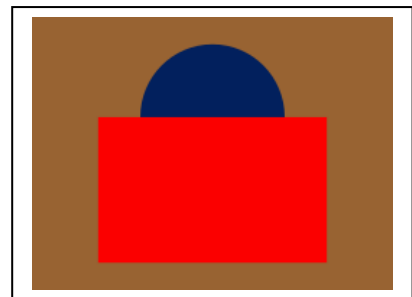




**Private Alfred Carey (Number 448042) of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Royal Montreal Regiment), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Bedford House Cemetery: Grave reference - enclosure number 6 - II.F.3.**

**(Right: The image of the shoulder-patch of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Royal Montreal Regiment) is from the Wikipedia web-site)**

**(continued)**



His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of a *boilermaker* and also a *fireman* (whether to extinguish fires or to feed them is not clear), Alfred Carey was to volunteer twice for service in the Canadian Infantry, a discharge in Montreal having been bought subsequent to his first enlistment.

There appears to be no documentation available a propos his history prior to 1914, his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to that of Canada seemingly un-registered. However, he *is* recorded as having presented himself for medical examination in Montreal on October 26 of 1914, and then as having enlisted(?) and attested on that same day. He was attached to 'D' Company of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) – a unit recruiting and mobilizing in Montreal at the time - as Private Alfred Carey, Number 65160.

This unit embarked for the trans-Atlantic crossing on May 11 of 1915. On June 1, the Commanding Officer of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion, by then encamped at Shorncliffe in England, reported that Private Carey had been *Struck off Strength* on May 10, the day prior to the unit's embarkation in Montreal. Despite the fact that one source reports otherwise, Private Carey was never to set foot on the ship – His Majesty's Transport *Cameronia* - his discharge having been bought – likely by his wife - and thus by May 11 he was no longer in the Canadian Infantry.

Only some six days later, however – on May 17, and again in Montreal - Alfred Carey once more enlisted, the reason for this volte-face not to be found among his documents.

Private Carey's military career at this point becomes confusing: he is documented as having been attached to the 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Canadien-Français*) based in Quebec City, although why an Anglophone would be sent to a French-speaking unit is not clear. However, his files then have him embarking on a date and a ship that does not correspond with the 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion's movements.

There appear to be two possibilities given the dates recorded; we follow both:

The 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion boarded His Majesty's Transport *Scandinavian* on June 17, 1915, in Montreal, to sail on the same day. On board were a number of drafts from six other battalions of Canadian Infantry: the 33<sup>rd</sup>, the 41<sup>st</sup>, the 47<sup>th</sup>, the 52<sup>nd</sup> and the 53<sup>rd</sup>. The vessel docked on June 26, nine days later, in the English south-coast naval harbour of Plymouth-Devonport.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion left Canada for the United Kingdom some four months before the main body of the parent unit. The ship it sailed on was His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* onto which vessel it embarked in Montreal on July 21 of 1915. The vessel sailed on the same day to dock in the Scottish port-city of Glasgow on August 3.



On board for the voyage had also been a draft destined for the Number 3 Stationary Hospital, a draft Number 4 Canadian Stationary Hospital and the First Draft of the Number 7 Canadian General Hospital.

(continued)

(Previous page: *The photograph of the Allen Lines vessel Scandinavian is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

There is one date that perhaps makes the more likely scenario the one which puts him on board *Scandinavian*. That is the one on his file which records him as transferred to the 23<sup>rd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion at *Shorncliffe* on July 31, 1915.

On January 18 of the New Year, 1916, - having willed his all to his wife on January 11 - his payroll record shows Private Carey being transferred once more, from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion in preparation for the short crossing 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 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion stationed at *Shorncliffe*\*, adjacent to the English-Channel town and harbour of Folkestone, it is likely that it was from there that his re-enforcement draft sailed, to disembark hours later in Boulogne on the coast opposite, on the night of January 19-20, 1916.



*\*The Canadian Army was to create a large establishment in the area of Folkestone-Dover during the Great War.*

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



Having landed in Boulogne, the draft then proceeded to the Canadian General Base Depot at Rouelles Camp, in the vicinity of the industrial city of Le Havre. Some two weeks later, on February 2, Private Carey was one of a detachment which left the Base Depot to join the parent unit of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion – which he did on the following day at Meteren.



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

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

\* \* \* \* \*

The 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Royal Montreal Regiment*) had by that time been serving on the Continent since February of that 1915 as an element of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the (1<sup>st</sup>) Canadian Division\*.

*\*Before the advent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division it was often simply designated, logically enough, as the Canadian Division.*

After its arrival from Canada via England, it had at first served in northern France in the *Fleurbaix Sector* just south of Armentières, before subsequently having been ordered into the *Ypres Salient* in April of that same 1915.

