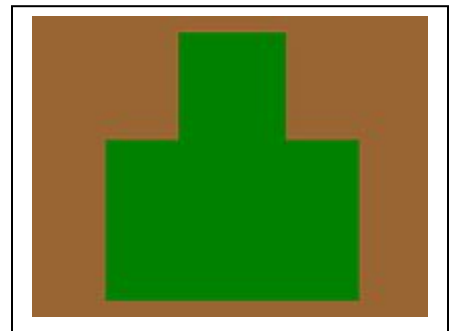




Captain Arthur Richard Batson, MC & Bar, of 'C' Company, Number 80013, of the 50th Battalion (*Calgary*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Dury Crucifix Cemetery: grave reference II.K.2.

His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of a hardware clerk and also a fisherman, it is not clear when Arthur Richard Batson made his way from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Dominion of Canada. However, it is documented that he underwent a medical examination on December 10 of 1914, in Calgary, before both enlisting and attesting – at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10, and *for the duration of the war* - four days later.

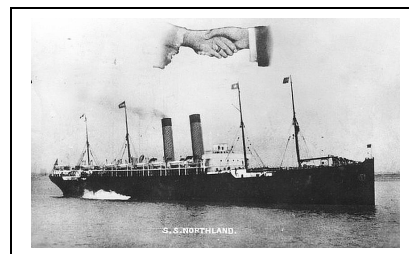


(Preceding page: *The image of the 50th Battalion shoulder-flash is from the Wikipedia Web-site.*)

On January 30 of the New Year, 1915, the Commanding Officer of the 31st (*Alberta*) Battalion of the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force officially accepted his application to serve. He was attached to 'C' Company.

It was to be a further six months before Private Batson (Number 80013*) made his way across the Atlantic Ocean. When he did – having entrained for the cross-continent journey in Calgary on May 12 - it appears that it was with a draft of the 31st Battalion, not the parent unit, that he sailed.

**Those who received an officer's Commission without ever having served in the ranks did not enlist and therefore did not receive a Number. Once promoted from the ranks, as was the case with Private Batson, the newly-commissioned officer's original enlistment number was rarely referred to again – in Captain Batson's case, even Canadian Archives appears not to recognize it.*



Private Batson's draft embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Northland* in Montreal, the vessel sailing from there on either May 28 or 29, 1915, to dock in the English south-coast port of Plymouth on June 8**.

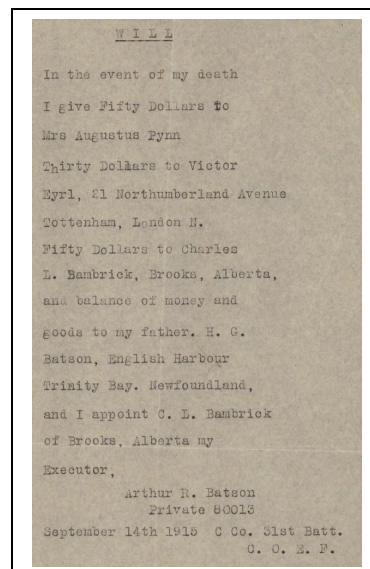
The 31st Battalion personnel on board *Northland* were not to take passage to the United Kingdom alone; also making the trans-Atlantic crossing on the ship were the 28th Battalion of Canadian Infantry, the 1st Draft (*McGill University Company*) of the 38th Battalion, the 4th Brigade Base Detail of the Canadian Field Artillery and the 15th Battery, also of the CFA.

(Right above: *The photograph of HM Transport Northland – ex-Zeeland, a Dutch vessel - is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries Web-site.*)

***The parent unit of the 31st Battalion sailed on board Carpathia from Quebec on May 17, to arrive in Plymouth twelve days later, on the 29th.*

The 31st Battalion file has Northland making the voyage from Montreal to Plymouth in an improbable seven-eight days. That of the 4th Canadian Field Artillery Brigade Base Detail, also to travel on Northland, contradicts this, recording a more likely arrival date of June 8.

