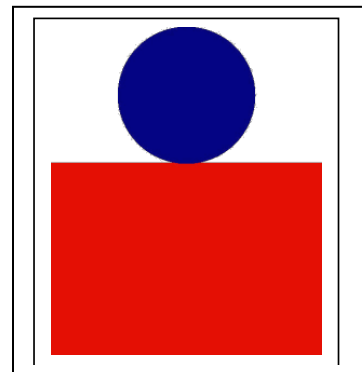




**Sergeant Henry (known as *Harry*) Michael Meades, (Number 46789) of the 13th Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Ypres Reservoir Cemetery: Grave reference, IX.H.46.**

**(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 13<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada) is from the Canadian Expeditionary Force Study Group web-site.*)**

**(continued)**



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *miner*, Henry Michael Meades appears to have left behind him little history of his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. His attestation papers show that before enlistment he had spent three years of service with the *Canadian Permanent Force*, presumably the formation officially known as the *Permanent Active Militia*\* but provide no further details.

*\*When in 1871 British troops vacated the Dominion of Canada – apart from the Halifax Garrison which remained a British responsibility until 1906 – a permanent military force was formed from existing Canadian militia formations. This formation at first comprised just two artillery batteries to which were later added a single infantry regiment and two cavalry regiments.*

The same papers record that by the time of his enlistment Henry Michael Meades was married; in fact, the year was 1907, the venue was Halifax and his wife's name was Helen\*. Nova Scotia Genealogy papers then add that her second Christian name was Agnes, and also that the couple had four children, all of them born in Springhill, Nova Scotia, where the family was living in Gray's Lane by October of 1914 (see further below).

*\*He was married as Harry Meades.*

His first pay-records\* show that it was on August 12 that Henry Michael Meades enlisted and that he was attached on the same day to the 93<sup>rd</sup> Cumberland Regiment\*\*, but where this procedure took place is not documented – although logically at Springhill.

*\*The same papers also show that: i) he was on the 93<sup>rd</sup> Regiment pay-roll from August 12 to 23 ii) on that of the 13<sup>th</sup> Overseas Battalion from August 24 to September 21 iii) and that on September 22 the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion became his pay-master.*

*\*\*As a unit of the Canadian Militia, the 93<sup>rd</sup> Cumberland Regiment was interdicted by law to operate outside the borders of the nation. However, there was nothing to preclude it from recruiting on behalf of the newly-forming Overseas Battalions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force – in fact the earliest such Battalions were for the most part volunteers recruited from the Militia regiments.*

By the time of his attestation on August 26 – witnessed by a magistrate on the morrow - Sergeant Meades, having been promoted directly to that rank on the day before, was at *Camp Valcartier*, Québec, where it is also recorded that he underwent a medical examination on August 29, a procedure that pronounced him as...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force.*

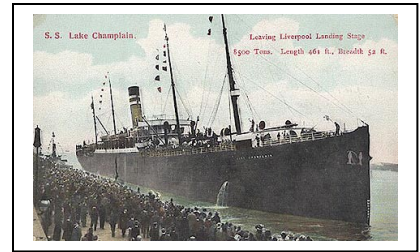


(Right above: *Canadian artillery being put through its paces at the Camp at Valcartier. In 1914, the main Army Camp in Canada was at Petawawa. However, its location in Ontario – but also at some distance from the Great Lakes – made it impractical for the despatch of troops overseas. Valcartier was apparently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

It was also on the day prior to this latter date that the Commanding Officer of the 17<sup>th</sup> Overseas Battalion (*Nova Scotia Regiment*), Lieutenant S.G. Robertson, brought a conclusion to the formalities of enlistment when he declared - on paper – that...*Henry Michael Meades...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

Things then moved quickly. On the following day, September 30, Sergeant Meades and his 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion were ordered to board ship in the port of Québec. On the same day at Québec they were joined on the vessel by the (1<sup>st</sup>) Divisional Cyclist Company for the slow downstream journey to the area of *la Gaspé*.

At *la Gaspé* their ship, the *Canadian Pacific Line* vessel *SS Ruthenia*, was to congregate with the thirty other troop carriers and seven escorts of the Royal Navy which, on October 3, were to begin the trans-Atlantic crossing in convoy to the United Kingdom\*.



(Right: *The image of a pre-War Lake Champlain, before she became Ruthenia, is from the [bing.com/images](http://bing.com/images) web-site.)*

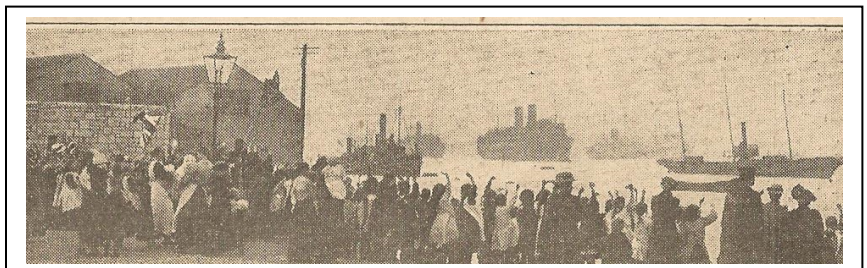
*\*On August 4, while travelling along the south coast of Newfoundland, the convoy was joined by the Bowering Brothers' ship Florizel which was carrying the First Five Hundred of the Newfoundland Regiment to England.*

Following a smooth – from all points of view – crossing of the Atlantic, the convoy entered the English south-coast naval harbour of Plymouth-Devonport during the afternoon of October 14\*. Many of the arriving units, however, were obliged to remain on ship for days before their disembarkation could be effected.

