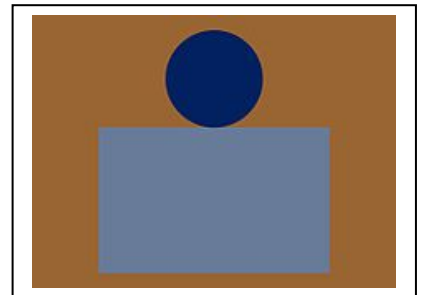




Private Hubert Ash (Number 488832) of the 43rd Battalion (Cameron Highlanders of Canada), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is interred in Albert Communal Cemetery Extension: Grave reference I. P. 22.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder flash of the 43rd Battalion is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

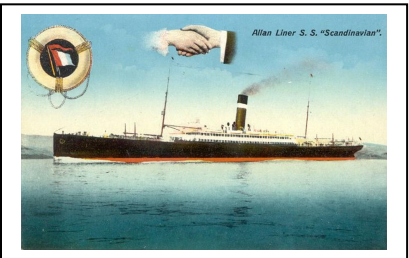
(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, he was perhaps the young Hubert Ash documented on the passenger list of the SS *Kyle*, the date March 12, 1915, taken during its passage from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland, to Louisburg, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada, he with the intention of working in the industrial city of Sydney as a labourer.

Hubert Ash presented himself for medical examination in Halifax on December 14, 1915, enlisting – in his case for a single year – on the same day before being attested on the morrow. His first pay records not only confirm his enlistment but they document that he was *taken on strength* by the 63rd Regiment (*Halifax Rifles*) on that December 14. Two days later, on the 16th, his enlistment was brought to an official conclusion when Lieutenant Colonel I.W. Vidito, Officer Commanding the 63rd Regiment declared (on paper) that... *having finally been approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

Eleven weeks later, it was with the 63rd Regiment (*Halifax Rifles*) (2nd Reserve Draft) that Private Ash was to sail, on March 2, 1916, having embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Scandinavian* from the port of St. John, New Brunswick*. The vessel would dock eleven days later in the English south-coast naval facility of Devonport-Plymouth on March 13.



(Right: *The image of the Allan Line (later Canadian Pacific) steamship Scandinavian is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries Web-Site.*)

**Private Ash was not to travel alone on this trans-Atlantic crossing for taking passage with his 2nd Draft of the 63rd Regiment were elements of a goodly number of other units: the 3rd Draft of his own 63rd Regiment; the 4th Draft of the 1st Canadian Field Ambulance; 'C' Section of the 2nd Canadian Field Ambulance; the 9th Canadian Field Ambulance; the 2nd Draft of the 9th Canadian General Hospital; the 3rd Divisional Train; the 3rd Draft of the 1st Canadian Army Service Corps Training Depot; and the 5th Draft of the 2nd Canadian Army Service Corps Training Depot.*

Having landed in England, the name of Private Ash was transferred from the nominal roll of the 63rd Regiment to that of the 17th Reserve Battalion. This unit was stationed at *East Sandling Camp*, a subsidiary of the large Canadian military complex collectively known as *Shorncliffe* which by then had been established in the vicinity of the English-Channel harbour and town of Folkestone in the county of Kent.



It was at *Shorncliffe* that Private Ash was now to spend the following twelve weeks in training before being sent across the Channel on *active service*.

(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*)

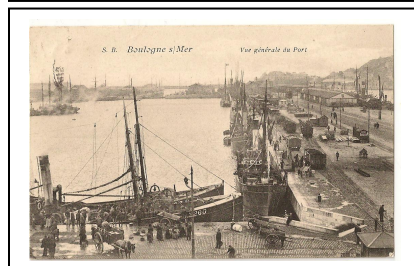
He would have been well familiar with the barracks at *East Sandling* by the time he left the place as he was apparently confined to them for twenty-five of the days that he spent there, all due to a series of minor indiscretions.