(Right above: *The typewritten copy of Private Batson's will, written four days before his first departure to France – from his personal file.*)



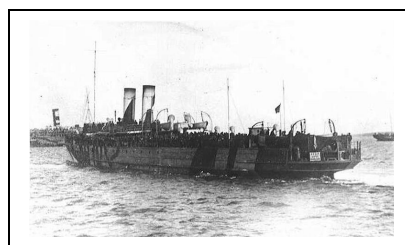
On the same June 8, the day that the 31st Battalion disembarked, the unit was taken by train across country to the fledgling Canadian military establishment at *Shorncliffe*, in the proximity of the English-Channel town and harbour of Folkestone.

There was now to be another period of waiting, at *Dibgate Camp* – a component of the *Shorncliffe* complex - of almost four months before the 31st Battalion was to make its way to the Continent.

(Right: *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)



The short passage to France was undertaken on the 18th of September, the unit leaving the United Kingdom on the ship *Duchess of Argyll* through nearby Folkestone and landing only hours later at the French port of Boulogne on the coast opposite.



(Right: *The image of a camouflaged Duchess of Argyll laden with troops is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Having then spent the night in a nearby camp, the unit entrained on the following morning for the short journey to the northern French centre of St-Omer. There it became an element of the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the newly-formed 2nd Canadian Division



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

From St-Omer the 31st Battalion was ordered north-east to the area of Cassel, then through Bailleul to cross the Franco-Belgian frontier. On September 22 it encamped at Westhof Farm, some thirteen kilometres south of the medieval Belgian city of Ypres (today *Ieper*).



By the end of that month, the 31st Battalion was experiencing its first posting to the front-line trenches. It - and its parent Canadian 2nd Division – were to remain in this area to the south of Ypres for the next eleven months.

(Right above: *A Belgian aerial photograph showing the devastation of Ypres as early as 1915 – the city is described as ‘morte’ (dead) - before the arrival of Private Batson* – from *Illustration*)

That first posting must surely have left a false impression in the minds of the 31st Battalion personnel of what was to come: on most days the 31st Battalion War Diarist merely entered... *Nothing to report*. Apparently the only fatal casualty came about as the result of the accidental discharge of a Canadian rifle.

(continued)

However, after a week's relief, the unit returned on October 12 to the front. By *this* posting's end, eleven fatalities had been reported and also an imprecise number of wounded, all victims of enemy artillery fire.

During the succeeding months the 13th Battalion followed the routines of life in the trenches, an existence which was divided into tours in the front lines succeeded by - or preceded by - time in the support lines just behind the front, and postings to the various reserve camps.

The latter occasions were opportunities for training, lectures, inspections by the upper echelons - usually the further away from the front, the more important the visitor - route marches, sports, with perhaps the odd entertainment organized by the troops themselves.



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

(Right above: *A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets - from Illustration*)

In the forward areas life was monotonous, if at times inevitably dangerous: there were parties of the construction, wiring and carrying variety. Patrolling and raids on a local scale were often the norm, as were rat-catching and lice hunts. Most casualties - discounting problems due to disease - were caused by enemy artillery - occasionally one's own - although snipers were also a constant danger.

Thus were spent the months of the late autumn and winter of 1915-1916. On March 27, however, the British attacked the German positions near the village of St-Éloi after having detonated half-a-dozen mines under the enemy positions. The craters created by the explosions rendered the terrain unrecognizable and impassable - the British attackers struggled with the ground, the weather and the Germans for six days before being relieved by the Canadians.



(Right above: *A mine crater in the British sector in the area of St-Éloi: they proved in many cases to be obstacles to the operations they were intended to facilitate. - from Illustration*)

The newcomers fared no better: for three days they stood in cold water and fought, all the time raked by the German artillery. On April 6 the enemy attacked and re-took much of ground that had been captured, although this did not bring an end to the fighting*.

* *Apparently the official end to this confrontation was April 17.*

(continued)

It was on that April 6 that Private Batson was wounded in the ankle and also in the head, during the action at St. Éloi, by flying shrapnel. He was eventually evacuated to the 23rd General Hospital in the French coastal town of Étaples where he was admitted two days later.



After six days of treatment there, he was placed on board his Majesty's Hospital Ship *Cambria* on April 14 for the short sea-journey back to England.

