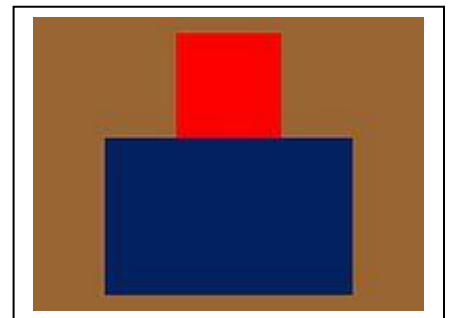


Private Thomas Reid (also found variously as *Reed* and *Read*), Number 415678 of the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on *Vimy Ridge*.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is from the bing.com/images web-site*)



(continued)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as being that of a *miner*, Thomas Reid appears to have left behind him little information of his early life prior to his departure from the Dominion of Newfoundland. When this emigration occurred is not clear although it was undoubtedly at some time before the year 1907.

By that time he had made the acquaintance of a Miss Mabel Arsenau (likely *Arsenault*) whom he was to wed – he at the age of twenty-two, she aged a young fifteen years – in a Church of England ceremony in the town of Glace Bay, Cape Breton, on June 8, 1907.

His wife did not live long after her marriage, as Thomas Reid is recorded as being a widower at the time of his enlistment, nor does it appear that the couple had any surviving children. It may also be that by that time of enlistment – although this is not confirmed – that he was living with his sister – and her husband? – in New Waterford as she is named as next-of-kin on his attestation papers*.

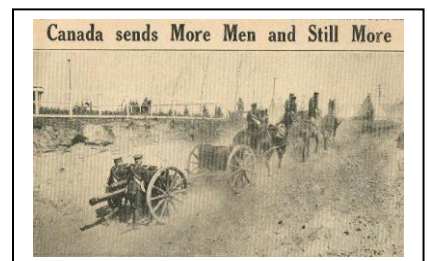
**His sister Agnes was married in 1910 but after that event the family material available from several sources has proved for the moment less easy to confirm.*

While Private Reid's first pay records document that the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services of July 4 of 1915, the report of a medical examination – a procedure undergone on July 6, two days later, which found him to be...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force* – cites his enlistment as already having taken place in New Waterford on June 28.

It is likely that after his enlistment in New Waterford, Private Reid was sent directly to the military encampment at *Valcartier Camp*, Québec, for it was there that he underwent the remainder of the formalities: the aforementioned medical of July 6; his attestation on July 14; and the official conclusion to it all when the Officer Commanding the 40th Battalion, Major – soon-to-be Lieutenant-Colonel - A.G. Vincent, declared – on paper – on the twenty-sixth day of that same month, that...*Thos. Reid...having finally been approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation**.

Major Vincent's newly-mobilized 40th Battalion by this time had already *taken on strength* Private Reid, as of that July 4 when he had been placed on the unit's pay-roll.

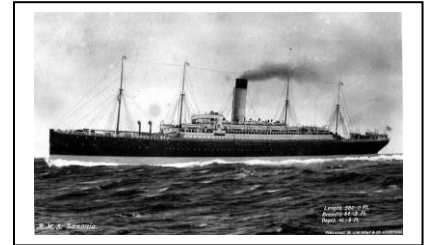
**The 40th Battalion had been mobilized on May 11 of 1915 at Camp Aldershot in Nova Scotia and had undergone its early training there, but it had then been relocated to Camp Valcartier in Québec on June 21. Thus as suggested above, it may very well be that Private Reid travelled there, to Québec, during that twelve-day interim of July 14 to 26.*



(continued)

(Preceding page: *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 not far from Ottawa – and also at some distance from any port – 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*)*

Two drafts from the 40th Battalion had already sailed before the parent unit itself crossed the Atlantic, but these forces were seemingly used upon arrival in England as reinforcements for other units already serving on the Continent. It was on October 18, 1915, that Private Reid and the main body of the Battalion took ship in the port of Québec – in the company of the 41st Battalion of Canadian Infantry – embarking onto His Majesty’s Transport *Saxonia**.



**For some six months during the early days of the Great War, the vessel had served to accommodate German prisoners of war. In March of 1915 she then had reverted to service as a troop transport.*

(Right above: *The image of the Royal Mail Ship Saxonia is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

The vessel sailed on the same date, to dock in the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport ten days later, on October 28. Private Reid’s 40th Battalion was then transported by train to the fledgling Canadian military camp then being established in the vicinity of the villages of Liphook and Bramshott – to which latter community the camp owed its name - in the southern English county of Hampshire.



