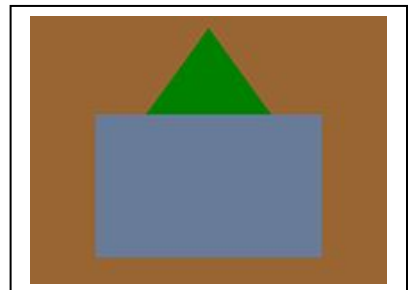




Private Samuel Maurice Applin (Number 133124, of the 42nd Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*), Canadian Expeditionary Corps, is interred in La Targette (formerly *Aux Rietz*) Military Cemetery, Neuville St-Vaast: Grave reference II.D.8.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder flash of the 42nd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service documented as that of a curtain cutter, Samuel Maurice Applin is recorded as having presented himself for medical examination, as having enlisted and also attested in Montreal, all on November 1 of 1915. According to his attestation papers, he had previously served for two years in the 5th Royal Highlanders of Canada, a Canadian Militia unit, there having attained the rank of lance corporal.

His war-time enlistment was officially confirmed on November 8 by the Officer Commanding the 73rd (Overseas) Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Peers Davidson, to whose unit he had been attached.

The next several months were spent in the Montreal area, during which time Private Applin was admitted into hospital on four occasions encompassing the period of March 4, 1916, until July 5 of the same year. There he received treatment for his prostate and also for a slight venereal problem.

Two days after his final release, on July 7, Private Applin was transferred to the 1st Reinforcing Company of the 5th Royal Highlanders of Canada, the parent unit having already sailed overseas on June 10 of the previous year, 1915. It was to be a further five months before Private Applin was to do likewise during which time, on November 1, he made a will in which he left his all to his mother, Emma.

It was likely in early December that the 1st Reinforcing Company of the 5th RHC was transported to the east-coast port of Halifax. There, on December 15, Private Applin boarded His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*, sister ship to *Britannic* - sunk by a mine in the Mediterranean only three weeks previously - and also to the ill-starred *Titanic*. The vessel sailed on December 20, to dock in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on Boxing Day, December 26.



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

The following few days were hectic for Private Applin and presumably for his entire unit: on December 28 the Company was either en route or had arrived in the county of Kent, at Shorncliffe Camp near Folkestone where he was taken on strength of the 92nd Battalion; a week later, on January 1, he was transferred to Bramshott Camp in Hampshire to be transferred to the 5th Reserve Battalion; sixteen days later again he was ordered to the not-too-distant Shoreham Army Camp on the Sussex coast where he was attached to the 20th Reserve Battalion.



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

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



Six weeks passed and then Private Applin was on his way again, on this occasion it was across the English Channel to the Continent and to *active service*, but not before having been transferred one last time: to the 42nd Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*), being officially *taken on strength* on March 5, 1917.

Once in France, the draft to which Private Applin had been attached was ordered to the General Base Depot for Canadian Forces at le Havre, there to languish for some four weeks as apparently it was not until March 31 that he was reported as having *left for unit*. When he eventually reported there *to duty* appears *not* to be documented.



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

It was to be only a matter of days after Private Applin joined his unit that the four Canadian Divisions were to fight for the first time together as an autonomous Canadian Corps – in fact there were even to be British forces under Canadian Command.

The occasion was to be at a place called Vimy Ridge.

* * * * *

The 42nd Battalion of the Canadian Infantry was a unit of the 7th Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 3rd Canadian Division of which there were to eventually four to serve on the *Western Front* during the *Great War*. The Battalion had been on the Continent since October 9 of 1915 when it had landed in France, but the Brigade* and Division had not been officially formed until midnight of December 31, 1915 - January 1, 1916.

**The other battalions of the 7th Brigade were the 49th (Edmonton Regiment), the PPCLI (Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry) and the RCR (Royal Canadian Regiment).*

In the winter on 1915-1916 and into the spring and summer of 1916, the Battalion had served in Belgium, just north of the Franco-Belgian frontier, and in the *Ypres Salient*. The first five months of its service on the Continent had therefore comprised the day-by-day drudgery and danger of the routines and rigours of trench warfare during the *Great War**.

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

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

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



The first major altercation in which the 42nd Battalion was to play a role had been the confrontation fought in June of 1916 at and about Mount Sorrel.

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under British (and thus also Canadian) control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.



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

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, had overrun the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans had been unable to exploit their success and the Canadians had successfully patched up their defences. The hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, delivered piece-meal and poorly coordinated, had proved a costly disaster for the Canadians.



