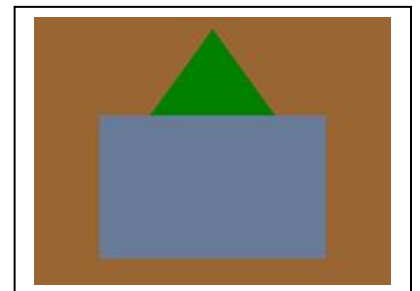




Private John Joseph Power (Number 878320) of the 42nd Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Boves West Communal Cemetery Extension: Grave reference A.17.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder flash of the 42nd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a miner, according to the 1911 Census John Joseph Power had immigrated from the Dominion of Newfoundland to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, in 1900, at the age of two years. The same source cites his brother Patrick as having left Newfoundland at the age of eight in 1904, but whether either of the boys had been accompanied by his parents – or the fate of those parents – has thus far proved only to be unclear.

The 1911 Census shows that by that year, the two Power brothers were living with an uncle and aunt, John and Mary-Joseph (*Maria* in some sources) Hines, and their family of six children – later to be nine - in the area of New Waterford, Cape Breton.

His first pay records indicate that it was on February 18 of 1916 that the Canadian Army began to remunerate Private Power for his services and that it was also on the date on which he was *taken on strength* by the 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*). The venue for this occasion was the community of New Waterford. Six weeks were then to pass before he was attested on April 1, that also being the day on which he underwent a medical examination, a procedure which was to pronounce him as...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*.

By the time these further undertakings, Private Power had already reported *to duty* for training to the not-distant town of Broughton to the south of the industrial city of Sydney which had recently been transformed into a military camp*.

**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 soon 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).*

May 16 of 1916 was then to be the moment on which the formalities of his enlistment were officially brought to a conclusion, likely also at Broughton. On that date the commanding officer of the 185th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Parker-Day, declared – on paper – that...*878320 Pte, Joseph Power...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

Private Power's posting to Broughton was to last altogether perhaps some fourteen weeks. By that time, the authorities had decided to create a *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* to comprise the 185th, the 85th, the 193rd and the 219th Battalions. On or about May 23 of 1915 these four formations were assembled to train together at *Camp Aldershot* in Kings County, Nova Scotia, where the *Brigade* then spent all that summer before receiving its colours on September 28, two weeks before its departure for *overseas service*.

Before that day arrived, however, Private Power had without doubt become a little better known to the Battalion authorities than had the majority of the unit's soldiers: in May he was to forfeit three days' pay for having been *Absent Without Leave*; in June a further three days' pay was lost for the same offence and one-hundred twenty hours detention was also awarded for absence from a Roll Call; August saw another two weeks' detention awarded; and in September two more days' pay was withheld, again for *Absence Without Leave*.

Then it was time to proceed on overseas service.

At seven o'clock in the evening of October 11, 1916, the one-thousand thirty-eight officers and *other ranks* of Private Power's 185th Overseas Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) 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: *Sister-ship to Britannic – that vessel to be sunk by a mine in the eastern Mediterranean a month later, in November of 1916 – and also to the ill-fated Titanic, HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor in the company of HM Hospital Ship Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay, Island of Lemnos, 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 again. Private Power's 185th Battalion was thereupon transported south-eastwards by train to *Witley Camp* in the English county of Surrey.

The 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) is documented as then having provided re-enforcements for Canadian forces already on the Continent. This role was to last until February of 1918, some sixteen months later, when the remainder of the unit would be absorbed into the newly-organized Canadian 17th (*Reserve*) Battalion.

The Battalion's organizers had originally anticipated that the *Cape Breton Highlanders* would be ordered – as an entity with the other three units of the *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* – to *active service* on the Continent, but this was not to be*. Only the 85th Battalion would eventually proceed to serve in the trenches of the *Western Front*.

**Before the end of the Great War, Canada was to have despatched overseas just over 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 specifically designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.

(continued)

By the time of Private Power'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 horrific 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)

Private Power was now to remain in the United Kingdom at *Witley Camp* for just seven weeks less a day. On the night of December 5-6 he took ship and crossed the English Channel – likely via the English south-coast port of Southampton before disembarking in the French industrial port-city of Le Havre situated on the estuary of the River Seine.

By this time the Canadian Army had established its Base Depot in and about the nearby community of Rouelles, and it was to there that Private Power reported on December 6, one of eighty-four re-enforcements from England to arrive on that day. Twenty-four days later, on December 30 (but see immediately below), nine-hundred thirteen men were documented as having been despatched to various units, Private Power may – or may not - have been one of that number.

In the meantime, Private Power's bad habits had returned and he was to be twice in trouble during the period spent at *Rouelles Camp*, Le Havre: on December 16 he was awarded three days of *Confinement to Barracks* for having chosen to be absent from a parade; apparently no lesson had been gleaned from this sentence as, less than two weeks later, on December 29, he was handed a five-day confinement sentence for his absence from a further early-morning parade.

As Private Power had been scheduled to leave to join his new unit on the morrow, December 30, this may explain why it was not until January 3 of the New Year, 1917, that the 42nd Battalion War Diarist, having withdrawn to Brigade Reserve at Neuville St-Vaast on just that day, was able to record the arrival of a re-enforcement draft of two-hundred fifty *other ranks**. He may have been serving his sentence until January 2.

