



Driver (*Gunner* – see further below) Charles Joseph Davis (Number 445364) of the 9th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is interred in Longuenesse (St-Omer) Souvenir Cemetery: Grave reference IV.D.30.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a papermaker, Charles Joseph Davis appears to have left no information pertaining to his departure from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the town of Sussex, in the Canadian province of New Brunswick. It was there that he enlisted on August 3rd of 1915 and it was also there and then that he was temporarily attached to the 55th Overseas Battalion (*New Brunswick & Prince Edward Island*). He then presented himself for medical examination and attestation on August 9.

On the same August 9 he was officially... *approved and inspected*... by the Officer Commanding the local Depot Company.

(continued)

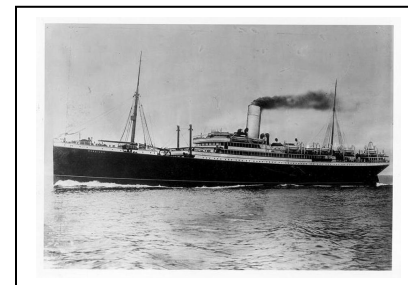
**Other sources cite August 9 as the date of his enlistment but his pay records show that it was on August 3 that by-then Private Davis first began to be remunerated by the Canadian Army for his services.*

Two days later, on August 11, the newly-enlisted recruits to the 55th Battalion were transferred to the recently-established military encampment at Valcartier, Québec, where the parent unit had been since June 15. There Private Davis and his new comrades-in-arms were to train until the end of October.

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



Already preceded to the United Kingdom by a first draft in June, the main body of the 55th Battalion - forty-two officers and one-thousand ninety-nine *other ranks* - boarded His Majesty's Transport *Corsican*, requisitioned from the *Allan Line*, in the port of Québec* on October 30, 1915.



**Another source has the port being Montreal.*

Also carrying the 2nd Draft of the Canadian Divisional* Signals Company, the vessel sailed on the same day and, after an apparently uneventful crossing, docked in the English south-coast naval harbour of Plymouth-Devonport on either the 8th or 9th of November.

**The Canadian Division was, logically, designated the Canadian 1st Division after the formation of the Canadian 2nd Division.*

(Right above: The image of Corsican is from the Old Ship Photo Galleries web-site.)

The 55th Battalion was then transported by train to the newly-established Canadian camp near to the villages of Liphook and Bramshott in the southern English county of Hampshire. There the unit continued to train while its personnel was continually exploited as a reinforcement pool for other Canadian contingents already engaged on the Continent.



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

On April 7 of the following spring, Private Davis was assigned to the 39th Canadian (Reserve) Battalion stationed at the Brigade Signals Base, West Sandling*, on the Kentish coast, just down the Dover Straits south of the sea-side town and port of Folkestone.

(continued)

There at West Sandling he was to languish until January of the following year, 1917, the only reference to him during this period being a medical inspection on August 13 of his varicose veins, the result of which was that he remained in the Army.

**West Sandling was one of a number of smaller military establishments – East and West Sandling, St. Martin’s Plain, Caesar’s Camp, Dibgate... - run at the time by the Canadian Army as elements of the major complex of Shorncliffe.*

The by-now Signaller Davis was to be transferred once more, on January 4, 1917, when the 39th Canadian (Reserve) Battalion was absorbed by the Canadian 6th (Reserve) Battalion (Eastern Ontario). Days later, nine to be exact, on January 13*, he became a cog in the wheel of the 4th Reserve Battery of the Reserve Brigade (Canadian Field Artillery) at East Sandling.



**A further source has March 11.*

(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)

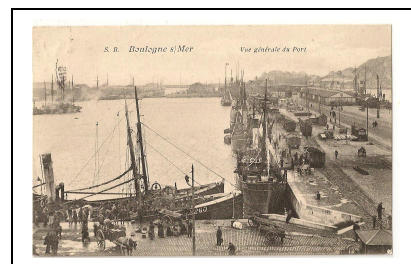
Signaller Davis was not to be attached to a different unit until he took passage overseas – on this occasion across the English Channel – to France. In the meantime he trained and also, on March 29, 1917, took the time to write a will in which he bequeathed his everything to his father.



