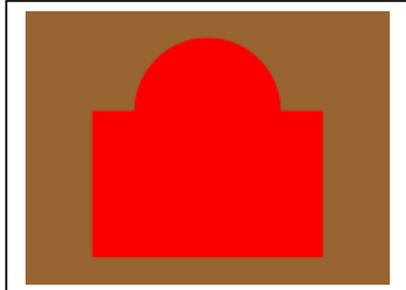




Private Alfred Cullen (Number 687570) of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion (1<sup>st</sup> British Columbia), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is interred in Upton Wood Cemetery, Hendecourt-les-Cagnicourt: Grave reference C.4..

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion (1<sup>st</sup> British Columbia), Canadian Infantry, is from Wikipedia*)



(continued)

His occupation prior to military service recorded on his attestation papers as that of labourer, Alfred Cullen is also documented as having arrived in the port of Louisburg, Cape Breton, on April 4, 1911, after having sailed from St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland on board the SS *Glencoe*. On the ship's ledger he describes himself as a printer.

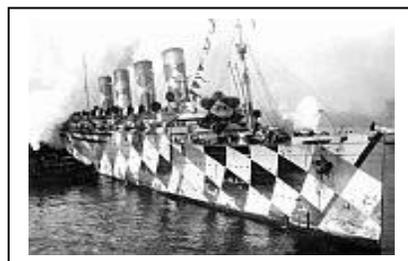
Some months later Alfred Cullen had found his way across the North American Continent to British Columbia, the 1911 Census showing him to be a resident of a large boarding house in the District of New Westminster. He appears to have remained in Canada's most western province, as it was in the community of Lytton that he both enlisted and attested on January 29 of 1916.

A week later, while still in Lytton, he underwent a medical examination on the records of which appear two contradictory statements: one, in black, declares him suffering from a... *slight inguinal hernia yet he is fit*; the second, in red ink records him... *unfit on account of inguinal hernia*.

His first pay records, which confirm the date of Private Cullen's enlistment, also show him to have been taken on strength by the 172<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (*Rocky Mountain Rangers*) on the same January 29. He was then *officially* approved and inspected by the Commanding officer of that formation on February 8.

Private Cullen was then to have two further examinations: the first occasion was on March 15, 1916, at Kamloops where the 172<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was based, but where no mention is made of a hernia; the second was in Vernon on September 19, a form on which three official signatures accompany a single stamped statement... *passed by board*.

It was to be some nine months later, on October 25, 1916, that Private Cullen would embark onto His Majesty's Transport *Mauretania* – sister-ship to *Lusitania*, this latter having been sunk by a U-Boat off Ireland in May of 1915 – in the east-coast Canadian harbour of Halifax. The vessel began her trans-Atlantic passage on the following day, to dock in the English port-city of Liverpool on the last day of that month.



(Right above: *The image of Mauretania, here wearing war-time dazzle camouflage, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

There were two other Canadian Infantry Battalions which sailed on *Mauretania*, the 154<sup>th</sup> and the 170<sup>th</sup>, as well as the 6<sup>th</sup> Draft of the Canadian Mounted Rifles Depot. Likely also taking passage with them would have been the usual miscellany of other military personnel, which would have brought the passenger complement on the vessel to some three-thousand five-hundred souls.

Upon its arrival Private Cullen and his comrades-in-arms were transported by train to the large Canadian military complex which had by then been established in the southern English county of Hampshire, in the vicinity of the villages of Bramshott and Liphook. There Private Cullen was to spend the succeeding five weeks.

That period having passed, he was nominally attached, on December 5, 1916, to the 54<sup>th</sup> (Kootenay) Battalion for further passage overseas – in this case to cross the English Channel – 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)



The draft of which Private Cullen was a soldier travelled to France by ship likely via the English port of Southampton and its French equivalent, Le Havre, at the estuary of the River Seine. It was close to this city that was to be found at this time the Canadian General Base Depot where reinforcements arriving from England were held until despatched to the units *in the field* to which they had been attached.

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

In Private Cullen's case, he reported to the Base Depot on December 7, from there to be despatched to the parent unit of the 54<sup>th</sup> (Kootenay) Battalion, already serving on the Continent, a week later, on the 13<sup>th</sup>. He is recorded as having reported *to duty* to his unit on the December 16, one of a draft of one-hundred forty-five *other ranks* from Le Havre which did so on that day.



\* \* \* \* \*

The 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a component of the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division. The Battalion – and the entire Division – had been in France only since August of that year, 1916; upon its arrival on the 14<sup>th</sup> of that month, it had immediately\* been sent north across the Franco-Belgian frontier to an area to the south west of the remnants of the city of Ypres and down the line towards the frontier area.

*\*Almost immediately having arrived in Belgium, one of the Battalion's four Companies was sent straight-away into the front-line trenches to be followed in quick succession by the other three. There had been little time allowed to become acclimatized.*

The Battalion was to remain in this area – much of it at St-Éloi\* - for a month during which time the newcomers were to be introduced to the daily grind of life in the trenches\*\*. Then... *Orders received from 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Inf. Bge. Hqrs. At midnight to march tomorrow morning at 8 a.m.* (Excerpt from 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of September 19, 1916).

The British High Command, by the month of August, had had other plans for its Canadian battalions. The 54<sup>th</sup> was not to be an exception.