**On the other hand, it may simply have been that the 42nd Battalion had been serving in forward positions until the morning of that same day and was not prepared until that day to receive newcomers.*

* * * * *

The 42nd Battalion of the Canadian Infantry was a unit of the 7th Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 3rd Canadian Division, of which four were to serve on the *Western Front* during the *Great War*. However, neither the Brigade* nor the Division was to officially come into being until midnight of December 31, 1915 – January 1st, 1916*.

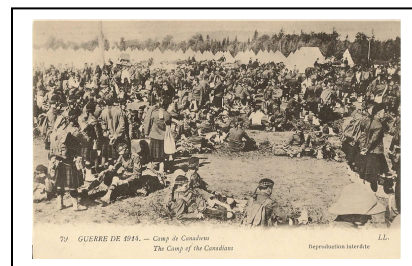


**There was to be a 5th Canadian Division but it remained in the United Kingdom during the Great War to act as a training unit and also as a re-enforcement pool.*

(Preceding page: *The personnel of the Battalion wore a Black Watch tartan kilt, one version of which is shown here. – from the canadiansoldiers.com web-site*)

**The other battalions of the 7th Brigade were the 49th (Edmonton Regiment), the PPCLI (Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry) and the RCR (Royal Canadian Regiment).*

(Right: *The caption reads merely 'Camp of Canadians' but it is from the early days of the Great War, thus likely in either northern France or in Belgium. The troops are from a Canadian-Scottish unit. – from a vintage post-card*)



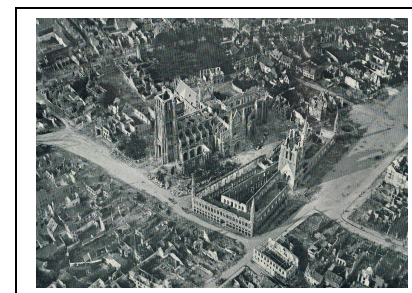
In the winter of 1915-1916 and into the spring and summer of 1916, the Battalion had served in Belgium, at first just to the north of the Franco-Belgian frontier in tandem with the Canadian 1st Division in the *Ploegsteert Sector*, and then, as of March and April, 1916, in the *Ypres Salient* where the 3rd Canadian Division had become responsible for an area to the south-east of the city.



(Right above: *While the caption reads that these troops are 'English', this could mean any unit in British uniform – including Empire (Commonwealth) units. This is early in the war as there is no sign of a steel helmet. – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right below: *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 first five months of the 42nd Battalion's service on the Continent had therefore comprised the day-by-day drudgery and dangers of the routines and rigours of trench warfare during the *Great War**. For some it had also included a course at the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade Sniper School which had begun on January 22, but of which no further documentation appears to be available.



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



(continued)

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

(Preceding page: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of the year 1916, by that time equipped with steel helmets and the less visible, British-made, Lee-Enfield rifles – from Illustration)

The first major altercation in which the 42nd Battalion was to play a role had been the confrontation between the 3rd Canadian Division – and eventually other Canadian Corps units - and the Kaiser’s German Army, fought in June of 1916 at and about *Mount Sorrel*.

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* still remaining under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This had been just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.



(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 successfully patch up their defences.



The hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, however, delivered piece-meal, poorly co-ordinated, and poorly supported by the artillery, had proved 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)

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



The 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, of which the 42nd Battalion was a component, was to be in the thick of it all. Excerpts from its War Diary take up the story:

2nd to 6th June – On the morning of the 2nd the enemy opened up a severe bombardment on our front, support and communicating trenches, commencing at 7.45 a.m. and keeping up an intense fire until noon when he launched an attack against our trenches.

(continued)

The artillery preparation had been so severe that he succeeded in penetrating our trenches and by evening of that day he was in possession of a good deal of our front and support trenches...

Counter attacks were made and succeeded in driving the enemy out of a portion of our trenches but owing to the difficulties of getting up reinforcements were unable to hold the ground recovered... The casualties suffered during the engagement were somewhat heavy in both officers and men...

The 42nd Battalion had incurred a total of two-hundred seventy-eight casualties up until the night of June 5-6 when the entire 7th Brigade was to be withdrawn. Neither the Brigade nor the 42nd Battalion was to play any further part in the affair. On the night of June 12-13 the Canadians had organized and then had delivered what was to prove to be a final – and decisive – counter-attack. After eleven days of fighting, the two sides had ended up for the most part where they had started.



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

(Right: Hill 60 as it remains almost a century after the events of 1916 and 1917 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooze, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: Still nursing the scars of a hundred years ago, it is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature. – by the Belgian Government. – photograph from 2014)



From then until the end of August would be a quiet time for the Canadians – as quiet as it ever was to become in the *Ypres Salient*. There was to be no further concerted infantry activity by either side, only patrols and raids on a local scale and the daily toll of casualties was to be mostly due to enemy artillery and snipers.

On August 22 the 7th Brigade had retired to rest billets in the Cassel area. There was to be little rest involved; the following two weeks had been spent in training in preparation for use in a different theatre. The Canadians were about to move south to *the Somme*.

