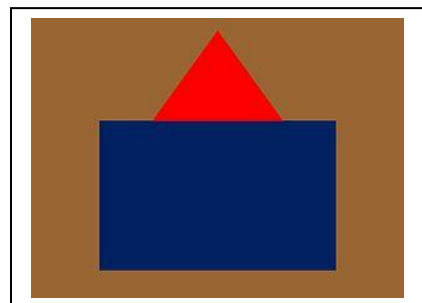




**Private Mack Reid (Number 68424) of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Wailly Orchard Cemetery: Grave reference II. H.24.**

**(Right: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)**

**(continued)**



His occupation prior to military service recorded as being that of a fireman – possibly one who feeds the furnace of a steam engine rather than the one who extinguishes it – Mack Reid appears to have left no history in the files a propos his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. All that one may say with certainty appears to be that he was present in Halifax during the late winter and early spring of 1915, as that is where and when he enlisted.

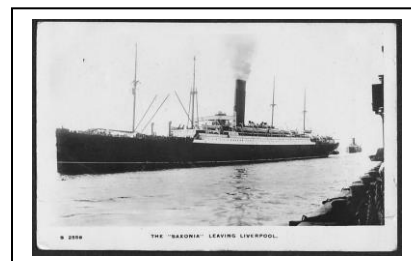
He was to undergo a medical examination on March 12 of that 1915, the report of which declared him as...*fit for overseas service*; on that same report he is documented as having enlisted on February 13, a month earlier, and as having been *taken on strength* on that same date by the 40<sup>th</sup> (Overseas) Battalion (Nova Scotia) of the Canadian Infantry.

The formalities of Private Reid's enlistment were then to be brought to a conclusion on March 25 – perhaps 28 - by the officer representing the commanding officer of the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion when he declared, on paper, that...*Reid Mack...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of the Attestation.*

Once the formalities of his enlistment had taken place – one may presume at Halifax although this is not confirmed – it is not clear as to where Private Reid was to pass the following forty-four days – maybe at *the Armouries* on Halifax Common. On May 11 the Battalion was despatched to the military camp at Aldershot in the Annapolis Valley for further training and, a single month later again, was ordered to *Valcartier Camp*, Québec, where this training was to continue until the parent unit's departure in October of that year.

Only days after the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Nova Scotia), had boarded a train for *Camp Aldershot* the War Diary of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles), in its entry for May 16, records the following: *75 Men enlisted to take the place of men discharged as medically unfit or undesirable.* The unit was about to take passage for the United Kingdom.

Perhaps it had been in anticipation of this situation that Private Reid was transferred to the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion on May 1; whatever the reason, he was never to see *Aldershot Camp* or *Valcartier*. Only nineteen days after being taken on strength by his new unit he was to leave for...*overseas service.*



On May 20, 1915, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Saxonía* in the harbour at Halifax.

(Right above: *The image of the Royal Mail Ship Saxonía leaving the port of Liverpool is from the Wikipedia web-site. Requisitioned by the British for government service she was deployed for use early in the conflict as a floating prisoner-of-war camp before seeing use as a troop transport as of 1915.*)

Private Reid's Battalion was not to travel overseas alone: also taking passage on board the vessel were the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of Canadian Infantry and a part 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Ammo Park. According to the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary again, *Saxonía* was to carry a total of twenty-two hundred seventy-four military personnel passengers.

At about six o'clock in the evening of that May 20, the last of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion having marched up its gangways, the ship sailed from Halifax. Some nine days later, at ten minutes past four o'clock in the morning of May 29, and after an uneventful voyage, the vessel docked in the English south-coast naval facility of Plymouth-Devonport.



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

Upon its arrival in England the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was transported eastwards by train to *East Sandling Camp* on the Kentish coast. This was a subsidiary camp in the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* being established at the time on the Dover Straits, in the vicinity of the town and harbour of Folkestone.



At the time it was also where the newly-forming 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was being assembled and organized before its transfer across the Straits to the Continent.

(Right above: *Little remains of Shorncliffe 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 2016*)

However, for eighteen days during that summer, Private Reid was being neither organized nor assembled: he was being treated for a venereal complaint in the tent hospital on Saint Martin's Plain, *Shorncliffe*, from August 18 to 31, when he was discharged to his unit.

