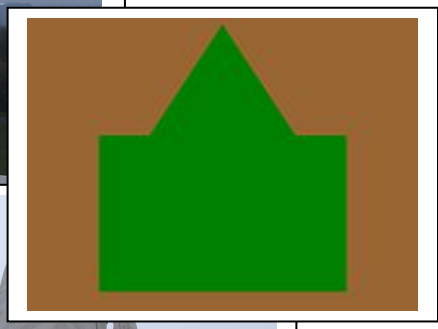


Private Morris (perhaps also *Maurice*) Cull (Number 180348) of the 47th Battalion (*British Columbia*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 47th Battalion (British Columbia) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force is from the Military Wiki web-site*.)

(continued)

His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a labourer, Morris Cull seems to have left no documentation behind him *a propos* his emigration from the Dominion of Newfoundland to Canada apart from the note of his arrival in the year 1908 to be found in the 1911 Census. At that time he was listed as a pile-driver at a railway construction camp close to the community of Sooke on Vancouver Island.

Five years later, at the time of his enlistment, he was registered as a resident at the *Northern Hotel* in the capital city, Victoria, although this may well have been just for that

short period only. Morris Cull is recorded as having enlisted on December 16 of 1915 in Victoria, then as having presented himself for medical examination and attestation on the following day.

On that same December 16, the now-Private Cull was taken on strength by the 88th Regiment of Militia, two days later to be transferred to the 88th Battalion, both units designated *Victoria Fusiliers*.* It may be that the unit was based at the *Willows Camp* in Victoria as this is where Private Cull is recorded as having been on April 25 of 1916 to undergo a further medical examination, the reason for which – perhaps vaccination? – appears not to be among his papers.

****It is of interest to note that one of the driving forces behind the formation of the 88th Regiment in 1912 was to become the senior Canadian officer of the Great War, Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur W. Currie. As a Canadian Militia formation the 88th Regiment was prohibited from overseas service but any personnel that it recruited could be transferred to one of the new Overseas Battalions which were being authorized at the time.***

The official conclusion to the formalities of Private Cull's enlistment was brought about on only the day after his enlistment – and arguably *before* he became a soldier of the 88th Battalion. Nevertheless, it was on December 17, that the Officer Commanding the 88th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel H.J.R. Cullin, 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 date on which the 88th Battalion left British Columbia to travel by train across the country to Halifax does not appear in Private Cull's files, although the Battalion stopped for long enough in Ottawa to be inspected by the Duke of Connaught, Governor General of Canada at that time*.

****His youngest daughter was to lend her name to a new Canadian regiment, the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.***

Private Cull and the 88th Battalion embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* in the harbour at Halifax on Canada's east coast on May 31 of 1916. The unit was not travelling alone: on board also were the 57th, 89th, the 90th, the 95th and the 99th Battalions of Canadian Infantry, as well the Number 7 Siege Battery from Toronto, likely close on six-thousand five-hundred military personnel in all.

(continued)

(Previous page: *HMT Olympic – sister ship to Britannic, to be sunk in November of 1916, and of the ill-starred Titanic - on the right, lies at anchor along with HMHS Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay on the Greek island of Lemnos in the autumn of 1915.* – from a photograph from the *Imperial War Museum, London*)

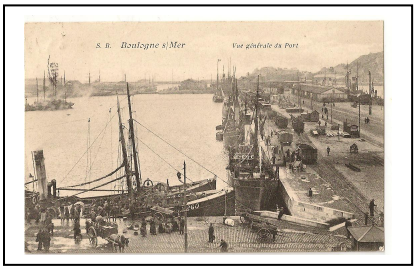
***Olympic* cast her lines and sailed on June 2, two days later. After an uneventful trans-Atlantic crossing, the vessel docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool six days**

later again, on June 8. From there it appears that the 88th Battalion was transported by train to the county of Kent.

At a site known as *Shorncliffe*, just south down the Dover Straits from the sea-side town of Folkestone, the Canadian Army had by that time established a military complex which incorporated a number of individual camps. It was at *Shorncliffe* that Private Cull was to remain for the following seventy-four days although on June 18, only days after his arrival, he and the majority of his unit were transferred to the 30th Canadian (*Reserve*) Battalion in preparation for *active service* on the Continent.