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

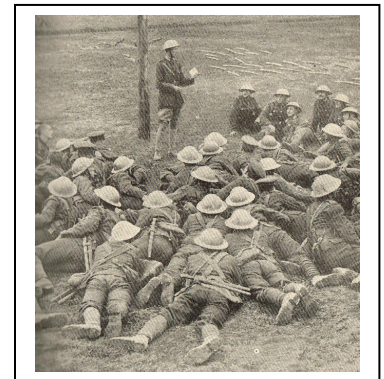
(Right: The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette – photograph from 2015)



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

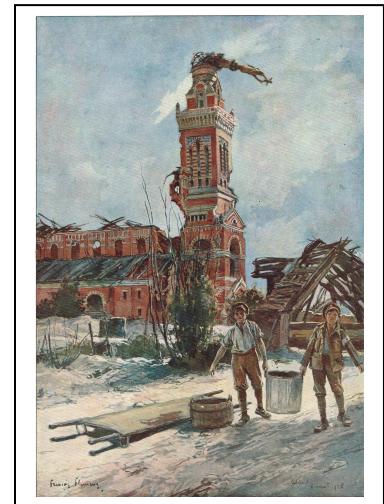
As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were to be brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), and then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23), before the Canadians entered the fray at the end of August and beginning of September to 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: *An image purporting to be that of a Canadian officer giving instructions to those under his command prior to the attack at Flers-Courcellette (see below), September 1916 – from The War Illustrated*)



In the meantime, having left the north of France on the morning of September 7, the 42nd Battalion had arrived by train and by foot on September 13 at the large military encampment which had been established at the *Brickfields (La Briqueterie)* in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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



On the morning of September 15 the Battalion had still been at *Brickfields Camp*. Then by the late afternoon it had moved forward into its assembly area before having advanced into its jumping-off positions. The unit's attack on Courcellette was to go in at six o'clock that evening.

The following is an excerpt from the 42nd Battalion War Diary entry for September 15, 1916:

ATTACK *The position of assembly was reached and all in readiness for the attack at 5.50 pm. The attacking companies went over the top at exactly zero hour.*

OBJECTIVES *The first objective **SUNKEN ROAD** was reached – also the 2nd i.e. **FABECK GRABEN TRENCH** without heavy casualties, and immediately steps were taken to clear the trench, reverse the parapet and consolidate...*

This operation by the 42nd Battalion on the 15th was to be one of the few that were to be successful on that day. The continuation of the attack on the morrow, however, had been less so: total casualties for the two days were seventy-four *killed in action*, two-hundred ninety-eight *wounded in action*, sixty-six *missing in action*.

(continued)

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



On September 17 the 42nd Battalion had been withdrawn from the battlefield and the forward area to *Tara Hill Camp* where it was then to spend until the 23rd day of the month re-enforcing and re-organizing. A further offensive had been in the offing, to begin on September 26, but the 42nd Battalion was not to be involved.

From September 23 to 28, the 42nd Battalion was to be marching and had left Albert to return there five days afterwards. None of the War Diaries of several other units which were also to march in a like manner appears to have provided any apparent reason for all this movement, but logically it may simply have been to liberate billeting space for newly-arriving units, whereas those marching were to be afforded a reprieve – at least from being shot at - after the extremely hard fighting that they had encountered.

The final three days of September and then October 1 had then been spent in billets in Albert before the 42nd Battalion had been ordered to return to the forward area. On October 5 it had relieved the 43rd Canadian Infantry Battalion in the front line.

The entire Battalion War Diary entry for the next day, October 6, 1916, reads as follows: *In the line. Early in the morning of the 6th a German attack was made on our Bombing Post in Kenora Trench which was repulsed. On the same night a Bombing Party was sent out West Miraumont Road proceed a distance of 200 yards but found no trace of the enemy. It had been another ordinary day on the Somme...*



(Right above: *Evacuating Canadian casualties to the rear in hand-carts after the battle – somewhere on the Somme – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)

...except that *that* day, October 6, 1916, was to be one of the last which the 42nd Battalion was to spend in the forward trenches of *the Somme*.

Three days later, on the 9th, one of its final duties having been to provide stretcher-bearers to bring in wounded from No-Man's-Land, the unit had withdrawn for a final time.

On October 10, as other Canadian forces had been arriving in the theatre of *the Somme*, the 42nd Battalion was to commence a thirteen-day withdrawal on foot – to the west before turning northwards to pass behind Arras - to arrive in the Neuville-St-Vaast Sector, north-west of that fore-mentioned city. There the unit had immediately taken over front-line duties from the PPCLI.



