



Driver Harold Albert Russell (Number 43768) of the 1st Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Noeux-les-Mines Communal Cemetery. Grave reference II.H.35.

(Right: The image of the Canadian Field Artillery (Style "A") cap badge is from the E-Bay web-site.)



(continued)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a sailor, Harold Albert Russell was possible the young man who took ship on the SS *Bruce* from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland to North Sydney, Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. The date was October 2, 1909, and the destination of the twenty-one year old Harold Russell was ostensibly Bangor, Maine.

Whether or not the above-named is in fact the subject of this military biography, the records* show that *our* Harold Albert Russell presented himself for enlistment at the military camp at Valcartier, Québec, during the month of September, 1914. A first medical report on September 3, which recorded him as...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force*...also suggests that at that same time he was *taken on strength* by the 3rd Battalion (*Toronto Regiment*) which had been created only the day before, on September 2, and which was also to train at Valcartier.

**His attestation papers also document that, to the question...‘Do you now belong to the Active Militia?’...he replied...‘3rd Regt CGA, St. John NB’. The CGA is, of course, the Canadian Garrison Artillery, but there are no further details of this service revealed anywhere else among his papers.*

Private Russell then underwent attestation and a further medical examination on the 25th day of that month, *this* medical report somewhat confusingly having recorded September 23, two days prior, as the day on which he in fact enlisted and was attached to the Divisional Ammunition Column* as a Gunner**.



**Later to be designated as the 1st Divisional Ammunition Column at the same time as the Canadian Division - with the advent of the 2nd Canadian Division - logically became the 1st Canadian Division.*

***His records bear the rank of Gunner, this being later amended to Driver with his transfer to the Divisional Train.*

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

The formalities of Gunner Russell’s enlistment were not brought to an official conclusion until more than two months later when, on December 4, 1914, the commanding officer of the Divisional Ammunition Column, Lieutenant-Colonel John Jenkin Penhale, declared – on paper – that...*H.A. Russell...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

By that December 4 of 1914, a great deal of water had passed under the metaphoric bridge.

(continued)

Some of the thirty officers and five-hundred sixty-one *other ranks* of the Divisional Ammunition Column had boarded His Majesty's Transport *Megantic** and the others on *Montezuma* at Québec on September 30.

Driver Russell's detachment on *Megantic* was to take passage with the Number 1 Canadian Field Ambulance as well as with the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station – both of which had embarked on September 25* - and also the 15th Battalion of Canadian Infantry whose date of boarding is not clear.

(Right below: *The image of Megantic is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

On that September 30, *Megantic* is recorded as having sailed from Québec. If so, she, like other vessels, would have moved downstream by easy stages until on October 3 she had rendezvoused at the Gaspé with the other vessels and the five naval escorts of the convoy which was to carry the *Canadian Expeditionary Force* overseas.



In the meantime the Number 1 Canadian Field Ambulance was undertaking the necessary vaccinations and other medical services on board ship.

From the Gaspé the thirty-one transports and their naval escorts sailed eastward on October 3 of that 1914. On October 5, as the formation passed along the south coast of Newfoundland, the small Bowring Brothers' steamer *Florizel* sailed to meet and join it. She was carrying the *First Five-Hundred* of the Newfoundland Regiment to war.

Following a smooth – from all points of view – crossing of the Atlantic, the convoy entered the English south-coast naval harbour of Plymouth-Devonport during the afternoon of October 14*.

Many of the arriving units, however, were obliged to remain on ship for days before their debarkation could be effected.



**The original destination had been the much larger port-city of Southampton, but a submarine scare had forced a change in plans.*

(Right above: *A number of the ships of the convoy which had carried the Canadian Expeditionary Force to England, at anchor in Plymouth Hoe on October 14, 1914 – from The War Illustrated*)

It was to be October 16 before the sixteen officers and four-hundred forty-three* *other ranks* of the Divisional Ammunition Column disembarked from *Megantic*, commencing at two o'clock in the afternoon and completing the exercise four hours later. From the port Gunner Russell's unit then marched to Mill Bay railway station, there at ten o'clock that evening to take a train to the large British military establishment on the Salisbury Plain.

****The unit's nominal roll numbers twenty-four officers and some five-hundred seventy-five other ranks. Logically, those not on Megantic travelled on Montezuma, approximate one hundred-forty all ranks – and the horses.***

Patney Station was reached some five hours later at twenty minutes past three in the morning. From there the unit – less fifty of the personnel who were by then suffering from food poisoning - was then to march a distance of eight miles (some thirteen kilometres) to the camp at *West Down North*, where tents had been pitched to await the Column's arrival.

The following days were to be spent organizing the unit's camp and in particular preparing for the arrival of the horses which had crossed the ocean with their handlers on *Montezuma*. Even though the Army was becoming mechanized, by far the greater part of the transport was still provided by natural horse-power.

However, when *Montezuma* had disembarked her equine charges, it was discovered that there had been some mismanagement: horses of the 1st Battalion had been placed on board instead of those of the Column. The number of extra horses had consequently meant no space for the Column's wagons which had thus been left behind at Québec*.

****Nor were all horses alike. If those of the 1st Battalion were the officers' riding horses then they would likely have been useless to the Divisional Ammunition Column whose need was for draught animals.***

By the end of the month things were returning to normal: the number of horses had risen to almost the establishment strength of seven-hundred nine; the unit's forge – and therefore its blacksmiths - was working; more than eighty per cent of the missing wagons had either been found or replaced; unit personnel was only some fifty off full strength; an inspection had been held and the horse-grooming found to be wanting; and it was raining.



(Right above: *The personnel of a Royal Horse Artillery forge and blacksmith's shop just prior to the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

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

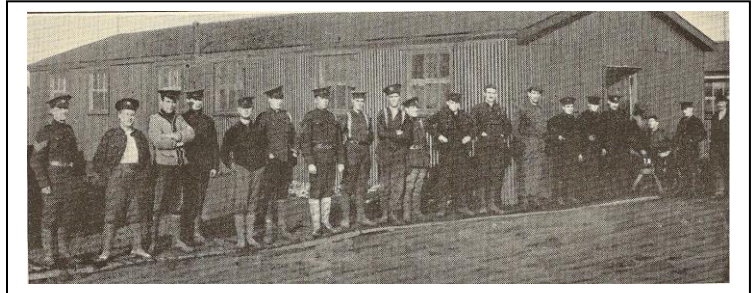
****Colonials they may have been, but at this early stage of the Great War, some eighty percent of Canadian Army personnel had been born in the British Isles.***

The soldiers of the Divisional Ammunition Column, however, while necessarily undertaking certain training exercises common to all units, physical exercises and route marches for example, were also engaged in those perhaps more pertinent to their particular service: Gunner Russell and his horses were to undergo specialized training to hook in and harness at speed and under duress.

The months of that late autumn and of the following winter were to be just as hectic in other ways: There were to be visits from politicians and generals – and one even from the King and Queen, with the requisite preparations for such an occasion.

More supplies and more horses arrived...as did the rains followed by snow, by which time some of the drill which had been absent during those first days and weeks had found its way into the busy schedule of Gunner Russell's unit.

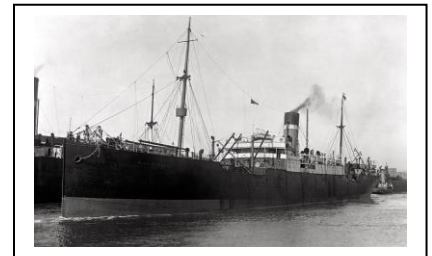
On February 4, 1915, the Canadian Division marched to a review area where it was inspected by His Majesty, King George V and the War Minister, Lord Kitchener*.



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

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

By the time of that final royal review, the Divisional Ammunition Column was stationed at Tidworth where it had spent the first week of February gathering and organizing for the imminent transfer to the continent. There were to be eight trains for men, animals and vehicles to be readied for departure on February 8 and then to be sent on their way to the docks at Avonmouth, Bristol.



Everything proceeded well and the trains were sent *ahead* of schedule.

(Right above: *The photograph of the ship City of Benares is from the Shipspotting.com web-site.*)

On the next day, February 9, upon arrival at dockside, the personnel of the DAC boarded the HMT *City of Benares* and a second ship, HMT *Rossetti*, for the crossing of the English Channel to France. The unit was to be in the company of the Number 3 Canadian Field Ambulance as well as the Divisional Signals Company and the Divisional Cyclist Company. The vessels both sailed at or about mid-night.

**The DAC's War Diarist apparently travelled to France on board the City of Benares; of Rossetti there is no mention. One must assume that the two ships experienced the same sort of passage since nothing to the contrary has been recorded.*

The *City of Benares* dropped anchor in the St-Nazaire roads late in the afternoon of February 11 although its passengers were not to disembark until the following morning, February 12. After they had landed, the troops were to spend much of the remainder of the day in unloading the vessel as the local dockers and stevedores appeared to be on strike. The task was accomplished by mid-night.

On the morrow, Saturday, February 13, there were to be four trains to transport the DAC to the north of the country. It was not until half-past seven in the evening that the first train began its journey, the remaining three then leaving at intervals of three hours.

