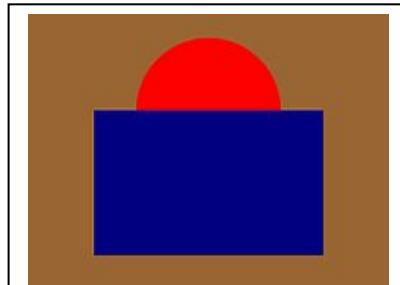




Private Frederick Ford (Number 469388) of the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Écoivres Military Cemetery, Mont-St-Éloi: Grave reference IV.D.17.

(Right above: *The shoulder-flash of the 24th Battalion (Victoria Rifles) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a miner, Frederick Ford appears to have left little if any information behind him *a propos* his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. All that may be said with any certainty is that he was present there, in the industrial city of Sydney, during a part of the month of August of 1915, for that was where and when he enlisted.

It is his first pay-sheet that confirms Frederick Ford's enlistment on August 7, 1915. The same document also shows that he was... *taken on strength* on that same day by the 64th Battalion which was at the time recruiting throughout the Maritime Provinces.

His first medical record then cites Sydney as the venue of his enlistment although that medical examination was apparently not undertaken for a further six days, on August 13. But it does proclaim him as being...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force*.

Another eleven days were to pass before Private Ford was attested and it was to be yet a further ten before the formalities of his enlistment were brought to a conclusion on September 3 by the Commanding Officer of the 64th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel H. Montgomery Campbell, when he declared - on paper - that...*Frederick Ford...Having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

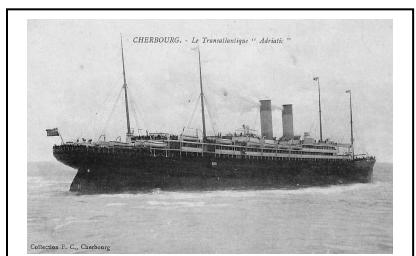
The Headquarters of the 64th Battalion were located in the New Brunswick town of Sussex and it was there that Private Ford was apparently to complete his training with the 64th Battalion, at the military complex of *Camp Sussex*. There is documented, however, an incident that questions whether or not at least some of that program was undertaken at Halifax.

The incident itself was medical – in fact dental. On or about January 31 of the New Year, 1916, Private Ford had two teeth filled. It then appears that he had a further fourteen of them removed, the procedure documented as having taken place, along with the fitting of the subsequent dentures, at the...*Camp Surgery, Halifax*.

After this episode, three more months were then to pass before he was recorded as having embarked on March 31 of 1916 onto the requisitioned *White Star* liner *Adriatic* in the harbour at Halifax - for passage overseas to the United Kingdom.

(Right below: *The photograph of Adriatic is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

The officers and *other ranks* of the 64th Battalion were not the only military passengers on the vessel: the 73rd Battalion of Canadian Infantry, an unidentified Draft of the Coburg Heavy Battery and the 8th Canadian Field Ambulance – this latter undertaking the ship's medical services during the crossing – were to be Private Ford's fellow travellers, almost twenty-five hundred souls all told.



Adriatic sailed on April 1, one of a convoy of three troop transports – the others also ocean-liners now in the service of the King, *Baltic* and *Empress of Britain* – and escorted by the elderly cruiser *Carnarvon*.

The vessel docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool at three o'clock in the afternoon of April 9. While some of *Adriatic*'s passenger-personnel – likely the artillery and medical units - were sent elsewhere, the 64th Battalion immediately left by train for the Canadian military establishment of *Camp Bramshott* – named for a nearby village - in the southern county of Hampshire.

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



It was to be only nine days after his arrival at *Bramshott* that Private Ford was sent to the Connaught Hospital situated in the nearby British Army complex of Aldershot. At first diagnosed as the ubiquitous NYD (*Not Yet Determined*), it was soon afterwards ascertained that his problem was a venereal one – surely a mild case as he was to receive treatment for only five days before being ordered back to his unit. Mild or not, his hospitalization appears to have cost him three days' pay*.

**The Army did not look kindly on soldiers who contracted venereal disease; even though it was not always adhered to - less and less so as the war progressed - there was in place a policy to penalize men who found themselves so diagnosed*. Private Ford's pay records suggest that such was the case in this instance as three dollars is seen to have been debited from his account.*

*Officers were usually treated more kindly and often the diagnosis was documented as NYD (*Not Yet Determined*) or even PUO (*Pain – or Pyrexia (fever) – of Unknown Origin*), thus allowing those afflicted to avoid any penalty – or stigma.*

On June 24, Private Ford was transferred to the 12th Canadian (Reserve) Battalion based at *Shorncliffe* – just south of the Dover Straits and in the vicinity of the harbour and town of Folkestone in the county of Kent. There he was to prepare for a posting to active service on the Continent in the near future.

