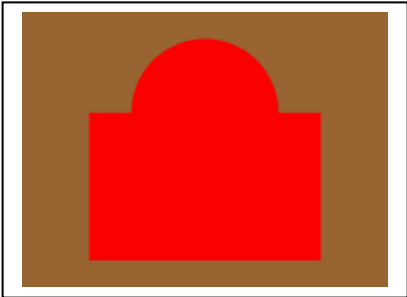




**Private Enos Ezekiel Ash (Number 489157) 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion (1<sup>st</sup> British Columbia) Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery: Grave reference XVIA.C.22.**

**(Right: The image of the shoulder flash of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion (1<sup>st</sup> British Columbia), Canadian Infantry, is from Wikipedia.)**



**His former occupation recorded as that of a *checker*, Enos Ezekiel Ash was likely the young man recorded on the passenger list of the SS *Bruce* on its voyage of September 3, 1907. The vessel was making the crossing from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland to North Sydney, Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia.**

**(continued)**

Among the other passengers on board *Bruce* were the young man's mother, Mrs. Moses (Alice) Ash and his sister Maisie. They were reportedly on their way to Halifax to join the father of the family, Moses Ash, who by that time was already working as a labourer – the 1921 Census was to cite him as an engineer – in the city of Halifax.

Young Enos may have made at least one return voyage to Newfoundland, travelling back from there to Nova Scotia in July of 1912, to work at North Sydney as a labourer - but there appear to be no further details to confirm this.

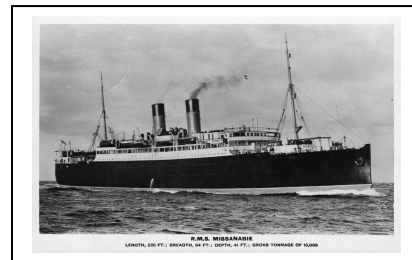
Enos Ash presented himself for medical examination in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on December 3 of 1915, and apparently enlisted and was attested on that same day, as well as being taken on strength by the 66<sup>th</sup> Regiment\*, Princess Louise Fusiliers\*\*. One day later his enlistment was approved by the Officer Commanding and he likely began training at the Regiment's base at the Halifax Armoury. He was, at the time, living with his parents in the family residence at 60, South Kline Street, in Halifax.

*\*A second source has him being - improbably - attached to the 66<sup>th</sup> Reinforcement Battalion (Edmonton Guards) which did its recruiting in that western city.*

*\*\*As a regiment of the Canadian Militia, it was prohibited by law to serve overseas. But the unit could, and did, as in the case of Private Ash, pass on its recruits to battalions which were being raised specifically for that purpose.*

It was to be less than two months later that Private Ash crossed the Atlantic to serve overseas. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of the 66<sup>th</sup> Battalion is documented as having boarded His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* on January 22, 1916, in the harbour at Halifax.

Private Ash's Battalion was not to have the ship all to itself as there were military personnel taking passage to the United Kingdom: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Cavalry Squadron; the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Cyclists Company; the 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Regiment (*Halifax Rifles*); a draft of the 66<sup>th</sup> (Princess Louise Fusiliers); 'C' Section of the 5<sup>th</sup> Draft of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance; and the Number 2 Tunnelling Company.



*Missanabie* sailed from Halifax on January 22, 1916, to dock in the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport eight days later, on January 30.

*(Right above: The photograph of His Majesty's Transport Missanabie is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)*

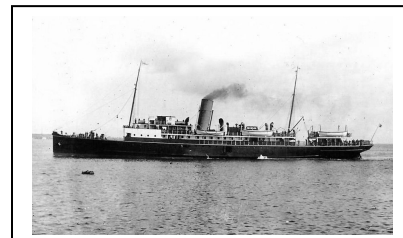
The 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of the 66<sup>th</sup> Battalion was thereupon transferred by train across southern England to be amalgamated into the 17<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion at the camp at East Sandling. The camp was a component of the large Canadian military complex of Shorncliffe, in the county of Kent, which had been established just down the coast from the English Channel town and port of Folkestone.

