



Private Willie Spurgeon Crowley (Number 3080382) of the 87th Battalion (*Canadian Grenadier Guards*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, is interred in Dury Mill Cemetery: Grave reference II.D.10.

(Right: The image of the Canadian Grenadier Guards cap badge is from the Regimental Rogue web-site.)

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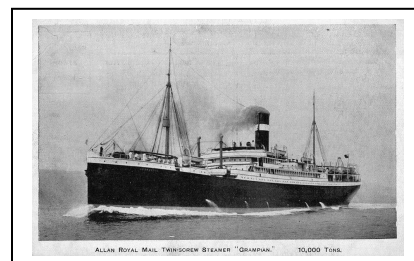
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, Willie Spurgeon Crowley had travelled through the American city of Boston on November 21, 1917, on his way to Montreal for enlistment (from *Ancestry.ca* documents)*. While he surely appears to be the person in question, the date of his enlistment and attestation of November 19 at the Number 4 Mobilization Centre in Montreal, and also that of both his medical examination and certification of attestation on November 20, are inexplicably incompatible to that of his passage through Boston. It is difficult to assume only a clerical error...

**Other travel documents suggest that he may have been the young man who made the passage on the SS Kyle from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland to North Sydney, Cape Breton, on May 24, 1917 (and again in June) (this unconfirmed, all from ancestry.ca), to cross the United States border at Vanceboro, Maine, on the following day (this confirmed). He was on his way to join his sister, Mrs. R.D. Parsons of 36, Pine Street, in the community of Greenwood, Massachusetts.*

On November 23, Private Crowley was *taken on strength* by the 1st Depot Battalion* of the 1st Quebec Regiment. He may have spent at least a part of the following ten weeks at the *Guy Street Barracks* in Montreal as that was the given address of the two witnesses, both soldiers, of the will he made out on January 30. In it he left his all to his mother, Jane Luther Crowley, still residing in Western Bay, Newfoundland.

**The task of the Depot Battalions was to instil only a minimum of training and discipline in the incoming recruits before despatching them to the Canadian Reserve Battalions in the United Kingdom to complete the job.*

If the date entered on the will is indeed the one on which he wrote the document, then he must have left soon afterwards to catch a train. The records show that Private Crowley of the 1st Depot Battalion of the 1st Quebec Regiment* embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Grampian* in the harbour at Halifax, Nova Scotia, on February 3 of 1918. The vessel sailed on the 5th(?), to dock in England on February 16.

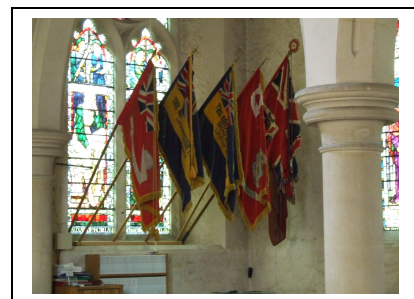


It may well be that Private Crowley was a soldier of either the 3rd or 4th Draft of his parent unit as both are documented as sailing for the United Kingdom on that day; also recorded as doing likewise are the 1st and 2nd Drafts of the 2nd Depot Battalion of the 2nd Quebec Regiment – but there is no record of the ship on which these contingents took passage.

(Right above: *The image of the Allan Line vessel Grampian is from the Old Ship Photo Galleries web-site.*)

**A second document has the name of this unit scratched out and replaced with... Cdn. Recruits from USA.*

Private Crowley's Draft upon disembarkation was immediately taken by train to the large Canadian military establishment at Bramshott in the southern English county of Hampshire. Upon his arrival there, on that same February 16, he was transferred to the 23rd Canadian (Reserve) Battalion.



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

It was to be almost a further three months before Private Crowley was transferred again. On this next occasion, May 10, he was to travel across the Channel to the Continent - likely through the ports of Southampton and Le Havre - there to report to the Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Étapes. He was just one of the one-thousand five-hundred forty-nine personnel to report there *to duty* from England on the following day, May 11.

Twelve days later again he was one of one-thousand two-hundred eighty-eight despatched onward to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp, also at Étapes.

On June 9 (Private Crowley's own records suggest the day prior) the Reinforcement Camp in its turn despatched ten *other ranks* to the parent unit of the 87th Battalion (*Canadian Grenadier Guards*). He reported *to duty* on June 10.