Nor was his charge sheet entirely without blemish either during this period: he had been Absent Without Leave on two occasions and – on both August 9 and September 7 - had been awarded seven days of being *Confined to Camp* to which had been added the forfeiture of five days' pay, for each of the offences.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) was a component of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division. The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division had been serving on the Continent since February, six months earlier, having been deployed in northern France and in the *Kingdom of Belgium* during that time, and it had distinguished itself during the *2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Ypres* in the spring of that same year. By the late summer of 1915 it was now the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division also to take a place in the line.



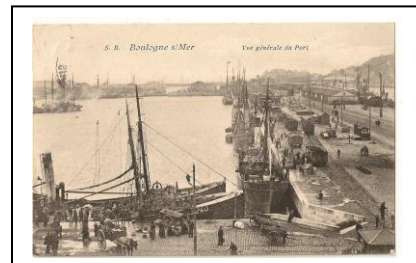
(Right above: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)

(continued)

On September 15, 1915, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion marched from *Shorncliffe Camp* in the late afternoon en route for the harbour at Folkestone where the unit boarded a troop transport for the short crossing to the Continent.

Sailing at ten o'clock that same evening, the troops disembarked in the French port of Boulogne two hours later, at one o'clock in the morning\*.

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



*\*There is a one-hour time difference between the United Kingdom and France.*

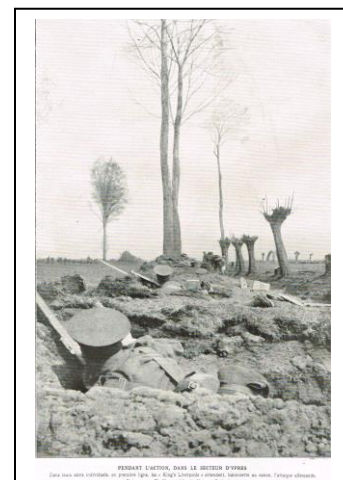
(Right below: *While the caption reads that these troops are 'English', this could mean any unit in British uniform – including Empire (Commonwealth) units. This is surely early in the war as there is no sign of a steel helmet. – from a vintage post-card*)



Later, on that same September 16, and after several hours rest, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion marched to meet transport which was to take them into northern France, not far from the frontier with Belgium, and not far distant from the large centre of Hazebrouk. Three days later the unit crossed into Belgium.

From there the unit crossed into Belgium on By September 23, the Nova Scotia Unit was relieving a British unit, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, *the King's Own*, in trenches close to the Franco-Belgian border in the area of the Kemmel-Ypres Road.

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

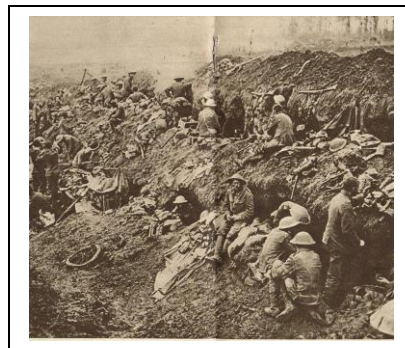


The following months were to be a relatively quiet period for all the troops - of both sides - in the trenches in Belgium; there was, of course, a steady trickle of casualties, usually due to enemy artillery fire and to his snipers, but until the spring of 1916 there was to be only the daily grind of the infantryman's life in – and out of – the trenches\*.

*\*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: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of the following year, 1916, but by that time equipped with steel helmets and also the less-evident British-made Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles – from Illustration)*



The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion's first two casualties on active service were in fact to be self-inflicted wounds. However, on September 25...*Had one man killed in action. #67563 L/Cpl McLean J.A. was sniping and succeeded in hitting two Germans. He was in the act of taking a third shot when he was hit in the head, almost the whole top being shot off. He lived two hours unconscious...* Excerpt from 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for September 25, 1915.

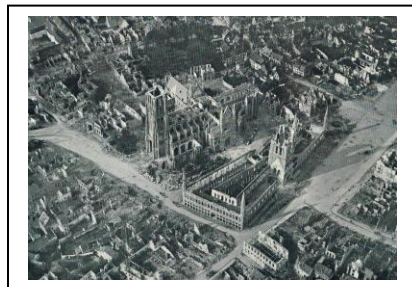


The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) had incurred its first fatality. More were to come, of course, in the months to follow but, relatively speaking, that autumn and winter period of 1915-1916 was to be a period of calm.

