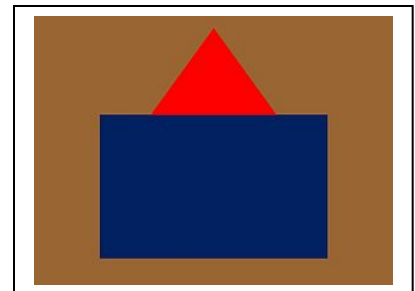




Private Daniel Wilton, Number 733795 of the 25th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Aubigny Communal Cemetery Extension: Grave reference I.G.53.

(Right: The image of the shoulder-patch of the 25th Battalion (Victoria Rifles) is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of an *engineer*, Daniel Wilton appears to have left behind him little information pertaining his early life in Woody Point, Bonne Bay, on the west coast of the island, or of his from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. It is possible that he and his bother Nathan were the two young men recorded on the passenger list of the SS *Glencoe* on her crossing of April 3, 1911, from Port aux Basques to Louisbourg, but there is no further evidence with which to confirm this.

It *is* documented, however, that he was in the capital city of the province in January of 1916, for that was where and when he both enlisted. His first pay-records show him having been *taken on strength* by the 112th Overseas Battalion of the Canadian Infantry on the 14th day of that month and as having been remunerated for his services to the Battalion as of the same day.

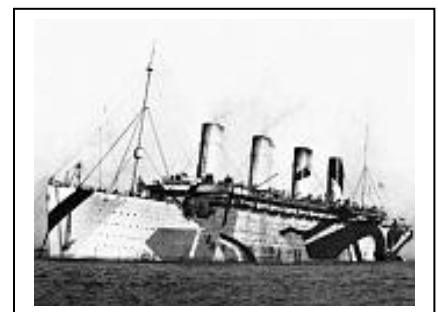
Private Wilton's 112th Battalion reportedly trained during that winter and spring of 1916 in, and in the vicinity of, the town of Windsor but, however, no dates appear among his files – or elsewhere – to show when that training may have commenced.

There was now a long wait before the formalities of enlistment continued and a shorter one again before they were brought to a conclusion. It was not until June 14 that Private Wilton underwent a medical examination in Halifax – a procedure that was to find him...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*...and was also attested, his oath witnessed by a local justice of the peace.

And then a further three weeks were to pass. It was finally on July 7, 1916, that Private Wilton was brought before the Commanding Officer* of the his battalion who thereupon declared – on paper – that...*Daniel Wilton...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this attestation*. It was now to be only a matter of another two weeks before the unit would depart for overseas service in the United Kingdom.

**Lieutenant-Colonel Hadley Brown Tremain (sic), the officer in question, was apparently not appointed Commanding Officer until July 23, the day of his Battalion's departure for overseas service.*

On July 23, having travelled the short distance to Halifax, the 112th Battalion boarded His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*, sister-ship to *Britannic* – later to be sunk in the Mediterranean in November of that same year – and also of the ill-fated *Titanic*. She, *Olympic*, was one of the largest ships afloat at the time, able to easily carry more than six-thousand troops – which she oft-times did.



(Right above: *The photograph of Olympic, shown here in her war-time dazzle camouflage, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

(continued)

Thus Private Wilton was not to take passage to the United Kingdom alone: apart from his own unit, travelling on *Olympic* were the 103rd, 109th, 115th and 116th Battalions of Canadian Infantry; the 4th Draft of the Canadian Mounted Rifles Depot; the 1st Draft of both the 65th and 71st Batteries of the Canadian Field Artillery; and the 2nd and 3rd Drafts of the 11th TD (*Training Depot?*) of the Canadian Army Medical Corps. Likely added to them were to be other miscellaneous military personnel, for a total of not far off six-thousand souls.

Having cleared the harbour in Halifax on July 24, HMT *Olympic* docked a week later in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool on the last day of the month. Nine days later again she had returned to Halifax, there to disembark repatriated soldiers.

From Liverpool the 112th Battalion was transported immediately by train to the large, newly-established, Canadian camp in the vicinity of the villages of Bramshott and Liphook in the southern English county of Hampshire.

There at *Camp Bramshott* Private Wilton and his comrades-in-arms were to remain for the following two months to complete their training while awaiting further orders to proceed from there to the Continent and on to the *Western Front*.

(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*)

On October 5, a re-enforcement draft from the 112th Battalion was transferred by ship, likely through the English port of Southampton, to its French counterpart, the industrial city of Le Havre, situated at the estuary of the River Seine. There it reported, on the morrow, October 6, to the nearby Canadian Infantry Base Depot, *Camp Rouelles*.



