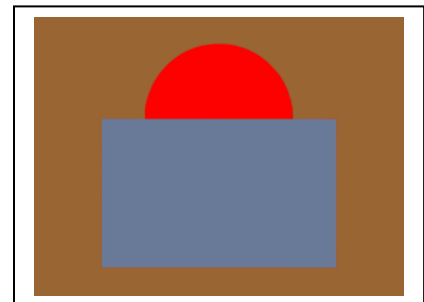




Private Joseph Robert Barrett (Number 261054) of the 2nd Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is interred in Mazingarbe Communal Cemetery Extension: Grave reference, III. A. 15.

His occupation prior to service recorded as that of a telegraph operator working at International Falls, Massachusetts, John Robert Barrett had sailed from Newfoundland to Vanceboro, Maine, likely on board the vessel *SS Glencoe* – *Bruce* and *Sylvia*(?) are other ships also noted – in March of 1903 to live with a sister at 604, Western Avenue, Lynn, Massachusetts, while taking up employment there.

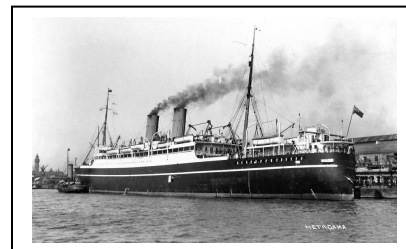


(Previous page: *The image of the 2nd Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles, shoulder-flash is from the Wikipedia Web-Site.*)

The date on which he re-crossed the United States-Canadian border in order to enlist does not appear in his personal files; however, Joseph Robert Barrett did so at Fort Frances, Ontario – just across the Rainy River from where he was working, so it may be that he crossed on the day that he enlisted – on March 21 of 1916, signing on *for the duration of the war* at the daily rate of \$1.10. He also passed a medical examination and was attested on that same day.

Private Barrett is documented as having been attached upon his enlistment into the 212th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, and *officially* recorded as a soldier of that unit by its Commanding Officer on March 27. Not quite three weeks afterwards, on May 15 or 16, he was transferred into the 97th Battalion (*American Legion*), also of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Some five months later again, Private (by then *Pioneer*) Barrett was on his way to the United Kingdom, but not before he had been attached - on July 28 - to another unit bound for overseas service: the 4th Canadian Pioneer Battalion. On September 12, 1916, this unit embarked in Halifax, Nova Scotia, onto RMS *Metagama**. The vessel sailed from there on the morrow, to dock in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool on September 22.



Pioneer Barrett did not take passage alone on *Metagama*. Apart from his own unit, also on board were the 14th, 55th, 56th, and 66th Brigades of Canadian Field Artillery, as well as the 14th Brigade Ammunition Column, also of the Canadian Field Artillery.

**Apparently although often carrying Canadian troops in its third-class accommodation, Canadian Pacific's Metagama – unlike many such vessels - was never requisitioned by the government to serve as a troop transport.*

(Right above: *The photograph of RMS (Royal Mail Ship) Metagama is from the Old Ship Pictures Galleries Web-Site.*)

According to his documents, it would seem that, upon arrival in the United Kingdom, Private Barrett's draft was sent to Witley Camp, a Canadian military establishment on the border of the English counties of Surrey and Hampshire – and not far removed from the large Canadian camp at Bramshott just to the south. A single paper then has him transferred to the 25th Reserve Battalion on July 27 – he *does* elsewhere appear to have eventually been transferred but likely not on *this* particular date.

The reason for the doubt is that two subsequent reports of Private Barrett were filed by the 4th Canadian Pioneer Battalion during this period at Witley Camp... and they both document a medical concern: on October 13 he was admitted into hospital at Witley Camp itself; on the following day he was forwarded to the Connaught Hospital at Aldershot, the large Army complex, for treatment to a venereal problem. He was to remain at Aldershot until discharged from medical care back *to duty* on November 6.

Likely the place of his return *to duty* with his unit - the 4th Canadian Pioneer Battalion having been re-designated as the 5th Canadian Pioneer Battalion only the day after Private Barrett's release - was again Witley. But once there it was only a matter of weeks more before he was to again be on the move.



(Right above: *Much of the work of the Pioneer Battalion troops involved construction and rudimentary engineering - here a road is being built... in liberated territory the caption claims . - from Illustration*)

Crowborough Camp was an Army establishment in East Sussex. Apparently in the earlier years of the *Great War* it had been used to harbour Belgian refugees but later on a Canadian machine-gun training school had been established there. By 1916 it had also become the Canadian Pioneer Training Depot - thus Private Barrett's attachment, and that of his unit, to the place on December 2 of 1916.