*(Right above: La Laiterie Military Cemetery, within the bounds of which is buried Lance Corporal John Archibald McLean – photograph from 2014)*

Calm or not, it was nevertheless during this period that Private Reid again ran afoul of the Battalion authorities: on March 28 he was awarded fourteen days of Field Punishment Number 1 for both...*i) Drunkenness and ii) Absent from billets.*

It was not to be until early April of 1916 that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was to undergo its baptism of fire in a major infantry action. The confrontation occurred at a place to the south of Ypres, St-Éloi, where, at the end of March, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the British detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then followed that with an infantry assault. The newly-arrived Canadian formation had been ordered to capitalize on the presumed British success, to later hold and to consolidate the newly-won territory.

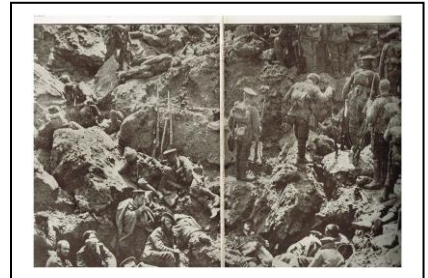


*(Right above: An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the Second Battle of Ypres - which shows the empty shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was to be little left standing. – from Illustration)*

(continued)

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which turned the just-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, plus a resolute German defence, greeted the newcomers who took 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.

Towards the end of the engagement at St-Éloi the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion relieved another battalion and subsequently had incurred a total of some eighty-five casualties, a greater toll than the unit had known on any single occasion up until that date. The action was over quickly for Private Reid's unit.



(Right: *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*)

Six weeks after the Action of the St. Eloi Craters, in early June, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be involved in the fighting in the area of Hoge, Mount Sorrel, Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60, Railway Dugouts and Maple Copse, all in a sector just to the south-east of the city of Ypres. This was to be the Battle of Mount Sorrel.



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

The Canadians had apparently been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans delivered an offensive, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity which fortunately they never exploited.



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

The British Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, thereupon reacted by organizing a counter-attack on the following day, an assault intended to, at a minimum, recapture the lost ground.



Badly organized, the operation was a dismal failure, many of the intended attacks never went in – those that did went in piecemeal and the assaulting troops were cut to pieces - the enemy remained where he was and the Canadians were left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.

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

Nine days later, on the night of June 12-13, the Canadian Corps made a second effort to recapture the lost ground. On this occasion the attack was better co-ordinated, had a well-planned artillery program to support it, and was successful. By the morning of June 13 the infantry action was over – although the German artillery was to fight it out for two more days – and both sides for the most part were back where they had been at the beginning of the affair.



**(Right above: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 – and 1917 when its summit was blown off - in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooze, 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*)**

The newly-arrived 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division\* had been the main recipient of the enemy's offensive thrust which had begun on June 2, but the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had played a role sufficiently important – manning defensive positions - for the name *Mount Sorrel* to become the first battle honour won by the unit during the Great War.

*\*The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division came into being officially at mid-night of December 31, 1915 and January 1, 1916. However, some of its forces did not arrive on the Continent until later, and it was not until March of that 1916 that the Division was able to assume responsibility for the south-east sector of the Ypres Salient.*

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

From the middle of June up until August 27 of 1916, 20, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion for much of the time had been in reserve well to the rear, so well to the rear, in fact, that it had been deemed safe enough for His Majesty the King and his son the Prince of Wales to pay a visit on August 14.



Some two weeks later, Private Reid's unit was then withdrawn into northern France to the vicinity of Steenvoorde, and to the village of Moulle.

The following week at Moulle was spent in becoming familiar with the British Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifle which was to replace the Canadian-made Ross Rifle, and also in training for a Canadian role in the British summer campaign of 1916, an offensive which to that date had not been proceeding exactly to plan.