(Right above: *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)

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



On August 20, 1916, he was assigned to a draft to be despatched to the 47th Battalion (*British Columbia*) which itself had – only nine days previously – taken ship to France. Private Cull left England on August 20 or 21, almost certainly sailing from nearby Folkestone, to disembark in the French port of Boulogne, some two hours' sailing-time distant.

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

From there the draft was ordered to the Canadian General Base Depot in the proximity of the port-city of Le Havre at the estuary of the River Seine. There the men were nominally *taken on strength* of the 47th Battalion, the unit itself by that time having already been posted on the northern side of the Franco-Belgian frontier.

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

A reinforcement draft of fifty *other ranks* left Le Havre on September 27 to join the 47th Battalion *in the field*; it reported *to duty* at *Victoria Camp* in the vicinity of the French commune of Nordausques, to the north-west of the larger centre of St-Omer, on the 29th.

The parent unit had by that time been withdrawn from Belgium where it had spent the prior five weeks becoming acclimatized to the rigours and routines of life in the trenches*. It was in training, ready for a move southwards.

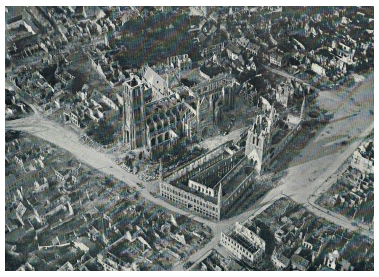
During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then 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 47th Battalion (*British Columbia*) was a component of the 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 4th Canadian Division, and it was as a unit of that 4th Canadian Division that it had landed in France in August of 1916, just days before Private Cull. The 4th Canadian Division was the last such formation to arrive on the Continent, having been preceded by the three others.



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

From the time of the arrival of the Canadian (1st) Division on the Continent in February of 1915, it and the succeeding Divisions had spent their time on the Western Front in the *Ypres Salient, certainly one of the most lethal theatres of the entire Great War, or in that part of the front leading south from Ypres to the frontier with France.**

By the late summer of 1916 there were four Canadian Divisions serving there, a fourfold increase on the numbers – although lacking in artillery - which had fought in the *2nd Battle of Ypres* in April of the previous year.

(Preceding 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*)

Canadian units of the 1st Division had also served for some weeks during May and June of 1915 in northern France at Festubert and Givenchy, there supporting the operations of the

British whose small but professional Army was to be all but annihilated there by the ineptitude of the tactics of the High Command.

During that late summer of 1916 and at about the time of the Canadian 4th Division's arrival on the Continent - and due to the high casualty count and the lack of success of the British offensive during the months of July and August in France - the Canadians were to be ordered to throw their weight into that confrontation.

* * * * *

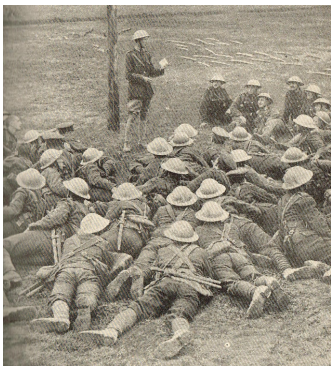
By the time of Private Cull's arrival at the end of September, a number of units of the other three Canadian Divisions had already left for the battlefields further to the south and the 47th Battalion, while still in training at Nordausques, was soon also to be making that journey to *the Somme*.

Meanwhile, by that October of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for three months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault costing the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short space of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

On 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 was to lose so heavily on that day at Beaumont-Hamel.

(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcelette* – 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.



The first major collective contribution of the newly-arrived Canadians was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcelette, a confrontation which was to occur five weeks before the arrival of the 47th Battalion on the scene.

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

By the beginning of October the 47th Battalion was preparing for its move to *the Somme*. At mid-day of October 3, Private

Cull and his comrades-in-arms began a four-and-a-half-hour march to the railway station at St-Omer. There it boarded a train which left at half-past five on that afternoon to arrive twelve hours later in the town of Doullens. An hour-long wait followed by an hour-long march saw the unit in its billets at seven-thirty on the morning of October 4.