(continued)

(Preceding page: A stretcher-bearer going about his business, likely after an infantry action: although not bearing arms, these men were subject to all the dangers of the battlefield, often for extended periods of time. – from Illustration)

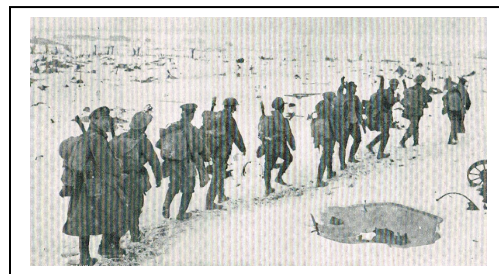
(Right below: The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'Place) in Arras which had already been steadily bombarded for two years by the end of the year 1916 – from Illustration)

The 42nd Battalion was to remain in this area for the next five months; the winter of 1916-1917 was to be a relatively calm period and the drudgery of trench warfare was to be the routine. And to become a part of that grinding life in the trenches of the *Great War*, it was at Neuville St-Vaast that Private Power had reported to duty with his new unit on January 3, 1917.



* * * * *

Apart from local raids and the occasional more ambitious – and costly – venture, concerted infantry action was minimal and most casualties were again due to enemy artillery and snipers. However, it was mostly sickness and particularly dental work that kept the medical services busy during this period.



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

In the month of January of the New Year, 1917, for a twenty-five day period lasting from the twentieth day of that month until the fourteenth day of the next, Private Power was assigned *temporary duty* with the 7th Canadian Machine Gun Company, this unit attached – logically enough – to the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade.

There appears to be no further information *a propos* this attachment in his files and no reason for his return to his unit after only that short period of time.

(Right: Canadian machine-gun personnel in training on their new equipment during the spring of 1917: not only was the Canadian Machine Gun Corps formed during this time, requiring a large addition to the numbers of its soldiery, but the Canadian Army was also changing its weaponry from the Colt Machine Gun to the Vickers Medium Machine-Gun as seen in the photograph. – from Le Miroir)

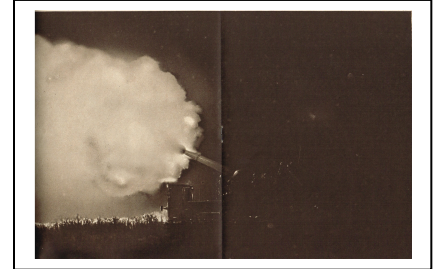


Towards the end of March it had become evident that a major operation was in the offing as battalions were withdrawn to undergo training and familiarization with the objectives of the upcoming offensive.

(continued)

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

On April 7 the 42nd Battalion began to move forward, three of its four companies into tunnels – and two of these three into *Grange Tunnel* (see below) - with the fourth having moved into *Empire Redoubt*. At midnight on Easter Sunday, the troops began to leave these shelters to move forward again, on this occasion into assembly trenches.



The attack on *Vimy Ridge* was now imminent.

As those final days had passed, the artillery barrage had grown progressively heavier; on April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion had described it as...*drums*. By this time, of course, the Germans were aware that something was in the offing and their guns in their turn threw retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft were 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 – only a single Brigade employed on April 9 – also participated. Almost fifty per cent of the personnel who had been employed for that day were British, not to mention those whose contribution – such as those who dug the tunnels - allowed for it to happen.*

On the early morning of 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 proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive at *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, separate entity under Canadian command, stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

While the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions attacked the *Ridge* itself, the 1st and 2nd were to deal with other objectives on the right-hand, and southerly, slope of the prominence.

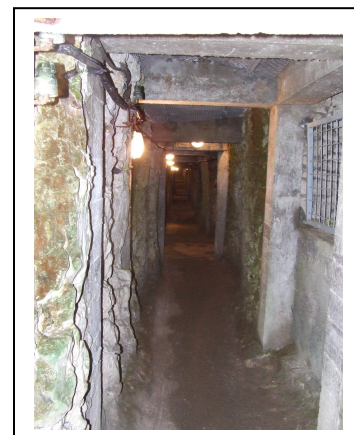
(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division equipped – or perhaps burdened - with all the paraphernalia of war on the advance across No-Man’s-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration*)



Anyone who has visited what remains of the several kilometres of tunnels built under the slope which leads up to *Vimy Ridge* will affirm the claustrophobic, cramped and confined conditions of those places. But they proved to be considerably better and safer for those thousands of troops who began to file into them as early as April 7 than the trenches would have been, and the secrecy that they ensured avoided the welcome that a prepared and alert enemy would have offered to them otherwise.

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

As has been seen, two of the four Companies, ‘A’ and ‘B’, of the 42nd Battalion were among those soldiers who were to spend better than an uncomfortable twenty-four hours underground in *Grange Tunnel* before the attack went in. ‘C’ spent the night in dugouts, while ‘D’ moved up overland in the dark hours before the early morning assault.



Of a strength of some seven-hundred twenty before the attack, just over three hundred were to be reported as casualties by the Battalion War Diarist three days later in his entry of April 11. The Battalion was relieved in the evening of the same day and was withdrawn to the area of Villers au Bois.

On April 20 the 42nd Battalion received orders to move back into Corps Reserve. The respite, however, was fleeting. On the night of the 23rd it was ordered forward into close support in the area of the village of Vimy.