(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*)



On June 6, Private Ash was transferred once more, nominally on that date and physically on the morrow, to the 43rd Battalion (*Cameron Highlanders of Canada*) when he sailed for France, most likely travelling through Folkestone and then the French port of Boulogne.

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



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



He apparently was to spend little time at the Canadian Base Depot at Le Havre where new arrivals from the United Kingdom reported to be despatched in drafts to their new units which were already serving on the *Western Front*.

His files record him as both *on strength* and *left for unit* on June 8, then as *arrived from Base* on the 10th. One of a re-enforcement draft of one-hundred one *other ranks* which likely reported to the rear area, Private Ash arrived at a time when the 43rd Battalion was holding a sector of the *Ypres Salient* at and in the vicinity of *Maple Copse*.

As will be seen, this was a time when the 3rd Canadian Division – and thus the 43rd Battalion – was engaged in some desperate fighting.

* * * * *

The 43rd Battalion parent unit had set foot on French soil on February 22 of that same year as a unit of the 9th Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 3rd Canadian Division, this formation itself having come into being in France only recently, officially at mid-night of December 31, 1915 and January 1, 1916. Serving at first in Belgian Flanders in tandem with the 1st Canadian Division, in March of 1916 the entire 3rd Division had been transferred to, and taken responsibility for, a south-eastern sector of the *Ypres Salient*, one of the more dangerous theatres of the *Great War*.



(continued)

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

The Battalion's first major confrontation with the enemy was to be the action at *Mount Sorrel* in early June of 1916, a time, as has already been noted, which coincided with Private Ash's reported arrival on the scene.

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*, *Railway Dugouts* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.

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, however, delivered piece-meal and poorly co-ordinated, 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 43rd Battalion War Diary entry of June 10 documents ...*101 O.R. reinforcements arrived from the Base*, this of course being the date on which Private Ash's own papers also record him reporting *to duty*. The fight for Mount Sorrel was ongoing at the time and the 43rd Battalion was serving in and close to the front lines in the vicinity of *Maple Copse* and *Sanctuary Wood*; but when – or even *if* – Private Ash took part in the fighting at this stage is not clear.



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

Three days later, on June 13, the action officially ended when a Canadian counter-attack took back most of the lost ground. Both sides were more or less back where they had started – and the cemeteries were a little fuller.



(continued)

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

On June 14 the clocks were put forward one hour, the first official use by the British and Empire (Commonwealth) Forces of Daylight Saving Time*. By the evening of June 15 the 43rd Battalion was retiring from the front, to return there on only two occasions during the next thirty days.

**Apparently the Germans had done so for the first time at the end of April.*

On July 14 Private Ash's unit – and with it many *other* Canadian units – was withdrawn from the *Ypres Salient* and found itself bivouacked two days later near Steenvoorde on the French side of the border to undergo training. But then it was only two weeks later, on July 26, that the Canadians of the 43rd Battalion found themselves marching back to the *Ypres Salient*, to the sector that they had so recently vacated.

Barely had the Battalion once again been relieved than Private Ash was hospitalized; on August 7 he was admitted into the 8th Stationary Hospital in the French seaside resort of Wimereux. Having been diagnosed as suffering from debility, he remained there for six days before being temporarily transferred on August 13 to the Number 1 Convalescent Depot at neighbouring Boulogne.



(Right above: *Fashionable Wimereux, on the north-western coast of France, at some time prior to the Great War, and before its transformation into an important medical centre – from a vintage post-card*)

Two days later again he was forwarded to another convalescent depot, the 5th, at Cayeux, also in the same area.

At the 5th Convalescent Depot, Private Ash's stay was of a longer duration: thirty-six days. Then, on September 21, he was sent to the Canadian Base Depot at Le Havre, there likely to perform light duties until the second day of October when he was ordered to report back to *duty* with his unit.

In the meantime, at the end of August, the 43rd Battalion had been withdrawn once more from the *Ypres Salient* and by the 27th – after a bath in the Belgian town of Poperinghe – had marched westward, again to the area of Steenvoorde. There, in conjunction with the other units comprising the Canadian 3rd Division, the Battalion underwent intensive training in preparation for a move south into France.