There is no record of *any* arrivals during that period in the 87th Battalion War Diary – which does *not* necessarily mean that there *were* none – at a time when the 87th Battalion had withdrawn to an encampment at Valhuon and was combining rifle drills with football games, parades with training and rest with working-parties.



(Right above: *A Canadian working-party loading up with supplies during the summer of 1917, somewhere in France – from *Le Miroir)**

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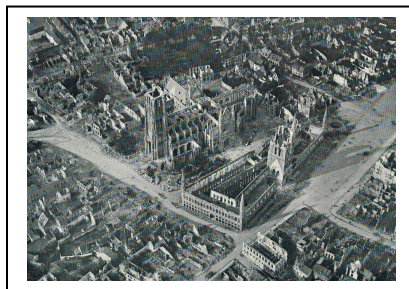
The 87th Battalion (*Canadian Grenadier Guards*) was an element of the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 4th Canadian Division, the last such Canadian formation to be despatched to *active service* on the Western Front during the Great War*.



****There was also a Canadian 5th Division but, once having been formed, it remained in the United Kingdom for the duration of the Great War.***

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

The 87th Battalion had arrived in France some twenty-one months before Private Crowley, on August 12 of 1916, landing in the French port-city of Le Havre. Three days later it had been on its way north, to the area of the Franco-Belgian frontier and then beyond, to serve for six weeks in a sector to the south-west of the remnants of the medieval city of Ypres (today *Ieper*).



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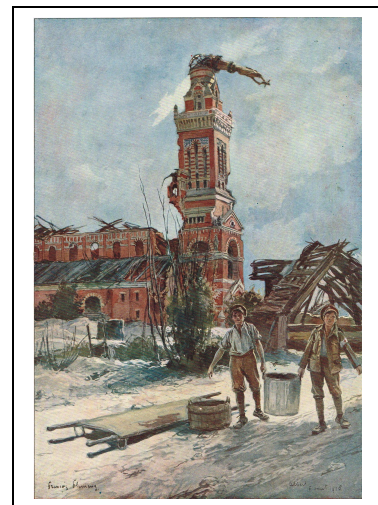
(Previous page: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2nd Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)

On October 3, 1916, having been withdrawn from Belgium only days before to undergo training in north-western France, the 87th Battalion had been ordered by the British High Command to move south, to the area of *the Somme*, where the wretched British summer offensive had by now become a campaign of the autumn as well.

Having travelled from the north at first by train and then on foot, the unit had arrived in the vicinity of the provincial town of Albert a week later. The Battalion then bivouacked at Brickfields Camp.

Meanwhile, by early September of 1916, when Canadian troops had first made their appearance in that particular theatre of the War, the *First Battle of the Somme* had already been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short space of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

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



On the first day of *1st Somme* all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which had lost so heavily on that July 1, 1916, at Beaumont-Hamel.

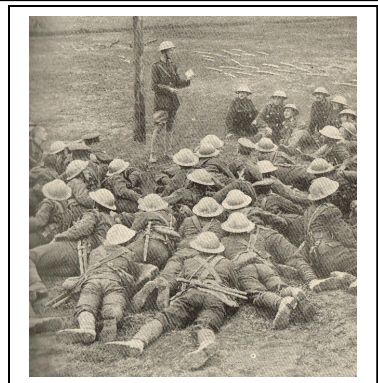
(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette – photograph from 2015*)



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, a confrontation which was to occur some seven weeks before the arrival of the 87th Battalion on the scene.

(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*)



The 87th Battalion had been in the trenches since October 17, but it was at six minutes past mid-day on October 21 that the unit put it an attack and captured the *Regina Trench* strong-point, an objective which had previously proved to be impregnable.

This success was unfortunately to be short-lived and Regina Trench was subsequently ceded to the Germans following a counter-attack.

The Battalion had then retired but had remained in the area of Pozières until October 30 when it moved into billets, further to the rear, in the town of Albert itself.

In November the unit had moved back into the area of *Regina Trench* on two further occasions: the first passed with little incident; however, during the second tour, the Battalion had been part of a further attack on November 18. *Regina Trench* having by then been definitively captured, the objective on this date had been to occupy a number of adjacent German positions. The operation had been only partially successful and the unit had incurred a total of another two-hundred thirty-two killed, wounded and missing in action.

