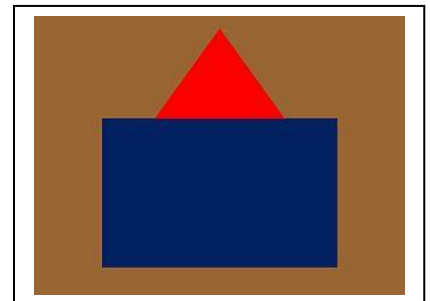


**Private John Dean (Number 67613) of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on *Vimy Ridge*.**

**(Right: The image of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) shoulder flash is from the Wikipedia Web-site.)**

**(continued)**



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *miner*, John Dean appears to have left behind him little if any information a propos his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. All that may be said with any certainty is that he was the capital city, Halifax, during November of 1914 and, before that, in the month of August of the same year for that was where and when he enlisted and then later attested.

His first pay records show that he enlisted on August 7 of 1914, as that is the date on which the authorities began to remunerate him for his services. At that time Private Dean was temporarily *taken on strength* by the 94<sup>th</sup> Regiment (*Argyll Highlanders*) of the Canadian Militia, a unit with whom he was subsequently recorded as having served for three months and twelve days.

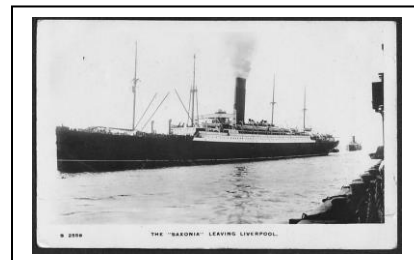
It was not to be until the month of November that he was transferred to one of the newly-forming Overseas Battalions\*. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of that month, in Halifax, Private Dean underwent a medical examination which pronounced him as being...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. Five days later, on November 26, he was attested and placed on the pay-list of the unit by which he was now *taken on strength*, the 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*).

*\*The Canadian Militia had been formed for the defence of the country and had no mandate to operate outside the nation's frontiers. Thus when War was declared in August of 1914, it had been decided to authorize the formation of new units – the aforementioned Overseas Battalions. This did not preclude the Militia regiments from recruiting on behalf of the new battalions, and indeed, many Militia soldiers immediately signed on.*

The formalities of his enlistment were then almost immediately brought to an official conclusion on the first day of the month of December, 1914, when the Officer Commanding the unit, Lt-Col. G.A. LeCain, declared – on paper – that...*John Dean...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

After that, it was to be a further six months before the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to embark for overseas, the unit having trained at the *Halifax Armouries* during that period – although this had been interrupted by an outbreak of diphtheria.

Private Dean and his unit embarked onto the requisitioned vessel *Saxonia* in the harbour at Halifax on May 20 of 1915 for passage to the United Kingdom. The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to travel in the company of the French-speaking 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion from Québec, and also with a contingent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Ammunition Park, a total of two-thousand two-hundred seventy-four military personnel all told.



*Saxonia* sailed on the same May 20, to dock in the English south-coast harbour and naval facility of Plymouth-Devonport at ten minutes past four in the morning of May 29. Private Dean's Battalion dis-embarked some five hours later.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *The image of the Royal Mail Ship Saxonia leaving the port of Liverpool is from the Wikipedia web-site. Requisitioned by the British for government service she was deployed for use early in the conflict as a floating prisoner-of-war camp before seeing use as a troop transport as of 1915.*)



(Right: *The harbour of Plymouth-Devonport as it has become almost a century after the Great War – it is a lot less busy nowadays - photograph from 2013*)

The new arrivals apparently soon were on board trains which were to speed them across southern England to the county of Kent. There, Private Dean's Battalion proceeded to the large and newly-forming Canadian establishment of *Shorncliffe*, just down the Dover Straits and in the vicinity of the English Channel town and harbour of Folkestone.



(Right: *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*)

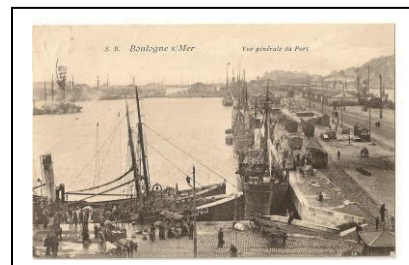
A week after his arrival at *East Sandling*, a subsidiary of the *Shorncliffe* complex, on June 7 Private Dean was temporarily employed by the Regimental Police. There appears to be no documented reason for this appointment and it was of short duration as he is recorded as having returned *to duty* and to training on June 19.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) was a component of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division. The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division had been serving on the Continent since February of that same 1915, having been deployed in northern France and in the *Kingdom of Belgium* during that time, and had distinguished itself during the *Second Battle of Ypres* in the spring of that same year. By the late summer of 1915 it was now the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division also to take a place in the line.



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

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



On September 15, 1915, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion marched from *Shorncliffe Camp* in the late afternoon en route to Folkestone where the unit was to board a troop transport for the short crossing to the Continent. Having sailed at ten o'clock that same evening, the troops disembarked in the French port of Boulogne on the coast opposite some two hours later, at one o'clock in the morning\*.