*\*St-Éloi was already well known to the personnel of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, many of its units having undergone their baptism of fire there in April of that same year. It had been a difficult lesson (see later below).*

***\*\*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)***

**The Battalion was to march southward and westward for three days, passing through – and being billeted at – the larger centres of Hazebrouck and St-Omer on the way to its training camp at Nortbecourt.**



***(Right: The northern French town of Hazebrouck, likely at a period between the wars – from a vintage post-card)***

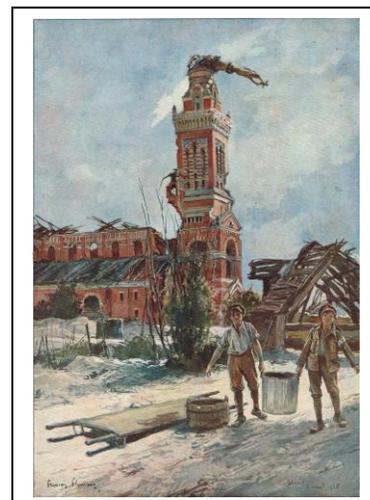
**There it remained for a further ten days before, on October 3, taking a train at Audruicq, a five-hour march distant. After a further twelve hours spent on the train to travel one-hundred or so kilometres, the unit descended at Gezaincourt. From now on the transfer was to be completed on foot, an exercise which was to take another week, from October 4 to 10 inclusive.**

**On that October 10, the Battalion terminated its march at the Brickfields (*la Briqueterie*), a large for-the-most-part-tented camp in the close outskirts of the provincial town of Albert.**

**By that September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault costing the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties of which some nineteen thousand dead.**

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

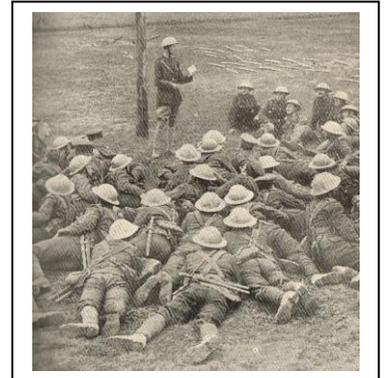
**On that first day of *1<sup>st</sup> Somme* all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and those of the *1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland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



(Right below: *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**)

As the battle progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), had been 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 be part of a third general offensive.

Their first major collective contribution had been in the area of two villages, Flers and Courcelette, a confrontation which was to occur six weeks before the arrival of the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the scene.



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

By the end of day after its arrival at the Brickfields, October 11, most of the personnel of the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion had already been sent forward to occupy support positions. Two days later again, the unit was sent further forward to relieve battalions in the front-line trenches. During that tour of five days, there was little co-ordinated infantry activity and no grand assault on the enemy positions. The continual trickle of casualties was, for the most part, due to the never-ceasing work of the German artillery.



Then it was back to Tara Hill Camp, this site also in the outskirts of Albert. Another week was to pass there before the Battalion was called upon once again to serve at the front. This tour was to be shorter but although the Battalion, as before, was not involved in infantry activity, the number of casualties was almost as high for those two days as it previously had been before, for five.

The 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be called upon on only two more occasions to serve in the front lines before the *1<sup>st</sup> Battle of the Somme* drew to its close in the middle of November: three days from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> of November inclusive; and then from the 13<sup>th</sup> until the 20<sup>th</sup> when the unit withdrew from the forward area for a final time.

It was during this latter period that the Battalion was engaged in the first infantry attack in its history when it was ordered to advance and capture *Dessauer Support Trench*. Already having been postponed for twenty-four hours four times in a row, the assault finally went in on the morning of November 18\*. The position was captured at the cost of forty-four *killed in action*, one-hundred seventy-one *wounded* and twenty-three missing in action.



**\*By this date, the official historians have decided, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of the Somme had officially concluded – with the capture of the village of Beaumont, a village of the Beaumont-Hamel Commune, by the 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) Division.**

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

**On November 20 the Battalion retired to Pozières on the main Albert-Bapaume Road; on the 22<sup>nd</sup> it withdrew into the town of Albert itself; then on November 25 it began the long march, a semi-circular one which retraced the unit's steps as far as Doullens. But at Doullens, reached on the 30<sup>th</sup>, there was no train waiting – at least, not for the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion.**



**(Right above and right: *The vestiges of the village of Pozières just after the Great War – The Monument which may be seen in both images – from much the same vantage point - is to the Australians – from a vintage post-card and, in colour, from 2016*)**

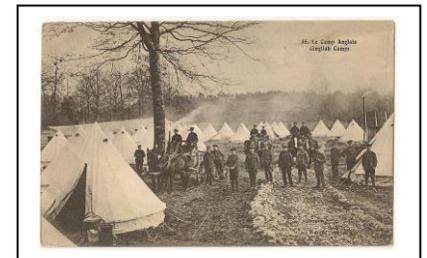


**Four days and some fifty kilometres later, the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion marched into the community of Ourton, perhaps thirty kilometres distant – behind the lines and to the north-west – of the city of Arras. It was there at Ourton, during this period being spent by his new unit in reserve that on December 16 Private Cullen's draft reported *to duty*.**

\* \* \* \* \*

**(Right: *a typical British Army Camp during a winter period somewhere in France – from a vintage post-card*)**

**From the time of his arrival until February 13, Private Cullen was to experience the rigours and routines of that life – front line, support and reserve - in the trenches. Of course the winter was settling in, as was likely also exhaustion – in all camps – after the exertions of *the Somme*. And then Private Cullen caught the mumps.**



**He was evacuated from the field on that February 13, to be transferred to the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance\*, established at that time in or near the community (or farm) of Les Quatre Vents, well to the west of Arras. On the following day he was forwarded to the 7<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in the larger centre of St-Omer. There he remained until March 7 when he was discharged back *to duty* with the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion, reporting there on the 9<sup>th</sup>.**



**(continued)**

*\*The 11<sup>th</sup> CFA apparently treated ninety-six cases of mumps in that month of February, according to its War Diarist, among its total of four-hundred ninety-five admissions.*

(Previous page: a *British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card*)

At the time of Private Cullen's return to his unit, the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion was beginning a training program which was to last some three weeks, mainly in the area of Chateau de la Haie. The British and Commonwealth forces were preparing for a spring-time offensive. It was probably not by coincidence that several units of the Canadian 4<sup>th</sup> Division, this including the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion, when sent forward to serve in the front and support lines, found themselves looking upwards towards dominating German positions dug into the crest of a slope: Vimy Ridge.

This situation was so in the case of Private Cullen's Battalion from March 26 until April 4 when it was ordered back to Lawrence Camp, Bois de la Haie, for final organization and preparation. On the afternoon and evening of April 8, the Battalion moved forward to assembly trench.

