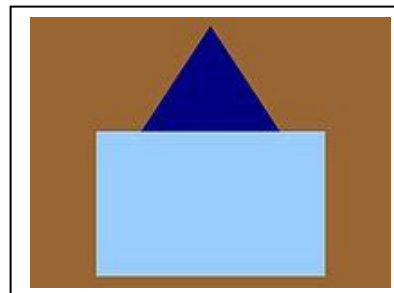




Private Herbert Lewis Ryan (Number 3031110) of the 58th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, lies in Vis-en-Artois British Cemetery: Grave reference V.G.6.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 58th Battalion is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of both a *miner* and a *rigger*, Herbert Lewis Ryan may have been the young man who crossed the Cabot Strait from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland on June 6, 1912, on board the steamship *Bruce*. His destination was to be the industrial city of Sydney, capital of Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. However, this suggestion of him as the subject of this biography requires confirmation.

On the other hand, it appears to be sure that it was he who crossed the Canadian-American border into the United States of America at Vanceboro, Maine, on May 16 of 1914. He and his father Robert were both making the same journey to visit Herbert's Cousin, Arthur. It may well be that Herbert decided to remain there as, more than three years afterwards, on his attestation papers he cites Chester Avenue, Chelsea, Massachusetts, as his residential address.

When exactly he re-crossed the border in order to join up, however, is not certain. All that may be said is that he was in the city of Toronto during the month of November, 1917, for that is where and when he enlisted.

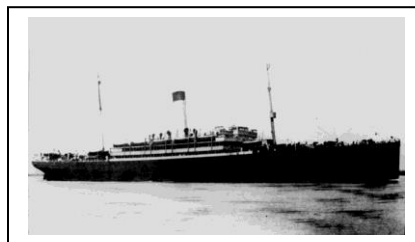
November 13, 1917, was to be a busy day for Herbert Lewis Ryan. Having presented himself at the (a?) Toronto Mobilization Centre for enlistment, he underwent a medical examination which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force*. He was then attested, after which a Major Mitchell, acting on behalf of the commanding officer of the 1st Depot Battalion of the 1st Central Ontario Regiment, declared – on paper – that...*Herbert Lewis Ryan...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

Thus drew to a close the formalities of Private Ryan's enlistment.

The task of the Regimental Depot Battalions was to instil only a minimum of training and discipline in its incoming recruits before then despatching them to the Canadian Reserve Battalions in the United Kingdom to complete the job. It is therefore a little surprising to find that Private Ryan was to spend some twelve weeks in uniform and training in Canada before being ordered overseas.

**It may well be that the icing of the St. Lawrence River and the recent and almost total destruction of the port of Halifax played a part in this waiting period.*

It was on February 3 of the New Year, 1918, that Private Ryan – by then recorded as being a soldier of the 2nd Draft of the 1st Depot Battalion 2nd Central Ontario Regiment – embarked onto the SS *Scandinavian* – perhaps *Grampian* - in the harbour at Halifax for overseas passage to the United Kingdom.



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

(continued)

Private Ryan's Draft was apparently not to travel alone as it seems that there was a number of other small detachments boarding the vessel at this time: the 3rd Draft, Western Ontario Regiment; the 3rd and 4th Drafts, 1st Depot Battalion, 1st Quebec Regiment; the 1st and 2nd Drafts, 2nd Depot Battalion, 2nd Quebec Regiment; the 2nd Draft of the Canadian Engineers Training Depot; and the 9th and 27th Drafts of the Railway Construction Depot*.

**While this all appears very likely, it requires confirmation to be certain.*

Scandinavian sailed on February 5 from Halifax and docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool eleven days later, on February 16. Private Ryan and his comrades-in-arms were thereupon taken by train to the large Canadian military complex of **Shorncliffe** in the vicinity of the harbour and town of Folkestone on the Dover Straits. There they reported to the 8th (Reserve) Battalion (Central Ontario) at the subsidiary camp of **East Sandling***.

**It would seem that Private Ryan's 2nd Draft had been transferred – bureaucratically – to the 8th (Reserve) Battalion on February 3, the day when it had stepped on board Scandinavian.*

(Right: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 2016*)



After some eight weeks of training at East Sandling, the 8th (Reserve) Battalion was ordered to move inland, to **Witley Camp** in the county of Surrey. Private Ryan was now to remain there a further fifty-two days, until June 1, when he was **struck off strength** by the 8th (Reserve) Battalion, to be **taken on strength** by the 58th Battalion, and thereupon sent overseas to France.

There appear to be no record of by which route Private Ryan travelled to the Continent. From **Witley Camp** there were two usual itineraries: through Folkestone and crossing the Dover Straits to the French port of Boulogne; or through the English south-coast port of Southampton and across the English Channel to land in the coastal industrial city of Le Havre.



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

Whichever way he travelled, he arrived on June 2 at the Canadian Infantry Base Depot, by that time re-established in the vicinity of the town of Étapes. On that June 2, 1918, Private Ryan was one of six-hundred one re-enforcements to report there **to duty**.

It was to be a single day over two weeks later, on June 17, that he was one of one-thousand eighty-five to be forwarded to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp at Aubin-St-Vaast where he would await despatch to the 58th Battalion.

(continued)

The wait lasted almost two months. On August 11 Private Ryan received orders to join his new unit, the 58th Battalion. His personal files record that he did so on August 13: the 58th Battalion War Diary reports no re-enforcements on that day or on the days preceding or following. The reason may be that the unit had just moved back up into the front lines whereas the newcomers would likely have reported to the Transport Lines at Le Quesnel where the Battalion was based at the time – but this, of course, is only conjecture.

* * * * *

The 3rd Canadian Division had officially come into being at mid-night of December 31 of 1915 and January 1 of the year 1916. Whereas the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions had been formed, organized and equipped before leaving England for *active service** on the Continent, the 3rd Canadian Division had been formed almost on an *ad hoc* basis, from infantry units that had already been serving in Belgium by that date and from others in reserve that were yet to arrive from the United Kingdom.

**As was in August of 1916 the 4th Canadian Battalion.*

As for the artillery, the Division was to have none of its own guns until July of 1916. Until that time its support was to be supplied by Royal Artillery units that had, just prior to that, been attached to the Lahore Division of the Indian Army*.

**Since 1857 – the year of the Indian Mutiny - the artillery of the Indian Army – all but a few portal mountain guns – had been supplied by the Royal Artillery.*

The 3rd Canadian Division's 9th Brigade of Canadian Infantry, with which the 58th Battalion was to serve, was not to arrive on the Continent until February 21-22 of 1916. In fact, not one of its four battalions – the 43rd, 52nd and 60th were the sister units of the 58th – had sailed from England until on or about February 20.