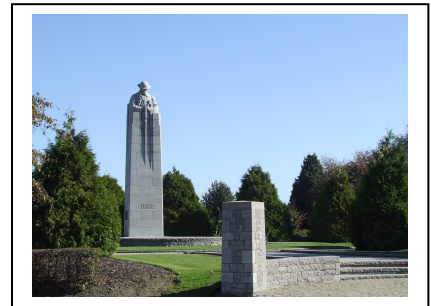
(Right: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle - showing the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)



Only a bare two months after its arrival on the Continent, and only days after it had moved into a north-eastern sector of the *Salient\**, the Canadian Division had distinguished itself during the *Second Battle of Ypres* in the spring of 1915.

*\*In fact, certain units were still not in position on the day of the first German attacks.*

(Right: *The Memorial to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier - just to the south of the village of Langemark, stands where the Canadians withstood the German attack at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915. – photograph from 2010*)



On April 22 of that year 1915, at five o'clock in the afternoon, the Germans had released chlorine gas in front of French colonial troops at the northern end of the *Ypres Salient*. The gas had then reportedly caused some six-thousand casualties in a very short space of time and had provoked a rout of the stricken defenders.

The Canadians, in the line just to the right, not having been affected to the same degree, had been ordered to fill the void left by the retreating French troops and to forestall a German break-through.

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

For its part, the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be called into action on April 22, the first day of the German attack, and had thereupon taken up defensive positions to the north-east of the city in the vicinity of *Wieltje\**.



*\*Up until this date the Battalion War Diary had been a neat, detailed, type-written journal; as of April 22 it is a hastily-scribbled effort scratched in pencil, promising that the details will be appended at a later date. But, if nothing else, it shows the desperate situation of the next few days.*

(continued)

Companies of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion then had made a stand with the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion at St-Julien (*Sin-Juliaan*) for the next two days before having been obliged to retire by the force of the German artillery activity. On several more occasions on the following days the Battalion – and the Canadians in general, with some British forces – were to retire to a series of reserve trenches.

*(Right: Troops, in this case the Liverpool Regiment, in trenches in the Ypres Salient. These are still the early days of the year as witnessed by the lack of steel helmets which came into use only in the spring and summer of 1916. – from Illustration)*

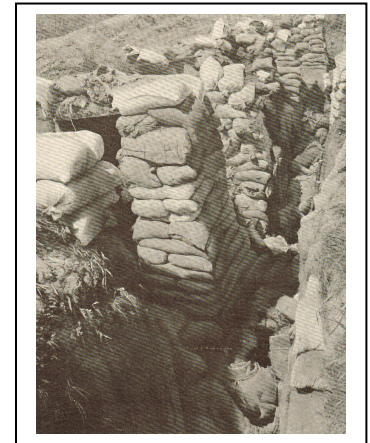


However, as history has recorded, the front had eventually been consolidated and the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be able to retire on the night of May 4-5 – a second document in the same source has 3-4. Only two weeks later it was to be in action once again.

At the beginning of May the British had responded to a French request for support during their operations in the Artois region, and the Canadians had been ordered further southwards\* in mid-month to the area of Festubert and, in June, to that of Givenchy-les-la-Bassée.

*\*Most of the Canadian units had already been in northern France in the area of Bailleul – resting, re-organizing and re-enforcing after Second Ypres - when the orders had arrived.*

*(Right: German trenches nick-named the Labyrinth – complete with corpses - captured by the French during their Pyrrhic victory at Notre-Dame de Lorrette – Over one-hundred thousand French troops became casualties during this campaign in the Artois. – from Illustration)*



At Festubert the British gains were to be negligible, an advance of some three kilometres, and in the ten days during which the action had lasted, the British High Command was to contrive to divest itself of what had remained after the *Second Battle of Ypres* of its small, professional Army.

There had also been a lot of good will lost between that British High Command and the Indians and Canadian forces who had also incurred heavy casualties\* – the Canadians particularly so after their losses during the aforementioned *Second Ypres*.

*\*The Meerut Division losses totalled twenty-five hundred and those of the Canadian Division some twenty-two hundred. Those of the 14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion had been reasonably light, however, sixty-seven all told.*

(continued)

After Festubert some of the Canadian forces had moved north almost immediately, into positions in the *Ploegsteert Sector* on the Belgian side of the frontier. There they were to remain until September and October of the following year when once again their services were to be required in France.

(Right: *A one-time officer in the Indian Army pays his respects to the fallen at the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle. – photograph from 2010(?)*)



The 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, however, was to be posted in June to the area of Givenchy-les-la-Bassée\*, a small village not far distant south of Festubert.

Having been ordered into the forward trenches on two occasions during that month to support British efforts – and having endured the same sort of losses, although lesser in number, from having repeated the same mistakes - by July 1 the unit was then to be back north in billets in the area of the Franco-Belgian border with the other battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division in the *Ploegsteert Sector*.

*\*Since the place is oft-times referred to simply as Givenchy it is worthwhile knowing that there are two other Givenchys in the region: Givenchy-le-Noble, to the west of Arras, and Givenchy-en-Gohelle, a village which lies in the shadow of a crest of land which dominates the Douai Plain: Vimy Ridge.*



(Right: *Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, Ploegsteert Sector, a mine crater from the time of the 1917 British offensive in the foreground – photograph from 2014*)

The Canadian Division was to remain in the *Ploegsteert Sector* until the spring of 1916. In the meantime, in mid-September of 1915, at the time of Private Clark's arrival, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division also disembarked in France and, within days, was on its way to Belgium, to serve in the sector just to the north of the Canadian Division, now designated as the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division.