(continued)

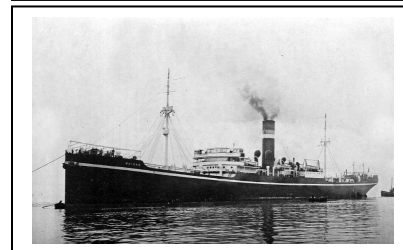
Some five weeks later – at some unspecified time in the meantime having been transferred from Shorncliffe to Hazely Down Camp in Hampshire – Private (now *Pioneer*) Ash was on his way across that English Channel with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pioneer Battalion\*, to active service with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division on the Continent.

*\*The unit had been training at Hazely Down since its arrival from Canada via Plymouth-Devonport on December 14-15, 1915, some twelve weeks earlier.*

On March 7, 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Pioneer Battalion embarked onto two ships in the English south-coast port of Southampton: on board the *Caesarea* were twenty-two officers and five-hundred fourteen *other ranks*; eight officers and two-hundred forty-eight *other ranks* travelled on *Maidan*, this ship also carrying the Battalion's transport and stores.



On the following morning, March 8, the two ships docked in Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine. Onto which vessel Pioneer Ash had embarked is not documented.



However, if it had been *Caesarea*, then, upon arrival in Le Havre, he was to spend the remainder of the day in a rest camp; if otherwise, Pioneer Ash was to spend the next number of hours unloading all that *Maidan* carried.

*(Right above: The images of Caesarea (previous page) and Maidan are both from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)*

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

At midnight on the same day, the Pioneers entrained and travelled north to the town of Bailleul on the Franco-Belgian border. It was a journey which took them some twenty-two hours, their travels subsequently terminating with a ten-kilometre march to *Scherpenberg Barracks* where the unit arrived at three in the morning.



The work of a pioneer battalion was unlike that of a regular battalion and for a period of the war, each Canadian division was to have incorporated one. Thus the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Pioneer Battalion was attached to the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division upon its arrival on the Continent in March 1916, and was thereafter stationed in Belgium with the Division during the earlier days of its war\*.

*\*All four of the Canadian divisions, having initially disembarked in France, were despatched post-haste to the area of the Franco-Belgian border or beyond, into the Kingdom of Belgium itself. Apart from a few weeks in May of 1915 in northern France at Festubert, they remained in Belgium until September-October of 1916 when then transferred to fight at the Somme.*

(continued)

Pioneer Battalions were responsible for the construction, repairing and improvement of such things as trenches, dugouts, wiring, drainage, sanitary facilities, roads and the like\*. It was hard work and undoubtedly the personnel was chosen, from amongst other attributes, each man for his physique and also for his experience in such work. Often working under fire, the Pioneers shared the dangers of life at the front with all the other troops which were stationed there.



(Right: *Canadian sappers building a road somewhere... 'in liberated territory' – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)

*\*In fact, much of the work done was also the responsibility at times of the Engineers. In 1917, when the Pioneer Battalions were disbanded, many of those former Pioneers were transferred to Engineer units.*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had itself been serving on the Continent since September of the previous year, but it had not been until April of 1916 that it fought its first major engagement.

The *Battle of St. Eloi Craters* 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 already excavated a series of galleries under the German lines, tunnels which they had laden with explosives before detonating them on that March 27. This was then followed up by an infantry attack.

After an initial success the attack had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the exhausted British troops. They had no more success than their British comrades-in-arms, and by the 17<sup>th</sup>, when the battle was called off, the Germans were back where they had been some three weeks previously and the Canadians had taken some fifteen-hundred casualties.



(Right above: *Advancing through the chaos in the aftermath of the detonation of a mine – from Illustration*)

It was during this period, on April 16-17, that Pioneer Ash sustained a gun-shot wound to his hip, although this did not occur in the area of St-Éloi. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Pioneer Battalion had sent out a number of parties overnight for various work in the area of Voormezele: wiring, carrying, digging and repairing trenches, draining positions and completing previous-begun work.

The German artillery had been active and some of the Pioneer parties had encountered enemy bombing-parties. It appears that all of the Pioneer parties with a single exception had incurred casualties.

(continued)

After preliminary treatment Private Ash was despatched to the 6<sup>th</sup> British Red Cross Hospital in the French coastal town of Étapes. From there, on or about April 27, he was shipped back across the English Channel\* to be hospitalized in either Clacton or Colchester – or both – before being transferred once more, on May 1, to Bishops Hall Hospital in Romford. There he apparently remained for just over two months.