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

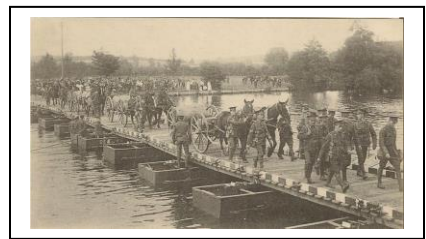
The 58th Battalion had been stationed at the Canadian military complex in the vicinity of the Hampshire villages of Liphook and Bramshott, the latter lending its name to the camp, when it was ordered overseas to service on the Western Front. On February 21, after a train-ride the day before to the English south-coast port-city of Southampton, it had taken ship to Le Havre, on the estuary of the River Seine, where the Canadians by then had their continental Base Depot.

On that same day, February 22, the Battalion had once more taken a train, this one to transport the unit to the north of France. By the evening of the 23rd it had taken up billets in or near the community of St-Sylvestre Cappel, there to drill and undertake route marches for the next six days, until the end of the month – 1916 was a leap year.



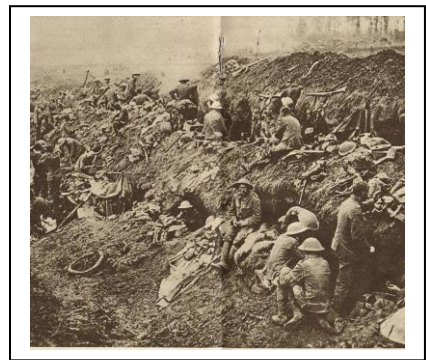
(Preceding page: *The French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

On March 1 the 58th Battalion had traversed the Franco-Belgian frontier to report to the camp in the area of Nieppe known as *Aldershot Huts*. There it was to undergo a nine-day initiation course run by the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigades and there it was to begin to appreciate life in – and out of - the trenches of the Western Front: the rigours, the routines...and the perils.



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



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

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

On March 10 the Battalion had begun to serve tours in the lines of the *Ploegsteert Sector*, this going north from the border area as far as Messines where the territory then had become the responsibility of the 2nd Canadian Division. The 58th Battalion had remained near the village of Ploegsteert for almost three weeks, under the watchful eye of the by-now veteran troops of the 1st Canadian Division with whom they were to share the *Sector*.

To the northwards, as it approached the remnants and rubble of the medieval city, the front line became a bulge which encircled the entire eastern area of Ypres and its outskirts. This bulge was the *Ypres Salient* – or just, *the Salient* – and had already earned a reputation as being one of the most lethal theatres of the *Western Front*. It was into the south-eastern sector of *the Salient* that at the end of the month of March the 3rd Canadian Division – by then at full establishment of twelve infantry battalions - was to be thrust.



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

But before it was to leave the *Ploegsteert Sector*, for the first time since the 58th Battalion had left the United Kingdom thirty-three days before, on March 24 the unit had...*paraded for baths*.

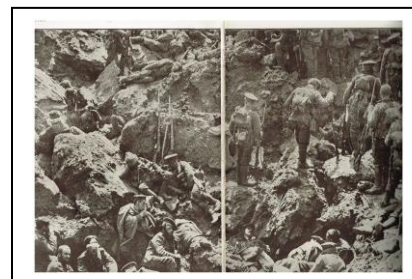


Even though the 58th Battalion War Diary for the next number of weeks was to report a relatively...*quiet Salient*, even so, the newcomers must have noticed an increase in belligerent activities and, as a consequence, a longer casualty list than it had known during its previous posting.

(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 to be little left standing. – from Illustration*)

At this same time, for the 2nd Canadian Division, the end of March and the first weeks of April were not to be as tranquil as those being experienced during the same period by the battalions of the 3rd Canadian Division.

The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* had officially 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 here that the British had excavated a number of galleries under the German lines, there to place explosives which they detonated on that March 27. This had been followed up immediately by an infantry assault.



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

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

However, as previously noted, *this* confrontation had been a 2nd Canadian Division affair and the personnel of the 58th Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the distant noise of the German artillery – if at all.

In March and April of 1916 the 1st Canadian Division also had been ordered transferred from the *Ploegsteert Sector* to the area of *the Salient*, in this case to the southern outskirts of Ypres in the area of Dickkebusch. The Division was still adjacent to the Canadian 2nd Division, but now to its left-hand and northern flank. Thus the 3rd Canadian Division, in its southeast sector, was now just to the left of the 1st Canadian Division: the Canadians had become a single entity, a re-positioning that was to be an advantage eight weeks later.

From June 2 to 14 the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the area of *Sanctuary Wood*, the village of *Hooge*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Maple Copse* and *Hill 60* was to be fought out between the German Army and the Canadian Corps.

The Canadian Corps had apparently been preparing an attack of its own on the enemy positions dominating the Canadian trenches when the Germans were to delivered an offensive which was to overrun the forward areas and, in fact, to rupture the Canadian lines, an opportunity which fortunately they had never exploited.



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

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

Badly organized, the operation was to be a horrendous experience: many of the intended attacks were never to go in – those that *did* had gone in piecemeal and the assaulting troops had been cut to shreds - the enemy had remained where *in situ* and the Canadians had been left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.

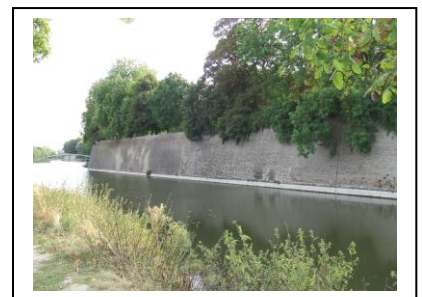
(Right: *The Canadian memorial which stands atop Mount Sorrel just to the south-west of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) whose spires and towers may be perceived in the distance.* – photograph from 1914)



For its own part, on June 2 the 58th Battalion had been in the Belgian town of Poperinghe, some twelve kilometres to the west of Ypres. In fact, it had been scheduled to have yet another bath – the time allotted, from one o'clock in the afternoon until six.

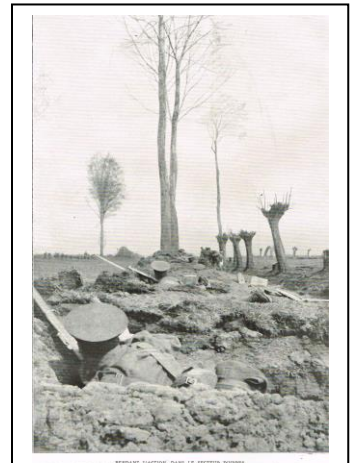
But the bath was not to be.

