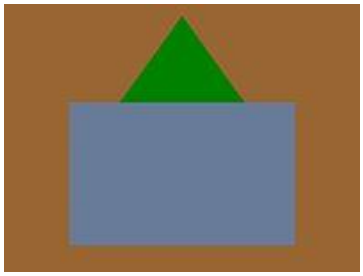
Corporal Henry George Hopkins (Number 418317) of the 42nd Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Auberchicourt British Cemetery: Grave reference I.BB.1A.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder flash of the 42nd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)



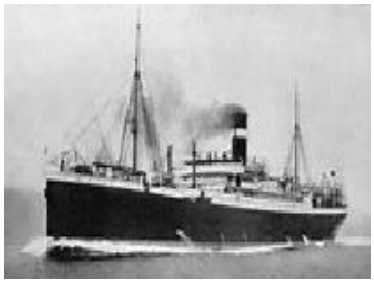
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *labourer*, Henry George Hopkins appears to have left behind him no details of his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Québec. All that may be said for certain is that he is documented as being in the city of Montréal during the month of March, 1915 - for that is where and when he enlisted.

Apparently Henry George Hopkins went through all the formalities on a single day: On March 8 he presented himself for medical examination, enlisted, underwent attestation and was officially *taken on strength* by the 42nd Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*)* whose soon-to-be commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel George S. Cantlie, declared (on paper) that…*having been finally approved and inspected by me…I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

Given that the 42nd Battalion mobilized and recruited in Montreal – and later sailed from there for overseas – it is likely - but to be confirmed - that this is also where Private Hopkins and his fellow recruits trained until their departure in June of that 1915.

The vessel onto which the ten officers and nine-hundred seventy-eight *other ranks* of the 42nd Battalion embarked on June 10 was His Majesty's Transport *Hesperian*.

Also taking passage overseas to the United Kingdom on board the ship were the 1st Drafts of the 8th Canadian Mounted Rifles, of the 13th Canadian Mounted Rifles and also of the 37th Battalion of Canadian Infantry.



(Right above: *The photograph of the Allan Line vessel Hesperian is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Not long after transporting Private Hopkins across the seas, she was torpedoed off Ireland – on September 4, 1915 – to sink two days later. Thirty-two lives were lost*.)

***Hesperian* sailed on that same date, to dock nine days later, on June 19, in the English south-coast naval harbour of Plymouth-Devonport. From there the unit was transferred by train to the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe*, then being established on the coast of the county of Kent.**

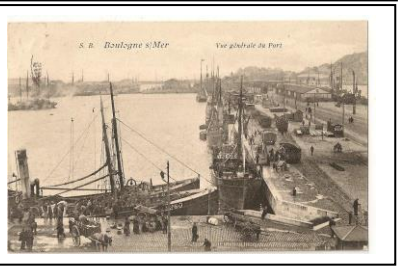
(Right: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago.* – photograph from 2016)

The complex comprised a number of subsidiary camps, the entirety designated as *Shorncliffe*. It was situated on the Dover Straits, in the close vicinity of the English Channel town and harbour of Folkestone through which a large number of Canadian Expeditionary Force units were to pass during the *Great War* on their way to the Continent and to the *Western Front* after having undergone a period of training*.

(continued)

Private Hopkins on August 10, while at Shorncliffe, also managed to forfeit a day's pay - $1.10 (including the ten-cent field allowance) – for an undisclosed misdemeanour.

Private Hopkins and the 42nd Battalion were no exceptions to the rule. After a likely few days of quarantine – officially for all newcomers from Canada – and the regulation fourteen weeks of training before being pronounced as prepared for *active service*, the 42nd Battalion marched to the pier at nearby Folkestone on October 9 of 1915 and embarked for the short Channel-crossing to the port of Boulogne on the far coast.



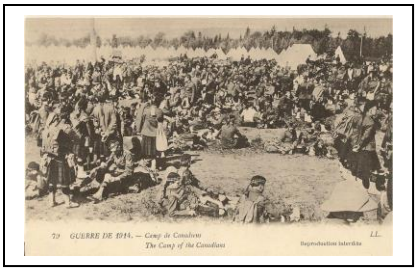
(Right top: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the top of the white cliffs of nearby Dover* – photograph from 2009)

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

The 42nd Battalion of the Canadian Infantry was a unit of the 7th Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 3rd Canadian Division, of which four such formations were to serve on the *Western Front* during the *Great War*. However, neither the Brigade* nor the Division was to officially come into being until the midnight of December 31, 1915 – January 1st, 1916.

(Right above: *The personnel of the Battalion wore a Black Watch tartan kilt, one version of which is shown here*. – from the *canadiansoldiers.com web-site*)

The other battalions of the 7th Brigade were the 49th (Edmonton Regiment), the PPCLI (Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry) and the RCR (Royal Canadian Regiment).

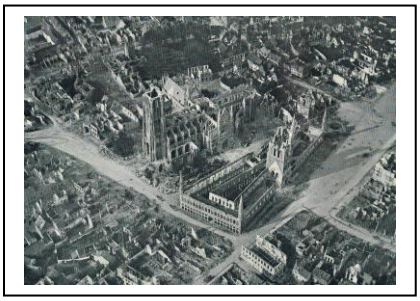


(Right: *The caption reads merely 'Camp of Canadians' but it is from the early days of the Great War, thus likely in either northern France or in Belgium. The troops are from a Canadian-Scottish unit*. – from a vintage post-card)

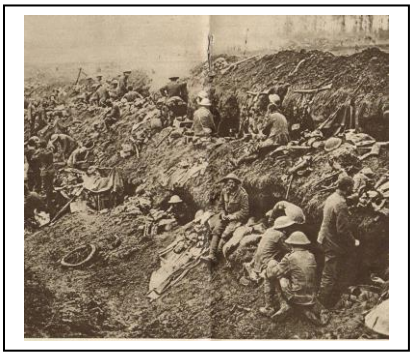
In the winter of 1915-1916 and into the spring and summer of 1916, the Battalion served in Belgium, at first just to the north of the Franco-Belgian frontier with the Canadian 1st Division in the *Ploegsteert Sector*, and then, as of March and April, 1916, in the *Ypres Salient* where it was responsible for an area to the south-east.