(Right above: *Cambria* in pre-War livery – from the *Old Ship Picture Galleries Web-site*)

By the following day again, the 15th, Private Batson had been admitted into the Edinburgh War Hospital in the Scottish county of West Lothian, apparently having passed through the hands – in fact it just the bureaucracy - of the Canadian Casualties Assembly Centre upon disembarkation at Folkestone. At the outset his wounds had been pronounced as superficial but, in those days before anti-biotics, the problem was now infection. He was to remain in hospital for forty-six days.

Although no operation was deemed necessary in Private Batson's case, he apparently still was suffering pain while walking when he was discharged from Edinburgh on June 1 or 2, to the point where he was reported as unable to wear shoes; boots were thus recommended. At this point he was forwarded to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Bear Wood, Wokingham.

Having then spent five weeks at Wokingham, Private Batson was thereupon transferred to the Granville Canadian Special Hospital situated in the town of Ramsgate, just up the coast from Dover and Folkestone. He was released from there after twenty-six days on August 1 with the recommendation that he undergo six weeks of *physical training* before being discharged *to duty*.

Thus it was that he was once more on the move, sent on August 2 to the 1st Canadian Convalescent Depot at Folkestone for those recommended weeks of rehabilitative therapy.



(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*)

When it was that Private Batson first decided – perhaps it was suggested to him – to apply for an Imperial Commission, seems not to be documented. However, he was appointed to the rank of Lieutenant (*Temporary*) on November 21 of that 1916, the day that he was attached to the 9th Reserve Battalion and posted to the south-coast town of Brighton. The appointment to his new rank appeared in the *London Gazette* edition of December 9.

(continued)

It was only a matter of days again following this promotion that Lieutenant Batson proceeded once more to the Continent. On December 2 he is recorded as having taken passage overseas and at the same time as having been transferred from the 9th Reserve Battalion to be *taken on strength* by the 50th Battalion (*Calgary*), already in service on the Western Front.

Once having landed in France he reported to the Canadian Base Depot in the vicinity of the port-city of Le Havre where he spent a mere two days before leaving for his unit *in the field* on the 5th. It is documented in his papers that he reported *to duty* two days later again, on the 7th – but recorded as having done so on the 6th in the Battalion War Diary.



Whatever the date, at the time his new unit was by then in the area of Divion, having just marched to there from the theatre of the *First Battle of the Somme*.

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

* * * * *

The 50th Battalion (*Calgary*) was a component of the 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 4th Canadian Division, and had landed in France at Le Havre – which the War Diarist consistently spelled HARVE - on August 11 of 1916.

From Le Havre the 50th Battalion had been despatched north to be stationed in Belgium. All of the Canadian units upon arrival on the Continent had been sent there*, to the front in Flanders and some then into the *Ypres Salient*. Towards the end of that August of 1916, all four Canadian Divisions were to be found therein Belgium**.

**The Canadian Division – later re-designated as the 1st Canadian Division – had at first been posted, for two months, just south of the Franco-Belgian frontier in the Fleurbaix Sector. It had then moved up to Ypres just in time to face the first gas-assisted offensive of the Great War.*



(Right: *Entitled: Bombardement d'Ypres, le 5 juillet 1915 – from Illustration*)

***The 5th Canadian Division remained in the United Kingdom to serve for training new arrivals from home, and as a reserve pool.*

As the 4th Canadian Division arrived, the other three Canadian Divisions in Belgium were preparing to go elsewhere. The British High Command had need of their services in its summer offensive further down the Western Front in France, a campaign which was not proceeding altogether as had been planned.

(continued)

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

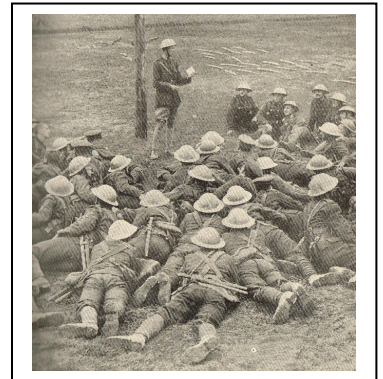


(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette – photograph from 2015*)

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

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

It was not to be until October 3 that the 50th Battalion – after a sparse five days’ training in northern France to where it had withdrawn – entrained at St-Omer to travel south in its turn to the cauldron of *the Somme*. Having travelled all night to arrive in Doullens, it then marched over the course of the next four days to arrive at *Brickfields Camp*, in the vicinity of the provincial town of Albert.