(Right above and right: *Some of the remnants of the village of Pozières as it was after the Great War, in 1919 – and as it is a century later. The Australian War Memorial may be seen in both images. – colour photograph from 2016*)

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

Relieved on the day following the attack, on November 22 the 87th Battalion had begun to march away from *the Somme*. By December 4 the unit had marched in a semi-circle – to the west and then to the north - to Fréwillers, some twenty-five kilometres north-west of the city of Arras.

From that time until the last week in March of the following year, 1917, the unit – as with most other Canadian units – had been posted in the sectors of the line between Béthune in the north and Arras in the south. There, during that winter of 1916-1917, they had settled into the daily routines and rigours 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, 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: 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)

The winter of 1916-1917 had been 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.



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

On March 26 the 87th Battalion had been relieved from its then-current tour in the front-line positions and withdrawn to a rest area at Chateau de la Haie. From the next day until April 2 the unit had undergone extensive training for the upcoming British offensive, so whether there was much *rest* to be enjoyed is to be speculated – but then, no-one had been shot at.

On April 3, the 87th Battalion had moved to the front area.

On April 4, 5 and 6 it had supplied working parties and dug trenches.

On April 7, the final elements of the Battalion had moved forward to the front area.

By ten o'clock on the evening of April 8, the 87th Battalion had reported itself to be in its battle positions.

On April 9 of 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 being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



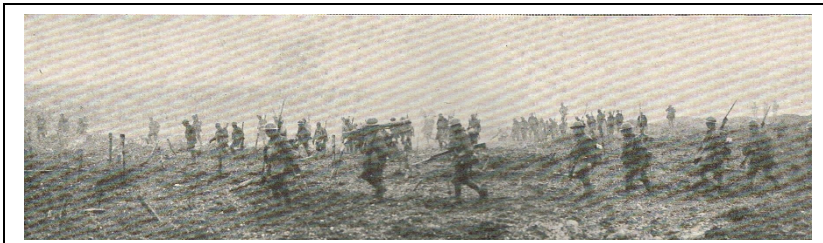
While the British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive was to be a disaster.

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

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.

(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, burdened 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*)



Excerpt from the 87th Battalion War Diary of April 9, 1917: *Easter Monday, zero hour 5.30 A.M. The Battalion, 520 strong all ranks, went “over the top” supported by a strong artillery barrage.*

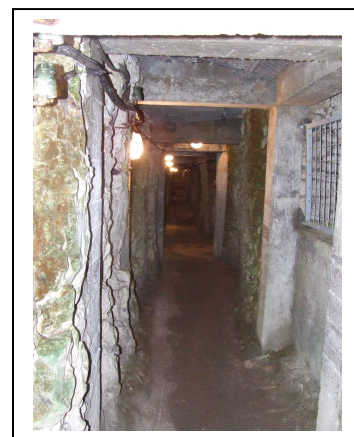
Excerpts from 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary entry for April 9, 1917:

12.25 p.m. - 87th Battalion report that a party of 75th Battalion who were out in front of BASSO (Trench) were counter attacked by the enemy, and believe that some of our men were taken prisoners.

12.55 p.m. – The 87th Battalion advise that they are sending out a Lewis Gun Officer, with 4 guns, and 20 men to clean up the situation around the Old German Front Line & proceed on to BASSO after this is accomplished.

2.00 p.m. – O.C., 87th Battalion reports one Machine Gun of the 11th Machine Gun Coy. operating sixty yards left of crater where LIEUT. Hannaford and his party are established.

(Right: *Grange Tunnel - one of the few remaining galleries still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years later on: They were hewn out of the limestone to ensure secrecy and, at the same time, the security of the attacking troops – photograph from 2008(?)*)



The Battalion assault had enjoyed only mixed results at first, even some of the successful attackers being forced to retire because their flanks had become vulnerably exposed. Eventually, however, the advance continued, one of the last actions going in at a quarter to seven in the evening to clear two more trenches of the enemy.

By the late evening of April 10 the Canadian Corps had cleared the area of Vimy Ridge of the few remaining pockets of resistance and had begun to consolidate the area in anticipation of the expected German counter-attacks.