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

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

The aforementioned passage overseas took place on May 2. Given the proximity of Shorncliffe to the harbour of Folkestone, it is likely that it was from there that he took passage to France, passing through the French port of Boulogne on the opposite coast, about two hours’ sailing-time distant, there to be *taken on strength* by the 3rd Divisional Ammunition Column.



Upon arrival on the Continent, Signaller Davis reported on May 3 to the Canadian Base Depot* to find himself re-transferred, to the 9th Brigade of the Canadian Field Artillery where he was to be no longer a signaller but a gunner**.

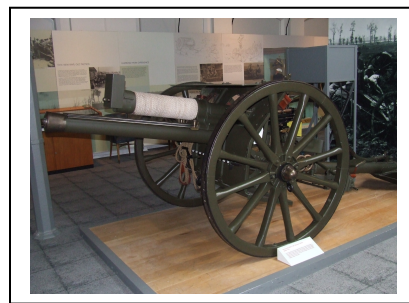
(continued)

****During this period, The Canadian Base Depots were undergoing a re-organization. It may be that Driver Davis was one of the ninety-four arrivals of May 3 at the Base Depot at Le Havre... and thus one of the twenty departures reported on the day following.***



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

*****A few later papers – and his gravestone – record him as Driver Davis. However, this may have come about because of his attachment to the 3rd Divisional Ammunition Column whose job was to deliver munitions, most of it drawn either by horse or by truck (lorry). Most of his later papers refer to Gnr. (Gunner) Davis.***



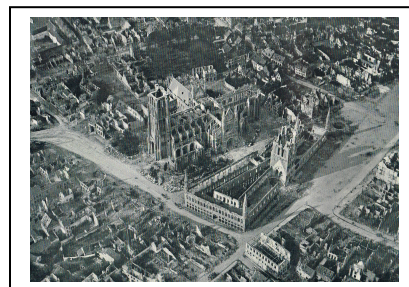
These latest transfers had all been, of course, on paper only; thus on May 4, 1917, Gunner Davis left the Canadian Base Depot in order to seek out his unit *in the field*. While there appears to be no precise date of his arrival *to duty*, at that time the 9th Brigade was operating in the Vimy Sector, during the period when the *Battle of Arras* was degenerating from a situation of promise into one of stalemate.

(Right above: An example of the British 18 pounder field gun which was the principal weapon of the British and the Commonwealth Field Artillery – and of the Canadian 9th Brigade - during the Great War. – photograph from 2012(?) taken at the Royal Artillery Museum at Woolwich)

* * * * *

The 9th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, comprising three field batteries and a howitzer battery, was in fact a component of the 3rd Canadian Division which had begun to form in France in December of 1915 and which had, since that time, seen action in four theatres of war, including two major campaigns.

The Brigade had disembarked on the Continent at the French port-city of Le Havre in July of 1916*. As it had been with all the Canadian forces to arrive before it, the 9th Brigade had soon crossed the Franco-Belgian frontier and, by the night of July 26-27, the unit had been stationed in the *Ypres Salient*, a place which would prove to be one of the most lethal theatres of the entire *Great War - if it had not already done so.***



****Up until July of 1916 the artillery needs of the 3rd Canadian Division had been supplied by the Royal Artillery.***

(Right above: 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*)

(continued)

*****The Brigade War Diary records the guns as being on the Ypres Ramparts. The city was - and still is – a moated medieval city, protected by substantial walls and ramparts, on the top of which, presumably, were sited the guns.***



(Right: Some of the ramparts at Ypres, wide enough to walk on and on which there is even sited a cemetery: The interiors are deep and hollow; in fact they provided shelter for A & B Companies of the Newfoundland Regiment in 1916. – photograph from 2010)