(Right: *The village of Vimy, perhaps two or three kilometres from Vimy Ridge, as it was just after the conflict of 1914-1918 – from a vintage post-card*)

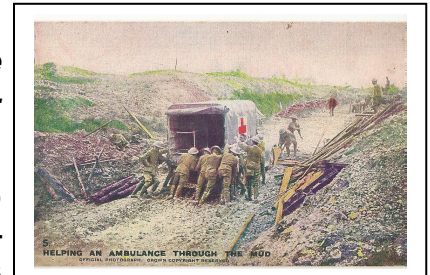


That tour in the front line near the village of Vimy during the final week of April was followed by a month of less-strenuous activities out of the line. The official conclusion of the *Battle of Arras* is recorded as May 16, 1917, but well before that date the offensive had lost the momentum of the first few days. The conflict had by that time once more degenerated into a stalemate.

After the official conclusion of the *Battle of Arras* on May 16, Private Power's 42nd Battalion had been withdrawn into reserve at Villers au Bois, there to remain until the end of the first week of June when it moved again into a forward area.

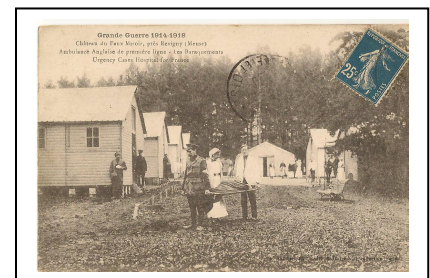
And it was during this month of June that Private Power was in need of medical attention on two consecutive occasions.

(Right: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)



On June 1 he was evacuated from his unit to be despatched to the 7th General Hospital – also known as *Malassises Hospital* – located in the large northern French town of St-Omer. He was suffering from a case of the mumps.

Hardly had he arrived at Base Details, having been discharged from hospital to there on June 21, than Private Power found himself in the 4th Canadian Field Ambulance at Hersin-Coupigny of June 27 for treatment to an inflamed Achilles tendon. The problem was apparently dealt with quickly as he was discharged *to duty* just three days later, on the final day of the month.



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

In the meantime, the *Great War* had had continued and in his absence Private Power's 42nd Battalion had been busy.

The second week of June had seen a major raid in the area of the Lens-Arras railway mounted by the 7th Infantry Brigade, an affair which involved three Companies of the 42nd Battalion; after this operation the remainder of the month was to be spent in training, in construction work and in being inoculated – against exactly *what* seems not to be documented but it would seem that a necessary recovery time for all the troops had followed.



(Right above: *A Canadian carrying-party – some of the work done by troops when in support and reserve – on the Lens front during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

The British High Command had by this time already been planning to undertake a summer offensive in the Ypres Salient, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention from this area – and also his reserves - it had ordered operations to take place as well in the sectors of the front running north-south from Béthune down to Lens.

(continued)

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

The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort, the incident probably best known to students of Canadian military history being the assault of August 15 on the so-named *Hill 70*. The attack was to be, in fact, the responsibility of the Canadian 1st and 2nd Divisions, thus the 42nd Battalion was not to be involved.



But even so, maybe the action merits a short passage at this point.

(Right: *Canadian troops moving into No-Man's-Land at some time during the operations of the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)



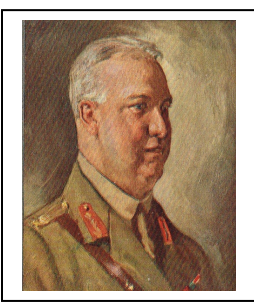
Those expecting *Hill 70* to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear. Yet it would seem that it was high enough to have been 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 the city of Lens itself.



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

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

The objectives of the attack were limited and were for the most part achieved by the end of the first day of the assault, August 15. Due to the apparent dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it had been expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it proved; on the 16th several strong counter-attacks were launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.



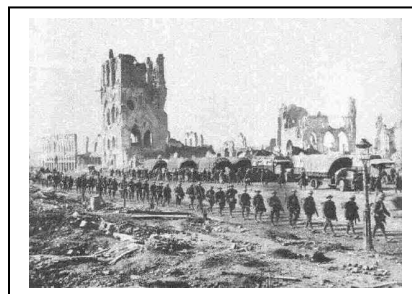
These defences held fast and the Canadian artillery, which was to be employing newly-developed tactical procedures, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* was to remain in Canadian hands.

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



As afore-mentioned, the 42nd Battalion played no role whatsoever in the engagement at *Hill 70*. It was in a rear area at the time and symbolic, perhaps, of the importance of the activities of the day undertaken by the unit, the Battalion War Diarist of the day was to make no entry at all for August 15.

This Canadian-led offensive campaign had apparently been scheduled to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium was proceeding less well than expected and the High Command was looking for reinforcements to make good the exorbitant losses. The Australians and New Zealanders, and then the Canadians, were ordered to prepare to move north, thus the Canadian Corps was obliged to abandon any offensive actions that they may have been contemplating.



(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*)

In the middle of October, therefore, the Canadians were ordered north into Belgium and to the *Ypres Salient*. Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign – already ongoing since the end of that July – was to come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – at least - 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 entered the fray, it was they who were to shoulder a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which were the spearhead of the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Canadian 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 having finally entered the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.