Their destination was the town of Hazebrouck to which to travel from St-Nazaire is a journey of some seven-hundred kilometres. The first train carrying the DAC arrived at its destination some twenty-seven hours later, at ten-thirty in the evening of February 15, having thus galloped along at an average of some twenty-six kilometres per hour*.

Just how far it was from the station to the billets of both men and horses is not clear from the diary, but it was reportedly a quarter past six in the morning before anyone slept.

(Right: *The northern French town of Hazebrouck, the photograph likely taken between the Wars – from a vintage post-card*)

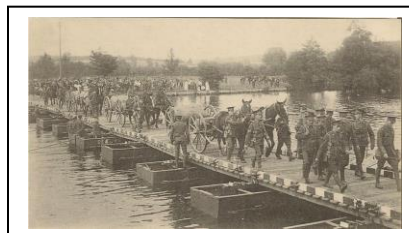


There appears to be no report in the DAC War Diary concerning the arrival of any of the subsequent trains. One may only presume that the War Diarist was not there to greet them at the station.

**Compared to the experiences of other troops, this was fast.*

Only days later, Gunner Russell was busy acquainting himself with the Column's authorities: having absented himself *without leave* for four days, he was sentenced to forfeit fourteen day's pay. The fact that he was now on *active service* undoubtedly accentuated the gravity of the offence.

From the time of its arrival in mid-February until mid-April, the Canadian Division* was stationed in the Fleurbaix Sector – the Ordnance Depot at Cæstre - to the south and west of the northern French town of Armentières. This was also just southward of the Franco-Belgian frontier which the formation would cross two months hence.



(Right above: *Troops on the march, here crossing a pontoon bridge, in the north of France: This is surely from the early period of the Great War as there is not a single steel helmet in sight. – from a vintage post-card*)

During that same initial period of service on the Continent the Divisional Ammunition Column was gradually becoming organized. The unit's prime task – having collected the various units' needs from the principal dump, the Ammunition Park - was to deliver them to the three infantry brigades of the Division and also to its artillery. This having been accomplished, the infantry brigades were then responsible for accommodating the needs of their own infantry battalions, and the artillery brigades their own batteries.

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The quantities of ammunition required were already prodigious: by the end of the war they were to have become astronomical: On March 4, a routine day, the DAC issued to the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade Ammunition Column, four-hundred quick-firing shrapnel shells (just under over five tons weight) and three-hundred thousand rounds of .303 small-arms ammunition for rifles and machine-guns.

On March 5, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade received one-hundred fifty-two Q-F shrapnel shells and one-hundred forty-five of .303 ammunition. Meanwhile, on that same day, the 2nd CI Brigade required one-hundred thousand rounds of .303 - and there were also seventy-five thousand rounds of .45 Colt automatic ammunition to distribute.

Even with these numbers having been delivered, the Divisional Ammunition Column was still able to report ...*We have on hand 862,000 .303 ball...5507 18 pr shrapnel...*

(Right: *A British eighteen-pounder quick-firing artillery piece, the mainstay of the British and Empire (Commonwealth) artillery forces during the Great War, here seen at the Imperial War Museum, London – photograph from 2011(?)*)



After two-month's service in the *Fleurbaix Sector* the Canadian Division was ordered north into Belgium, and into the north-eastern sector of the *Ypres Salient**. On April 7, 1915, the Divisional Ammunition Column began to make the transfer**.

**As it approached the remnants and rubble of Ypres, the front line became a bulge which encircled the entire eastern area of the medieval city and its outskirts. This bulge was the Ypres Salient – or just 'the Salient'. Already having earned a reputation as a dangerous place, it was to become one of the most lethal theatres of the entire Western Front.*

***Of course, it was to be the infantry that was posted to the Salient, the support troops being well behind the lines and further to the west. The Divisional Ammunition Column, while much of its work would be on Belgian soil, was at first to be based near the French town of Steenvoorde and its head-quarters established on the French side of the Franco-Belgian frontier.*

Gunner Russell's DAC began to move toward Steenvoorde on April 7 and had settled into its new surroundings – according to the Canadian Division's War Diary – by the following day. This appears to be correct, except to say that the first area to which it had been directed – this according to the *unit's* War Diary - ...*proved to be quite unsuitable*. By the morrow, apparently, further arrangements had been made and all was well.

It would appear that the priority for the next few days was to provide the Canadian troops newly-arriving in *the Salient* with ammunition, not only for immediate use but also to create a reserve stock... *This is necessary as the trenches are being taken over from French troops which do not of course use the .303 ammunition and so there would be no ammunition in the trenches or in rear...to start with* (Excerpt from DAC War Diary entry for April 14, 1915).

On April 16 alone, to this end, one million, three-hundred sixty thousand rounds of .303 ammunition were despatched by the DAC to the various units requesting them.

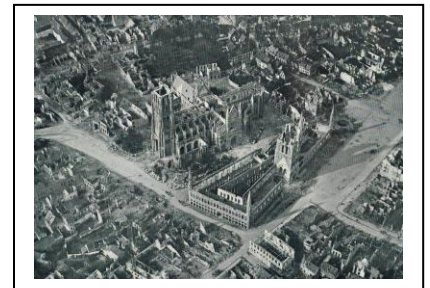
Days later, following a general move forward towards Ypres by all the Canadian forces, the DAC forsook its billets in the area of Steenvoorde, traversed the frontier, and took up quarters to the north-east of the town of Poperinghe. The date was April 20, 1915; two days later, on April 22, the Germans struck.

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

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



The *2nd Battle of Ypres* was to see the first use of chlorine gas by anyone during the *Great War*. It was later to become an everyday event and, with the introduction of protective measures such as advanced gas-masks, the gas was to prove no more dangerous than the rest of the military arsenals of the warring nations. But on this first occasion, to inexperienced troops without the means to combat it, the yellow-green cloud of chlorine proved overwhelming.



(Right above: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2nd Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)

The cloud was at first noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon of April 22. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left wavered then broke, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered.

Then a retreat, not always very cohesive, became necessary while, at the same time, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 1st Infantry Brigade were moved forward to support the efforts of the French and of the Canadian 3rd Infantry Brigade.



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

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

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



(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after several Canadian battalions occupied its west bank– to the left – at the end of April, 1915 - photograph from 2014*)

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

As for the Divisional Ammunition Column, on the evening of that April 22...An order came in at 8.10 pm from Canadian Divisional Artillery Headquarters to “send up lots of ammunition”. At 8.40 pm 2800 18-pr Shrapnel, 200 Lyddite 4.5 How (howitzer), and 600 000 of .303 ball were on the road to the refilling point. The supply was kept in circulation during the whole night. The Canadian Ammunition Park...kept us well filled up. All our horses, wagons and personnel were kept going during the night... (Excerpt from DAC War Diary entry for April 22, 1915)



Almost seven-thousand shells and well over a millions rounds of .303 small-arms ammunition were distributed during the first twenty-four hours of the battle.

The second twenty-four hours was almost as busy according once more to the DAC War Diary entry of April 24: three-thousand two-hundred shells in total and a further eight-hundred forty-five thousand .303 rounds were supplied. It was to continue thus until, in fact, some units were reporting an over-supply of ammunition.

By Sunday, April 25, as might be expected after some seventy-two hours of battle, not only the personnel but also the horses were becoming more than a little jaded, to the point where concern was being expressed for the animals’ condition. Indeed, certain units were beginning to report that some horses were no longer capable of performing.



(Right above: *Innocent victims of the conflict: an artist’s portrayal of dead horses in the Grande Place (Grand’Place) at Ypres during the battle of the spring of 1915 – from Illustration*)

(continued)

Fortunately, the situation was by this time stabilizing and the demands on the supply trains and columns were becoming less heavy. Not only that, but replacement horses were being received from some of the cavalry units which were unable to undertake any of the fighting in the trenches*.

**The cavalry was to be of little use from the late autumn of 1914 until the summer of 1918 when the war once again was to become one of movement. In fact, the Canadian Mounted Rifle Regiments were soon to lose all their horses and, officially at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916, became regular infantry battalions.*



(Right above: *From a later period of the Great War, Canadian cavalry patrolling an area behind the lines – from Illustration*)

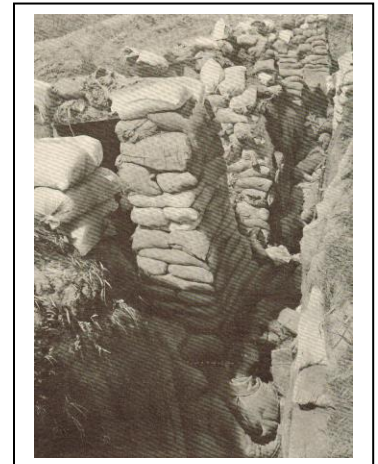
By Friday April 30, the DAC was supplying fewer than one-hundred thousand rounds per day of the .303 ammunition and fewer shells than on the days preceding. And although the fighting was to continue, the Canadians were to be less and less implicated and the infantry battalions were being withdrawn westward into northern France. There they were to rest, to re-organize and to re-enforce before then being re-called to fight another battle.

As for the Divisional Ammunition Column, it was now to be re-billeted on May 7 in the border area to the south of Ypres. A week later it was ordered to move once more, on this occasion to the vicinity of the community of St-Venant, further across the frontier into France.

