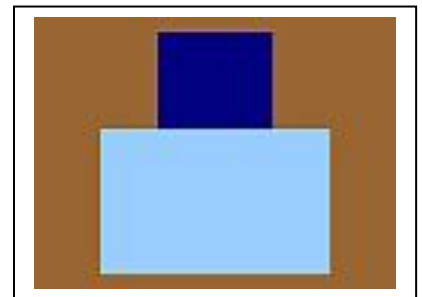




Private Archibald Courage (Number 457383) of the 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*The Victoria Rifles of Canada*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Maple Copse Cemetery: Grave reference, Special Memorial G. 10., on which are engraved the words KNOWN TO BE BURIED IN THIS CEMETERY

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion (The Victoria Rifles of Canada) is from the Wikipedia web-site*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of an *elevator constructor*, Archibald Courage appears to have left no record of his passage from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian city of Montreal where he was to enlist. However, it is more than likely that he immigrated there at some time after the death of his father in 1898 but at some time before August 8 of 1910.

This latter August 8 is the date on which his mother, accompanied by his youngest sibling, eleven-year-old Albert, are to be found registered on the passenger list of the SS *Bruce*, travelling from Port aux Basques to North Sydney, Cape Breton - a list on which they are registered as *returning* Canadians on their way to Montreal\*. Her address at the time of her son's later enlistment is documented as being 132, Colbourne Street, in that city.

*\*Mrs. Courage's recorded occupation, that of a charwoman, is also to be found on that same passenger list.*

Recorded as having enlisted and also as having undergone medical examination\* in Montreal on June 14 of 1915, Archibald Courage then attested on the following day\*\*. As the unit began recruiting on only June 1, he was thus one of the first to enlist in the 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion, where he was attached to "C" Company.

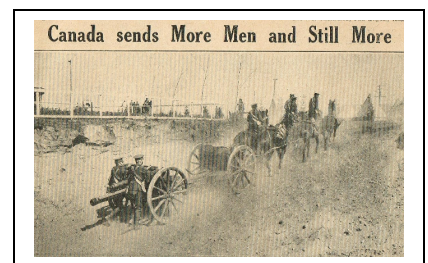
The official conclusion to the formalities of Private Courage's enlistment was brought about on that June 15. At that time, the Officer Commanding the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel F.A. de la Gascoigne, declared – on paper – that... *having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

On the last day of that month, Private Courage and his new comrades-in-arms, seven-hundred eighteen all told, were sent to the military camp at Valcartier, Québec, there for some seventeen weeks of further training\*\*\*.

*\*The examiner on his report saw fit to mention a number of tattoos present on both arms, about eight in all - skull & cross-bones, crossed flags, hearts & hands and a girl's head being the most notable.*

*\*\*His first pay records begin on June 15.*

(Right: *Canadian artillery being put through its paces at the Camp at Valcartier. In 1914, the main Army Camp in Canada was at Petawawa. However, its location in Ontario – and away from the Great Lakes – made it impractical for the despatch of troops overseas. Valcartier was apparently built within weeks after the Declaration of War. – photograph (from a later date in the war) from *The War Illustrated*)*



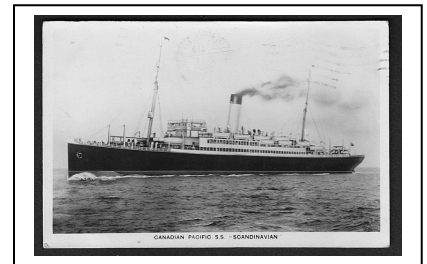
*\*\*\*At the time of his enlistment Archibald Courage was also recorded as having had previous military experience, with the Prince of Wales Fusiliers in Montreal. This information is further evidence that he had already been a resident of the city for a substantial period since it appears that the Regiment had been re-designated as the Grenadier Guards of Canada in 1912.*

By August 1, the number of Battalion personnel had swollen to one-thousand four-hundred eighty-two, this being full battalion strength, including reserves. On October 25 the formation returned to Montreal for final organization: departure for *overseas service* was imminent.

On November 6, 1915, the unit boarded His Majesty's Transport *Scandinavian* in Montreal. Private Courage's Battalion was not, however, to travel alone; also taking passage were the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Troop Companies of the Canadian Engineers.

The vessel sailed on that November 6, reaching the English south-coast naval harbour of Plymouth-Devonport nine days later, on November 15. From there a train was taken, Private Courage and his fellow soldiers reaching the recently-established Canadian military complex in the vicinity of the villages of Liphook and Bramshott, in the county of Hampshire, on the following day.

