



Private Thomas Joseph Pippy, Number 878226, of the Royal Canadian Regiment, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Raillencourt Communal Cemetery Extension: Grave Reference I.C.18.. He shares his grave with another soldier of the RCR, Private Herbert Cecil Phillips of Clarke's Harbour, Nova Scotia.

(Right: The image of the cap badge of the Royal Canadian Regiment is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a clerk, Thomas Joseph Pippy appears to have left St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, with his parents and siblings in the year 1898. The family then crossed the Cabot Strait from Port aux Basques to not only land in - but to make its new home in - North Sydney, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Some eighteen years later, in 1916, the town of North Sydney was where he was to enlist.

His first pay records and a medical report indicate that it was on March 15 of that year, while he was still in North Sydney, that the Canadian Army began to remunerate the by-then Private Pippy for his services. The unit by which he was *taken on strength* on that same day was the 185th Overseas Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

A month later, on April 12, he subsequently underwent a medical examination – a procedure which found him fit...*for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. He also attested later on that same day before a local justice of the peace.

However, it was then to be a further two weeks, not until April 26, before the formalities of his enlistment were officially concluded: it was on that date that the commanding officer of the 185th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Parker-Day declared – on paper – that...*878226 Pte. Thos. J. Pippy...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

By this time, Private Pippy had likely already spent the intervening weeks since his enlistment on March 15 undergoing some basic training in the town of Broughton*, only some twenty kilometres distant to the south of the industrial city of Sydney. In fact, Broughton is recorded as having been the venue of his medical examination and of his attestation on April 12.

**Broughton had been a 'company town', developed towards the end on the nineteenth century by the Cape Breton Coal, Iron & Railway Company. Apparently too much money had been spent on it as the company went bankrupt in 1907 and the town was to soon be abandoned. At the outset of the Great War it was taken over by the Canadian Army and, more particularly, by the 185th Battalion (Cape Breton Highlanders).*

This posting to Broughton was not to last any longer than just over two months. By that time, the authorities had decided to create a *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade*, this to comprise the 185th, the 85th, the 193rd and the 219th Battalions of Canadian Infantry. On May 23 of 1915 these four formations were assembled to train together at *Camp Aldershot*, Nova Scotia, where the *Brigade* then spent all summer before receiving its colours on September 28, two weeks before its departure for *overseas service**.

**There is no reason given as to why he was to forfeit two days' pay in the month of June: unpaid leave to visit his family in North Sydney?*

Apart from this being a time of training, the period spent at Aldershot was also the occasion for Private Pippy to pen a Will on August 23, a document in which he bequeathed his all to his mother. As well, as of the first day of October, 1916, and just prior to departure, he allocated a monthly twenty dollars from his pay, also to his mother.

At seven o'clock in the evening of October 11, 1916, the one-thousand thirty-eight officers and *other ranks* of the 185th Overseas Battalion embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* in the harbour at Halifax. Earlier that day the 85th and the 188th Battalions had gone on board, to be followed on the morrow by the 219th and the 193rd.

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

On October 13th - at about eleven o'clock in the morning - it was the turn of the half-battalion of the 166th – five-hundred three *all ranks* - the final unit, to march up the gangways before *Olympic* cast her lines and sailed towards the open sea. For the trans-Atlantic passage she was carrying some six-thousand military personnel.



The vessel arrived in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on October 18, some five days later, and the troops disembarked on the following day. The 185th Battalion was thereupon transported south-eastwards to *Witley Camp* in the county of Surrey.

The 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) is documented as then having provided re-enforcements for Canadian forces on the Continent. This was to last until February of 1918 when the remaining personnel of the unit was absorbed into the Canadian 17th (*Reserve*) Battalion.

The Cape Breton Battalion's organizers had originally anticipated that it would be sent – in the company of the other three units of the *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* – into *active service* on the Continent, but this was not to be*.

**Before the end of the Great War, Canada was to have despatched overseas more than two-hundred fifty battalions – although it is true that a number of these units, particularly as the conflict progressed, were below full strength. At the outset, these Overseas Battalions all had presumptions of seeing active service in a theatre of war.*

However, as it transpired, only some fifty of these formations were ever to be sent across the English Channel to the Western Front. By far the majority remained in the United Kingdom to be used as re-enforcement pools and they were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by units that had by then been designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.

By the time of Private Pippy's arrival in England, the Canadian Corps had been involved in the *First Battle of the Somme* for two months during which time it had suffered terrible losses. It was to fill the depleted ranks of those battered units that three-quarters of the newly-arrived *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* were to be deployed.



(Right: *Dead of the Somme awaiting burial – an unidentified photograph*)

This distribution of re-enforcements was, however, to take some time even though a number had already crossed the English Channel by the end of the year, 1916. In the case of Private Pippy the spring of two years hence, 1918, had already arrived before he was to be ordered to proceed to the Continent.

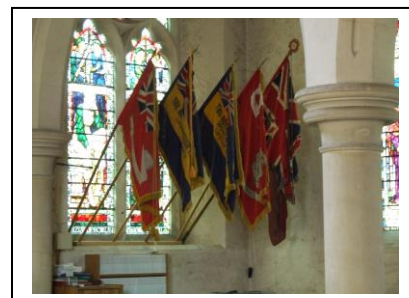
In the meantime Private Pippy had been sent from *Witley Camp* to be admitted into the Connaught Military Hospital at the (British) Army complex at another Aldershot – this one in England. There he was to remain under medical care for twenty days, from November 5 until 25, for a venereal complaint*.