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

(Right below: *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*)



The first five months of Private Hopkins' Battalion's service on the Continent had therefore comprised the day-by-day drudgery and dangers of the routines and rigours of trench warfare during the *Great War. For him it had also included a course at the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade Sniper School which had begun on January 22, but of which no further documentation appears to be available.**



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

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

(Right above: *A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of the year 1916, by that time equipped with steel helmets and the less visible, British-made, Lee-Enfield rifles* – from *Illustration*)

The first major altercation in which the 42nd Battalion and Private Hopkins were to play a role was the confrontation between the Canadian 3rd Division – and other Corps units - and the Kaiser's German Army, fought in June of 1916 at and about *Mount Sorrel*.

On June 2 the Germans attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Railway Dugouts*, *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, overran the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans were unable to exploit their success and the Canadians successfully patched up their defences.

The hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, however, delivered piece-meal, poorly co-ordinated, and poorly supported by the artillery, had proved a horrendous experience for the Canadians.

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

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

The 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, of which the 42nd Battalion was a component, was to be in the thick of it all. Excerpts from the Battalion's War Diary take up the story:

2nd to 6th June – On the morning of the 2nd the enemy opened up a severe bombardment on our front, support and communicating trenches, commencing at 7.45 a.m. and keeping up an intense fire until noon when he launched an attack against our trenches. The artillery preparation had been so severe that he succeeded in penetrating our trenches and by evening of that day he was in possession of a good deal of our front and support trenches…

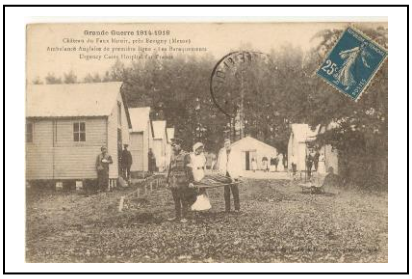
Counter attacks were made and succeeded in driving the enemy out of a portion of our trenches but owing to the difficulties of getting up reinforcements were unable to hold the ground recovered… The casualties suffered during the engagement were somewhat heavy in both officers and men…

The 42nd Battalion incurred a total of two-hundred seventy-eight casualties up until the night of June 5-6 when the entire 7th Brigade was withdrawn. Neither the Brigade nor the Battalion was to play any further part in the affair. On the night of June 12-13 the Canadians organized and then delivered what proved to be a final – and successful – counter-attack. After eleven days of fighting, the two sides had ended up for the most part where they had started.

(Right above: *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)

(Right: *Hill 60 as it remains almost a century after the events of 1916 and 1917 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooge, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: Still nursing the scars of a hundred years ago, it is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government.* – photograph from 2014)

From then until the end of August was to be a quiet time for the Canadians – as quiet as it ever became in the *Ypres Salient*: there was to be no further concerted infantry activity by either side, only patrols and raids on a local scale and the daily toll of casualties was to be mostly due to enemy artillery and snipers.



Being wounded, of course, was not the only reason for finding oneself in a medical facility. Thus on August 22 – in fact the last day on which the 42nd Battalion was to serve in *the Salient* until the autumn of the following year – Private Hopkins was admitted into the 10th Canadian Field Ambulance. Having reported sick the previous day, he had incurred lacerations to his left index finger and abrasions to the left hand.

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

From the 10th CFA he was forwarded for further treatment to the 12th Casualty Clearing Station at Hazebrouck. Then from Hazebrouck, within hours of his arrival, Private Hopkins boarded the 21st Ambulance Train for the journey to the 3rd Canadian General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers on the coast – although his own papers say it was at Boulogne.

(Right above: *The railway station at Dannes-Camiers through which thousands of sick, wounded and convalescent military personnel passed during the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

Private Hopkins injuries likely proved not to be serious – although in those days prior to antibiotics any abrasion was a matter for concern – and he was next admitted into the 7th Convalescent Depot at Boulogne on August 26 from where, two days later again, he was discharged *to duty* at the Canadian Base Depot, by that time established at Rouelles in the vicinity of the industrial French port-city of Le Havre, on the estuary of the River Seine.

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

He was not to return to his unit until September 21 – the War Diary reports the date to be September 22 - by which time the 42nd Battalion had already been transferred to - and engaged in - the *First Battle of the Somme*.

*** * * * ***

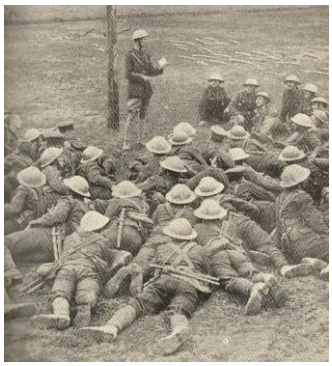
On the August 22 of Private Hopkins' departure for medical attention, the 7th Brigade had retired to rest billets in the Cassel area. There was to be little rest involved; the following two weeks had been spent in training in preparation for use in a different theatre. The Canadians were about to move south to *the Somme*.

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 had 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 comprised of 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, 1916, at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

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

As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were to be brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), and then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23), before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major collective 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*)

In the meantime, having left the north of France on the morning of September 7, the 42nd Battalion had arrived by train and by foot on September 13 at the large military encampment which had been established at the *Brickfields* (*La Briqueterie*) in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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

On the morning of September 15 the Battalion had still been at *Brickfields Camp*. Then by the late afternoon it had moved forward into its assembly area before having advanced into its jumping-off positions. The unit's attack on Courcelette was to go in at six o'clock that evening.