The 40th Battalion was apparently the first Canadian unit to be stationed there.

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



(Right: *Royal Canadian Legion flags amongst others adorn the interior of St. Mary’s Church in the English village of Bramshott. – photograph from 2016)*

But for exactly how long the unit *remained* posted at *Camp Bramshott* is not clear – although it was long enough for Private Reid to be deprived of three days’ pay for an undisclosed indiscretion from November 16 to 19, 1916. The 40th Battalion, originally destined to be a unit of 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade of the soon-to-be 3rd Canadian Division, apparently soon afterwards was to become re-designated as a reserve battalion and would then be transferred to the Kentish coast, to *Shorncliffe**.

(continued)

****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 aspirations of seeing active service in a theatre of war.***

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



(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)

* * * * *

When exactly this transfer to Kent came about is not clear, but it was not to happen before the final days of the first month of the New Year, 1916, for it was on January 28 that Private Reid was admitted from the Canadian *Camp Bramshott* into the Connaught Military Hospital at the nearby *British Camp Aldershot*.

Not all that long prior to this date Private Reid had spent some time in London in the *Borough of Lambeth*. He likely had travelled from *Camp Bramshott* to the London railway terminal of *Waterloo* and thereabouts had found the companionship of a young lady. It had been this encounter which was later to see him in Connaught Military Hospital*.

****Of no consolation to Private Reid, of course, would have been the knowledge the Borough of Lambeth is where the residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury is located.***

Private Reid was to pass the next twenty-five days at Connaught receiving treatment for his venereal complaint. On February 22, his 40th Battalion having by then been transferred to *Cæsar’s Camp* in the Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* in the county of Kent, he was released from Aldershot to become a responsibility of the military hospital there at the same *Shorncliffe*.

It may well be that this transfer was only a bureaucratic one with Private Reid now becoming a charge of the *Shorncliffe (Canadian) Military Hospital*. Whether that is so is not clear but, whatever the case, only a single day later again, on February 23, he was admitted into the *Cherryinton Military Hospital* in the city of Cambridge, the infirmary specializing in cases such as that of Private Reid.

Twenty-six days afterwards, on March 20, he was discharged back to duty with the 40th Reserve Battalion, now at *Cæsar’s Camp.**

****It is what it appears to be: the site of the 40th Battalion’s camp is thought to have been where Julius Caesar first pitched his tents when he first landed on English soil some two thousand years prior to Private Reid.***

Back to *duty* though now he was, the episode of Private Reid's enforced absence was not over: for him, as for many others in the British and Commonwealth Forces, there was now a financial price to pay.

Venereal disease was frowned upon by certain sectors of the public, thus by certain politicians and thus by the military hierarchy. Therefore there existed a policy that hospitalized soldiers be deprived of a percentage of their already meagre pay and of all of any allowances to compensate for the medical attention received*.

**It is apparently true to say officers were often favoured as their diagnoses at times were submitted as NYD (Not Yet Determined) or PUO (Pain of Undetermined Origin). Thus both financial retribution and social stigma were often avoided.*

(Composite from a Record Sheet and Pay Sheet) *Venereal: Stoppages 29 X 50 cents (from one-dollar daily pay) plus 29 X allowance (10 cents per diem) – 21/2/16 to 20/3/16: the total came to seventeen dollars and forty cents.*

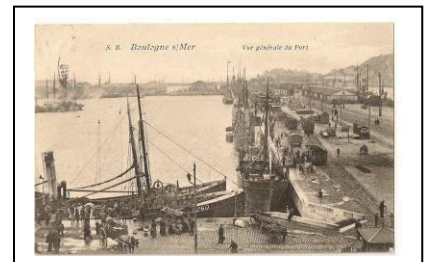
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Cæsar's Camp was, as were several others, a subsidiary of the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* which had seen the arrival and departure through its gates of the 2nd Canadian Division on its way to the Continent in September of 1915. It was then also to witness the transfer of units of the 3rd Canadian Division during the autumn of 1915 and the winter which followed – as shall be seen - as they left England through the nearby harbour and town of Folkestone, to disembark some two hours later in Boulogne on the French coast opposite.



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

Private Reid was now to spend the next six months and two weeks with the Battalion at *Shorncliffe*, with nothing particular to report: on April 18 he was admonished...*for drunkenness*; during the month of May, after dental treatment and having passed before a medical board he was deemed to be...*fit*; and on September 25 he penned a Will in which he left his all to his sister Agnes.



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

Then arrived the month of October: on the third day of the month Private Reid was *struck off strength* by the 40th Battalion as a preliminary to his being sent on *active service* to the Continent and placed on the nominal roll of the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*), already serving on the *Western Front*, on the same day.