**He appears in one way to have been fortunate: the British and Canadians had a policy whereby venereal patients were often obliged to forfeit some of their pay and all of their field allowance as a contribution towards the treatment necessary – for Canadian private soldiers this amounted to sixty cents out of their daily dollar and ten cents wage. This deduction has been noted in Private Pippy's pay records but has then been barred out with no apparent subsequent change to his income.*

Also during that interim while he was awaiting orders to proceed to *active service* on the Continent, Private Pippy received promotion, on February 5, 1917, to the rank of lance corporal.

The wait for the call to France was to be a long one. In fact, Lance Corporal Pippy was still to be one of the 185th Battalion's personnel when it was finally absorbed into the 17th (Reserve) Battalion during the month of February, 1918. During that period, his status had changed on four occasions: on May 18, 1917, to revert at his own request to the rank of private soldier; on June 20, 1917, to the rank of (acting) lance corporal *without pay* – not unusual at the time; to (acting) lance corporal with pay on December 1 of the same 1917; and finally, on February 23, 1918, once more to the rank of private, and once more at his own request.

February 23 was also the date on which he and many of his comrades-in-arms were transferred to the 17th Canadian (Reserve) Battalion (*Nova Scotia*) which was stationed at that time at the nearby *Canadian Camp Bramshott*. There he was to remain for a month and two days before the order came for his services in France.



(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*)

It was on March 25, 1918, that he was *struck off strength* by the 17th Reserve Battalion to be *taken on strength* by his new unit, the Royal Canadian Regiment, three days afterwards, upon his arrival in France.



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

Private Pippy travelled to France on the night of March 25-26, 1917 - likely passing via the English south-coast port of Southampton and the French industrial port-city of Le Havre situated on the estuary of the River Seine. From there he was transported to the coastal town of Étaples where by then had been established the 3rd Canadian Infantry Base Depot where he reported *to duty* on the latter date, March 26.

Four days following his arrival on the Continent he was despatched from the Base Depot to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp at Callonne-Ricouart, some eighty kilometres distant, where he was one of three-hundred twenty-eight *other ranks* to report from Étaples on that day. Exactly on what date he was ordered to his new unit from there is not documented but it *is* recorded that he was one of the only two re-enforcements to join the Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment from the CCRC on April 7 of that 1918.

* * * * *

The Royal Canadian Regiment, although having been the senior regiment in the Canadian Army at the outbreak of the *Great War*, had not been among the first units to be despatched overseas to the United Kingdom in October of 1914. In fact, it *had* been sent overseas, but in a different direction, to languish for a year on the British island possession of Bermuda.



After that posting, in the summer of 1915, the Royal Canadian Regiment had been brought home to Canada and had then taken the same ship onward to the United Kingdom where it had thereupon been attached to the 7th Infantry Brigade of the newly-forming but not yet active 3rd Canadian Division.

The RCR* as part of the 7th Brigade had then been transferred to the Continent on November 1 of 1915. The unit was eventually to serve with the aforementioned fledgling 3rd Canadian Division** which, when having come into being, had been sent to the Franco-Belgian frontier area in tandem with the 1st Canadian Division and then, at the end of March of 1916, to the *Ypres Salient*.

(Right above: *Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, Ploegsteert Sector, where the 1st and 3rd Canadian Divisions served in the winter of 1915-1916, a mine crater from the time of the 1917 British offensive showing in the foreground – photograph from 2014*)

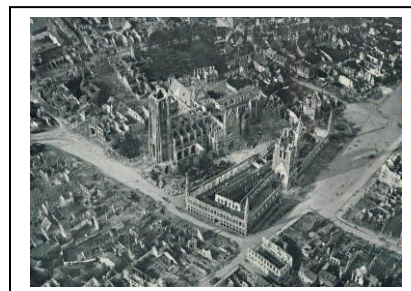
**The RCR was – and still is today – a regiment, a force which may comprise any number of battalions: today, in 2017, there are three. Some British regiments, for example, however, eventually recruited as many as twenty or more battalions to serve at the Front during the Great War. Only a single battalion - normally one-thousand strong but during the Great War oft-times comprising a lesser number - of the Royal Canadian Regiment ever served at the front during the Great War.*

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*****The 3rd Canadian Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. Unlike the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions and, later, the 4th Canadian Division, it was not formed in the United Kingdom but, in an almost ad hoc fashion, of units already serving on the Continent at the time, and of others which were to arrive from England as late as February of 1916.***

The first months of 1916 had been relatively peaceful for the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division in the frontier area. It was to be in March, 1916, that the entire Division had been transferred to the *Ypres Salient*, a lethal place at the best of times, to an area to the south-east of the city and in the vicinity of such places as the village of *Hooge*, and those that soon were to go by English names such as *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Maple Copse* and *Mount Sorrel*.