In fact, that *near future* was to be only days away.



(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)



On June 28, 1916, Private Ford was bureaucratically *taken on strength* by the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) and during that night crossed the English Channel, likely from nearby Folkestone to Boulogne – although this is not confirmed - on the French coast, some two hours' sailing-time away.

(continued)

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

From the ship on which he had taken passage, Private Ford was transported to the Canadian General Base Depot in the vicinity of the French industrial port-city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine*. He was to remain there for two weeks awaiting further orders.



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

*According to the Base Depot War Diary there were no arrivals on June 29, but on the following day the...‘The largest draft that ever marched into Camp arrived from England’... four-thousand two-hundred fourteen.

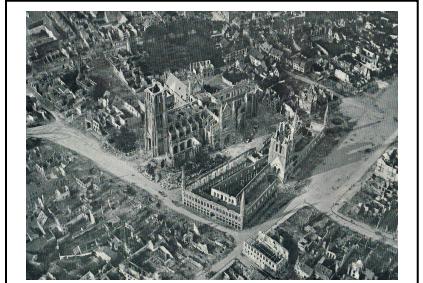


The orders came some two weeks afterwards and Private Ford was thereupon despatched, on July 12, to seek out the parent unit of the 24th Battalion. He was one of just thirty-six reinforcements to depart from the Depot on that day – not necessarily all being destined for the same unit, of course.

His dossier then goes on to document that he reported to the 24th Battalion two days later, on July 14. No details of this event appear to be recorded elsewhere, least of all in the War Diary. However, the Battalion and its War Diarist were not to move into the Brigade Reserve area at Reninghelst until a day later and it was likely there that any reinforcements would have arrived.

* * * * *

A component of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian 2nd Division, the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) was a Montreal-based unit with a history which dated back to 1862. After mobilization it had sailed to Great Britain from Canada in May of 1915, and had been transferred with the Division to France, then to the *Kingdom of Belgium*, in September of the same year. There it was to serve with the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade to the south of the *Ypres Salient* in a sector between the already battered city of Ypres and the Franco-Belgian border.



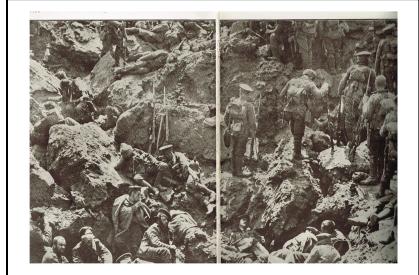
(Right above: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)

(continued)

It was not to be until early April of 1916, more than six months following its arrival on the Continent, that the 2nd Canadian Division was to undergo its baptism of fire in a major infantry operation. It was at a place called St-Éloi where, on the 27th day of March, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then had followed up with an infantry attack. The role of the newly-arrived Canadian formation was to then capitalize on the presumed British successes, to hold and to consolidate the newly-won territory.

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the often putrid weather which was to turn the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and then a resolute German defence, had greeted the Canadian newcomers who were to begin to take 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.



(Right above: *An attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – from Illustration*)

The *Action of the St. Eloi Craters* had not been a happy experience for the novice Canadians. The 24th Battalion, however, according to its War Diary, had not been heavily involved and the majority of its casualties at the time had been due to artillery fire. Apart from repelling a German bombing party on April 15, the unit had been engaged in very little of the infantry action.

Six weeks following the episode at St-Éloi there had then been the confrontation at *Mount Sorrel*. This had involved principally the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division* but a number of other units from the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions, since the situation at times was to become critical, had also subsequently played a role.

**The Canadian 3rd Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. However, unlike its two predecessors, it was formed on the Continent, some of its units having already been on active service there for months. Others did not arrive until the early weeks of 1916, thus it was not until March of that year that the Division was capable of assuming responsibility for any sector. When it eventually did, it was thrust into the south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This was in a sector to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least – to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.



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

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, had overrun the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans had been unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences.

Sir Julien Byng's* hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, however, delivered piece-meal, poorly supported by artillery and badly co-ordinated, had proved a costly disaster for the Canadians.

