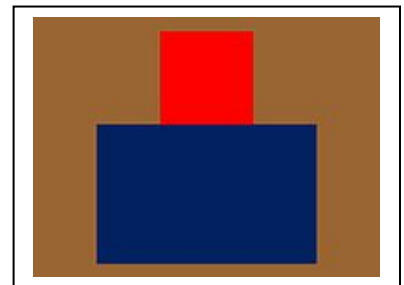


Private George Blake Carter (Number 742586) of the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick) is from the Wikipedia Web-site.*)



(continued)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a school master, George Blake Carter cited his place of residence at the time of his enlistment as being St. John, New Brunswick. There appears, however, to be little information available pertaining to his emigration from the Dominion of Newfoundland to New Brunswick in the first place.

On January 24 of 1916, George Blake Carter enlisted* in St. John, New Brunswick, before undergoing a medical examination and also his attestation on the following day, January 25. On the day of his enlistment Private Carter was documented as having been *taken on strength* by 'C' Company of the 115th Overseas Battalion (*New Brunswick*) of the Canadian Infantry.

**January 24, 1916, was the day on which – according to his pay records - the Canadian Army began to remunerate Private Carter for his services.*

It appears not to be until April 8, 1916, that his enlistment and attestation became official; it was on that day that the Commanding Officer of the Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel F.V. Wedderburn, declared – on paper – that... *having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

The 115th Battalion (*New Brunswick*) had been authorized only in the month of December of 1915. It had recruited throughout New Brunswick and mobilized in St. John where, being headquartered there, it was to train in the Barrack Green Armoury. It likely was to have been transferred to the military complex at Valcartier, Québec, in mid-June, as Private Carter is recorded as arriving there on the 20th of that month.

It was to be only in July of that summer of 1916, seven months after it had officially been sanctioned, that the unit was transferred overseas.

In the meantime, Private Carter was in need of medical attention: measles and tonsillitis had necessitated his hospitalization in St. John, the latter complaint being serious enough to warrant a tonsillectomy. He had entered hospital on April 30, to be discharged from there twenty days later, on May 20-21. He apparently also made an appearance for medical reasons while at Valcartier, although there is no date appended and the report merely states... *No Admission.*

Private Carter and his 115th Battalion – a unit of thirty-four officers and eight-hundred one *other ranks* - embarked on July 23, 1916, onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* – sister-ship of *Britannic*, to be sunk in November of that same year, and of the ill-starred *Titanic* – in the harbour at Halifax for the trans-Atlantic crossing to the United Kingdom. On the following day, July 24, the vessel sailed, to dock in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on the 31st, some seven days later again.



(Right above: *HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor along with HMHS Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph originally from the Imperial War Museum, London*)

(continued)

The 115th Battalion did not take passage alone on board *Olympic*. Also travelling on the vessel were the following units: the 4th Draft of the Canadian Mounted Rifles; the 103rd, the 109th, the 112th and the 116th Battalions of Canadian Infantry; the 1st Draft of the 65th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery; and the 2nd and 3rd Drafts of the 11th TD(?) (Is this *Transport Division*?), Canadian Army Medical Corps.

Upon its arrival in England, the 115th Battalion was transferred from Liverpool by train to *Oxney Farm Military Camp* near to Borden and also close to *Camp Bramshott* in the southern English county of Hampshire. Apparently once there, from time to time, Private Carter's Battalion provided reinforcements to battalions already on active service on the Continent and which had incurred losses to be made good.



Thus the unit was never to serve either in France or in Belgium. After only eleven weeks at Bramshott, on October 15, 1916, the entire remaining personnel of the 115th Battalion, its numbers having dwindled, was absorbed at nearby Bramshott by the 112th Battalion (*Nova Scotia*), a unit which had made the crossing on *Olympic* with the 115th.

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

Health problems once more arose for Private Carter: on this occasion the problem was at first diagnosed as mumps, but later identified as an infection of the salivary glands - *parotitis*. He was admitted for treatment into the Military Isolation Hospital in Aldershot Army Camp on December 12, to be released on January 18.

Private Carter's new unit of New Brunswickers and Nova Scotians remained at Camp Bramshott until February 3 of the year 1917 when at least a number of its personnel – including Private Carter - was *taken on strength* by the newly-formed 13th (*Reserve*) Battalion.