The 25th Reserve Battalion (*Western Ontario*) was to be re-formed during this period - officially so on January 2 of the New Year, 1917. And the majority of its personnel was recruited by absorbing the entire Canadian Pioneer Training Depot at Crowborough*. Likely his transfer to this unit involved little more than placing his name on another piece of paper; whatever the case, Private Barrett was now - this time for *sure* - a soldier of the newly-almost-officially-formed 25th Reserve Battalion as of December 29, 1916**.

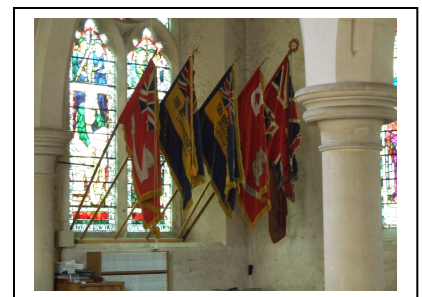
**The Pioneer Battalions were being disbanded as much of what they did was also being done by the Canadian Engineer Companies; thus these units became redundant.*

***The 25th Canadian Reserve Battalion was organized at Crowborough before being transferred to Bramshott on January 17 of 1917.*

He was still serving with that unit on April 17 when he was once more in need of medical attention. On this occasion he was sent to the Barnwell Military Hospital in the city of Cambridge. The hospital there was, during the *Great War*, a major centre for the treatment of venereal problems, a condition with which Private Barret was again afflicted. There he remained for just over ten weeks before being discharged to the 3rd Canadian Command Depot, there to serve until convalescent enough for the authorities to decide his military future.

Seven weeks later again, Private Barrett was considered to be *fit for duty*.

On August 17, the day of his release from convalescence, Private Barrett was transferred to the Western Ontario Reserve Depot - serving the 25th Reserve Battalion - at Bramshott Camp. This was to prove to be another brief posting as he was transferred from there to the 16th Reserve Battalion (*British Columbia*) Reserve Depot at Seaford* on the East Sussex coast on the 23rd of that same August.



(continued)

****There seem to have been several military camps at Seaford during the period of the Great War, the South Camp apparently the one administered by the Canadians.***

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

As it was with all the Canadian Reserve Battalions, the raison d'être of the 16th Canadian Reserve Battalion (*British Columbia*) was to supply reinforcements to the battalions serving on the Western Front.



(Right: 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)

Private Barrett was thus attached to the 2nd Battalion Canadian Mounted Rifles in France, sailing from the United Kingdom to report to that unit on or about November 8 of 1917. While documented as being *on strength* of the 2nd CMR on that same date, he is likely to have spent time in transit at one of the four Canadian Infantry Base Depots at Étapes.



(Right above: This is Canadian Cavalry in 1917 – but the days of the horse were disappearing and the cavalry was underemployed during the Great War. The Canadian Mounted Rifle Regiments had become battalions of foot soldiers* by the end of 1915. – from Illustration.)

Rather than then joining his unit directly, Private Barrett next proceeded to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Depot, also in the vicinity of Étapes. This Depot had been established only two months previously... *for handling all reinforcements for the Canadian Corps, from date of despatch from Base until ordered to join their respective units.* It was from Villers-au-Bois that Private Barrett left to report to duty with the 2nd CMR, which he did on November 23.

* * * * *

The 2nd Regiment, Canadian Mounted Rifles, was, by the time of Private Barrett's arrival, no longer mounted, having reverted to the role of infantry in December of 1915. It had arrived on the Continent in September of that year as an element of the Mounted Rifle Brigade, itself a component of the 2nd Canadian Division. But as of January 1 of 1916, it had become a unit of the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade* (see below) and thus a component of the 3rd Canadian Division.

The 2nd Regiment, Canadian Mounted Rifles had taken passage for France in the late afternoon of September 22. On board His Majesty's Transport *La Marguerite* it crossed the English Channel and disembarked in the French coastal town and port of Boulogne.

By the end of the following day the unit had travelled by train to the northern town of Bailleul on the Franco-Belgian border and had settled both men and horses into billets in farms in the vicinity.

(Right: *The image of La Marguerite is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)



For the succeeding months the 2nd Regiment had remained in an area a little to the east of Bailleul, in the proximity of the Belgian community of Neuve-Église where a camp, Aldershot, had been established. It was in the trenches there that the unit had suffered its first fatality: Sergeant Major Marchall (Marshall?) was shot through the heart by a German sniper on October 7.