(Right below: *Almost a century after the 50th Battalion passed through it on the way to the First Battle of the Somme, the once-splendid railway station in St-Omer is today in dire need of renovation. – photograph from 2015*)

On October 15 the Battalion was posted into the trenches of *the Somme* for the first time. For the next month the War Diary entries report nothing out of the ordinary: *front, support* and *reserve*. The 50th Battalion is not recorded as having played a major role in any concerted major action apart from volunteering men to carry wounded from another battalion to the rear – except on one occasion to be seen below.



(continued)

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

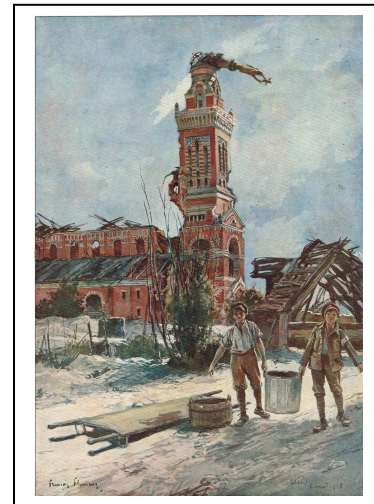


(Right below: Canadian soldiers at work in Albert, the already-damaged basilica in the background – from *Illustration*)

The *First Battle of the Somme* has been officially judged to have come to an end on November 13-15 with the capture of the village of Beaumont by the 51st Highland Division.

This should not suggest that there was no longer any fighting: an excerpt from the Battalion War Diary entry of November 17 documents that... *Orders received for 'A' and 'B' COMPANYS with Twenty O.R. volunteers each from C and D COMPANYS to go over the top on the morning of the 18th...*

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



The attack was to be in the vicinity of *Regina Trench*, a former strong-point in the German defences and a position which had been attacked on several occasions before being definitively taken by the Canadians on November 11.

On this later occasion the soldiers of the 50th Battalion advanced under the cover of a barrage and took a small trench and some prisoners without heavy losses. However, as the Battalion began to consolidate, it came under an enfilading fire and was eventually forced to retreat to *Regina Trench* itself.



Thus the episode ended – with a casualty list of two-hundred fourteen all told. The unit was withdrawn to Albert on the following day and, one week later, on November 26, it marched westward and away from 1st Somme.

(Right: *Regina Trench Cemetery and some of the area surrounding it which was finally wrested from the Germans by Canadian troops in November of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)



The unit retired to the west and then north in a semi-circular fashion behind and then beyond the city of Arras. By December 4 the 50th Battalion had marched some seventy kilometres as far as Divion where it remained in training for a further two weeks. And it

was, of course, at Divion during this period, that Lieutenant Batson reported *to duty* with his new unit.

* * * * *

During the months of January and February of 1917, Lieutenant Batson was to be a busy officer. On January 11 he was sent on a week-long *Grenade Course*: It had been about two centuries since the weapon had last been in favour with the British Army – and others.



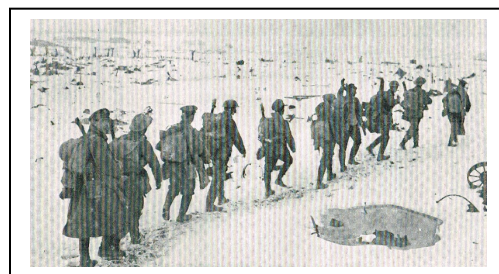
(Right above: *The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'Place) in Arras had already been steadily bombarded for two years by the end of the year 1916. – from Illustration*)

The troops in the trenches during the autumn of 1914 had been the first to recognize the usefulness of a hand-bomb, and had soon been improvising them from tin cans, nails, scrap metal (and even stone), and explosives detonated by a hand-lit fuse.

By 1915 the belligerent nations – and others supplying both sides – had developed armaments which are still recognizable today: the grenade was one of them. And although delivery of them to the adversary was still mostly assured by means of the human arm, there were various techniques of doing so - and there were also mechanical devices to ameliorate that delivery, not least of which was the rifle grenade. Many battalions had specialist platoons or sections (half a platoon) for the purpose.

Having returned to the parent unit, Lieutenant Batson was next despatched to the *6th Course of Instruction(?)*. Of a longer duration than the *Grenade Course*, it was to last from January 28 until February 25.