On the same day this new formation was ordered to quarters at Shoreham, East Sussex, on the south coast of England. There Private Carter was to continue to train and to await his eventual despatch to France.

On the day of his departure across the English Channel, April 20, 1917, those personnel of the draft were *struck off strength* from the 13th (*Reserve*) Battalion, to be *taken on strength* of the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*). This transfer was, in fact, only bureaucratic in nature as the 26th Battalion was by then already serving on the Continent.

It is not documented through which port Private Carter's reinforcement draft left England for overseas service – it may have been nearby Newhaven, but this is only speculation. It is also likely that his contingent disembarked at the French port-city of Le Havre near to which the Canadians had established the large Canadian General Base Depot; once again, however, there is no confirming evidence.



But it *is* recorded that Private Carter reported to the Base Depot at Le Havre, on April 21, the day after leaving England. He was one of one-hundred ninety-six arrivals to report to *duty* there on that day.

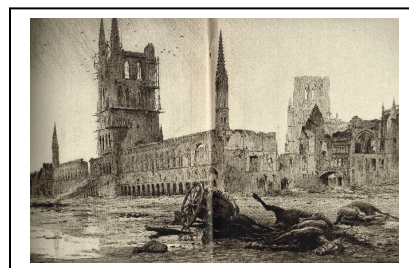
(Preceding page: *The French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

It was only two days later again, on April 23, 1917, that he was recorded as having left Le Havre to seek out the parent unit of the 26th Battalion. However, the Commanding Officer of the 26th Battalion records Private Carter as having *joined unit* only on May 21 following, a month later – and only *officer* arrivals had been recorded in the War Diary on that April 23.

It may well have been that Private Carter's draft spent those four weeks in a holding camp – entrenching battalions were also used for this purpose – before reporting to the 26th. But there appears to be no confirmation of either.

* * * * *

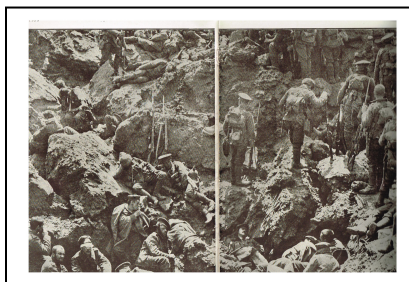
The 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*) had been serving on the Continent since September of the year 1915. It was an element of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 2nd Canadian Battalion. Since its arrival it had served in an area of the front to the south of the remnants of the medieval city of Ypres – in the direction of where the lines traversed the Franco-Belgian border - and also close to the lethal *Ypres Salient* itself.



(Right above: *An artist's impression of the centre of Ypres in the year 1915: By the end of the Great War not much of what is shown here was to be left standing. - from Illustration*)

In early April of the next year, 1916, the 2nd 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, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then followed this with an infantry assault. 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 greeted 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*)

(continued)

The 26th Battalion, albeit a part of the 2nd Canadian Division, had found itself playing a peripheral role in this action at St-Éloi: while other units were fighting up to their waists in water, the Battalion War Diarist could find time to comment on the weather for twenty-two days in a row.

Then some seven weeks later, on June 2, the Germans attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under British and Canadian control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse*, *Railway Dugouts* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.

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

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.

In the meanwhile, the 26th Battalion was still in the area of St-Éloi, serving in the left sub-sector.

It was ‘*standing to*’ in the same place for the following four days. Thus it took no part in the counter-strike of the day following the attack, June 3, an operation which proved to be a costly disaster for the Canadians. In fact, on June 7, the Battalion found itself retiring to a camp in the rear rather than advancing towards the fighting.

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

On the next day, however, the unit was sent forward to relieve troops in support positions in the area of *Railway Dugouts*, just behind the places which had seen the heaviest fighting. There it remained until June 12 when, once more, it retired to the rear area.

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

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

(continued)



By the time that the 26th Battalion moved up to the front again on the next day, the action at Mount Sorrel and the vicinity was all but over. During the night of June 12-13 the Canadians had once again attacked and, thanks this time to better organization and a good artillery barrage, had retrieved almost all of the lost ground. Both sides were now back much where they had been eleven days earlier.

(Right: Hill 60 a century after the great War, today preserved - as much as nature will allow - by the Belgian Government – photograph from 1915)

It should be added, however, that although units from the Canadian 1st and 2nd Divisions saw action during those eleven days, it was the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division on whose sector that the German onslaught fell, and it was that same Division which, logically, was to bear the brunt of the fighting.



