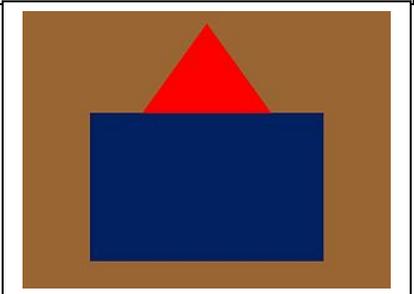


**Corporal Andrew Murdison Wilson, number 902508 of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Loos British Cemetery: Grave reference, Lens Canadian Cemetery No. 2\*, Memorial 24.**

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

**(continued)**



***\*This cemetery was destroyed during the fighting later in the war and little or no trace of a great number of graves remained. Special memorials to the soldiers buried but lost there were then placed in Loos British Cemetery not far distant. The now non-existent burial-ground should not be confused with the present Canadian Cemetery Number 2, Neuville St-Vaast, adjacent to the Canadian National Memorial on Vimy Ridge.***

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *bank clerk*, Andrew Murdison Wilson was apparently born in Scotland before his parents emigrated to the Dominion of Newfoundland where his father was to become Secretary and Registrar of Higher Education and was to have an office in the Colonial Building. This information is dated as from 1913, by which time Andrew Murdison Wilson was working as a clerk in St. John's at the *Bank of Nova Scotia*.

However, by May of 1915 he was working, also as a bank clerk – but now with the *Bank of Commerce* - in the Nova Scotia town of Springhill, and it was then and there that he presented himself for enlistment. He had been employed there in Springhill for a bare three months, having landed in Halifax from the Bowring Brothers' steamer *Stephano* on February 3 after the voyage from St. John's.

His first pay records show the precise date of enlistment to have been May 13 and it was also on that same date that Andrew Wilson had been *taken on strength* by the 193<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (*Cumberland Highlanders*). Ten days later, while still in Springhill, he was to undergo a medical examination, a procedure which found him to be...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*.

On that same May 23 he attested, his oath witnessed by a local justice of the peace.

The 193<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's Headquarters had initially been established in the town of Truro, but it may well be that Private Wilson was never to be stationed there. On May 23 the four Companies of the Battalion – each having been based in a different area - reported to *Camp Aldershot* in King's County to complete their training with the 185<sup>th</sup>, 219<sup>th</sup> and 85<sup>th</sup> Battalions which were now to comprise the newly-authorized *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade*. By that date the 193<sup>rd</sup> Battalion apparently numbered fourteen-hundred fifty-nine men, three-hundred above establishment strength.

It was then not until a further month after the arrival of his Battalion at *Aldershot*, the date June 22, that the formalities of Private Wilson's enlistment were brought to a conclusion by Lieutenant-Colonel John Stanfield, the Officer Commanding the 193<sup>rd</sup> Overseas Battalion (*Cumberland Highlanders*) when he declared – on paper - that...*Andrew Wilson...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

At some point after this date Private Wilson was given leave to visit his family. The date of his arrival back in Newfoundland appears not to be recorded but the passenger list of the SS *Kyle* shows him returning to *Aldershot* and crossing the Cabot Strait from Port aux Basques back to North Sydney on August 10.

(continued)

On September 23, 1916, the wife of the Canadian Prime Minister presented its Colours to the 193<sup>rd</sup> Battalion and three weeks later its thirty-three officers and one-thousand twenty-four *other ranks* (other sources contradict this number, of course) were transported by train to the waterside at the harbour at Halifax.

His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*, sister ship of *Britannic* – to be sunk in the Mediterranean Sea in that November of 1916 – and of the ill-starred *Titanic*, was at the time one of the world's largest passenger ships. She needed to be in order to carry the number of troops that were to pour into her on October 11, 12 and 13 for passage to the United Kingdom: *Olympic* was to carry not only the personnel of Private Wilson's 193<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, but also those of the 85<sup>th</sup>, the 188<sup>th</sup>, the 219<sup>th</sup> and the 185<sup>th</sup> Battalions, plus one-half of the 166<sup>th</sup> Battalion, all of them Canadian Infantry units.