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

On October 16, Private Power and his 42nd Battalion began to move northward to play its role at *Passchendaele*. By train and then on foot on that day the unit was transferred from Magnicourt to the vicinity of the town of Hazebrouck. There... *it was quartered in tents and billeted.*

It remained close to Hazebrouck in training for a week before, on October 23, then having marched – commencing at two-thirty in the morning - to Cæstres station where it there entrained. The Battalion then crossed the Franco-Belgian frontier before reaching Ypres, from where it was ordered into Divisional Reserve where it was to daily supply working-parties.



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

(Right below: *Just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the monument pictured on just the previous page – the Canadians would have been attacking up the slope and advancing towards the camera - photograph from 2010*)

Moving forward in stages, the 42nd Battalion was nonetheless still serving in the rear areas for a week until October 30 when orders were received to move forward to the *Gravenstafel Ridge* and to take over support positions from the Royal Canadian Regiment which was thereupon to advance up to the front lines. On the following day the unit received instructions to move up in preparation for carrying out an operation... *to rectify the front line.*



Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of November 1, 1917: *The dispositions taken over by the Battalion consisted of a more or less regular line of shell holes, there being no trenches. During the first night this line was somewhat straightened out and the shell holes consolidated and connected up as far as was possible considering the wet conditions of the ground. An advanced post was established...*



(Right above: *Canadian troops performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir*)

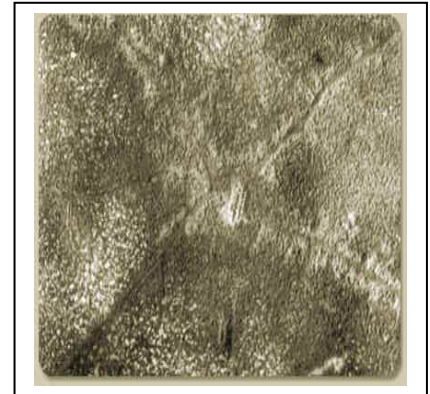
An attack was carried out by the 42nd Battalion on November 2 with limited success and the unit retired from the front on the night on November 3-4. Casualties during those five days in the forward area had amounted to forty-eight *killed in action or died of wounds*, one-hundred twenty *wounded* and four reported as *missing in action*.

(continued)

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



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



The unit had then withdrew to Watou to the west of the town of Poperinghe where it was to remain, receiving some reinforcements, until the morning of November 13. At that time the 42nd Battalion - indeed the entire 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade – then was moved by bus back to the southern outskirts of Ypres.

By this time the *Third Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele* was floundering to its conclusion, some sources even citing the early date of November 6 as the official end to it. Official date or not, it certainly did not mark the end to the fighting and although the 42nd Battalion took no part in any further offensive – one was cancelled at the last moment – a further hundred casualties were incurred during these few days.

(Right below: *An unidentified Canadian-Scottish unit, preceded by its pipe-band, on the march 'somewhere on the Continent' – from Le Miroir*)



On November 19 and 20, having retired on the night of the 17th-18th, the Battalion, on foot and by motorized transport, moved away from *Passchendaele*, across the border into France, to halt at Bourecq at two o'clock on the afternoon of the 20th. It was there on the morrow that... *146 O.R. reinforcements arrived and were taken on strength and posted among the Companies to fill vacancies caused by casualties.*



As those re-enforcements arrived, Private Power was moving in the opposite direction: he had been awarded fourteen days of leave back in the United Kingdom. In fact, he was absent for seventeen days, the discrepancy likely due to the travelling time that such leave necessitated – thus he was away from his unit from November 25 until December 12.

(Right above: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

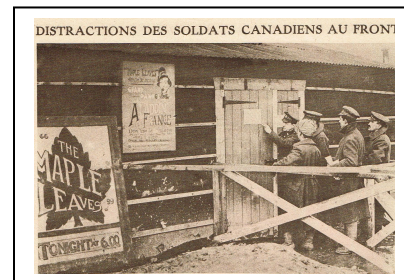
During this interim, the 42nd Battalion was to remain at Bourecq until December 18, the day after the polls closed. A national election was taking place at home at this time and military personnel serving abroad were also to have their say. Thus the polls were open from December 1 to 17 and during that period seven-hundred ninety-one soldiers of the 42nd Battalion cast a ballot, over seven hundred on the first day.

On December 18 the unit received orders countermanding a scheduled move to Neuville St-Vaast and was instead instructed to proceed to the area of Fosse 10* in the vicinity of Lens.

The expected busses failed to materialize until the following morning by which time the Battalion had marched two kilometres, had acquired good rations and had found comfortable billets. It arrived at Fosse 10 some twenty-four hours behind schedule, but well-fed, well-watered and well-rested.

**The word 'fosse' in French not only signifies a ditch or a common grave, it is also means a pit, or mine-shaft, of which apparently there were at least ten in the area.*

The winter of 1917-1918 was spent in much the same area until the month of March and in much the same manner as during the preceding winters of the *Great War* – relatively peaceably. Training appears to have been intense but so does the number of activities which were laid on for the troops; some were of a military nature with inter-unit competitions frequently held but sports have also been regularly recorded in the 42nd Battalion War Diary, as has the occasional concert as well.