(continued)

(Right: German prisoners being escorted to the rear by Canadian troops during the attack on Vimy Ridge – from Illustration)



There had, on that second day, been the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on the previous day's success had proved impossible. Thus the Germans closed the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

The remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* was not to be fought in the manner of the first two days and by the end of those five weeks little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success.

The 87th Battalion had reverted to that routine of life in the trenches in the Lens Sector. June was fairly active, particularly the evening of the 8th when three battalions had fairly successfully raided the enemy lines. On the debit side had been a count of one-hundred thirty-nine casualties.

In contrast to June, much of July had been spent in reserve in the area of Chateau de la Haie. Parades, lectures, drills, inspections, visits from Brigade and Divisional Commanders as well as from the High Command, sports and working parties were all the order of the day. The Battalion had even lined the sides of the road on one particular date when His Majesty King George V was passing by.



(Right above: A further photograph of a Canadian working-party carrying supplies of all kinds to the troops in forward positions – from *Le Miroir*)

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 reserve troops - 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.

(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*)

(Right: Canadian troops 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 have been 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: 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)



Objectives of the attack had been 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 had been expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it proved; on the 16th several strong counter-attacks had been launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.

These defences had held and the Canadian artillery, which had been employing newly-developed tactical procedures, had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. Hill 70 was to remain in Canadian hands*.

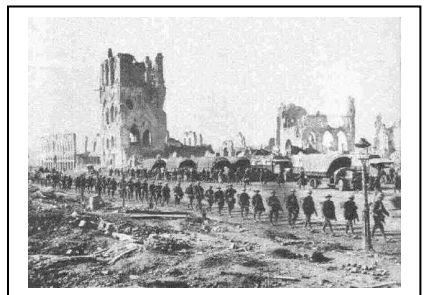
(Right: A Canadian 220 mm siege gun, here under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action – from Le Miroir)



The assault on Hill 70 had been made by formations of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions. The 87th Battalion, being of the 4th Canadian Division was not a part of this operation, but had been active in the outskirts of Lens during that same period, partially in the area of the Lens-Lievin Road where it today still crosses the Béthune to Lens railway line, and in the western outskirts of the city of Lens itself.

**This Canadian-led offensive campaign had been scheduled to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium was proceeding less well than expected and the High Command was looking for reinforcements to make good the exorbitant losses.*

The Australians and New Zealanders, and then the Canadians, were ordered to prepare to move north, thus the Canadians were obliged to abandon their plans.



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

(continued)

In the middle of October the Canadians had been ordered north into Belgium and to the *Ypres Salient*. Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign – ongoing since the end of that July - came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – at least later professed to be - one of the British Army’s objectives.



(Right above: *Somewhere, perhaps anywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917. – from Illustration*)

From the time that the Canadians had entered the fray, it was they who had shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions who spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Divisions in reserve.



From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was to be true with the 2nd Division having finally entered the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

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

(Right below: *Just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the above monument – this, according to the 87th Battalion War Diary, is where the unit was in trenches on October 30 of 1917. – photograph from 2010*)

Meanwhile, October 11 had been the first day of the transfer of the 87th Battalion which would bring it, after a year’s absence, and for a second occasion, to the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. By the 22nd of the month the unit was in Toronto Camp in the area of Brandhoek, a village to the west of Ypres itself and half way along the road to Poperinghe.



On the 27th, thirty-two officers and six-hundred eighteen *other ranks* of the Battalion had moved to the vicinity of Potijze, north-east of Ypres, to be quartered in shelters and dugouts. There, for a further six days, they had mostly been engaged in providing work parties and, at least on one day, had sent one-hundred men to carry some of the many wounded to the rear.



(Right: *Canadian troops performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

Back at Brandhoek on November 2, the unit had entrained on the following day again for Caestre, in northern France. After further days of training and inspections, the Battalion had found itself back in Toronto Camp, Brandhoek, on November 10. From there it had been ordered to Ypres, from Ypres to Potijze, from Potijze to Abraham Heights, and from there to Crest Farm on the outskirts of the no-longer existent community of Passchendaele itself, all in the space of two days: there at Crest Farm the 87th Battalion had relieved companies of three other Canadian battalions.