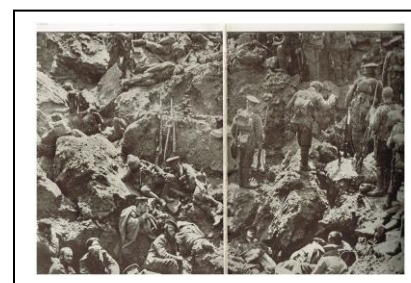
However, in April it had been the 2nd Canadian Division, in a neighbouring sector to the south of Ypres, which was to receive the attention of the German Army for a few days. For the 2nd Division this period was not to be as tranquil as that being experienced elsewhere during the same time by the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion and the other units of the Canadian 3rd Division.



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

The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* was to officially taken place from March 27 up 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 there that the British had excavated a series of galleries under the German lines, there to place explosives which they had detonated on that March 27, having then followed up with an infantry assault.

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



(Above right: A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – from Illustration)

However, as previously noted, this confrontation had been a 2nd Canadian Division affair and the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the artillery duels some kilometres away.

Its own first major infantry action, some seven weeks later, was to be the confrontation with the Germans at *Mount Sorrel*, in the south-east area of the *Ypres Salient*.

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Salient* remaining under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This had been just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, in the areas of the village of *Hooge* and those other places of English-sounding names as listed in a closely-previous paragraph. They are still referred to by the local people as such today.



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

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



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

Ten days later the Canadians had again counter-attacked, on this occasion better informed, better prepared and better supported. The lost terrain for the most part had been recovered, both sides had returned to the positions in which they had been eleven days before – and the cemeteries, inevitably, were that much fuller.



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

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



The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had been caught in the maelstrom of June 2 and had remained in the forward area until the night of June 5-6 when it had been relieved and had retired to Camp “B” well to the rear. The unit was not to serve again during the action at *Mount Sorrel* where it had, by the time of its retirement, incurred some one-hundred forty-five casualties.

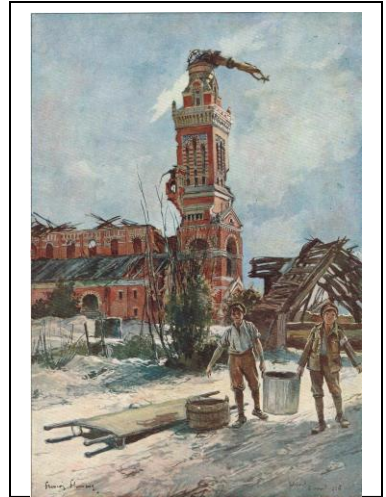


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(Preceding page: *A century later, reminders of a violent past at the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres: The area today is protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature. – photograph from 2014*)

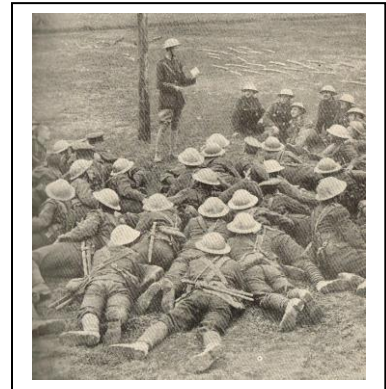
Thus the RCR Battalion returned to the everyday routines of trench warfare for some two months, after which time the unit – as was to be the case of most of the other Canadian Battalions – had been once more withdrawn, in succession, on this occasion for special training in ‘*open warfare*’. The Canadians were about to travel south into France to play a role in the British summer offensive of 1916.

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



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

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



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

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



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

The RCR had arrived in the area of the provincial town of Albert in the late evening of September 13 and just two days later, on September 15, had been ordered to move forward in order to attack a German strong-point, the *Zollern Graben*, on the following day. By four o'clock in the morning of September 17, when it withdrew, the RCR had incurred some two-hundred eighty casualties and the *Zollern Graben* was still in German hands.

Three weeks later, another major action was to follow: the attack of October 8-9 on the *Regina Trench* system was not a success but, on the contrary, a further expensive failure; the German positions would not be definitively taken until November 10-11. By that latter time, however, the RCR was to be in the *Lens Sector*, some fifty kilometres to the north. In fact, the unit was to be moving in that direction within days of having fought at *Regina Trench* on October 8.



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



(Right: *Wounded at the Somme being transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from *Le Miroir**)

During the five weeks of its sojourn at *the Somme* the Battalion had lost, *killed* and *wounded*, about four-hundred fifty *all ranks*. Over two-hundred more had been reported as *missing in action*, the War Diarist having optimistically predicted that most of them would be later found in field ambulances and casualty clearing stations. The accuracy of that forecast does not appear to have been documented.

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



The RCR Battalion had begun to withdraw from *the Somme* on October 10. The Battalion War Diarist makes no mention of any motor transport or train having been employed so it may be assumed that the unit, as with many others, had retired from there on foot. The route had taken it westward at first, then had turned northward so as to pass to the west of the by-now shattered city of Arras and beyond.

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

It was on the 24th of that October of 1916 that the unit had arrived in the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector* to the north-west of Arras. The War Diarist on that date was to report the Battalion's strength as having been three-hundred eighty-six *all ranks*, less than forty per cent of regulation battalion numbers.

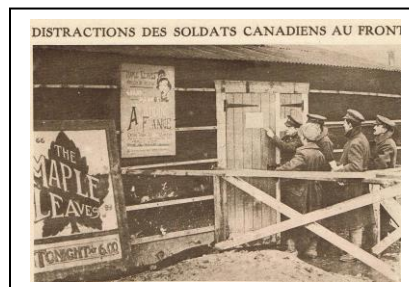


The Somme had taken its toll.