The winter of 1916-1917 was one of the everyday grind of life in and out of the trenches. There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides. This latter activity was encouraged by the High Command who felt it to be a morale booster which also kept the troops in the right offensive frame of mind – the troops who were ordered to carry them out in general loathed these operations.



There was to be of course, a constant trickle of casualties, for the most part occasioned by the enemy artillery and snipers. However, it was mostly sickness and dental work that kept the medical services busy during this period.

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

Then it was spring and the time for the campaigning season to begin. By April 1 the last of the 50th Battalion's personnel had been withdrawn from the trenches near Souchez, to *Vancouver Camp* at Chateau de la Haie.



(Right above: *The village of Souchez even before the arrival of the Canadians in the sector, the photograph taken in 1915 – from Le Miroir*)

The reason for the move was to undergo special – and in some cases novel – training for an upcoming British attack in the area of Arras. The Canadians had been ordered to advance in an area where the ground sloped upwards, to the top of a German-occupied rise which dominated the entire Douai Plain. The crest of the rise was known as *la crête de Vimy* – Vimy Ridge.



(Above right: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, has stood atop Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

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 count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great 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.

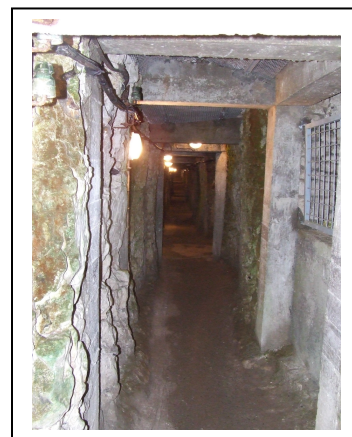
While the British campaign proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive was to be yet a further disaster.

(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 almost entirely of its German occupants.

Several kilometres of tunnel had been 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 50th Battalion War Diary, however, records that in fact the unit was kept in reserve to support the 11th and 12th Battalions on April 9.



It was not until late in the evening that it moved forward to the support line and thus was not to avail of the protection that the tunnels offered.

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

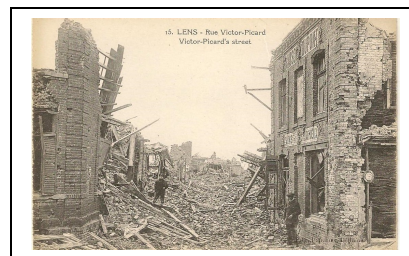
**This was the first occasion on which the Canadian Divisions were to act in concert as a Canadian Army Corps rather than been individually attached to a British force. In fact, British forces were now placed under its command.*

On April 9, the 50th Battalion had incurred a total of six casualties, two killed and four wounded. However, on the following day, the unit was involved in the successful attack on *Hill 145*: casualties for April 10, sixty-two *killed in action*, one-hundred thirty-six *wounded*, and thirty-one *missing in action*.

**On top of which today stands the Canadian National Memorial*

The Germans, having lost the *Ridge* and the advantages of the high ground, retreated some three kilometres into prepared positions in front of the Canadians whose further offensives were to prove less successful than that of Easter Monday; while some progress at times was made – at Arleux-en-Gohelle, for example - German counter-attacks often reclaimed ground from the British and Canadian troops – as at Fresnoy in early May. And as ever, it was a costly business.

After the official conclusion of the *Battle of Arras*, on or about May 15, many of the Canadian units were now posted in sectors not far to the north, in the area of the mining centre and city of Lens and other communities. Others remained *in situ*, thus the Canadian Corps was to become responsible for the area of the *Western Front* from Béthune in the north almost as far as Arras to the south.



(Right above: *Lens was to be treated in the same manner as was Arras, this image likely from a period later in the War. – from a vintage post-card*)

The *London Gazette Supplement* of September 17 of 1917 - a second source has 14/9/17 - includes the following in the section dedicated to Canadian Forces: **Lt. Arthur Richard Batson, Infy: - For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. At a time when the situation was uncertain he went forward alone and cleared it up by a daring personal reconnaissance over open and fire-swept ground. He sent back a report of the greatest value, and on previous occasions he has made very valuable and gallant reconnaissances of the same nature.**

Lieutenant Batson had by this time already received his Military Cross at a presentation ceremony at *Camp de la Haie* on August 12; however the date and locale of the action in question appear not to be documented, neither in the *London Gazette*, nor on a citation card, nor in the 50th Battalion War Diary.