The following is an excerpt from the 42nd Battalion War Diary entry for September 15, 1916:

(continued)

ATTACK ***The position of assembly was reached and all in readiness for the attack at 5.50 pm. The attacking companies went over the top at exactly zero hour.***

OBJECTIVES ***The first objective SUNKEN ROAD was reached – also the 2nd i.e. FABECK GRABEN TRENCH without heavy casualties, and immediately steps were taken to clear the trench, reverse the parapet and consolidate…***

This operation by the 42nd Battalion on the 15th had been one of the few that were to be successful on that day. The continuation of the attack on the morrow, however, was to be less so: total casualties for the two days were to be seventy-four *killed in action*, two-hundred ninety-eight *wounded in action*, sixty-six *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 was likely on September 17, just prior to the time of Private Hopkins return to his unit, that the 42nd Battalion had been withdrawn from the forward area to *Tara Hill Camp* where it was then to spend until the 23rd re-enforcing and re-organizing.

*** * * * ***

From September 23 to 28, Private Hopkins' Battalion was to be marching. It left Albert to return there five days afterwards. Not one of the War Diaries of several other units which also marched in a like manner provides any apparent reason for all this movement: it may simply have been to liberate billeting space for newly-arriving units, whereas those marching were being allowed a reprieve – at least from being shot at - after the extremely hard fighting that they had encountered.

The final three days of September and then October 1 were spent in billets in Albert before the 42nd Battalion was ordered to return to the forward area. On October 5 it relieved the 43rd Canadian Infantry Battalion in the front line.

The Battalion War Diary entry for the next day, October 6, reads as follows: *In the line. Early in the morning of the 6th a German attack was made on our Bombing Post in Kenora Trench which was repulsed. On the same night a Bombing Party was sent out West Miraumont Road proceed a distance of 200 yards but found no trace of the enemy.*

What the exact circumstances of the wounding of Private Hopkins were is not recorded; it is only documented that he was injured in the right thigh and left arm by shrapnel from gun-fire and that his wounds were deemed to be *severe*. The history of his treatment is partially recorded in the following Medical Case Report issued on October 13, 1916, by the 2nd Northern General Hospital (see below):

(Right above: *Evacuating Canadian casualties to the rear in hand-carts after the battle – somewhere on the Somme* – from *Illustration* or *Le Miroir*)

*** * * * ***

13 OCT 1916 – GSW Oct 6th of right thigh. Was operated on at Clearing Station and again at Base Hospital. Shrapnel was removed each time. There is a large wound on right thigh and two or three scratches on left leg.

Wounds clean and patient's condition quite satisfactory.

There is a firm swelling with skin showing bruises in front of the right thigh wound. This is probably clot.

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

The casualty clearing station at which Private Hopkins underwent his first operation appears not to be identified. The Base Hospital referred to was the 1st Australian General Hospital established by then in the area of Rouen where he was admitted on October 9 to be operated on for a second time. Three days later, on October 12, Private Hopkins was embarked onto His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Carisbrook Castle* for the return crossing to the United Kingdom.

(Right above: *The photograph of HMHS Carrisbrook Castle is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site*.)

Upon his arrival in England on the same October 12 he was transferred – on paper – from the 42nd Battalion to the Canadian Casualties Assembly Centre whose office would deal with his case while he was in the United Kingdom. Physically, however, Private Hopkins was transferred to the 2nd Northern General Hospital at Beckett's Park in the city of Leeds. There he was to receive further medical treatment for some five weeks, including a third operation following an X-Ray:

Nov 2nd. – Under local anæsthesia a small incision was made over the Rt Thigh in front and upper 1/3 and a piece of shrapnel bullet removed from just below the skin.

Discharged from the 2nd Northern General Hospital on November 16, Private Hopkins was then forwarded to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at *Woodcote Park*, Epsom, the well-known horse-racing centre in the county of Surrey. He was to remain at Epsom until the beginning of the next year, 1917, at which time, on or about January 2, he was sent *On Command* – excused from training but to do light tasks – to the CCD (Canadian Command Depot*) at St. Leonards-on-Sea on the Sussex coast.

****The Command Depots were for men who were too fit to be in a convalescent camp but not fit enough to be returned to their unit. Their progress in rehabilitation there, was to allow the Army to decide what – if any – future use it had for them.***

Apparently the Canadian Army still had plans for Private Hopkins as, some six weeks after his posting to the CCD, on February 13, he was transferred to the Army camp at nearby Shoreham-on-Sea and to the Canadian 20th Reserve Battalion (*Québec*).

This was to be a period during which he trained and, on March 17, was prevailed upon to write a will in which he bequeathed his all to his mother. Only days afterwards, on March 22, 1917, he was *taken on strength* by his former unit, the 42nd Battalion, and crossed from England back to France.

The first twenty-four days of Private Hopkins' return to the Continent were to be spent at the Canadian Base Depot in the area of the French port-city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine. From there it would appear that he was posted – on April 15 – to an entrenching battalion, perhaps the 3rd, *that* unit recording a draft of five officers and twenty(?) *other* ranks as having reported *to duty* on that day.

These units, as the name suggests, were employed in defence construction. They comprised men who not only had at least a fundamental knowledge and experience of such work but who also had the physique to perform it. However they also came to serve as re-enforcement pools where men awaiting the opportune moment to join their appointed unit might be gainfully employed for a short period of time.

(Right above and right: *The village of Mont St-Éloi at an early period of the Great War and a century later - The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – partially destroyed in 1793 and again during the Great War – are visible in both images.* – from *Le Miroir* and (colour) from 2016)**

Not to be confused with St. Eloy (St-Éloi) in southern Belgium where Canadian forces also served, Mont St-Éloi is to be found to the north-west of the city of Arras in northern France and was, at the time, well behind the lines.

On April 15 the 3rd Entrenching Battalion was stationed in the area of Mont St-Éloi where it was working not only on road construction but also the laying of a light railway.

(Right above: *Canadian sappers constructing a road 'in liberated territory' – so says the caption.* – from *Illustration*)

It was to be a further five weeks before Private Hopkins reported back to his unit. During the period of his absence a great deal of military water had flowed under the bridge.

*** * * * ***

(continued)

October 6, 1916, the day on which Private Hopkins had been wounded, was to be one of the last that the 42nd Battalion would spend in trenches on *the Somme*.

Three days later, on the 9th, one of its final duties having been to provide stretcher-bearers to bring in wounded from No-Man's-Land, the unit withdrew.