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The RCR, in its new quarters in the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector*, once more had begun the daily pattern of life in and out of the trenches*, a routine which had then lasted until the middle of February of the following year, 1917.

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



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



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

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

Thus the winter of 1916-1917 was to pass in that manner for the Royal Canadian Regiment. The Battalion War Diary is fairly repetitive in its entries: little in the way of infantry action except patrols and the occasional raid – by both sides. All activity was to be local and most casualties due to German artillery and snipers.



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

Then in February the unit had been ordered into Divisional Reserve at Bruay where it had begun five weeks of training for the upcoming British offensive; not that it had been all work: the War Diary reports sports events and concerts among the litany of parades, lectures, marches, drills, work-parties and visits from military and political personages.



(Right above: *A Canadian carrying-party loading up before moving up to the forward area, one of the many duties of troops when in support or reserve – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

On March 21 the RCR had moved forward into the trenches once again; after five weeks in reserve perhaps the change was to be a bit of a shock to the Battalion's collective system: the War Diarist notes that the new quarters... *LA MOTTE Camp, is composed of Bivouacs, with nine tents for officers. We are its first occupants. It can be greatly improved.*

But he also enters that... *"C" Company relieved the right Company of the 58th Battn. taking over the exact frontage from which we are expected to jump off.* Such an observation illustrates the recent policy of informing junior officers and senior NCOs of the plans of intended actions, knowledge that these personnel were to pass down to the men under their command.

And it surely had been becoming clear to the men of the RCR that there were to be intended actions; the forward and rear areas in the Neuville St-Vaast Sector had been hives of ongoing activity for which the unit had supplied working-parties and carrying-parties each day: dumping-areas had been cleared, bivouacs had been sand-bagged, stone had been laid for walks, new trenches had been dug and old ones deepened, troops familiarized with the newly-excavated tunnels and other positions, water-pipes and communication lines buried, artillery and machine-guns sited...

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

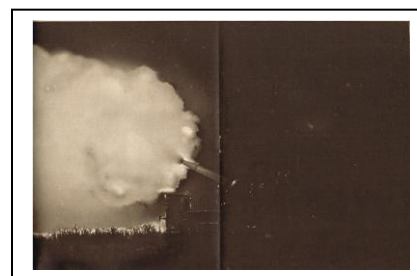
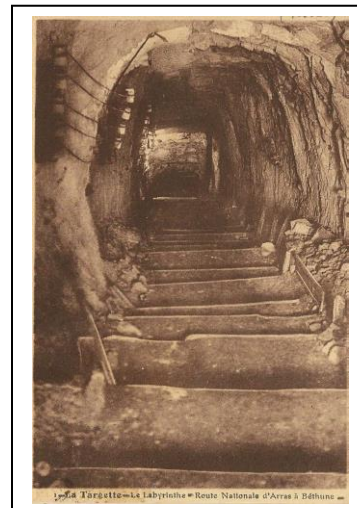
On April 1 the RCR Battalion had retired to Villers-au-Bois for a week, there to organize for the first day of the offensive. On April 7, the first of the unit's Companies had moved into one of those tunnels which had been hewn out of the chalk; it was to be hoped that these galleries would reduce the number of casualties with the men sheltering there until the last possible moment, and that it would also nurture the element of surprise.

The men of the RCR were to remain underground for well over twenty-four hours.

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

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

**It should be said that a great deal of the artillery used in the assault on Vimy Ridge was British and that a British Division – see above - 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 all to happen.*



On April 9 of 1917 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a French effort elsewhere.

In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, one of the few positive episodes having been the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

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



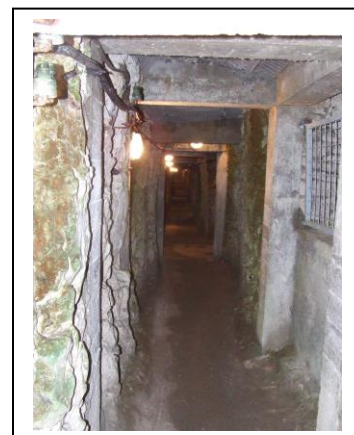
(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial* which, since 1936, has stood on *Vimy Ridge* – photograph from 2010)

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

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

(Right below: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3^d 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*)

For no reason other than that it is one of the more legible entries to follow, an extract of the experience of “A” Company during the opening of the attack of April 9 is here included as being representative of the events of the assault undertaken by the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion.



(Excerpts from the Battalion War Diary entry of April 9, 1917) 3.12 a.m. “A” Company under Captain Munn reports Co. in Assembly trenches.

5.30 a.m. Raining. Barrage opens.



While the other three Companies were in communication with Headquarters at a relatively early hour, apparently not so “A” Company, not until... 1.40 p.m. Message from “A” Co. delivered by wounded runner stated that they had captured four machine guns, were in touch with Units on both flanks... and that they had sent a patrol over the Ridge.

2.15 p.m. "A" Co. (left Co.) is in its objective. Strength 1 Officer and approximately 50 other ranks with no N.C.O.'s. It is in touch with "C" Co (right) who's (sic) approximate strength is 1 Officer and sixty other ranks... "A" Co. has sent a patrol over the ridge from which as yet no report has been sent. There is a small gap between "A" Co. and the P.P.C.C.L.I. owing to the shortage of men. We command the whole situation at present, but unless reinforcements and supplies of every sort, more especially S.A.A. (small-arms ammunition) available, machine Guns, shovels etc., are sent up at first opportunity, it will be difficult to withstand another counter attack.