Much has been – and rightly so – said and written of those many tunnels which had been hewn out of the chalky underground for the occasion but, in the case of the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Battalion Headquarters was the only Company to avail of one, *setting up shop in Cavalier Tunnel.*

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.

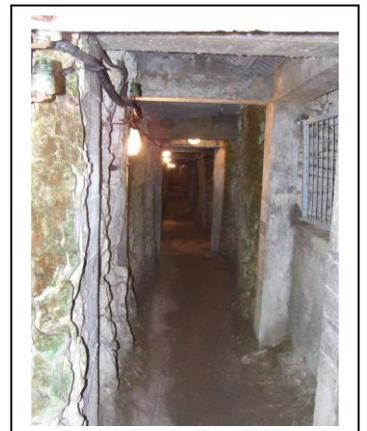


The French offensive was to be a disaster.

(Above right: *the Canadian National Memorial which 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, 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: *Grange Tunnel - one of the few remaining galleries still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years later. – photograph from 2008(?)*)



(continued)

(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary: *VIMY RIDGE 9/4/17 Weather, snow & rainstorms. 5.30 am. Bn. attacked, - 350 all ranks in four waves behind 102<sup>nd</sup> Bn. Frontage LA SALLE to OLD BOOT Sap. Distance about 500 yards. Objective BEER and BLUE trenches... Strenuous opposition encountered on our left flank from enemy strong post at OLD BOOT Sap & slight opposition from strong point near BROADMARSH CRATER. All objectives were reached and communication with 42<sup>nd</sup> Bn. established...*

*...Our casualties approximately 4 officers & 20 O.R. killed, 5 officers and 100 O.R. wounded. – 100. OR missing*

On April 10 the Canadians finished clearing the area of Vimy Ridge of the few remaining pockets of resistance and began to consolidate the area in case of the expected German counter-attacks.



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

There had been, on that day of April 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on the previous day's success proved logistically impossible. Thus the Germans closed the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

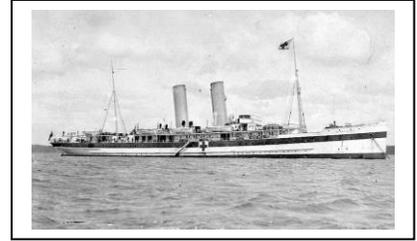
The remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* was not to be fought in the manner of the first two days and by the end of those five weeks little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success.

On March 18, Private Cullen's Battalion was in support trenches but at some time during that day Private Cullen himself was once more on his way for medical attention at the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance, now operating at La Haie, closer to the front than it had been Les Quatre Vents. He was on this occasion inflicted with trench fever... *Went sick May 18<sup>th</sup> at Vimy Ridge with pains in Back, hips and legs...*



(Right above: *The French coastal resort of Wimereux at some time prior to the Great War – It was to be transformed into a major medical centre during the time of the conflict. – from a vintage post-card*)

Having remained in the 11<sup>th</sup> CFA for ten days, Private Cullen was transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian General Hospital in the peace-time seaside resort of Wimereux. A further five days of treatment followed before he was invalided, on June 2, back to the United Kingdom on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St Patrick*.



(Right above: *The image of HM Hospital Ship St. Patrick is from the Old Ship Photo Galleries web-site.*)

It may be that he passed through the British Columbia Regimental Base Depot at Seaford – or perhaps, more likely, his reported being... *Taken on Strength* there was only on paper – but on June 3 Private Cullen was admitted into the 1<sup>st</sup> Eastern General Hospital in the university city of Cambridge.

A further ten days were to pass before Private Cullen was then further transferred, on June 13, to the Canadian Convalescent Camp, 'Woodcote Park', at Epsom, Surrey, a town well known for its horse racing. His condition while there described as still... *painful*, he apparently had recovered enough by then to perform... *light duty there*. On June 23, Private Cullen was discharged from Epsom.

On June 24 the records show that he had been posted back to the East Sussex coast to the Canadian military establishment at Seaford, there to be *taken on strength* by the 16<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion. Only three days later again, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of the month, he was re-attached, now to become a soldier of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian (Reserve) Battalion.



(Right: *The community cemetery at Seaford in which are buried a number of Canadian soldiers, including two Newfoundlanders: Frederick Jacob Snelgrove and Ebenezer Tucker – photograph from 2016*)

On September 21 of 1917, Private Cullen once more sailed across the English Channel with a re-enforcement draft, on this occasion having been despatched to join the 7<sup>th</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> *British Columbia*) Battalion, already serving on the Western Front in France. Upon his arrival on the Continent – likely again at the port-city of Le Havre – his draft proceeded to one of the – by that time – four Canadian Infantry Base Depots in the proximity of the French coastal town of Étapes.

His files document that by September 27, 1917, Private Cullen had arrived at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade School, apparently a component of the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp, also in or close to Étapes. Twelve days later he, one of a re-enforcement draft of nineteen *other ranks*, reported *to duty* with the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, at that time out of the line and billeted at *Vancouver Camp* at Chateau de la Haie.

(continued)

\* \* \* \* \*

The 7<sup>th</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> *British Columbia*) Battalion was a unit of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself part of the Canadian Division\*, the first Canadian formation to serve on the Western Front during the Great War. By the time that Private Cullen joined its ranks, the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, as indeed had the entire Division, had distinguished itself both in Belgium and also in France.

*\*It was not numbered until the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was formed.*

The first major confrontation between the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the German Army had been during the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Battle of Ypres*.

After its first six weeks on the Continent as of mid-February of 1915 when it had served in the Fleurbaix Sector of northern France – and until June of the following year - the Canadian Division had been stationed in the *Ypres Salient*, a theatre which was to prove to be one of the most lethal of the entire *Great War*.

It was on April 22 of 1915, some two months after being posted in the area, that the Canadians had first really been put to the test.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> *Battle of Ypres* saw the first use of chlorine gas by the Germans in the *Great War*. Later to become an everyday event, with the advent of protective measures such as advanced gas-masks, it was to prove no more dangerous than the rest of the military arsenals of the warring nations. But on this first occasion, to troops without means to combat it, the yellow-green cloud of chlorine proved overwhelming.