(Right above: *A stretcher-bearer going about his business, likely after an infantry action: although not bearing arms, these men were subject to all the dangers of the battlefield, often for extended periods of time*. – from *Illustration*)

On October 10, as other Canadian forces were arriving in the theatre of *the Somme*, the 42nd Battalion was beginning a thirteen-day withdrawal on foot – to the west before turning north to pass behind Arras - to arrive in the Neuville-St-Vaast Sector, north-west of that fore-mentioned city. There the unit immediately took over front-line duties from the PPCLI.

(Right above: *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 Battalion was to remain in the area for the next five months; the winter of 1916-1917 being a relatively calm period, the drudgery of trench warfare was the routine. Apart from local raids and the occasional more ambitious – and costly – venture, concerted infantry action was minimal and most casualties were again due to enemy artillery and snipers. However, it was mostly sickness and particularly dental work that kept the medical services busy during this period.

Towards the end of March it had become evident that a major operation was in the offing as battalions were withdrawn to undergo training and familiarization with the objectives of the upcoming offensive.

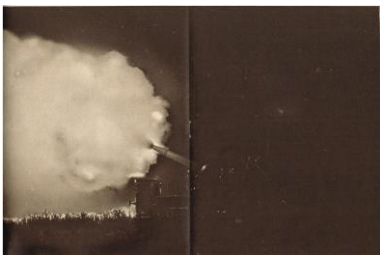
Among these preparations were some novel developments: use of enemy weapons; each unit and each man to be familiar with his role during the upcoming battle; the construction of ground layouts built, thanks to aerial reconnaissance, to show the terrain and positions to be attacked; the introduction of the machine-gun barrage; and the excavation of kilometres of approach tunnels, not only for the safety of the attacking troops but also to ensure the element of surprise.

On April 7 the 42nd Battalion began to move forward, three of its four companies into tunnels – and two of these three into *Grange Tunnel* (see below) - the fourth going into *Empire Redoubt*. At midnight on Easter Sunday, the troops began to leave these shelters to move forward again, on this occasion into assembly trenches.

The attack on *Vimy Ridge* was now imminent.

(continued)

As those final days had passed, the artillery barrage had grown 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 were aware that something was in the offing and their guns in their turn threw retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft were very busy.



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

It should 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.

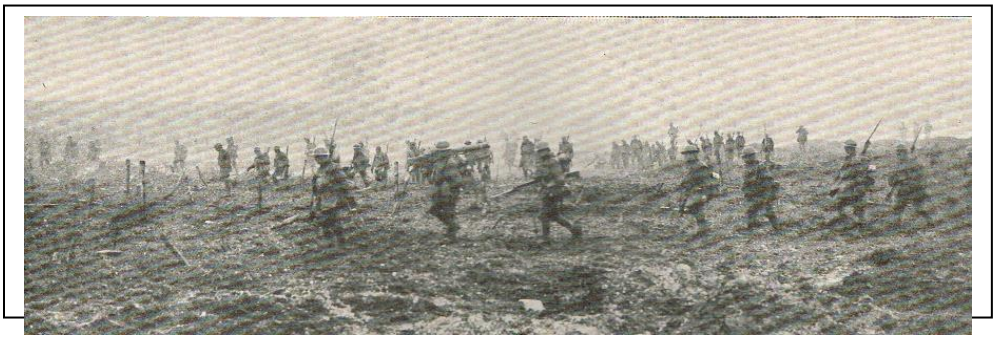
On the early morning of April 9 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great 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 proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive at *le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

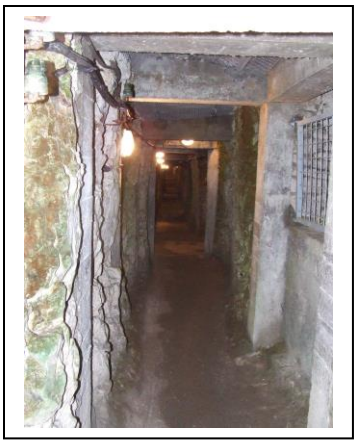
(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, has stood on Vimy Ridge* – photograph from 2010)

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, separate entity under Canadian command, stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants. While the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions attacked the *Ridge* itself, the 1st and 2nd Divisions were to deal with other objectives on the right-hand, and southerly, slope of the prominence.

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



Anyone who has visited what remains of the several kilometres of tunnels built under the slope which leads up to *Vimy Ridge* will affirm the claustrophobic, cramped and confined conditions of those places. But they proved to be considerably better and safer for those thousands of troops who began to file into them as early as April 7 than the trenches would have been, and the secrecy that they ensured avoided the welcome that a prepared and alert enemy would have offered to them otherwise.



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

As has been seen, two of the four Companies, 'A' and 'B', of the 42nd Battalion were among those soldiers who were to spend better than an uncomfortable twenty-four hours underground in *Grange Tunnel* before the attack went in. 'C' spent the night in dugouts, while 'D' moved up overland in the dark hours before the early morning assault.

Of a strength of some seven-hundred twenty before the attack, just over three hundred were to be reported as casualties by the Battalion War Diarist three days later in his entry of April 11. The Battalion was relieved in the evening of the same day and was withdrawn to Villers au Bois.

On April 20 the 42nd Battalion received orders to move back into Corps Reserve. The respite, however, was fleeting. On the night of the 23rd it was ordered forward into close support in the area of the village of Vimy, the Battalion having by then been re-joined by Private Hopkins whose papers report his return on April 21.

(Right above: *The village of Vimy, perhaps some three kilometres from Vimy Ridge, as it was just after the conflict of 1914-1918* – from a vintage post-card)

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That tour in the front line near the village of Vimy during the final week of April was followed by a month of less-strenuous activities out of the line. The official conclusion of the *Battle of Arras* is recorded as May 16, 1917, but well before that date the offensive had lost the momentum of the first few days. The conflict had by that time once more degenerated into a stalemate.

And only seven days after that battle-ending May 16, fewer than five weeks after his return *to duty*, Private Hopkins was once again in need of medical attention.