*\*At this stage he was bureaucratically transferred from his unit to the Canadian Casualties Assembly Centre whose responsibility he became (on paper) upon his arrival back in the United Kingdom.*

It was then to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Woodcote Park, Epsom, that Pioneer Ash was forwarded on July 3, to stay there until the 28<sup>th</sup> of that same month. On that latter date he was discharged to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Convalescent Depot at Monks Horton, to be declared as *fit for duty* by a Medical Board on August 30.

Pioneer Ash's final stop before his return to the Continent was at the large Canadian military camp at Shornecliffe in the county of Kent, just down the coast from the coastal town and port of Folkestone. There he remained for a further three weeks at the Canadian Pioneer Training Depot until September 21 when he returned overseas – across the Channel and likely from nearby Folkestone to Boulogne on the coast opposite - for a second time.



On the following day, September 22, he was *taken on strength* of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Pioneer Battalion at the Canadian Base Depot, Le Havre.

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

Only a week later again, on October 1, Pioneer Ash became a soldier 3<sup>rd</sup> Entrenching Battalion *in the field*. As the name suggests, an entrenching battalion specialized in digging trenches\*; however, Pioneer Ash appears to have been digging for only a mere four days – not a very long trench! – before his expertise was required by the Canadian Corps Troops Supply Column.

He was with the Supply Column for only twelve days, released on October 18 and returned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Entrenching Battalion with which entity Pioneer Ash then served until February 26 of the following year, 1917. At that point his records show him as having reported back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Pioneers whose War Diary, perhaps unsurprisingly, documents that... *thirty-seven other ranks – re-enforcements – reported for duty from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Can: Entrenching Battalion* on that day.

***\*Not only did these Entrenching Battalions provide a useful construction service; they were also used as re-enforcement pools where new troops arriving from the United Kingdom could be gainfully employed while awaiting despatch to their units.***

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Pioneer Battalion was in fact soon to be dis-banded: on May 18 of 1917 its personnel for the most part was divided to re-enforce the 7<sup>th</sup>, the 29<sup>th</sup> and the 75<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalions. Pioneer (now again to become *Private*) Ash, being a soldier of either the 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Company, became attached to the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, and ordered to serve in the 1<sup>st</sup> Company of the Battalion.

These transfers took place likely as a result of the casualties incurred by the Canadians on April 9 at Vimy Ridge – some ten thousand on that first day - and on the days during the succeeding actions. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Pioneer Battalion had not been directly involved in the fighting, but had been more than busy building and repairing roads, railways and bridges, constructing defensive positions in case of counter-attacks, creating new artillery posts, wiring new positions and likely performing more than a thousand and one other duties.



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

There is little to report on Private Ash between that May 18 and August 18 apart from the three days' pay forfeited for overstaying a pass on June 10.

After the *official* conclusion of the *Battle of Arras* on May 16, the Canadians had been ordered posted not far to the north, to the mining area 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 from this area – as well as his reserves - it had 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 August 15 the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion attacked German positions on high ground to the north of the mining city of Lens as part of a major operation by Canadian forces. Relatively successful at first, much of the ground initially won by the Battalion had then been ceded back to the Germans by the following day\*.

*\*The main objective, Hill 70, had been successfully attacked and taken on the 15<sup>th</sup>, the newly-won positions then successfully defended on the following days against the subsequent German efforts to re-take the area.*

(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*)



The *Battalion War Diary* reported casualties amongst the *Other Ranks* as being very heavy by that time. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was relieved and retired to Braquemont, a mine pit to the south-west of Béthune.



By then Private Ash had already been wounded, one of those *very heavy casualties* of the 15<sup>th</sup>, incurring a slight shrapnel wound to the left thigh. Three days later, on the 18<sup>th</sup>, he was then reported in hospital – likely the 16<sup>th</sup> General in Le Tréport – and being invalided back to the United Kingdom on board His Majesty's Australian Hospital Ship *Warilda*. On August 20 he was admitted into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Western General Hospital in Manchester. His medical record cites *...Entry in front centre Exit 3" higher outside. Circular 3/4" wounds Bone untouched.*

At the same time, the wound of the preceding year was also reported to be causing problems.



