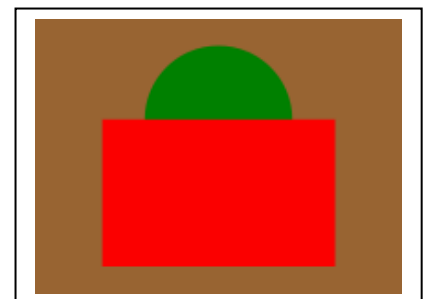




Private Joseph Reid (Number 7785) of the 2nd Battalion (Eastern Ontario Regiment), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Woods Cemetery: Grave reference II.E.9..

(Right: The image of the 2nd Battalion (Eastern Ontario Regiment) shoulder-flash is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *driver*. Joseph Reid emigrated from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Ontario in either 1901 (1921 Census records) or 1903 (1911 Census records). By 1911 the family – his father, mother and four siblings - was living at 365, DuPont Street, Toronto West, this his given address at the time of his enlistment in 1914.

His first pay-records indicate that it was on the fourteenth day of the month of August of that year that the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services. They also show that he was already by that time a trooper of the 9th Mississauga Horse, a Canadian Militia cavalry regiment*, in which unit he had apparently been serving for a year: he was now to serve as a trooper, full-time, for a further six weeks. His enlistment likely took place in Toronto, although he was not to remain there for very long.

**Militia regiments were organized for Home Defence only, thus, by law, were interdicted from operating beyond the frontiers of the country. However, this did not preclude them from recruiting on behalf of the newly-forming Overseas Battalions – authorized after the Declaration of War in August of 1914 – or many, perhaps the majority, of their personnel from transferring to the aforementioned Battalions.*

Private Reid apparently did not undergo a medical examination until August 26 at which time the Medical Officer considered him to be...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. The examination took place at the newly-established *Camp Valcartier*, Québec, where he was to attest four weeks later, on September 22. Although the date of his arrival there is not documented among his papers, it appears that the 9th Mississauga Horse had at the time been requested to contribute a half a company of its recruits to become soldiers of the 2nd Battalion of Canadian Infantry.

On that same date the formalities of Private Reid’s enlistment were brought to a conclusion by the 2nd Battalion’s Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel David Watson, who declared - on paper - that...*Joseph Reid...having finally been approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*. It was there and then that he became a private soldier of the 2nd Battalion (*Eastern Ontario Regiment*).

(Right: *Canadian artillery being put through its paces at the Camp at Valcartier. In 1914, the main Army Camp in Canada was at Petawawa. However, its location in Ontario – and away from the Great Lakes – made it impractical for the despatch of troops overseas. Valcartier was apparently built within weeks after the Declaration of War. – photograph (from a later date in the War) from The War Illustrated*)



There was to be little time for training for the 2nd Battalion in Canada; it would have to be done once Private Reid had arrived in the United Kingdom. It was to be only days after his attestation – it may well have been *on September 22* - that the 2nd Battalion boarded His Majesty’s Transport *Cassandra* at Québec for the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom.



(Preceding page: *The image of Cassandra is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Apparently also travelling – and recorded as having boarded *Cassandra* on September 25 - was a part of the personnel of the 2nd Canadian Field Ambulance*, the remainder to sail on accompanying vessels. In fact, *Cassandra* was not a large vessel; she could accommodate some twelve-hundred passengers, thus Private Reid's 2nd Battalion and the detachment of the 2nd CFA likely filled her to capacity.

If *Cassandra* followed the example – or perhaps it was she who set it – of other vessels, then, having weighed anchor in the Port of Quebec, she then was to *drop* it again only minutes later. On or about September 25, once having embarked all their military personnel passengers, a number of ships then sailed *upstream* some two kilometres from Quebec City to spend the next few days in Wolfe's Cove.

Whenever it was that *Cassandra* sailed from Québec – a number of the ships did so on September 30 - she was then to drop anchor days later further downstream, at the Gaspé. There the gathering convoy of thirty-one transports and its naval escort organized itself for the trans-Atlantic voyage before having finally sailed from Canadian waters on October 3.

Whether Private Reid was aware of it or not is not documented but, on October 5, as the formation was passing along the south coast of Newfoundland, the small Bowring Brothers' steamer *Florizel*, carrying the *First Five-Hundred* of the Newfoundland Regiment overseas, sailed to meet it and to join it.

The convoy reached its destination, the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport, on October 14. However, such was the poor organization of the port at that time, that some troops were to remain on board their ship for several days before disembarking. In fact the convoy had been sailing for Southampton but a submarine scare had brought about a change in plans and Plymouth-Devonport, undergoing refitting and renovations, was used – *faute de mieux*.