(Right above: *The very first protection against gas was to urinate on a handkerchief which was then held over the nose and mouth. However, all the armies were soon producing gas-masks, some of the first of which are seen here being tested by Scottish troops. – from either Illustration or Le Miroir*)



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

The cloud was noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon of April 22. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left wavered then broke, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered. The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, in reserve at Ypres, had been ordered forward to Gravenstafel, only to join in the general retreat – and at times chaos – of the following days.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the situation had become relatively stable, the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan held until the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> when a further retirement had become necessary. At times there had been gaps in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans were unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or they did not have the means to exploit the situation.



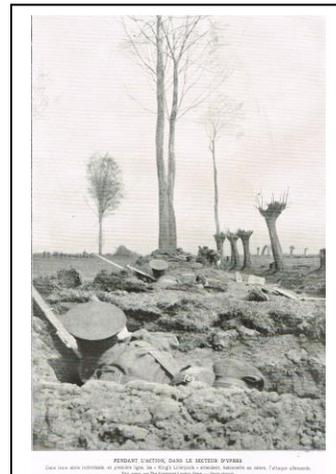
And then the Canadians closed the gaps.

(Preceding page: *The Memorial to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier – stands just to the south of the village of Langemark (at the time Langemarck) – at the Vancouver Crossroads - where the Canadians withstood the German attack – abetted by gas – at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915. – photograph from 2010*)

As had many other units, the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, had incurred numerous casualties; in the appendices of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary are to be found the following numbers: *killed in action, seventy-nine; wounded, one-hundred fifty; wounded and missing, twenty-seven; missing in action, three-hundred forty-seven.*

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

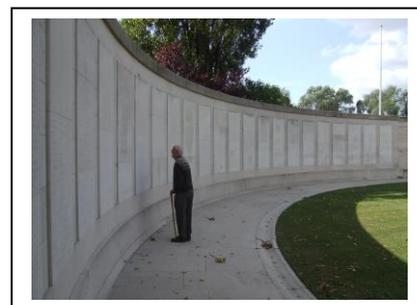
During the first four days of May the Battalion was... *lying dug in behind hedges in support of FRENCH on YSER CANAL. Heavily shelled...*(War Diary) On May 5 it retired the considerable distance from there to the northern French town of Bailleul where it arrived at three-thirty in the morning.



There followed two weeks of rest – as restful as it ever got during the *Great War* – before the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered south, on or about May 19, across the border into France to fight in actions to be undertaken near places by the names of Festubert and Givenchy. The French were about to undertake a major offensive just further south again and had asked for British support.

There at Festubert a series of attacks and counter-attacks took place in which the British High Command managed to gain three kilometres of ground but also contrived to destroy, by using the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what was left of the British pre-War professional Army. The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but – not possessing the same numbers of troops – was not to participate to the same extent. It nonetheless suffered.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion had first entered the line, in reserve dugouts, in the area of Festubert on that May 19. The unit was to remain in the sector until June 22, by that time having participated, it appears from the Battalion War Diary entries, in a single large-scale attack, that of May 24. The number of casualties for that day were some one-hundred eighty – to add to the fifty due to enemy artillery fire on May 22. Most of the other losses incurred during that entire period were also mostly due to the German guns - as well as his snipers.



(continued)

**(Previous page: *A one-time officer who served in the Indian Army during the Second World War, pays his respects to those who fell, at the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle. – photograph from 2010(?)*)**

The Canadian Division and Indian troops, the 7<sup>th</sup> (*Meerut*) Division\* also having been ordered to serve at Festubert, had hardly fared better than the British, each contingent – a Division - incurring over two-thousand casualties before the offensive drew to a close.

The French effort – using the same tactics - was likewise a failure but on an even larger scale; it cost them just over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded and missing*.

*\*The Indian troops also served – and lost heavily – in other battles in this area in 1915 before being transferred to the Middle East.*

On May 26 the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion marched away from Festubert to billets in or near to the community of Essars. The reprieve was to last for but five days, until June 1, when the unit was ordered further south to Givenchy-les-la-Bassée\*, a small village not far distant south of Festubert. Ordered into the forward trenches on two occasions during that month to support British efforts – incurring the same sort of casualty numbers due to repeating the same sort of mistakes – on June 22 the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was relieved by troops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade and retired from the area. At about the same time, over a number of days, *all* the units of the Canadian Division were also to retire.

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

As a part of that withdrawal from Givenchy, the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to march to billets in Essars. From there it was to move northwards and into Belgium, to the Ploegsteert Sector, just across the frontier.

Having reached the Ploegsteert Sector on July 5, there the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion remained – as did the entire Canadian Division. In the next months it came to be well-acquainted with the Franco-Belgian area between Armentières in the east – any further east would have been in German-occupied territory – Bailleul in the west, and Messines in the north. It was in the vicinity of this last-named community, at Plus Douce Farm, that the unit was now posted.



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

It was to be another eleven months before the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion\* was involved in a further major altercation. Of course, local confrontations – in raids and during patrols - were fought from time to time, and artillery duels and the ever-increasing menace of snipers ensured a constant flow of casualties.

**(continued)**

On June 22 the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was relieved by troops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade and retired in the direction of Belgium. There, by the 27<sup>th</sup> of that month it was taking over trenches in the area of Messines, just south of Ypres.

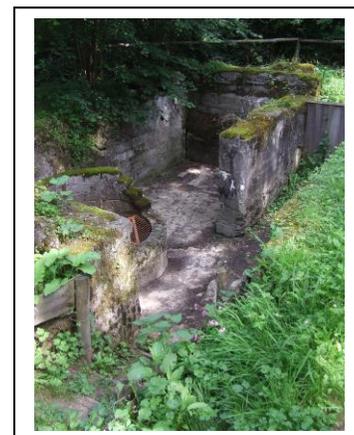
At Messines the unit was once more subject to those everyday routines of trench warfare – perhaps by then quite welcome to those who had just served during the confrontations of April at Ypres and of May-June at Festubert and Givenchy – routines that were to continue for more than eleven months.