***\*There is a one-hour time difference between the United Kingdom and France.***

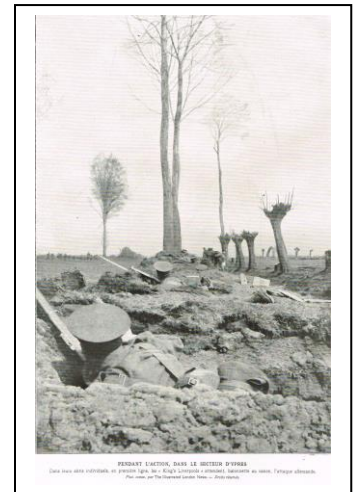
***(Right: While the caption reads that these troops are 'English', this could mean any unit in British uniform – including Empire (Commonwealth) units. This is surely early in the war as there is no sign of a steel helmet. – from a vintage post-card)***



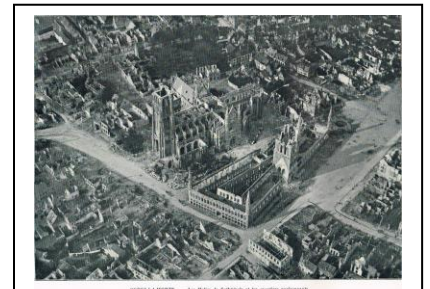
Later, on that same September 16, and after several hours rest, the Battalion marched to meet transport which was to take them eastward, to the area of Lynde, not far distant from the larger centre of Hazebrouk and some twenty kilometres to the south-west of the Franco-Belgian frontier. Three days later, on September 19, Private Dean's unit crossed into Belgium to encamp near the village of Locre (today Loker).

By September 23 the Nova Scotia unit was relieving a British unit, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, *the King's Own*, in trenches close to the Franco-Belgian border in the area of the Kemmel-Ypres Road.

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



By this time, the much-greater part of the *Kingdom of Belgium* was living under German occupation. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was now about to join the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – as well as Belgian, French and British troops - in the small south-western area of the country which yet remained under the control of the Belgian government and its allies: from the *Ypres Salient* westward to the coast.



The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to remain in these sectors until August of the following year, 1916.

***(Right above: A Belgian aerial photograph showing the devastation of Ypres as early as 1915 – the city is described as 'morte' (dead) - before the arrival of Private Dean – from Illustration)***

Those months were to be a relatively quiet period for all the troops of both sides in the trenches in Belgium; there was, of course, a steady trickle of casualties, usually due to enemy artillery fire and to his snipers, but until the spring of 1916 there was to be only the daily grind of the infantryman's life in – and out of – the trenches\*.

***\*During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, perhaps a hundred metres***



or so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former being nearest to the front and the latter the furthest away.

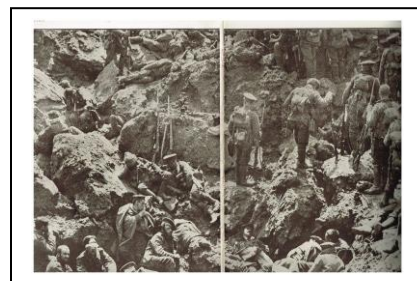
Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

(Right: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of the same year, 1916, but by that time equipped with steel helmets and also the less-evident British-made Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles – from Illustration)



In early April of 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division would undergo its baptism of fire in a major infantry action. It was at a place named St-Éloi where, at the end of March, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the British had detonated a series of mines beneath the German lines and then had followed up with an infantry attack. The as yet un-blooded troops of the Canadian formation had been ordered to follow up on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which had turned the just-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, plus a resolute German defence, greeted the newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on April 3-4. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.



Towards the end of that confrontation, on April 13-14, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had relieved another Canadian unit in craters and new trenches, and subsequently had incurred a total of some eighty-five casualties, a greater toll than the unit had known on any single occasion up until that date.

(Right above: *The occupation of a crater in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps in the St-Éloi Sector – from Illustration*)

Six weeks later, in early June, the Battalion was then to be peripherally involved in the fighting in the area of *Mount Sorrel, Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60, Railway Dugouts* and *Maple Copse*, in the so-called *Ypres Salient* and just to the south-east of the city of Ypres. The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was the main recipient of the enemy's offensive thrust but the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division would play a role sufficiently important for the name *Mount Sorrel* to become the first battle-honour won by the unit during the *Great War*.



(continued)

**(Preceding page: *The Canadian memorial which stands atop Mount Sorrel just to the south-east of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) whose spires and towers may be perceived in the distance – photograph from 1914*)**

**(Right: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 and 1917 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooge, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government. During the first week of June, 1917, at the outset of the Battle of Messines Ridge, a British mine planted under its summit, removed most of any resemblance to a hill. – photograph from 2014*)**



**(Right below: *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*)**

From the middle of June up until August of 1916, the 20<sup>th</sup>, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been in reserve well to the rear, so well to the rear, in fact, that it had been deemed safe enough for His Majesty the King and his son the Prince of Wales to pay a visit on August 14.