Excerpt from the 58th Battalion War Diary entry for June 2, 1916: *Battalion in waiting, ordered to “stand to” at 10 a.m. ready to move on hour’s notice... 3 p.m. ordered to “Stand to” ready to move at once... 5 p.m. ordered to proceed to Camp “F”... 5.45 p.m. ordered to proceed to BELGIAN CHATEAU...and took up positions in trenches... 9.30 p.m. ordered to move to YPRES RAMPARTS...*



(Right above: *Some of the reconstructed ramparts and the moat which today once more protect the medieval city of Ypres: The ramparts are hollow and subterranean, as they were at the time of the Great War when the massive walls afforded protection for troops billeted inside, including those of the Newfoundland Regiment during eight weeks of 1916.* – photograph from 2010)

(Right: Troops – in this instance British – in hastily-dug trenches in the Ypres Salient. These are still the early days of the year as witnessed by the lack of steel helmets which came into use only in the summer of 1916. – from Illustration)



The movement had been completed by two o'clock in the morning from which time on carrying-parties had worked to supply bombs (*grenades*) and small-arms ammunition to the troops in the front-line positions.

(Right below: 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)

At nine o'clock in the evening of June 3, the 58th Battalion had been ordered forward into the area of the village of Zillebeke, there to man *support* positions. These were to remain occupied, all the time under fire from the enemy artillery, until June 10 - during which time two Companies had also held positions at *Maple Copse* in the forward area. The unit had then been relieved.



This relief was to last but some twenty-four hours before the Battalion had been ordered back up to the forward area. The move had been undertaken by half-past three on the morning of June 12 and the unit had begun to ready itself for what was to about come: an assault on the German positions during the following night.



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

Excerpts from the 58th Battalion War Diary entry for June 13, 1916: *Ordered by Brigade to make a bombing attack...with the object of retaking old Front Line. Heavy artillery support in early evening. 1.30 a.m. the attack was made, and was a complete success. The enemy retaliated with heavy and light artillery...*

(Right: Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooge, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government. It resembles a hill much more before a British mine was detonated under it in the first week of June 1917, an explosion which blew the summit to smithereens. – photograph from 2014)



(continued)

Thus had ended the *Battle of Mount Sorrel*, each side – apart from a small German gain at *Hooge* – back much where it had been prior to the confrontation. Only the cemeteries had changed: they were that much larger.

The enemy had continued with a heavy artillery concentration for the following days – a barrage which had created a number of extra casualties – but there was to be no further infantry activity. On June 14th the 58th Battalion had been withdrawn to the area of the village of Zillebeke and of *Belgian Chateau*.

For the two months which were to succeed the confrontation at *Mount Sorrel*, things had reverted to the everyday routines of trench warfare. There was to be no concerted infantry action by either side, such activity having once again been limited to raids and patrols - although the opposing artillery had still been active.

The 58th Battalion had remained in the same south-eastern sector of *the Salient* until the fourth week of August when British and Irish units had begun to replace the Canadians*. For the most part these troops had previously been involved in the fighting of the British summer offensive to the south, in France, and now the Canadians were to be called upon to replace *them*.

**As mentioned on a previous page, one of these units – perhaps the only one not from the British Isles – had been the Newfoundland Regiment, serving in a British formation, the 29th Division.*

The 58th Battalion had begun to retire on August 23, then to spend several days in the Belgian town of Poperinghe – baths, route marches, football, no casualties – before having moved west to the vicinity of the French town of Steenvoorde where billets had been arranged. There the unit was to remain there in training for eleven days before, having then transferred there on foot and by motorized transport, on September 7 it had entrained at the railway station at Arcques.



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

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

By the summer of 1916 the Canadian units were exchanging it for the more reliable British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III, a rifle that was to ultimately serve around the globe until well after the Second World War.

(continued)

The train departed from the station at precisely...6.29 p.m....so the 58th Battalion War Diarist has recorded. At four-thirty of the following morning, having spent ten hours to complete a journey of about one-hundred kilometres, the train had deposited the unit at Auxi-le-Château. An excerpt from the Battalion War Diary entry for that September 8 continues: *Men a bit jaded from long night in train. Gave them hot tea at 8 a.m. and an hour's rest. Bucked up wonderfully and finished the march to billets...at 12 noon in good style. No marching casualties. Good billets, band concert in evening, everyone happy...*

Five days of marching later, on September 14, after a bath and a pay parade on the last of those days, the 58th Battalion had proceeded a final fifteen kilometres to the town of Albert, just behind the front. There the unit had bivouacked, expectant of an issue of clean clothing on the morrow. The Battalion had arrived at *the Somme*.

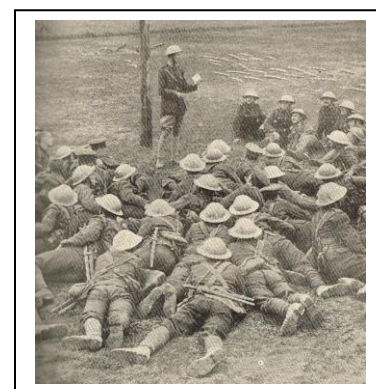
By mid-September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had by that time been ongoing for some two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which was to cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand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

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



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

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



(Right: *An image purporting to be that of a Canadian officer giving instructions to the troops under his command prior to the attack at Flers-Courcellette, September 1916. – from The War Illustrated*)

Having arrived in Albert on September 14, and then at the nearby *Ulna Hill* encampment on September 15, the 58th Battalion had been apprised that it had only twenty-four hours to wait until it was to be ordered forward to follow up on the anticipated successes of the by-then ongoing attack of that day.

(continued)

However, the unit's advance was to be dependent on the success of the Canadian 7th Brigade having captured its objective. This was not to happen: the order for the 58th Battalion had thus been rescinded and the unit was to spend that day digging new positions, and the *next* day...*sitting* in them.

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

On the following day again, September, 17...*found out that we were not quite in our right position, re-distributed Battalion... Barrage fire very heavy. ...had a working-party of 400 digging a jumping off trench... Everyone fairly cheerful.*

Everyone, perhaps, except the casualties: on that day the War Diary was to report – all ranks - thirteen *killed in action*, sixty-eight *wounded* and three *missing in action*.

It was to be September 20 before the Battalion had climbed out of the relative security of the trenches to attack the enemy positions. In the meantime the German guns had claimed a further forty-eight *killed, wounded* and *missing*.