Gunner Russell's unit was now about to play its role during the confrontations at Festubert and at Givenchy.

It was only about two weeks after the Canadians had retired from the 2nd Battle of Ypres that they had been ordered to join British and Indian forces in northern France, to that part of the *Western Front* which was to be found in the areas of the afore-mentioned communities of Festubert and Givenchy. The French were about to undertake a major offensive just further south again and had asked for British support, a limited offensive to divert German attention and troops from the French effort.

(Right: *Captured German positions in the French-occupied area just down the line from Festubert and Givenchy: The trenches are still primitive compared to the complex labyrinths which they would soon become. – from Illustration*)



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

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

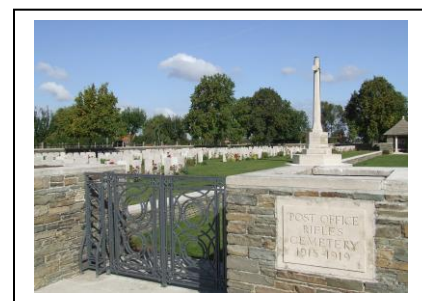
The French effort – using the same tactics - had likewise been a failure but on an even larger scale; it cost them just over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded and missing*.



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

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

On and about the final day of May the Canadian units which had fought at Festubert had been ordered further south to Givenchy-les-la-Bassée*, a small village not far distant to the south of Festubert. Despatched into the forward trenches in the middle of the month of June to support British efforts, the Canadians were to incur the same sort of results, although fewer in number – fourteen killed, seventy-nine wounded - from having repeated some of the same errors as at Festubert.



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

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

On June 17 the Canadian Division had begun to retire from the entire area of northern France, to fall back into Belgium*. Once there it had taken over responsibility for the *Ploegsteert Sector*, just on the Belgian side of the frontier.

****The (by now) 1st Canadian Divisional Ammunition Column must have been one of the few exceptions to this rule as it remained based south of the frontier.***

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



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(Preceding page: *Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, Ploegsteert Sector, a mine crater from the time of the June, 1917, British offensive in the foreground – photograph from 2014*)

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

In the mean-time, it was not to be until the night of June 26-27, 1915, that the DAC left its quarters and positions in proximity to the town of Béthune, to move into new billets to the south-east of Bailleul.

Logically, it was one of the last of the Canadian units to leave the sector as unexpended ammunition was to be returned to it: there was a shortage of shells at this period of the *Great War* – and the ones available were not always very good. Those that had been distributed had of necessity been strictly rationed.

(Right below: *The re-built town of Bailleul almost a century after the visit by the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade: much of the damage to be done to it was the result of the later fighting in the spring of 1918. – photograph from 2010.*)

The billets at Bailleul had been inherited from the 48th Divisional Ammunition Column, an Imperial (*British*) unit and...*were found to be in an unsanitary condition by our Medical Officer*. However, most problems had subsequently been put right – by nine o'clock the next morning. The only thing to lack apparently was enough water for the horses, and the only criticism offered by General Alderson, Commander-in-Chief of the (by-now) 1st Canadian Division who inspected on June 30, was that some men were badly shaved and some horses were badly shod.



Nineteen days after the General's inspection, Gunner Russell was charged for a second time for having been *absent without leave* from his unit. There appear once again to be few details recorded of the incident except that for those three days absence he was awarded five days of Field Punishment Number 1.

Only one month later again, Gunner Russell was hospitalized. On September 17, 1915, he was admitted into the 3rd Casualty Clearing Station at Bailleul where he was diagnosed as having a venereal problem. Three days later he was forwarded to the 22nd General Hospital at Camiers, and two days later again transferred onward to the 9th Stationary Hospital, by that time established at Rouen. There he underwent further treatment for three weeks even though the problem was now deemed to be *slight*.

Gunner Russell was released from hospital on October 12, 1915, to be sent to report to Base Details where the jobs – usually temporary – were the maintenance and amelioration of camp facilities. This may well have been at the new Canadian Base Depot opened only days prior at Le Havre where he remained until the last day of that month.

Despatched from Le Havre to re-join his unit in the field, he did so three days later, on November 3, the 1st Canadian Divisional Ammunition Column at the time still operating in the *Ploegsteert Sector* and headquartered in the area between Bailleul and Neuve-Église on the Franco-Belgian frontier. It was to remain there until the beginning of April 1916.

There was little infantry activity – apart from patrols and the occasional raids, large and small, during any of the four winters of the *Great War*, and that period of 1915-1916 was no exception. A list of the ammunition dispensed by the 1st DAC during the *entire* month of March, 1916, particularly of .303 rifle and machine-gun bullets (the term *ball* is used) - when compared to the numbers expended during the 2nd *Battle of Ypres* - illustrates this:

<i>Shrapnel 18 pr.</i>	<i>...14504 Rds (rounds)</i>
<i>H.E. (high explosive) 18 pr.</i>	<i>...2247 Rds</i>
<i>Shrapnel 4.5 How. (howitzer)</i>	<i>...125 Rds</i>
<i>H.H. 4.5 How.</i>	<i>...2716 Rds</i>
<i>.303 ball</i>	<i>...319 000 Rds</i>
<i>.600</i>	<i>...35 Rds</i>



(Right: A British – and Commonwealth – 4.5 inch howitzer on display at *Firepower*, the museum of the Royal Artillery at *Woolwich*, now unfortunately closed – photograph from 2013)

At the time of Gunner Russell’s admission for medical care, in mid-September of 1915, the 2nd Canadian Division had made its appearance on the Continent. Most of its personnel and equipment had passed through the English harbour and town of Folkestone and the French port of Boulogne before having immediately been despatched to occupy the sectors in Belgium just north of where the 1st Canadian Division was serving.

The 3rd Canadian Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. Some of its units had already been stationed on the Continent by that time, others to arrive from the United Kingdom some two months afterwards. The Division was to have no artillery of its own before that July of 1916: up until that time the Royal Artillery was to supply its needs. Until March 1916, it served in much the same area as the 1st Canadian Division, in the *Ploegsteert Sector**.

**For both of these newly-arrived formations it was to be several months before the full fury of war was unleashed upon them: for the 2nd Division this was to occur at the Action at the St-Éloi Craters* in April of 1916. Then, some two months later it was to be the turn of the 3rd Division – at Mount Sorrel, a fierce confrontation into which units from the other Canadian Divisions were also to be drawn.*

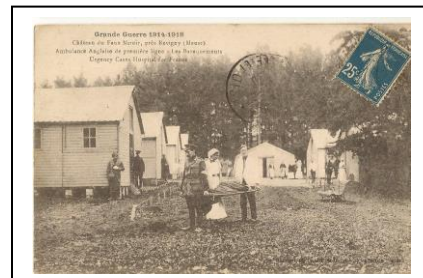
Days after his return to his unit on January 21, Gunner Russell was seconded to the Canadian Engineers for some unspecified reason. He returned to his unit twelve days later, on February 2.

**Not to be confused with the village of Mont St-Éloi, France, to the north-west of Arras, in a sector with which many Canadian troops were to become familiar during 1917 and 1918.*

(continued)

In the meantime, Gunner Russell had been granted leave from January 1 of the New Year, 1916, until the 18th of the same month. No further information a propos his whereabouts during this period seems to be available.

Apparently Driver Russell had been experiencing problems with his eyes and he was accordingly sent on February 7 to the 2nd Canadian Field Ambulance at Dranoutre. What had originally been diagnosed as simply myopia (*short-sightedness*) had soon been identified as...*mixed astigmatism*; for this he was transferred on the following day, February 8-9, to the 4th Stationary Hospital at St-Omer.



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

What the procedures were that were undertaken to resolve Gunner Russell's problem do not appear among his files, but whatever care there was did not take long to administer: on February 12 the 4th Stationary Hospital discharged him to Base Details at Le Havre. There at the Canadian Base Depot he was sent to the T.B. unit – one presumes this to signify *tuberculosis*.

It was to be a further month, not until March 14, before Gunner Russell was despatched to re-join his unit, the day prior to that having undergone a medical examination of...*all "T.B." N.C.O's and men in Camp*. He reported back *to duty* with the 1st CDAC on March 15.