Some two weeks later, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the unit was withdrawn into northern France to the vicinity of Steenvoorde and to the village of Moule.

The following week at Moule had been spent in becoming familiar with the British Lee-Enfield Mark III rifle which was replacing the Canadian-made Ross rifle, and also in training for a Canadian role in the British summer campaign of 1916, an offensive which to that date had not been proceeding exactly according to plan.

**(Right below: *Canadian troops likely in trenches built for training purposes – they are too prim and proper to be the real thing – and here now equipped with steel helmets and with Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles\*, during the late summer or early autumn of 1916 – from The War Illustrated*)**

**\*The Canadian-produced Ross rifle was an excellently-manufactured weapon; its accuracy and range were superior to that of many of its rivals, but on the battlefield it had not proved its worth. In the dirty conditions and when the necessity arose for its repeated use - and using mass-produced ammunition which at times was less than perfect - it would jam, leaving its user defenceless at a critical moment.**



**By the summer of 1916 the Canadian units were exchanging it for the more reliable British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III, a rifle that was to ultimately serve around the globe until well after the Second World War.**

**(continued)**

Private Dean and his 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion were to train for eight days in the area of Mouille before, on the afternoon of September 4, marching to the railway station at Arcques. There the unit boarded a train which pulled out at about one hour after mid-night. It travelled southwards until six-thirty that same morning, that of September 5, when it stopped at Conteville, some sixty kilometres from Arcques, to discharge its Canadian cargo.

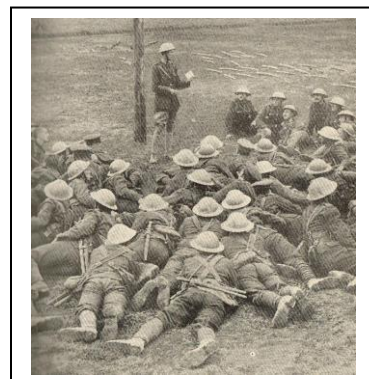
By that September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which was to cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

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



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

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



As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were to be brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray at the end of August to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette.

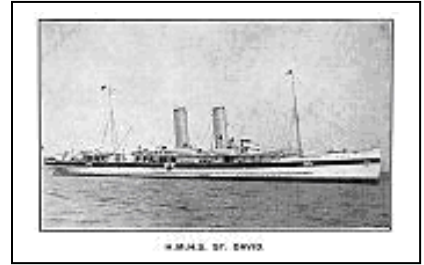
Meanwhile, on the evening of September 10, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion, having marched from Conteville for five days – a further eighty kilometres - arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the *Brickfields (La Briqueterie)* in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert. There the unit was to bivouac and on the morrow was to supply two-hundred fifty *other ranks* as a working-party to bury cable.

It was on or about that September 11 that Private Dean was wounded – there appear to be no further details other than that he incurred a gun-shot (likely shrapnel) wound to his left thigh. He was thereupon evacuated from the field to be despatched to the 13<sup>th</sup> General Hospital established in the coastal town of Boulogne. There he was receive treatment and to await five days, until September 16 when he was placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *St. David* for the short return journey to England, in his case to Folkestone.



\* \* \* \* \*

(Right: *The image of HMHS St. David is from the Old Picture Galleries web-site.*)



Once having been disembarked, he was *taken on strength* – on paper - from the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion by the Folkestone office of the *Canadian Casualty Assembly Centre* whose mandate it was to be responsible for the Canadian sick and wounded arriving from the Continent until such time as they either returned *to duty* or were repatriated\*.

*\*In practice the system proved to be something of a fiasco and its several offices were closed in 1917.*

Private Dean entered the nearby *Shorncliffe Military Hospital* on September 19 where he remained under medical care for just over six weeks, until November 3. On the following day he was reported as having returned to the CCAC facilities where he was to await placement for a further week.

When the order arrived it was to the *Canadian Command Depot* at Shoreham-on-Sea on England's south coast. The function of the *Depot* was to accommodate personnel undergoing rehabilitation and convalescence until such time as the Army decided the future use – if any – that it might have for the individual in question. In the case of Private Dean, after some six weeks, on December 19 he was eventually sent to be *attached* to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Training Battalion at St. Leonard's, Hastings, not far distant along the coast from Shoreham-on-Sea.

With thirty-nine days of training at Hastings under his belt, Private Dean was transferred from there to the large Canadian military establishment of *Camp Bramshott* in the county of Hampshire. There he was *taken on strength* by the 26<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion to be readied for a return to the fighting in France.



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

But at *Camp Bramshott* it was not to be long before Private Dean found himself hospitalized again, although what the diagnosis was on this occasion appears not to be altogether clear. He was admitted into the *Connaught Military Hospital* in the adjacent British *Camp Aldershot* on or about February 19 of 1917, to be released back to his unit some two weeks later, on March 6.