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

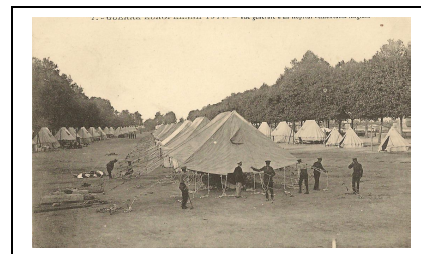
There was little infantry activity on the part of the 42nd Battalion to be reported until March 12-13 when a raid was conducted. The War Diarist in his file of the day notes... *the raid was carried out exactly to schedule and with the greatest dash by the whole party.* He then adds that... *Unfortunately on reaching the objective the post was found to be empty.* But, on the plus side again, there were no casualties incurred.

* * * * *

While the Battalion was busy in its preparation for that upcoming raid, Private Power was once again experiencing consecutive medical complaints.

The first was a problem which was to be present for the entirety of the *Great War* and which was the result of the living conditions which the troops of all the belligerent nations were to endure: this was scabies. Scabies mites which existed in the filth of the trenches and elsewhere in their billions, laid their eggs under the skin of the soldiery whose clothing they also inhabited and into whose skin they burrowed to do so. Unfortunately the condition was highly contagious and not easily avoided.

Having been treated for scabies at the 8th Canadian Field Ambulance – at aux Rietz (*la Targette*)? - after his admission on March 6-7 of 1918 and then subsequently at the 1st CFA, Les Brébis, Private Power was then forwarded from there to the 1st Canadian Casualty Station at Ruitz on March 9. His problem by then was ICT – *Inflammation of the Connective Tissues** – of his right hand.



****Basically, the inflammation is the result of one's immune system mistakenly attacking the body's own tissues.***

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

The procedure for rectification of Private Power's ICT proved to be more complicated than had the treatment of his scabies. Having been admitted – as seen above - into the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on March 9, three weeks later, on the night of March 29-30 he was placed on board the 20th Ambulance Train and transported to the 25th General Hospital at Hardelot.

From Hardelot he was again transferred, on April 12, to the St. Martin's Plain Convalescent Camp at Boulogne where he was to remain for but two days after which he was ordered to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Étaples. From there – having been deemed as once more fit for *active service* - on April 20 Private Power was despatched to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp at Calonne-Ricouart, some eighty kilometres to the east from Étaples, and not far distant from where his unit was currently posted.

Only six days after having reported to the CCRC, on April 26, he was on his way back to his unit, to arrive back *to duty* later on that same day.

* * * * *

For March 21, some five weeks before Private Power's return, this the first day of the spring of that 1918, there again is no entry of the day to be found in the War Diary. The 42nd Battalion was in the line but apparently on that day its part of the line was a great deal quieter *there*, in the Vimy-Souchez area, than it was not so far to the south.



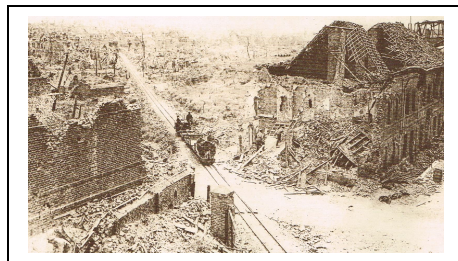
(Right above: The piles of rubble are the remains of the village of Souchez – in the Canadian sector - as it was already in 1915 when it was in French hands. – from Le Miroir)

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, the Germans then delivered a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', launched on that March 21.

The main blow fell at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops* in the area of their juncture with French forces.

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

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



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



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

The first intimation of urgency came about on March 25 when the Battalion was ordered to... ‘stand to’ in readiness to move at one hours notice from 5.30 am. morning March 26th. Acknowledge by wire (War Diary excerpt for March 28, 1918). At five minutes to eight on the morning of the 26th the order came from Brigade to ‘stand down’.

Then, at six-thirty on the morning of March 28, all companies were ordered once more to ‘stand to’ in their battle positions... The reason for the order was the enemy attack which was taking place to the south... The Artillery bombardment covering the attack was easily heard and in fact the Brigade Area was subjected to bombardment at the same time...all precautions were made to meet an enemy attack...(War Diary excerpt for March 28, 1918)

But at half-past nine on that same evening the order was once again given to ‘stand down’. And despite those latter days of activity, casualties for the entire month were a single killed in action and sixteen wounded.

By the beginning of April, the 42nd Battalion was serving in the area of Avion, a community just to the south of the city of Lens; for the unit there was to be no further ‘standing to’. Further to the south the German spring offensive was being held and coming to a halt, as so was soon to be ‘Georgette’ in Belgian Flanders where the British front had been somewhat bent but not broken.

Thus a relative calm descended on the front as the German threat faded – the enemy had won a great deal of ground, but there had been nothing lost to the Allies of any military significance on either of the two fronts. Nor was the calm particularly surprising: both sides were exhausted and needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to reinforce.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The 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(?)*)

From the point of view of reserves, the Allies – French and British and Commonwealth - were a lot better off than were their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were belatedly arriving on the scene.

An overall Commander-in-Chief had also been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – casualties were minimal – until the second week in August.

At this point there was now to be a penultimate medical episode in Private Power’s military career. It occurred on July 7 and it was to conclude two weeks following, on July 21. A common occurrence, it was a sprained ankle which was to see him sent for that period to the 3rd Army Rest Camp.