But there was now serious trouble for Gunner Russell in the offing: *9-4-16 – In confinement awaiting trial 25-3-16. Tried and convicted by F.G.C.M.* of Disobeying a lawful command and sentenced to TWO YEARS IMPRISONMENT WITH HARD LABOUR. Confirmed by Brigadier H.C. Thacker 10-4-16.*

Sentence of 9-4-16 commuted to 3 months F.P. No. 1. Auth: - 2nd Army C.M. 7764 d/- 15-4-16

**Field General Court Martial*

Thus Gunner Russell was sent on April 21 of 1916 to the 1st Canadian Field Punishment Station at Westhof Farm. It was to be no holiday for him: *Prisoners had their hair clipped as soon as possible after being admitted... They were not allowed to have tobacco, rum, beer, lights, or matches, nor were they allowed any other food than that issued to them, and in order to avoid prisoners smuggling such things into their sleeping quarters, it was necessary to search each prisoner returning from working parties or parades... Any man found guilty of insubordination or breaking any rules during the days, or who in any way gave trouble – such as reporting sick without sufficient cause or being found with forbidden articles in his possession when searched – was tied up after returning from work at night. On one occasion during stormy weather some of the prisoners refused to work, but the extra punishment of being tied up out of doors in a storm and afterwards solitary confinement in a dark cell on a diet of bread or biscuit and water, prevented recurrences of this nature.*

(continued)

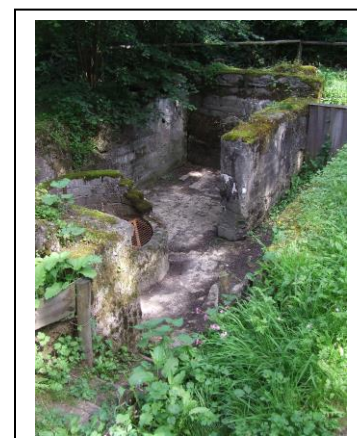
(The above a *Report re 1st Canadian Divisional Field Punishment Station, Westhof Farm, 31 March 1916*, Australian War Memorial [AWM] 4 783/2, quoted in Pugsley: *On the Fringe of Hell*. P. 93.)

Gunner Russell re-joined his unit in the field on July 8, some three months later. During the interim, the Canadian Corps – designated as such upon the arrival of the 2nd Canadian Division on the Continent – had been busy.

* * * * *

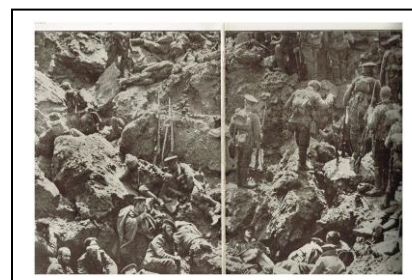
The two newly-arrived Canadian divisions had indeed been active: The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* officially had taken place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it was there that the British had dug a series of galleries under the German lines. Having then placed explosives in them which they detonated on that March 27, they had followed up with an infantry assault.

(Right: *The remains of a construction built at Messines in 1916 by the Germans to counter-act the British tunnellers: they sank twenty-nine wells – one seen here – from which horizontal galleries were excavated to intercept the British tunnels being dug under the German lines. – photograph from 2014*)



After a brief initial success the attack soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than had had the British, and by the 17th of the month, when the battle was called off, both sides were back where they had been some three weeks previously – and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.

(Right above: *A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – from Illustration*)



At that time, even as the 2nd Canadian Division troops were fighting at St-Éloi, the *entire* 1st Canadian Division had been ordered from – and was transferring from - the *Ploegsteert Sector* to the south of Ypres, once more into *the Salient*, to be stationed between the Canadian 2nd Division adjacent to its right and the Canadian 3rd Division to its immediate left*.

**Some weeks earlier, and for the most part during the month of March by which time its last infantry battalions had reported for duty, the 3rd Canadian Division had been transferred to a south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient (see further below).*

As for Gunner Russell's 1st Canadian Divisional Ammunition Column, on April 2 it turned over its supplies of shells and cartridges to the Column of the British 24th Division which was to replace it in the *Ploegsteert Sector*.

(continued)

It had also received orders that...*The 1st Divisional Ammunition Column will relieve the 50th Divisional Ammunition Column on Tuesday April 4.* (Excerpt from Operational Order No. 16 issued March 30, 1916)

The unit, divided into four detachments, was to leave the area of Godeswaerswelde, where it had lately been headquartered, on the same April 2. On the next day, the 1st CDAC War Diarist apparently revealed for the first time the Column's destination. It was going back to the *Ypres Salient*, in the sector just south of the city. It was thus to be, as seen in a preceding paragraph, stationed in-between the two other Divisions of the Canadian Corps.

By this time the size of the unit had evolved as had the demands for ammunition as the Great War progressed. Upon leaving Canada the DAC had counted just fewer than six-hundred personnel and some seven-hundred horses: as of the end of May, 1916, the numbers were eight-hundred ten personnel, outnumbered by the one-thousand ten horses.

The total count of wheeled-vehicles at this time – including such things as wagons and bicycles - was also well outnumbered by animals: one-hundred sixty-eight of the former, the same aforementioned one-thousand ten of the latter.

Some eight weeks after the arrival of the 1st Canadian Division in the Salient, from June 2 to 14, the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the area of *Hooge, Railway Dugouts, Sanctuary Wood, Maple Copse* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps* was to be played out. The Canadians had 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 of which fortunately they never took advantage.

**While it was the newly-arrived 3rd Canadian Division which had borne the brunt of the German onslaught, the situation had become critical enough for other units to be ordered to engage the enemy.*

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



The hurriedly-contrived Canadian counter-strike of the following day, June 3, ordered by the British Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, had been delivered piece-meal and had also been poorly co-ordinated, poorly organized and poorly supported by artillery. It had proved to be a costly disaster for the Canadians.

(Right: *A century later, reminders of a violent past close to the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres, an area today protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature. Apparently it had been much higher until the first week in June of 1917 when a British mine removed much of the summit on the opening day of the Battle of the Messines Ridge. – photograph from 2014*)



(continued)

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



For the personnel and animals of the 1st CDAC, that June 1 of 1916 had been exceptionally quiet and apparently no ammunition whatsoever had been despatched to either the infantry or to the artillery.

On June 2, until the late afternoon, the situation had been almost as calm: by noon only eight rounds of shrapnel for the eighteen-pounder quick-firing guns had been requested. However, after the German attack on that afternoon, sixteen waggon-loads of eighteen-pounder shells and twelve waggon-loads of 4.5-inch howitzer shells had been asked for and, by ten o'clock that same evening, had been sent.

(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*)



In a War Diary that rarely has casualties to report, on the entry of June 3 – but in reference to June 2 – it documents three *killed in action* and a further twenty-five *missing in action*.

On June 6, apart from a large quantity of artillery shells, more than one-million, four-hundred thousand .303 bullets were delivered – forty-two wagon-loads in all. On June 9, the number had risen to two-million, one-hundred seventeen thousand...

The Canadian offensive of the night of June 12-13 recaptured most of the lost ground. Its objectives had been achieved by early morning and the remainder of that day was spent in the consolidation of the captured and re-captured positions in anticipation of a German response.

Surprisingly perhaps, no counter-attack had been forthcoming. Nevertheless, all that afternoon, all night, all the following day, again all that night and well into June 15 when the unit again retired, the personnel holding those trenches and dugouts were subjected to a constant bombardment.



These bombardments and the Canadian artillery's retaliation were to be the final acts of the *Battle of Mount Sorrel*.

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

The artillery activity had not lasted much beyond that June 15, if the requirements of the gunners of the 1st Canadian Division as recorded in the Ammunition Column's War Diary is correct: from the thousands of shells requested only days before, the numbers soon had dwindled into the low hundreds. On June 21 the quantity documented was '*nil*'.

The 1st Canadian Divisional Ammunition Column War Diary for the remainder of the month of June, and then for July and August does little more than document a daily inventory of materials arriving and departing.

The unit was of course responsible for a great deal more explosive ordnance than artillery shells and rifle bullets: Mills bombs (*hand-grenades*), rifle grenades, Stokes shells, signal rockets, Very cartridges, trench-mortar bombs and varied detonators were all components of its arsenal.

(Right: *This assembly of French trench mortars of Great War vintage, used to stand at the entrance to the Army Museum at les Invalides, Paris. – photograph from 2015*)



It was during this quiet period, his 1st CDAC still supplying the needs of the 1st Canadian Division in the *Ypres Salient*, that Gunner Russell returned from his three-month sentence, reporting back to duty on July 8.

* * * * *

Only eleven days after his arrival from Westhof Farm, on July 19, the 1st CDAC took part in a *Mounted Sports* event organized by the Y.M.C.A. The unit's War Diary appears to have taken pleasure in recording that...*The 1st C.D.A.C., took several prizes and although there were many entries from the Canadian Corps, the 1st C.D.A.C. took 1st, 2nd and 3rd Prize for turnout of Mules and Harness.*

S.O.S. Ammunition Supply Race. – *The drivers had to double one hundred yards, harness up, and gallop into Wagon Park, a distance of one hundred and fifty yards, hook in and advance to a position about two hundred yards. The best time was 6 minutes and fifty seconds.*

Whether or not - and if so, in what capacity - Gunner Russell participated in these *Mounted Sports* has unfortunately not been recorded.

Less than a month later, on August 13, 1916, Gunner Russell was transferred. His new unit was to be the 12th Canadian Field Artillery Brigade, and he was *taken on strength* on August 14. He was not the first to be transferred from the 1st CDAC to this newly-organizing formation as, during that July, some thirty-plus personnel had joined the 12th Brigade.



It was on this occasion that his designation changed from *Gunner* to *Driver*.

(Right above: *A convoy of ammunition on its way to providing shells to artillery units: This is likely at the Somme during the summer of 1916. – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

The 12th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery of the Canadian Expeditionary force had officially come into being, its H.Q. at Ouderdoom, Belgium, on June 22 of that year, 1916. As this was just to the south-west of Ypres and in the area of responsibility of the 1st Canadian Division, Driver Russell's physical transfer was not to be over a great distance.