On January 1 the Mounted Rifle Brigade was officially no more and, while retaining the title of *Mounted*, the personnel of the unit became *foot* soldiers; the majority of their horses were apparently appropriated for officers not necessarily serving in the trenches*.

**In the previous month of December it had been decided to dismount the Mounted Regiments. Cavalry was finding less and less a role to play in the conflict – despite the biases of the High Command – thus the CMR units lost their horses and became regular infantry. However, the strength of a CMR battalion was little over fifty per cent of a bona fide infantry unit and so, while the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th CMR Regiments remained intact and became the four infantry battalions of the 3rd Canadian Division's 8th Infantry Brigade, the remaining CMR formations were then used as re-enforcements to bring the fore-mentioned battalions up to strength.*

Thus the 2nd CMR settled into the infantryman's routine of life in the trenches* of the Western Front. The unit was posted in March to an area in the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most lethal theatres of the entire war, just to the south-east of the remnants of the medieval city of Ypres. There the Battalion personnel was to become familiar with places which already bore the names that Canadian history has come to know them by: *Hill 60, Sanctuary Wood, Maple Copse, Railway Dugouts* – and the village of *Hooge*.



(Right above: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – 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 support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of the same year, 1916, but by that time equipped with steel helmets and also the less-evident British-made Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles – from Illustration)



In the first weeks of the month of April the 2nd Canadian Division became embroiled in a confrontation with the enemy at the St-Éloi Craters further south down the front. However, it was to be a further six weeks or so before the 3rd Canadian Division would undergo its own major baptism of fire.

(Right: 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)



The baptism of fire was yet to come: a further two months were to pass.

On June 2 the Germans attacked the only high ground in the Ypres Salient which remained under British control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of Hooze, 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 above: Remnants of Canadian trenches dating from 1915-1916 at Sanctuary Wood – photograph from 2010)

(Right: 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 enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, overran the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans were unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences.

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



(continued)

During the night of June 12-13 the Canadians once again counter-attacked and, thanks to better organization and a better, well-organized and delivered artillery barrage, had taken back almost all of the lost ground. Both sides were back much where they had been eleven days earlier – and the cemeteries were a little fuller.

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



However, the 2nd Battalion CMR – and in fact, all the battalions of the 8th Brigade – had been withdrawn from the forward area on June 4. The total of *killed, wounded and missing* for the Brigade during those first days had mounted to nineteen-hundred fifty, not far off fifty per-cent of a normal-strength brigade.

The 2nd Battalion, having been called from the rear area in time for the counter-attacks of June 3, had suffered two-hundred seventy-two casualties all told, although some twenty or so had been innocuous enough for the sufferer to remain on duty.

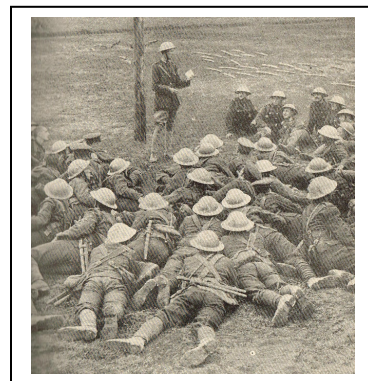
Thus the Battalion was to remain in Steenvoorde – west of Poperinghe and over the frontier in France – until July 15. It began its return to the forward area on that day and was once more in Ypres on July 21.

Once more the routine of trench warfare of front, support and reserve was to settle in. The little infantry action by either side comprised the everyday patrolling with the occasional raid, an activity that the troops in general loathed but that the High Command felt kept them on their toes and to be good for morale. There was still a steady trickle of casualties, for the most part due to enemy artillery and snipers.

At two-thirty in the morning of August 24, the Battalion was relieved and began a march to the rear through Poperinghe; on the morrow it continued on to the area of North Steenvoorde where it was to be engaged in training exercises at a company level and also at battalion strength. The individual soldier was now also to become familiar with the British-made Lee-Enfield Mar III rifle which was then supplanting the unpopular Canadian-built Ross.

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.

(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**)



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 had lost so heavily on that day at Beaumont-Hamel.

As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were 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 two villages, Flers and Courcellette.



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

On September 7, the 2nd Battalion CMR had boarded Train Number 8 in the station at Cassel. Some twelve hours later the unit de-trained at Candas with a seven-hour march ahead until an area was reached where the unit for the most part was billeted in fields.