(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)

The 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade had been in the midst of it all. Excerpts from the War Diary take up the story:

2nd to 6th June – On the morning of the 2nd the enemy opened up a severe bombardment on our front, support and communicating trenches, commencing at 7.45 a.m. and keeping up an intense fire until noon when he launched an attack against our trenches. The artillery preparation had been so severe that he succeeded in penetrating our trenches and by evening of that day he was in possession of a good deal of our front and support trenches...

(continued)

Counter attacks were made and succeeded in driving the enemy out of a portion of our trenches but owing to the difficulties of getting up reinforcements were unable to hold the ground recovered... The casualties suffered during the engagement were somewhat heavy in both officers and men...

The 42nd Battalion had incurred a total of two-hundred seventy-eight casualties up until the night of June 5-6 when the 7th Brigade was withdrawn. It was to play no further part in the affair. By the night of June 12-13 the Canadians had organized and then delivered what proved to be a final – and successful – counter-attack. After eleven days of fighting the two sides had ended up for the most part where they had started.



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

(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: Still nursing the scars of a hundred years ago, it is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government – photograph from 2014)*



From that time until the end of August had been a quiet time for the Canadians – as quiet as it ever became in the *Ypres Salient*: there had been no further concerted infantry activity by either side, only patrols and raids on a local scale. The daily toll of casualties had been mostly due to enemy artillery and snipers.

On August 22 the 7th Brigade had retired to rest billets in the Cassel area. However, there was to be little rest involved; the following two weeks had been spent in training in preparation for use in a different theatre. The Canadians were to move south to *the Somme*.

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 *1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment* which had lost so heavily on that day at *Beaumont-Hamel*.

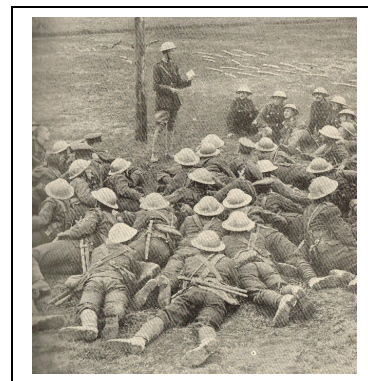


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(Preceding page: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcelette* – photograph from 2015)

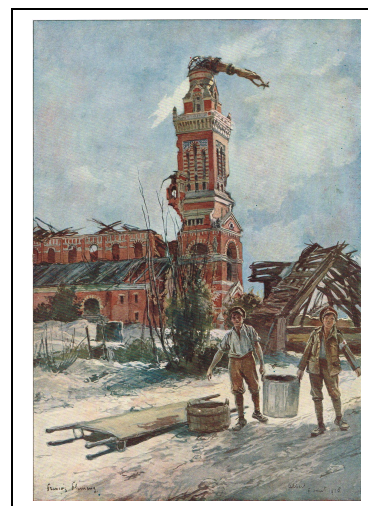
As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), had been brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30, to be a part of a third general offensive. Their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

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



Meanwhile, having left the north of France on the morning of September 7, the 42nd Battalion had arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the Brickfields Camp (*La Briqueterie*) in the proximity of the provincial town of Albert on September 13.

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



On the morning of September 15 the Battalion had still been at Brickfields Camp. By late afternoon it had moved forward into its assembly area and then into its jumping-off positions. The attack on Courcelette was to go in at six o'clock that evening.

Excerpt from 42nd Battalion War Diary entry for September 15, 1916:

ATTACK *The position of assembly was reached and all in readiness for the attack at 5.50 pm. The attacking companies went over the top at exactly zero hour.*

OBJECTIVES *The first objective SUNKEN ROAD was reached – also the 2nd i.e. FABECK GRABEN TRENCH without heavy casualties, and immediately steps were taken to clear the trench, reverse the parapet and consolidate...*

This operation by the 42nd Battalion on the 15th was one of the few that were successful on that day. The continuation of the attack on the following day was less so: total casualties for the two days, seventy-four *killed in action*, two-hundred ninety-eight *wounded in action*, sixty-six *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*)



(continued)

While the Battalion was to return again to the forward areas and was to suffer subsequent casualties, the action at Courcellette was the first and last major action fought by the unit during *First Somme*. On October 10, as other Canadian forces were arriving, the 42nd Battalion was beginning a thirteen-day withdrawal on foot from there to Neuville-St-Vaast, north-west of the city of Arras, where it immediately took over front-line positions from the PPCLI.