There appears to be nothing recorded of Private Dean in his dossier for the next five months, until August 11, 1917, when he entered the 12<sup>th</sup> *Canadian General Military Hospital* at *Bramshott*.

(continued)



On this occasion the problem had been self-inflicted: venereal disease and the complication of orchitis...and it was to be a two full months and two days before he was discharged from care.

It was then to be just two days after his release, on October 15, that Private Dean was transferred to another Canadian Reserve Battalion, the 17<sup>th</sup>, also stationed at *Bramshott*. There he resumed his training for a further four months...

...before he was once more hospitalized, on February 23 of the following year, 1918, to the *Canadian Special Care Hospital* at the not far-distant *Canadian Camp Witley* in the southern extreme of the neighbouring county of Surrey. It would appear that there were further post-venereal complications: epididymitis.

Now it was not to be until April 26 that Private Dean was discharged back *to duty* with the 17<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion.

On the night of May 10-11, 1918, having been *struck off strength* by the 17<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion, he crossed the English Channel for a second time on his way to *active service* on the Continent. Later in the day of the 11<sup>th</sup>, he arrived at the Canadian Infantry Base Depot, now established in proximity to the French coastal town of Étapes.

Eleven days later, on May 22, he was ordered to the nearby Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp, at Aubin St-Vaast, where he was to await transfer to his former unit, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion, by which he had once more been *taken on strength*. The order came on June 21 and, two days later again, his personal papers document Private Dean as having re-joined the Nova Scotia Battalion.

\* \* \* \* \*

Private Dean had been absent from his unit for six-hundred forty-nine days, since September 11, 1916. At that time the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had only recently arrived in the area of *the Somme* in order to bolster the flagging campaign of the same name. It was to be on September 15 that the Canadians were to undertake their first collective operation, in conjunction with the British; it was to be a further general offensive.



(Right above: *The French village of Courcellette, Somme, as seen from fields north of the community, where the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was blooded at the Somme. – photograph from 2017*)

On September 14 the Battalion had been ordered forward into dug-outs in assembly areas. On the next morning again, September 15, the Canadians were to be going to the attack.

(Right: *Canadian soldiers working, carrying water in the centre of Albert, the town's already-damaged basilica in the background – from Illustration*)



(continued)

Excerpt from 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for September 15, 1916: *5<sup>th</sup> Brigade attacked and captured the Town of Courcellette... the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved forward as though on General Inspection the young soldiers behaving like veterans, going through very heavy artillery barrage without a quiver...*

Of the six-hundred ninety personnel who had gone over the top on the day of the assault, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diarist was to record thirty-six dead, one-hundred ninety-one wounded and seventy-seven as *missing in action*\*.

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

*\*It seems that some of the missing may have soon returned to duty as a later War Diary entry records two-hundred fifty-eight casualties all told.*



On October 1 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion – its operational strength by then apparently reduced to two-hundred (sic) all ranks and twelve machine-guns – *received orders to attack and capture “at all costs” enemy trenches known as KENORA and REGINA... “B”, “C” and “D” Companies... were to proceed over KENORA up to REGINA, which they did, but by the time they had got to the wire the casualties had been so heavy that only one officer was left... and about thirty men...*

The attack was to be a failure and the survivors had been obliged to fall back to *Kenora Trench*. Total casualties during the action had been a further one-hundred twelve.

(Right: *Ninety-eight years later on, the land on which the action was fought, as seen from Regina Trench Cemetery – photograph from 2014*)



On the night of October 1-2 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had retired from *the Battle* - and from the area of - *the Somme* and made its way westwards and then northwards. It had subsequently bypassed the battered city of Arras and continued beyond, to the region of the mining centre of Lens. There the unit was to remain for the following six months, in the area and in the trenches of places such as Bully-Grenay, Angres and Bruay.



(Right above: *Wounded at the Somme transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from Le Miroir*)

(Right: *The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand’Place) in Arras which had already been steadily bombarded for two years by the end of the year 1916 – from Illustration*)



That winter of 1916-1917 was to be one of relative calm, allowing the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion – and many other units - to return to the everyday rigours and routines of trench warfare\*; after *the Somme* it had perhaps been a welcome respite.

There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides. The medical facilities during this period had been kept much more busy by cases of sickness and dental problems than by the numbers of wounded in need of treatment.