According to the Battalion War Diary entry for November 16... *The total casualties for the tour were 4 Officers and 172 O.R. which is exceedingly heavy for four days in holding the line, and shows the intenseness of the situation in the vicinity of Passchendaele.* It had been an almost- ceaseless enemy artillery bombardment which had inflicted the vast majority of these losses on the unit.

On the next day, November 17, the 87th Battalion was relieved and began to retire to France – on foot and by motor transport. Six days again, on the 23rd, after a march of some twenty-eight kilometres from Cantrainne it had been billeted in the proximity of La Thieuloye, to the north-west of Arras and far from the forward area. By December 21, however, the Battalion was once more at the front, now in the Chaudière Sector - and Christmas Day of 1917 turned out to be just another day in the trenches*.

**On December 3 and 4 the personnel of the Battalion were encouraged to exercise their right to vote in the Canadian National Election ongoing at the time. Also offered was the opportunity to invest in War Bonds, thus allowing those fighting in the conflict the chance to pay for it as well.*

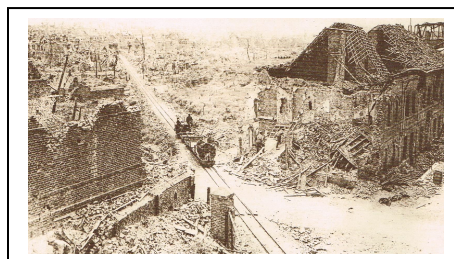
(Right below: *The Canadian National Monument on Vimy Ridge as seen looking southwards from the Chaudière Sector – photograph from 1914*)

In contrast to Christmas, New Year's Eve had been celebrated by everyone taking the train to Neuville St-Vaast for a bath!



Much of January, most of February and the first two weeks of March, 1918, were for the most part a quiet time, not only for the 87th Battalion but indeed for most of the Canadian 11th Infantry Brigade. On March 12 the unit was preparing to leave Alberta Camp to go back to the front lines. They were to once again be posted to the Lens Sector.

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, they delivered a massive attack, Operation 'Michael', launched 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*.



(Preceding page: *While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily at the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and 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.

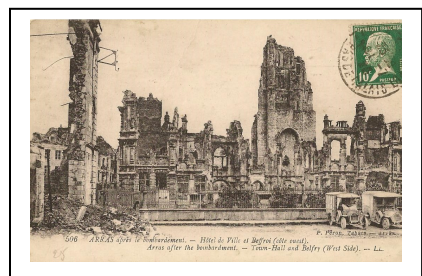
**A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It also was successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.*

(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)



(Right below: *The venerable City Hall of Arras and its bell-tower looked like this by the spring of 1918 after nearly four years of bombardment by German artillery. – from a vintage post-card*)

It seems that the Battalion remained *in situ* in the Lens Sector until the end of the month of March when it was transferred some kilometres south to the Arras Sector, then moving back and forth in the area to the north of the city itself. But the 87th Battalion was not to be posted to *the Somme* to staunch the German onslaught of that spring; the unit remained in the region to the north and north-west of Arras where Private Crowley was to report *to duty* on June 10.



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A further month was to pass before the 87th Battalion was then ordered forward from the relative security of Valhuon to the area close to Roclincourt, perhaps half-way between Vimy and the city of Arras. It began its tour there on July 10 and was relieved – back into *support?* – a week later.

Five days later again it returned to the front near Roclincourt - on this occasion to take part in two raids to inflict casualties and to obtain information – until it in turn was relieved on the final day of the month. Casualties incurred by Private Crowley's Battalion during that month of July were light by the norms of the day.

(Right: *Arras Road Cemetery, Roclincourt, in which lie a number of Canadian dead and at least one Newfoundlander – photograph from 2014(?)*)



This, however, was to change during the month of August. Under the new Allied Generalissimo, Foch, an immense offensive was being prepared to push the Germans back whence they had come some four months previously – and beyond*.