(Right: *Transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power* – from a vintage post-card)

*** * * * ***

On May 23, 1917, Private Hopkins reported *sick*. By the next day he was in the care of the 8th Canadian Field Ambulance at Villers au Bois; from there he was shuttled to the 13th Canadian Field Ambulance in the vicinity of Ablain-St-Nazaire; his next stop was a goodly distance away, at the 13th Casualty Clearing Station, Gailly, to the east of the city of Amiens; then on May 27 he was admitted into the 51st General Hospital at Étaples.

Private Hopkins' problem on this occasion was a venereal one, albeit a mild case, or at least that was what was thought at the outset. But it was to be almost seven weeks before he was discharged – possibly to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Depot, by that time established at Étaples.

However, only a mere five days were then to pass before he was returned to the 51st General Hospital for further treatment, care which was to last for another eight weeks.

(Right above: *The French coastal town of Étaples was the site of a large medical complex during the Great War. Étaples Military Cemetery is the last resting-place for almost eleven-thousand Commonwealth soldiers of that same conflict*. – photograph from 2010)

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*. An entry on Private Hopkins' file reads: *Forfeits Field Allowance* – a daily ten cents – *and is placed under stoppage to pay at the rate of 50c per diem* – from his $1.00 per day pay - *while in hospital from 28/5/17 to 12/7/17 (46 days)…Same for 18/7/17 to 4/9/17.*

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 that September 4 Private Hopkins was discharged from hospital to Base Details at the 3rd Canadian Divisional Reinforcement Depot. It was not to be until on or about November 21, 1917, that his pay records confirm him as having once again re-joined his unit.

*** * * * ***

After the official conclusion of the *Battle of Arras* on May 16, and just prior to Private Hopkins' departure to hospital, the 42nd Battalion had been withdrawn into reserve at Villers au Bois, there to remain until the end of the first week of June when it had again moved into a forward area.

The second week of June had seen a major raid in the area of the Lens-Arras railway mounted by the 7th Infantry Brigade, an affair having involved three Companies of the 42nd Battalion; after this operation the remainder of the month had been spent in training, in construction and in being inoculated – against exactly *what* seems not to be recorded but it would seem that a recovery time for all the troops was necessary.

(Preceding page: *A Canadian carrying-party – some of the work done by troops when in support and reserve – on the Lens front during the summer of 1917* – from *Le Miroir*)

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

(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*)

The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort, the incident probably best known to students of Canadian military history being the assault of August 15 on the so-named *Hill 70.* The attack was to be, in fact, the responsibility of the Canadian 1st and 2nd Divisions, thus the 42nd Battalion was not involved.

But even so, maybe the action merits a short passage at this point.

(Right above: *Canadian troops moving into No-Man's-Land at some time during the operations of 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 would seem that it was high enough to have been 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 above: *This 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)

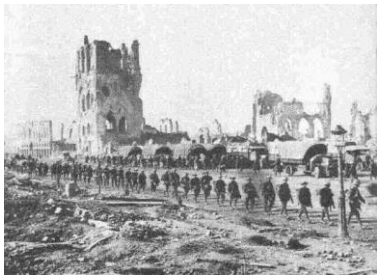
The objectives of the attack had been limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of the first day of the assault, August 15. Due to the apparent dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it had been expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it was to prove; on the 16th 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, which had been employing newly-developed tactical procedures, had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* was to remain in Canadian hands.

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

As afore-mentioned, the 42nd Battalion had played no role whatsoever in the engagement at *Hill 70*. It had been in a rear area at the time and symbolic, perhaps, of the importance of the activities of the day undertaken by the unit, the Battalion War Diarist of the day made no entry at all for August 15.

This Canadian-led offensive campaign had apparently been scheduled to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium had been proceeding less well than expected and the High Command was looking for reinforcements to make good the exorbitant losses. The Australians and New Zealanders, and then the Canadians, were to be ordered to prepare to move north, thus the Canadians had been obliged to abandon any offensive actions that they may have been contemplating.



(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*)

In the middle of October the Canadians had been ordered north into Belgium and to the *Ypres Salient*. Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign – ongoing since the end of that July – would come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, having usurped that name from a small village on a ridge that had ostensibly been one of the British Army's objectives.

(Right: *Somewhere, perhaps anywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917* – from *Illustration*)

From the time that the Canadians had entered the fray, it was to be they who had shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was to be the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which had been the spearhead of the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions in reserve.

From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was to be true with troops of the 2nd Canadian Division having finally entered the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

(Preceding page: *The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians which stands in the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele* (*today Passendale*) – photograph from 2010)

On October 16 the 42nd Battalion had begun to move northward to play its role at *Passchendaele*. By train and then on foot on that day it had transferred from Magnicourt to the vicinity of the town of Hazebrouck. There… *it was quartered in tents and billeted*.

It had remained close to Hazebrouck in training for a week before, on October 23, then had marched – commencing at two-thirty in the morning - to Cæstres station where it had there entrained. The Battalion had then crossed the Franco-Belgian frontier before reaching Ypres where it was ordered into Divisional Reserve and ordered to supply daily working-parties.

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

(Right below: *Just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the monument pictured just previously – the Canadians would have been attacking up the slope and advancing towards the camera* - photograph from 2010)

Slowly moving forward in stages, the 42nd Battalion was nonetheless still serving in the rear areas for a week until October 30 when orders had been received to move up to the *Gravenstafel Ridge*, there to take over positions from the Royal Canadian Regiment which was thereupon to advance up to the front lines. On the following day the unit had received instructions to press up in preparation for carrying out an operation… *to rectify the front line.*

Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of November 1, 1917: *The dispositions taken over by the Battalion consisted of a more or less regular line of shell holes, there being no trenches. During the first night this line was somewhat straightened out and the shell holes consolidated and connected up as far as was possible considering the wet conditions of the ground. An advanced post was established…*

(Right above: *Canadian troops performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele* – from *Le Miroir*)

The fore-mentioned attack was carried out by the Battalion on November 2 with limited success and the unit retired from the Front on the night on November 3-4. Casualties during those five days in the forward area had amounted to forty-eight *killed in action* or *died of wounds*, one-hundred twenty *wounded* and four reported as *missing in action*.