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 having cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

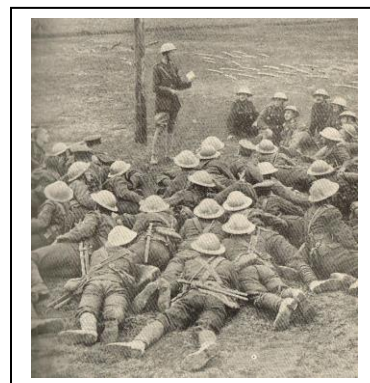
(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette – photograph from 2015*)



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

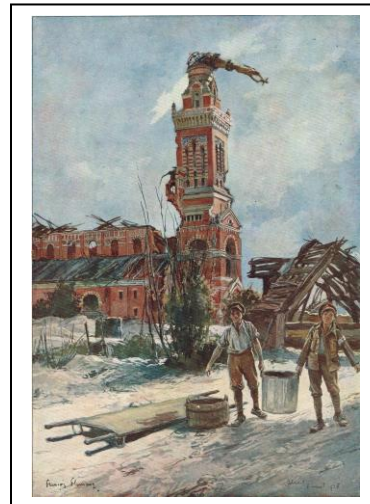
As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were brought in; at first it had been the *South African Brigade* (July 15), then the *Australians and New Zealanders* (July 23), before the *Canadians* entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive.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



Meanwhile, on the evening of September 10, the *25<sup>th</sup> Battalion* had arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the *Brickfields (La Briqueterie)* in close proximity to the provincial town of *Albert*. On the *11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>* the unit had trained – at times in co-operation with aircraft – and provided working-parties.

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



On the afternoon of October 14 the *Battalion* had been ordered forward into dug-outs in assembly areas. On the next morning, September 15, the *Canadians* were to be going to the attack.

(Excerpt from the *25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary* entry for September 15, 1916): *5<sup>th</sup> Brigade* attacked and captured the *Town of Courcellette... the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion* moved forward as though on *General Inspection* the young soldiers behaving like veterans, going through very heavy artillery barrage without a quiver...

Of the six-hundred ninety personnel who went over *the top* on the day of the assault, the *War Diary* recorded thirty-six dead, one-hundred ninety-one wounded and seventy-seven as *missing in action*\*

(continued)



*\*It seems likely that some of the missing later returned to duty as a later War Diary entry records two-hundred fifty-eight casualties all told.*

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



On October 1 the Battalion – its operational strength by then apparently reduced to two-hundred (sic) all ranks and twelve machine-guns – *received orders to attack and capture “at all costs” enemy trenches known as KENORA and REGINA...*

*“B”, “C” and “D” Companies... were to proceed over KENORA up to REGINA, which they did, but by the time they had got to the wire the casualties had been so heavy that only one officer was left... and about thirty men... (War Diary)*

The attack was a failure and the survivors had been obliged to fall back to *Kenora Trench*. Total casualties during the action had been a further one-hundred twelve.

*(Right: Ninety-eight years later, the land on which the action was fought, as seen from Regina Trench Cemetery – photograph from 2014)*



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

On the night of October 1-2 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had retired from *the Battle* - and from the area of - *the Somme* and made its way westwards and then northwards, passing to the west of the city of Arras to the region of the mining centre of Lens.



*(Right: 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 unit was to remain in the area and the trenches of places such as Bully-Grenay, Angres and Bruay for the next four months or so before returning southward to Neuville St-Vaast.



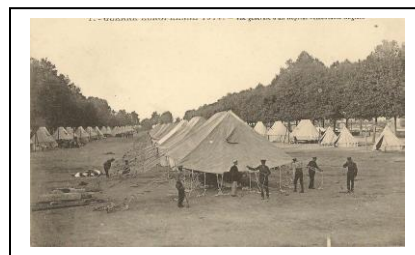
\* \* \* \* \*

On the night of that November 25-26 there was an undocumented incident during which Private Reid incurred accidental injuries...*not in the performance of military duty...to his head and to his groin*. His unit at the time was in the area of Fosse 10 – the term *fosse* being French for the pit-head of a mine - and preparing to move in the direction of the forward area on the next day.

Private Reid was to move in the opposite direction on that next day, at first evacuated to the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance, established by that time also in the vicinity of Fosse 10, before being transferred to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Casualty Clearing Station, further behind the lines to the west at Bruay. He was to remain for treatment there for the next eleven days.

