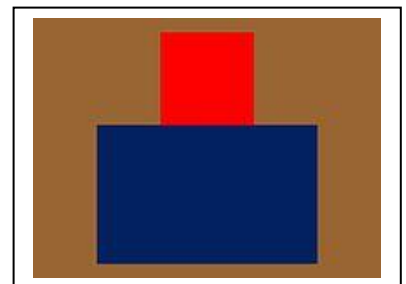




Private William Pippy* (Number 715692) of the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Ramillies British Cemetery: Grave reference A.8.

(Right: The image of the shoulder-patch of the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick) is from the Wikipedia Web-site.)

(continued)



**On many papers, even official files, his family name is recorded as 'Peppy'.*

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *painter*, William Pippy was likely the young man travelling with his brother Lorenzo on board the SS *Bruce* from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland to North Sydney, Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. The date was December 12, 1912, and the pair was on the way to work - William as a painter, Lorenzo as a fireman (he who fires steam boilers?) – in the industrial city of Sydney, Cape Breton.

William Pippy is recorded as having enlisted on two dates: on a medical report dated January 5, 1916 – the examination undertaken in Sydney – it is documented as having been on that same date; his first pay records, however, cite January 15 as the day on which the Canadian Army* first remunerated him for his services. That is also the date on which he was *taken on strength* by the 106th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*).

**The term 'Canadian Army' apparently did not come into official use until 1940.*

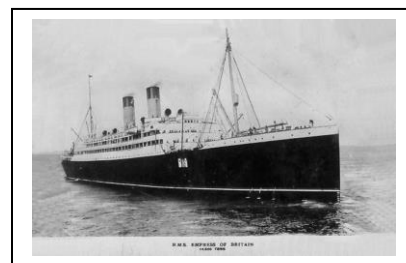
The formalities of enlistment continued: on January 20 Private Pippy underwent a second medical examination, this one in Truro where the 106th Battalion was based. However, he was apparently back in Sydney, according to his files, on February 25 where he was then attested.

These procedures all came to an official conclusion on March 4 – likely once more in Truro on this occasion – when the commanding officer of the 106th Battalion, Major Robert Innes – soon to be Lieutenant Colonel Innes - declared – on paper – that...*William Peppy (sic)...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

The following four months were to be spent in training in Truro* – although a private diary of one of the recruits records that... *no barracks, parade ground or firing range, the men were living in hotels, the YMCA, or at home... training consisted mainly of shovelling snow and marching.*

**Two further companies were based in Pictou and Springhill.*

It was on July 15 of 1916 that the 106th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Empress of Britain* in the harbour at Halifax for passage to the United Kingdom. Private Pippy's unit was not to travel alone: also on board were the 5th Draft of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, the 93rd and 105th Battalion of Canadian Infantry as well as the 1st Draft of the 63rd Regiment (*Halifax Rifles*), and the 8th Draft of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery.



(Right above: *The photograph of RMS Empress of Britain is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Sources differ on the date of the vessel's sailing - it was on either July 15 or 16. But all documents agree that it was on July 25, after an apparently rough voyage, that the *Empress* docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool.

From there the 106th Battalion was transported by train to *Dibgate Camp*, a subsidiary of the large Canadian military complex of *Shornecliffe* already established on the Kentish coast in the vicinity of the town and harbour of Folkestone.



(Right: *Little remains of Shornecliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 1916*)

Before the end of the *Great War*, Canada was to despatch overseas more than two-hundred fifty infantry 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 these were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by newly-formed units that had by then been designated as Canadian reserve battalions.

Such was to be the case with the 106th Battalion: its personnel was eventually to be transferred, primarily to the 40th Battalion – it also to suffer the same fate in January of 1917 when it was absorbed into the 26th Reserve Battalion.

Well before that time, however, Private Pippy had already been transferred, on September 27, 1916, to *another* 26th Battalion, this one already serving on the Continent. He sailed later that same day - almost certainly from nearby Folkestone to pass through the French Coastal town of Boulogne – and was then recorded on the next, September 28, as having reported to *duty* at the Canadian Base Depot in the vicinity of the French industrial port-city of Le Havre.



(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*)

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



There he awaited despatch for the following ten days before being ordered to join his new unit in the field. Having then left Le Havre on October 8, he reported to the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*) two days later, on October 10. At this time the Battalion was in the process of withdrawing from the *First Battle of the Somme* and was temporarily in billets in or about the community of Longueville.



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

It was there, at Longuevillette, and also then, on October 10, 1916, that the 26th Battalion War Diarist wrote in his entry for the day... *Reinforcements this date 164 O.R. (other ranks) from 106th Battn..*

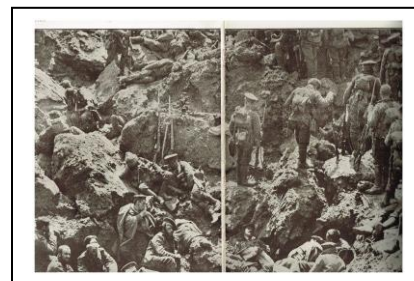
* * * * *

The 26th Infantry Battalion (*New Brunswick*) was an element of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 2nd Canadian Division, and it had been serving in the *Kingdom of Belgium* since September of 1915. After having landed in and having been transported through France, the Division had immediately been posted to a sector in-between the by-then battered city of Ypres and the Franco-Belgian frontier.



(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*)

From March 27 up until and including April 17, 1916 – these the *official* dates - the Battalion had been involved in the *Action of the St-Éloi Craters*. The craters had been formed when, on that March 27, the British had detonated a series of mines - underground galleries filled with explosives. The explosions had been immediately followed with an assault by British infantry units.



The Canadians were to take over from the British to occupy the *presumed* newly-won territory; however, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which had turned the just-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, plus a resolute German defence, had greeted the newcomers who had taken over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6.

(Right above: *The occupation of a crater in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps in the St-Éloi Sector – from Illustration*)

This had been the first major encounter with the enemy that the Canadian 2nd Division was to experience and it likely had come as a shock to the new-comers. After some three weeks of fighting in mud and water, at times reportedly up to the waist, at first the British – and then the Canadians who had relieved them – had been held in check by the German defenders and had incurred a heavy casualty list.

It appears from the Battalion War Diary, however, that the 26th Battalion had been only very *marginally* involved. During the period of the Canadian action, the unit had been... *standing by*, had been... *in camp*, or for five days in a row...*Battalion in trenches, Large working parties working on trenches. Weather fine.* Apart from the casualties incurred due to his artillery, the Battalion appears to have had no contact with the enemy.

Then from June 2 to 14 was to be fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the areas of *Sanctuary Wood*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Maple Copse*, *Hooge* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps. The Canadians had, it would seem, been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions dominating the Canadian trenches when the Germans had delivered an offensive, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity which, fortunately, they had never exploited.



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

The British Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, had reacted – perhaps a little bit precipitately - by organizing an impromptu counter-attack on the following day, an assault intended, at a minimum, to recapture the lost ground of June 2.



Badly organized, this operation was to prove a horrendous failure: many of the intended attacks had not gone in – those that had done so, had not been able to do so in any concerted manner and the assaulting troops had been cut to shreds. The enemy had remained in the captured Canadian positions and the Canadians had been left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.