During those eleven months the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions made their appearance – in September and December respectively - in the Kingdom of Belgium, the 2<sup>nd</sup> receiving its baptism of fire in the *Action at the St-Éloi Craters\** in April of 1916. Some two months later it was to be the turn of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division – at Mount Sorrel, a fierce confrontation into which the other Canadian Divisions were also to be drawn.

*\*Not to be confused with the village of St-Éloi in France just to the north-west of Arras, in a sector with which many Canadian troops were to become very familiar during both 1917 and 1918.*

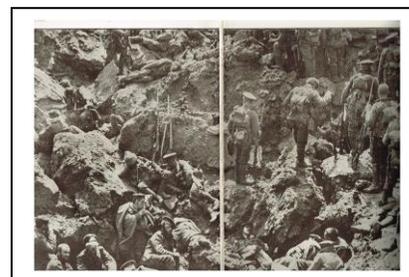
For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, the first weeks of April were not to be as tranquil as those being experienced during the same period by the personnel of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the other units of the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division.

The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* officially took place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St. Eloi 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 number of galleries under the German lines, there to place explosives which they detonated on that March 27.



(Right above: *The remains of a construction built at Messines in 1916 by the Germans to counter-act the British tunnellers: they sank twenty-nine wells – one seen here – from which horizontal galleries were excavated to intercept the British tunnels being dug under the German lines. – photograph from 2014*)

After a brief initial success the attack soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than had the British, and by the 17<sup>th</sup> of the month, 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.



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

(continued)

However, as previously noted, this confrontation was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Division affair and the personnel of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the German artillery. But their turn was to come: by May 1<sup>st</sup> the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been transferred into the *Ypres Salient*.

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



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

*\*While it had been the newly-arrived 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division which had borne the brunt of the German onslaught, the situation was critical enough for other units to be ordered to engage the enemy.*

According to the Battalion War Diary, June 3 was first occasion on which 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion personnel were involved in any infantry action, incurring heavy casualties as did most of those units which were engaged in the Canadian counter-strikes of that day. Then later that evening the Battalion was withdrawn.

It was not until June 10 that the unit was ordered to move forward again to take up its positions for the operation which had been planned for the night of the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>. During that final Canadian counter-attack of June 13 the War Diarist noted merely the following: *Attack carried out successfully on our immediate left after severe bombardment at dawn. All ground regained. Many prisoners captured.*



(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*)

(Right: *Maple Copse Cemetery, adjacent to Hill 60, in which lie many Canadians killed during the days of the confrontation at Mount Sorrel – photograph from 2014*)

The subsequent summer period was again quiet, at least in the *Ypres Salient*, although further south in France, important events were occurring, events into which the Canadians were soon to be drawn. In the middle of August the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division\* – including Private Cullen's soon-to-be 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion - arrived to take its place alongside the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>.



***\*This was the last such Canadian formation to serve on the Continent. A 5<sup>th</sup> Division was organized but it was to remain in the United Kingdom, there to provide training for newcomers from home who would then be despatched to the four Divisions serving on the Western Front.***

It was just two days after the August 14<sup>th</sup> disembarkation of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division in Le Havre and its move toward the Kingdom of Belgium, that the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion began its *withdrawal* from there back into northern France. It was to spend eleven days in an area ten kilometres to the north-west of the large centre of St-Omer, training for things to come, before leaving there on August 27 to march(?) to the railway station at Arques where it entrained for the journey south.

By one-fifteen in the afternoon of the following day, after a journey that had taken some thirteen hours - plus a short march – it was placed in billets in the community of Bonneville. The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion had arrived in the French *Département de la Somme* and also in the middle of the battle of the same name.

As would the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion which was to follow to *the Somme* eight weeks later, the 7<sup>th</sup> was to proceed on foot to the Brickfield Camp and then to billets in nearby Albert where it remained from September 2 to 7, moving up into the trenches on that latter date. During its first tour it incurred on September 8... *numerous casualties owing to gap exposing flank. Gap filled and consolidated...*



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

It would appear that this episode was to be the Battalion's only major engagement during the *1<sup>st</sup> Battle of the Somme*. It was to serve as a reserve on another occasion but by October 17 it was ready to retire to a quieter sector further north. La Vicogne, Autheux, Nieuvellette, Guoy-en-Ternois, Dieval were all stages along the semi-circular route passing behind the city of Arras and beyond until the unit reached Camblain l'Abbé to the north-west of that fore-mentioned city. On November 2 the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was back in the trenches in the area of Souchez.

The following months were to be spent in the routine of trench life. The Canadian units were all during this time – once having served at *the Somme* - posted in very much the same sectors, between, in the south, Arras and, to the north, Béthune.



***(Right above: The piles of rubble are the remains of the village of Souchez – in the Canadian sector - as it was already in 1915 when it was in French hands. – from Le Miroir)***

(continued)

There was little in the way of concerted infantry activity carried out during that winter of 1916-1917, and casualties were usually the result of enemy artillery and snipers except when patrols and raids – a favourite with the High Command but apparently loathed by the lowly soldier whose duty it was to carry them out - were organized on a local scale.

During the month of March the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion and, indeed, most if not all the infantry battalions of the Canadian Corps began to organize and to train for the upcoming British offensive - the broader story of the assault on Vimy Ridge by the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions is related elsewhere in Private Cullen's dossier.



The Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division was allotted the responsibility of clearing the ground on the far right – and south of the village of Thélus - of the Canadian attack.