(Right: *The village of Courcelette, a main objective of the attack of September 15 - just over a century after the events of the 1st Battle of the Somme* – photograph from 2017)

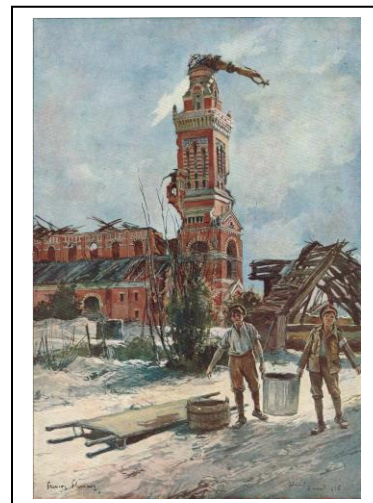
That assault of September 20 had been a small bombing raid rather than a part of a full-fledged offensive. Small parties of the 58th and 43rd Battalions were to storm a German trench from both ends and to thus establish communications.

The mission had not been accomplished and casualties for the day – for the 58th Battalion alone – had amounted to another fifty-eight *all ranks*. Two days later, having thus by then spent a week in the trenches, the unit had retired on September 22 to *Brickfields Camp*, in close proximity to the town of Albert.

But even being relieved was not accomplished in safety at *the Somme*: during its withdrawal to *Brickfields* the 58th Battalion was to incur yet another seven *killed*, twenty-six *wounded* and five *missing*. The total count for its first tour in the trenches of *the Somme*, including sick, had been about three hundred.

From then until October 2 the Battalion was to be on the march in the rear area. The British High Command had planned a further *push* during this period and in order to free billets for the incoming troops whose lot it was to be to do the pushing, marches had been planned for those units by now in need of a reprieve, to places far removed from the forward area.

The day after its return to the area of Albert, on October 3, the 58th Battalion had once more been ordered into the forward area, on this occasion to relieve the 18th Canadian Infantry Battalion in the vicinity of the *Miraumont Road*.



This was to be a six-day tour and, as it transpired, it was to be the *final* tour for the unit at *the Somme*. The end has not come, however, before the 58th Battalion had fought in the major engagement of October 8.

This attack was to be on the German defensive system known as the *Regina Trench* which had already proved its value to the enemy and which, up until this time, had resisted all efforts to capture it. It was to continue to do so for a further month.

One of the first obstacles – apart from artillery-fire, machine-gun fire and rifle-fire – was, as ever in this war, the wire: Excerpt from 58th Battalion War Diary entry for October 8, 1916: *...Wire was encountered by all three Coys...at from 10 to 20 yards in front of REGINA TRENCH. On the right the entanglements was barbed concertina wire about 4 feet in height and 4 feet in depth, lightly staked to the ground.*

On the centre the same kind of wire well staked with iron screw pickets and coils of loose wire placed on top, approximately 4 feet in height and five feet in length. On the left the entanglements appeared to have been more strongly built than on any other portions of the front. The entanglements had not been damaged by our artillery fire to any appreciable extent...



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

Early gains were later to be ceded to German counter-attacks and the Battalion had lost heavily during the operation. It was not to be until two days later that the War Diarist had counted the losses – these for the entire tour from October 3 to 9 inclusive but, of course, the greatest number from October 8: *thirty killed in action, one-hundred forty-four wounded and shell-shocked, and one-hundred eleven missing in action.*



(Right above: *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*)

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



On that final day of the tour, October 9, the Battalion had withdrawn to the *Tara Hill Camp*; on the next it had moved to *Brickfields*; two days later again, on October 12, at ten minutes past one o'clock in the afternoon, it had then begun the long march away from *the Somme*.

(continued)

The fighting there still had had some five weeks to run, but that was to be the task for other units; some of the new battalions were to be of the 4th Canadian Division and they had been even then just still arriving.

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



The 58th Battalion had proceeded to make its way westwards as far as Montigny where it had remained for several days before then having turned northwards to pass to the west of the city of Arras via Villers-Brulin. The unit had arrived at its destination, Bruay, on October 25.

By the end of the month the unit was to move once more – into front-line trenches.

This entire area, the sectors from Arras in the south to Béthune in the north – and the multitude of mining communities, large and small, of the region - were now to become more and more a Canadian responsibility as the troops withdrew from *the Somme*.



(Right above: *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*)

For the personnel of the 58th Battalion the late autumn and then winter of 1916-1917 had then been one of the every-day grind of life in and out of the trenches. There had been little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides. This latter activity had been encouraged by the British High Command who felt it to be a morale booster which was also to keep the troops in the right offensive frame of mind: apparently, the troops ordered to carry them out in general loathed these operations.

Casualties were to be, overall, light; even while posted in the forward areas the War Diarist had often been able to record...*Casualties – nil*. During this entire period the medical services were to be much more occupied with cases of sickness and, perhaps surprisingly, the need for dental work than they were with the victims of enemy military activity.



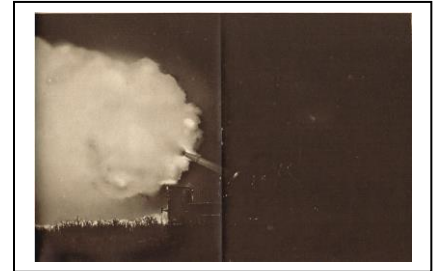
(Right above: *A detachment of Canadian troops moving to the forward area during the winter of 1916-1917 – from Illustration*)

Towards the end of the month of March the 58th Battalion had been withdrawn well to the rear, to the vicinity of Divion, there to undergo intensive training. The exercises had continued after the unit had moved into *Lamotte Camp* on the last day of the month and while it had remained there until April 8*.

**It had not been training alone: the entire Canadian Corps at some time or another during this period had undergone these special preparatory exercises in a number of areas behind the lines.*

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

On the final five days, the unit had been sent to become familiar with ground that had been re-arranged so as to resemble the terrain to be attacked. As those days had passed, the troops would have become aware of the increase in artillery activity as the preparatory barrage was progressively to grow in strength and fury.



It must have by then been evident to all that the offensive for which the entire Canadian Corps had been preparing was now imminent.

(Right above: A heavy British artillery piece spews its flame into the middle of the night. – from Illustration)

**It should be said that a great deal of the artillery used in the assault on Vimy Ridge was British and that a British Division also participated. Almost fifty per cent of the personnel who had been employed for that day were British, not to mention those whose contribution – such as those who dug the tunnels - allowed for it to happen.*

On the evening of April 8 the seven-hundred fifty-six *all ranks* of the 58th Battalion had moved up into their assembly trench. However, they apparently were not to pass via those well-documented tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety. Having moved over-ground, the Battalion had been in position and – since it was not to be involved in the initial attack – had been beginning to dig in by one o'clock in the morning of April 9.