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

Then for ten more days there had been some desperate fighting, at first involving mainly units of the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division*, but soon the critical situation had drawn in troops from other Canadian formations.

**Officially coming into service at midnight of December 31, 1915 and January 1 of 1916, the 3rd Canadian Division, while awaiting the arrival of its final infantry battalions from England, had trained for a period in the Ploegsteert Sector before, in March and April of 1916, becoming responsible for a south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

The 26th Battalion had been engaged in relieving other battalions during the course of the encounter and it had been heavily shelled on occasion. However, it had not been in the forward area during much of the infantry activity and had been withdrawn altogether by the day of the final Canadian counter-attack.

By the time that the 26th Battalion had moved up to the front again on June 14, the action at *Mount Sorrel* and its vicinity had been all but over. During the night of June 12-13 the Canadians had once again attacked and, thanks to better organization and a well-conceived artillery barrage, had taken back almost all of the lost ground. Both sides were now to find themselves back much where they had been just eleven days earlier.

(continued)

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



(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*)



Thus, after having played its role at *Mount Sorrel*, the 26th Battalion had been relieved and withdrawn to *Camp “D”* on June 20.

The second half of that following month of July had been spent at first in *Alberta Camp* and then further back again, at Brigade Reserve in the *Vierstraat Sector*. To compensate for this likely monotonous period of rest, the Battalion was then posted back into the forward trenches for twenty-two of the first twenty-four days of August.



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

Having retired again to *Alberta Camp* near Reninghelst on August 25, the 26th Battalion had now prepared to leave Belgium. The Regimental War Diarist noted in his entry of that day: *All ranks in the best of spirits anticipating the move and eager to effect all details in the number of days training, SOMME OPERATIONS.*



The training area for the 26th Battalion was to be at Tilques, back over the border in northern France and in the vicinity of the larger centre of St-Omer. It had required three successive days of marching for the unit to reach its billets at Éperlecques by August 28 before it then had commenced training on the morrow. One of the first items on the agenda of December 29 was to be the replacement of the Canadian-made Ross rifles by its British counterpart, the short Lee-Enfield Mark III*.

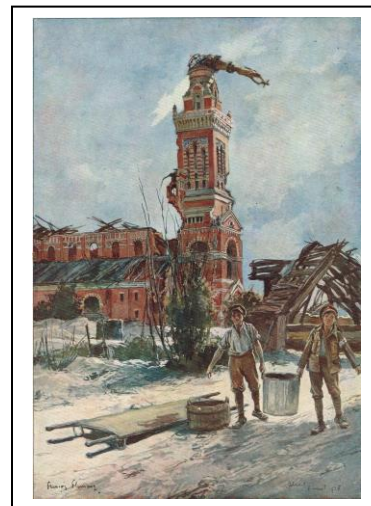
(Right above: *Canadian troops likely in trenches built for training purposes – they are too prim and proper to be the real thing – and here now equipped with steel helmets and with Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles*, during the late summer or early autumn of 1916 – from *The War Illustrated**)

****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 jammed, leaving its user defenceless at a critical moment.***

A week later the Battalion had marched to the railway-station in Arcques to entrain for the journey south to Conteville. A day spent resting in billets had then been followed by five more on foot *not* resting, by a march which terminated on September 11 at the *Brickfields (la Briqueterie)*, a large military camp in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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

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



On that first day all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions having been 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.

As the Battle had progressed, 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 August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette.



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

The 26th Battalion had arrived in the area four days prior to the attack at Flers-Courcellette – other units had reported there on only the day before – thus those interim days were to be spent in preparation for the attack of September 15. As it had happened, the 26th Battalion had been in reserve at the outset and, as such, was not to move forward until five o'clock in the afternoon, twelve hours after the initial assault, at which time it had re-enforced the efforts of the 22nd and 24th Battalions.



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

On the following day, the 26th Battalion, according to its War Diary, had been moved to the relative safety of a succession of shell holes, apparently staying there all day and... *where the most intense shelling was endured by the battalion throughout this entire day.*

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



On the 17th the unit had been ordered moved once more and had taken up positions in a sunken road, to once again remain there all day. The only exception had been 'B' Company which was to assist in an attack delivered by the 24th Battalion before it *also* had moved there. The attack in question... *met with considerable opposition and rifle and machine gun fire was very heavy.*

On September 27 the Battalion had been ordered forward once again, on this occasion to play a role in *the Battle of Thiepval Ridge*, more specifically on the right flank, in the area of *Regina Trench*. The operation had proved to be a further costly misadventure, all for the price of one-hundred eighty-two more casualties.

(Right: *Regina Trench Cemetery – Regina Trench was adjacent to Kenora Trench, another daunting German strong-point – and some of the ground on which the Canadians fought during that autumn of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)



Then on October 10 the unit had been withdrawn from the *First Battle of the Somme*.

The 26th Battalion had retired towards the westward, then turned northwards to pass behind, to the west of, the battered city of Arras. On the way, before turning to the north, it was to spend two nights in billets at Longuevillette.

As seen on a previous page, it was there on October 10 that Private Pippy's re-enforcement draft reported *to duty*.



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

* * * * *

By October 15 the 26th Battalion had moved into the *Angres II Sector*, in the area of Lens, and up into the front lines. On the next day, the 16th, the Battalion War Diarist entered simply: *Battalion in trenches Conditions quiet, weather wet.*

(continued)

The conditions were not to be quiet for long: on the morrow the enemy exploded a mine opposite a trench held by 'D' Company of the Battalion. The remainder of the day was to be spent repairing damage and consolidating the defences. There were no casualties reported on that day but the incident may have reminded some of the troops – perhaps particularly the newcomers - that things could still be bad, even away from *the Somme*.



(Right above: *This, after four years of bombardment by both sides, is what was to become of Lens before the Great War ended.* – from a vintage post-card)

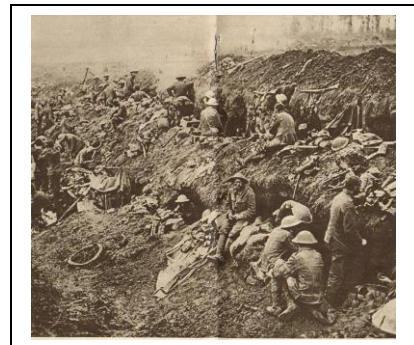
The next five months or so must have started to seem somewhat monotonous – and uncomfortable as it was a cold winter – for a great deal of the time, with a few instances of terror thrown in every now and then. For the most part, the 26th Battalion was in that same *Angres II Sector*, in theory spending one week in the front line, a second week in the support lines, and a third week in reserve – although, of course, it never worked out exactly that way.

And sometimes there was even a bath and a bed.

In reserve one could count on everything from a variety of inspections from those higher up the military ladder – and every now and then from a leading politician or a member of a royal family – to being seconded into a variety of working-parties. While in support there were more working-parties, route marches, training on new equipment, inspections from lesser lights on that military ladder, more inspections for trench foot and other medical problems, and carrying ammunition and the like from the rear to the front.