On August 25 the 9th Brigade was relieved by a Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery and retired whence it had come a month earlier, to the northern French community of Steenvoorde. The unit's War Diary entry of August 27 reads thus: *The Brigade carried on training and equipping in preparation for action on a new front.*

By that September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had already been ongoing for some two months. The campaign had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, the assault having cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in a short space of four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

On the first morning of *1st Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had comprised troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the some 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 above: At Beaumont-Hamel looking from the British lines down the hill to Y Ravine Cemetery which today stands atop part of the German front-line defences - The Danger Tree is to the right in the photograph. – from 2009)



(Right: A horse-drawn ammunition train being brought up to the guns during the First Battle of the Somme: Much of the transport during the Great War – and also the Second World War – was undertaken by horses. – from Le Miroir)



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 had 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, Flers and Courcellette.

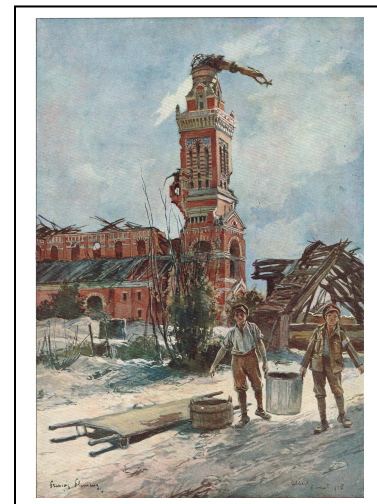
(continued)

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

While some Canadian units were already serving at *the Somme* during the month of September 1916, the 9th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, remained in training. It was not to be until early October that the Brigade War Diarist wrote: *3/10/16 to 7/10/16 Route march to Albert (Somme District) via Lillers, Wavrans, Boubers, Doullens and Bouzincourt. Considerable rain en route.*

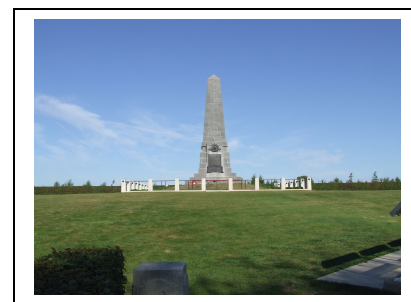
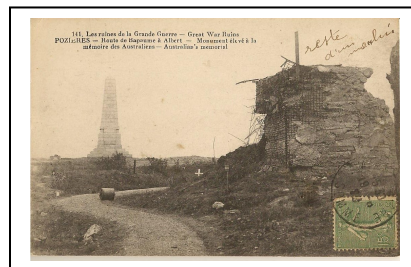
The march ended at the Brickfields (*La Briqueterie*), the site of a large military encampment in the immediate vicinity of the provincial town of Albert, through which had already passed a goodly number of Canadian formations.

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



The unit was allowed only enough time to arrange its billets before it was ordered forward, on October 10, to the area of Pozières on the Albert-Bapaume Road, to relieve the 18th Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery (*Lahore Division*) which had been providing support for the 3rd Canadian Division up until then, since the latter's arrival on the Continent.

(Right above and right below: *The vestiges of the village of Pozières as it appeared in 1919 – the monument, to be seen in both images, is to the Australians who fought there in 1916, just before the arrival of the Canadians – from a vintage post-card and a photograph from the same area - from 2016*)



On October 11 the Brigade War Diary reported two batteries firing fifty rounds per hour and the third battery expending three hundred per day. In fact, the Brigade appears to have been firing for most of the time between that day and the night of November 23-24 when it retired from the field.

(Right below: *Unidentified gunners during 1st Somme working their 18-pounder field guns – from Le Miroir*)

The withdrawal from the area of *the Somme* was, for the 9th Brigade, much like its arrival. It was another route march, on this occasion three days instead of four – November 26-28 – with the first day one of continual rain. The unit marched via Doullens in a semi-circular fashion in the direction of the city of Arras, in the northern proximity of which the Canadians relieved British counterparts of the Royal Field Artillery.