With the addition of some three hundred miscellaneous others who also took passage on her, the vessel was to provide passage to the United Kingdom for some six-thousand souls. She was to eventually clear the port of Halifax at eleven o'clock on the morning of that October 13, 1916. Six days later, on October 18, she docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool, the troops to remain on board until the following day.



(Right above: *HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor along with HM Hospital Ship Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay on the Greek island of Lemnos in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London*)

From Liverpool, Private Wilson's unit was transported to *Witley Camp* in the southern extreme of the English county of Surrey for yet further training. There appears to be nothing in Private Hickman's file *a propos* the seven weeks that he was to spend there, except that he had landed in England as a corporal (*acting* – apparently without pay), having been promoted as soon as he had stepped on board *Olympic* in Halifax – and perhaps confirmed to this rank on January 4, 1917. On November 23 he then penned a Will in which he bequeathed his all to his mother.

After having spent both Christmas Day and New Year's Day – the latter (*Hogmanay*) more important for the Scottish units than for the others - Private Wilson was transferred on paper to the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) on January 13 of 1917, and transferred physically – whether from *Witley* or from nearby *Camp Bramshott* is not clear - to France during the night of January 13-14 – likely via Southampton and the French port-city of Le Havre - there to report on the latter date to *Rouelles Camp*, the Canadian General Base Depot in close proximity to Le Havre.

In order to proceed to *active service*, Corporal Wilson had reverted to the ranks at his own request at the time of his departure\* from England.

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



***\*His promotion story is a little convoluted and not altogether resolved: on April 28, 1917, he was officially re-instated to the rank of corporal (acting – with pay) – a role which he may never have in fact relinquished (see immediately below); a month later, this restoration to corporal was made officially retro-active back to January 14, the day on which he had seemingly reverted to the ranks. Another month later again, on June 26, the confirmation of the rank of full corporal – rather than acting – was made, this also to be retro-active to January 14, 1917.***

**The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for January 19, 1917, reads partially as follows: *Battalion marched from FOSSE TEN into rest billets at BRUAY. Reinforcement draft of 11 N.C.O's received from N.S. Highland Brigade.* If indeed he was one of this draft, as his papers document, then he was apparently still a corporal at the time.**

**Whatever the truth of the matter, Corporal(?) Wilson was now to learn the ins and outs of the sharp end of *active service*.**

\* \* \* \* \*

**The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force had already been serving in France and Belgium for some sixteen months by the time of Corporal(?) Wilson's arrival, since mid-September of the year, 1915. The Battalion was a component of the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, and it had been in service on the Continent continuously since its arrival on the *Western Front*.**



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



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

**Only days after having passed through the port of Folkestone and its French counterpart, Boulogne, on September 22 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to take over trenches from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of *The King's Own* in the *Kingdom of Belgium*. These had been in the area forward from the communities of Locre and Kemmel, in that small part of the country which had not by then been occupied by the Germans, and to the south of the already-battered medieval city of Ypres.**



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

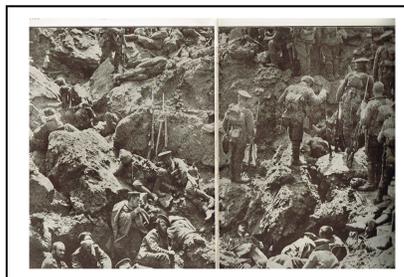
**(Right below: A Belgian aerial photograph showing the devastation of Ypres as early as 1915 – the city is described as ‘morte’ (dead) - before the arrival of Corporal(?) Wilson – from Illustration)**

The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to remain in these sectors until August of the following year, 1916.

In early April of 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had undergone its baptism of fire in a major infantry action. It had been at a place named St-Éloi where, at the end of March, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the British had detonated a series of mines placed in galleries excavated beneath the German lines and then had followed up with an infantry attack. The newly-arrived Canadian formation had been ordered to later follow up on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.



However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which had turned the just-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, plus a resolute German defence, had greeted the newcomers who were to take over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.



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

Towards the end of that confrontation, on April 13-14, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had relieved another Canadian unit in craters and new trenches, and subsequently was to incur a total of some eighty-five casualties, a greater toll than the unit had known on any single occasion up until that date.