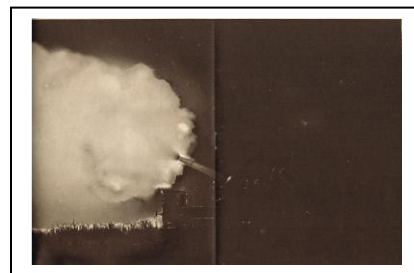
(Right above: *A detachment of Canadian troops going forward during the winter of 1916-1917 – from Illustration*)

Towards the end of the month of March, on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered withdrawn well to the rear, to Maisnil-Bouche, where it was to undergo intensive training which was to be the eventual lot of most, if not all, of the battalions of the Canadian Corps before the upcoming British offensive: learning the topography of the ground to be attacked; the use of the enemy's weapons which, when captured, were to be turned against him; the by-passing and thus isolation of strong-points instead of the costly assault; the coaching of each and every soldier as to his role on the day; the increased employment of aircraft in directing the advance; the concept of a machine-gun barrage; and the exchange of information between the infantry and artillery so as to co-ordinate efforts...

...and at *Vimy Ridge*, the use of tunnels and underground approaches to mask from the enemy the presence of troops and also to ensure the same troops' security.

During the final five days, April 2-7, the unit had been sent to become familiar with ground that had been re-arranged so as to resemble the terrain to be attacked: then, in only two days' time, all that training was now to become the real thing.

As the days had passed the artillery barrage was to grow progressively heavier; on April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion had described it as...*drums*. By this time, of course, the Germans would have become aware that something was in the offing and their guns in their turn had thrown retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft had been extremely busy\*.



(Right above: *A heavy British artillery piece continues its deadly work during a night before the attack on Vimy Ridge. – from Illustration*)

*\*It must be said that a great deal of the artillery used in the assault on Vimy Ridge was British and that a British Division – only a single Brigade employed on April 9 – also participated. Almost fifty per cent of the personnel who had been employed for that day were British, not to mention those whose contribution – such as those who dug the tunnels - allowed for it to happen.*



On April 8... *Battalion less 1 platoon per company moved from MAISNIL BOUCHE to concentration area at BOIS DES ALLEUX. In the evening the Battalion moved up to its position...via cross country route...* (Excerpt from 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary).

But it apparently was not to pass via those well-documented tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety.

On April 9 in that spring of 1917, the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it would be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, one of the few positive episodes having been the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign had proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive of *le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

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

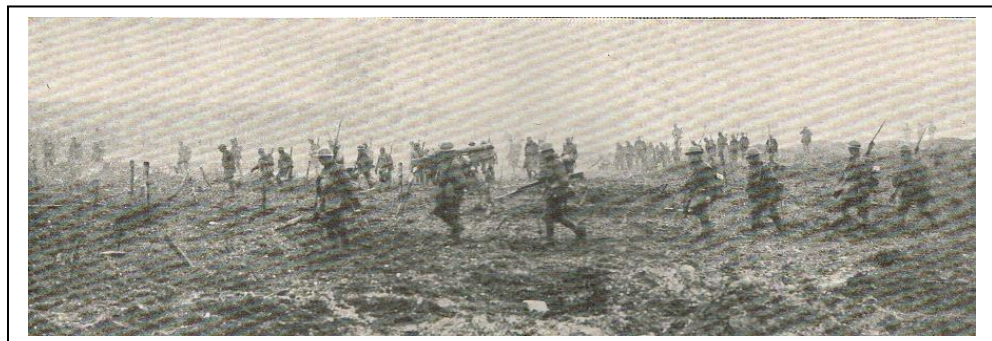
On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity, had stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

The Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had not been responsible for the taking of *Vimy Ridge* itself, but for the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the southern slope and therefore on the right-hand side of the attack.

The Battalion's objectives were apparently soon to be captured and much of the remainder of the day had been spent in consolidating these newly-won positions.

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

(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*)



(Right: *Canadians under shell-fire occupying the third line of trenches on Vimy Ridge: the fighting of the next few days was to be fought under the same conditions. – from Illustration*)



The Germans, having lost *Vimy Ridge* and the supposed advantages of the high ground, retreated some three kilometres to prepared positions in front of the Canadians whose further offensives were less successful than that of Easter Monday; while some progress at times was made – at Arleux-en-Gohelle, for example - German counter-attacks also re-claimed ground from the British and Canadian troops – as at Fresnoy in early May.



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

There had been, on those first days of April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted, and highly unlikely, *breakthrough* – but such a follow-up of the previous day's success had proved to be logistically impossible, the weather – and the order from above *to consolidate* - preventing any swift movement of guns and material.

Thus the Germans had been gifted the opportunity to close the breach and the conflict had once more reverted to one of inertia.

Nor was the remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* to be fought in the manner of the first two days and, by the end of those five weeks, little else had changed; the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success. At the time that the *Battle of Arras* was to officially draw to its conclusion, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been in reserve, resting and training – if that is not a contradiction – in the vicinity of the community of Gouy-Servins, to the west of the city of Lens.

Excerpts from 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War diaries of July 2 and 3, 1917: *Battalion at BOUVIGNY HUTS. Preparations to relieve 46<sup>th</sup> British Division, 138<sup>th</sup>. and 137<sup>th</sup>. British Brigades, 1/5 Battalion Leicesters and 1/4 Battalion Leicesters. Casualties, 1 Other Rank killed, 9 Other Ranks wounded.*

*Relief completed about 2 a.m. – No further casualties were to be documented for the remainder of the day. It had now been back to business as usual.*

The British High Command by that time had long before decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention – and also his reserves - from this area, it had ordered other operations as well to take place in the sectors of the front running north-south from Béthune down to Lens.