Private Reid's 2nd Battalion was one of those to spend the longest amount of time in the harbour on board ship: while the 2nd Canadian Field Ambulance personnel landed on October 15, the 2nd Battalion was not to set foot on land until October 25, whereupon it was transported by train to the Salisbury Plain.

The 2nd Battalion War Diarist concludes his entry for that October 25 by noting that the subsequent railway journey was not to start until almost two o'clock on the following morning, to arrive at the *train's* destination at seven-thirty a.m.



Bustard Camp, the *unit's* destination, was yet a further five or six hours' march distant, and was to be undertaken on foot.

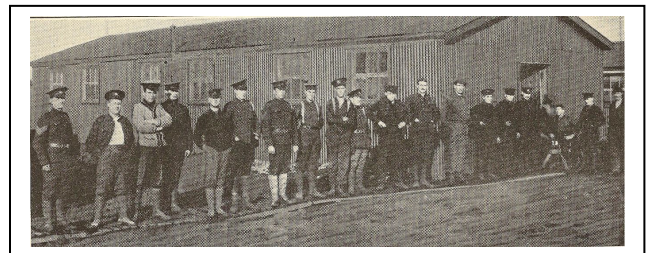
(continued)

(Preceding page: *The convoy carrying the Canadian Expeditionary Force at anchor in Plymouth Hoe on October 14, 1914 – from The War Illustrated*)

The Army Regulations of the day were such that troops were to undergo some fourteen weeks of training from the time of enlistment; at that point they were to be considered as being fit for *active service*. Thus the newly-arrived Canadians were to spend the remainder of October and up until the first week of February, 1915, in becoming proper *Soldiers of the King* – even if they were *colonials*.

Apparently Private Reid also felt that he should make his presence felt at Bustard Camp. The details of what exactly happened appears not to have been left among his files but it would seem that he was to forfeit an entire month's pay as well as his field allowance for that time: a total of thirty-three dollars – perhaps with fifteen days' detention as well.

On February 4 the Canadian Division* marched to a review area where they were inspected by His Majesty, King George V and the War Minister, Lord Kitchener**. The next few days were spent in final preparation for departure before, on February 7, the 2nd Battalion boarded a train to take it to the English west-coast port of Avonmouth.



**Designated as such until, logically, the advent of the 2nd Canadian Division, when it became the 1st Canadian Division.*

***For whom the Canadian city of Kitchener was named in 1916 – it had been called Berlin until then.*

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

At Avonmouth, Port of Bristol, on the following day, the 2nd Battalion – by then a component of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade - boarded HMT *Blackwell*, the ship then sailing as part of the Canadian Division Armada later that day. It was apparently to be a very rough and unpleasant voyage, the Battalion War Diarist making but a single mention of it... *Men very sick.*

Three days later, on February 11, the vessel dropped anchor in the French port of St-Nazaire on the coast of Brittany, the 2nd Battalion disembarked and, by five o'clock on that same evening, was travelling northwards to the area of the Franco-Belgian frontier.

For the first weeks of its service on the Continent, the Canadian Division was to be posted to the *Fleurbaix Sector* in northern France and just south of the border town of Armentières. It was in the area of Armentières that the 2nd Battalion was to be introduced to the rigours and routines of trench warfare* by the North Staffordshire Regiment and the King's Royal Rifles – and to the harsher realities of combat when the Battalion suffered its first fatality on February 20.

(continued)

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

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

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

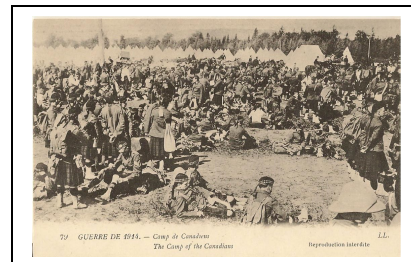


Two months later, Private Reid’s 2nd Battalion was ordered posted to the Ypres Salient and thus it was on April 18, at twenty-five minutes past ten in the morning, that the unit – in fact, the entire 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade - crossed the border into the Kingdom of Belgium.

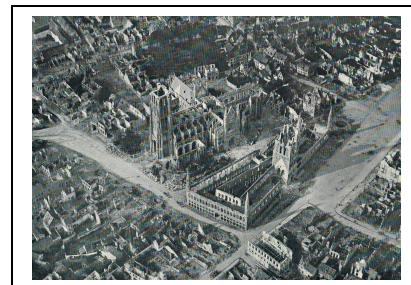
The Brigade traversed the frontier to the west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe where it was to remain for two days before advancing eastwards to Vlamertinghe where it was to remain for a further forty-eight hours. It was then that the Germans decided to launch their attack in an effort to take the nearby city of Ypres.



(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: 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)



Up until that time, during what were in fact only a few days of Canadian tenure, the Salient had proved to be relatively quiet. Then the dam broke - although it was gas rather than water which, for a few days, threatened to sweep all before it. The date was April 22, 1915.