At the sharp end of the stick, of course, activities became more restricted by the size of one's environment. For one thing, keeping one's head down, if one wished to retain it, meant that all there was to see was the wall of the trench and the sky – this for days on end. If one left the relative safety of the front line positions it was to go on patrol – usually at night – or on a raid – usually at night - or on a wiring-party – usually at night – thus a good night's sleep was not necessarily a common thing – or even a bad night's sleep for that matter.

Food and water at times were temporarily scarce, sanitary facilities as well, and one's company at times was augmented by a corpse or two or more lying close by in No-Man's-Land. And death always stood at one's shoulder - apparently an average of two thousand died on the Western Front each and every day of the War: *wastage*, Douglas Haig called it.



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

(continued)

(Preceding page: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets – from Illustration)



(Right: A carrying-party loading up – one of the duties of troops when not serving in the front lines: The head-strap was an idea adapted from the aboriginal peoples of North America. – from Le Miroir)

Most casualties, relatively few in number, were due to the ever-present enemy artillery fire, but snipers were also a constant danger. Disease and living conditions as might be expected – perhaps particularly the ubiquitous lice, prime source of scabies – were to take an additional toll. But perhaps surprisingly, it appears to have been dental work that kept the medical services occupied at this time.



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

Thus the 26th Battalion had spent the winter of 1916-1917 following the routine of trench warfare, perhaps only two incidents having been worthy of anything more than the habitual sparse entries: on January 16 Battalion personnel had mounted a raid on the German positions opposite, had bombed a number of dug-outs, had taken a handful of prisoners and had incurred seven dead and fifteen wounded; following that some seven weeks later, on the morning of March 3, an impromptu local armistice had been arranged to evacuate the wounded from No-Man's-Land, the result of an operation on the previous day – the Germans having delivered them to half-way across the divide before the Canadians were to complete the job.

***So says the War Diary, but since no such operation is noted for March 2, it must have been undertaken by another unit.**

Then it was spring and the time for the campaigning season to begin. On March 24 the Battalion left Bois des Alleux where it had been spending five days in Brigade Support. It thereupon marched to Grand Servins... *Poor billets...* recorded the War Diarist.

The reason for the move had been to undergo special – and in some cases novel – training for an upcoming British attack in the area of Arras. It had been planned that the Canadian Corps was to advance in a sector close to where the 26th Battalion had recently been operating, in an area where the ground sloped upwards to the top of a German-occupied rise which dominated the entire Douai Plain. The crest of the rise today still goes by the name - in French - of *la crête de Vimy* – in English, *Vimy Ridge*.



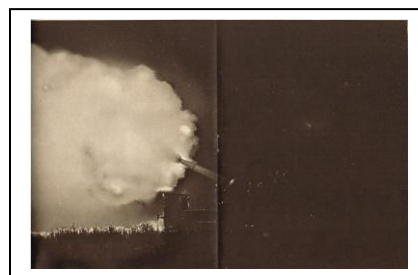
(Preceding page: *Seen from the La Chaudière Sector in what was German-occupied territory until April-May of 1917, a part of Vimy Ridge, today of course dominated by the Canadian National Memorial – photograph from 2015*)

The special training in question was to comprise a variety of new ideas in soldiering: learning the topography of the ground to be attacked; the use of the enemy's weapons which, when captured, were to be turned against him; the by-passing and thus isolation of strong-points instead of the costly frontal assault; the coaching of each and every soldier as to his role on the day; the increased employment of aircraft in directing the advance; the concept of a machine-gun barrage; and the exchange of information between the infantry and artillery so as to co-ordinate efforts...

...and at *Vimy Ridge*, the use of tunnels and underground approaches to mask from the enemy the presence of troops and also to ensure the same troops' security.

As these final days had passed, the artillery barrage had grown progressively heavier; on April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion was to describe it as...*drums**.

By this time, of course, the Germans had been well aware that something was in the offing and their guns in their turn had been throwing retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft had been constantly busy overhead.



(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 elsewhere - 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.*

It was as late as April 8 before Private Pippy's Battalion moved forward towards the assembly areas for the attack and not until four o'clock the following morning that the last elements reached their jumping-off posts.

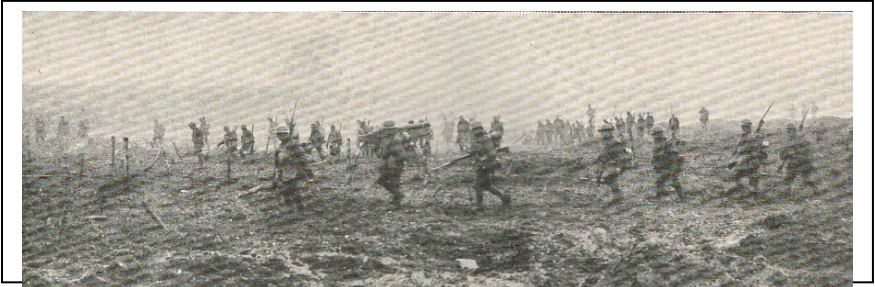
On April 9 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the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



While the British campaign would prove to be 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*)

(Right: Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, equipped – or 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 that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, on this occasion acting as a single, autonomous entity – there was even a British brigade under 2nd Canadian Division command - stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

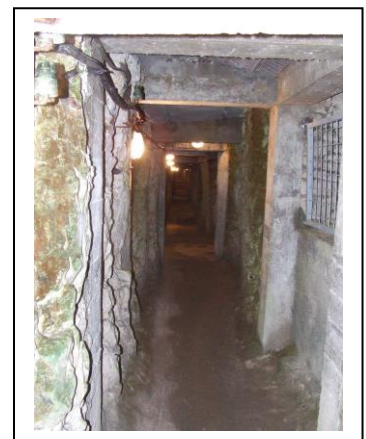
Several kilometres of tunnel had been hewn out of the chalk underneath the approaches to the front lines of *Vimy Ridge*, underground accesses which afforded physical safety and also the element of surprise during the hours – and in some cases, days – which led up to the attack.

The Battalion War Diary notes that the objectives of the 26th Battalion were not on *Vimy Ridge* itself, the prising of which from the grasp of the Germans had been made the responsibility of the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions.

The War Diary also notes that, as was the case with many other units, the advance of the 26th Battalion to the...*Jumping Off Trenches*...was to be made over-ground, not through any of those well-documented tunnels.

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

The objectives of the 26th Battalion – indeed, of the 2nd Canadian Division - were in the *Thelus Sector*. Thélus was – and is – a small village further down the slope and to the right-hand side – south in the direction of Arras - of the attack.



The creeping barrage having come down at 5.30 am, the first wave of the assault jumped off and...*at Zero plus 32 minutes the light signal (3 white Very lights (flares)) was fired showing that Bn. had reached and occupied their objective. The casualties in the attack were slight and during the rest of the days the Coys. spent the day in clearing the trench and making shelter for the men.* (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of April 9, 1917)

Little further progress was made after the successes of that first day, the terrain proving too difficult for the advance of guns and the necessary equipment – and, as usual, the Germans were quick to recover, although no serious attempt was made by them to retake *Vimy Ridge. The Battalion remained in the forward area consolidating its position** until relieved on April 15.**

**It appears that they may already have been prepared to lose the Ridge, as they had apparently readied positions further to the rear.*

***Even had the Canadians not been ordered to consolidate rather than to advance and exploit their early success, the recent weather had ensured that the ground was impassable as were the relatively few roads and tracks which had been mutilated by the constant traffic of the past days and weeks.*

(Right: Canadian sappers, having just laid a narrow-gauge railway line across the battle-field, use it immediately to evacuate the wounded of both sides. This photograph taken on the field at or in the vicinity of Vimy Ridge. – from Illustration)



However, by that time, Private Pippy was no longer serving with the 26th Battalion: he was in hospital.