Private Wilton's detachment was also transferred, this time on paper, from the 112th Battalion, to be *taken on strength* by the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) already serving on the Continent*.

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



*A total of just one-hundred seventy-two re-enforcements arrived from England at the Base Depot on that day. At other times the number was up in the thousands.

It was to be a further two weeks before Private Wilton departed from Le Havre to join his unit. On October 20 the Base Depot despatched three-hundred fifty-two re-enforcements to various units; one-hundred ten of them, Private Wilton among that number – plus eleven signallers - were destined to join the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) in the field on October 22, at a time when the four fighting companies of the Battalion were in front-line and support positions forward of the commune of Bully-Grenay, adjacent to the city and mining centre of Lens.

(continued)

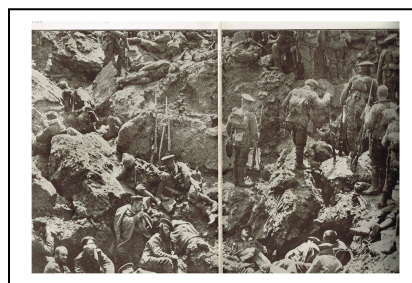
The 25th Battalion was to remain in this general area for almost an entire year – even the Canadian contribution to the *Battle of Arras* in the spring of 1917 was to be fought there – and thus this was to be a period during which Private Wilton and his unit were to become accustomed to the daily grind of war in the trenches.

* * * * *

The 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force had already been serving in France and Belgium for some thirteen months by the time of Private Wilton's arrival, since September of the previous year, 1915. It was a unit of the 5th Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2nd Canadian Division, and had been in service on the Continent continuously since its arrival on the *Western Front*.

In early April of 1916, the 2nd Canadian Division had undergone its baptism of fire in a major infantry action. It was at a place named St-Éloi where, at the end of March, on the 27th, the British had detonated a series of mines beneath the German lines and then had followed up with an infantry attack. The newly-arrived Canadian formation had been ordered to 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 over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and, in doing so, had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.



Towards the end of that confrontation, on April 13-14, the 25th Battalion had relieved another unit in the craters and subsequently had incurred a total of some eighty-five casualties, a greater toll than the unit had known on any other single occasion up until that date.

(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*)

Six weeks later, in early June, the Battalion had been involved in the fighting in the area of *Mount Sorrel*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, the village of *Hooge*, *Railway Dugouts* and *Maple Copse*, all just to the south-east of the city of Ypres. The Canadian 3rd Division had been the main recipient of the enemy's offensive thrust but the 25th Battalion of the 2nd 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.



(Right above: *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*)

(Right: *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*)



From the middle of June up until August of 1916, 20, the 25th 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. Some two weeks later, on the 27th, the unit was withdrawn into northern France to the vicinity of Steenvoorde and to the village of Moulle.

The following week at Moulle had been 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 when compared to the 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.

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

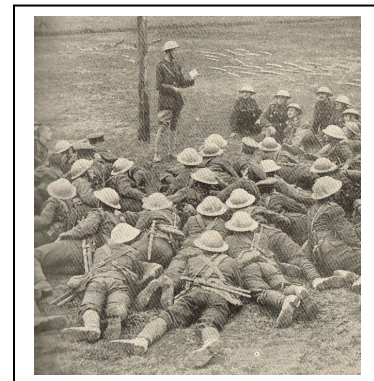
On that first day of *1st Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland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



(continued)

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

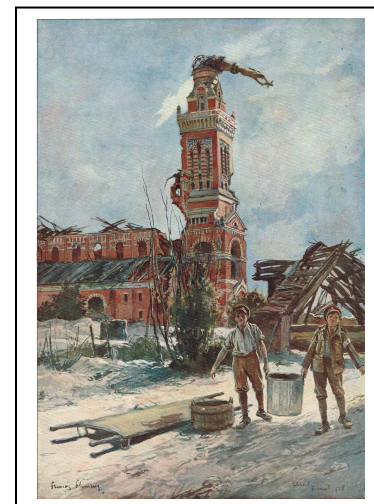
As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were to be brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive.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



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

Meanwhile, on the evening of September 10, the 25th Battalion had arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the Brickfields (*La Briqueterie*) in the proximity of 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: *Canadian soldiers at work carrying water in Albert, the already-damaged basilica in the background* – from *Illustration*)

Excerpt from 25th Battalion War Diary entry for September 15, 1916: *5th Brigade attacked and captured the Town of Courcellette... the 25th 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 War Diary was to record thirty-six dead, one-hundred ninety-one wounded and seventy-seven as *missing in action**.