The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort.



(Right: 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*)



One of the primary objectives was to be *Hill 70* in the outskirts of the mining centre 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.

(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)



Yet *Hill 70* had been 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 that of the city of Lens itself.

(Right: The portrait of Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie is from *Illustration*.)



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

These defences had held and the Canadian artillery, by then employing newly-developed procedures, would inflict heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* was to remain in Canadian hands.

(Right: Canadian troops in the vicinity of *Hill 70* a short time after its capture by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions – from *Le Miroir*)



Of course, the Germans were not the only ones to incur casualties: by the time that the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion retired on August 17, the unit had recorded some one-hundred fifty *killed, wounded and missing in action*, fifty of which were apparently incurred on that August 17.



(Right below: *The spoils of war: Canadian personnel on some of the terrain on which they had recently fought – and captured – from Le Miroir*)

While it may have retired temporarily from front-line positions on August 17, the Battalion's respite was to last not even a day – and the unit had incurred casualties even while being withdrawn into those support positions. On August 18 the Battalion War Diarist would report a unit *trench strength* of just fifteen officers and three-hundred seventy-five *other ranks*.



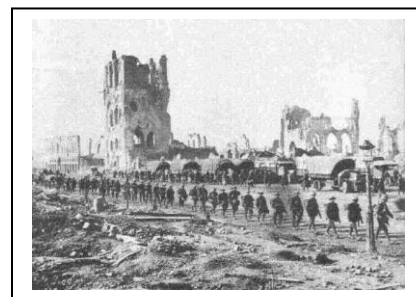
On the night of August 20-21, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had relieved the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in the front line, still in the area of the Cité St-Laurent\*. Ordered withdrawn on the night of August 21-22, the depleted ranks of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had retired on foot and by bus to the aforementioned community of Gouy-Servins. To the casualty count made on August 17, a further seventy could now be added.

*\*The many pit-heads and their neighbourhoods surrounding the mining-centre and city of Lens were often designated by the term Cité followed by the name of a saint.*

After the weeks of relatively little infantry activity during the early days of that summer of 1917, the attack on August 15 in the area of *Hill 70* and the city of Lens had apparently been intended as the precursor to further weeks of an entire campaign spear-headed by the Canadians.

However, the British offensive further to the north, in Belgium, had been proceeding less well than intended and the Canadians were to be needed there. Activities in the *Lens Sector* were to be suspended in early September and for a short period, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to revert to those rigours and routines of trench warfare.

It was not to be until the final weeks of the month of October that the Canadians were to become embroiled in the British summer – and then autumn - offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign has come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from a small village on a ridge that had been – *ostensibly* - one of the British High Command'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 below: *an unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)



(continued)

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who were to shoulder a great deal of the burden. During 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 would spearhead 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 the reverse was to be the case with troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division to finally enter the wretched remnants of the by-then non-existent village of Passchendaele itself.

(Right above: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war – from Illustration*)

(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1917, after the battle of that name – from Illustration*)

The strength of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion on that November 5 was to be reported as being twenty-one officers and five-hundred seventy-six other ranks, perhaps some sixty per cent of the regulation peace-time number.

(Right below: *The Canadian Memorial standing on Passchendaele Ridge, at the south-western outskirts of the re-constructed village – photograph from 2015*)

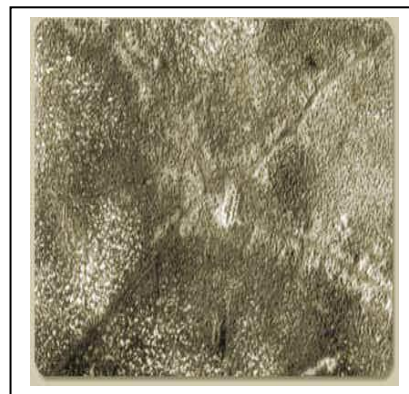
During the three days that the unit was then to spend at the front, the casualties sustained by the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion were to be, by comparison to those incurred by others, fairly light: seventeen *killed in action*, sixty-seven *wounded* and six *missing in action*.

(Right adjacent: *Canadian soldiers on the Passchendaele Front using a shell-hole to perform their ablutions – from Le Miroir*)

In the late evening of November 8 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been withdrawn from the area of the front line, to the south of Ypres itself. About a month later again, on or about December 12, and after having voted in the Canadian General Election, the unit had been ordered southward again, to Villers-au-Bois, not many kilometres distant from - and to the west of - the area of the village of Vimy.