On the penultimate day of that July of 1917, Private Power’s unit began to make its way from the Neuville-Vitasse Sector, just south of Arras, to that part of the lines in front of the city of Amiens where the German offensive had been halted in April, almost four months previously.

(Right below: *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*)

Having made its way on foot and by train, by the evening of the 31st the 42nd Battalion was billeted in the vicinity of Dury*, to the south of the city of Amiens. After a halt there of two days it was on its way eastwards once more, towards the area of the imminent battle.



****Not to be confused with a second Dury – on the Arras-Cambrai road - where the Battalion was to fight only a month later.***

The 42nd Battalion was not alone: a large number of other Canadian units* – indeed almost the entire Canadian Corps – had at that time begun to move in a semi-circular itinerary to the west of Amiens, then south, then east again to finish in front of the city. This movement was to be effected in only a matter of days, much of it on foot, and all of the latter stages during the hours of darkness; during the day-time the assembling forces were secreted in woods, out of sight.

****The Third Battle of Amiens was to involve not only Canadian forces, but British, Australian, New Zealand, French and American units as well.***

This secrecy was intended to surprise the enemy – and it did*.

****According to the 42nd War Diary the Germans were successfully led to believe that the Canadian Corps was at the time operating on the Ypres Front in Belgium.***

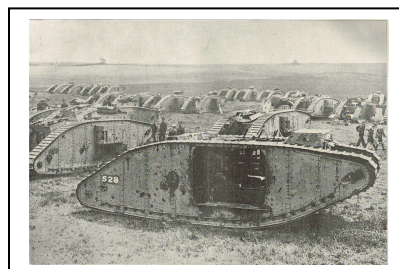
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However, it was not only the enemy that was being kept unaware of the purpose of all this marching by all these troops. It was not until August 4 that the 42nd Battalion War Diarist included the following in his entry of the day: *On this date the very secret announcement was made that the Battalion would take part in a large offensive operation on the AMIENS Front in co-operation with Tanks, RAF Squadrons, Cavalry, Motor M.G.s etc.*

Also on that day the 42nd Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*) buried its Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Bartlett McLennan, D.S.O.. *He was killed in the forward area while making a personal reconnaissance of the country over which the Battalion was to attack some days later... (42nd Battalion War Diary)*

On the night of August 5-6 the Battalion moved into the *Bois de Gentelles*. It there remained until the night of August 7-8 when it moved forward into its jumping-off positions: the Allied attack - well supported by tanks - was to commence on the morrow morn.

(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 next morning, August 8, was foggy when the barrage descended upon the German defenders. Private Power's Battalion, in the second wave of the attack, had reached and attained its objective by twenty minutes past ten in the morning. There and then it consolidated its gains while other units continued forward. On that day the enemy – particularly the machine-gunners – had fought hard at times but the pursuit, albeit sometimes slowed, had never stopped.



By the evening the Canadians had in places advanced some eleven kilometres, a remarkable effort by *Great War* standards.

Even the casualty count was unusual: fourteen *killed in action* or *died of wounds* and thirty-one *wounded*.

(Right above: *A group of 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*)

Having been rested as of August 9, the Battalion moved forward again on the 12th to attack the *Parvillers Trench System*. The position was carried but only following a ten-hour battle, at times fought hand-to-hand. By the 15th when the unit was relieved and a casualty count made, Private Power's Battalion had suffered a further one-hundred thirty-one dead and wounded all told.



And Private Power had been among that number.

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

Private Power is documented as having been evacuated to and admitted into the 4th Canadian Field Ambulance – this likely having been an Advanced Dressing Station run by the Ambulance - on August 12, 1918, before being subsequently forwarded to the 49th Casualty Clearing Station at Boves on the same day.

(Excerpt from the 42nd Battalion War Diary entry for August 12, 1918) *...Zero Hour...had been set for 3.30 pm. ...the Operation...resulted in more than ten hours hand-to-hand fighting during which the attack was many times pressed home with the bayonet...*

Casualty report: *“Died of Wounds” – While taking part in operations at Parvillers, on August 12, 1918, he was severely wounded by machine gun fire. Also receiving a bayonet wound in the right thigh. He was immediately attended to and evacuated to No. 49 Casualty Clearing Station, where he died six days later.*

Nephew to John Hines - to whom he had allocated as of October 1 of 1916 a monthly twenty dollars from his pay and to whom, on September 20 and November 28, 1916, he had also willed his all - and to Mary (*Maria*) Joseph Hines (née *Donovan*) of House 335, New Waterford, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, he was also younger brother to Patrick.

Private Power was reported as having *died of wounds* on August 18, 1918, by the Officer Commanding the 49th Casualty Clearing Station at Boves.

John Joseph Power had enlisted at the *apparent* age of eighteen years and six months: date of birth in St. John’s, Newfoundland, September 5, 1898 (from attestation papers)*.

**There is a birth entry for a John Joseph Power in the records, born in St. John’s, Newfoundland on September 5, 1897, to Edward and Elizabeth Power, but no other documents appear to bear any other compatible information.*

Private John Joseph Power was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

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