* * * * *

On April 9, during the attack on Vimy Ridge, he had been wounded in his left knee. It is likely that he had then been evacuated to an advanced dressing-station before being sent to the rear. Unfortunately no such information is to be found in his records and the next entry has him having been admitted by April 10 into the 26th General Hospital in the French coastal town of Étaples.

It was to be almost two weeks later, on or about April 22, that Private Pippy was embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Cambria* for the return journey back across the Channel to the United Kingdom. Once having arrived in England he was then taken to the 2nd London General Hospital at Chelsea where he was to receive treatment for the following forty-five days, from April 22 until June 6.



(Right above: The image of the steamship Cambria in her peace-time livery is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

The following are excerpts from a medical report issued by the 2nd London General Hospital upon Private Pippy's discharge from there:

24/4/17 – Shell wound...left knee...stitches out and shrapnel removed...wound sewn up...

1/5/17 – Remove extension and splint...massage...improving

6/6/17 – Transfer to Holborn

Private Pippy's subsequent stop was to be of a longer duration, ninety-six days in all, at Holborn Military Hospital, Western Road, Mitcham. Its medical record – some of which follows – is also to be found among Private Pippy's papers:

(continued)

7/6/17 – 2 scars...walks with stick...

13/6/17 – Patient to have massage & movement to left knee joint daily...

22/6/17 – ...improving slowly...

5/7/17 - ...much better...

17/7/17 - ...movements freer...

28/8/17 - ...much better...

3/9/17 - ...recommended for discharge... (this occurred on September 10)

There was one final period of convalescence awaiting Private Pippy upon his release from Holborn Military Hospital: one of sixteen days at the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Hillingdon House, Uxbridge, where he was admitted on the same September 10, 1917.

The records from Hillingdon House reveal that he had had preliminary surgery on the day of his wounding, April 9, thus *before* he had been admitted into hospital at Étapes:

10/9/17 - Shrapnel wound 9/4/17 outer side of left knee. Removed by opening inner side of knee...wound healed...slight pain in knee...

By September 25, Private Pippy was well enough to begin a ten-day sick furlough, although where or how he spent it is not to be found among his files.

Upon his arrival back in England on April 22-23, some five months previously, Private Pippy had been transferred bureaucratically to the New Brunswick Regimental Depot at Shoreham-on-Sea, just to the west of the resort town of Brighton. It was now to there that he was despatched at the conclusion of his furlough.

On September 25, 1917, he reported to the 3rd Canadian Command Depot at St. Leonard's on the Sea, Hastings, a camp for still-convalescing servicemen – and for others who were temporarily not attached to any unit – where assessments were to be made and decisions taken as to what further service, if any, the individual might now offer to the Canadian military.

Private Pippy at the time of his arrival at Hastings, was considered to be...*fit for light duty*.

During the time of a posting to the C.C.D., the Army authorities would decide upon the future – if any – service that the rehabilitating serviceman would ultimately render. Just over ten weeks later, on December 6, it was decided that Private Pippy still had something to offer and thus he was posted to the 13th (*Canadian*) Reserve Battalion which was stationed at the time in nearby Seaford, east along the coast.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The community cemetery at Seaford in which are buried a number of Canadian soldiers, including two Newfoundlanders: Frederick Jacob Snelgrove and Ebenezer Tucker* – photograph from 2016)

The 13th Reserve Battalion was, of course, just a further stepping-stone to Private Pippy's full rehabilitation. That objective had apparently been more or less* reached by the beginning of April as on the fourth day of that month he was *struck off strength* by the reserve unit, to be once more *taken on strength* by the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*).

**In his pay records he is recorded as having been awarded seven days of Field Punishment Number 2 for having been Absent Without Leave at some unrecorded time during this period.*

His return passage to the Continent likely took place on April 4, 1918, the same date as the paper transfer, as on the morrow he was reported as having arrived – one of a draft of two-hundred forty-three *other ranks* destined for the 26th Battalion to arrive from England on that day - at the 2nd Canadian Infantry Base Depot – at the time in the throes of re-organization - at Étapes.

Private Pippy was next ordered to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp, another recent establishment, two days later on April 7, to arrive there in the vicinity of Calonne-Ricouart some eighty kilometres distant, on that same day. It may well be that he was to remain there for the following four-and-a-half months as there are no records to show him elsewhere, not until August 14 - by which time the CCRC had moved to Aubin St-Vaast.

On that day he was transferred, not back to his former unit as might have been supposed, but to the 78th Battalion (*Winnipeg Grenadiers*). On August 15* he was *taken on strength* by that unit and also joined it *in the field*. The field at the time was a battle-field, in front of the city of Amiens where, since the morning of August 8, the Canadians, British, Australians and French had been on the offensive.

**This date in his own papers, although he was likely one of the fifteen other ranks reported as having arrived...from courses and hospital...on the 14th.*

The 78th Battalion (*Winnipeg Grenadiers*) was one of the four battalions of the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade which itself was one of the three brigades of the 4th Canadian Division. It had been serving on the Continent since August of 1916 and had thus been in France for only a day or two more than two years.

On that August 8 the unit had figured in the second wave of the attack which commenced at twenty minutes past four on that fog-shrouded morning. It continued the attack – an enormously successful one, an advance of eleven kilometres in places on the first day alone until an enemy counter-attack on August 11, three days later, necessitated a halt – and even slight withdrawals – by mid-day*. On August 12 the 78th Battalion was to be relieved and had retired.



(continued)

****On August 8 the Canadians and Australians had been supported by large numbers of tanks, but not so the French and British whose attacks were not to be as successful. As the tanks became less numerous having been put out of commission for a variety of reasons, the Canadian and Australian advances also became less effective.***

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

The 78th Battalion had been in reserve in the area of *Caix Wood* when Private Pippy's re-enforcement draft reported *to duty*. It was still there in training four days afterwards when it was ordered further to the rear on August 18; and it was once more in training on August 24, when the Battalion was again ordered to withdraw as far as *Gentelles Wood* which had been a major assembly point for the initial attack of August 8.

(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)



Three days later again, on August 27, Private Pippy's new unit was marching to the railway station at Longeau – yet further away again from the fighting*.

****A more complete account of the Canadian role in the Battle of Amiens will be found in future pages.***

In fact, by the evening of August 28, the 78th Battalion was in billets at St-Aubin, back in the area from which it had marched only weeks previously, in the outskirts of the city of Arras. During the next four days it was to move forward in stages to assembly positions to the east of Arras.



(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)

The High Command, after the *Battle of Amiens* – which was still ongoing, French troops having replaced the Canadians - had decided to strike eastward along the axis of the Arras-Cambrai road; in fact the opening encounter had already started by the time that the 78th Battalion had marched out of *Gentelles Wood*. Although no-one knew it at the time, of course, the soon-to-be four simultaneous offensives by the Allied and Associated troops – to become known collectively as *the Hundred Days* - would conclude only on November 11 of that year with the coming into effect of the Armistice.