(Right: *The image of Canadian Pacific's SS Scandinavian is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)



The 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to remain at Bramshott for some thirteen weeks. During this period it was decided that the unit would be designated a component of the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade which in turn was to be an element of the newly-forming Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division.

Apparently, this attachment became official on Christmas Day of 1915, although for all practical purposes, the move did not transpire for a further two months\*. During this period, on February 4, likely in anticipation of a transfer overseas, Private Courage wrote a will in which he bequeathed his all to his mother.

*\*The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division officially came into being in Belgium at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. Some of its units had already been serving on the Continent for months while others, as has been seen, were yet to arrive.*

On February 20, 1916, three trains left the station at nearby Liphook to carry the officers, men and equipment of Private Courage's Battalion to not-too-distant Southampton where the unit embarked onto two ships, the *Queen Alexandra* and the *Matheran*\*, for the short cross-Channel passage to the Continent.



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

*\*Matheran struck a mine off the South African coast on January 26 of 1917 and was sunk with the loss of a single crew-member.*



(Right: *The image of Matheran is from the [www.wrecksite.eu](http://www.wrecksite.eu) web-site.*)

At five o'clock in the afternoon of that same day, the *Queen Alexandra* cleared the port of Southampton. She was a full ship, some one-thousand soldiers on board since the 60<sup>th</sup> was in the company of detachments of both the 50<sup>th</sup> and the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalions.

Fortunately the voyage was a good one, the sea calm, and the ship arrived in the French port-city of Le Havre at eleven o'clock in the late evening of that February 20.

(Right above: *The image of the Queen Alexandra is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)



If, in fact, Private Courage had travelled on board the *Queen Alexandra*, he then marched to Rest Camp Number II, arriving there at eight-fifty the following morning. The War Diarist reported a cold, unsettled day, the only billets for the troops being tented affairs. However, if he travelled on board the *Matheran*, he was not to dock in Le Havre until six o'clock on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, at which time he *then* marched to the Rest Camp.



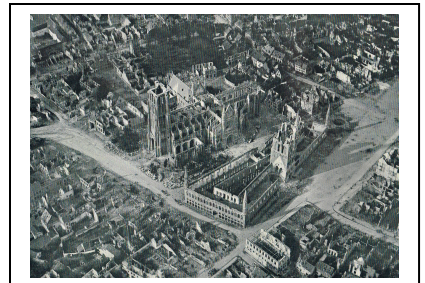
And just to complicate matters, a third party left Southampton as late as the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup>, to disembark at seven-thirty on the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

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

Nevertheless, it would seem that eventually all Battalion personnel were to be found either on board a first train - or on the way to the station for a second train - on the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. However, that *first* train did not stop at the right station and, after a journey of twenty-four hours in order to travel - without stopping – just three-hundred fifty-two kilometres, those on board were then faced with a twenty-kilometre march to their billets at Goderwaersvelte.

The second contingent, on the other hand, had required only twenty-two – but apparently very *cold* - hours to arrive at the *right* station.

A week later, on March 1 and 2 – “C” Company and Private Courage on this second date - the Battalion was once more on the move. On this occasion it was to the vicinity of the community of Locre, just to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres (today *Ieper*), there to be temporarily attached to the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade in order to get a first taste of the routines of life in the trenches\* - and its first taste of death *in action*: Private John Rae Morgan on March 7.



(Right above: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2<sup>nd</sup> Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)

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

**On March 28 the 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered transferred into a south-east sector of the Ypres Salient, a lethal place at the best of times, of which there were few. It moved into front-line trenches at Sanctuary Wood\* where the month of April was subsequently to pass – perhaps deceptively – in much the manner as described above. The steady trickle of casualties at this time was to be largely due to enemy artillery action and by the ever-present – on both sides – snipers.**

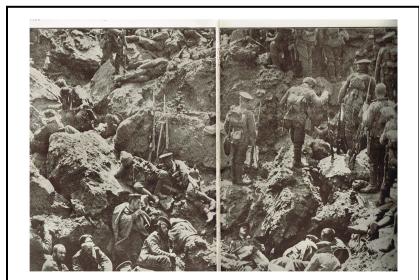
***(Right: Remnants of Canadian trenches dating from 1915-1916 at Sanctuary Wood – photograph from 2010)***