(Right below: *From La Clytte Military Cemetery, looking northwards over the three kilometres which separate it from the neighbouring village of Ouderdoom (today Ouderdom) – photograph from 2017*)

Destined to be a component of the 1st Canadian Division, the 12th Brigade was eventually to comprise batteries already existing in other formations as well as three new batteries by then designated the 47th, 48th and 49th. Now, within days of Driver Russell's arrival, the Brigade was to leave the *Ypres Salient* for a training area in northern France in preparation for its contribution to the British summer offensive at *the Somme*.



On August 14, while still at Ouderdoom, the 12th Brigade – by this time of only three batteries: the 8th, 47th and 49th, each of four eighteen-pounder quick-firing field guns - had received notice of a move two days hence to the area of Arneke, almost directly west of Poperinghe. On the morrow, a second set of orders arrived which outlined the itinerary for a further march, this from Arneke to the site of the 2nd Army Training Area on August 17.

The first march – at the outset of Headquarters and support personnel - began at fifteen minutes past five on the morning of August 16 as ordered and arrived at its starting point at five minutes past seven, twenty-five minutes early, the three batteries having joined the procession at various points en route during that time. Apparently the good progress was impeded later that morning when the stream designated for watering the horses was found to be dry: happily some was found in a number of surrounding farms.

Having passed through the communities of Abeele and Steenvoorde the Brigade eventually reached the vicinity of Arneke at half-past two in the afternoon. Excerpt from 12th Brigade War Diary entry for August 16, 1916: *...Large fields with good watering facilities accommodated whole Brigade. Summing up the march everything went very well – March discipline was good and horses stood it well...The men will Bivouac in the Fields with guns and horses...*



(Right above: *Men and horses of the Royal Horse Artillery lined up for inspection at a training camp some eight years prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The continuation of the march on the following day was longer than that of the 16th, the distance perhaps as much as thirty-five kilometres; even the War Diarist found it...*trying*.

And on that night, once again the men were to bivouac with the horses.

(continued)

August 18 was allotted to Driver Russell's Brigade for cleaning-up and for recuperating after the two-day transfer on foot from Ouderdoom. In the evening...*suggested Programme of training received from 1st C.D.A.* Copies sent to Batteries...*

**Canadian Divisional Artillery*

The suggested programme was a full one: Battery drill and manoeuvre, laying, signalling, range-finding, communication with telephones...*they will remain out all day & Bivouac on area to-night...* Then it was all repeated on the next day – apparently successfully.

Unfortunately, before the conclusion of the exercises on August 23...*Complaints were received today from several inhabitants of CLERQUES regarding thefts of money and grain. There is no evidence to show that these were committed by men of this Brigade but the fullest investigation is being made...* There is no further mention of the incident in the Brigade War Diary.

On the afternoon of August 25, its training finalized, the 12th Brigade received orders for its movement and entrainment which would transfer it the theatre of *the Somme* some hundred kilometres away.

For the journey the Brigade was divided into three detachments, each to leave from a different railway station with orders to march to – and meet at – the community of Bouzincourt, four kilometres north-west of the provincial town of Albert, once having de-trained*.



**The entire Brigade at this point still comprised only the 8th, 47th and 49th Batteries and a Headquarters Group; Driver Russell's unit is not identified.*

(Right above: *The once-resplendent railway station at St-Omer, today in urgent need of repair, from which the 8th Battery of the 12th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, entrained en route to the Somme – photograph from 2015*)

The transfer began on August 27 and by nine o'clock in the evening of the next day the three batteries had reported to their wagon lines at Bouzincourt. For none of them, however, was there to be much rest as the Brigade War Diary reveals:

28-8 - 11.30 p.m – Headquarters Staff and 47th Battery left wagon lines to move into action, the former at USNA REDOUBT and the latter in NASH VALLEY.

29-8 – 12.30 a.m. – 49th Battery left wagon lines to move into action in NASH VALLEY.

29-8 – 4 a.m. – 8th Battery left wagon lines to move into action in NASH VALLEY.

The three Batteries then began to register, an exercise hindered since...Owing to great amount of shelling by both sides the ground is so badly cut up that it is almost impossible to distinguish anything but what looks like a ploughed field...

(continued)

(Right below: *Unidentified gunners during 1st Somme working their 18-pounder field guns - in dry weather – from Le Miroir*)

Neither the War Diary nor Driver Russell's papers describe what his duties were exactly. However, it should be remembered that by now he was a Driver and not a Gunner – even though he was now assigned to an artillery unit – thus it may well have been that he was to remain based to the rear in the wagon lines at Bouzincourt rather than working somewhere alongside a gun.



Yet it would seem that, even so, his existence was less than comfortable: *30-8 - All Battery wagon lines are in open fields – the men Bivouacing (sic) (bivouacking). The Rations have not been satisfactory since coming into this position. The quality is good but the quantity is not up to standard. Rations and forage are delivered to Brigade in truck(?) which necessitates much waste and confusion in distribution. Weather – Rain all day... (Excerpt from War Diary entry of August 30, 1916)*

To complicate matters, at least temporarily at this time, finding sufficient water for the horses necessitated a round-trip of two and a-half hours to the community of Varennes. For neither man nor beast was the introduction to *the Somme* a happy experience.

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

On the first morning of *1st Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had comprised troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the some 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 Beaumont-Hamel.



(Right above: *At Beaumont-Hamel: looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences - The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – from 2009*)

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 had entered the fray on or about 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.



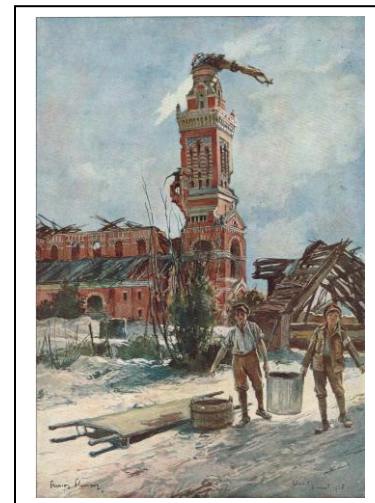
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(Preceding page: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette* – photograph from 2015)

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

Twelve days before the offensive of September 15 was to take place, infantry units of both the Canadian Corps and the Australian Imperial Force undertook an assault on the German positions at *Mouquet Farm*. This was the first occasion at *the Somme* on which the guns of the 12th Brigade were to co-operate in a joint venture with the foot soldiers.

The opening barrage began at ten minutes past five on September 3, an operation for which both high-explosive and shrapnel shells had been brought forward to the total of twelve 18-pounder gun-positions of the 12th Brigade. Precise orders had been given for the rate of fire: three rounds per minute for the first two minutes; two rounds for the following four minutes and so on...



After thirty minutes the rate was one per minute, but the *shoot* of that day apparently went on for hours, perhaps until the end of the morning. Added to that was always the possibility of German retaliation...*47th Battery reports a counter-attack is expected...All Batteries notified to shoot at these troops in the open...Batteries disposed (of) two lots of these men who were evidently assembling for a counter-attack...No counter-attack was delivered...* (Excerpt from War Diary entry of September 3, 1916)

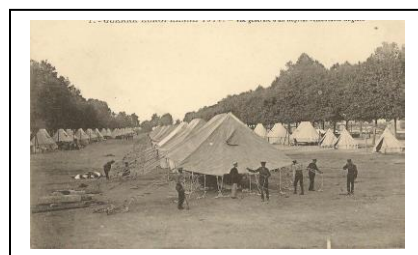
This, of course, had meant a great deal of work for the drivers and those others engaged in supplying ammunition to the guns: the first thirty minutes of firing alone had necessitated almost nine tons of shells. As for the following hours, the requirements appear not to have been documented, but it was always better to have a surplus on hand rather than an insufficiency.

After the action at *Mouquet Farm* a number of orders and counter-orders were received to the effect that the Brigade was to be transferred elsewhere. It was not until three days later, however, that the Brigade finally retired to their wagon lines to await...further orders.

* * * * *

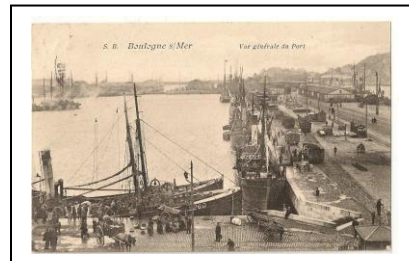
By that date, Driver Russell had been hospitalized once more.

The Oxford Concise Medical Dictionary defines *Hammer Toe* as...*a deformity of a toes, most often the second, caused by fixed flexion of the first joint*. It goes on to say that the condition may be very painful. This was the complaint for which Driver Russell had been admitted – second toe on the left foot - on September 2 into the 1st Casualty Clearing Station at Choques.



(Right above: 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)

If indeed it was the 1st CCS, it seems unlikely that Driver Russell was serving at *the Somme* at the time* since Choques is – in a straight line – some sixty kilometres to the north of Albert. On the other hand there is a railway line that passes close by and which eventually leads to Boulogne. Driver Russell is recorded as having been transferred on September 3, on the 4th Ambulance Train, from the CCS to the 3rd Canadian General Hospital at Boulogne where he was admitted on September 4.