(continued)



(Preceding page: *The Military Cross, with the Bar attached to the ribbon above the medal*)

It was to be not long after this gazetting that a second such citation appeared, on this occasion in the *London Gazette* of March 5 of 1918. Lieutenant Batson had been awarded the Bar to his MC – in effect a second Military Cross.

It reads as follows: **Lt. Arthur Richard Batson, Infy:- For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. When our main attack had failed, he collected and organized stragglers, and by his example and courage inspired them to fresh and successful efforts after two other attacks had failed. (MC Gazetted 17 September, 1917)**

In his personal papers, Lieutenant Batson is recorded as having been promoted to the rank of captain on June 15, 1917. If this is so – and it appears to be confirmed - then both his MC and his Bar were surely awarded for conduct in actions prior to that date, likely during the five-week-long *Battle of Arras* - perhaps the first at *Vimy Ridge*. However, as was the case with his first award, neither the date on which the action occurred nor its whereabouts seem to have been made available.

The British High Command had by this time decided 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 also 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.

(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 Le Miroir*)

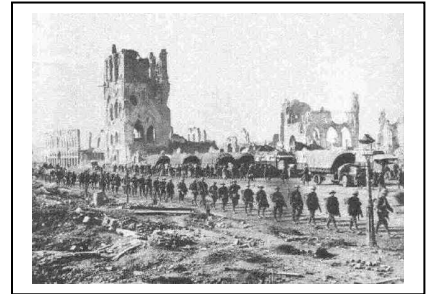
July of 1917 was quiet, the entire month spent withdrawn behind the forward area. This apparently carried over into August until the 17th when the unit relieved the 54th Battalion in the trenches. Two days prior to this there had been the attack at *Hill 70*, a successful if costly operation. But this had been the responsibility of the Canadian 1st and 2nd Divisions; thus life for the 50th Battalion had continued in its routine manner.

After that early summer of relatively little infantry activity, this attack on August 15 in the area of *Hill 70* and the city of Lens had been intended to be the precursor of weeks of an entire campaign. However, the British offensive further north was proceeding less well than intended and the Canadians were to be needed there. Activities in the *Lens Sector* were suspended in early September and the Canadians began training.



(Right above: *Canadian troops under fire in the forward area of Lens at some time during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

It was not until the final weeks of October of 1917 that the Canadian Corps became embroiled in the offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially named 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 – ostensibly - one of the British Army’s objectives.

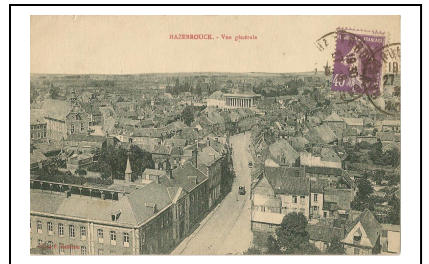


(Right: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was true with troops of the 2nd Canadian Division finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

However, whatever Captain Batson’s precise role was during those weeks of that offensive, it appears likely to remain anonymous.

It was on October 11 that the 50th Battalion was transported by motor vehicles to the area of northern France. It remained there, in the area of the large centre of Hazebrouck, for the next ten days, in preparation for a further move into Belgium.



(Right above: *The northern French town of Hazebrouck, likely at a time between the two World Wars – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right: *Somewhere – it might have been anywhere – on the Passchendaele battle-field – from Illustration*)

On October 21, the 50th Battalion moved north into Belgium, being bussed to Ypres before proceeding on foot to the area of Potijze, a small community just to the north-east. The personnel were there fed and equipped before moving on further into support lines to relieve an Australian unit. On the 22nd the 50th Battalion was moved up into the front lines.



(Right: *Canadian troops – not having proper bathing facilities - performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir*)



It remained there for five days before being relieved, in much that same area with little to report other than some local patrolling – and enemy artillery activity, except on October 26 when it had played a support role for the 46th and 47th Battalions. Total casualties for the tour, *killed* and *wounded*, amounted to one-hundred ninety-four.