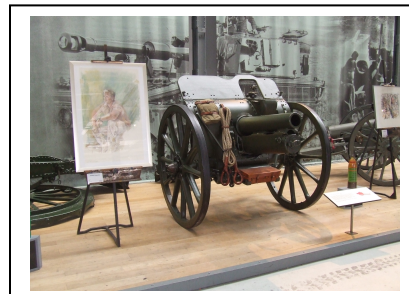
(continued)

Up until the end of February, 1917, the batteries of the 9th Brigade served in much the same area, to the north of Arras and close to Roclincourt, apparently at one brief moment in support of the Canadian 1st Division, during the fourth week of that month. The guns were busy on most days: apart from battering enemy positions they were also engaged in wire-cutting, and providing barrages and covering fire for local operations.

At times there were also spotted more precise targets such as enemy working-parties which then received the guns' attention.

And of course, the Germans were at the time doing likewise.

(Right: Again according to the *Brigade War Diary*, the howitzer battery of the Canadian 9th Brigade employed British 4.5 inch weapons, an example of which is shown here. – photograph from 2011 and also taken at the Woolwich Arsenal)



Then on February 26 orders were received to withdraw to the proximity of Amettes, a community just to the west of the larger centre of Béthune. On March 9 the unit was at Gouy-Servins and back within light artillery range of the enemy. Apparently it was now time for some serious training.

During this period much of the time was spent in practising barrage systems, and trials were undertaken on the last two days of that month of March. In nine days' time all of the hard work of the previous weeks was to be repeated – on this latter occasion for real.

Preparations for the imminent offensive were well under way by the beginning of April. The artillery was busy cutting wire, and selected targets – particularly those which were to be objectives of the different stages of the upcoming attack - were receiving more than the usual attention. There was also counter-battery work and, during the final days, support for raids on German 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 was to prove an overall disappointment, the French offensive was a disaster.

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

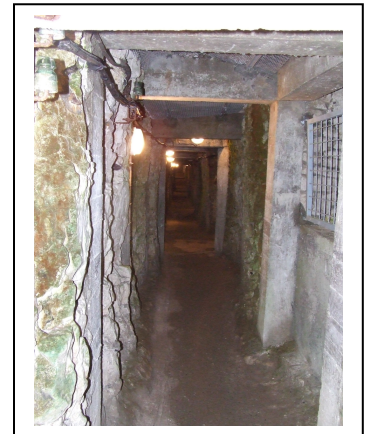
On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity, stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

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



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

The 9th Brigade was at the time, of course, supporting the efforts of the Canadian 3rd Division to which it was attached. The following are excerpts from Appendix A, a report on the happenings of that April 9, 1917, extracted from the Brigade War Diary: *Promptly at 5.30 a.m. this morning the barrage opened and from here it appeared well synchronized all along the line... Our barrage was reported as being very good, a large percentage of the rounds being just off graze.*



The smoke barrage put up by the R.E.s was also reported to be most effective. At 5.37 a.m. a report was received that we had crossed enemy's front line...

Many of the further reports received during the day were of the success of the artillery operations. By the end of the morning the Canadian infantry had achieved its objectives and was consolidating the captured positions in expectation of enemy counter-attacks. In several cases these German counter-strikes were dealt with by the Canadian artillery.

On April 10 the Canadians finished clearing the area of Vimy Ridge of the few remaining pockets of resistance and also continued to consolidate the area, still in anticipation of German reaction which, in the event, was surprisingly light.

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



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

(continued)

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. This was the situation at the time that Gunner Davis reported in early May to *duty* with the 9th Brigade.