****He may of course have been evacuated prior to that date.***

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

It was to be a month afterwards that he was released from medical care at Boulogne, being forwarded to Base Details at the Canadian Base Depot, Le Havre, on October 2. Four days later again – although a second source contradicts this – on October 6, he was classified as being...*fit for service*.

Then, however, before he could return to his unit, he was sent to the 39th General Hospital in Rouen, the diagnosis at first the ubiquitous NYD (*Not Yet Determined*), soon to be identified as the familiar venereal problem.

On November 4 Driver Russell was discharged from there. But the complaint was to continue to cause him problems – financial ones. It was a policy of the British and Commonwealth Armies during the *Great War* to impose the forfeiture of a soldier's Field Allowance – ten cents per day in the Canadian Expeditionary Force – during the time of treatment and also to reduce his pay by a daily fifty cents, ostensibly to underwrite some of the costs of treatment for venereal disease*.

The policy was applied in the case of Driver Russell for the twenty days from October 16 until his release on November 4.

****This policy was not always enforced, less and less as the war progressed, and particularly in the case of officers where the Not Yet Determined quite often was allowed on their reports to remain...undetermined.***

He returned to the Canadian Base Depot on November 5, leaving there on November 15 to re-join his unit in the field. There he is then reported in his own documents as having returned to the 12th Brigade on November 19; the unit's War Diarist, however, has overlooked Driver Russell's arrival. Perhaps this was because he was still recording the Brigade's activities which were continuing at *the Somme*.

* * * * *

By this time the 12th Brigade had been fighting the *First Battle of the Somme* for twelve weeks less a day. But then, so had all the other batteries of the 1st Canadian Division, and they would continue to do so until the end of that month of November, 1916.

The infantry battalions of the 1st Canadian Division had fought for some four-five weeks before being withdrawn from *the Somme*, to be replaced by battalions of the 2nd Canadian Division. They too had left after the same-length interval when next had arrived - and then likewise departed - the troops of the 3rd and finally the 4th Canadian Battalions.

It would appear that the same system was not to apply for the Canadian Artillery. In all fairness, many of the infantry battalions, even before the end of their four-to-five-week period of service, had been reduced to skeletal strength, the fields of *the Somme* littered with their corpses and the hospitals crammed with their broken and ruptured frames.



This was not, of course, so much the case with the artillery.

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

(Right: *Wounded troops being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the 1st Battle of the Somme – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)



Fewer casualties and likely less mental fatigue – although who are we to judge *that?* – and the increasing dependence on the weight of shell and shot meant that although the guns of the other Canadian Divisions were arriving at *the Somme*, they were *adding* to, rather than just replacing, the British and Commonwealth fire-power.



Subsequent to Driver Russell's departure in early September for medical attention, the 12th Brigade had moved back on September 6 into the area of its wagon lines in the proximity of Albert. Five days following it was ordered forward and established Brigade Headquarters at La Boisselle...*in Old German Front Line where there are two deep dugouts.*

(Right above: *The Lochnagar Crater caused by the mine – claimed by some to be the largest man-made explosion in history up until that date – detonated at La Boisselle – photograph from 2011(?)*)

**La Boisselle was the site where, on the morning of the attack of July 1 of that same 1916, the British detonated the largest of the nineteen mines that they had excavated and set under the German lines. The crater, now a century old, is still impressive, even today.*

(continued)

The guns were certainly in positions elsewhere but the unit's headquarters remained in La Boisselle for the next twenty-four days. On September 13 the 12th Brigade batteries began firing in preparation for the attack of two days hence and continued intermittently until twenty minutes past six of the morning of that September 15.

This was when the artillery barrage supporting the infantry began, to continue for the next three hours whereupon the targets and the intensity were altered as planned. The assault by the infantry against the *Sucrierie* (sugar refinery) building at Courcelette was successful; it was apparently the only success of the entire day's fighting, and was achieved despite at least one battery of the 12th Brigade having run out of ammunition*.



**It was to be twelve hours before that problem was resolved - but only to be repeated two days later.*

(Right above: The village of Courcelette seen from the north just over a century after the events of the 1st Battle of the Somme – photograph from 12017)

The attack was to continue into the late morning of September 17 and it was not until twenty minutes after mid-day of that day that...*Brigade Major 1st C.D.A. verbally over telephone ordered Batteries to stop firing.*

The next attack scheduled for September 26 followed much the same pattern except that the 12th Brigade War Diary entry for that day illustrates a further problem that occurred between the infantry and the artillery: *15th Bn. reports that they reached front line in one minute without any casualties and ran into our own Barrage with a few casualties...*



Artillery fire was often a matter of timing, in the case of a creeping-barrage, the problem was matching the progress of the supporting gun-fire with the pace of the advance of the accompanying infantry. In the conditions in which *the Somme* was often fought this was not always easy.

Nor were the shells always of top quality...and the gun barrels often became worn. The result was that *shorts* often fell on top of the troops that they were intended to protect.

(Right above: Ploughed up in the neighbouring fields and now in an Aubervillers farm-yard, shells fired a century ago await the next visit of a French bomb-disposal team. – photograph from 2010)

On October 3 the guns were apprised that as of the night of October 4-5 they were to operate against new zones and thus, before that time, were to be moved forward.

(continued)

It being *the Somme* where forward movement was rarely measured in long distances, guns even less mobile than soldiers on foot, and these artillery pieces having to be man-handled out of old placements and into new positions, it was not - given the rain, the mud, and a watchful enemy - to be an easy task.

12th Brigade Headquarters had been ordered to move forward as well, perhaps some four kilometres along the main Arras-Bapaume road, into the remnants of a trench amidst the rubble of the once-village of Pozières.

(Right and right below: *The vestiges of the village of Pozières as it appeared in 1919 – the monument, to be seen in both images, is to the Australians who fought there in 1916, just before the arrival of the Canadians – from a vintage post-card and a photograph from the same area - from 2016*)



The weather was apparently more execrable than usual on the day of the move. Excerpt from the 12th Brigade War Diary of October 5, 1916: *During the night each Battery got two guns forward... The greatest possible difficulties were met with and in most cases overcome. The mud was so deep vehicles could scarcely be moved as most of the way was over open country – no roads being available. 8th Battery had one Ammun. wagon destroyed by shell fire and 1 G.S. wagon* broken. 47th Battery had to abandon 2 G.S wagons and 2 Ammun. wagons under shell fire...*



***General Service**

The reason for the urgency to re-site the guns was a further British offensive, this one due to begin on October 8. The main objective of the attack was a German defensive strong-point known as *Regina Trench*. The artillery, having spent the preceding days attempting to cut the enemy wire, was to herald the battle with a barrage. At ten minutes to five in the morning it did so.



(Right above: *Barbed-wire entanglements, these pictured in late 1917, which at that time formed part of the strong German defensive positions known as the Hindenburg Line – from Illustration*)

As had proved to be the case on previous occasions, the wire was not cut, nor in many places was it even damaged enough to allow the passage of the attacking troops. In the small number of areas where the artillery had been successful, the few channels freed were to create funnels and thus killing zones for the German machine-guns.

(continued)

Not that the guns and gunners were to blame: high-explosive, not shrapnel, destroys wire, yet not enough H.E. was available. The British shells at this stage of the war still contained a goodly percentage of duds, in addition to which the mud and soft ground assured that many of those intended to explode on contact would not do so.

Add to that the number of guns unavailable because they had become stuck or – being in the open, put out of combat - during the transit of the previous days, thus reducing the weight of firepower, and one realizes that the likelihood of eliminating the enemy wire had been – once again - grossly overestimated by the High Command.

(Right: *Regina Trench Cemetery and some of the area surrounding it which was finally wrested from the Germans by Canadian troops in November of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)



At ten thirty-five on the morning of October 8 the 12th Brigade War Diarist wrote in his journal: *As far is as known at present the attack has not been entirely successful...*

For the days following this attack the 3rd Brigade and the 12th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, had been ordered to remain *in situ* and to continue their efforts at wire-cutting, particularly around the area of *Regina Trench*, to assist another proposed attack on the position on October 19 – this eventually postponed until the following day on account of the inclement weather.



Wire cutting etc... was continued.

(Right above: *A photograph dated February of 1918 of a gun-team of the 2nd Canadian Siege Battery positioning one of their BL 6-inch 26 cwt* howitzers, another British gun used also by all the Commonwealth forces – from the Wikipedia web-site*)

**The ‘cwt’ denotes hundred-weight – one-hundred pounds – thus the barrel and main carriage of the piece weighs twenty-six hundred pounds, well over a ton. The 6-inch is the calibre of the shell.*

1st Canadian Divisional Artillery War Diary entry for October 20, 1916: *Attack again postponed – Wire cutting etc.* – The assault had, in fact, been made by troops of the 4th Canadian Division at mid-day on October 21. Although initially successful, the Canadians were then driven back by the Germans whence they had come.

1st Canadian Divisional Artillery War Diary entry for October 26, 1916: *...12th Bde (Artillery Brigade) support an attack made by 44th Batt’n...on REGINA TRENCH.*

At first the attack was reported to have got well home but by 11 am it was definitely reported that the attack had failed. Losses were not heavy...