The autumn of 1915 and the winter of 1915-1916 were to be a relatively quiet time with a minimum of infantry activity undertaken by either side.

\* \* \* \* \*

Meteren is a component of a commune in northern France only a few kilometres to the west of the larger centre of Bailleul. It was situated between fifteen and twenty kilometres away from the front and thus was close enough to be used as a reserve area for troops relieved from the forward area and also as an administrative area.

It was to Meteren that the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had retired on the final day of January, 1916, to Corps Reserve where it was to remain until its return to the trenches three weeks hence. Lectures, physical drill, church parades, athletics, musketry, grenade drill, football, signalling, gas-helmet drill, trench-construction... the list *does* go on, but for some reason not to include any mention of the arrival at that time of any re-enforcing troops.

Nonetheless, his own papers record that this was where and when Private Carey reported to his new unit. And all things considered, it was as good a time and place as any to become familiar with the rigours, routines – and *after* those three weeks in reserve, the perils – of life in the trenches\* of the Great War.

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

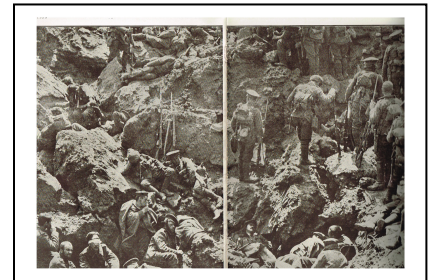


*Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a position at times for weeks on end.*

*(Right above: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, by that time equipped with steel helmets – from Illustration)*

Some two months after Private Carey's arrival, in early April of 1916, the newly-arrived 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had undergone *its* baptism of fire on a large scale. It was at a place named St-Éloi where, at the end of March, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and followed up with an infantry attack. The newly-arrived Canadian formation was to follow up on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which turned the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and a resolute German defence were to greet the newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6. Two weeks later, the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.



*(Right above: An attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – from Illustration)*

However, the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division - and thus the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and therefore Private Carey – were not called upon to serve in this engagement, although they were certainly close enough to be aware of it. But he, the unit, and the Division, were busy elsewhere: in April they were moving from the *Ploegsteert Sector* back to the *Ypres Salient*, to an area just south of the city itself. The Battalion War Diary entries of the time show that overnight, life in the trenches was suddenly to become more exciting.

It was to be some two months after this posting of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division into the *Ypres Salient*, that the Germans once more were to pass to the offensive\*.

*\*In fact the brunt of this fighting was to fall upon the troops of the also newly-arrived Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division which had been in Belgium only since December of 1915. However, such was the gravity of the situation that units other than those of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division were to be called upon for support.*

From June 2 to 14 was fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the area of *Sanctuary Wood, Maple Copse, Hooge, Railway Dugouts* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps. The Canadians had been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans delivered an assault, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity which fortunately they never exploited.

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

*(Right below: The Canadian memorial which stands atop Mount Sorrel just to the south-east of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) whose spires and towers may be perceived in the distance – photograph from 1914)*

The Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, reacted – perhaps a little precipitately - by organizing a counter-attack on the following day, an assault intended to, at a minimum, recapture the lost ground.

Badly organized, the operation was a horrendous experience, many of the intended attacks never went in – those that *did* went in piecemeal and the assaulting troops were cut to shreds - the enemy remained where he was and the Canadians were left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.

On the day of the German attack, June 2, the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been serving in Divisional Reserve. However it was soon called forward to the area of Zillebeke behind *Maple Copse* to where, during the night of June 2-3 it had advanced in individual companies and platoons. Continuing forward on the following day, the unit had incurred very heavy casualties – three-hundred seventy-nine all ranks.

*(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 4 the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion was relieved and retired back to Divisional Reserve, leaving behind two officers and fifty *other ranks* – all volunteers – to bury the dead.

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





The husband of Elizabeth\* – it is implied that the couple had children (he made a twenty-dollar-a-month proviso for them *in trust* from his pay) but no further details appear to be available\*\* – of 214, Galt Avenue, Verdun, Montreal, Province of Québec (and she later of various other addresses), Private Carey was reported as having been *killed in action* on June 3, 1916, in the fighting at *Mount Sorrel*.

Alfred Carey had first enlisted at the *apparent* age of thirty-two years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland – but seemingly confirmed by *no* parish records – October 11, 1882.

Private Alfred Carey was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



*\*To whom in a Will dated January 11, 1916, he bequeathed his all.*

*\*\*Private Carey's finances were in disarray after his death: the Army had paid monthly allowances and other monies to a Private Carey but also to a Private Carrière who were in fact one and the same. His wife's allowances were also duplicated for the same reason. By the time that the mistake was discovered, the Carey estate was some four hundred dollars in debt – a fair sum in those days.*

*How much either knew of these overpayments is not recorded, nor are any insinuations of impropriety made, in the files.*

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to [criceadam@yahoo.ca](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 23, 2023.