(Right: *The remnants of the village of Vimy, some four kilometres from the Ridge – and behind the German lines in April of 1917 – seen just after the conclusion of the conflict – from a vintage post-card*)

(continued)



(Right: *Villers Station Cemetery, Villers-au-Bois, is the last resting-place for just over one-thousand two-hundred Commonwealth military personnel and thirty-two former adversaries.* – photograph from 2017)



Three months later, on March 23 – two days following the first day of spring of that 1918 - the unit was moved further south once more, on this occasion to the area of St-Aubin on the outskirts of Arras, to arrive there on the 24<sup>th</sup>. The Battalion was then '*standing-by*', ready to move on short notice, owing to expectations of an attack by the enemy.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans were to come 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, the enemy launched a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21 – the first day of spring.

The main force of the attack was to fall at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the old battlefields of 1916, and it was to descend for the greater part on the British Fifth Army stationed there, particularly where its forces were serving adjacent to French units.

(Right: *While the Germans did not attack Lens – some sources say that this image is of neighbouring Liévin - in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it very heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and thus to oblige them to retain troops in the area.* – from *Le Miroir*)



The German advance continued for some two weeks, 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 a great deal of French co-operation with the British were the most significant.

Then 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 also was to be successful for a while, but had petered out by the end of the month.



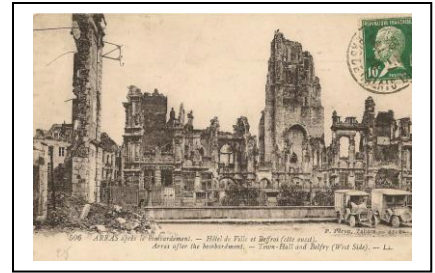
(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918* – from *Illustration*)

The War Diary suggests, however, that the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not involved in the heaviest – if any - of the related fighting. The unit was posted mostly near Wailly, just to the south-west of the city of Arras\*, and the majority of the casualties incurred were due – as they often were - to enemy artillery activity rather than to infantry action.

(continued)



**(Right: *The City Hall of Arras and its clock-tower in 1919 after some four years of bombardment by German artillery – from a vintage post-card*)**



By the end of April the Battalion officers appear to have had nothing more important to discuss than whether or not to adopt the kilt as part of the regimental uniform.

***\*The area just to the south and west of Arras was at the northern extreme of the German offensive. Unsure as to what the enemy's intentions were, the High Command moved the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division into the area to forestall any attack, if and when it occurred, to protect the avenue to the Channel ports and also the coal-fields in the area of Béthune.***

***In the event, the offensive in that direction was stopped cold by the British Third Army before it reached Arras, but during the period of the crisis the Germans had stayed active enough to keep the British and Canadians wondering.***

***As for the situation to the north, it apparently was never deemed serious enough to warrant any Canadian movement in that direction\*.***

**(Right: *Wailly Orchard Cemetery was at first a front-line burial ground first used in May of 1916, but it was greatly expanded by the Canadians in 1918 of whom one-hundred eighty-nine dead lie therein. – photograph from 2015*)**



By that time a relative calm had descended on the front as the German threat had faded – the enemy had won a great deal of ground, but had gained nothing of any military significance on either of the two fronts. Nor was the calm to be particularly surprising: both sides had been exhausted and now needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to re-enforce.

***\*And the Germans were also busy elsewhere on the Western Front; the offensives launched against British and Commonwealth forces were not the only battles to be fought. During this period Ludendorff, up until late spring, was also busy attacking the French.***

The Allies, nevertheless, from the point of view of re-enforcement were soon to be a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were belatedly arriving on the scene\*.

***\*The arrival of those troops from the Russian Front was to represent the final substantial reserves available to the German High Command. On the other hand, as seen above, their adversaries would soon see not only a superiority but a supremacy in numbers. It was to be only a matter of time.***



An overall Allied Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he had been setting about organizing a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

(Preceding page: *Le Maréchal Ferdinand Jean-Marie Foch, this photograph from 1921, became Generalissimo of the Allied Armies on March 26, 1918.* – photograph from the *Wikipedia* web-site)

The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had remained in the same area to the south of Arras after the crisis, the months of May and June to be spent in relative calm in the vicinity of Neuville-Vitasse; July, according the Battalion War Diary, was to prove even calmer as the unit had been withdrawn further back to Bellacourt.

By that July, of course, Private Dean had already returned *to duty* with his unit, reportedly, as seen, on June 23, one of a re-enforcement draft of a single officer and forty-seven *other ranks* which arrived on that day, likely in the rear area. The Battalion at the time was serving in the front-line trenches in the *Mercatel Sector* although it was to be relieved late on the following evening to the so-called *intermediate line*.