The unit had then withdrawn to Watou to the west of the town of Poperinghe where it was to remain, receiving some re-enforcements, until the morning of November 13. At that time the 42nd Battalion - indeed the entire 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade – had been transported by bus back to the southern outskirts of Ypres.

By this time the *Third Battle of Ypres*: *Passchendaele* was floundering to its conclusion, some sources even citing the early date of November 6 as the official end to it. Official date or not, it certainly did not mark the end to the fighting and although the 42nd Battalion took no part in any further offensive – one was cancelled at the last moment – a further hundred casualties were incurred during these few days.

(Right above: *An unidentified Canadian-Scottish unit, preceded by its pipe-band, on the march 'somewhere on the Continent'* – from *Le Miroir*)

On November 19 and 20, having retired on the night of the 17th-18th, the unit had bussed and marched away from *Passchendaele*, across the border into France, to halt at Bourecq at two o'clock on the afternoon of the 20th. It was there on the morrow that… *146 O.R. reinforcements arrived and were taken on strength and posted among the Companies to fill vacancies caused by casualties.*

Private Hopkins had returned to report *to duty*.

*** * * * ***

The Battalion and Private Hopkins were to remain at Bourecq until December 18, the day after the polls closed. A national election was taking place at home at this time and military personnel serving abroad were also to have their say. Thus the polls were open from December 1 to 17 and during that period seven-hundred ninety-one soldiers of the 42nd Battalion cast a ballot, over seven hundred on the first day.

On December 18 the unit received orders countermanding a scheduled move to Neuville St-Vaast and was instead instructed to proceed to the area of Fosse 10* in the vicinity of Lens. The expected busses failed to materialize until the following morning by which time the Battalion had marched two kilometres, had acquired good rations and had found comfortable billets. It arrived at Fosse 10 some twenty-four hours behind schedule, but well-fed, well-watered and well-rested.

****The word 'fosse' in French not only signifies a ditch or a common grave, it is also means a pit, or mine-shaft, of which apparently there were at least ten in the area.***

The winter of 1917-1918 was to be spent in much the same area until the month of March and in much the same manner as during the preceding winters of the *Great War* – relatively peaceably. Training appears to have been intense but so does the number of activities which was laid on for the troops; some were of a military nature with inter-unit competitions frequently held but sports also seem to have been regularly recorded in the 42nd Battalion War Diary, as has the occasional concert.

(continued)

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

There was little infantry activity on the part of the 42nd Battalion to be reported until March 12-13 when a raid was conducted. The War Diarist in his file of the day notes*… the raid was carried out exactly to schedule and with the greatest dash by the whole party*. He then adds that… *Unfortunately on reaching the objective the post was found to be empty.* But, on the plus side again, there were no casualties incurred.

For March 21, the first day of the spring of that 1918, there again is no entry of the day to be found in the War Diary. The 42nd Battalion was in the line but apparently on that day *its* part of the forward area was a great deal quieter there, in the Vimy-Souchez area, than it was not so far to the south.

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

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the Divisions no longer necessary on the *Eastern Front* because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, the Germans then delivered a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', launched on March 21.

The main blow fell at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops there* in the area of their juncture with French forces.

(Right: *While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it 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 a month, petering out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was the result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British were the most significant.

A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', fell in northern France and in Belgium almost three weeks later, on April 9, in the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It too was also successful for a while, but was petering out by the end of the month.

(continued)

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

The first intimation of urgency came about on March 25 when the Battalion was ordered to… *'stand to' in readiness to move at one hours notice from 5.30 am. morning March 26th. Acknowledge by wire.* At five minutes to eight on the morning of the 26th the order came from Brigade to '*stand down'*.

Then, at six-thirty on the morning of March 28, all companies were ordered once more to '*stand to*' in their battle positions… *The reason for the order was the enemy attack which was taking place to the south… The Artillery bombardment covering the attack was easily heard and in fact the Brigade Area was subjected to bombardment at the same time…all precautions were made to meet an enemy attack…*(War Diary excerpt for March 28, 1918)
But at half-past nine on that same evening the order was once again given to '*stand down*'. And despite those latter days of activity, casualties for the entire month were a single *killed in action* and sixteen *wounded*.

By the beginning of April, the 42nd Battalion was serving in the area of Avion, a community just to the south of the city of Lens; for the unit there was to be no further '*standing to*'. Further to the south the German spring offensive was being held and coming to a halt, as so was soon to be '*Georgette*' in Belgian Flanders where the British front had been somewhat bent but not broken.

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

It was during this time that Private Hopkins was promoted on two occasions: on June 9, also the day of a church parade and of presentation of medal ribbons, he was appointed to the rank of lance corporal. A month later, on July 12, at a time when the unit was completing a tour in Divisional Reserve – apparently the Battalion had indulged in a series of baseball and lacrosse matches - he put up his second stripe, thus advancing to the rank of corporal.

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

From the point of view of reserves, the Allies – French and British and Commonwealth - were a lot better off than were their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were belatedly arriving on the scene.

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

(Right below: *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)

On the penultimate day of that July of 1917, Corporal Hopkins' unit began to make its way from the Neuville-Vitasse Sector, just south of Arras, to that part of the lines in front of the city of Amiens where the German offensive had been halted in April, almost four months previously. Having made its way on foot and by train, by the evening of the 31st it was billeting in the vicinity of Dury*, to the south of the city of Amiens. After a halt there of two days it was on its way east once more, towards the area of the imminent battle.

Not to be confused with a second Dury – on the Arras-Cambrai road - where the Battalion was to fight only a month later.

The 42nd 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, much of it on foot, and all of the latter stages during the hours of darkness; during the day-time the assembling forces were secreted in woods, out of sight.

The Third Battle of Amiens was to involve not only Canadian forces, but British, Australian, New Zealand, French and American units as well.

This secrecy was intended to surprise the enemy – and it did*.

According to the 42nd War Diary, the Germans were successfully led to believe that the Canadian Corps was at the time operating on the Ypres Front in Belgium.