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

Some six weeks later, in early June, the Battalion had then been involved in the fighting in the area of the village of Hoge, Mount Sorrel, Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60, Railway Dugouts and Maple Copse, in the so-called Ypres Salient and just to the south-east of the city of Ypres. The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division had been the main recipient of the enemy’s offensive thrust but the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was apparently to play a role sufficiently important for the name *Mount Sorrel* to become the first battle-honour won by the unit during the *Great War*.



(Preceding page: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 and 1917 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooge, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government. – photograph from 2014*)

The confrontation at *Mount Sorrel* would be fought from June 2 to 14. The Canadians had apparently been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans had delivered an offensive, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity which fortunately they had not exploited.



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

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

The British Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, had reacted – perhaps a little too precipitately - by organizing a counter-attack for the following day, an assault intended, at a minimum, to recapture the lost ground. Badly organized and inadequately supported, the operation was to be a horrendous experience: many of the intended attacks had not been delivered – those that had, had gone in piecemeal and the assaulting troops had been cut to shreds - the enemy was to remain where he was, in captured Canadian positions, and the Canadians had been left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.



Ten days later the Canadians had again counter-attacked; on this occasion they had been better prepared and were to be better supported. The lost ground for the most part had been recovered, both sides had found themselves back where they had started – except for a small German gain at *Hooge* - and the cemeteries, alas, had been that much fuller.



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

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

(continued)

**(Right below: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India* – photograph from *Bain News Services* via *Wikipedia*)**

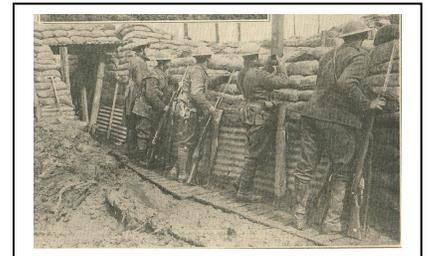
Some two weeks later, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of the month, the unit had been withdrawn into northern France to the vicinity of Steenvoorde and to the village of Moulle.

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



**(Right below: *Canadian troops likely in trenches built for training purposes – they are too prim and proper to be the real thing – and here now equipped with steel helmets and 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 would jam, 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.**

By that September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault 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.

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

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



(continued)

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

Meanwhile, on the evening of September 10, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the *Brickfields (La Briqueterie)* in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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

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

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

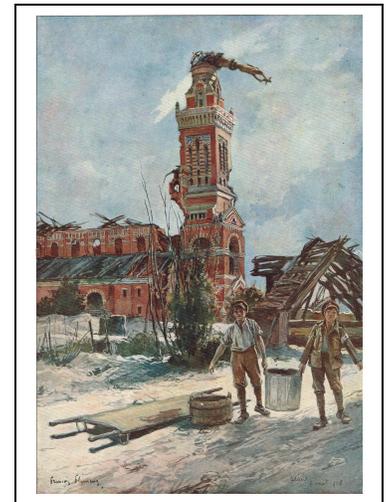
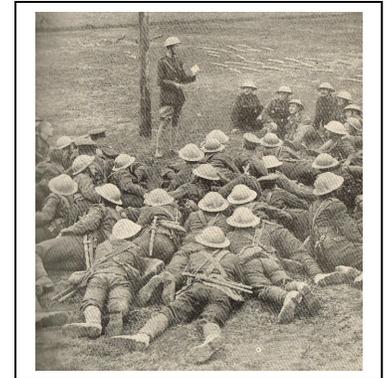
Excerpt from the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for September 15, 1916: *5<sup>th</sup> Brigade attacked and captured the Town of Courcellette... the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved forward as though on General Inspection the young soldiers behaving like veterans, going through very heavy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

Of the six-hundred ninety personnel who had gone over *the top* on the day of the assault, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diarist was to record thirty-six dead, one-hundred ninety-one wounded and seventy-seven as *missing in action*\*

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

On October 1 the Battalion – its operational strength by then apparently reduced to two-hundred (sic) all ranks and twelve machine-guns – *received orders to attack and capture “at all costs” enemy trenched known as KENORA and REGINA... “B”, “C” and “D” Companies... were to proceed over KENORA up to REGINA, which they did, but by the time they had got to the wire the casualties had been so heavy that only one officer was left... and about thirty men...*

(continued)



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

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



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



On the night of October 1-2 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had retired from *the Battle* - and from the area of - *the Somme* and had made its way westwards and then northwards. It had subsequently passed to the west of the battered city of Arras and beyond, to the region of the city and mining centre of Lens. There the unit was to remain for the following six months, in the area and in the trenches of places such as Bully-Grenay, Angres and Bruay.