On September 19 he was pronounced to be *fit for discharge* and thus found himself released for a second time to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Woodcote Park, Epsom. On October 5 Private Ash was further transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Command Depot\* at Seaford on the English south coast.

(Right above: *The community cemetery at Seaford in which are buried a number of Canadian soldiers, including two Newfoundlanders: Frederick Jacob Snelgrove and Ebenezer Tucker – photograph from 2016*)

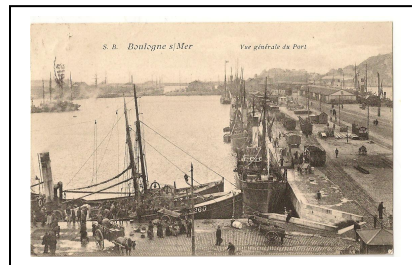
*\*A command depot was a holding camp for men too fit to be in a convalescent camp of institution, but not yet fit enough for training with a reserve or active unit. Thus while not training, they were assigned menial duties while the Army decided how best they might be used – or not.*

(continued)

It would appear that after seven weeks of deliberating, the Canadian Army still had something in mind for Private Ash.

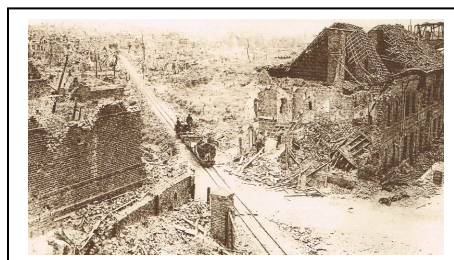
Seaford had also been the base in England for the 1<sup>st</sup> Reserve Battalion since its move there from Shorncliffe in March of 1917. On November 22 Private Ash was discharged from the Command Depot and added to the nominal roll of the 1<sup>st</sup> Reserve Battalion. He remained at Seaford for some eight weeks until January 17 of 1918 when he was one of a draft sent to re-enforce the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*1<sup>st</sup> British Columbia*) back in France.

Hardly had he set foot on French soil however, than on January 19 he was admitted into the 25<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Hardelot for medical attention to scabies, a common condition during the war caused by the presence of body lice. He was then next reported as being discharged to Base Details at the 3<sup>rd</sup>(?) Canadian Infantry Base Depot, Marlboro, in the area of Boulogne on February 12. Private Ash eventually returned to duty with the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion on February 22.



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

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the Divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, the Germans launched a massive attack, Operation 'Michael' on March 21. The main blow fell 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 there.



(Right above: *While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they did bombard it heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Miroir*)

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

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



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



During the early days of *'Michael'* the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was in the area of Loos, a mining centre to the north of the German advance. By April 1<sup>st</sup> the unit had been billeted in Dainville to the south-west of Arras; by the 13<sup>th</sup> it had been back in the outskirts of Arras in underground quarters, the Ronville Caves, and also in the front line. On April 22, after a further tour in the front lines, the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion took up billets in the village of Maroeuil, some six kilometres to the north-west of Arras.



On May 4 the unit was still in that area, serving in support.

(Right above: *the remnants of the Grande Place in Arras at the time of the Great War – from Illustration*)

(Right: *One of the several entrances into the Ronville Cave system, almost a century after its use by Commonwealth and British troops. It was used at different times by thirty-six different Army Divisions. – photograph from 2012(?)*)

On May 1 private Ash was admitted into the 7<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Braquemont and from there to the 4<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Camiers three days later, on the 4<sup>th</sup>. The only diagnosis which seems to appear in his files is that of PUO – a Pain of Unknown Origin, frequently found in the records of the time. Discharged to the 6<sup>th</sup> Convalescent Depot at Étaples on May 9, he was then again transferred, to the 13<sup>th</sup> Convalescent Depot at Trouville on May 11. The date on which he next reported *to duty* with the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion appears not to be recorded.



The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion spent much of the following three months behind the lines. The Germans were by now exhausted from their efforts of March and April and the British and French – with the now-arriving Americans - were preparing for a counter-offensive on a grand scale. It would later become known to history as *the Hundred Days* and it was to be the advance which brought an end to the *Great War*.