Thus, after having played its roll at *Mount Sorrel*, the 26th Battalion was relieved and withdrew to Camp “D” on June 20. There it was engaged in supplying working-parties for defence construction and carrying-parties for supply the troops manning the forward area. The Battalion was soon to be back in the front line itself and once more enduring the rigours and routines – and perils - of life in the trenches*.

**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, 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 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 and, less visible, British-made short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration)

The second half of the month of July, 1916, was spent at first in *Alberta Camp* and then further back again, at Brigade Reserve in the Vierstraat Sector. On the other hand, the Battalion was then posted back into the trenches for twenty-two of the first twenty-four days of August.

Having retired to Alberta Camp near Reninghelst on August 25, the 26th Battalion prepared to leave Belgium. The Regimental War Diarist noted in his entry of that day: All ranks in the best of spirits anticipating the move and eager to effect all details in the number of days training, SOMME OPERATIONS.

The training area for the 26th Battalion was at Tilques, back over the border in northern France and in the vicinity of the larger centre of St-Omer. It had required three successive days of marching for the unit to reach its billets at Éperlecques by August 28 before commencing training on the morrow. One of the first items on the agenda of the 29th was the replacement of the Canadian-made Ross rifles by its British counterpart, the short Lee-Enfield Mark III.

A week later the Battalion marched to the railway-station in Arcques to entrain for the journey south to Conteville. A day spent resting in billets was followed by five more on foot *not* resting, a march which terminated on September 11 at the Brickfields (*la Briqueterie*), a large military camp in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.



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

The 1st *Battle of the Somme* had by that time been ongoing for some two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which was to cost 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 all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions having been 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.

As the Battle had progressed, 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 the two villages of 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*)

The 26th Battalion had arrived in the area four days prior to the attack at Flers-Courcellette – other units had reported there on only the day before – thus those interim days were spent in preparation. For the attack of September 15, the 26th Battalion was in reserve at the outset and, as such, did not move forward until five o'clock in the afternoon, twelve hours after the initial assault, at which time it re-enforced the efforts of the 22nd and 24th Battalions.

(continued)

On the following day the 26th Battalion, according to its War Diary, was moved to the relative safety of a succession of shell holes, apparently staying there all day and... *where the most intense shelling was endured by the battalion throughout this entire day.*



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



On the 17th the unit was ordered to move once more and took up positions in a sunken road, to once again remain there all day. The only exception was that of 'B' Company which assisted in an attack delivered by the 24th Battalion before also it moved to the sunken road. The attack in question... *met with considerable opposition and rifle and machine gun fire was very heavy.*



On September 27 the Battalion had been ordered forward once again, on this occasion to play a role in *the Battle of Thiepval Ridge*, more specifically on the right flank, in the area of *Regina Trench*. The operation had proved to be a further costly failure for the price of one-hundred eighty-two more casualties.

(Right above: *Regina Trench Cemetery – Regina Trench was adjacent to Kenora Trench – and some of the ground on which the Canadian battalions fought in the autumn of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)

After having delivered one final local attack at the beginning of the month, on October 10 the 26th Battalion had been withdrawn from *the Somme*. It had marched west and then north so as to pass behind the city of Arras and beyond. It had thereupon been posted to a sector in the mining area of Lens, to the north of Arras.



There it was to stay until the spring of the following year, 1917.

(Right above: *An aerial view of part of the city of Lens, before the Great War an important coal-mining centre: The photograph was taken in 1917, during the period when the Lens Sector was the responsibility of the Canadians. – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

The winter of 1916-1917 was one of that 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 them to be a morale booster which also served to keep the troops in the right offensive frame of mind – in general, the troops who were ordered to carry them out loathed these operations.

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



From April 2 until April 7 of 1917 the 26th Battalion had been in intense training on ground that had been re-arranged so as to resemble the terrain to be attacked. On the 8th the unit moved forward – although *not* via those well-known tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety.

(Right above: *The city of Lens as it was to be in 1917* – from *Le Miroir or Illustration*)



On April 9, 1917, 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.