(continued)

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

The *Second Battle of Ypres* saw the first use of chlorine gas by any of the belligerent nations – in this case the Germans - during the *Great War*. It was later to become an everyday event and, with the introduction of protective measures such as advanced gas-masks, the gas was to prove no more dangerous than the rest of the military arsenals of the warring factions. But on this first occasion, to inexperienced troops without the means to combat it, the yellow-green cloud of chlorine proved to be overwhelming.

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



The cloud was first noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon of April 22. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left wavered then broke, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered. Then a retreat, not always very cohesive, became necessary while, at the same time, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade were ordered moved forward to support the efforts of the French and of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade.



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

By the end of the second day of the attack, the 23rd, the situation had become relatively stable – at least temporarily - and the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan were held until the morning of the 24th when a further retirement became necessary.

At times there had been breaches in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans were unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or else they did not have the means of exploiting the situation. And then the Canadians closed the gaps.

The 2nd Battalion remained attached to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade in the north-eastern sector of *the Salient* until April 25 when it withdrew towards Vlamertinghe and re-joined its parent 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade.



Having remained there to rest on the following day, the unit was then to be ordered forward to occupy positions near a pontoon bridge on the Yser Canal. Heavily shelled on the morrow, the Battalion subsequently returned to its billets at Vlamertinghe on the 29th.

(Preceding page: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade moved forward to its western bank from Vlamertinghe – to the left – photograph from 2014*)

Private Reid and his unit were to remain at Vlamertinghe until May 3 when the Battalion had withdrawn further, to the northern French centre of Bailleul, there to re-enforce and re-organize.

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



On May 15 the 2nd Battalion was then ordered to move further down the line via Colonne and Hinges to Béthune from where it was to advance three days afterwards towards the areas of Festubert and Givenchy. The French were about to undertake a major offensive just further south again and had asked for British support.

There at Festubert, a series of attacks and counter-attacks would take place during which the British High Command was to manage to gain some three kilometres of ground but also to contrive to destroy, by using the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what was left of the British pre-War professional Army. The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but – not having the same numbers of troops to put in the field – would happily not participate to the same extent. It nonetheless suffered heavily*.

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

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



That French effort – using the same suicidal tactics - was likewise to be a failure but on an even larger scale; the price that they paid was just over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded and missing*.

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

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



On the final day of May the 2nd Canadian Infantry Battalion was relieved from its posting at Festubert and on June 1 was in billets in Essars; in another nine days' time it was ordered further south, to Givenchy-les-la-Bassée*, a small village not far distant to the south of Festubert. Despatched into the forward trenches from June 11 to 17 to support British efforts, the unit was to incur the same sort of results, although the numbers were smaller – fourteen *killed in action*, seventy-nine *wounded* - from having repeated the same sort of mistakes as at Festubert.

On June 17 the Canadian Division began to retire from the area, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Battalion among the first of its units to do so.

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

As a part of that withdrawal from Givenchy, the 2nd Battalion was to march to billets in or near to the community of Oblinghem, two kilometres removed from the larger community of Béthune. From there on June 25, it then began to move towards and into Belgium, to the *Ploegsteert Sector*, just across the frontier.

Having reached the *Ploegsteert Sector*, there the 2nd Battalion was to remain – as was indeed the entire Canadian Division.

In the next months it was to become well-acquainted with the Franco-Belgian area between Armentières in the east – any *further* east would have been in German-occupied territory – Bailleul in the west, and Messines in the north; given the route marches enumerated in the War Diary and the itineraries used, it would have been surprising had it been otherwise.



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

The Canadian Division remained in that border area of Belgian West Flanders until March and April of the following year when its services were to be required in the southern area of the *Ypres Salient*.

During those autumn and winter months neither side made much of a concerted attempt to dislodge the other from its muddy quarters in the trenches. As with all the other units at the front, the 2nd Battalion's time – as seen on a previous page - was to be divided between postings to the front-line trenches, to the support positions, and into reserve. Casualties were to be caused mostly by artillery fire*, by snipers, and by the occasional raid on the enemy lines.

**It is estimated that some sixty to seventy percent of the casualties on the Western Front during the Great War were due to artillery-fire.*

(continued)

In mid-September of 1915 the 2nd Canadian Division had landed on the Continent and had immediately moved into Belgium to take its place in an adjacent sector just to the north of the now-designated 1st Canadian Division. It too had then spent a relatively-calm autumn and winter in the trenches, but as the first day of spring, 1916, came and went, the Division was preparing to undertake its first major infantry operation of the *Great War*.