*(Right below: 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)*

Next forwarded on December 12 to the 22<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital in proximity to the village of Camiers, Private Reid was to spend less than a week there before being ordered to two Convalescent Depots: to the 6<sup>th</sup> CD from December 13 to 23; and, just in time for Christmas, to the 5<sup>th</sup> CD at Cayeux where he was to spend a further eighteen days.



On January 10 of the New Year, 1917, Private Reid reported to duty the Canadian Base Depot\* situated in the vicinity of the industrial port-city of Le Havre. Having been deemed as once more...*fit for active service*...on January 13, three days later again he was despatched to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Entrenching Battalion.

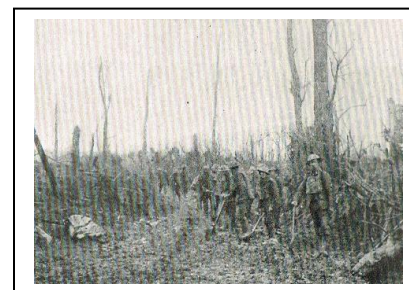


*(Right: The French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)*

*\*One of the primary purposes of the Base Depot was to receive all the incoming Canadian troops from the United Kingdom and to organize and equip them. This having been done, the Depot then arranged for their despatch to their new units at a time and a place that was convenient to the units in question.*

He joined the Battalion on January 20, one of a draft from the Canadian Base Depot to do so on that day at a time when the unit had been posted to the area of Hersin, a community a dozen or so kilometres to the west of the city and mining-centre of Lens. Private Reid was subsequently to serve in the unit's ranks for the following twelve weeks.

*\*These units, as the name suggests, were employed in defence construction and other related tasks. They comprised men who not only had at least a fundamental knowledge and experience of such work but who also had the physique to perform it. However they also came to serve as re-enforcement pools where men awaiting the opportune moment to join their appointed unit might be gainfully employed for a short period of time.*



*(Right above: Canadian troops from an unspecified unit engaged in road construction, this also being a job to which entrenching battalions were assigned. – from Le Miroir or Illustration)*

For all of those twelve weeks the 2<sup>nd</sup> Entrenching Battalion remained in the area of Hersin. Its tasks were multiple and varied: ditch-digging, road and railway construction, carrying, loading and unloading, hut fabrication and general carpentry, street-cleaning in the local communities and escorting prisoners of war working-parties...the War Diary's list continues...

On April 4 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Entrenching Battalion played its subsidiary role, that of reserve pool. On that day it dispersed one-hundred sixty of its *other ranks* to seven different Canadian battalions. Twenty of them – Private Reid one of that number – were despatched to the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Maisnil-Bouché where they reported *to duty* on April 7\*.

*\*While his own files cite April 4, this date is contradicted by the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary which has April 7 as the day on which...‘20 Other Ranks reported this date as reinforcements’.*

\* \* \* \* \*

For the personnel of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) the winter of 1916-1917 had been one of the every-day grind of life in and out of the trenches. There had been little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides. This latter activity was encouraged by the High Command who felt it to be a morale booster which also kept the troops in the right offensive frame of mind: the troops who were ordered to carry them out in general loathed these operations.

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

Towards the end of the month of March, on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Battalion had been withdrawn well to the rear, to Maisnil-Bouché, there to undergo intensive training. The exercises were to continue until, and including, April 7, only two days before the training was to become the real thing.



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

On the final five days, the unit had been sent to become familiar with ground that had been re-arranged so as to resemble the terrain to be attacked.

And as has been recorded in a previous paragraph, the final day of those training exercises was the day on which Private Reid and his re-enforcement draft joined the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Maisnil-Bouché.

(continued)

On April 8... *Battalion less 1 platoon per company moved from MAISNIL BOUCHE to concentration area at BOIS DES ALLEUX. In the evening the Battalion moved up to its position...via cross country route...* (Battalion War Diary).

It apparently was not to pass via those well-documented tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety.

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

On April 9 in that spring of 1917, 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 daily 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 effort at Arras proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive of *Le Chemin des Dames* was a disaster.