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

On April 9 in that spring of 1917, the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, one of the few positive episodes having been the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



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

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time operating as a single, autonomous entity – there was even a British brigade serving under 2nd Canadian Division command - had 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*)

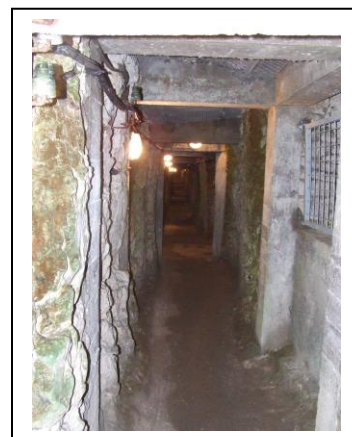


Excerpt from the 58th Battalion War Diary entry for April 9, 1917: *...Intense bombardment of enemy positions commenced at 5.30 A.M. Battalion position about 2200 yards from Front Line. 7th and 8th Brigades went over and captured all objectives at comparatively small cost. Enemy return fire was not heavy...some gas shells but with little effect...*

It had not been until the following day, April 10, after it had been reported that the Canadian Corps had captured all its objectives that...*We expect to be sent in to relieve a Battalion of the 7th C.I. Bde. soon...*

The *soon* in question was to be April 11 and the Battalion had immediately then been ordered to attack German positions, an attack which was not successful. But the Germans had been on the retreat* and two days afterwards those same enemy trenches, now empty, were to be in Canadian hands – by default. The Canadians were now to follow the German retreat.

**Some historians think that the Germans had already prepared positions to the rear in anticipation of the loss of the Ridge which may not have been the superb defensive position that it was considered by some – and by some still is today.*



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

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

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 had proved to be logistically impossible*.

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

**The weather and the orders to consolidate captured positions rather than to continue the advance as long as the enemy was retreating rendered the continuation of the attack impossible.*

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



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.

The 58th Battalion was not to play a role at either Arleux-en-Gohelle or at Fresnoy-en-Gohelle, and although it was to be posted on several occasions to the forward area, a cursory glance at the Battalion War Diary reveals that for the unit, after those few post-*Vimy Ridge* days, the remainder of *the Battle of Arras* had been a relatively tranquil affair.

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



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

(Right above: *An example of the conditions under which the troops were ordered to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917: it was probably worse, if possible, as this photo was taken in 1915 – from Le Miroir*)



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

(Right above: *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.

(continued)

Yet it had been high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – to be the area’s key feature, its capture more important than that of the city of Lens itself.

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



Objectives had been limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it had been expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it, and so it was to prove: on the 16th several strong counter-attacks had been launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.

(Right: *This 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*)



These defences had held firm and the Canadian artillery, which had been employing newly-developed procedures, was to inflict heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* had remained in Canadian hands.

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



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

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

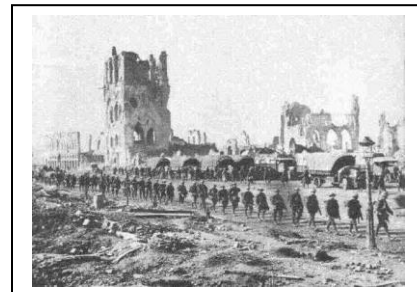


However, the British offensive further to the north had been proceeding less well than intended and the Canadians were to be needed there. All offensive activities in the *Lens Sector*, apart from the ceaseless patrolling and the less-frequent raids, had therefore been suspended in early September.

Since the responsibility for the attack on *Hill 70* had been assigned to the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions, the 58th Battalion had played no part in its capture. Apart from a three-day period of minor operations at the end of June, the number of casualties incurred during all the summer months of 1917 had been few – very few. It was to continue that way for the unit until the middle of October.

(continued)

It had been during the final weeks of October that the Canadians were to begin to become embroiled in the offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign has come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, having usurped that name from a small village on a ridge that had been – at least *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.



(Right: *Troops file through the rubble of the Cloth Hall in the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

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



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

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

The 58th Battalion had been posted to the rear area, to billets in the communities of Ourton and Dieval in the days preceding the orders to transfer northward into Belgium. From there on October 15 – at half-past three in the morning its personnel had begun to march to the railway station at Tinqués. Having then arrived there at seven o'clock on that same morning, it was to be on its way by train some ninety minutes later.



It was, however, to be a further twenty-two hours before the Battalion was to be quartered in billets at St-Sylvestre Cappel on the Franco-Belgian frontier. Having then remained in that area for six days, it was once more to travel by train. Having left at four in the morning to travel to the vestiges of the railway station just outside the southern ramparts of Ypres. From there the unit had marched across the city to the camp established in the north-eastern suburb of Wieltje.



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

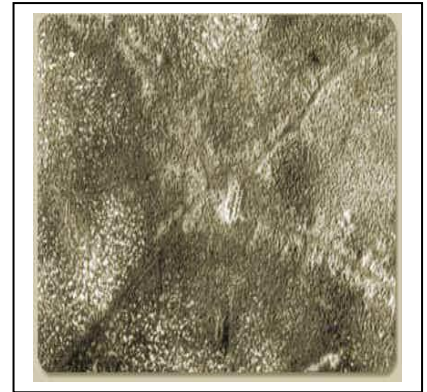
During the next few days after its arrival the unit had gradually made its way forward until October 24 when it had reported to the front lines. On October 25 it had remained *in situ*, some of the day's casualties having been caused by Canadian artillery firing *shorts*. On the evening and night of the 26th the Battalion had moved forward once more, into its assembly and jumping-off positions, in readiness for the morning of the 27th.

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



There may have been more than a little apprehension on the part of the 9th Brigade Command before the attack as evidenced by the following entry into Appendix Number 26 of the Brigade War Diary a propos the undertaking: *This operation had been undertaken already by other troops, but, owing to the strength of the position and the state of the ground, the attack had failed.*

The operation had been no less than the taking of the village of Passchendaele in four stages, the first two to be carried out by the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions, the final two by the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions.



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

The attack of October 27 had begun with the barrage at *Zero Hour*, at twenty minutes to six. At first things had been reported as proceeding well, but about ninety minutes into the attack progress had been held up, particularly by machine-gun fire – in fact, in some places the troops were to be forced back as far as their jumping-off positions.