It was to be at a place named St-Éloi where, at the end of March, on the 27th, the British had detonated a series of mines beneath the German lines and then had followed up with an infantry attack. The newly-arrived Canadian formation had been ordered to follow up on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the 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 were to take over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.



(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*)

All this of course was a 2nd Canadian Division affair. At the same time, the 1st Canadian Division was being transferred from the *Ploegsteert Sector* northwards – by a semi-circular itinerary – to the area of the southern outskirts of the city of Ypres in the vicinity of the remnants of the villages of Dickebusch and of Zillebeke. By the second day of April, Private Reid’s 2nd Battalion was doing its first tour of duty there in the forward trenches.

The 2nd Battalion War Diary for the month of April notes nothing much more than the daily routines of artillery activity and sniping interspersed at times by the intrusion of aircraft – theirs and ours – over the lines, on one occasion culminating in the death of the plane’s two occupants in No-Man’s-Land.

On April 10 the unit moved back into Brigade Support for a rest only to soon realize that it was not only the front line which was within range of the German guns. On April 17 it moved further back to the area of the town of Poperinghe, not only to be undisturbed by enemy shelling, but also to have a bath and a change of clothing. However, a week later, on April 24, this – like all good things – came to end and by the late evening the 2nd Battalion was on its way back to the front, to trenches opposite a certain *Hill 60*. The relief was complete by two o’clock the next morning.



(Right: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916* and 1917 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*)

****Those 'events of 1916', known to Canadian History as the Battle of Mount Sorrel, occurred at the beginning of June of that year. '1917' refers to the detonation of a mine on the first day of the Battle of the Messines Ridge, which reduced what remained of Hill 60 after 'Mount Sorrel', to the more or less flattened area which it is still today.***

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

(Excerpt from the 2nd Battalion War Diary Appendix for April 26, 1916) On the afternoon of the 26th April, 1916, the German artillery bombarded the Dump, Battalion Headquarters, Railway Cutting, Jackson Street, Larch Wood and open ground in rear of trenches...



The bombardment was steadily increased during the late afternoon, and about 6.30 p.m. a mine was exploded... This particular part of the line was held by 14 men belonging to No. 13 Platoon.

At the particular time the mine was exploded, our Artillery were retaliating on the German lines opposite our front. Immediately after the mine was exploded, the Germans opened up a heavy bombardment on our Support and Communication trenches, also along our front line trenches...this was done no doubt to prevent our supports coming up.

The crater formed by the mine measures about 130 feet long by 85 feet wide, by 30 feet deep.

After the mine explosion took place the S.O.S. SIGNALS were sent out and in a few seconds our artillery opened fire on the enemy lines.

The bombardment steadily increased in violence on both sides and when the German fire lifted a little on our front line, we manned our parapet and opened rapid fire on the enemy who were advancing and coming over the parapet in groups opposite trench 39, trench 42 and the sap on the left of trench 44.

The enemy did not appear to be carrying rifles, but had hand grenades, spades, and what looked by "drums" slung on a stick carried by two men. This "drum" contained what is known as a mobile charge. Two of these were secured later and contained an explosive similar to 40% dynamite. This explosive is used for blowing up mine shafts, bridges etc.

A few of the Germans who advanced, succeeded in reaching our bombing post in Trench 39.

They advanced from their own trench by rushes, taking cover in shell holes and in the crater opposite the sap in trench 39. This sap is used as a bombing post and a bombing section of 8 men held this post, three of these were killed by shell fire and five wounded. We had evacuated this post as it was almost levelled by shell fire.

(continued)

The enemy only occupied our sap for a few minutes when our troops counter-attacked and closed in on the sap where the Germans had entered our trench. Seeing our men closing in, the enemy beat a hasty retreat into the crater in front of trench 39, and made off under cover of the heavy smoke that had settled down on “No-Man’s-Land”.

They left behind them a number of hand grenades and shovels as well as two of the cylinders already mentioned.

Many were seen to fall as a result of our rifle fire and were helped back to their own trenches by their comrades...

Casualty report: “Killed in Action” – Trenches south of Zillebeke

The son of George Ephraim Reid (also found as *Reed* as in the 1911 Census), fisherman, and of Lucy Reid (also née *Reid* or *Reed*) of Catalina, Newfoundland, before 635, then, later, 761, DuPont Street, Toronto – to whom he had left his all in an undated Will – he was also brother to Beatrice, to Evellyn (1911 Census) or Llewelyn (Parish Records), to Eli, and to Alfred (1921 Census) or Albert (1911 Census).

Private Reid was reported as having been *killed in action* on April 26, 1916, while fighting in the *Ypres Salient*.

Joseph Reid had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty years and eleven months: yet both his attestation papers and the Catalina Parish Records cite his date of birth at Catalina, Newfoundland, as September 15, 1904.

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



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