(continued)

By that juncture of the *Great War*, 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 much of the personnel of the Canadian units which had remained in England was now to be deployed.



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

Private Reid crossed to France – likely through Folkestone and Boulogne – on the night of either October 4-5, 1916, or the next. He was thereupon transported to *Rouelles Camp*, the Canadian Base Depot situated in proximity to the industrial city of Le Havre at the estuary of the River Seine.

It is not recorded when he was despatched to his new unit, but it *is* documented that Private Reid reported *to duty* on October 15. By that date the 26th Battalion had just retired from the *First Battle of the Somme* and had moved north into the *Angres II Sector*, in proximity to the mining-centre and city of Lens. On the morning of October 15 the unit had still been in the rear area, at Barlin; on that evening, it was to move up to the forward area again – and with it Private Reid.

This northern area had been and still was an active front and Lens was already showing it by then as Private Reid was to soon appreciate; but at least it was not *the Somme*.

* * * * *

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



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

Private Reid's Battalion was to spend the subsequent several months of the autumn of 1915 and the winter of 1915-1916 in the same area. During none of the winters of the *Great War* was there much concerted infantry action of any consequence on the *Western Front* and this one was to prove to be no exception. This period of relative calm had, however, allowed the unit personnel to adapt to the conditions – to the rigours, the routines and also to the perils – of life in and out of the trenches*.

(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.***

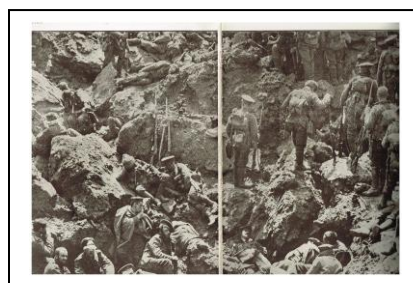
The unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.

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: 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)



After that quiet winter, from March 27 up until and including April 17, 1916 – these the official dates - the 26th Battalion had been involved in the Action of the St. Eloi Craters. The craters had been formed when, on that March 27, the British had detonated a series of mines - underground galleries filled with explosives – under the enemy lines. The eruptions had been immediately followed with an assault by British infantry units.



The Canadians were ostensibly to take over from the British in order to occupy the presumed newly-won territory; however, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which turned the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, plus a resolute German defence, were to greet the newcomers who had taken over from the by-then exhausted British on or about April 4-5-6.

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

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

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

Then from June 2 to 13 had been fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the areas of *Sanctuary Wood*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Maple Copse*, the village of *Hooge* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps.

The Canadians had, it would seem, been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions dominating the Canadian trenches when the Germans had delivered an offensive, which was to overrun the forward areas and was, in fact, to rupture the Canadian lines, an opportunity which, fortunately, they had 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, perhaps a little bit impulsively, had reacted by organizing an impromptu counter-attack on the following day, an assault intended, at a minimum, to recapture the lost ground of June 2.

Badly organized and supported, this operation was to prove a horrendous experience: many of the intended attacks were never to go in – those that had done so, had gone in piecemeal and the assaulting troops had been cut to shreds - the enemy had remained where he had been – in captured Canadian positions - and the Canadians had been left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.

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



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

**Officially coming into service at midnight of December 31, 1915 and January 1 of 1916, the 3rd Canadian Division had trained for a period in tandem with the 1st Canadian Division in the Ploegsteert Sector before, in March and April of 1916, having become responsible for a south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

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

By the time that the 26th Battalion had moved up to the front again on June 14, the action at *Mount Sorrel* and its vicinity had been all but over. During the preceding night of June 12-13 the Canadians had once again attacked and, thanks to better organization and a good artillery barrage, had taken back almost all of the lost ground.

(continued)

Both sides had now been back much where they had been just eleven days earlier – and the cemeteries were to be a little bigger and more numerous.

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



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



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

(Right: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooze, Sanctuary Wood Railway Dugouts 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 second half of that following month of July was spent at first in *Alberta Camp* and then further back again, at Brigade Reserve in the *Vierstraat Sector*. To compensate for this likely monotonously-calm period, the 26th Battalion was then posted back into the forward trenches for twenty-two of the first twenty-four days of August.