(Right: *The Canadian Memorial on Passchendaele Ridge – photograph from 2015*)



The Battalion War Diary from that point onwards records the unit as being in various places behind the line, but never back in the forward trenches. The 50th Battalion had returned back into France from Belgium by the evening of November 18.

(Right below: *Canadian soldiers in front of a temporary theatre peruse the attractions of an upcoming concert. – from Le Miroir*)



The month of December offered something a little different to all the Canadian formations which were serving overseas at the time: the General Election. Polls for the Army were open from December 4 until 17 – for the 50th Battalion they opened on December 10 - and if the number of soldiers who voted from the 50th Battalion was as high as those of other units recorded in their war diary, it 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, not only were they allowed to fight in the *Great War* but they were also invited to pay for it as well.

The winter of 1917-1918 was spent in the area of the mining towns around Lens; little if any confrontational military activity for that period is reported in the Battalion War Diary except for raids by both sides conducted in the month of January – apart from that, things were quiet enough to allow some of the Battalion personnel leave to go the United Kingdom, and then, later, others to go to Paris.



(Right above: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

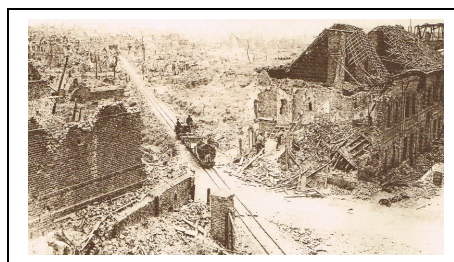
In the meantime, the unit continued to rotate postings in the trenches, in the support positions, and also in reserve, the latter mainly at *St. Lawrence Camp* in the grounds of the Chateau de la Haie in the area behind the Vimy Sector.

On February 27 of 1918, his status as Captain (*Acting*) was elevated to that of Temporary Captain, his name finding its way once more into the *London Gazette* list of promotions published on April 16, some seven weeks after the fact.

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 enemy 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 stationed there.

(Right below: *While the Germans did not attack the area of Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and thus 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 29th 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*)



The War Diary suggests, however, that the 50th Battalion was not involved in the heaviest of the fighting, if any at all. Still posted just to the north-west of the city of Arras, the majority of the casualties incurred were still due to enemy artillery activity rather than to any infantry action. Captain Batson was even sent on a machine-gun course during the month of April.

After March and April, the months of May and June were spent in relative calm in the by-now familiar camps in the grounds of the Chateau de la Haie, much of the time apparently being taken up with sports; a goodly number of the Battalion War Diary entries for the month beginning with the words... *in rest billets*; July was seemingly just as calm. All that, however, was to change in August.



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

By that August the British and Commonwealth troops had recovered from the retreat of March and April forced by the German offensive; the units had re-enforced, and were now in a position to undertake the grandiose offensive planned by the recently-appointed Generalissimo, Ferdinand Foch.

The campaign would come to be known as *the Hundred Days* and its beginning was to mark the point where *the Great War*, after four years of trench stalemate, became once more one of movement. Until November 11, the day that the Armistice came into effect, the Germans were continually to be in retreat, although the fighting was never to take place on German soil. During these final months, the Canadians were to play a major role.

While many of the Canadian Battalions which were to play a part in the attack and advance of August 8 had already begun their discreet transfer from the sectors north of Arras to the theatre of upcoming operations by August 1, Captain Batson's 50th Battalion was still encamped in the area of Agnez-les-Duisans and playing baseball. However, on the following day it was to travel by bus and by train to Longpré, a community to the north-east of the city of Amiens.

It was the first stage in a six-day transfer.

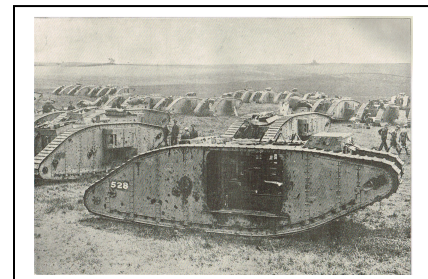
The remaining distance was to be covered on foot and, to hide the many columns of marching infantry from the eyes of German aerial spotters, it was done at night – in the case of the 50th Battalion, over the course of six nights. Passing in a semi-circular movement to the west then south of the city of Amiens, the unit arrived at its assembly point on the Maucourt-Fouquescourt Road in the morning of August 10*.