It had been the 3rd Canadian Division – of which the Royal Canadian Regiment was an element - and also the 4th Canadian Division, whose objective had been *Vimy Ridge* itself, the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions – the latter incorporating a British brigade - having had responsibility for objectives on the right-hand side of the main slope*.

Of the some ten thousand plus Canadian casualties of the assault*, the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had incurred fifty-six *killed in action*, one-hundred sixty-five *wounded*, and sixty-five *missing in action* on the first day.



**This the count by mid-night of April 12*

The five-week *Battle of Arras* having sputtered to a halt in mid-May, the Royal Canadian Regiment was once again to face a long period of trench warfare. However, for many of the other units of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions which were serving in sectors from Vimy in the south to Béthune to the north this monotonous work was going to be spiced up: the Canadian Corps High Command had some offensive work planned.

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

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



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

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

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



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

In the meantime the RCR Battalion had undertaken, on June 8, one of those aforementioned raids. It had been on German positions in the *Avion Sector* just to the south of the city and mining-centre of Lens. Having taken place in the evening of that day, the operation had been of short duration and had involved very few casualties.

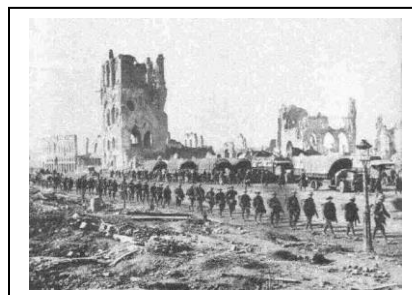
No further raids appear to have been mounted by the RCR Battalion in the weeks which were to follow, thus it had once again been a period of the routines and rigours as described in preceding pages, with much of it to be spent in the rear areas.

Two months later, on August 15, a major attack had been launched by troops of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions in the suburbs of the mining-centre and city of Lens and just to the north of the place, at a small rise known to Canadian history as *Hill 70*. The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion, however, was not to be a part of this particular offensive and on that day had in fact been busy in training exercises in the vicinity of the community of LaPugny (sic).

As far as anything of military importance on that day was concerned, the Battalion War Diarist was sparing with his ink: *Nil*.

The Canadian efforts were apparently to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium had been proceeding less well than anticipated and the High Command had by now been beginning to look for reinforcements to make good the exorbitant losses. The Australians and New Zealanders, and then the Canadians in turn, had been ordered to prepare to move north; thus the Canadians were to be obliged to abandon their plans.

It was to be just over seven weeks after the capture of *Hill 70*, on October 6, that the Royal Canadian Regiment had begun to make its way on foot and by train, to the area of the Franco-Belgian border. Later that day the unit had been billeted in the northern French town of Bailleul.



But it was not to be until October 23, having travelled in a circuitous route on foot and by train, that the RCR was to find itself in the war zone of the *Ypres Salient*.

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



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

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

From the time that the Canadians had entered the fray, it was they who had shouldered 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 had spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions in reserve.



From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 (other sources cite other dates) - - the reverse had been true with troops of the 2nd Canadian Division having finally entered the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.

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

From October 23 until the end of the month the RCR had been in reserve in the area of Sin Jaan (*St-Jean*), having contributed to carrying-parties, working-parties and stretcher-parties. On October 30 it had been ordered forward and was to be involved peripherally in an attack by the 3rd Division.



The unit then had remained in the lines until having been relieved on November 4 – all of this at a cost of two-hundred fifty-eight casualties.

(Right above: *Just a few hundred to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the above monument. – photograph from 2010*)

November 4 was only two days before (*another*) date of the official close of *Passchendaele* – July 31, 1917 to November 6, 1917 – but that of course was not to mean that the guns stopped firing or that the soldiers of both sides stopped dying on that day. Some Canadian units had withdrawn from Belgium by that date but still many remained, among them the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion.



(Right above: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war – from Illustration*)

It was not until November 14 that the Royal Canadian Regiment was to be back in the trenches intersecting what in peace-time had been the road leading north from Passchendaele (today *Passendale*) to the community of Westroosebeke*.

There it was to be almost continually shelled for three days, having incurred fifty casualties before then having been withdrawn from its positions – and from the 3rd *Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele* – on the morning of November 18.

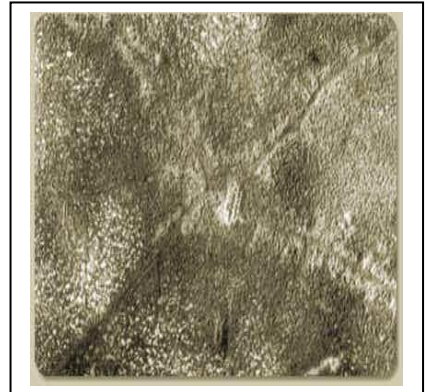
****The Battalion's positions were also atop the Passchendaele Ridge.***

(Right: The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration)

Two days later again, on November 20, the unit had been back in northern France, at Rely, a community some eighteen kilometres to the west of Béthune. There it was to remain, both resting and training, for a month, until December 21 when it had been bussed back to the *Lens Sector*.

