operation of September 2 against the German Drocourt-Quéant Line – from Le Miroir*)



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

However, on the following day the unit moved forward once more, presumably into territory that had already been taken from the enemy as the Battalion War Diarist makes no mention of infantry activity on that September 3. This advance brought the Battalion forward from Chérisy through another ruined village, Vis-en-Artois, and on to the west bank of the *Canal du Nord*. There the Battalion advance halted, as did that of the entire Canadian Corps.



This operation came to be recognized as the breaking of the *Drocourt-Quéant Line*, these positions being a component of the German defensive system collectively known as the *Hindenburg Line*.

(Right: *Within the bounds of Vis-en-Artois British Cemetery, Haucourt, lie well over two-thousand three-hundred Commonwealth dead of which some fourteen hundred remain unidentified. – photograph from 2017*)



It was to be more than three weeks later that the Canadian forces would attempt to force a crossing of the Canal du Nord. In the meantime the 10th Battalion retired, on September 4, back to Chérisy where busses awaited to transport it further westward – away from the forward area – to Simoncourt, west of Arras.

(continued)

(Right below: *German artillery positions which were overrun by the Canadian advances during early September of 1918 – from Le Miroir*)

During the seven days of the preceding operation, despite the fact that Private Peters' Battalion had played but a relatively minor part in the fighting, the unit had lost – all ranks - thirty-six *killed in action*, two-hundred sixteen *wounded* and four *missing in action*.



(Right: *The caption to this photograph reads: Prisoners taken by the Canadians at Quéant – from Le Miroir*)

The Battalion remained in its billets at Simoncourt until the 20th day of that month. It trained, paraded, bathed, practiced its musketry skills, played sports, was inspected, re-organized, re-enforced and – on a grimmer note – provided personnel for burial parties on the recent battle-fields.



By this time the High Command was concluding its plans for the crossing of the *Canal du Nord*. The fact that this waterway was still incomplete – and thus devoid of water – in one area, was an advantage to any attackers; but then of course the Germans thus had an idea of where the attack was most likely going to fall. It is therefore perhaps surprising that the *Canal* was crossed relatively easily.

On September 20 Private Peters' Battalion marched during much of the morning before boarding a train for the return journey to the forward area, a ride which was described as...*long and tedious*...by the War Diarist who also recorded that the train took six and a-half hours to reach its not-too-distant destination. Upon its arrival, the unit's day concluded with a further march in heavy rain to its billets in and about the community of Mercatel.

There the Battalion awaited further orders until September 25, its time being spent in training, inspection and, for four of the five days, a two-hour concert given by the Battalion Band. On the evening of that September 25, the unit marched to nearby Cagnicourt, to its billets and assembly positions.

The attack across the *Canal du Nord* had been scheduled for September 27. Thus on the 26th...*The day was spent in resting the Battalion and issuing stores for the coming offensive*...then followed by...*a Communion Service held at 5.30 PM in one of the Trenches*.

The 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary Appendices record that in the early morning of September 27, 1918...*at 5.20 a.m. the barrage commenced in accordance with general plan of attack*.

The 10th Battalion War Diary Appendix a propos the operations of September 27 notes that...*the 10th Canadian Infantry Battalion moved from Reserve Billets near CAGNICOURT at 8.00 a.m. on the 27th*... and also that...*The Battalion at this time was at the rear of the Brigade*...

This being the case, it may be concluded that Private Peters was not to play any role in forcing the passage of the *Canal du Nord*, a feat which, by eight o'clock, had already been accomplished. In fact it was not until two o'clock in the afternoon that the 10th Battalion was able to make contact with the 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion which had preceded it. It was to be later again, at about six o'clock – due to enemy resistance – that Private Peters' unit was to play its part.



(Right above: *German prisoners evacuating wounded out of the area of the unfinished part of the Canal du Nord which the Canadians crossed on September 27, thus opening the road to Cambrai – from Le Miroir*)

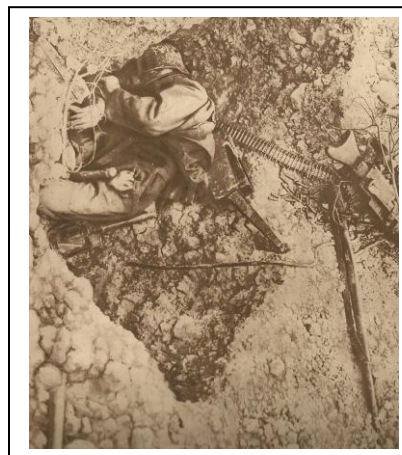
(Right: *The same area of the Canal du Nord as it is almost a century after the Canadian operation to cross it – photograph from 2015*)



Excerpt from the 10th Battalion War Diary Appendix a propos the operations of September 27, 1918: *About 3.30 p.m. the 5th Battalion commenced their advance and took the village of HAYNECOURT and the area within the Divisional Boundaries as far forward as their final objective.*

4. ADVANCE OF THE 10TH BATTALION – *the 10th Battalion followed closely protecting the Right Flank while the advance was made.*

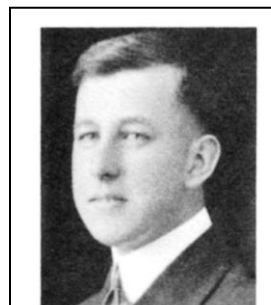
The 10th Battalion passed through the 5th Battalion at the Sunken Road east of HAYNECOURT at about 5.30 p.m. The Advance from this point forward was made under great difficulties. It was quite obvious that the Right Flank was very much exposed. It was not known how far forward the 4th Division had been able to proceed and large numbers of the enemy could be seen very distinctly moving about our Right Flank. In addition the Advance was impeded by several well placed Batteries of Machine Guns and Field Guns who had direct infilade (sic) fire, and who, until they had been finally put out of action by our Machine Gunners, continued to cause us casualties.



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

Casualty report – *Killed in Action – Whilst acting as a scout during the attack North East of Haynecourt he was hit in the stomach and killed by shrapnel from an enemy shell.*

(Right: *The photograph of Herbert Smith 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.*)



The 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 January 1 of 1916 Private Herbert Smith Peters had allotted a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay, and of Alice Emily Peters (née *Smith*) – to whom he had willed his all on August 31, 1917 - he was also brother to Gertrude, to John-Edgar and to Edward-Cole (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 reported as having been *killed in action* on September 27 of 1918 while fighting in the area of Haynecourt.

Herbert Smith Peters had enlisted at the *apparent age* of nineteen years and four months: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, March 18, 1896.

His brother, Edward Cole Peters, had already died, *killed in action* at *Sanctuary Wood* on June 2, 1916, during the fighting at *Mount Sorrel*. His grave, pictured to the right, is to be found in White House Cemetery, St-Jean-les-Ypres, Belgium.



Private Herbert Smith Peters was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).).

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