By the evening of September 11 the unit had arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the Brickfields (*La Briquetterie*) in the close proximity of the provincial town of Albert. The Battalion had been more fortunate than other units, having made the latter part of the transfer by motor transport, not on foot.



On the late evening of its arrival at Brickfields, the unit moved up to relieve the 10th Canadian Infantry Battalion in the forward area. When it in turn was relieved on the night of September 13-14 it was posted to reserve positions in the vicinity of the remnants of the village of La Boisselle*.

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

**Today the village of La Boisselle is known for the huge crater which remains there a century after the detonation of the largest of the nineteen mines exploded just prior to the attack of July 1. At the time it was supposedly history's largest man-made explosion. The crater, now more than a hundred years old, is still impressive, even today.*



(Right: *The aforementioned Lochnagar Crater caused by the mine detonated at La Boisselle – photograph from 2011(?)*)

(continued)

While a major attack was being delivered by other battalions on September 15, the 2nd CMR found itself in reserve, to advance later in the day, after dark, to support the 1st CMR which had run into problems at Le Mouquet Farm. That night it was subjected to a heavy enemy barrage.



(Right: *Wounded troops being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the 1st Battle of the Somme – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)

On the following day the attack was pursued, the 2nd Battalion once more playing a reserve role, to pass through and exploit any positive advance. Both the Battalion War Diary and the Brigade War Diary claim several successful local confrontations with the enemy. Total casualties incurred by the unit during this operation – until five o'clock in the morning of September 17 - came to eighty-six.



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

With the exception of a two-day operation in co-operation with the 32nd Infantry Brigade in the last days of September, the Battalion was out of the forward area from September 17 until October 9. On that date it moved forward to the front lines in front of that section of the German defence system known as *Regina Trench*, there mostly to dig, wire and generally consolidate – all subject to the attention of the German guns. The toll for these six days totalled one-hundred sixteen.

The Battalion was not to return to the 1st Somme battlefield. On October 20 it began to march away, at first to the west, then north, in a semi-circular itinerary to the west of the city of Arras when it turned eastward once more to approach the front*. By October 26 it was relieving a battalion of the London Regiment at Roclincourt – according to the War Diarist of the time... *situation very quiet. No casualties* – just to the north of Arras.

**Apparently the unit was fortunate again: on the first part of the withdrawal, while others were on foot, the 2nd Battalion CMR was able to journey on an empty supply train.*

At the time, after *the Somme*, perhaps the drudgery of life in the trenches did not seem too bad. Total December casualties by comparison must have seemed extremely light: four killed, eighteen wounded.

After the 1st Battle of the Somme the four Divisions of the Canadian Corps were stationed in a sector of the Western Front roughly comprising the area between Béthune in the north to Arras in the south. It was to remain there for almost a full year before its services were required once more in Belgium.



The winter of 1916-1917 was mostly a quiet affair, shattered at intervals by another raid, some on a small, local scale, others more ambitious – and more costly.

(Preceding page: *A detachment of Canadian troops going forward during the winter of 1916-1917 – from Illustration*)

This *quiet time* allowed for units to be withdrawn more frequently and for longer periods, to camps well behind the lines. Of course, training working- and carrying- parties, lectures, inspections and marches were all a part of it, but also apparently were such things as sports, ten-day periods of leave and the occasional concert.



(Right above: *A Canadian carrying-party – some of the work done by troops when in support and reserve – on the Lens front during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

Towards the end of March, 1917, however, the training became more intense. In fact, for the 2nd Battalion, this training had started at Raimbert in mid-February and continued until mid-March when it moved forward again to cede its place to another unit. It was, nevertheless, out of the line again by the final day of the month, at Villers-au-Bois.

On April 5, two of the Battalion's Companies moved up to relieve other units in the forward area, the others remaining behind at Villers au Bois to continue final preparations. On April 7, they in turn began to move forward.

At about the same time Battalion Operation Order Number 44, from the Commanding Officer, was issued:

EXTRACT FROM BATTALION OPERATION ORDER NO: 44 APRIL 7th, 1917

(1) The Canadian Corps, will at time and date to be notified later, in conjunction with a larger operation by the THIRD ARMY on the RIGHT, attack and capture VIMY RIDGE. The 3rd Canadian Division will attack with two Brigades in line and one in Reserve.

8th Can. Inf. Brigade on the RIGHT.

7th Can. Inf. Brigade on the Left.