Those daily exertions of life in the trenches were now to begin once more.

(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)



The month of December, even though the Battalion War Diarist appears to have neglected it, had nevertheless offered something a little different – and a reminder of home - to all the Canadian formations which had been serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army were to be open during that month and participation, in at least *some units*, had been in the ninety per cent range*.

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

The tranquillity of the winter was to continue until the very end of the season, but no further. The first day of spring of 1918, with the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion still stationed in the area of the city and mining centre of Lens, was to bring to a close this relative calm.

(Right: Not only had Lens been a major producer of coal prior to the Great War, but it was large enough to have been an important railway hub as well. – from Le Miroir)



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

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

(Right below: *While the Germans did not attack the city of Lens Lens – one source claims this picture to be of neighbouring Liévin - in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily during the time of their spring offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and thus to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir*)



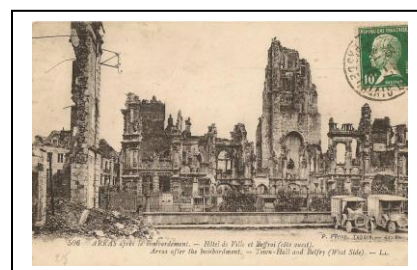
The German advance had continued for a month, to peter out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive had been a result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British were to be the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

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

Thus, despite, at times, the critical situation in the areas of both *the Somme* and *Flanders*, the services of the Royal Canadian Regiment – nor of any other Canadian unit - were apparently not to be required during either *Operation Michael* or *Operation Georgette*. The Canadians had moved troops into areas at the northern extremity of the German offensive, there to forestall any further forward movement on that front in the direction of the Channel ports by enemy forces.

But there had not been any major German infantry activity at or about Arras: the High Command, of course, was not to know the enemy’s intentions.

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



That entire period had been spent by the RCR Battalion in the sector of Lens, then in the southern suburb of Avion and, latterly, in the vicinity of the commune of Cambigneul, sixteen kilometres north-west of Arras.

(Right: *The city and mining-centre of Lens as it was by the end of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



April 7 had been the final day of week-long posting to the front-line trenches in the *Lens Sector* and by that mid-night the RCR Battalion had been relieved by the PPCLI Battalion, it also a component of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade.

And it was to be, as seen in a previous paragraph, on the night of this relief that Private Pippy and a second single *other rank* from the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp had reported *to duty* with their new unit.

* * * * *

The following two months were spent well to the rear, in an area where games, parades and concerts were also a part of the routine of army life, although maybe not quite as frequent as the seemingly-everyday working-parties and carrying-parties.



(Right above: *A Canadian carrying-party delivering the trappings of war somewhere on the Western Front: Apparently the use of the head-band - known as the 'tump' - had been adopted in the Canadian forces because of its use by the indigenous peoples at home. – from Le Miroir*)

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



It was to be the end of July before Private Pippy's Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion was to see action at the front again, except on certain occasions when training exercises were held in forward areas, activities that were of necessity made to be as realistic as possible.

It may well have been that Private Pippy and his comrades-in-arms at times asked themselves not only why there was this very welcome and quiet period, but also what the purpose could be of all the drills, marches, exercises, study and use of German weapons, familiarization with new tactics, lectures, bayonetting, grenade-throwing, gas evasion and divers manoeuvres. The answer to the latter question was to come in August.

The period of relative quiet after the efforts of the German spring offensives, *Michael* and *Georgette*, was due of course – certainly in the earlier stages - to the exhaustion of both sides by the end of that April of 1918.

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



But then it was to continue that way as the Allies and the newly-arriving Americans began in their turn to prepare for an offensive campaign – and therefore also as the German forces began to gird themselves for the inevitable retribution which was soon to burst upon them.

(continued)

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

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



The month of July was quiet as well, although Private Pippy and his Battalion were still eventually to be posted into the forward area where they could be shelled and shot at. But in the days during which he had been withdrawn to the rear there also appeared to be the same continuous preparations for something grand in the offing.

On July 30 the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion was ordered to parade...*in battle order*.

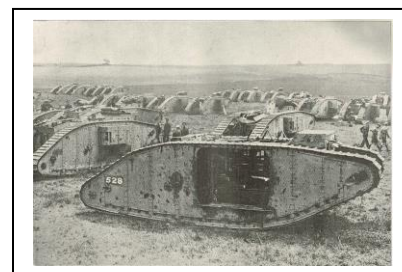
Then: on foot to LeSouich; by train to Doullens; from there to the cathedral city of Amiens by train on the first day of August; on the evening of the 2nd to billets in Sains en Amienois some four kilometres distant - and within enemy artillery range as several casualties, including fatalities, were to prove.

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



At Sains en Amienois Private Pippy likely spent three days in cleaning-up and in drying clothes, in training, in meeting French comrades-in-arms and also, on two of the three evenings given unto him, attending a concert performed by an unidentified – at least to the War Diary *reader* – band.

On August 6 the RCR Battalion was ordered to move: *GENTELLES WOOD full of troops. Whole Division and tanks* – recorded the War Diarist. From there three days later, on the 9th, it moved forward yet again, to *LeQuesnel Wood* on the Roye Road, expecting to attack on the next day*.