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



(Right above: *A group of German prisoners, some serving here as stretcher-bearers, being taken to the rear after their capture by Canadian troops: a tank may be seen in the background – from Le Miroir*)

The initial attack had been delivered two days prior, on August 8. It was now the task of the late-coming battalions to pass through the first attackers and to ensure the continued momentum of the assault. The 50th Battalion eventually reached the day's objectives despite strong enemy resistance which was broken only by the intervention of tanks.



(Right above: *In 1917 the British formed the Tank Corps, a force which became ever stronger in 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again 'somewhere in France'. – from Illustration*)

The advance continued for the next two weeks during which time the Germans ceded up to fifty kilometres of ground. Then on August 28, the 50th Battalion, having withdrawn to *Gentelles Wood* two days before, was transferred by bus whence it had come. By that same evening it was occupying trenches to the east of Arras.

The move by Captain Batson's unit was only one of many during these few days: the entire Canadian Corps was to be returned to the area of Arras. The attack would be resumed but now in a totally different sector.

(continued)

Thus, on September 1, the 50th Battalion was preparing for an offensive on the Drocourt-Quéant Line which was to advance between the village of Dury and the Arras-Cambrai Road. Captain Batson was to command 'B' Company in the capture of a sector of the German defences.

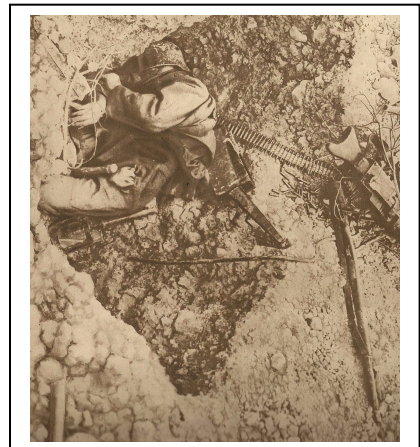


After that, the entire Battalion was to support the 46th Canadian Battalion in its move towards the Canal du Nord.

(Right above: Typical of the flat countryside along the Arras-Cambrai Road, just perceivable on the left-hand side in the photograph, and looking towards the village of Dury – photograph from 2014)

The attack went in at five o'clock in the morning of August 2, and despite the efforts of the German machine-gunners who fought with their customary tenacity - in contrast, apparently, to many of the troops in the trenches and dug-outs who surrendered in their hundreds - the unit's objectives were subsequently achieved.

The day's successes, however, were not without cost, the Battalion War Diarist's entry for the day reading partially thus: *Captain A.R. BATSON, MC displayed his usual high qualities of leadership in capturing his objectives and again and again undoubtedly saved a large number of casualties through his masterful tactics in disposing of Machine Gun Positions. After his position had been consolidated and his men protected as far as possible against enemy shell fire, he was killed while discussing the situation with the Company Commander on his flank**.



(Right: A German machine-gunner who also gave his all – from Illustration)

The Company loses in Capt. A.R. BATSON, M.C., one of the oldest and most trusted Company Commanders it has ever possessed.

**This officer was the victim of the same shell as was Captain Batson.*

(Right below: A handful of the some ten-thousand prisoners taken by Canadian troops during the fighting at Drocourt-Quéant – from Le Miroir)

The son of George Batson (elsewhere spelled *Batstone*), postmaster, and Charlotte Batson (née *Ivany*) of English Harbour, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Elizabeth-Ann, to Martha-Jane, to John, to Victor Chesley, to Thirza (sic) and to Sarah-Guppy (sic).



(continued)

Captain Batstone was recorded as having been *killed in action* on September 2, 1918, during the fighting at Drocourt-Quéant.

(Right: *An appointment that Captain Batson never kept – Field Marshal Haig inspecting Canadian troops after the action at Drocourt-Quéant – from Le Miroir*)

Arthur Richard Batson had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-seven years, although his attestation papers and a source copied from parish records both document his date of birth as having been August 15, 1886.

(Right: *The sacrifice of Captain Arthur Richard Batson is honoured on the English Harbour, Trinity Bay, War Memorial which stands in the grounds of All Saints Church in the community. – photograph from 2014*)

Captain Arthur Richard Batson was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).

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.