(Right above: *The caption which accompanies the photograph says merely that these are Canadian soldiers and their prisoners on the battlefield of Vimy Ridge. – from Illustration*)

The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary of the first days of the attack give an overview of the situation\*:

*9 – 16 Dull in morning, raining. Bn. in conjunction with remainder of Can. Corps and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on Right attack and carry enemy positions to a depth of 1500 yards. First objective taken without much heavy fighting although subjected to steady rifle and M.G. fire. In advancing on Final Objective (RED) considerable resistance from enemy strong points met with. RED Objective consolidated by linking up shell holes in front of AVSBURGH WEG.*

*Casualties during attack were heavy\*\*.*

*Bn. relieved by 13<sup>th</sup> C.I. Bn. during night of 15/16<sup>th</sup> and moved into support along the TONGUE Trench...*

*\*A more detailed report is to be found in the Diary Appendices.*

*\*\*The appendices enter a total of four-hundred fifty-nine casualties – all ranks – for the period of April 9 to 15 (inclusive).*

Once more, life for the personnel of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion reverted to that of trench warfare – some say it is ninety per cent boredom, ten per cent terror - for the late spring and early summer of 1917. Officially, the *Battle of Arras* - of which the assault on Vimy Ridge was only a single episode, although the most successful one and which occurred on the first day - was to last for five weeks, but it was petering out to its close well before that and once again the conflict was to return into stalemate.

It was to be the month of August before a further concerted effort was demanded of the Canadian Corps, and it was also to be in the same general area, albeit a little to the north of Vimy, in the outskirts of the mining centre, and the city, of Lens.

(continued)

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 - from that area, it had also ordered operations to take place at the sector of the front running north-south from Béthune to Vimy.



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 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: *This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. – photograph from 1914*)



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 16<sup>th</sup> several strong counter-attacks were launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.

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.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been heavily involved in the operation of Hill 70 and its environs: Having moved into its assembly positions on the night of August 14-15, at four twenty-five in the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>, the... 2<sup>nd</sup> Can. Inf. Bde. With 3<sup>rd</sup>. Can. Inf. Bde. on RIGHT and 2<sup>nd</sup> Can. Div. on LEFT attack enemy trenches with view to capture of high ground NORTH of LENS... Our troops forced to advance from shell hole to shell hole... Posts were established about 70 yds in front of GREEN OBJECTIVE but owing to being outflanked and enfiladed from the RIGHT, Posts were withdrawn... Casualties...very heavy (from 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of August 15, 1917).

(continued)

The unit was relieved on the 17<sup>th</sup>, four officers and fifty *other ranks* remaining behind to bury the dead\*.

*\*It appears that eighty-four all ranks died on the field of battle during these three days; there were reported three-hundred fifty-one other casualties of whom ten were later to die of their wounds.*

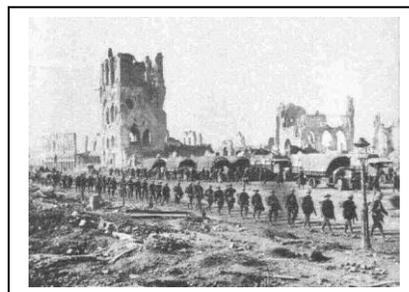
This Canadian effort had apparently been scheduled to continue into September and even longer, but ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium was proceeding less well than expected and the High Command were looking for reinforcements to make good their exorbitant losses. The Australians – further to the south than the Canadians - and then the Canadians themselves were ordered to prepare to move north, thus the Canadian Corps was obliged to abandon its plans.

There were therefore to be no further major Canadian-inspired actions in the Lens-Béthune sectors and the troops yet again were to settle back into that monotonous yet at times precarious existence of life in – and behind – the forward area. On most days, according to the Battalion War Diary, it was the artillery which fought it out – but, of course, the infantry was often the target.

It is in the Battalion War Diary Appendix of October 10, that the arrival of Private Cullen to duty is noted: *The following reinforcements having arrived 9.10.17 are taken on the strength and posted to Coys and Sections as follows:- No. 3 Coy ...687570 Pte Cullen A.*

The Battalion remained in the area of Chateau de la Haie, engaged in further training, until October 19 when it made its first move towards the north. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> the unit halted its march, to be billeted for several days at Bavinchove Farm, close to the Franco-Belgian frontier. During this period a small procession of, at first officers, then senior NCOs, made its pilgrimage to the Belgian town of Poperinghe to view models of the battlefield now being fought over to the east of the city of Ypres.

In the middle of that October the Canadians had been ordered north into Belgium and once more 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 was latterly *professed to have been* - one of the British Army's objectives.



(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*)

(Right: *Somewhere, possibly anywhere or almost everywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917. – from Illustration*)



(continued)

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was true with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

(Right below: *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*)

It was on November 4 that the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion crossed the Franco-Belgian frontier by train from Staple and was transported to the vicinity of the village of Brandhoek, about half-way between the larger centres of Ypres and Poperinghe.



Two days later the unit was on a train again, this time for the short journey from Brandhoek to Ypres. Alighting in the ruins of the railway station there, Private Cullen and his comrades-in-arms marched across the city and to the north-east, as far as the remnants of the small community of St-Jean.

(Right: *The remnants of the railway station just outside the ramparts of Ypres where the Battalion detrained – the image is from 1919 – from a vintage post-card*)



On the night of the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, the Battalion moved into the front line near Gravenstafel, relieving a unit of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade. On November 10 there was to be a major attack\* by British and Canadian troops, a leading role being played by the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> Division front, and carrying out the assault, was to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the right.

*\*According to the maps, the attack was to sweep past the left-hand side of the by then non-existent village of Passchendaele, the objective being the German line some thousand yards further on.*



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

Private Cullen's Company – Number 3 – *...will be in support and will advance behind the assaulting Companies to consolidate the immediate objective as a support line.* Private Cullen and his fellow-soldiers were apparently heavily involved as the following excerpt from the Battalion War Diary illustrates:

*(We)...had been held up by persistent sniping... making movement impossible until it had been stopped. There were two light M. guns outside of the pill-box but these were put out of action...*

*...Orders were given for the pill-box to be taken and the Company to be placed on its proper line at the objective...*

*...As our own Lewis guns were by this time all out of action, Sgt. Giles...asked for a Lewis gun section from the 20<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battn. This section...supplied covering fire while some men of this company and No 3 Company rushed the strong point...*

*...The strength of the Company at this time was about 45, so No 3 Coy occupied part of the line between Nos 1 & 2 Companies.*

The Commanding Officer was later able to report that he... *returned to the line and found No 11 & 12 Platoons in the front line helping to consolidate No 9 & 10 Platoons consolidating with a Coy of the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn. in support.*

*We maintained these positions until relieved by 10<sup>th</sup> Bn in front line when No 3 Coy took up the support position to the left of the Road.*

The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion subsequently retired from the forward area and on November 12 marched back to Ypres from where it took a train to return to Brandhoek. On the following day the War Diarist reports the unit as having a bath.