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

**The first attack had already been delivered by then, in the early – and foggy – morning of August 8. But as the offensive had been planned as a continuous advance, it was necessary to have troops which were fresh and ready to continue the operation, allowing the previous units the time to regroup, refresh, re-enforce and to prepare for a yet further assault a few days hence.*

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

Things, however, apparently went somewhat awry on this occasion as the Battalion sat awaiting orders all the following day and, in fact, it was not until the early morning of the 14th that Private Pippy and the others of his unit moved into the positions at Brigade Reserve recently vacated by the PPLCI* Battalion which had moved in order to deliver its assault from another quarter.



**Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry was named for the daughter of the Duke of Connaught, Governor General of Canada at the time.*

That attack by the PPCLI eventually *did* go in and by four o'clock of the next morning, August 15, the 7th Brigade had captured the village of Parvillers. It was then relieved and... *Brigade moved by march route and lorry to LEQUESNEL AREA into bivouacs. In the late afternoon the Brigade moved to VALLEY WOOD AREA* (From the 7th Brigade* War Diary).



(Right above: *Hillside Cemetery, Le Quesnel, within the bounds of which lie at least two Newfoundlanders – photograph from 2015*)

Battalion casualties *all told* for the period of August 8-16 inclusive had been: ten *killed in action*; sixty-five *wounded*; and three *missing in action*.

**The 7th Brigade comprised the 42nd, 49th, RCR and PPCLI Battalions.*

But by this time Private Pippy had been sent on a (gas?) course. The date had been August 12 and since there is no further information to be gleaned from his records, it can only be assumed – but it is not confirmed – that he had served with his unit during the opening days of the 3rd *Battle of Amiens*.

* * * * *

The RCR Battalion had continued its advance without Private Pippy, but only a week later, by the evening of August 19, the entire 7th Brigade was withdrawing from the recent battle-field and was on its way back whence it had come only three weeks previously. It was not alone: by August 27 the final units of the Canadian Corps were moving back to the area to the east of Arras, their places in front of Amiens having been progressively taken over by elements of the French Army.



The Canadians were to depart in much the same manner as they had arrived: at first on foot, then by motorized transport and by rail; they also moved rapidly and discreetly.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *French dead in the communal cemetery at Caix, just to the west of Rosières, the French relieving Canadian troops towards the end of the second week of the battle: Caix also hosts a British Commonwealth cemetery as well as a German burial ground. – photograph from 2017*)

By the time that the last Canadian troops had arrived back in the area of Arras, the first had already gone to the offensive – an operation to become known to history as the *Battle of the Scarpe* - on a new front. As early as the evening of August 25... *a very wet and dirty night...* the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had moved forward into its assembly areas... *trenches 1500 yards EAST of ARRAS.*

The attack was to follow the axis of the main road from Arras to Cambrai. By mid-morning on the following day the neighbouring 8th Brigade had already attacked and was reported as having captured Monchy-le-Preux.

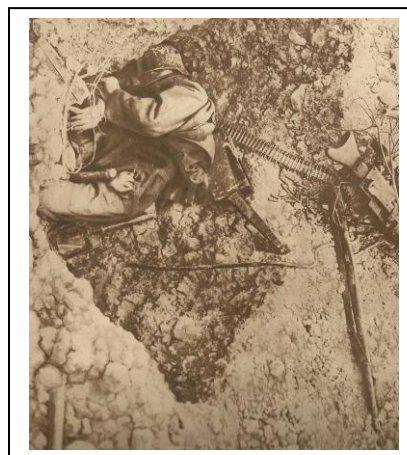
**Of interest to Newfoundland readers may be that on August 26 Monchy-le Preux was captured by troops of the 3rd Canadian Division. More than sixteen months earlier, on April 14 of 1917, the Newfoundland Regiment had been ordered forward into a battle that should never have been. While a desperate defence later in the day had earned ten men – nine from the Regiment – a medal each, the unit had suffered some four-hundred fifty killed, wounded, missing or prisoner.*



After Beaumont-Hamel, April 14, 1917, was to be the costliest day of the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment's war.

(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the south-west. In 1917 the Newfoundlanders, already in the village, had advanced out of the ruins of the village to the east, away from the camera; in 1918 the Canadians, attacking from the west, encircled the place. – photograph from 2014*)

The 7th Brigade – and thus the RCR, now accompanied by tanks – was ordered forward. By the late afternoon of August 29, after three days of at times very difficult fighting, most objectives had been secured and the Germans had been driven back some eight kilometres. The Battalion was thereupon withdrawn to billets in Arras while the *Battle of the Scarpe* officially was drawing to its close on August 30.



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

As the fighting had progressed the German resistance had become more pronounced and as usual, his machine-gunners were to give and to ask no quarter. RCR Battalion casualties from August 25-29 were as follows: *thirty-two killed in action or died of wounds; one-hundred fifty-seven wounded; seven missing in action.*

(continued)

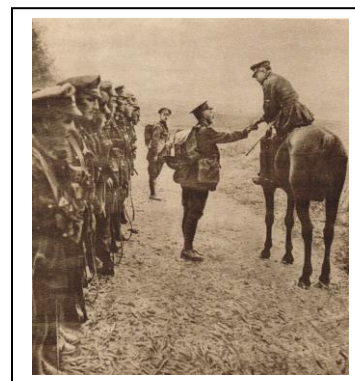
Only forty-eight hours later, on September 2, a further offensive which was to last but two days began. It came to be known as the *Battle of Drocourt-Quéant* and by September 4 it had driven the enemy back six more kilometres.