9th Can. Inf. Brigade in Reserve.

The 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade will attack on RIGHT of 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, the 2nd K.O.S.B., will be on the RIGHT of the 1st C.M.R. in the attack on BLUE OBJECTIVE.

On 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 few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



(continued)

The British campaign was to be an overall disappointment; the French offensive was to be another disaster.

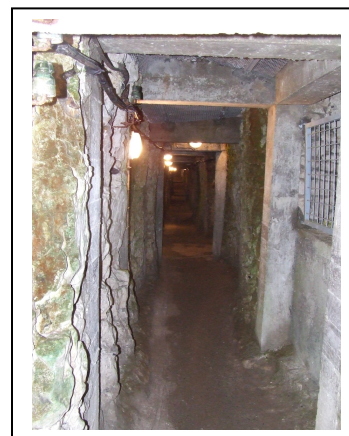
(Previous page: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands atop Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

(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*)



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 entirely of its German occupants.

Several kilometres of tunnel hewn out of the chalk under the approaches to the front lines of *Vimy Ridge*, underground accesses which afforded physical safety and also the element of surprise during the hours – and in some cases, days – leading up to the attack. The Battalion War Diary, however, notes that even though the objectives of the 2nd CMR Battalion were on the Ridge itself, this being the job being the responsibility the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions, only one of its four companies was to avail of the protection of a tunnel.



As it was with many of the troops, the advance to the... *Jumping Off Trenches...* by the other three companies was made over-ground.

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

**This was the first occasion on which the Canadian Divisions were to act in concert as a Canadian Army Corps rather than being individually attached to a British force. In fact, British forces were now placed under its command.*

Excerpts from the 2nd Battalion CMR War Diary, Appendix B, take up the story:

At 4.00 A.M., the personnel for the attack commenced to assemble... By 5.10 A.M., all companies reporting they were in position. ZERO had been set for 5.30 A.M., but being a dull misty morning it was scarcely dawn, when at that hour the attack commenced with our curtain fire falling upon the enemy lines...

...“B” Company crossed into enemy lines, other companies moving up...as the company ahead vacated its jumping off trench...

...in every case the advance being in accordance with the artillery curtain fire, and each objective being reached and captured with our artillery time table...

The Battalion attacked with 23 Officers and 664 Other Ranks, and its strength upon relief was 14 Officers and 353 Other Ranks. (Relief came at ten-thirty on the evening of April 11.)

All the objectives were taken on either April 9 or April 10, but little further progress was made after those first successes, the terrain proving too difficult for the advance of guns and the necessary equipment – and, as usual, the Germans were quick to recover, although no serious attempt was made by them to retake Vimy Ridge. The Canadians continued to consolidate the positions captured and the advance came to a halt.



(Right above: Canadians under shell-fire in the process of occupying the third line of trenches on Vimy Ridge: the fighting of the next few days was fought under the same conditions. – from Illustration)

Officially the *Battle of Arras* lasted for some five weeks. During this period the Canadians launched further, perhaps less ambitious, attacks on German positions. The results were mixed as at the costly success at Arloy-en-Gohelle and the less successful one – but just as costly - at Fresnoy. But in neither action was the 2nd CMR Battalion to play a role. The fighting petered out, both sides apparently satisfied to stay where they were – at least until the month of August.

The British High Command had by that time – as of the final day of July - launched a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention – and also 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.

One of the primary objectives was to be the so-named *Hill 70* in the outskirts of the mining centre of Lens. Objectives were limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of the day of the attack, August 15. Due to the dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it was expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it proved.

(Right above: 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: A Canadian 220 mm siege gun, here under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action – from Le Miroir)



(continued)

On August 16 several strong counter-attacks were launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points. These defences held and the Canadian artillery, which was employing newly-developed procedures, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* remained in Canadian hands.

Anyone who expects anything more than a slight rise in the ground at Hill 70 is to be disappointed. Today its summit is the site of a traffic round-about where roads converge having mounted nothing more than a gentle incline.

Yet it was apparently high enough to be 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 Lens itself.

(Right: *The monument to commemorate the capture of Hill 70 by the Canadians stands some hundred metres or so from its apex, this point just to the left from where the roads intersect.* – photograph from 2014)

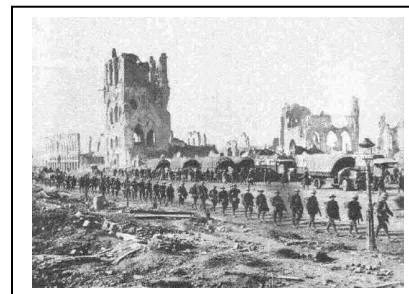


But the responsibility for the capture of Hill 70 had been handed to the Canadian 1st and 2nd Divisions; for the personnel of the 2nd Battalion CMR the days of August 15 and 16 were nothing out of the ordinary – the unit marched all day on the 15th and it then trained all day on the 16th.