* * * * *

It is not likely that he reported directly to the forward area on the day of his arrival*; but if he had, this is how the enemy would have greeted Gunner Davis: *...Enemy planes most active throughout the day and although they crossed our lines a number of times, they were forced back by our Anti-aircraft guns.*

Enemy artillery was unusually inactive today. Our Batteries carried on with the usual amount of firing at opportunity targets etc. (from War Diary entry of May 4, 1917)

**It is to be remembered that the exact date of Gunner Davis' arrival seems not to be recorded.*

(Right: The re-constructed village of Vimy – at a distance of a kilometre or so from Vimy Ridge itself – some ninety-seven years after the events of April 9, 1917 – photograph from 2014)



The remainder of May and then June plus the first three weeks of July was spent in the area between Vimy and Avion, some few kilometres to the north. Apart from supporting several raids by the Canadian infantry and resisting those made by their German counterparts, the period was a succession of... *fairly normal* days, apparently even... *quiet* on occasion according to the War Diarist.

Then on July 23 the Brigade withdrew, to be seconded to the Canadian 1st and 2nd Divisions: there was to be... *an operation against the high ground N.W. of Lens... and the 9th was to be in support.*

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 also 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 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)

(continued)

27th July, 1917 - Operational Order 100

With a view to forcing the enemy to evacuate LENS the Canadian Corps has been ordered to undertake operations for the capture of the high ground North of LENS.

(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: The 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 were limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the supposed dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it was expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it proved; on the 16th several strong counter-attacks were launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.

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*.



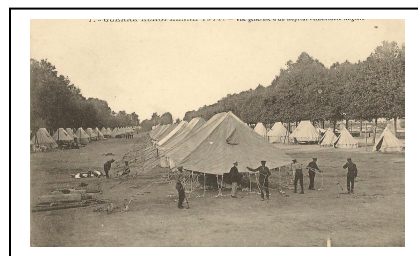
(Right: A Canadian 220 mm siege gun, here under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action by its crew – from Le Miroir)

The 9th Brigade War Diary entry for August 15, 1917, reads partly as follows: ***Operational Order 100 was carried out today starting at 4.35 a.m... The enemy barrage was very heavy on the zone to our right but later in the day became very intense on our front. The infantry reached their final objective... on HILL 70 on schedule time.***

Several attacks against this now-famous hill were launched by the enemy during this day but were completely broken up by our artillery fire before they reached our new front lines... and are known to have suffered enormous casualties...

Gunner Davis was admitted on that same August 15 into a Casualty Clearing Station* to be treated for shrapnel injuries to the head. At that time he was considered by the medical staff to be *dangerously ill*.

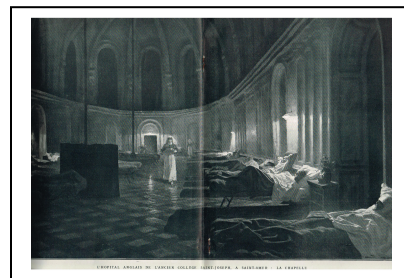
(Right: a *British casualty clearing station* – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card)



From that CCS, Gunner Davis was forwarded for further medical attention to the 7th General Hospital in the northern French town of St-Omer on either August 16 or 17. The diagnosis of *dangerously ill* was there confirmed.

(Right below: *The Collège St-Joseph* – today a private Catholic girls' school – in the town of St-Omer was an English hospital, one of many established there, during the Great War – from *Illustration*)

**The records document that it was the 7th CCS, but the British 7th CCS at the time was established on the Normandy coast. The Canadian 7th CCS was closer, at St-Pol, but it was apparently reserved for Cavalry and there appear to be no records of admissions or discharges on that August 15. The Station War Diarist of the day gives the impression of being rather more pre-occupied at the time with the Divisional Horse Show.*



The son of George Davis, fisherman(?), and of Bridgid (sic) (but elsewhere *Bridget*, deceased November 11, 1914?) of Witless Bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to at least Mary of 594, Lake Front, Hanlan's Point, Toronto, Ontario, to whom he had allotted a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay.

Gunner Davis was reported on August 17 as having... *died of wounds received in action two days previously.*

Charles Joseph Davis had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-two years and eleven months: date of birth at Witless Bay, Newfoundland, September 15, 1893.

Gunner (*Driver*) Charles Joseph Davis 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.