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

**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.*



(continued)

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

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

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



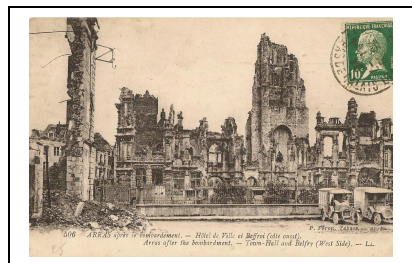
(Right below: *Wounded at the Somme transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from Le Miroir*)

On the night of October 1-2 the 25th Battalion had retired from *the Battle* - and from the area of - *the Somme* and would make 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 mining centre of Lens. There the unit would remain for the following six months, in the area, and in the trenches, of places such as Bully-Grenay – where Private Wilton and his draft were to report *to duty* on that October 22 - Angres and Bruay.



* * * * *

(Right: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery – from a vintage post-card*)



That winter of 1916-1917 was to be one of relative calm, allowing the 25th Battalion – and many others - to return to the everyday rigours and routines of trench warfare; after *the Somme* it was perhaps a welcome respite. Of course, for Private Wilton it would all have been a new experience*.

Casualties for the most part were due to enemy artillery – shell-fire apparently to be responsible for some two-thirds of *all* casualties on the *Western Front* - with snipers also having taken their toll; but in fact, it was to be myriad sicknesses and, perhaps surprisingly, more than that, dental problems which would keep the medical services occupied during this time.

(continued)

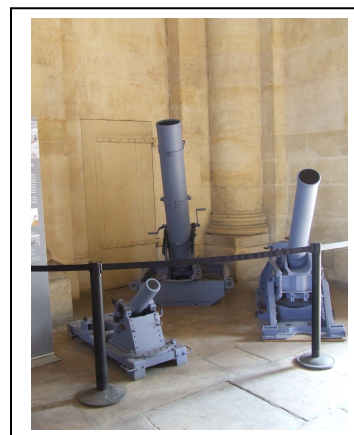
****During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was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



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

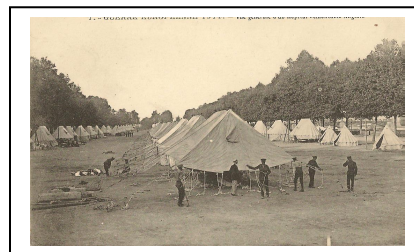
(Right above: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of the year 1916, by that time equipped with steel helmets and the less visible, British-made, Lee-Enfield rifles – from Illustration)

The 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) War Diary entry for March 3, 1917 – while the unit was serving in the La Folie Sector - reads as follows: During the morning our artillery engaged an enemy steel observation post opposite our front line known as the Mystery Box. The post was destroyed. The artillery was assisted by the Trench Mortars. Our Snipers were again active claiming several hits. During the afternoon the enemy was again active with his artillery and T.M.s but did little damage.



(Right: Not German but - dating from the time of the Great War - comparable French trench mortars which used to stand as shown, here in the entrance to the Musée de l'Armée, Paris – photograph from 2015)

But nonetheless they did some: Private Wilton was wounded and evacuated to the 42nd Casualty Clearing Station at Aubigny where he was deemed by the medical staff to be dangerously ill*.



****There appear to be no details of his injuries on any papers in Private Wilton's dossier.***

(Right above: A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War: Other such medical establishments were of a more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card)

(continued)

The son of John Thomas Wilton, former fisherman deceased June 30, 1913, and of Elizabeth Wilton* (née *Bobbitt*) – to whom in a document dated October 2, 1916, he had willed his all – of Woody (also found as *Woodie*) Point, Bonne bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Samuel-John, Thomas-Frederick, George-Alfred, Nathan-Norman and to Augusta-Winnifred.

**The couple were married on September 15, 1882.*

(Right: *The sacrifice of Daniel Wilton is honoured on the War Memorial which stands in the community of Woody Point, Bonne Bay. – photograph from 2013(?)*)

Private Wilton was reported by the Commanding Officer of the 42nd Casualty Clearing Station as having died of wounds on March 6, 1917.

Daniel Wilton had enlisted at the *apparent* age of nineteen years: date of birth at Woody Point, Bonne Bay, Newfoundland (from attestation papers), September 20, 1896; however, the original Newfoundland Birth Register cites the year of his birth as having been 1893.

Private Daniel Wilton was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 23, 2023.