However, it was not only the enemy that was being kept unaware of the purpose of all this marching by all these troops. It was not until August 4 that the War Diarist included the following in his entry of the day: *On this date the very secret announcement was made that the Battalion would take part in a large offensive operation on the AMIENS Front in co-operation with Tanks, RAF Squadrons, Cavalry, Motor M.G.s etc.*

Also on that day the 42nd Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*) buried its Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Bartlett McLennan, D.S.O.. *He was killed in the forward area while making a personal reconnaissance of the country over which the Battalion was to attack some days later…* (42nd Battalion War Diary)

On the night of August 5-6 the Battalion moved into the *Bois de Gentelles*. It there remained until the night of August 7-8 when it moved forward into its jumping-off positions: the Allied attack - well supported by tanks - was to commence on the morrow morn.

(continued)

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

The next morning, August 8, was foggy when the barrage descended upon the German defenders. Corporal Hopkins' Battalion, in the second wave of the attack, had reached and attained its objective by twenty minutes past ten in the morning. There and then it consolidated its gains while other units continued forward. On that day the enemy – particularly the machine-gunners – had fought hard at times but the pursuit, albeit sometimes slowed, had never stopped.

By the evening the Canadians had in places advanced some eleven kilometres, a remarkable effort by *Great War* standards.

Even the casualty count was unusual: fourteen *killed in action* or *died of wounds* and thirty-one *wounded*.

(Right above: *A group of German prisoners, some serving here as stretcher-bearers, being taken to the rear after their capture by Canadian troops: a tank may be seen in the background.* – from *Le Miroir*)

Having been rested as of August 9, the Battalion moved forward again of the 12th to attack the *Parvillers Trench System*. The position was carried but only following a ten-hour battle, at times fought hand-to-hand. By the 15th when the unit was relieved and a casualty count made, Corporal Hopkins' Battalion had suffered a further one-hundred thirty-one dead and wounded all told.

(Right above: *Canadian soldiers consolidate newly-won positions while others cross a river on an improvised bridge*. – from *Le Miroir*)

After three days behind the line in the area of Le Quesnel, the 42nd Battalion began the return journey whence it had come only three weeks previously. The same means of transport – foot, motor vehicles and rail – and the same semi-circular itinerary were employed, and for the same reason as before. And once again, it was the entire Canadian Corps that was to be on the march; by the last week of August the French Army had taken over responsibility for the area of the Canadian advance, and the Canadians were back on the *Arras Front* where they were to immediately resume the offensive.

In the meantime the 42nd Battalion was in camp at Duisans – just to the west of Arras – on August 24. Excerpt from 42nd Battalion War Diary entry for August 25, 1918: *At 2.30pm. a conference…issued instructions…for the Operations which were to take place at 3. am. on the following morning. …The 7th Infantry Brigade was to attack…and to capture MONCHY* - BOIS DE VERT – BOIS DU SART – and JIGSAW WOOD.*

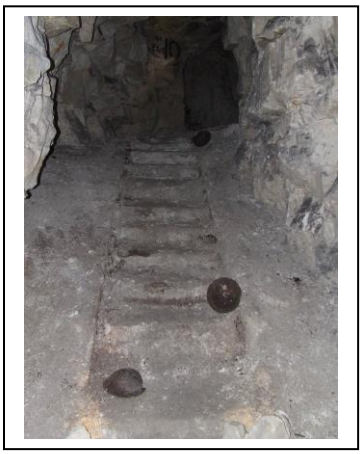
(continued)

Monchy-le-Preux was the village attacked by the Newfoundland Regiment – not 'Royal' until January of 1918 - on April 14 of 1917, where a force of only ten men, nine from the Regiment, held off the enemy for hours (all were decorated), and also where it incurred some four-hundred sixty dead, wounded or taken prisoner, losses second only to those at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916.

(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux, the photograph taken from the western side from which the Canadians were to attack and from the Arras-Cambrai road, the axis along which the attack of September-October of 1918 advanced* – photograph from 2014)

The 42nd Battalion moved forward that evening of August 25 and a three-hour march took it to the eastern outskirts of Arras. After some four hours' rest the unit moved forward again, but such had been the difficulties encountered by the preceding troops that it was late in the afternoon before the unit was to attack German positions in the area between Monchy-le-Preux – even though the village had by then been taken - and the Arras-Cambrai road.

The confrontation in which Corporal Hopkins was now involved is known to posterity as the *Battle of the Scarpe.* For the 42nd Battalion it was to continue until the night of August 28-29 when the 3rd Division of which it was a component was relieved by the Canadian 4th Division. By that time the Canadians had advanced a distance of about eight kilometres – for its part in the operation the 42nd Battalion had paid the price of three-hundred twelve casualties of which seventy-five dead.



The unit retired to billets in the remnants of the city of Arras. Whether the unit found shelter in the shattered buildings, in cellars or in the caves which had been enlarged during the war is not recorded. In any case, the unit was *in situ* for only two nights before being withdrawn to the west of Arras to the vicinity of Hermanville.

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

That did not last long either: on September 2 the unit was back in eastern Arras and obliged to find shelter… *in portions of dis-used trenches, and in shell holes, but the great majority of the Battalion were forced to lie out in the open for the night.* (Excerpt of 42nd Battalion War Diary entry for September 2, 1918)

By the next night most of the troops had found tents and bivouacs – and also a few dug-outs in a cemetery - in which to rest. Later that day a further move appeared to be imminent on the morrow and so it proved. On September 4, Corporal Hopkins was again on the march, to Vis-en-Artois, and also to another night to be spent in bivouacs in the open.

He moved eastward with his Battalion to the area of Cagnicourt on the following day, September 5.

By this time, on September 2, the Canadian-British forces had broken through the imposing German defensive system between the villages of Drocourt and Quéant. The Germans had retreated on the following day as far east as the *Canal du Nord* with the Canadian Corps following up. There had been sporadic and resolute resistance – as usual the enemy machine-gunners fought bravely and often to the end – but by nightfall on September 3 the Canadians were reportedly in control of most of the ground up to the waterway*.