(continued)

The weather for the final five days of that October was briefly and repetitively recorded as...*indifferent*. Apparently...*stormy weather prevailed. Very high winds and heavy storms of rain. Visibility rough and too poor for any accurate registration. The country in a very heavy state, ammunition supplied by pack.*

Any fighting at all would have been difficult: nobody appears to have tried – at least in nothing other than a minor way.

The same weather and the same lack of activity prevailed during the first week of November, 1916. Only...*wire-cutting and 4.5 Howitzer bombardments carried out when lights out. Enemy Trenches and Approaches shot up at night.* – This the sole 1st Canadian Divisional Artillery entry for November 1 to 6 inclusive - from November 7, 8 and 9, only...*Continuation of preparations*

The afore-mentioned preparations were for a further attack on the *Regina Trench* system on the night of November 10-11. Two infantry brigades of the Canadian 4th Division were to storm the German positions, supported by the guns of the 1st and 3rd Divisional Artillery.

This attack by Canadian troops was to be the final one on *Regina Trench* as it was successful...*all objectives taken, casualties very few and several prisoners taken.* There was to be no enemy counter-attack on this occasion.

(Right: *Some of the ground around Regina Trench on which much heavy fighting took place a century ago: today it has reverted back to farm-land.* – photograph from 1915)



The following days were to be busy for the personnel of the 12th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery: not only were the incessant wire-cutting efforts to continue, but a heavy five-day bombardment of the enemy – particularly during the early hours of November 13 - was pursued in support of an offensive by the British IInd (2nd) and Vth (5th) Corps elsewhere on the *Somme Front*.

On November 18 – five days after the *official* end of the *First Battle of the Somme* – Canadian troops of the 4th Canadian Division, the last to arrive at *the Somme* from the previous Canadian theatre of war in Belgium, launched an attack in the area of Grandcourt, once again along the axis of the Arras-Bapaume main road.

The operation was not a success and after a small advance the Canadians were ordered to withdraw to the shelter of, perhaps ironically, the *Regina Trench* System.

The next day was reportedly quiet and, also reportedly, Driver Russell returned to the unit from his hospital bed on that same November 19, 1916.

* * * * *

(continued)

He had arrived in time to witness the final days of his unit's service *at the Somme*. These six days were quiet enough: there was to be a preventive *shoot* on the 21st in case the enemy infantry took advantage of the cover of the fog – it didn't; and on the following day a German barrage was delivered against the troops on the 4th Canadian Division front; on two more of those days there was...*nothing to report*.

Thus on November 25, 1916: *Relief of 1st CDA by 57th Div Arty completed at 5 pm at which hour 2 CDA assure command of the artillery covering 4th Canadian Div. All 1st CDA in Wagon Lines.*

For the 12th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, the *First Battle of the Somme* was now a thing of the past.

For Driver Russell's 12th Brigade, as an element of the 1st CDA, the retirement – all on foot - from *the Somme* was effected at first in a westerly direction. The procession then turned towards the north in order to pass to the west of the city of Arras and beyond.

Four days after its departure from its wagon lines on November 27, on the final day of the month it arrived at its destination, rest-billets in the area of Camblain-Châtelain to the south-west of the northern French town of Béthune.

(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 important coal-mining region into which most of the Canadian Corps had by now been withdrawn after having served at *the Somme* – the thirty kilometres of sectors, from Arras in the south to Béthune in the north – was now to become more and more an area of Canadian responsibility until October of the following year, 1917.

(Right: *The northern French town of Béthune, the original photograph likely taken towards the end of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



During December, after having spent twelve days at Camblain-Châtelain, the 12th Brigade was then ordered stationed at Anzin, a community in the north-western outskirts of Arras. The War Diary entries make mention of minor operations in co-operation with infantry, thus the guns were busy on most days: apart from battering enemy positions they were also engaged in wire-cutting, and providing barrages and covering fire for local offensives. At times there were also spotted more precise targets such as enemy working-parties and his artillery batteries which then received the guns' attention.

The winter of 1916-1917 was to be little different from any of the other winters of the period of the *Great War* in that concerted infantry action was minimal, only the everyday patrolling and the occasional raids, some major, most minor.

(continued)

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



Towards the end of December of 1916 the 12th Brigade, CFA, had returned northwards to Marest, not far removed from Camblain-Châtelain; there it had remained based for a month, until the end of January, when it had been ordered to nearby Hersin*.

**As the officer responsible for the War Diary of a unit was normally attached to the Headquarters Company, it may well be that here he is reporting the movement of the H.Q. rather than that of the troops – or in this case, guns - which may have remained in situ.*

This was also a time when the various batteries and brigades were to take stock of their equipment and to report any deficiencies or inadequacies to the appropriate authorities.

The care of the horses and mules of an artillery unit was, of course, a priority, and in that particular winter there was a shortage of fodder, worrisome because in winter more energy, thus food, is required by the animals to labour over soft and muddy roads. Many of them were reportedly in poor condition.

Various personnel left the 12th Brigade to be replaced by newcomers, some of these novices to the practical problems of the *Western Front* – and not just those presented by enemy activity. A cold, wet winter was a time when the daily sick-parades – of which a surprisingly elevated number were dental problems - were to be longer than at other times of the year.

The 12th Brigade remained based at Hersin until March 7. Militarily things were beginning to stir once again despite the more-than-occasional snow, and the unit had supported a large raid of battalion strength on March 2. It had then received orders to march southwards to an area just east of Camblain-l'Abbé and, after several days of preparation for the relief, had begun the march on the morning of the 8th of the month.



(Right above: *The village of Camblain-l'Abbé as it appears a century after the Canadian presence in its vicinity – and likely much less busy – photograph from 2017*)

Three hours and twenty-five minutes later, according to the unit's War Diarist, it had arrived at its new posting and had thereupon begun to establish its wagon lines in the vicinity of Camblain-l'Abbé itself and then its headquarters at nearby Écoivres.



(Right above: *Écoivres Military Cemetery as it was to look not soon after this period of 1917 and the confrontation atop Vimy Ridge – from a vintage post-card*)

Likewise, the guns of the 12th Brigade now relieved a similar number of those of other Canadian artillery brigades. By March 11 the gunners had begun to register their weapons.

However, apparently by that time, the Canadian Artillery High Command had decided to reorganize all its artillery batteries and thus issued orders to that effect*...*informing us that the Batteries of the 12th Bde. C.F.A. were to be split up***...

**The orders – as cited above - appear in the 12th Brigade War Diary dated March 15. Surprisingly they do not surface in the 1st Canadian Divisional War Diary until three days later, on March 18.*

***In December of 1914, artillery batteries had been reduced to a strength of four guns, two sections of two guns each. In March of 1917 this number was increased to three sections of two guns in all Canadian artillery batteries, whether of heavy or light guns.*

In the case of Driver Russell, he...*owing to reorganization is posted to 1st Bde CFA & TOS (Taken On Strength) by 1st Bde CFA 20/3/17...*

Four days after having been *taken on strength* by his new unit, on March 24 Driver Russell – whether he had reported *to duty* with the 1st Brigade by that time does not appear to be documented – was admitted into the 3rd Canadian Field Ambulance, perhaps at Estrée-Cauchy or at Maison Blanche, the former a rest-station, the latter a dressing-station. He was suffering from conjunctivitis.

His treatment having lasted some four days he was thereupon discharged *to duty* and joined – or re-joined - the 1st Brigade *in the field* on March 28-29.

The 1st Brigade of the Canadian Field Artillery, had arrived in the area of Camblain-l'Abbé at the same time as had the by-now dis-banded 12th Brigade. It had subsequently been ordered to move its guns into the forward area - only to find that it had no gun-pits nor adequate protection for its ammunition which was being left out in the open and at the mercy of the late-winter elements.

Thus its personnel had spent the ten days or so since the 1st Brigade's arrival making good these deficiencies: Whether he returned on March 28 or 29, Driver Russell was to report to a unit which was now prepared for action.

In fact it had been in action since arriving in France the day before Driver Russell's original unit in February of 1915. Although the 1st Brigade's War Diary suggests otherwise – a difference of forty-eight hours – it likely had then preceded Driver Russell and the Divisional Ammunition Column, by a day, to the north of France.

Since that time the 1st Brigade had served continuously on the Continent and its history during that period was to comprise much the same, in terms of dates, campaigns and theatres of war, as was that of the DAC – later 1st CDAC – which, after all, with Driver Russell, had been providing it with ammunition all that time.

(continued)

Now in March of 1917, after a quiet winter period, the gods of War were beginning to rattle their sabres once again. It must have been apparent by this fourth week of the month that preparations were being put in place for what could only be interpreted as a spring offensive by the British and Commonwealth forces.

(Right below: 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)

Among these activities and 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.



During that month of March and even earlier, all the Canadian infantry battalions were to be withdrawn in turn well into the rear area, there to undergo a period of this intensive training. These exercises in many cases were to continue until, and including, April 7, only two days before the training was to become the real thing.