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

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



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

****The Canadian-produced Ross rifle was an excellently-manufactured weapon; its accuracy and range were superior to that of many of its rivals, but on the battlefield it had not proved its worth. In the dirty conditions and when the necessity arose for its repeated use - and using mass-produced ammunition which at times was less than perfect - it jammed, leaving its user defenceless at a critical moment.***

A week later the 26th Battalion had marched to the railway-station in Arques to entrain for the journey southwards to Conteville. A day spent resting in billets had been followed by five more on foot *not* resting, a march which had terminated on September 11 at the *Brickfields (la Briqueterie)*, a large military camp in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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

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

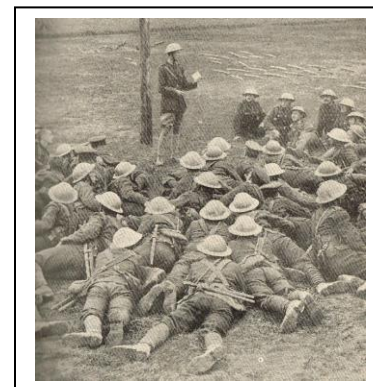
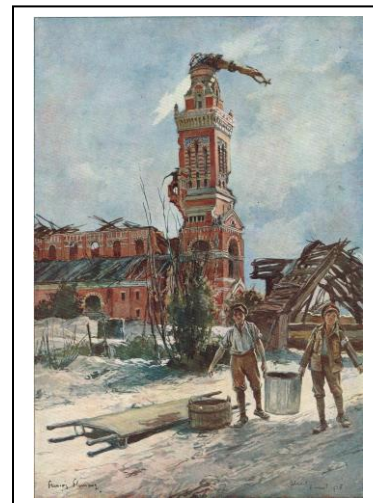
On the first day of *First Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions having been the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment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

As the Battle had progressed, troops from the Empire (*Commonwealth*) were to be brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians 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 Courcelette.

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

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



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



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

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



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



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

On September 28 the 26th Battalion had been ordered forward once again, on this occasion to play a role in *the Battle of Thiepval Ridge*, more specifically on the right flank of the advance, in the area of the German redoubt of *Regina Trench*. The operation would prove to be a further failure for the price of one-hundred eighty-two more casualties.



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

On October 3 the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*), having retired from the forward area, was soon to be preparing to disengage entirely from the *First Battle of the Somme*. It had done so on October 10.



The Battalion had withdrawn towards the westward before having turned northwards to pass behind and to the west of, the battered city of Arras. Having marched for the following five days, the unit had then passed into what was to become more and more an area of Canadian responsibility, the sectors northwards of Arras as far as the venerable town of Béthune.

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

By the evening of October 15 the 26th Battalion had completed its relief of a British unit in the *Angres II Sector*, in the area of the city of Lens, and had occupied positions in the front lines. On the next day, the 16th, the Battalion War Diarist had entered simply: *Battalion in trenches Conditions quiet, weather wet.*



(Right: *This is what was to become of Lens before the Great War ended – from a vintage post-card of 1919*)

And it had been, of course, during those latter days, that the 26th Battalion War Diarist had recorded... *Reinforcements joined the Battn. this date as follows: 32 O.R (or 52 or 82).*

Private Rose had arrived to take his place in the ranks of the 26th Canadian Infantry Battalion (*New Brunswick*).

* * * * *

The conditions documented by the War Diarist were not to remain quiet for long: on the morrow of the Battalion's occupation of front-line positions, the enemy would explode a mine opposite a trench held by 'D' Company of the Battalion. The remainder of the day was thereupon spent repairing the damages and consolidating the defences. There were no casualties reported on that day but the incident may have reminded some of the troops – perhaps particularly any newcomers - that things could still be bad, even away from *the Somme*.

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

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

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

During the period of that winter of 1916-1917 there had been little in the way of concerted infantry action by either side. There had been at least two large raids conducted locally by the 26th Battalion, and patrols and wiring parties were an everyday part of life, but this seems to have been the extent of offensive operations in all that time.



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

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

(Right: *A detachment of Canadian troops going up towards the line during the winter of 1916-1917 – from Illustration*)



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

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

Among these exercises were to be some different developments: the use of captured enemy weapons; each unit and each man to be familiar with his role during the upcoming battle; plaster-of-Paris scale models and 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.

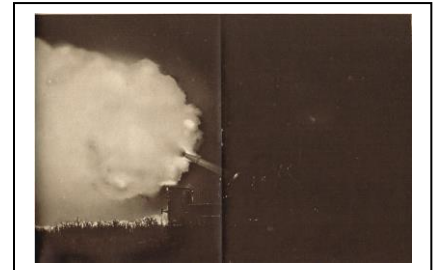
It was as late as April 8 before Private Reid's Battalion moved forward towards the assembly areas for the attack and not until four o'clock the following morning that the last elements reached their jumping-off posts.