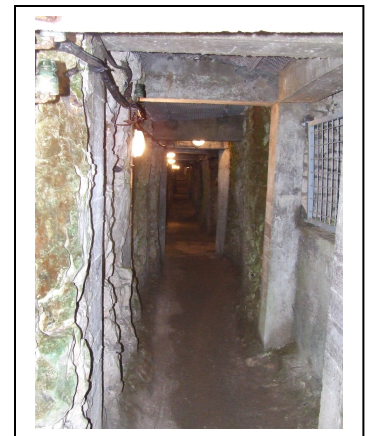
In terms of the daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the War for the British, one of the few positive episodes of the entire operation being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

(Right above: *the Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands on Vimy Ridge* – photograph from 2010)

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

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, separate entity, stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

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



The Canadian 2nd Division was not responsible for the Ridge itself, thus the 26th Battalion had been involved in the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the slope and on the right-hand – the southerly - side of the attack. It had cleared its objective in thirty-two minutes and spent the rest of that April 9 consolidating the captured trenches against a likely German counter-attack.

(Right: Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, equipped – or burdened - with all of 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)



Having lost the *Ridge* and the attendant advantages of the high ground, the Germans retreated some three kilometres in front of the Canadians whose further offensives were less successful than that of Easter Monday; while some progress at times was made – at Arleux-en-Gohelle in April, for example - German counter-attacks often re-claimed ground from the British and Canadian troops – as at Fresnoy in early May.

And there was *always* a price to pay.

* * * * *

The five-week Battle of Arras having officially concluded on May 15, on the day of Private Carter’s joining the unit, May 21, the 26th Battalion was in Divisional Reserve and well behind the lines at Aux Reitz (*La Targette*), not far distant from Vimy Ridge. There the routine included drills, inspections and training – as well as providing work-parties for various tasks for which they were sent further forward to the front area.



Thus the daily grind of trench re-commenced.

(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*)

In fact, the 26th Battalion was to remain in Divisional Reserve until the end of June, and then spent the first five days of July moving through Brigade Reserve on its return to the forward area. On this occasion it was to be posted to a sub-sector just to the north of the mining city of Lens.

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 – and his reserves as well - from that 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.

(continued)

(Preceding page: An example of the conditions in which the troops were ordered to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917 – from *Le Miroir*)

The month of July – a quiet period according to the Battalion War Diary – was spent in that routine of life in the trenches. The final days of the month, as were the first two weeks of August, would then be spent in reserve, in training for the impending offensive to be undertaken in the area. Then, on August 14, at nine-thirty in the morning the unit moved forward to its assembly area, picking up stores on the way.



Eventually assembled by nine-thirty later that same evening, those personnel of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions to be involved in the assault of the morrow were ordered to advance into their attack positions. They were recorded as being in position by two o'clock in the morning of the 15th.

(Above right: Canadian troops under fire advancing across No-Man's Land in the summer of 1917 – from *Le Miroir*)

Those expecting *Hill 70* to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear. Yet it was high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than the city of Lens itself.



(Right above: This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15th Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. – photograph from 1914)

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



Objectives were limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of 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; on the 16th several strong counter-attacks were launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.



(Right above: Canadians soldiers in the captured rear area of Hill 70 during the days after the battle – from *Le Miroir*)

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.

(continued)

The 26th Battalion retired on the night of August 17-18.

The son of Kenneth Mike Carter, fisherman, and Mary-Ann Carter (née *Oldford*) – to whom he had willed his all - of Newell's Island, Greenspond, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Thomas, Eliza, to Hugh-White, David-Martin, Arthur, to Kenneth-James*, Susanna-Rebecca, Frances-Mary and to John S.**.

(Right: *The sacrifice of Private Carter is honoured on the War Memorial in the community of Greenspond. – photograph from 2010(?)*)



Private Carter was reported as having been *killed in action* on August 15 of 1917, during the first day of the fighting at and around *Hill 70*.

George Blake Carter had enlisted some two weeks before his twenty-third birthday: date of birth in Greenspond, Newfoundland, February 7, 1893.

Private George Blake Carter was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

**Private Kenneth James Carter (Number 1814) of the Newfoundland Regiment, was one of those wounded on July 1, 1916, during the fighting at Beaumont-Hamel. He survived the Great War.*



***Some of these names are from the Ancestry web-site, some from a copy of St. Stephen, Greenspond, Parish Records, and two from the 1921 Census; neither of the first two sources includes them all.*

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 27, 2023.