**The British-appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Corps.*

(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)

The 24th Battalion was not to play a leading part in the action at *Mount Sorrel*. Uninvolved during the early days, the unit moved forward into the front-line trenches in the area of *Maple Copse* on June 7, there to remain until relieved on the 11th. Thus neither did it participate in the closing stages of October 12-13.

The Battalion was not to escape without casualties however. Once again these were caused mostly by German gun-fire, particularly at the time when it was moving forward towards *Maple Copse* on June 7, one platoon incurring twenty-three casualties in a single extremely heavy bombardment and thus almost ceasing to exist.

(Right: *Maple Copse, the scene of heavy fighting in June of 1916, and its cemetery wherein lie numerous Canadians* – photograph from 2014)



(Right below: *Railway Dugouts Burial Ground (Transport Farm) today contains twenty-four hundred fifty-nine burials and commemorations*. – photograph from 2014)



From the time of its withdrawal from the area of *Mount Sorrel* until the final week of August the 24th Battalion had passed the early summer submitting to the rigours, routines and perils of life in - and out of - the trenches*. Often the war diaries of this period refer to *quiet days...front quieter than normal* – although, of course, everything is relative.

After the exertions of *Mount Sorrel*, any infantry activity was to be on a local level and limited to patrols and raids, and most casualties were due to artillery and to sniping.

(continued)

(Right below: A century later, reminders of a violent past at the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres, the area today protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature – photograph from 2014)

**During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, perhaps a hundred metres or so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.*

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

(Right: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from *Illustration*)

These, as described above, were the conditions into which Private Kennedy and his Reinforcement Draft marched on July 7 – although the Battalion War Diary makes no mention of the event. At the time his new unit was serving as Brigade Reserve and was posted in what remained of the village of Dickebusch, furnishing working-parties for myriad duties and tasks.

On the day following in was to move even further back to the rear area; thus Private Ford's landing into a war zone proved to be a soft one. It was to get a lot harder.

* * * * *

On August 25 the 24th Battalion withdrew westward, entirely away from the Ypres Salient and the forward area, to the region of Steenvoorde, back in France, where new training grounds had been established. Further to the south, the British summer offensive was not progressing as well as planned and losses had been heavy: help in the form of troops from the Commonwealth was already being ordered by the High Command.



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

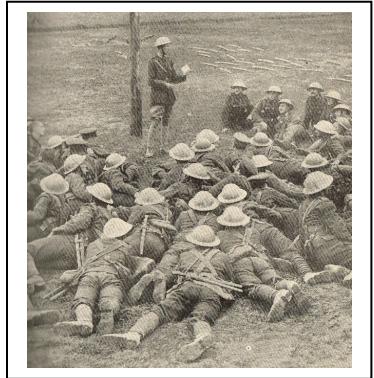
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By September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short space of only four hours - 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 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

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 the New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcelette.

(Right: *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*)



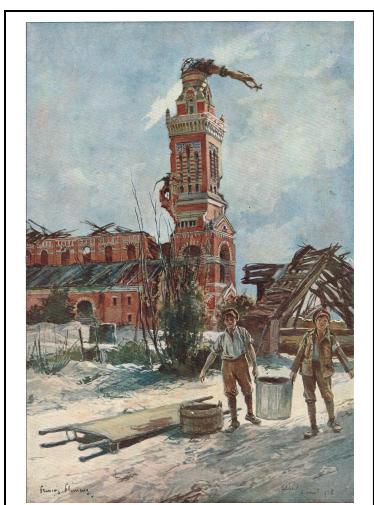
Meanwhile, on September 4, ten days after its retirement from Belgium, the 24th Battalion had left its billets at Éperlecques and marched to the railway station at Arques. There it had boarded a train for the journey to Conteville, just over one-hundred kilometres distant, arriving at its destination at five-thirty on the following morning.

Later on during that same September 5, the Battalion had started to march, to arrive some five days later at the large military encampment at the *Brickfields (La Briquetterie)*, in the proximity of the provincial town of Albert.

There it was to remain, providing working- and wiring-parties, until midnight of September 14 when it had moved forward to positions in the *Chalk Pits* for the attack of the morrow.

During the first two days of that offensive the 24th Battalion was as involved as any other Canadian Battalion – it just was not shooting or bombing anyone. It was, however, carrying small-arms ammunition and bombs (grenades) to the forward areas for others to use, as well as Bengal Lights, flares, stretchers, rations...