The unit was to remain in the area for the next five months, the winter of 1916-1917 being a relatively calm period, the drudgery of trench warfare being the routine. Apart from local raids and the occasional more ambitious – and costly one – concerted infantry action was minimal and most casualties were the result of enemy artillery and snipers.

* * * * *

Towards the end of March – and just after Private Applin had reported *to duty* - it became evident that a major operation was in the offing as battalions were withdrawn to undergo training and familiarization with the objectives of the upcoming offensive. On April 7 the Battalion moved forward, three companies into tunnels – two into *Grange Tunnel* (see below) - and the fourth into Empire Redoubt. At midnight on Easter Sunday, the troops began to leave these shelters to move forward again, on this occasion into assembly trenches. The attack was imminent.

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



The French offensive was to be a disaster.

(Above right: *the Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

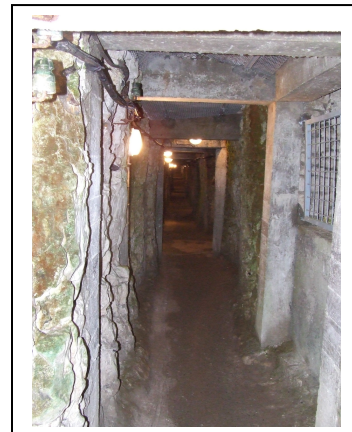
On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity under Canadian command, stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it entirely of its German occupants. The 3rd and 4th Divisions attacked the Ridge itself, the 1st and 2nd were to deal with other objectives on the right-hand side, the southerly, slope of the summit.

Anyone who has visited what remains of the several kilometres of tunnels built under the slope which leads up to Vimy Ridge will affirm the claustrophobic, cramped and confined conditions of those places. But they proved to be considerably better and safer for those thousands of troops who began to file into them as early as April 7 than the trenches would have been, and the secrecy that they ensured avoided the welcome that a prepared and alert enemy would have offered them otherwise.

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

As has been seen, two of the four Companies, 'A' and 'B', of the 42nd Battalion were among those soldiers who were to spend better than twenty-four hours underground before the attack went in. 'C' spent the night in dugouts, while 'D' moved up overland in the dark hours before the early morning assault. There appears to be no record of which Company Private Applin was a soldier.

Of a strength of some seven-hundred twenty before the attack, just over three hundred were to be reported as casualties by the Battalion War Diarist three days later in his entry of April 11. The Battalion was relieved in the evening of the same day and was withdrawn to Villers au Bois.



(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division equipped 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*)



A tour in the front line near the village of Vimy during the last week of April was followed by a month of less-strenuous activities out of the line – even though the Battle of Arras officially continued until the middle of May. The second week of June saw a major raid mounted by the 7th Infantry Brigade which involved three companies of the 42nd Battalion after which the remainder of the month was spent in training, in construction work and in being inoculated – against what seems not to be documented but it would seem that a recovery time was involved.

After the official conclusion of the *Battle of Arras* on May 16, some of the Canadian battalions had been ordered posted not far to the north, to the mining centre of the city of Lens and other communities.

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



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

(Previous 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 Miroir*)

(Right: *Canadian troops moving into No-Man's-Land at some time during the operations of the summer of 1917 – from Miroir*)



On the night of July 2-3, the Battalion was in the area of Souchez-Avion to the north of Vimy and in the front line by that evening. Excerpts from the War Diary read as follows:

On the night of July 2/3rd the Battalion moved into the line relieving the 116th Canadian Battalion in the sub-section AVION Area...

On the night of relief enemy's artillery was very active "A" Company had 4 casualties from shell fire while assembling at GOODMAN TUNNEL to move off, "D" Company had 5 casualties on the way in.

The son of Joseph J. Applin (also *Appelin*) and Emma Applin (née *Mugford*) of Flower's Cove – he and his family had moved from Newfoundland* via Port aux Basques on the SS *Bruce* to North Sydney on or about October 6 of 1908. The family was eventually to take residence in Montreal at 143, St-Joseph Boulevard and, soon after their son's enlistment, at 93, Mount Royal Avenue East. He was also brother to at least Clara and Nathaniel.

**The passenger list suggests that they already had residence in Canada and that Emma Applin was a Canadian citizen.*

Private Applin was reported as having been *killed in action* on July 3 – a second source has July 2 – in the Avion sector.

Samuel Maurice Applin had enlisted at the *declared* age of eighteen years and one month: date of birth at Flower's Cove, Newfoundland, September 27, 1897.

Private Samuel Maurice Applin 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 28, 2023.