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

At this point the enemy decided to withdraw all along the entire front facing the Canadian Corps and the British forces which were advancing with it. His new line of defence was to be hinged on the *Canal du Nord*, an as yet uncompleted work, but sufficiently advanced so as to present a formidable obstacle to any further offensive.

In the meantime the Canadians continued their advance along the Arras to Cambrai road axis. This was largely unopposed apart from artillery fire and the occasional well-placed machine-gun nest but, even so, it was to be a further three weeks before the necessary men and supplies could be brought up to the west bank of the Canal in preparation for a forced crossing.



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

After its retirement at the end of August, the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had spent six days in the area of Arras before moving up to become a part of that general advance towards the *Canal du Nord*.

It was during this advance, on September 9, that Private Pippy – one of a detachment of twenty-four - returned from participation in his course, to re-join his unit which on that day was being at times heavily shelled in the area forward of the village of Chérisy.



(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 this period spent in the forward area, there was again a period, from September 19 to 26, during which the unit was withdrawn by train as far to the west as Berneville. On that second date the Battalion and Private Pippy returned – on this occasion by bus – to the forward area.

All was by that time ready for an assault across the Canal du Nord by all four of the Canadian Divisions, not only in the area two and a half kilometres long where, not having been completed, the bed was still dry, but across bridges erected elsewhere to span the filled waterway as well. The attack went in on September 27.

(Right: *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 - see vintage photograph - of the Canal du Nord as it was almost a century after the Canadian operation to cross it – photograph from 2015*)

On that September 27 the twenty-three officers and five-hundred eighty-eight *other ranks* of the RCR moved up by stages to the Canal which, by the time of their arrival, they were able to cross without opposition. The surprise attack of that morning had been a complete success and, although German resistance to the east of the waterway had stiffened later in the day, Private Pippy's Battalion was by then advancing away from the Canal by a semi-circular – and at first northerly - route towards the town of Cambrai.



By three o'clock in the morning of September 28, Private Pippy's RCR Battalion was in an assembly point to the north-east of the *Bourlon Wood*.

(Right above: *Two German field-guns of Great War vintage stand on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City, the one in the foreground captured during the fighting at Bourlon Wood – photograph from 2016*)



Excerpt from Appendix 9 of the Royal Canadian Regiment War Diary: ...*“D”, “C” and “A” Companies being in front line, “B” Company in reserve.*

At 5.30 they jumped off. Little opposition was met with during preliminary stages, the prisoners taken numbered under 50. One long field gun and one light field gun being captured. Opposition was met and heavy Machine Gun fire...on the right... The right company was temporarily checked, but an opening being located in enemy wire, a footing was gained in MARCOING LINE. On the left the enemy still occupied houses along the CAMBRAI road...and severe fighting took place. Three tanks came forward but were put out of action...

The operation had started well but had soon been encountering strong opposition which had halted – and at times thrown back – the Canadian advance. At seven o'clock that evening the attack was ordered broken off to allow the by-now depleted companies to move to re-enforce the troops already occupying the captured *Marcoing Line* and *Marcoing Support Line*. There they were to re-organize for a resumption of the advance.

(Right above: *A tank – the word was first used as a code-name for these new ‘land-ships’ – either at repose or out of action for no evident reason – from Le Miroir*)



That resumption began at eight o'clock on the following morning, September 30, 1918... *with the 49th Battalion on right and the 42nd Battalion on left. Heavy casualties from machine gun fire resulted during day. Opposition was strong and progress limited. The general line of the CAMBRAI-DOUAI Road was reached.*



(Right: *Supplies arriving to allow for the advance to continue, not always an easy task in an area such as north-eastern France where there are numerous canals – from Le Miroir*)

Excerpt from Appendix 9 of the Canadian 7th Brigade War Diary: Sept. 30th. *...our barrage came down at 6:00 a.m. and P.P.C.L.I. and R.C.R. attacked in conjunction with the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the right and the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the left. The line fluctuated during the day, due to the uncertain situation of the left exposing the left to machine gun fire. We reached the Chapel on high ground...but were forced to retire for above reason...*

By six o'clock that evening the RCR Battalion was holding positions in a sunken road. It continued to do so until the Canadian 9th Infantry Brigade passed through it at five o'clock on the following morning, October 1.

Casualty Report – *“ Previously reported Missing, now Killed in Action” – Whilst taking part in the attack at Tilloy, on the afternoon of September 30th, 1918, he was killed by enemy shell fire.*

The son of Harry (*Henry*) Pippy, shipwright, and of Frances (*Fannie*) Maria (*Marie*) Pippy (née *Tapson*) – the couple married on September 9, 1876 – of St. John's, Newfoundland, before North Sydney, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, he was also brother to George, Eliza-Anne, Laurie, Ethel and to Charles.

It would appear that Private Pippy was at first reported as *missing in action* on that September 30, 1918, this to be amended to *killed in action* later on the same day.

Thomas Joseph Pippy had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-five years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, April 15, 1891 (from attestation papers); however, a copy of Congregational Church Parish Records in St. John's record the date of his birth as April 19 of the same year.

Private Thomas Joseph Pippy 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 24, 2023.