Around about noon, however, positions overlooking the 58th Battalion's objectives had been captured and held by other units, thus having allowed for a successful attack by the 58th Battalion which had stormed the enemy positions – trenches and concrete pillboxes. These had been obstacles whose capture had been considered absolutely essential to the success of the entire offensive.



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

But it had been only after severe fighting by the three attacking battalions of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade – and heavy losses - that the breakthrough had been made. During this action and the remainder of the tour – October 24 to 28 inclusive - the 58th Battalion was to incur the following casualties: fifty-eight *killed in action* and four to *die of wounds*, two-hundred thirteen *wounded*, and twenty-seven *missing in action*.

(Right: Just a few hundred to the south-west of a re-constructed Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the monument pictured above – this, according to 9th Brigade maps of the plan of attack, is the land up which the four Canadian Divisions advanced at the end of October and beginning of September of 1917. – photograph from 2010)



On October 28 the Battalion had retired to the area of Wieltje; two days later it had moved to the west by bus, via the communities of Vlamertinghe and Poperinghe, to the vicinity of the Belgian border village of Watou. The Battalion War Diary entry of October 31 reports: *Casualties – nil. Wind North East 5 miles per hour. No parades. Battalion resting.* Quite a contrast.

But *Passchendaele* had not quite finished with the 58th Battalion. After ten days of repose in the calm of Watou, on November 9, the unit had been ordered to return eastwards to the forward area.

On foot, by train and then on foot again, by the end of that day it had returned to Wieltje.



(Right above: *In the stone of the Menin Gate at Ypres (today Ieper) there are carved the names of British and Empire (Commonwealth) troops who fell in the Ypres Salient during the Great War and who have no known last resting-place. There are almost fifty-five thousand remembered there; nevertheless, so great was the final number, that it was to be necessary to commemorate those who died after August 16 of 1917, just fewer than thirty-five thousand, on the Tyne Cot Memorial.* – photograph from 2010)

By this time the 3rd *Battle of Ypres* had been floundering to its conclusion. Just days prior the Canadians had by-passed what once had been the village of Passchendaele and the front line had been established just to the north. It had been to those positions that the 58th Battalion moved forward on November 11, there to relieve the 10th Battalion of the 1st Canadian Division.

In those trenches to the north of Passchendaele for the subsequent three days the unit had incurred casualties from enemy artillery and from a counter-attack on the 13th. On the morrow it once more – and for the final time – had retired. Three days later again, the 58th Battalion had been reported as encamped in northern France, in the area of Auchy-au-Bois to the west of the larger centre of Béthune where the casualty list, apart from those who had reported as *sick*, was *nil*. It was to remain at Auchy-au-Bois for a month.

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

****Apparently, at the same time, the troops were given the opportunity to subscribe to Canada's Victory War Loan. Thus the soldier fighting the war was also encouraged to help pay for it as well.***

As they had been during the three previous winters, the months from December until March were to be quiet. When it had been in the forward area, many of those days and weeks had been spent by the 58th Battalion in the area of the city and mining-centre of Lens and of its suburbs – the *cités*, many of them named after saints: when posted to the rear, the Battalion had withdrawn to places such as Raimbert and Neuville St-Vaast, adjacent to *Vimy Ridge*.



(Right above: *This was Lens by the end of the Great War although much of the damage had been done by the spring of 1918. – from Le Miroir*)

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

On March 21 the 58th Battalion had been in the front lines of the *Méricourt Sector*. At or about this time the War Diarist was to report increased – and perhaps unusual - activity in the enemy lines: shiny helmets in the enemy trenches, unconcealed movement in the German support and reserve lines, gas alarms sounded in the opposition camp, heavy mortar and artillery activity, and an enemy raid on March 28.

The situation had continued thus during the days that had followed and once more on April 2...*A large amount of movement by train and transport was observed in Enemy Reserves Area. Thus, likely as a result of all this activity...Companies are doing large amount of work strengthening the support positions.*



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

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans were to come to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred westward the Divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, they had delivered a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21.



The main blow was to fall at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops posted there in sectors adjacent to the French.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and thus to oblige them to retain troops in the area – some sources claim this to be a photograph of nearby Liévin. – from Le Miroir*)

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

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

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

The reaction to the German onslaught appears to have been somewhat confused. The offensive had fallen outside – to the south – of the Canadian Corps’ area of responsibility, the Arras Sector having been the attack’s northernmost limit. Of course, the British High Command was not to know the German intentions, and those unusual incidents reported by the 58th Battalion’s War Diarist had likely been undertaken to convince the Canadians to remain where they were – and out of the battle*.



****But the Canadian Corps could well have been a part of the battle if the British 3^d Army had not repulsed a northerly-headed attack or if an attack directly towards the Channel ports had come about – which was what the British High Command had feared.***



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

Whereas other Canadian units soon after March 21 had been placed on alert and had been marched southwards towards the sectors to the area south and south-west of Arras (see * above), there appears to have been no mention whatsoever in the 58th Battalion War Diary of any sense of urgency or even note of the events ongoing elsewhere. The unit had carried on as before the crisis: the same routines, the same duties, and in the same sectors – front, support and reserve - around Lens.

Thus a relative calm again had descended on the front as the German threats had faded – for the enemy the campaign had won the Germans a great deal of ground, but nothing of any real military significance on either of the two fronts.

(continued)

Nor had the subsequent calm* been particularly surprising: both sides had been exhausted and in need of time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to re-enforce.

**From April 1 until July 12 (inclusive) – one-hundred three days - the 58th Battalion reported at total of two ‘killed in action’ and 17 ‘wounded’. At other times during the war this would have been the toll of a single normal ‘quiet’ day.*

The Allies from this latter point of view were a lot better off than were their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were by now belatedly arriving on the scene. An overall Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing a counter-offensive.



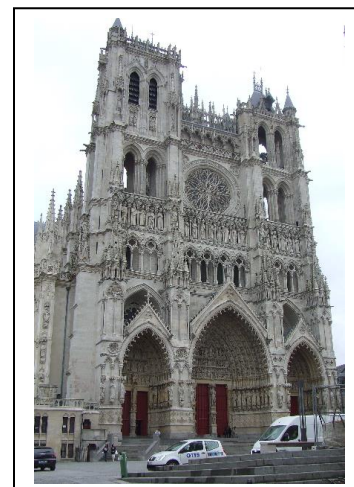
Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

(Right above: *Le Maréchal Ferdinand Jean-Marie Foch, this photograph from 1921, became Generalissimo of the Allied Armies on March 26, 1918. – photograph from the Wikipedia web-site*)

Meanwhile, by the beginning of July, the 58th Battalion had been posted to sectors to the south of Arras: Bellacourt, Telegraph Hill, Neuville-Vitasse. A raid had been attempted on July 22 against enemy positions at Neuville-Vitasse but it had been stopped cold by the German wire. A few grenades had been thrown in the enemy’s direction before the Canadians had been obliged to retreat, but little if anything had been accomplished for the price of...*one killed and one wounded.*

On the final day of that July, 1918, having been billeted for a single day at Sus St-Ledger to the south-west of Arras, the...*Battalion embussed at night for a point to be notified later.*

Towards the end of that same month, most of the military personnel of the four Canadian Divisions* had begun to move in a semi-circular itinerary - to the west of, then south of, and finally east of - to finish *in front of* the city of Amiens. There the Canadians and other Allied troops were to face the German forces in the positions where they had remained since the attacks of the previous March, April and May.