(continued)

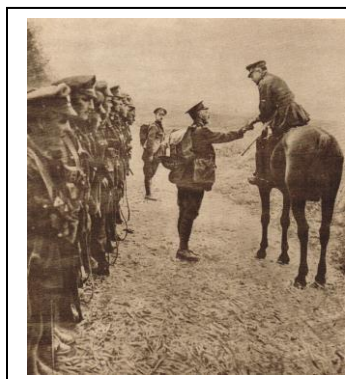
(Preceding page: *Some of the ground on which fighting took place at the end of August and beginning of September of 1918: The Arras to Cambrai road – looking in the direction of Cambrai – may be perceived just left of centre on the horizon. – photograph from 2015*)

Excerpt from 26th Battalion War Diary Appendix for August 26, 1918: *...minutes to ten we moved to positions in lines... At 10. o'clock we started to advance, meeting really stiff resistance from Machine Guns and Snipers in German front line. After putting these...out of action our advance was easy until we reached the high ground in front of the SENSEE*

September 2 had by that time been fixed as the date for the next offensive effort by Canadian and British forces along the Arras-Cambrai road, the attack on the so-called *Drocourt-Quéant Line*, a component of the German defensive complex known to the English-speakers as the *Wotan Line* positions of the *Hindenburg Line* complex.

(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*)

Zero Hour came at five-o'clock on that morning and the Germans were initially overwhelmed. The attacking battalions of the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade gained the opposing front-line trenches and the 78th Battalion was to pass through as ordered. It then began, however, to suffer from heavy enemy artillery and machine-gun fire, and support from neighbouring units was apparently not forthcoming – nor, apparently, were any tanks available. In the afternoon the Battalion was ordered to fall back to positions in which the night was eventually to be spent.



Total casualties for the day had been heavy: two-hundred fifty-one *all ranks* of which fifty-three had been *killed in action*.

On the following day, September 3, the unit was to await orders all day to advance; none, it seems, were forthcoming and in the evening it was told to remain where it was. In fact, it appears that the Germans had already retired in places during the night of September 2-3 as far back as the eastern bank of the *Canal du Nord*.



(Right above: *The section of the Canal du Nord, at the time there was no water in it, where the Canadians crossed it – attacking from west to east, right to left – almost a century ago – photograph from 2015*)

The next few days were spent by 78th Battalion personnel in burial of the dead, salvaging equipment – including that of the enemy – in general cleaning-up and in the subsequent inspections. On the eighth day of the month the Battalion undertook a four-hour march to the area of the village of Wailly where it arrived in a rain-storm. The foul weather also continued the next day, preventing any drilling – the clouds with the proverbial silver lining.

(Right: *Salvaging captured enemy artillery pieces which were to be quickly turned and used against the retreating German forces – from *Le Miroir)**



On September 10, Private Pippy and the other personnel which had been so recently drafted from the 26th Battalion were despatched back to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp whence they had come four weeks before.

While his own personal documents record Private Pippy as having re-joined his 26th Battalion on September 11, the Battalion War Diary cites September 12 as being the day on which a draft of forty *other ranks* reported to the unit at Cagnicourt from the CCRC. If not, it was surely on the 14th when the number was ninety-eight.

* * * * *

By this time it was more than fifteen months since Private Pippy had been evacuated, wounded, from the field at *Vimy Ridge*. During that period the 26th Battalion had been continuing to wage its own small part of the *Great War*.

Six days after the assault of April 9, the 26th Battalion had been relieved to withdraw from the forward area. It had then been ten days, until April 25, before it was to be ordered forward again, into support positions where, towards the end of April, its personnel had been employed in digging new trench positions so as to be in a position to support Canadian attacks going in at Arleux-en-Gohelle and later at Fresnoy.

These costly operations had gone ahead – the first a relative success, the second a lot less so - but apparently the 26th Battalion had not been heavily involved. Once again, most of the unit's casualties seem to have been due to enemy artillery action.



(Right: *German prisoners being escorted to the rear by Canadian troops during the attack on Vimy Ridge – from *Illustration)**

After the five-week *Battle of Arras* had stuttered to its conclusion – officially on May 15 - the remainder of the month of May and most of June were to be spent by many Canadian units, including the 26th Battalion, withdrawn from the line, the time to be partially used for reinforcement and for further re-organization.

On July 1, Dominion Day, however, the 26th Battalion had been on its way to the forward area and by the following day was to be installed in Brigade Reserve, once again in the *Angres Sector* in the vicinity of the mining centre of Lens. By the 6th the unit had been once more in – or in the area of - the front lines and by the 20th the Battalion War Diarist was recording preparations being made for... *the coming show*.

(continued)

The British High Command had by this time decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention – and his reserves as well - 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 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*)

For the 26th Battalion, the end of July and the beginning of August of 1917 were to be a succession of days of training. The Canadian Corps, since *Vimy Ridge*, was from now on always to fight as an autonomous entity; its now-apparent military capability was also to be exploited to a much greater extent than had been the case in earlier days.

One of the primary objectives of the late-summer subsidiary campaign had been the so-named *Hill 70* in the outskirts of the mining centre of Lens. On August 14, the 26th Battalion and other 1st and 2nd Canadian Division units had moved to assembly areas. On the 15th the attack went in.

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 – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than that of Lens itself.

(Right above: *The monument to commemorate the capture of Hill 70 by the Canadians stands some hundred metres or so from its apex, this point just to the left from where the roads intersect. – photograph from 2014*)

(Right: *The portrait of Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie is from Illustration.*)

Objectives were to be limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the seeming dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it had been expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it was to prove; on the 16th several strong counter-attacks were to be launched against the Canadian positions, positions which by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.



These defences had held and the Canadian artillery, which had been employing newly-developed procedures, was to inflict heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* had remained in Canadian hands.

(Right: *A Canadian 220 mm siege gun, hidden from aerial observation under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action – from Le Miroir*)



As far as the actions of the 26 Battalion at *Hill 70* are concerned, excerpts from Appendix Number 5 of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary give a general idea: *At 4.25 a.m. on Wednesday, 15th August the Artillery opened up and the 25th Battalion on the Right and the 22nd Battalion on the Left advanced to the attack, closely followed by the 24th and 26th Battalions respectively. The objective...was the BLUE Line. ...the 24th and 26th Battalions, which were to pass through the 24th and 26th Battalions...would also advance at Zero hour until clear of the German Front Line so as to avoid the enemy barrage. This proved most successful and the casualties...were very light.*

The Blue Line was captured on scheduled time, namely, at 4.51 a.m.

At 5.24 a.m. the 24th and 26th Battalions passed through...and advanced on the GREEN Line which they captured at 5.42 with the exception of the Left Company of the 24th Battalion which was held up...by Machine Gun fire and Bombers. ...this Company, however, captured their objective by 7.15 a.m. The whole of the GREEN objective was now in our hands...

At this point the Germans had counter-attacked the positions held by the 24th Battalion but had been driven off.

The remainder of the day was spent in consolidating the positions gained and clearing the battle-field. The consolidation was carried out...and Machine Guns were placed in Strong Points.