*(Right: Canadian troops – not having proper bathing facilities - performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir)*

This was to be the final day of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion's *Passchendaele* campaign as on the 14<sup>th</sup>, by bus and by lorry, the unit was transported to the northern French town of Béthune where it was then billeted for four days. Three days in reserve followed, reinforcements arrived – which still provided a trench strength of only twenty-one officers and three-hundred seventy-three other ranks – and then it was posted back to the trenches at Lievin, on the outskirts of Lens.

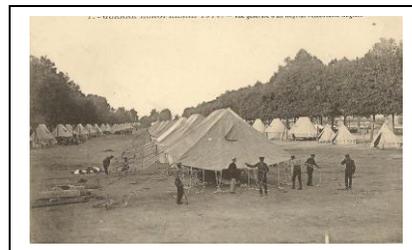
December – during the first week of which month Private Cullen and his comrades-in-arms were invited to cast their vote in the Federal Election - and then January, February and the first part of March of 1918 followed the routine of the trenches, neither side making any concerted effort to evict the other from its winter quarters.

It was during this last winter of the Great War that Private Cullen found himself once more in need of medical attention: he was suffering from a case of *congenital epididymitis*, a painful inflammation of the lower urinary tract and bladder which then affects the scrotum.

On January 11, 1918, he was evacuated for treatment to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance at Grand Servins, a facility which then immediately passed him along to the 18<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Lapugnoy.

(continued)

(Right: a *British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War: Other such medical establishments were of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card)*



Private Cullen was subsequently forwarded from the 18<sup>th</sup> CCS on the following day, January 12, and evacuated from the forward area on the 20<sup>th</sup> Ambulance Train, to the 8<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital in Wimereux, a location that he already knew, where he remained for the next twelve days.

Private Cullen's first posting upon discharge from hospital on January 24 was to the 1<sup>st</sup> Convalescent Depot in nearby Boulogne. The next posting was on the day afterwards, to the Number 3 Rest Camp, likely in the same complex. Well-rested or not, two days later he was ordered to Base Details at St-Omer before being further forwarded on the following day again, to one of the four Canadian Infantry Base Depots at Étaples.

Private Cullen re-joined his unit from there on February 9.

Then came March 21.

(Right: *While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they did bombard it heavily during 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)*



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 then 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 there\*.

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.

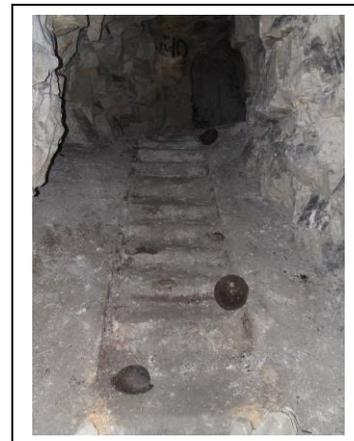
*\*A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division. It was also successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.*

The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was still serving in the area of Lens and Loos at this time. On March 23 it received orders to be prepared to move. This it did on several occasions during the following few days, finally – having travelled a distance of some forty kilometres - encamping at Berneville on the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup>.

(continued)

From Berneville to nearby Dainville; from there to billets in the *Ronville Caves* in the outskirts of Arras; from there to the front lines before moving back to Arras – this last exercise repeated – all by April 21 when the unit was moved further back, and north-west of Arras, to the vicinity of the commune of Maroeuil. The crisis was apparently now over and the War Diarist on March 30 was able to enter: *Situation normal. Practically no artillery activity on either side.*

(Right: *One of the several entrances into the Ronville Cave system, almost a century after its use by Commonwealth and British troops. It was used at different times by units of thirty-six different British and Commonwealth Army Divisions. – photograph from 2012(?)*)



(Right: *The 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*)

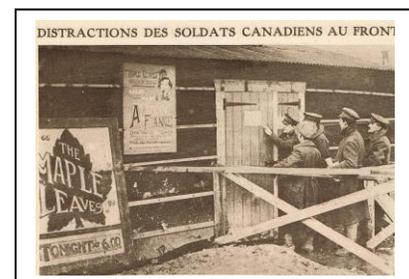


(Right below: *the remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'Place) in Arras at the time of the Great War – from Illustration*)



Once more followed a period of some three months during which little in the way of concerted infantry action was recorded. After the exertions of the German spring offensive this was perhaps hardly surprising – exhaustion was surely a factor on both sides. But the Germans had shot their bolt and it was next to be the turn of the Allies – the British (and Commonwealth) and French, bolstered by newly-arriving American forces – to go to the offensive.

Thus the latter weeks of those three months were spent by the Canadians in re-enforcing, organizing, training and otherwise preparing for the events that were to follow. There were even lighter moments as the inter-unit playing of sports became a favourite with the troops – and there was also the occasional concert to help bolster morale.



(Right above: *Canadian soldiers in front of a temporary theatre peruse the attractions of an upcoming concert. – from *Le Miroir**)

Also from time to time there was the prospect of a ten-day period of leave, sometimes to Paris and sometimes back to the United Kingdom. It may be that Private Cullen was to be one of those granted that leave as he is recorded as at the Canadian Reinforcement Base Depot on May 11 and back with his unit on May 21. However, no further information appears among his documents.

(continued)

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 now 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 areas north and north-west of Arras to the new theatre of battle some ninety kilometres to the south. It was done rapidly and it was done secretly.

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

On the first day of August, 1918, the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was relieved in the forward area near Agnez-les-Duisans and was transported by train to Maroeuil. These were to be the final moves before – although few could have guessed it – the start of what was to be the final campaign of the Great War\*.