(Right: *The venerable gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the leading German troops had been able to see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918 – photograph from 2007(?)*)

**A very few units – two? - went in the opposite direction: they were to make themselves visible and noisy enough to give the impression that the Canadian Corps was once more moving into Belgium from where, logically, any future offensive would thus be launched.*

(continued)

During the six days following its departure from Sus St-Ledger the 58th Battalion had followed that same circuitous route via such places as Dromesnil, Prouzel, Hébécourt, Bois de Boves (*Boves Wood*) before reaching Bois de Gentelles (*Gentelles Wood*) at five in the morning of August 6. Whereas the first part of the transfer had been made by motorized transport, the latter stages had all been made on foot*.

**While, at the outset and as noted above, this huge transfer of troops had been undertaken by train and motor transport, the later stages had been accomplished on foot - and in marches during the hours of darkness to avoid the watchful eyes of any German observers. The strategy had worked, for the attack of August 8 apparently took the Germans completely by surprise.*

(Right: *Boves West Communal Cemetery in which lie numerous Canadians and a single Newfoundlander, a Private Joseph Power – photograph from 2017*)



For the remainder of that August 6 and then August 7, the 58th Battalion was to remain under cover and in bivouacs in *Gentelles Wood*. At nine-thirty on the evening of the 7th, the personnel had then moved forward to the assembly area in the front line...*preparatory to attack in the morning of the 8th.*

Excerpts from the 58th Battalion War Diary entry for August 8 of 1918: *...The Battalion was in their position by 2.10 A.M...the Companies were already (sic) for the attack at #.30 A.M. Plan of attack was as follows:- “B” Company was to assault, and to take German positions...and then push on and clear out enemy strong point at cross-roads... Patrols were then to move forward...along DEMUIN Road and protect Company attacking DEMUIN. “C” Company was to push through “D” Company, and attack and take Village of DEMUIN. “D” Company was then to pass through DEMUIN, and attack COURCELLES, and establish a line along high ground.*

“A” Company was to remain in reserve until DEMUIN had fallen and then was to push South East from DEMUIN, assault high ground...and assist 116th Canadian Battalion by bringing fire to bear on ground East of HAMON WOOD...

...Four tanks were allotted to precede the Battalion to work in conjunction with the infantry, paying special attention to cross-roads...and to clearing out of DEMUIN.

The Allied artillery fired the opening salvo of the opening barrage at twenty minutes past four on that morning of August 8. Initial progress had been inhibited by an early-morning mist and later by resolute German machine-gunners but...*This was eventually overcome, and with the exception of a little trouble when entering DEMUIN, and in cleaning up the village, the operation was concludes according to schedule.*



(continued)

Four tanks...preceded the Battalion, and great credit to these is given by the men for their excellent work in clearing up enemy machine (-gun) nests and strong points. The whole operation was entirely successful...

(Preceding page: In 1917 the British had formed the Tank Corps, a force which was to become ever stronger in 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again 'somewhere in France' – from Illustration)

At the end of that day, the 58th Battalion had been ordered to withdraw to Hamon Wood...accomplished by 9.00 P.M.

For the Allied* forces it had been a good day, in particular for the Dominion troops, the Australians and the Canadians: whereas in earlier battles progress – if any – had been measured in metres, on August 8 some Canadian units had succeeded in advancing eleven kilometres.**

***In this battle, the term 'Allied' signifies British, Commonwealth and French forces – the Belgians were also Allies but took no part in this, the Third Battle of the Somme. The Americans were present but were not considered to be an Allied power.**

****The first day of the Battle of Cambrai in November of 1915, and also of the German spring offensive, March 21, of 1918 were perhaps to be the only two exceptions to this rule since the autumn of 1914 when the two sides had created the trenches of the Western Front.**



The unit had moved to the vicinity of Le Quesnel – by this time in the rear area – before, two days later, on August 11, having been ordered up to the front once more, on this occasion to act as close support for the 116th Battalion.

(Right above: Hillside Cemetery, Le Quesnel, in which lie at least two Newfoundlanders who wore a Canadian uniform – photograph from 2015)

And, of course, it was some two days later again, on or about August 13, that Private Ryan was recorded in his files as having reported to duty with the 58th Battalion.

*** * * * ***

On August 15 Private Ryan's Battalion relieved the 116th Battalion in the front line by which time its casualty count was a further twelve *killed* and sixteen *wounded*. Only a single day – and ten more casualties - after having relieved the 116th, the unit was itself relieved, in this instance by the 10th Battalion of Canadian Infantry.



For the 58th Battalion, the *Battle of Amiens* had come to an end.

(continued)

(Preceding page: A group of German prisoners, some serving here as stretcher-bearers, being taken to the rear after their capture by Canadian troops: a tank may be seen in the background – from Le Miroir)

(Right below: Canadian soldiers consolidate their newly-captured positions while others cross a river on an improvised bridge. – from Le Miroir)

The Battalion was now to return to the *Arras Front* in much the same manner as it had arrived only those two weeks previously, by using many of the same itineraries; it was also mostly the same feet that were to undertake the first kilometres of the journey. Then, once again, in the area of Amiens, trains and motorized transport were to be brought into service.



And once more, much of this movement was made under cover of darkness as it was hoped to deceive the Germans about the movements of the Canadian Corps yet again on this second occasion.

At the same time, fresh French units now were relieving the Canadian forces as they retired from the battle. As for the British and other Commonwealth Divisions who had fought alongside the Canadians, they for the most part were to remain *in situ* as there was still a great deal of fighting to be done on this front.