\* \* \* \* \*

The first two weeks of July were then spent as reported above, in the area of Bellacourt before, on July 15, it moved – on foot - to nearby Fosseux, some ten kilometres to the north-west. There it was to stay posted in training until the penultimate day of the month on which the unit took busses...*via SAULTY and DOULLENS to BRIQUEMESNIL, debussing at 4.00 a.m...* Excerpt from 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for July 30, 1918

Excerpt from 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for July 31, 1918: *The day was spent in resting, in a field on the outskirts of the town. At 9.00 p.m. the Battalion paraded and marched via PICQUIGNY, to ST. PIERRE A GOUY, arriving at 1.00 a.m. All were settled in tents and barns at 2.00 a.m...*

In the days and nights that followed before August 8, the intended date of the start of the Allied offensive, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was transferred to Bois de Blangy - on the way continuing to train, at times with tanks - just to the east of Amiens, and on the main road from there to St-Quentin, from where it then moved forward into the trenches.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not alone: a large number of other Canadian units – indeed almost the entire Canadian Corps – had at that time begun to move in a semi-circular itinerary to the west of Amiens, then south, then east again to finish in front of the city. This movement was to be effected in only a matter of days, all of the latter stages of it on foot, and these also during the hours of darkness.

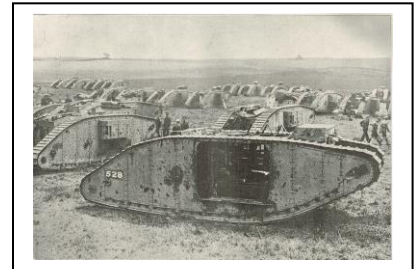
It was intended to surprise the enemy – and it did.

(Right above: *The venerable gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the leading German troops had been able see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918* – photograph from 2007(?))



At 4.30 in the morning on that August 8, the advance began – *the Hundred Days* as it became known – which with other Allied offensives, although few would have guessed it - was to bring the *Great War* to a close on November 11. The Canadians were to move forward some twenty kilometres – supported particularly at the outset by those tanks - during the first three days of the offensive, a feat unheard of since the autumn of 1914 when the opposing forces had settled into four years of trench stalemate\*.

*\*The only exceptions to this rule having been the opening day of the First Battle of Cambrai, November 20, 1917, and the first days of the German spring offensive just over four months before.*



(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*)

(Excerpt from the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of August 8, 1918) *The weather was greatly in our favour, a thick mist hung over the ground. At 4.20 a.m. our Artillery opened as one gun, our counter-Battery work was especially good, the enemy artillery being forced to cease in half an hour, scarcely a shell falling in our trenches. The plan of the attack was as follows:- ...the 5<sup>th</sup> Cdn. Inf. Bde. moved up at ZERO plus 1 hour, in artillery formation and formed up on the consolidated line with the 24<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalion on the left, 26<sup>th</sup> Cdn. Battalion on the right, 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalion in support and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion in reserve, the objective being about 1000 yards in advance of GUILLACOURT, which was successfully reached and consolidated about noon, the general line of advance was parallel to the AMIENS-CHAULNES Railway... The mist was so thick that it was impossible to proceed other than by compass, this method was also difficult at times owing to the obscurity of all land marks. Strong opposition from enemy machine gun nests encountered...but were all attended to in quick time... The work of the tanks was also especially good in destroying enemy machine gun nests... At 6 p.m. the 6<sup>th</sup> Cdn. Inf. Bde. passed through us, together with Cavalry Patrols, exploiting the success. The Battalion remained on the consolidated line until next day.*

The casualties incurred by the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion on this first day of the *Battle of Amiens* were eight killed, one-hundred seven wounded and three missing – *all ranks*.

On the next day the attack was pursued, the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary – of which of course the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a component - reporting that...*The attack was entirely successful, VRELY was taken and many prisoners... The advance continued to MEHARICOURT, which was captured with very little trouble by 5.00.p.m. ...it was decided to consolidate in front of MEHARICOURT...*



*Our casualties were – 1 Officer wounded, 6 O.R. killed and 152 O.R. wounded.*

(continued)



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

Casualty report: *Killed in Action – Was with his company advancing across an open field, when he was shot through the head by an enemy rifle bullet and instantly killed.*

**Attack through Vrely west of Meharicourt**

The son of Joseph Dean, former miner, deceased March 3, 1918 – to whom, as of June 1 of 1915, he had allocated a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay, and to whom on August 6, 1917, he had willed his all - and of Rachel Dean (née Warren), deceased October 12, 1904, of Pilley’s Island, Newfoundland, he was also brother to at least three sisters: Blanche, Elizabeth and Georgina.



(Right above: *The War Memorial in the community of Pilley’s Island honours the sacrifice of Private John Dean. – photograph from 2015*)

Private Dean was recorded as having been *killed in action* on August 9, 1918, during the fighting of the *Battle of Amiens*. There appears to be no record of any burial whatsoever.



*William* John Dean had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-seven years: date of birth at Pilley’s Island, Newfoundland, August 18, 1892 (from attestation papers). The Newfoundland Vital Statistics Office birth records document the year as 1891...as well as the name *William*.

(Right above: *This stone in the Salvation Army Cemetery, Pilley’s Island, - where his parents lie – also commemorates Private John Dean ‘killed in action somewhere in France’. – photograph from 2015*)

Private John Dean was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) 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 23, 2023.