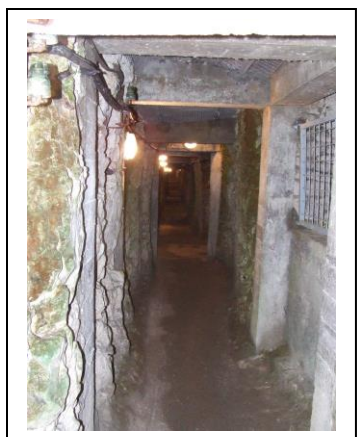
On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity – there was even a British brigade serving under Canadian command - stormed the slopes of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

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



The Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was not responsible for the taking of *Vimy Ridge* itself, but for the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the southern slope and therefore on the right-hand side of the attack. The Battalion's objectives were apparently soon captured and much of the remainder of that day and the next was spent in consolidating these newly-won positions.

The Germans, having lost *Vimy Ridge* and the advantages of the high ground, retreated some three kilometres in front of the Canadians whose further offensives were less successful than that of Easter Monday; while some progress at times was made – at Arleux-en-Gohelle, for example - German counter-attacks often re-claimed ground from the British and Canadian troops – as at Fresnoy in early May.



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

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

There had been, on the first days, April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted, and highly unlikely, *breakthrough* – but such a follow-up of the previous day's success proved to be logistically impossible.



Thus the Germans were gifted the time to close the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

Nor was the remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* to be fought in the manner of the first two days and, by the end of those five weeks, little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success.

By the middle of June the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was in reserve, resting and training – if that is not a contradiction – in the vicinity of the community of Gouy-Servins, once again in the area of the city and mining-centre of Lens.

During that month of June, Private Reid had been busy: he was granted a ten-day period of leave to begin on June 2; in fact, with an allowance for travel it was a *twelve-day* period, which suggests that it may have been back to the United Kingdom. He re-joined his Battalion on June 14, thereupon to immediately report... *sick*.



(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*)

\* \* \* \* \*

Admitted on that same day into an unidentified field ambulance, Private Reid was there diagnosed as having incurred another venereal problem and was thereupon despatched to the 51<sup>st</sup> General Hospital at Étaples on June 17. He was not to be released from treatment there until more than seven weeks later\*.

*\*For this period, following the not-always-followed policies – particularly not for officers - of the British and Canadian Armies vis-à-vis venereal disease, Private Reid during this period of forty-seven days not only forfeited his field allowance of ten cents per diem but was charged fifty cents per day to cover the expenses of his treatment.*

On August 2, upon his discharge from hospital, Private Reid reported to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Base Depot\*, also at Étaples, for duty with *Base Details*.

(continued)

Once more considered to be fit for *active service*, three weeks later, on August 23, he is recorded in his personal military record as having left the 2<sup>nd</sup> CIBD for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Entrenching Battalion at Hersin - but also as having re-joined the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Gouy-Servins – both on that same day.

Neither of these units, however, record any re-enforcements arriving on that particular date or for any number of days either before or after. Be that as it may, Private Reid was then recorded as back with the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion as late as August 28.

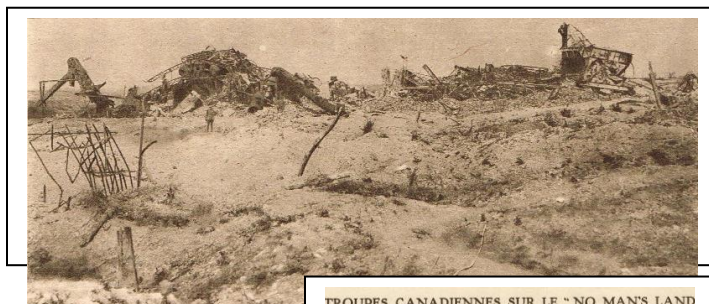
*\*By this time each Canadian Division had a Base Depot to organize its own re-enforcements – thus the 2<sup>nd</sup> Base Depot was responsible for re-enforcements for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division. The system was apparently not very satisfactory as, by the spring of 1918, there was once again just a single Canadian Infantry Base Depot.*

\* \* \* \* \*

In the meantime, during Private Reid’s absence, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been busy. Having spent the remainder of June in the *Rest Area*, on July 1 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered to move forward once more and by July 3 it had relieved two battalions of the British Leicestershire Regiment in the forward area.

*(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 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 also his reserves - from this area, it had also ordered operations to take place at the sector of the front running north-south from Béthune to Lens.