Having repulsed several further German attempts to re-gain the lost ground - those counter-attacks accompanied by heavy bombardments and hostile aeroplane activity on both August 16 and 17 - the 26th Battalion had been relieved and was to retire into the area of the former British front line.



(Right above: *Canadians soldiers in the captured rear area of Hill 70 during the days after the battle – from Le Miroir*)

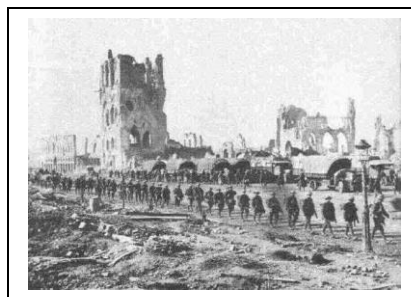
This Canadian-led campaign had apparently been scheduled to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium had been proceeding less well than expected and the High Command had been beginning to look for reinforcements to make good its by-then exorbitant losses. The Australian Imperial Force, as well as the New Zealand Division and then the Canadians themselves, all had been ordered to prepare to move northwards; thus the Canadian Corps had been obliged to abandon its plans.

There were therefore to be no further major Canadian-inspired actions in the Lens-Béthune sectors and the troops yet again were to settle back into that monotonous but nonetheless at times precarious existence of life in – and behind – the forward area. On most days, according to the Battalion War Diary, it had the artillery of both sides which had been most active – but, of course, the infantry had usually been the target.

Even though it had been known by September that the Canadians were to be transferred north into Belgium, for the 26th Battalion there was to be a more-than-nine-week interlude between the action at *Hill 70* and the transfer to its next theatre of operations. During this time the daily grind of life in the trenches had still been the rule - with several exceptions when the unit had been withdrawn to areas behind the lines, particularly for training, although the War Diary shows that sports had been becoming considered more and more a morale booster among the troops.

It was not until the 24th day of that October of 1917 that the 26th Battalion had entrained in or near the community of Tinquies to begin the transfer north into Belgium and once more to the *Ypres Salient* which the unit had left some thirteen months before.

Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign – ongoing since the last day of that July – has come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that had been – at least latterly ostensibly professed to have been - one of the British Army's main 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*)

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



From the time that the Canadians were to enter 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 Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was to be true with troops of the 2nd Canadian Division (see below) finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.



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

(continued)

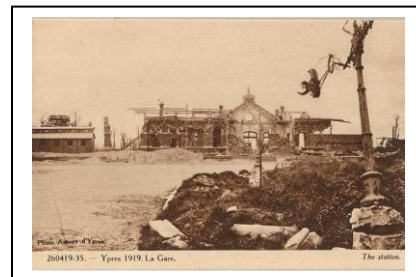
The 26th Battalion had arrived in the vicinity of the northern French commune of Cæstre on the evening of October 24. Although this had been designated as a rest area, the War Diary entries record numerous activities, lectures and training exercises undergone in preparation for the unit's subsequent move to the *Passchendaele Front*.

The unit was on its way again from Cæstre on November 3, having boarded a train which had crossed the Franco-Belgian Frontier to transport its charges into the ruins of what once had been the railway station at Ypres.

Having left the train at the station just outside the southern ramparts of the city where it still is today, the Battalion then had traversed the remnants of Ypres, past the Cloth Hall as in the image of the previous page, in a north-easterly direction to arrive at Potijze.

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

On November 4, the 26th Battalion was to move closer to the forward area. As the unit had been on its way forward, it had drawn supplies and ammunition to carry up to the front line. On the following day it had been ordered forward again, by eleven o'clock in the evening having reached the assembly areas from which it would go to the attack.



Excerpts from Operational Order, Number 180 – issued 2nd Nov. 1917: 1) *The 2nd Canadian Division has been ordered to attack and capture PASSCHENDAELE on “Z” day.*

2) *The attack will be carried out by the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the Right and the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the Left: the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade will be in Divisional Reserve...*

...5) *The 26th Battalion will assault on a 2 Company front with one Company in Support and one Company in Reserve.*

...9) *Consolidation...a) The forward slope should be held by posts in shell holes or short lengths of trench; these posts must be well scattered...in order that the enemy may have no good target for his artillery...*

b) *A main line will be dug just behind the crest of the ridge and so sited as to escape direct observation while denying the crest to the enemy should he succeed in breaking through our advanced posts.*

This main line will also serve as the jumping off line for counter attacks.

Excerpts from Appendix 3 of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary:

6) *On this occasion...At 6 a.m. on the 6th of November the barrage opened and the 26th Battalion advanced to the attack...*

The whole of the 5th Brigade objectives were gained on schedule time, namely, by 6.58 a.m., and consolidation commenced.

By 10 a.m. the ground won by the Brigade had been well consolidated...

(Right: Just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the Passchendaele monument – this is the ground up which the Canadians fought during those weeks of October and November of 1917. – photograph from 2010)



Casualties during the operation incurred by the 26th Battalion had been forty-two killed in action and two-hundred seven wounded, all ranks.

(Right: Canadian troops – not having proper bathing facilities - performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from *Le Miroir*)



On November 10 the Battalion had retired back into Ypres; on the morrow it had withdrawn further westwards, to Brandhoek; and on November 12 and 13, it had then moved south, over the Franco-Belgian frontier, back to the area of Cæstre.

Three days later again, both the 26th and 24th Battalions had moved into the rear area at Mont St-Éloi. There the units apparently had remained for the succeeding six days at which time, on November 22, the 26th Battalion had been ordered into support positions at La Chaudière. There it was to stay until November 28 when it had been relieved by the 27th Battalion and had retired to *Villers Camp*, in the vicinity of Villers-au-Bois.



(Right above and right: *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 – destroyed in 1793 – are visible in both images. Mont St-Éloi is not to be confused with the St-Éloi in Belgium which was mentioned earlier. – from *Le Miroir* and (colour) from 2016)*



(Right below: *Villers Station Cemetery within the bounds of which lie some two-thousand Commonwealth dead of which one-half are Canadian – photograph from 2017)*

There at *Villers Camp*, the personnel of the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*) was to be re-introduced to the everyday routines of life behind the front which they had left behind five weeks before – perhaps after *Passchendaele* it was all a welcome reprieve.



(continued)

Although the officer responsible for the War Diary appears to have neglected it in all but a single short sentence in his journal, the month of December was to offer something a little different to all the Canadian formations which had been serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army had been open from December 4 until 17, 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 help pay for it as well.*

The winter of 1917-1918 was to pass much in the manner of the previous winters of the *Great War*, in stagnation. Any infantry activity had tended to be local: ever-present patrols and the occasional raid – an activity still much in favour with the British High Command; apparently loathed by those whose duty it was to undertake them. And most casualties, as usual, had still been due to the enemy's artillery-fire* and to his snipers.

**Apparently between sixty and seventy per cent of all casualties on the Western Front were due to artillery fire.*

Some of the time that the 26th Battalion was to spend in the forward area had been in the vicinity of Liévin, to the west of Lens; at other times it had been further to the south, in the Neuville St-Vaast Sector. The days, for the most part, were to be reported as... *quiet* – the exceptions to the rule having been described as... *very quiet*.