(Right above: French dead in the communal cemetery at Caix, just to the west of Rosières. Caix also hosts a British Commonwealth cemetery as well as a German burial ground. – photograph from 2017)

Maison Blanche, Bouquemaison, Gouy-en-Ternois, Hermaville and Étrun hosted the 58th Battalion on successive days during its passage from one battlefield to the next. The final – albeit brief – stop at Étrun was, apart from billets, also to offer the added attractions of two parades: one for pay and the second for a bath.



(Right above: Canadian re-enforcements, in the case troops of a Canadian-Scottish unit, arriving at the front led by a regimental pipe-band – from Le Miroir)

It was likely as late as during the short interlude at Étrun on August 25 and 26 that the Battalion personnel was made aware of what lay in store – the orders were issued from Brigade at eleven-thirty, late on the evening of August 25. It could hardly have been much later: the next attack was imminent.

(continued)

The Allied Commander-in-Chief, Foch, had decided to strike often and continuously, keeping the pressure on an overstretched adversary. The French with British and American support had attacked at *the Marne*; the *Battle of Amiens* had been fought but was to continue under another official designation; and now the British and Canadians were to open a further front along the axis of the main road from Arras to Cambrai: the *Second Battle of Arras*.



(Right above: *Some of the ground on which fighting was to take place at the end of August and beginning of September of 1918: The Arras to Cambrai road – looking in the direction of Cambrai – may be perceived just left of centre on the horizon. – photograph from 2015*)

Again the Canadian Corps was to be used in a major role; the Germans, having been deceived once about its whereabouts – and believing it still to be stationed somewhere on the *Amiens Front* – were about to find themselves mistaken for a second time.

At seven o'clock on the evening of September 26, the 58th Battalion was ordered forward into the trenches at *Orange Hill* from which it was to attack; by ten o'clock all was ready. The advance to the assembly positions was to begin in just three hours.

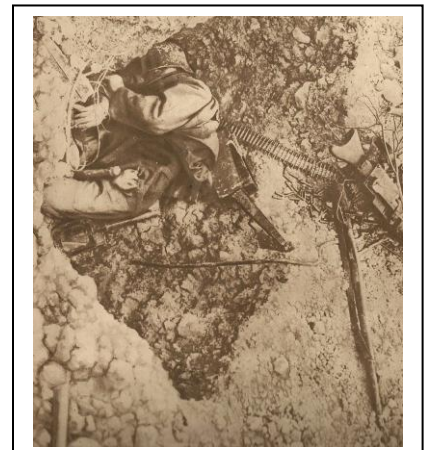
Excerpts from the 58th Battalion War Diary entry for August 27, 1918: ...*The Battalion was to attack the BOIS DU SART, supported by artillery and tanks, four tanks being allotted to the Battalion. Zero Hour was fixed at 4.55 a.m...*

The task was a fairly difficult one as the men only left ORANGE HILL at about 2.15 a.m. had to march about 4 miles to their assembly position in the dark over absolutely country without guides and attack over territory never seen before. Heavy fighting took place in the wood, but by 6.50 a.m. "D" and "C" Company had pushed completely through, and a small patrol...had penetrated HATCHET WOOD. About 7.00 a.m. our patrols were driven...and the enemy again forced his way into the BOIS DU SART, but by 7.30 a.m. the whole of the wood was in our hands. "D" Company had suffered heavily, and there was still a great deal of machine-gun fire... The wood was heavily shelled with gas. One Company of the 49th Battalion...protected the left flank...took great pains in establishing a line and did the utmost to protect the 58th Battalion. This was the position at nightfall on the 27th.

The cost of the advance had not been light: Casualties (*all ranks*) – thirty-two *killed in action*, one-hundred ten *wounded* and seven *missing in action*.

Early on the following day the 58th Battalion had been relieved and had moved towards the rear. Not long afterwards it was recalled to act as *support* in an attack to be delivered by the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade.

(Right: *A German machine-gunner who also gave his all – from Illustration*)



Excerpts from the 58th Battalion War Diary entry for August 28, 1918: *...the 9th Cd. Inf. Bde. were to attack at 11.00 a.m...58th left support... The 52nd Bn. were to assault and take trenches south of BOIRY and then swing to the North and attack and take ARTILLERY HILL, the 58th Bn. giving necessary support. ...by 1.00 p.m. BOIRY had been cleared by us, and "D" and "B" attacked ARTILLERY HILL. At this point some trouble was experienced... Two pill boxes caused much trouble...*

These two obstacles were later out-flanked by a Company of the 42nd Battalion upon request in mid-afternoon, the pill-boxes having subsequently been silenced and their occupants captured.

The fighting for the day was, however, far from over. The Germans, having overcome the surprise of the initial assault, were by this time beginning to fight back, and artillery support added to the Battalion's collective machine-gun fire was necessary to disperse a threatened counter-attack. Canadian re-enforcements arrived and by just after six o'clock the situation had been stabilized although the German guns were still active.

Casualties (*all ranks*) for that day were to be sixteen *killed*, eighty-one *wounded* and *gassed*, and four reported as *missing in action*.

Previously reported wounded & missing then Killed in Action 28/8/18

Casualty report: *Killed in Action – He was killed with his company in an attack east of MONCHY-LE-PREUX*. Details relative to the nature of the wounds sustained could not be ascertained, and no further particulars regarding his death are obtainable.*



**On April 14, 1917, the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had been ordered into an attack which was militarily untenable. It had failed and the enemy had organized a counter-attack. The remnant of the Battalion, its commanding officer, and a single soldier of the Essex Regiment – ten men in all – had held off this attack until re-enforcements arrived. All ten had subsequently been decorated.*

Although sources differ somewhat, the Newfoundland unit incurred losses of some four-hundred sixty on that day – killed in action, wounded, missing in action and taken prisoner – a count second only to that on the field at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916.

(Right above: Seen from the west from the British point of view, and also from the Arras-Cambrai Road, this is the re-constructed village of Monchy-le-Preux almost a century after the events of 1917 and 1918. – photograph from 1914)

The son of Robert Ryan, fisherman, and of Naomi Ryan – to whom on January 9, 1918, he had willed his all, and to whom he had also, as on February 1 of 1918, he had allotted a monthly twenty dollars from his pay - of Blackhead, District of Bay de Verde, he was also brother to Edwin-Lewis (died at the age of six months), to Hilda-Gertrude, to Mary, to Orlando-William and to Ronald-Banks (died at the age of six days).

(continued)

Having been cited as *wounded* and *missing in action* on August 28, 1918, Private Ryan was later reported on that same day as having been *killed in action*.

Herbert Lewis Ryan had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-five years and a single month: date of birth at Blackhead, Newfoundland, October 24, 1892.

Private Herbert Lewis Ryan was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 24, 2023.