(Right above: *Canadian troops, here with steel helmets and Lee-Enfield rifles*, training in trenches a little bit too immaculate to be the real thing – from Le Miroir*)

On the 7th day of September the unit had begun to progress towards the area of the ongoing *First Battle of the Somme* by motor vehicle and by train, but mostly on foot.

It was to be a week before it arrived at its destination, the military camp of *La Briqueterie*, in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

(Right: *Some of the fields which surround la Briqueterie almost a century after the battles of the Great War – photograph from 2014*)



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

On that first day all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles 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, 1916, at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

As the Battle had progressed, 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 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 above: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette. – photograph from 2015*)

Within two days of its arrival on September 16, the 43rd Battalion had entered the front line at *the Somme* for the first time. On this first occasion it was to take part, on September 20, in a local attack - and then in a defensive action against a German counter-attack which pushed the Canadians back to the day's starting positions.

The confrontation of that day was to cost the Private Ash's Battalion a casualty count of fifty-nine *killed in action* and seventy-four *wounded*. Two days following, on the 22nd the unit briefly returned to La Briqueterie.



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

After a further period of training elsewhere, the 43rd Battalion retraced its steps to La Briqueterie on October 2, this recorded as being the day on which Private Ash returned from the Base Depot to report *to duty*. On the following day, October 3, the unit relieved other Canadian troops in the area of Courcellette.

(continued)

Its four companies were in turn themselves relieved two days later again, on the 5th, once more returning to *La Briqueterie* – elsewhere called *Brickfields Camp* – having incurred a further eleven dead and fifty-two wounded.

Then after a further two days, on October 7, Private Ash and the 43rd Battalion were back once more in the trenches preparing for another local attack to be delivered on the 8th. It was delivered - but the combination of un-cut wire and German resistance resulted in a withdrawal soon after the attack had begun. Casualties on this day were eight killed, two-hundred twenty-four wounded and twenty-one(?) missing.

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

It was on this day that Private Ash was wounded. He was evacuated from the field to the 1st Canadian Field Ambulance in Albert where, on October 9, he was placed in the Main Dressing Station for further treatment.

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

The 1st Canadian Field Ambulance report for the day reads partly: *CANADIANS attacked about 5 am. Wounded coming in in large numbers by 8 am. All busy in MDS* six tables in operation for stretcher cases*

**Main Dressing Station*

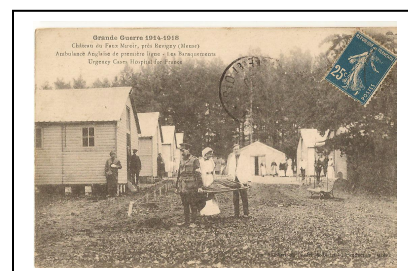
This soldier was severely wounded by shell fire during an attack made by this Battalion on the morning of October 8th, 1916. He was evacuated to No.1 Canadian Field Ambulance where he succumbed to his wounds on the following day. (Casualty report from Private Ash’s personal records)

(Right: *a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some* – from a vintage post-card)

The son of William Ash (former fisherman, deceased August 16, 1914, and of Martha Ash (deceased September 19, 1914) of Carbonear, Newfoundland, he was also youngest brother to Elizabeth, to Samuel-Valentine, to Adeline (Mrs. John Penney?) and to Albert.

Private Ash was reported as having died of wounds in the 1st CFA on October 9, 1916.

Hubert Ash had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-eight years: date of birth (from his attestation papers) in Carbonear, Newfoundland, September 1, 1889*.



***Carbonear Methodist Parish Records cite the year of his birth as being 1886.**

(Right: The memorial stone to Private Ash in the United Church Cemetery in Carbonear - Far right: The Carbonear Cenotaph honours the sacrifice of Private Hubert (Herbert on stone) Ash – photographs from 2012.



Private Hubert 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. Last updated – January 25, 2023.