*\*Known to history as the Hundred Days, it would culminate in the Armistice of November 11, 1918.*

*(Right: The 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(?))*



Only four days were necessary for Private Cullen and his Battalion to be transported, sometimes by train, just as often on foot, by a semi-circular route to St-Aubin Montenois, a community west south-west of the cathedral city of Amiens. There the unit arrived on the evening of August 4, to be billeted for two days. The remainder of the transfer was to be undertaken – for the sake of secrecy – during the hours of dusk or darkness.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> it moved once more, on foot to Camps-en-Amienois, by bus to Amiens, then again on foot to Gentelles, a dozen kilometres or so south-east of Amiens, where it arrived at four-thirty in the morning of August 7. After too few hours rest... *In the evening the Battalion equipped for the attack and at 10 p.m. moved into its Assembly Area East of GENTELLES, move being completed by midnight (Battalion War Diary).*

The War Diarist continues the account: *8-8-18 ...At 4:20 a.m. the attack commenced, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade “kicking off.” At the same time a heavy Artillery barrage opened up, continuing until the enemy were out of range. Two hours later the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved forward from its Assembly Positions.*

*Owing to difficulties en route, caused by the absence of bridges over the River LUCE... the Battalion was an hour and a half late in arriving at the RED LINE. At CAYEUX took over the attack, and by 2:35 p.m. had reached its final objective, with very slight losses, having met with no organized enemy resistance...*



**(Preceding page: Canadian soldiers consolidate some of the newly-won positions while others cross a river on an improvised bridge. – from *Le Miroir*)**

***During the advance a considerable number of prisoners, Machine Guns, Stores, etc., were captured by the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion...***

**Casualties for the day were light: fifty-four in total of whom two had been reported as *killed in action*.**



**(Right above: *Canadian and German wounded – some cases more serious than others - waiting to be evacuated to the rear – from *Le Miroir**)**

**At one o'clock in the afternoon of the following day the Battalion retired towards Amiens and it was not to return to the front lines until just after midnight on the 17<sup>th</sup>. A planned attack by French forces came to nought and the latter part of that day was dominated by an artillery duel.**

**It was on August 21 that Private Cullen and his Battalion began to retrace their steps whence they had come some two weeks previously. By the 27<sup>th</sup> the unit was back in Arras and, a day later, was returning to serve in support lines\*.**

***\*It was not only the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion which returned. The entire Canadian Corps which in the space of days had been transferred to the battlefields in front of Amiens had, in the fourth week of that August, been returned to the Arras front. French troops for the most part now took over the responsibilities for the campaign in the south. The moves were both remarkable feats of logistics – undertaken, moreover, in secret - and the enemy was taken by surprise on both occasions.***

**7<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary from 1<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1918: Appendix A - 7<sup>th</sup> Cdn. Battalion (1<sup>st</sup> British Columbia) Operational Order 161 dated the 31<sup>st</sup> August, Bn. to be relieved on the 31<sup>st</sup> and move forward to new area in front of CHERISY.**

**Appendix B – 7<sup>th</sup> Cdn. Bn. Operational Order 162 dated the 2<sup>nd</sup> September, instructions to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade as to the breaking through of the DROCOURT QUENTIN (sic) line on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September.**

***The 7<sup>th</sup> Cdn. Inf. Battalion will attack on a two-company frontage No. 3 Coy. on the right, and No. 1 Coy. on the left...***

**The recently-appointed Allied Generalissimo, Foch, had decided that during the Allied campaign the Germans were to be given no respite. The attacks were to be not only numerous but they were to be delivered all along the Western Front.**

**The next Canadian effort was to attack along the axis of the Arras-Cambrai main road. The troops to be employed were those which had been engaged only days before, some eighty kilometres to the south in front of Amiens.**

**(continued)**

(Right: *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 of Mount Dury. – photograph from 2016*)



On the night of September 1-2... *the Battalion staged forward en route to jumping off line; all Companies had reported in Assembly Positions by 4:55 a.m. (7<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary)*

*2-9-18 At 5 a.m., Zero Hour, the barrage opened and the attack commenced. The Assault Companies, Nos. 3 and 1, at first met with considerable opposition from Machine Gun fire, but shortly afterwards the Tanks allotted to the Battalion made their appearance: from then on the Battalion advanced with comparatively little opposition and by 7.30 a.m., had reached the RED LINE – its objective... During their attack, the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion captured between six and seven hundred prisoners and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy; a large number of Machine Guns and great quantities of stores were captured...*

*...Shortly after...the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion was established in the new system, re-organizing and re-equipping was commenced in preparation for a possible further advance being ordered. The dead were buried and the wounded collected and sent to the rear...*

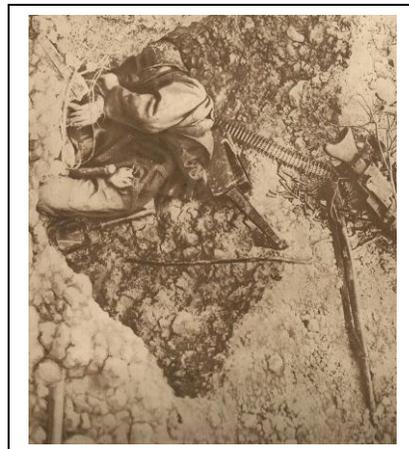


(Right: *In 1917 the British formed the Tank Corps, a force which became ever stronger in 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again 'somewhere in France' – from Illustration*)

Casualties reported for the day were: twenty-five *killed in action*; ninety-two *wounded*; and ten *missing in action*.

(Right: *A German machine-gunner who also gave his all – from Illustration*)

The son of James William Cullen and Ann Maria Cullen (née *Spurrell*), widowed by the time of her son's enlistment, originally of Gooseberry Island (and Pool's Island?) before the family moved to St. John's\*, he was also brother to Charles, to George and perhaps to Alice.



*\*Mrs. Cullen's address in the city is given in the 1913 Business Directory as 79A, Gower Street, also the residence of a Lawrence Cullen.*

Private Cullen was reported as having been *killed in action* on September 2 of 1918 during the attack of that day on the Drocourt-Quéant Line.

(continued)

Alfred Cullen had enlisted at the age of twenty-seven years and nine months: date of birth on Gooseberry Island, Newfoundland, April 16, 1888.

Private Alfred Cullen 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.