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

One of the primary objectives was to be the so-named *Hill 70* in the outskirts of the mining-centre and city of Lens.

*(Right: Canadian troops advancing under fire across No-Man’s Land in 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 was 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 the city of Lens itself.



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

Objectives were limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it was expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it, and so it proved: on the 16<sup>th</sup> 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 and the Canadian artillery, which had been employing newly-developed procedures, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* remained 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*)



Of course, the Germans were not the only ones to incur casualties: by the time that the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion retired on August 17, the unit had recorded some one-hundred fifty *killed, wounded* and *missing in action*.

The Battalion was nevertheless soon back in the forward area, to be relieved on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the month by which time a further fifty *killed, wounded* and *missing* had been added to the preceding total.

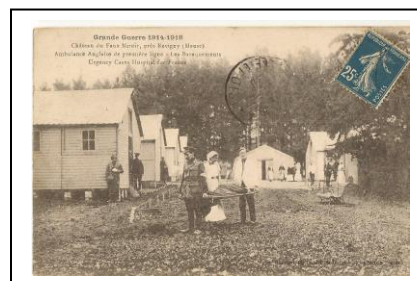
(Right: *Canadian troops in the vicinity of Hill 70 a short time after its capture by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions* – from *Le Miroir*)

After weeks of relatively little infantry activity during the early period of that summer of 1917, this attack on August 15 in the area of *Hill 70* and the city of *Lens* had been intended to be the precursor of weeks of an entire campaign spear-headed by the Canadians.



However, the British offensive further to the north was proceeding less well than intended and the Canadians were to be needed there. Activities in the *Lens Sector* were suspended in early September and for a short period, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to revert to the daily grind of life in the trenches.

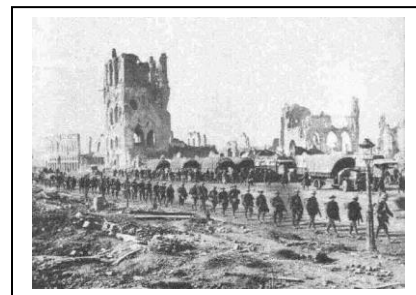
The monotony of this interim period was broken, for Private Reid, by yet a further visit to a medical facility, the 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance near Bruay. Admission was on September 13, and his stay to be of a shorter duration than either of his two previous hospitalizations. It was for treatment for a case of scabies, a condition usually attributable to the presence of lice, of which there was never much shortage in the trenches – and elsewhere – during the *Great War*.



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

Discharged on September 21, Private Reid returned to his unit on that same day.

It was not until the final weeks of October that the Canadians became embroiled in the offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came 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: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. From the week of October 26 until November 3 it was to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair the reverse was true with troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division finally entering the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.



The strength of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion on that November 5 was reported as being twenty-one officers and five-hundred seventy-six other ranks, perhaps just over fifty per cent of regulation battalion numbers.

(Right above: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield during the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)



(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*)

During the three days that they were to spend at the front at this time, the casualties sustained by the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion were, by comparison to others, fairly light: seventeen *killed in action*, sixty-seven *wounded* and six *missing in action*.



(Right above: *The Canadian Memorial which today stands on Passchendaele Ridge in the outskirts of the re-constructed village – photograph from 2015*)

(continued)



In the late evening of November 8 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was withdrawn from the area of the front line, to the westward of Ypres itself. Days later, on or about December 12, the unit was moved out of Belgium and further south again, to Camblain l'Abbé, out of the line, not many kilometres distant to the west of Vimy, and in much the same area where the Battalion had been posted some five months previously.

The month of December offered something a little different to all the Canadian formations which were serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army were open from December 4 until 17, and participation, in at least some units, was in the ninety per cent range\*.

(Right: *Much of the small, nowadays tranquil, village of Camblain l'Abbé – photograph from 2017*)



\*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.

(Right: *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*)



As they had been during the three previous winters, the months from December until March were to be quiet. They were spent by the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion in much the same area and little, if any, confrontational military activity for that period was to be reported in the Battalion War Diary.