In the meantime Private Ash's unit trained, re-equipped, marched, provided working-parties and carrying-parties, and oft-times played sports: in the area of Lignereuil from May 7 to 26; at Camblineul from May 27 to June 2; at Anzin-St-Aubin from June 2 to June 17; at Bailleul aux Cornailles from June 17 until July 13; and then to Arras from July 17 to July 21 after which time the Battalion was posted to the front line from July 22 to 29 – but with only spasmodic enemy artillery and aerial activity to endure.



(Right above: *Canadian troops advancing to the front lines loaded with equipment for upcoming operations – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

Not that Private Ash was ever-present during this period: on May 1 he was admitted into the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance at Villers au Bois complaining with what was diagnosed as the ultra-common PUO (Pain – or Pyrexia (fever) – of Unknown Origin); the 1<sup>st</sup> CFA forwarded him to the 7<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Ligny St-Flochel on the same day.

After a three-day period, the 7<sup>th</sup> CCS placed Private Ash onto the 11<sup>th</sup> Ambulance Train which transported him to the 4<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at the sea-side town of Camiers where he remained until May 9. From that date until May 27 came a succession of four convalescent depots, the 6<sup>th</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup>, the 13<sup>th</sup>, to finish back at the 6<sup>th</sup>.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May Private Ash was ordered to the Canadian Infantry Base Depot where, on June 12, he was pronounced as being fit enough to re-join his unit. To that end he was despatched, on July 14, almost five weeks later again, to the nearby Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp. From there almost another month was to pass before, on August 12, he left to seek out the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion which, by that time, was already involved in the fighting in front of Amiens (see below).

He may well have been one of the reinforcement draft of forty other ranks which reported to the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion on August 14 at Warvillers.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the meantime, almost three months after Private Ash's evacuation for medical attention on May 1, July 29 the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been relieved at the front and sent back to the support lines until August 1. Then had begun the preliminary phase of the advance of *the Hundred Days*.

From August 3 until 6 (inclusive) the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved westward and then southward, at first by train and then during the hours of darkness on foot, to St-Aubin-Montenoy to the west of the city of Amiens. On August 7 *...In the evening the Battalion equipped for the attack and at 10 p.m. moved into its Assembly Area East of Gentelles, move being completed by midnight\**.

(Right: *The gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the leading German troops had been able see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918 – The edifice houses a flag and other commemorations of the sacrifice of the Dominion of Newfoundland among others – photograph from 2007(?)*)



*\*In fact, almost the entire Canadian Corps was moved in a matter of days, mainly by night, to face the Germans in the area in front of Amiens that they had captured four months earlier. The Canadian presence apparently came as a total, and unpleasant surprise to the enemy. During the third and fourth weeks of August the exercise was repeated, in reverse, and the Canadians then attacked in another theatre altogether (see below).*

On the following day, at twenty minutes past four in the morning, the attack went in.

In only three days the troops on the Amiens Front had advanced some twenty kilometres.

(Right: *Canadian troops advancing amid the debris of the recaptured provincial town of Albert on or about August 22, 1918 – from Le Miroir*)



On August 18, Private Ash was wounded yet again, on this occasion incurring gun-shot injuries to the left arm and to the back. It had apparently been a day of little infantry activity and few casualties, two *Other Ranks* being reported *Killed*, four *Wounded*, by the Battalion War Diarist.

Private Ash was evacuated from the field and taken for further treatment to the 47<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station, situated at the time at either Crouy or Edgehill.

The oldest son of Moses Ash, fisherman, and Alice Ash (née *Skeard(?)*) – to whom, as of February 1, 1916, he had allotted a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay - of Channel, Port aux Basques, Newfoundland – later of 56 Queen Street, then later of 60, South Kline Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia - he is also recorded as being brother to Maizie, to Norine, to Caroline, to William and to Freeman – this requires confirmation.

Private Ash was reported as having *died of wounds* on August 25, 1918, by the Commanding Officer of the same 47<sup>th</sup> CCS.

He had apparently enlisted on his birthday at the age of twenty-two years: date of birth, December 3, 1893.

Private Enos Ezekiel Ash 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 28, 2023.