(Right below: *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*)

And it was, of course, during this period that Corporal(?) Wilson reported to his new unit from the Base Depot close to Le Havre.

\* \* \* \* \*

That winter of 1916-1917 was to be one of relative calm, allowing the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion – and many other units - to return to the everyday rigours and routines of trench warfare\*: after *the Somme* it was perhaps to be a welcome respite.



There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and wiring, and the occasional raids by either side.

The medical facilities during this period were to be kept much more busy by cases of sickness and of dental problems than by the numbers of wounded in need of treatment.

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



*\*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*

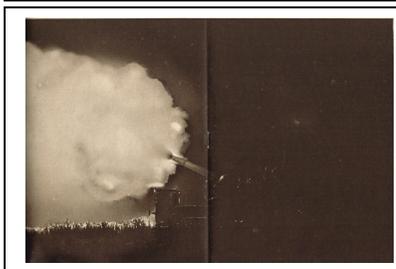
*or so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest the forward area, the latter furthest away.*

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

*(Right: A photograph of Canadian troops in their support positions somewhere on the Somme during the autumn of the year 1916 - By that time they had been equipped with steel helmets and the less visible, British-made, Lee-Enfield rifles – from Illustration)*



Towards the end of the month of March, on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered withdrawn well to the rear, to Maisnil-Bouche, where it was to undergo intensive training. There the exercises lasted until, and including, April 7, only two days before the training in question was to become the real thing. During the final five days, April 2-7, 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 final days passed the artillery barrage\* grew progressively heavier. On April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion was to describe it as...*drums*. By this time, of course, the Germans were undoubtedly aware that something was in the offing and their guns in their turn were throwing retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft were very busy.

*\*It ought to be noted that a great deal of the artillery used in the assault on Vimy Ridge was British and that a British division – only a single brigade employed on April 9 – 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.*

*(Right above: A heavy British artillery piece continues its deadly work during a night before the attack on Vimy Ridge. – from Illustration)*

On April 8... *Battalion less 1 platoon per company moved from MAISNIL BOUCHE to concentration area at BOIS DES ALLEUX. In the evening the Battalion moved up to its position...via cross country route...* (Excerpt from 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary). It apparently was not to pass via those well-documented tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety.

On April 9, Easter Monday, in that spring of 1917, the British Army 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 very few positive episodes to be the assault by the Canadian Corps of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the advance.

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

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

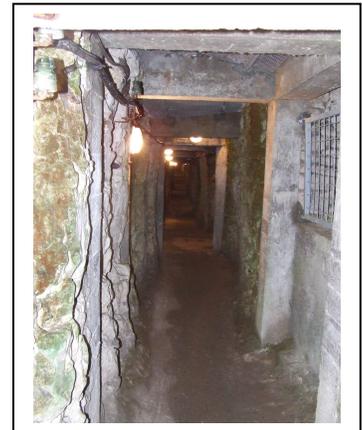


On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity, stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

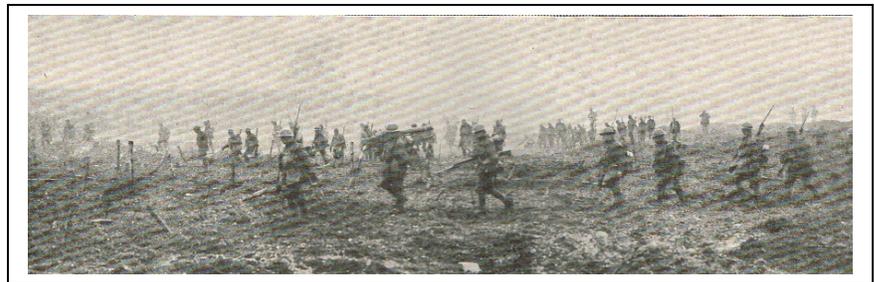
The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was not responsible for the taking of *Vimy Ridge* itself, but for the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the southern slope and therefore on the right-hand side of the attack. And on that day it had under its command the aforementioned British brigade.