And then it was the first day of spring, 1918.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion's war was now to brusquely change from the calm cadence that it had been enjoying since the unit had retired from *Passchendaele*. On March 23 it was moved further south to the area of St-Aubin on the outskirts of Arras, arriving there on the 24<sup>th</sup>. There the Battalion was ordered to be '*standing-by*', ready to move on short notice, owing to expectations of an attack by the enemy.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the Divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, they delivered a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', launched on March 21. The main blow was to fall at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops there.



(continued)

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

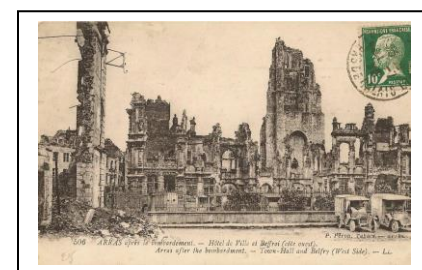
The German advance continued for a month, petering out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was the result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British were the most significant.

*\*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 29<sup>th</sup> Division. It also was successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.*

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



Its War Diary suggests that the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not involved in the heaviest of the fighting. Posted mostly near Wailly, just to the south-west of the city of Arras, the majority of the casualties incurred were due – as they often were - to enemy artillery activity rather than to infantry action. By the end of April the Battalion officers appear to have had nothing more important to discuss than whether to adopt the kilt as part of the regimental uniform.



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

A previous page saw the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion...“standing-by”, ready to move at short notice, owing to expected attack by the enemy... (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry for March 24) That expected enemy attack never came to pass; nor did any others in the Arras Sectors, and by the end of August the situation on both of the offensive fronts had become quieter and more stable.

(Right below: *A photograph of a Canadian working-party – comprised of troops in reserve - carrying supplies of all kinds to the troops in forward positions: The use of the head-straps – known as ‘Tumps’ – was an idea borrowed from Canada’s indigenous peoples. – from Le Miroir*)

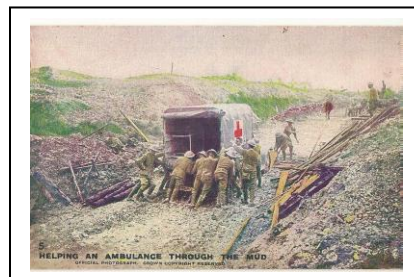
The Battalion remained in the area of St-Aubin for some days until the end of the crisis and then spent the months of May, June in relative calm in the area of Neuville-Vitasse, also south of Arras. However, this calm was broken on occasion – on most days by artillery fire – and on occasion by a raid, such as the one mounted by the 25<sup>th</sup> battalion on June 13:



25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for June 14, 1918: *Situation quiet throughout the day. Weather very fine.*

*At 1.00 a.m. 14.6.18. a party of 6 Officers and 140 Other Ranks, in command of Capt. G.W. ANDERSON, raided the enemy outpost line in the "MAZE", near NEUVILLE VITASSE. The raid was supported by all calibres of artillery, Trench Mortar and Machine Gun fire, and the R.E. put over a discharge of dummy gas projectors. The raid was a complete success, 5 prisoners, including 2 Officers, and 1 Machine Gun being captured, and approximately 50 to 60 of the enemy being killed. Our casualties were – Lieut. E.S. Spurr, M.C., killed, 1 O.R. killed, 22 O.R. wounded and 3 O.R. missing.*

(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*)



**Casualty Report:- Killed in Action – While returning from a raid on enemy trenches at Neuville-Vitasse, he was severely wounded in the leg and arm by fragments of an enemy shell, that burst close to him, and died before he could be taken to a dressing station.**

The son of John Cyrus Reid, former fisherman accidentally killed November 12, 1894, and of Harriet Wood Reid (née Isaacs) – to whom as of June 1 he had allotted a monthly twenty dollars from his pay – of Stepside, Burin, Newfoundland (she later of 51, Longard's Road, Halifax before Box 108, Windsor, Nova Scotia), he was also brother to at least Mary-Ann-Isaacs, James-William, Thomas-Isaacs, to Lavina (sic)-Isaacs and to John-Cyrus.

Private Reid was reported as having been *killed in action* during a raid on enemy lines in the area of Neuville-Vitasse on June 14, 1918.

Mack Reid had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-three years and three months: date of birth in Burin, Newfoundland, January 11, 1893.

Private Mack 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).



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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 26, 2023.