Then on March 21, 1918, the first day of spring, 1918, on an eighty-kilometre front to the south of Arras, the Germans had blown holes in the British defences and their storm troopers had poured through.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans were to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred westward 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 was to fall in great part at first on the British and Commonwealth troops there, particularly where they had been posted adjacent to the French.

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



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

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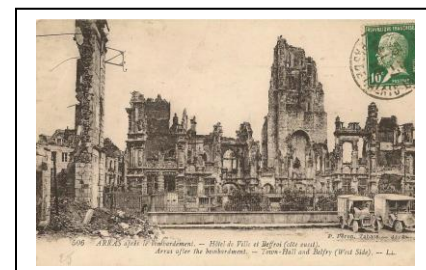
****A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in Flanders, the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It also was successful for a while, but also had petered out by the end of the month.***



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

The War Diary suggests, however, that during this critical time, the 26th Battalion had not been involved in the heaviest, if any, of the fighting – in fact, no Canadian unit had been. Posted mostly in the area of Wailly, just to the south-west of the city of Arras, the majority of the casualties incurred had been due yet again to incessant enemy artillery activity rather than to any infantry action.

The Battalion during the crisis was to remain posted in approximately the same area, to the south-west of Arras. Many other Canadian units had also been ordered to the area, orders and counter-orders ensuring a great deal of movement and, at times, not a little confusion. However, the Canadian Corps was not to send any forces to *the Somme*, the troops having gone no further south than the area of Arras*.



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

****The Canadians had been retained in situ because the enemy objectives had not been evident to the British High Command – nor, as the battle progressed, were the Germans apparently to remain faithful to their original plans. The Canadians were held back to forestall any German attempt to break through to the Channel ports and to block a possible enemy advance in the direction of the coal-fields around Béthune.***

However, by the end of the first week in April, the situation to the south, on the *Amiens Front*, while still dangerously uncertain, had been becoming stable enough – the British 3rd Army having stopped dead an enemy advance towards Arras – to have allowed for the Canadians to be at least partially withdrawn from the positions that they had occupied to the south and south-west of Arras; nor, when it had come on April 9, does it appear that the enemy northern offensive was to warrant any move by the Canadians in that direction.

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

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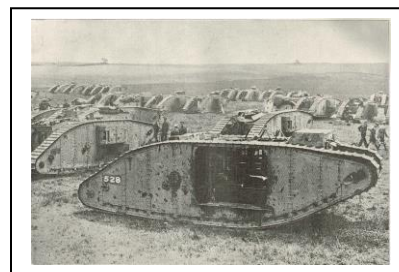
The Allies from this point of view were, nonetheless, to be a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans had been by then belatedly arriving on the scene. An overall Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he had been setting about organizing – although some historians find the term a bit flattering - a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

(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*)



Towards the end of July, the 26th Battalion – and a large number of other Canadian units – were to begin to move in a semi-circular itinerary - to the west of, then south of, and finally east of - to finish in *front* of the city of Amiens, there to face the German forces where they had remained since the attacks of the previous March and April.

On August 2, while en route, the Battalion was to undergo two days of tactical training in co-operation with tanks. On the evening of August 3 it had received orders to move forward once more – on foot as usual*.



(Right: *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, at the outset, this huge transfer of troops had been undertaken mainly by train and motor transport, the later stages had been accomplished on foot, in marches during the hours of darkness. The strategy had worked, for the attack of August 8 apparently took the Germans completely by surprise.*

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



The 5th Brigade War Diary entry for that August 8, 1918, reads as follows: *Weather very fine. The 2nd Canadian Division attacked at 3.20 a.m.*

The 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade passed through the 4th Canadian Infantry brigade at the first objective at 8.20 a.m. The attack of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade was on a frontage of 2,200 yards.

The villages of WIENCOURT L'EQUIPEE, GUILLAUCOURT and all other objectives were taken with a large number of guns and prisoners.



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

The War Diary Appendix pertaining to the attack cites the success of the co-operation of tanks and infantry*. It also notes that many of the casualties of the day were caused by enemy artillery, snipers, and – for the 26th Battalion – by enemy aircraft operations.

**This is borne out by the fact that on the flanks of the attack, the French on the right and the British on the left, neither of which had the use of tanks, experienced many more problems during the advance.*

By the time that the unit had been relieved and placed in reserve in the vicinity of Vrely on August 11, it had incurred – since and including August 8 - approximately forty personnel *killed in action* and a further two-hundred six *wounded in action*.

(Right: *Hillside Cemetery, Le Quesnel, in which lie at least two Newfoundlanders who wore a Canadian uniform – photograph from 2015*)



Having been re-enforced during the following days by some two-hundred fifty officers and *other ranks*, the Battalion had been ordered back to the front line on August 15 to relieve sub-units of the 22nd and 25th Battalions. One of its companies had gone to the attack on the next afternoon and...*advanced our line about 500 yards in places*. When it was to withdraw two days afterwards it had a further fifty-four casualties in total to report.



(Right above: *August 8: captured positions on the Somme being consolidated by Canadian troops against a German counter-attack – from Le Miroir*)

On the next day again, August 16, the unit was to be – as were many other Canadian units – on the move away from the battlefield. They were to be returning to the *Arras Front* in much the same manner as they had arrived only weeks previously, using many of the same itineraries and with many of the first kilometres undertaken on foot.

Then, once again, trains and motorized transport had been brought into service. At the same time, fresh French units were to be relieving the Canadian forces as they had retired from the battle.

(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*)



And once more, much of this movement was to be made under cover of darkness as it had been hoped to deceive the Germans yet again on this second occasion. The first night and part of the second night of the 26th Battalion's withdrawal had been undertaken by a march to Villers-Bretonneux before the unit had been put on busses to Amiens.

From there it was to march again – then transported by train to the community of Aubigny – before having completed the transfer by...*marching from there to HAUTEVILLE, taking over billets previously occupied by us in July.*

There was to be little respite for the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*). On the next day, August 24, it had...*left HAUTEVILLE at 7:00 p.m. and marched to BERNEVILLE, arriving at 10:00 p.m... Bombing planes quite active.*

Less than forty-eight hours later, the 26th Battalion and other forces of the 2nd Canadian Division plus two other Canadian brigades of the 1st Canadian Division were now to play a part in the opening attacks of the new offensive along the Arras-Cambrai road.

(Right below: *Some of the ground on which fighting took place at the end of August and beginning of September of 1918: The Arras to Cambrai road – looking in the direction of Cambrai – may be perceived just left of centre on the horizon. – photograph from 2015*)

Excerpt from the 26th Battalion War Diary entry for August 26, 1918: *Battalion in action. The 4th and 6th C.I. Brigades went over at 3:00 a.m. and we followed up in support to them at 5:45 a.m. Not much enemy shell fire. We passed about a mile beyond our own front line and took up position there...*

Excerpt from 26th Battalion War Diary Appendix for August 26, 1918: *...at the minutes to ten we moved to positions in lines... At 10. o'clock we started to advance, meeting really stiff resistance from Machine Guns and Snipers in German front line. After putting these...out of action our advance was easy until we reached the high ground in front of the SENSEE River...where we were forced to halt because the right flank had not come up...*



The Germans had once more been taken by surprise and once again a good advance had been made; in fact...*At 8:25 a.m. the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade was reporting that they had taken the final objective and were preparing to assault GUEMAPPE and the ridge East of the COJEUL River.* These objectives and others had been taken later that day by the 4th and 6th Brigades while the three brigades of the 2nd Canadian Division had been re-organizing and readying themselves for a further attack on the morrow.