Corporal Wilson's 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion's objectives were apparently soon to be captured and much of the remainder of the day had been spent in consolidating these newly-won positions.

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



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



(Right below: *Canadians under shell-fire occupying the third line of trenches on Vimy Ridge, anonymous dead lying in the foreground: The fighting of the next two days was to be fought under the same conditions. – from Illustration*)

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



(continued)

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

There had been, on those first days of April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted, but highly unlikely, *breakthrough* – however, such a follow-up of the first day's success had proved to be logistically impossible – apart from the order to halt and consolidate - the weather having prevented any swift movement forward, if any at all, of guns and material.



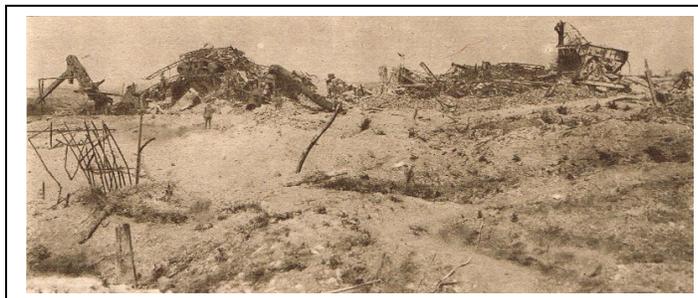
Thus the Germans were gifted the time to close the breach and the conflict once more was to revert to one of inertia.

The remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* was not to be fought in the manner of the first days and, by the end of those five weeks, little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success. By the time that the *Battle of Arras* had officially drawn to its conclusion, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been withdrawn into reserve, to rest and to train – if that is not a contradiction – in the vicinity of the community of Gouy-Servins, to the west of the city of Lens.

Now there were to be several weeks before a return to the forward area. Excerpts from 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War diaries of July 2 and 3, 1917: *Battalion at BOUVIGNY HUTS. Preparations to relieve 46<sup>th</sup> British Division, 138<sup>th</sup>. and 137<sup>th</sup>. British Brigades, 1/5 Battalion Leicesters and 1/4 Battalion Leicesters. Casualties, 1 Other Rank killed, 9 Other Ranks wounded.*

*Relief completed about 2 a.m.* – No further casualties were to be documented for the remainder of the day. Thus it was back to business as usual.

The British High Command by that time had long before 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 ordered other operations as well to take place in the sectors of the front running north-south from Béthune down to Lens.



The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort and one of the primary objectives was to be *Hill 70* in the outskirts of the mining centre of Lens; to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions had been confided the responsibility for the capture of the aforementioned position. Thus during the second week of August, Private Wilson and the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion were to be moving forward into the northern outskirts of the city of Lens in anticipation of capturing what is a seemingly-innocuous piece of territory.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *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*)

(Right: *Canadian troops advancing 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.

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

Yet *Hill 70* was high enough to have been considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – as the key feature in the area, 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 16<sup>th</sup> several strong counter-attacks were to be launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by that time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.

These defences held firm and the Canadian artillery, by then employing newly-developed procedures, would inflict heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* thus remained in Canadian hands.

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

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

(Right: *The spoils of war: Canadian officers and men on some of the terrain on which they had recently fought – and captured – from Le Miroir*)



The son of Andrew Wilson, Secretary and Registrar for the Council for Higher Education in Newfoundland, and of Flora Wilson, both originally from Scotland, he was also brother to Miss A.A. Wilson, Musselburgh, Scotland.

Corporal Wilson was reported as having been *killed in action* on August 15, 1915, in the fighting at *Hill 70*.

Andrew Murdison Wilson had enlisted at the *apparent* age of eighteen years and ten months: date of birth (from attestation papers) in Musselburgh, Scotland, August 15, 1897, exactly twenty years to the day before he was to die.

Corporal Andrew Murdison Wilson 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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 23, 2023.