September and early October, due to the thus-far disappointments of the British summer offensive in Belgium, were not to see the expected continuation of that Canadian campaign. Instead, the time from mid-August until mid-October was spent preparing the Canadian Corps for a move to the north.

It was not until the final weeks of October that the 2nd CMR Battalion became involved in that offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was one of the British Army's objectives.

(Right above: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917.* – from *Illustration*)



From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. From the week of October 26 until November 3 it was the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions who spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair the reverse was true with the 2nd Division finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.



(Previous page: *Somewhere, possibly anywhere or almost everywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917. – from Illustration*)

* * * * *

By the time of Private Barrett's arrival on November 23, the 3rd Battle of Ypres had floundered to its close. Apparently the 2nd CMR had not been involved in the latter stages of the fighting as its casualties for that entire month are recorded in the 8th Brigade War Diary as, surprisingly, being only... *4 O. Ranks wounded*. Private Barrett would have reported in the area of Flechin, to the south of the larger centres of St-Omer and Hazebrouck in northern France, which was where the 8th Brigade was stationed by then.



(Right above: *The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians which stands in the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele (today Passendale) – photograph from 2010*)

During the month of December the fighting was also light. In the middle of the month the 8th Brigade received orders to move to the Hill 70 Sector and accordingly marched south-east towards Mazingarbe. The 2nd CMR was reported as being posted there, in the forward area, on December 22... and was apparently still there on St. Stephen's day, five days later.

Although the officer responsible for the War Diary appears to have neglected to enter it in his journal, the month of December had offered something a little different to all the Canadian formations which were serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army were open from December 4 until 17, and participation, in at least some units, was in the ninety per cent range*.

**Apparently, at the same time, the troops were given the opportunity to subscribe to Canada's Victory War Loan. Thus the soldier fighting the war was also encouraged to help pay for it as well.*

The first days of the New Year saw a number of local raids carried out on enemy positions. The Brigade War Diarist made the following entry on January 12: *In the early hours of the morning of the 13th, the 2nd C.M.R. Bn. carried out a successful raid on the enemy trenches, capturing 2 prisoners and inflicting many casualties*.*

(Right: *Canadian troops in No-Man's-Land in the area of Mazingarbe in 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

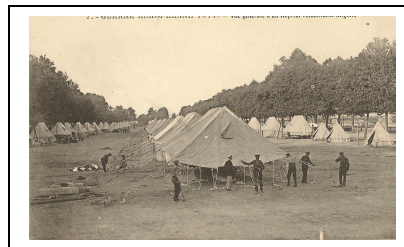
The reasons for the raid were cited in the 8th Brigade War Diary as follows: *1. Reconnaissance 2. Destroy Dugouts and M.G. Emplacements 3. Secure prisoners, inflict casualties upon the enemy and to lower his morale*



(continued)

**This entry was a part of the January 12 file. Also, in the entry of January 10 – and in the Battalion Diary Appendices – references are made to this raid being carried out on the 12th.*

It was during this operation that Private Barrett was wounded. Evacuated from the field, he was eventually admitted on that same December 12 into the 7th Casualty Clearing Station at Braquemont. There appear to be no further details of his injuries other than that they were multiple and that he was deemed by the 7th CCS medical staff to be... *dangerously wounded*.



(Right above: A casualty clearing station being established somewhere on the Continent, under canvas for mobility if and when needed – from a vintage post-card)

The son of Herbert Barrett, fisherman, and Susannah Barrett – to both of whom he had willed his all as of October 10, 1917 - of Spaniard's Bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to the sister with whom he lived in the United States, to Herbert (born 1887), and to Ethel-Jane (born 1890). Private Barrett was reported as having *died of wounds* on that January 12 of 1918 in the 7th CCS.

He was buried on the following day.

Joseph Robert Barrett had enlisted at the *apparent age* of thirty years and nine months. While the date of his birth on his attestation files is recorded as June 15, 1885, in the Upper Island Cove Church of England Parish Records it is documented as June 15, 1884.

Private Joseph Robert Barrett 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.