(Right above: *Canadian troops in a captured village: wounded German prisoners on stretchers are awaiting their evacuation to the rear area. – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

The 26th Battalion was to be in action for the two following days before its retirement on August 29 to the area of Neuville-Vitasse. The advance had apparently become more difficult after the first day; enemy resistance had been progressively stiffening and the wire in some areas had been left uncut and had not been easy to pass through.

Casualties had been heavy and the finally the Battalion was to retire to the *Ulster Trench* line where it had established a couple of outposts and defensive positions, there to await orders.

(Right: *Barbed-wire entanglements which formed part of the German defensive positions known as the Hindenburg Line – from Illustration*)



When these orders arrived at about eleven o'clock on the evening of August 28, the Battalion was to withdraw, which the unit had done some hours later, at three o'clock the next morning.

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



Having reached Neuville-Vitasse, the 26th Battalion was soon to be once more on the move, on to Achicourt later that evening and on to Berneville on the next day. A period of training was now to follow, exercises which would take the unit back to Achicourt, on to the area of Upton Wood and then to Hendecourt, some eighteen kilometres to the south-east of Arras. The unit was to remain there for five days, from September 7 to 12 before ordered to nearby Cagnicourt.

There at Cagnicourt it was to be posted in close proximity to a number of batteries of heavy six-inch and eight-inch howitzers which apparently had orders to fire all night, much to the discomfort of the infantrymen of the 26th Battalion alongside who were trying to sleep.

(Right: *A photograph dated February of 1918 of a gun-team of the 2nd Canadian Siege Battery positioning one of their BL 6-inch 26 cwt* howitzers – from the Wikipedia web-site*)



It was, of course, during this posting that Private Pippy returned to the 26th Battalion from his temporary tour of duty with the 78th Battalion, on either September 12 or 14.

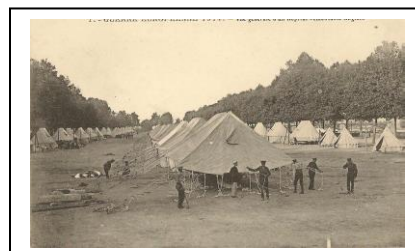
* * * * *

Agnez-les-Duisans, whereas Hendecourt lies eighteen kilometres to the south-east of Arras, is about ten kilometres to the north-west. The transfer of the 26th Battalion from the former to the latter on September 15 entailed an afternoon and evening march, a journey

by train and then a further ninety-minute march to billets, these arrived at by one o'clock in the morning. As the War Diarist has remarked in his entry for that September 16... *Very hard march as men were tired after train journey.*

The 26th Battalion then rested, re-equipped, and was re-enforced on that September 16 before training re-commenced on the morrow. In the meantime, the officers had discovered that a casualty clearing station was in the area and some of these gentlemen were intent on making the acquaintance of the nursing sisters stationed there – one may safely presume that it was *off limits to other ranks.*

(Right: *A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity was to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War: Other such medical establishments were sometimes of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card*)



All good things, so it is said, come to an end – even for officers – and only two days after the move to Agnez-les-Duisans, on September 18, Private Summerton's Battalion was to take the train whence it had come and was then to march to the area of Bullecourt – two kilometres distant from Hendecourt – and beyond, to relieve Scottish units in the front line. This it did on the next day.

It was apparently...*Quiet all day...*for four of the next five days. September 25 was much less so, as the Battalion War Diary entry for that date attests: *Heavy counter-attack on posts at daylight...Rear post attacked at 9:00 a.m. but enemy driven off. S.O.S. sent up but not answered. Quiet until about 3:30 P.M. when another attack was made after heavy bombardment...post fell back to shell holes in rear.*

Casualties very heavy. Post re-established at 9:30 P.M. Battalion less posts relieved...complete 11:00 P.M...

It was to be the first days of October before the 26th Battalion found itself once more in the forward area, acting as Brigade Reserve for an attack scheduled for October 2. As it transpired, that action was cancelled during the evening of October 1, thus, until October 8, Private Pippy and his comrades-in-arms remained in the area of the village of Raillencourt on the Arras-Cambrai road.

(Right above: *Raillencourt Communal Cemetery in which place lies another Newfoundlander by the name of Pippy: 878226, Private Thomas J. Pippy of the Royal Canadian Regiment – photograph from 2017*)



(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*)

During that interim – September 25 to October 8 - of course the war had been proceeding fairly well for the Canadians and British, on the *Cambrai Front* and elsewhere: the crossing of the *Canal du Nord* had been forced by on the morning of September 27 and further advances had been made before the enemy resolve had stiffened in the days that followed. To the south the St. Quentin Canal had been crossed on September 29 and further to the south again French and American forces were advancing.



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

September 29 had also seen an offensive launched in Belgium eastward from the *Ypres Salient* and it *also* was to quickly capture large tracts of occupied territory from the Germans. The strategy of exerting unrelenting pressure, simultaneously, on a number of fronts was to result in an overall retreat of the German Army in both France and Belgium.

But while the enemy was retreating, he was still fighting. His artillery and his machine-gunners in particular were making the price of success an expensive one.

(Right: *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*)



The following are the 26th Battalion War Diary entries for October 8, 9 and 10 of 1918:

8th – Battalion in Brigade Reserve. Conference of all Officers at 1.30 p.m. Final instructions re attack issued. Battalion moved to assembly area. Casualties:- Two Other Ranks Killed, one Other Rank Wounded.

9th – Escadouvres* – ZERO at 1.30 a.m. Everything “Jake”. At 5:30 p.m. Companies “Jumped off” from Assembly Area facing North East. Our attack held up by machine gun fire East of NAVES Casualties:- Four Other Ranks Killed and Seventy-eight Wounded.

**In fact, Escaudœuvres*

(Right above: *Naves Communal Cemetery Extension in which lies at least one Newfoundlander: 57893, Private Jocelyn March of the 20th Battalion, Canadian Infantry – photograph from 2017*)

10th – Battalion in Front Line until 5.00 a.m. when 4th C.I. Brigade went over and continued the advance. Weather fine. Casualties:- Lieut. A. Mitchell and Three Other Ranks Wounded but remained on duty.



Casualty report: *Killed in Action.* – *Whilst with his Company shortly after entering Cambrai, an enemy shell exploded near him, wounding him in several places. Medical aid was rendered immediately, but he died shortly afterwards.*

The son of Edward Pippy, fisherman – to whom he had willed his all on September 24, 1916 – and of Lavinia Pippy (née Adams) of Pippy’s Lane, Otterbury, Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Maud, Ezekiel, John-Goodison, to Joseph and to Lorenzo-Adam.



(Right above: *The photograph of Private Pippy is from a web-site entitled – A Short History and Photographic record of 106th Overseas Battalion C.E.F.*)

William Pippy had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-three years: date of birth in Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, March 12, 1892.

Private William 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 26, 2023.