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



(continued)

On September 17, the unit was ordered to deliver an attack on the German front line, an assault which had commenced at five-thirty in the afternoon. The operation had enjoyed mixed results – and heavy casualties - and the War Diarist wrote the following scathing paragraph in his entry of that day: *With regard to this attack, if the Artillery preparation had been in any way adequate, there is no doubt but that the objective would have been obtained along the whole line. As it was, a barrage was put up approximately 500 yards in rear of the German front line, which merely served to warn the enemy that an attack would probably be launched, and they were able when our men advanced, to stand up on their parapets and shoot them down.*

By the 18th the Battalion was back at *Brickfields Camp*: total casualties during the preceding days of *all ranks*, three-hundred twenty.

(Right below: *Wounded soldiers at the Somme being evacuated to the rear area in hand-carts – from Le Miroir*)

His personal files show that on September 21 Private Ford was admitted into the 86th Field Ambulance to have a fragment of shrapnel from a high-explosive shell removed from his left arm. For the following five days he was recovering from this minor surgery while his comrades-in-arms were enjoying a long route march. He reported to duty with his Battalion on September 26, by which time the unit had returned to *Brickfields Camp*.

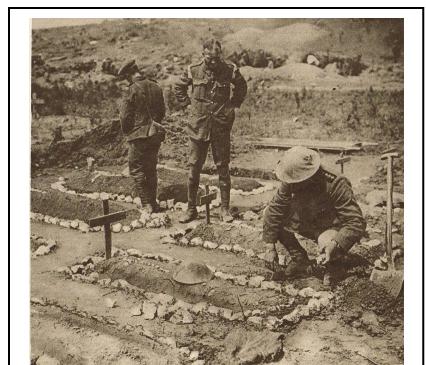


On September 28, the unit was back in the line once more, on this occasion having been ordered to make an attack on the so-called enemy *Regina Trench* system. The attack had been one of several to fail and *Regina Trench* was not to be taken definitively until November 11, six weeks later. The 24th Battalion's operation had cost a further two-hundred four casualties all told.



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

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



On October 2, the remnants of the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) had begun its withdrawal from the *First Battle of the Somme*. It had marched westward before turning northward, passing in a semi-circular fashion behind the city of Arras.

(continued)

It had then continued in the direction of the mining centre of Lens, to be stationed in the suburbs, in the *Angres Sector*, in which area it was to serve for much of the subsequent autumn and early winter.

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

The late autumn of that 1916 – after the *First Battle of the Somme* - and the winter of 1916-1917 was a time for the remnants of the Canadian battalions to re-enforce and to re-organize. There was to be little concerted infantry action during this period apart from the everyday routine patrolling and the occasional raid - sometimes minor, at other times more elaborate – against enemy positions.



(Right: *Lens was to be treated little better than Arras, this image likely from a period later in the War.* – from a vintage post-card)

There was as ever to be, of course, the constant trickle of casualties, for the most part still occasioned by the enemy artillery and his snipers, although it was to be mostly sickness and particularly dental work which kept the medical services busy during this period.



As for the 24th Battalion itself, it then remained in the *Angres Sector* from October 15 of 1916 until January 17 of the New Year, 1917. The unit was then posted to - and billeted in – the town of Bruay, further north and well to the rear where it was to remain stationed for almost an entire month.



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

And then it was to serve for even more than a month in the *La Folie Sector*, this in the forward area, from February 11 until March 22. But by that time, Private Ford had played out his role to the end.

The 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) War Diary entry for February 16, 1917, reads as follows: *LA FOLIE SECTOR – Fairly quiet throughout the day. Usual TM (Trench Mortar) activity; our retaliation very effective. Casualties 1 OR killed & 5 wounded.*



(Right above: *Écoivres Military Cemetery as it was almost a century ago, just after the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

The ward of Alexander Spracklin (cited as *next-of-kin*) – and to whom he had willed his all - of Charlottetown, Bonavista Bay, Private Ford was reported as having been *killed in action* while serving in the trenches of the *La Folie Sector*.

Frederick Ford had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-nine years and six months: date of birth at Trinity Bay, Newfoundland, February 9, 1886 (from attestation papers)*.

(Right: *The Charlottetown, Bonavista Bay, War Memorial honours the sacrifice of Private Elias Ford of the Newfoundland Regiment, but not Private Frederick Ford.* – photograph from 2011)



**The only birth in Parish Records that in any way appear to correspond to the above criteria is the birth in Little Catalina of a Frederick John Ford to James and Susannah Ford (née King) on February 27, 1884. There appears to be no further information a propos the couple.*

Private Frederick Ford 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 25, 2023.