(Right above: *Almost a century after Private Cull and the 47th Battalion passed through it on the way to the 1st Battle of the Somme, the once-splendid railway station in St-Omer is today in dire need of renovation* – photograph from 2015)

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

The remainder of the transfer to the area of *the Somme* was now to be made on foot. Stopping in places such as Hérissart and Warloy during a long and circuitous march, at half-past mid-day on October 8, the 47th… *Battalion arrives at BRICKFIELDS* having marched via SENLIS and BOUZINCOURT and bivouacs on area allotted* (from the 47th Battalion War Diary).

La Briqueterie (Brickfields), scene of a large British camp at the time, was very close to the provincial town of Albert.

The 47th Battalion remained on the site at Brickfields for only two nights before the majority of personnel was moved to nearby Tara Hill Camp for a further five days; this is not to say, however, that the officers and men were inactive. Apart from the day on which they moved camp, they supplied as many as four-hundred personnel per day to act as working-parties, not always a safe job, as several casualties were to testify.

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

On October 16 there was a short tour in the trenches but there was no infantry activity, the several casualties being due to enemy artillery fire. Thereafter, life for the 47th Battalion reverted to the routine of the trenches that it had known in the *Ypres Salient* in August and September – although it was surely a novel, if unpleasant, experience for Private Cull. This relative calm was to last for just under a month.

(continued)

Excerpt from 47th Battalion War Diary entry of November 10: *7 P.M. Battalion leaves Brigade Reserve to occupy trenches for the purpose of carrying out a minor operation.* It was scheduled for that night of November 10-11.

The *minor operation* in question was to be an attack on the Regina Trench system. This German strongpoint and defensive system had already resisted several attempts to

take it, all but one of these previous efforts having been both costly and futile*. The Battalion War Diarist recorded the following:

…The attack which was made at 12 midnight was completely successful, its objective being captured and held in spite of heavy enemy barrage and machine gun fire, a considerable number of prisoners and two machine guns were captured…

Unfortunately he was also able to record forty-two *killed in action*, fourteen *missing in action* and one-hundred ten *wounded*.

And, in fact, on the single successful occasion – also costly - the Germans had been able later to recapture the position. The strong-point was not to be definitively taken by the Canadians until that November 11, some three weeks afterwards.

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

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

Once more it was the routine life in – and out of - the trenches, with reinforcements arriving to fill the depleted ranks.

November 23 was a day much like many others: a brief entry for the day made as usual by the War Diarist at about eight-thirty in the evening. The casualty list for that day – one spent partially in the trenches after a relief of the 102nd Battalion – is short: *625911. Wounded. 629057. 108348. Killed in action.*

The casualty report found in the Military Archives (via the *Ancestry* web-site) merely reads: *KIA Trenches at Le Sars*

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

(continued)

The brother of William Cull (see * below) – named as *next of kin* - of Fogo, Newfoundland, Private Cull was reported as having been *killed in action* on November 23, 1916.

The files of Morris Cull record only a brother William, of Fogo, Newfoundland. However, in a short article found on the internet ('The Pilot' of November 14, 2012, bensonhewitt@eastlink.ca) there is mention of a telegram to a brother, a telegram which records the death of Private Morris Cull, 180304, killed in action on November 23, 1916.

In the same article is mentioned the name of the father: John. John, who lived at Barr'd Island before moving to Shoal Bay, had two sons – Morris being the younger – and two daughters.

Searching through the Fogo Anglican Parish Records – thanks to Grand Bank Genealogy – one finds… John Cull and Susan (also Susannah) Cull (deceased 1880?) had the following children: Rachel, born March 6, 1869; William, born September 3, 1871; Eliza, born, July 25, 1875; and Maurice, born November 3 – in 1877.

There had also apparently been a Miss Mellie Marland – her address 1931, Oak Bay, Victoria, British Columbia – recorded as a friend, in the life of Morris Cull. It had been to her, on September 30 of 1916, while in northern France and only weeks before his death, that he had willed all his *property and effects*.

Morris (Maurice) Cull had enlisted at the age of thirty-eight years: date of birth at Fogo, Newfoundland, November 3, 1877.

Private Morris Cull 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.