***\*Also in this area were such place-names as Maple Copse, Mount Sorrel, Hill 60, Hooge and Railway Dugouts, within months to be the theatre of a major engagement between the Canadians and the German Army.***

**Meanwhile, for the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, stationed further south down the line from Ypres, the first weeks of April were not to be as tranquil as those experienced by Private Courage and his comrades-in-arms.**

**The Action at the St. Eloi Craters officially took place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it was here that the British had excavated a series of galleries under the German lines, there to place a series of explosives which they detonated on that March 27. The explosions were followed by an infantry attack.**



***(Above right: A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – from Illustration)***

**(continued)**

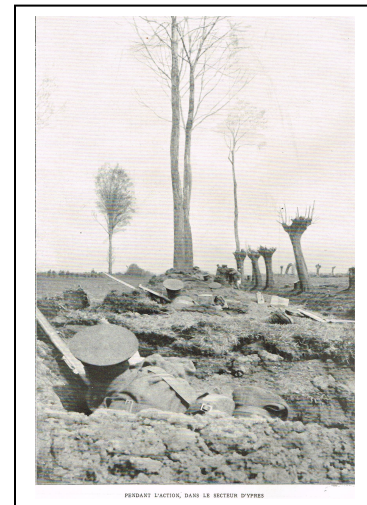
After an initial success the attack had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the by-then exhausted British troops. The newcomers were to enjoy no more success than had their British comrades-in-arms, and by the 17<sup>th</sup>, when the battle was called off, both sides were back where they had been some three weeks previously – and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.

However, the confrontation at St-Éloi was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Division affair and the personnel of the 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the ever-increasing German artillery.

On the penultimate day of the month, April 29, the Battalion *stood down* before moving to the rear, to the western side of the remnants of Ypres. There, for fourteen of the first fifteen days of the month of May, the Battalion War Diarist saw fit to introduce his entry with the word... *quiet*. Such was no longer to be the case as of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the day that the unit moved forward once more to *Maple Copse*. Apparently the artillery of both sides was very active – and so it continued for the days afterwards, the War Diary entry for May 18<sup>th</sup> reading as follows:

*Very heavy bombardment by enemy of Maple Copse, Sanctuary Wood, Border Dugouts, start 5.00 am and lasting most of the day, our artillery replying. New gun used by enemy in this vicinity, supposed by Artillery Officers to be 6" Naval Gun mounted on railroad, or other carriage. This gun fired during the day from Clonmel Copse, apparently sending over a very high explosive shrapnel with great forward range. The shell could not be heard until it burst and at first was mistaken for bombs from aeroplanes.*

The Battalion was to be in the *Maple Copse Sector* until the end of May but it was not until the final War Diary entry of the month that casualties were noted: a total of seventy-one for that sixteen-day period. Only one, an officer, was mentioned by name.



(Right above: *Troops, in this case British, manning trenches in the Ypres Salient during the early years – likely the winter of 1915-1916 since they are without helmets and the trees without leaves. – from Illustration*)

There is a casualty report, however, which bears Private Courage's name and which cites the cause of his death: *Was acting as a Battalion sniper and on the evening of May 18, 1916, he attempted to repair his sniper's post when he was shot through the stomach by an enemy bullet, dying a few minutes later.*



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

(continued)

The son of Archibald Courage, seaman and rigger, deceased in the *Greenland* disaster\* of March 22-23 of 1898, and of Elizabeth Jane Courage (née *Nichols*)\*\* – to whom he had allotted a monthly twenty dollars from his pay - of Courage's Beach, Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Jessie-Louise, to William-Nichols, to Emma-Beatrice, to Frank, to Susannah, to Flora and to Albert.

*\*Archibald Courage, having taken ship to the 'front' to hunt seals in the spring of 1898, was one of those marooned on the ice during a storm on the night of March 22-23. When the Greenland had finally been able to reach its men, twenty-three bodies were recovered; a further twenty-five were never found. The remains of Archibald Courage were buried on March 29, some six days later.*



(Right above: *The image of the steamer SS Greenland is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

*\*\*A later address for Mrs. Courage, her second in Montreal, was recorded as 545, De Lanaudière Street.*

Private Courage was reported as having been *killed in action* of May 18, 1916, while serving in the area of the trenches in the vicinity of Maple Copse. A single paper among his documents notes a burial report dated June 1.

Archibald Courage had enlisted at the apparent age of thirty-two years and six months: date of birth at Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, October 3, 1882.

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

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to [criceadam@yahoo.ca](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 27, 2023.