**Nobody knew it at the time of course and perhaps, after four years of static warfare, no one dared to think it, but this campaign - to become known as the Hundred Days – was to end with the Armistice of November 11 of 1918. (Although by that time there would be several such agreements as the Central Powers one by one were to leave the field.)*

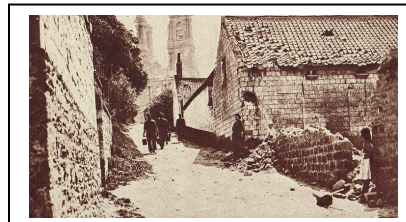
In the previous April the German spring offensive had almost reached the gates of Amiens in the south and had advanced towards the Channel ports in the north before being stopped. That area in front of Amiens was to be the jumping-off point for the Allied attack of August 8*, thus the early days of August saw a great transfer of Canadian troops from the area north-west of Arras to the new theatre of battle some ninety kilometres to the south. The move was to be rapid – and to be cloaked in secrecy.



(Right: The great gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the leading German troops had been able to see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918 – The edifice houses a flag and other commemorations of the sacrifice of the Dominion of Newfoundland – photograph from 2007(?))

**It was to be the end of September before the Allied counter-attack would commence in the north on the front in Flanders where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving.*

The 87th Battalion left its quarters in the proximity of Écoivres and Mont St-Éloi on the evening of August 3 and was bussed some one-hundred twenty kilometres before it dismounted at four-thirty on the following morning in, or close to, the community of Oisemont – still at a distance of forty-seven kilometres from Amiens.



(Right above and right below: The village of St-Éloi at an early period of the Great War and a century later - The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – destroyed in 1783 – are visible in both images. – from Le Miroir and (colour) from 2016)

Private Crowley's Battalion billeted in or in the vicinity of the villages of Heucourt and Prouzel on successive days having marched by night, before, on August 6... *The Brigade Group began its move to concentration area BOIS DE BOVES. At five o'clock on the afternoon of the next day again the Brigade began a further, final movement into the BOIS DE GENTELLES.*



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Excerpt from the 87th Battalion War Diary entry of August 8, 1917: *Notification received that zero hour was to be 4.20 A.M. and at 5.30 A.M. the Battalion started to move. It moved around the south end of the GENTELLES WOOD and then south and parallel to the ROYE Road, crossing the RIVER LUCE and taking up a position along Old German trench system... From here it could be seen that our attack was progressing favourably and many prisoners were being sent back. The Battalion moved again at 9.20 A.M...*



(Right above: *The remnants of the community of Roye, this picture taken in 1917, even before the events of 1918 – from a vintage post-card*)

The attack of August 8 was for the most part a great success – the Canadians having advanced an unheard-of eleven kilometres. It continued in places overnight and, in general, recommenced early in the morning of the morrow. On the 10th, the 87th and 54th Battalions were operating in support of the 10th and 12th Canadian Infantry Brigades as the attack continued, the other two battalions of the 11th Brigade having withdrawn temporarily.



(Right above: *The caption records this as being a photograph of German prisoners taken by the Canadians, some of them carrying a wounded officer – Allied or German officer is not documented. Also to be noted is one of the newer tanks. – from Le Miroir*)

On the evening of the 11th, Private Crowley's unit had made its way to the village of Rosières and by August 19 was reported as having advanced as far as the community of Hattencourt. There it was involved in an action which had as its objective to advance the line some five-hundred yards... *Line was secured without difficulty on left but strong resistance was met with on the right in vicinity of FRESHCOPSE where heavy bomb fighting took place... Our casualties reported to be light.* (Battalion War Diary)

In his entry of the following day, August 20, the War Diarist wrote... *Our artillery continue to be very active carrying out harassing fire and destructive shoots. Special attention is paid to the bridges across the SOMME.* The attacks were continuing and, as the objective of the current offensive had been to advance to the River Somme, it would appear that this goal was about to be realized. On that same August 20, the 87th Battalion retired into reserve.



(Right above: *Canadian soldiers consolidate newly-won positions while others cross a river on an improvised bridge. – from Le Miroir*)

On the night of August 24-25 the entire 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade was withdrawn into reserve and was replaced in the line by elements of the French 34th and 35th Divisions. It was to leave the area as it had come: quickly and discretely.

Only days hence it would be fighting another battle to the east of Arras, the area that it had left just over three weeks previously.

As for the 87th Battalion, during the evening of August 27, it boarded a train at Longeau Station and at sixteen minutes past eleven of that same evening, began the railway journey from there to Acq from where the personnel then took busses to Berneville. Two days later again, Private Crowley and his comrades-in-arms were back in the area of Neuville-Vitasse, to the south-east of Arras.