There was still some mopping-up to be done: as late as September 10 the 42nd Battalion had to deal with some local German attacks which, when driven off, retired to the eastern bank of the Canal, still under German control.

(Right above: *Douglas Haig, C.-in-C. of British and Commonwealth forces on the Western Front inspects Canadian troops after their successful operation of September 2 against the German Drocourt-Quéant Line.* – from *Le Miroir*)

It was time now to consolidate, to re-enforce – the Canadian Corps, from September 1 to 3 (inclusive), had incurred just short of six-thousand casualties – to re-organize and to prepare for the next stage, the crossing of the *Canal* itself. The 42nd Battalion, after six days in the forward area, was relieved and moved back to Vis-en-Artois where it remained in…*very damp and generally very depressing*…underground accommodation commonly referred to as *the Cave* for the following six days.

Corporal Hopkins' Battalion was then withdrawn as far back as the Berneville-Dainville area west of Arras where it stayed for only a few days before being called forward on the 26th. The Canadian Divisions were going to attempt a crossing of the *Canal du Nord* on the morrow and, if all went well, troops of the 3rd Division was to follow through and exploit the hoped-for breakthrough.

It *did* go well. On the morning of September 27* the Canadians crossed the *Canal du Nord*, broke through the *Hindenburg Line* in that sector, captured *Bourlon Wood* and were then advancing on the venerable town of Cambrai. In fact, on the first day the attack was so successful that the 42nd Battalion, having crossed the *Canal* on a hastily-constructed bridge at mid-day of the 27th, apparently was opposed only by enemy artillery, so far had the Germans been obliged to fall back.

(Right above: *German prisoners evacuating wounded out of the area of the unfinished part of the Canal du Nord which the Canadians crossed on September 27, thus opening the road to Cambrai* – from *Le Miroir*)

(continued)

However, the opposition had soon stiffened and on the following day Corporal Hopkins' Battalion, having in the morning advanced as far as a railway embankment to the east of *Bourlon Wood*, was then forced to spend the remainder of the day there.

(Right: *The same area of the Canal du Nord – today filled with water - as it was almost a century after the Canadian operation to cross it* – photograph from 2015)

Two days later, on September 29, the British – the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, by that time a Battalion of the 9th (Scottish) Infantry Division - the French and the Belgians struck at Ypres.

(Preceding page: *Two German field-guns of Great War vintage stand on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City, the one in the foreground captured during the fighting at Bourlon Wood* – photograph from 2016)

The following four days were of hard and costly fighting. The Germans had by then recovered and were resisting fiercely. Progress was made but never at the same cadence as that of September 27. By the time that the Battalion was relieved on the late evening of October 1, it had incurred a total of two-hundred ninety-three casualties in the fighting since September 26.

(Right: *A German machine-gunner who fought to the last* – from *Illustration*)

The area in which Corporal Hopkins' unit was to remain until October 10, north of *Quarry Wood*, was practically devoid of any shelter for the Battalion personnel, the War Diarist recording that… *much time was spent by the men in digging in and making themselves comfortable with the use of bivvies* (bivouacs).

On that October 10 the Battalion marched to the area surrounding Quéant where, finding a situation much akin to the one which they had just left, the men of the unit found it… *was necessary for them to dig in and construct bivvies for themselves*. From the time of its arrival there, for the succeeding ten days, the Battalion underwent training, inspections, awarding of decorations, the funeral of Major General L.J. Lippett, a visit from the Prince of Wales and, perhaps most welcome to the several NCO recipients, a temporary posting to Officer Cadet School in England.

On October 20 the 42nd Battalion proceeded by bus to Auberchicourt and from there on foot to Somain for the night, before continuing on to Cataine where it billeted on the 21st.

Coincidentally, on the day that Corporal Hopkins marched out of Somain, the 10th Canadian Field Ambulance was arriving there from the western outskirts of Arras.

(Right: *The City Hall of Arras and its bell-tower looked like this by the spring of 1918 after nearly four years of bombardment by German artillery*. – from a vintage post-card)

Operational Order No. 216 SECRET 22nd. Oct. 1918

…The 42nd Canadian Battalion RHC will leave billets in Cataine and pass through 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade at 07.00 hours…

The 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade was to advance in conjunction with other Canadian units but exactly what the objective of the operation was, appears not to be documented in the War Diary or its Appendices.

It may however be said that the advance apparently met with little resistance from the enemy: the casualty list for the entire period of the tour, from October 21 to 27 (inclusive) amounted to… *KILLED: 3 OR. – 1 while on Command; DIED OF WOUNDS: 3 OR. ; WOUNDED 16 OR*

(Right above: *Canadian troops somewhere in the rain and mud of the Arras front during the autumn of 1918* – from Le Miroir)

While the date on which he was wounded appears not to be documented, it *is* recorded that Corporal Hopkins was evacuated to the 10th Canadian Field Ambulance at Somain for treatment to a gun-shot wound to his left side.

The son of Henry (*of James*) Hopkins, fisherman – his death likely the drowning recorded on April 25, 1886 – and of Jane Hopkins (née *Mills*) of Old Perlican, Newfoundland – she later recorded as residing variously at 52 Monroe Street; 29 Flower Hill; and Cowan Home, Forest Road; all in the city of St. John's Newfoundland – he was also brother to Anna, to Jane, Cecilia, Joseph, Mirian and to Stephen-John.

Corporal Hopkins was reported as having *died of wounds* on October 23 of 1918 by the Commanding Officer of the 10th Canadian Field Ambulance.

Henry George Hopkins had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-eight years: date of birth at New Perlican* – cited on his attestation papers – February 22, 1887; however, copies of the Old Perlican Parish Records document the date as February 19, 1885.

His papers record New Perlican but all the Parish Records refer to Private Hopkins' family as being from Old Perlican.

(Right above: *A family monument in the General Protestant Cemetery in St. John's stands in commemoration of Corporal Henry George Hopkins. It also records him as having died, in 1918, at the age of thirty-three years*. – photograph from 2014)

(continued)

Corporal Henry George Hopkins 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.* Last updated – January 25, 2023.