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 had been 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 below: *A heavy British artillery piece spews its venom into the middle of the night during the course of the preparatory bombardment before the First Battle of Arras. – 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 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.*



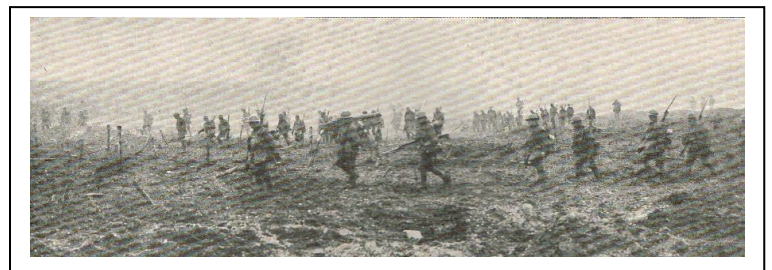
On April 9 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the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



While the British campaign would prove an overall disappointment, the French offensive of *le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

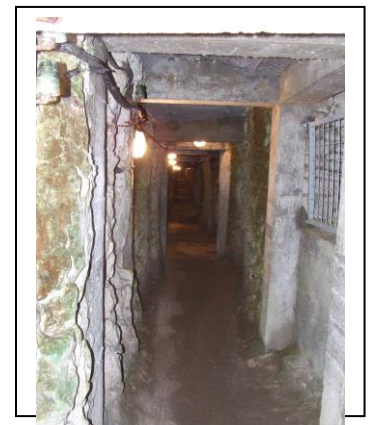
(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, has stood on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

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



On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, on this occasion acting as a single, autonomous entity – there were even British troops under 2nd Canadian Division command - stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



**It appears that the Germans may already have been prepared to lose the Ridge, and had readied positions further to the rear. And in any case, the Canadians had been ordered not to press any advantage but...to consolidate.*

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



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

It would then be an all-too-short ten days, until April 25, before the unit was ordered forward again, into support positions where, towards the end the month, its personnel was then employed in digging new trench systems so as to be in a position to support further Canadian attacks, these going in late April at Arleux-en-Gohelle and later, in early May, twice at Fresnoy.

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

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

On July 1, Dominion Day, however, Private Reid's 26th Battalion was on its way up to the forward area and by the following day was in Brigade Reserve, once again in the *Angres Sector* in the vicinity of the mining centre of Lens.

On the 6th the unit was once more in – or in the area of - the front lines and by the 20th the Battalion War Diarist was recording preparations being made for... *the coming show*.

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



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

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

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

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

Those expecting *Hill 70* to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of the 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 that of the city of Lens itself.



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

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



Objectives had been limited and were for the most part to be achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the seeming 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 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 and the Canadian artillery, which was employing newly-developed procedures, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* remained in Canadian hands.

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

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

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



At this point the Germans counter-attacked the positions held by the sister 24th Battalion but they were driven off.

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

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



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

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

But Private Reid was not one of those to march there in the 26th Battalion's ranks.

The son of Thomas Reid*, labourer and fisherman, and of Rebecca Reid (née *Mugford*, married November 14, 1871, then deceased in child-birth September 17, 1891, at Whitbourne) of Juniper Stump and Salmon Cove (District of Port de Grave) and then of Whitbourne, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Mary-Jane, to Elizabeth, James-John, Isaac, Susanna, Agnes, Annie, Fannie and Bertha.

Private Reid had penned a Will on September 25, 1916, in which he was to leave his all to his sister Agnes; he had also allotted to her the sum of one hundred dollars on a single occasion, January 5, 1917.

**This may be the Thomas Reid of Whitbourne to be found in the 1921 Census, at that time (re-)married to Emma in or about 1900 and with whom he was to have four children. The Isaac also found in the Census may be the sibling Isaac listed above.*

Private Reid was at first reported as *wounded* and then as *wounded and missing* on August 15, 1917. A casualty report cites: *Previously reported wounded and missing, now for official purposes presumed to have died on or since 15/8/17 – dated February 2, 1918.*

(Right: *The sacrifice of Thomas Reid is honoured on the War Memorial in the community of Whitbourne, Newfoundland. – photograph from 2016(?)*)



Thomas Reid had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-nine years and two months: date of birth at Brigus (from attestation papers where Brigus is found as *Brighurst*), August 15, 1884 – also the date of his death. However, other sources – *Ancestry.ca* original birth records and parish records – cite the date as February 28, 1892*.

**Whether the fact that Thomas Reid was illiterate was a factor in the discrepancies is a matter of speculation.*

Private Thomas Reid 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 23, 2023.