The following is from Appendices to be found in the 87th Battalion War Diary for the month of September, 1918:

87th Battalion Canadian Infantry (Canadian Grenadier Guards)

Operational Order No. 138

a) The Canadian Corps will attack DROCOURT-QUEANT LINE and enemy positions in rear, on a date and at a time to be notified later*.

****The date was to be September 2.***

b) 1st Canadian Division on the right, 4th Canadian Division in the centre...

c) The 10th and 12th Canadian Brigades will carry out the initial attack, objective the "RED LINE".

d) ...11th Canadian Brigade will pass through and continue the attack to the "BLUE LINE".

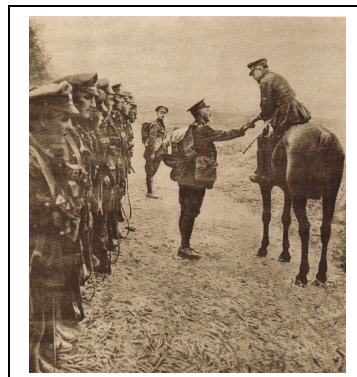
e) The 87th Battalion... will carry out the first advance to the "GREEN LINE"...

The 87th Battalion moved to the assembly area on the night of September 1-2, 1918, and – not being a part of the first wave - at zero plus one hour moved forward to its *jumping off* positions. The four Battalion Companies were formed up in the order of advance. "B" on the right, "D" on the left, "A" in support and "C" in reserve.

Unfortunately there appears to be no record of in which Company Private Crowley was serving.

(Right: After the successful operation of breaking the Hindenberg Line at Drocourt-Quéant, Canadian troops are here being inspected by the Commander-in-Chief of the British and Commonwealth Forces in Europe, Douglas Haig. – from Le Miroir)

Excerpts from Battalion War Diary entry of September 2: At 5.30 A.M. heavy barrage opened. Enemy's reply did not reach our assembly position. At 6.20 A.M the Battalion moved forward... We were to attack at 8 A.M. but the situation was still obscure. The C.O. consulted with the O.C. of the 75th Battalion and then hoping that by advancing on the left the situation on the right might be eased, decided to push on. According at 8.30 the Battalion went forward...



On reaching the crest of the ridge just east of the sunken road, the leading Coys came under heavy Machine Gun and shell fire, frontally and on both flanks... At 1.30 P.M. the C.O. advised Brigade that we could not hope to get further without artillery and tank support and shortly after the G.O.C. stated that we could hold on to what we had and await orders...

This the Battalion did, on the understanding that the advance would continue on the following morning. Apparently casualties were fairly heavy, particularly for 'B' Company but unfortunately the War Diarist decided to record only the losses among the officers.

And on September 3... Credit is due to officers and men for their behaviour. The fighting on top of MOUNT DURY and on the forward slope was extremely heavy and notwithstanding very heavy casualties the made made (sic – but probably 'men made') ground and held their position under very heavy shell and machine gun fire and with the left flank quite exposed.

There appears to be no explanation as to why the name of 3080382 Private Crowley does not appear among the list of fatalities of September 2 and 3 which was entered among the Appendices of the Battalion War Diary. There seems to be little doubt that September 2 was the day on which he died, according to the papers among his military records:

Circumstances of casualty – Killed in action. Killed during an attack on enemy positions South West of Dury near the jumping off trench.



(Right above: *The Canadian Memorial to those who fought at the Drocourt-Quéant Line in early September of 1918: It stands to the side of the main Arras-Cambrai road in the vicinity of the village of Dury and also of Mount Dury. – photograph from 2016*)

The son of William Crowley, miner, and Jane Luther Crowley, of Western Bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Annie-Maud, Florence-Elliot, Gertrude, to Gladys-Kitchen and to Lily B.A..

Private Crowley was reported as having been *killed in action*, fighting at the Drocourt-Quéant Line on September 2, 1918.

(Right: *A family monument, erected by his parents and which stands in Western Bay Old United Church Cemetery, commemorates the sacrifice of Private Crowley. – photograph from 2010(?)*)



Willie Spurgeon Crowley had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty years and ten months: date of birth at Western Bay, Newfoundland, January 27, 1897.

Private Willie Spurgeon Crowley was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



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