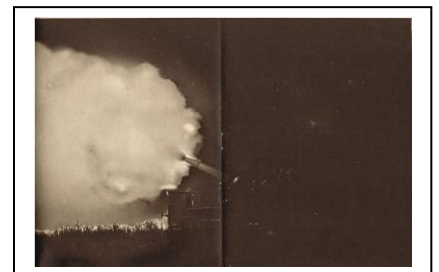
(Right above: Canadian machine-gunners, their presence to be more and more evident on the battle-field, in training with their Vickers medium machine-guns – from Illustration)

The artillery had also been busy, formulating new means of co-operation with the infantry: new flexible barrage techniques, signalling, use of observers in the air as well as on the ground, all were to be tested in the upcoming confrontation.

And during the final five days before the attack, the infantry units which had been sent to the area of Vimy Ridge so as to become familiar with ground that had been re-arranged to resemble the terrain to be attacked, they would have become aware of the increase in artillery activity as the preparatory barrage grew in strength and fury.

By that early April it must have been evident to all that the offensive for which they had all been preparing was now imminent.

(Right below: A heavy British artillery piece spews its flame into the middle of the night during the preparatory barrage of the First Battle of Arras. – from Illustration)



(continued)

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.

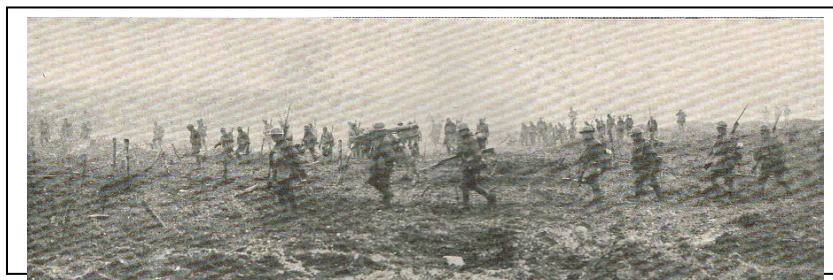
While the British effort at Arras proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive of *Le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

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



On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, 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 4th or 3rd 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*)



Excerpt from 1st Brigade, CFA, War Diary entry for April 9, 1917: *At Zero Hour (5.30 A.M.) the big advance on VIMY RIDGE commenced. A wonderful series of barrages were put up on the German front and Support line.*

Our troops had very little trouble in reaching the German front and support lines. He Reserve line was held by a few hostile machine guns which caused the only serious casualties our troops suffered. This did not stop them however and before dark the whole Ridge of VIMY was in our hands...

(Right: *The monument to the Canadian 1st Division which stands just outside the village of Thélus* – photograph from 2017)



...In the early afternoon (the) O.C. (Officer Commanding) 3rd Battery started his Battery forward and shortly after dark his six guns were reported in action near the NINE ELMS. This Battery being the farthest forward in the 1st Army Front. Throughout the advance very little hostile shelling was reported. ...made a reconnaissance of the forward area, Battery positions were selected.

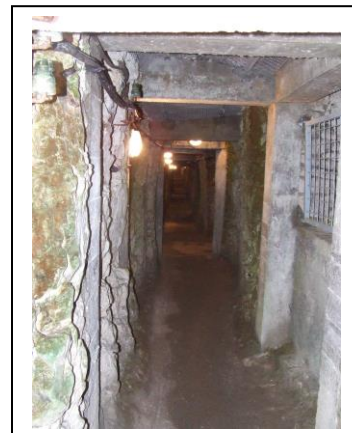


(Preceding page: *Within the bounds of Nine Elms Military Cemetery, Thélus**, lie five-hundred thirty-seven dead of whom four-hundred thirty wore a Canadian uniform. – photograph from 2017)

**A second Nine Elms Cemetery is to be found in the north-western outskirts of Poperinghe (today Poperinge) Belgium.*

During the next few days the weather made life miserable, particularly perhaps for the artillery personnel who were endeavouring to manoeuvre their weapons forward and to bring heavily-laden ammunition wagons to the forward area. Most of the time it was very difficult: on some days it proved to be impossible.

The 1st Canadian Division had been on the right-hand side of the attack, on the southerly slope in the area of Roclincourt. *Vimy Ridge* itself had been the responsibility of the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions while the 2nd Canadian Division had assaulted the *Thelus Sector*, this being that part of the fighting in-between the Ridge and the objectives of the 1st Canadian Division. All the Canadian operations of April 9 had met with success.



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

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.

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, in part because of the weather, to be logistically impossible.

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

Thus the Germans were gifted the opportunity to close the breeches in their lines 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.

(continued)

During this period, the guns - for a number of days as of April 11 – were unable to move forward due to the sodden ground. Then they were ordered to...*remain silent*...except in the case of an SOS being sent by infantry units *in extremis*. Apart from a few shells being expended in an unsuccessful attempt to register the guns and a practice barrage on May 2, the 1st Brigade War Diary appears to report no activity whatsoever on the part of the unit at this time, at least not until it exchanged guns and positions with a brigade of the Royal Field Artillery on May 7.

**When an artillery unit was relieved or changed its positions or zone, the practice at times was for the personnel to be withdrawn but for the guns to remain in place, to be used by the incoming teams. Since the battle front rarely moved a great distance, since the ground conditions were difficult, and since the same types of guns and howitzers were being used by all, this policy made a great deal of sense.*

During the weeks that followed it would appear that the German artillery was active - even after the official end of the *Battle of Arras* - in the area of Vimy which was shelled regularly, and against the Canadian and British gun positions in those sectors. The 1st Brigade lost several of its pieces at this time and also some of its personnel to enemy fire.



(Right above: *The village of Vimy, pictured here at a time just after the Great War, is some three kilometres distant to the east from Vimy Ridge. – from a vintage post-card*)

By the end of the month of May the 1st Brigade of the CFA was becoming battle-weary – likely true of the belligerents of both sides. The unit's War Diary entry of May 30 reads partially as follows: *The 1st Brigade, C.F.A., are now down to 50 O.R. under strength due to the heavy shelling of our battery positions during the past week. We are also a total of 159 horses under strength*.*

**This was presumably not good news for the War Diarist who in his following entry informs us that: Preparations are now under way for the coming 1st First Army horse show which is to take place on June 24th.*

June and July were to be relatively quiet months, more so perhaps for the Canadian infantry battalions which were once again frequently retired to the rear areas. The artillery had had to remain in place - the 1st Brigade still positioned in the area of Vimy - although its guns were now maybe less active. Even so, on June 2 the 1st Brigade reported having counted its thirteenth gun...*lost to hostile fire since May 7.*

The drivers and other personnel from the Brigade Wagon Lines must have been kept busy as well, as the unit's guns and howitzers were in the habit of sending three-hundred shells per night in the direction of the enemy positions.

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 that 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.

(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*)

On July 21 the 1st Brigade, CFA, began to transfer its batteries northwards to the area of Les Brébis, in the vicinity of the mining village of Loos.

By the 24th all guns and personnel had moved and both ammunition and gun pits were being constructed in their newly-designated positions.



On July 27 the following order was circulated: *With a view to forcing the enemy to evacuate LENS the Canadian Corps has been ordered to undertake operations for the capture of the high ground North 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.

(Right: *The gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15th 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 supposed 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*.

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



In the meantime, once in place in Les Brébis at the end of July, the 1st Brigade, CFA, had continued its daily routine to which was now added the task of cutting wire. On one day some sixteen-hundred rounds had been fired but apparently there was to be no progressive barrage, as there had been before *Vimy Ridge*, to prepare the ground – or to disturb it – for the assault.

In fact, on August 14, the eve of the attack on *Hill 70*...*Batteries of the Brigade did not fire today*...perhaps because the observers reported...*No new wire observed, or any wire which would prove an obstacle to advancing Infantry.*

However, the 1st Brigade's guns were busy on the next morning of August 15: *At 4.25 am our Barrage opened (well synchronized and well distributed)*...and the infantry had been able to advance. Almost ten-thousand rounds were to be expended on that day by the unit's howitzers and guns.

The *only* report of losses on that day by the Brigade appears in a short report in the War Diary recorded at ten minutes past nine in the morning: *In the early stages of the opening barrage at 4.25 am the 1st Battery had one gun destroyed by premature*. One man was killed and four wounded.*

**One of the gun's shell exploded in the barrel as it was fired.*

The casualty report a propos Driver Russell differs: *Killed in Action – While on duty with his gun at Loos, he was killed by an enemy shell which exploded in the gun-pit.*

(Right below: *The mining community of Loos to the north-west of Lens, as it already was by 1915 when it was a responsibility of the French Army: The structure in the background...‘Tower Bridge’ to the troop...are the towers of a pit-head from which the cages (elevators) descend into the mine. – from Le Miroir*)

The son of Isaac Russell*, fisherman – to whom he had allocated a monthly ten dollars from his pay - and of Elizabeth Anne Russell (née *Curnew*, deceased from typhoid on December 17, 1895) of Country Road, Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, he was also brother to May-Ellen, to Martha-Matilda and to Elijah.



**Isaac Russell apparently married for a second time, to Esther; the couple were to have at least four children: George, Minnie, Esther and Nellie.*

(Right: *The sacrifice of Driver Russell is honoured on the War Memorial in the community of Bay Roberts. – photograph from 2010*)

Driver Russell was reported as having been *killed in action* during the fighting at *Hill 70* on August 15, 1917.

(continued)



Harold Arthur Russell had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-six years: date of birth at Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, April 18-19, 1888.

Driver Harold Arthur Russell was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



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