*\*The original destination had been the much larger port-city of Southampton, but a submarine scare had forced a change in plans.*

Such was the case of the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion which apparently was not to come ashore until seven o'clock in the evening of Wednesday, October 21, and then only to march to North Road Station to board trains for the journey to the *Salisbury Plain*. This was accomplished by fifteen minutes past ten that evening. It was to be a long night.

The station at Patney was reached five hours later, from where the unit was then expected to march for almost four hours to reach *Pond Farm Camp*, a subsidiary encampment of the British military complex there on the *Salisbury Plain*.



Within days the entire *Canadian Expeditionary Force* was to be transported to this area where – with a few exceptions - it would remain for the following sixteen weeks.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *Some of the ships of the convoy which had carried the Canadian Expeditionary Force to England, at anchor in Plymouth Hoe on October 14, 1914 – from The War Illustrated*)

By the morrow of its arrival at *Pond Farm Camp* a daily routine had been established, a routine that was to be followed until the time of the unit's departure for France, although, for the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion, with at least a change of venue on November 21: on that date the unit moved to *Bustard Camp* which had just been vacated by the PPCLI\* which had left to serve with a British Brigade on the Continent.

*\*The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry was named for the youngest daughter of the Duke of Connaught, Queen Victoria's youngest son and Governor General of Canada during the early years of the Great War.*

It should be remembered that British Army regulations of the day – to which the Canadians adhered - were such that troops were to undergo some fourteen weeks of training after the time of enlistment; at that point they were to be considered as fit for *active service*.

Since a great number of the Canadian new-comers had received little appropriate training, if any – as was the case with Sergeant Meades - the just-arrived infantry battalions were to spend the remainder of October and up until the first week of February, 1915, in becoming proper *Soldiers of the King* – even if they were *colonials*.

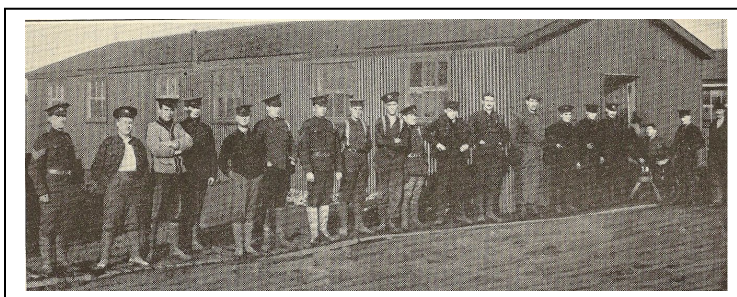
The months of that late autumn and of the following winter were to be just as hectic in other ways: There were to be visits from politicians and generals – and even one from the King and Queen, with the requisite preparations for such an occasion.

By the end of January a decision had been made by the upper echelons by which Sergeant Meades' 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion, rather than proceeding to *active service* with the Canadian Division on the Continent, was to remain in the United Kingdom as part of a reserve and training force, to be initially stationed at nearby Tidworth.

And whereas certain of the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion personnel were to be transferred to fill the man-power deficiencies of those units now soon to be despatched across the English Channel for *active service* on the Continent, Sergeant Meades was to remain as an N.C.O. of the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion and to be posted to Tidworth.

A few days later, on February 4, 1915, the Canadian Division marched to a review area where it was inspected by His Majesty, King George V and the War Minister, Lord Kitchener\*. Only days later, it was to be on its way to France.

*\*For whom the Canadian city of Kitchener, Ontario, was named in 1916 – it had been called Berlin until then.*



(continued)

(Preceding page: *Canadian troops during the autumn of 1914 at Bulford Camp, Wiltshire, adjacent to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Hospital Headquarters – from The War Illustrated*)



(Right: *George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – from Wikipedia*)

Towards the end of the first week in February, preparations were well under way for departure with trains being loaded and sent in the direction of the port-city of Bristol from where the Canadian Division was to sail. By February 10, and for the next couple of days, the trains were then to be carrying the Division's personnel to the awaiting troopships.

Sergeant Meades was now to spend until the first days of May, 1915, at Tidworth and also likely at *Shorncliffe*. His unit had not been alone in having been withdrawn from the CEF fighting battalions as the 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> had also been designated to be part of the training and reserve force. None of these units were to be officially deemed as *reserve* until April 29 of that year, but in practice by that time they already were\* \*\*.

*\*Before the end of the Great War, Canada was to have despatched overseas two-hundred fifty battalions – although it is true that a number of these units, particularly as the conflict progressed, were below full strength. At the outset, these Overseas Battalions all had presumptions of seeing active service in a theatre of war.*

*However, as it transpired, only some fifty of these formations were ever to be sent across the English Channel to the Western Front. By far the majority remained in the United Kingdom to be used as re-enforcement pools and they were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by units that had by then been specifically designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.*

*\*\*The next wave of Canadian units was destined to serve in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, it to be formed at the Shorncliffe complex on the Kentish coast in the vicinity of the town and harbour of Folkestone. Thus the Canadian training and reserve force was transferred from Tidworth to this newly-created military establishment during or about the third week of April of the spring of 1915, to be formed into the Canadian Training Division.*



(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*)

It was on May 2 that Sergeant Meades was *stuck off strength* by the 17<sup>th</sup> Canadian (Reserve) Battalion during that night of May 2-3, and traversed the English Channel to join his new unit on *active service*. It is likely, but not confirmed, that he travelled from *Shorncliffe* via nearby Folkestone and then Boulogne on the coast opposite before being transported north-eastward to join the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the *Kingdom of Belgium* where he reported to *duty* on that second day, March 3\*.

**\*A second source has him being taken on strength by the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion during its posting to the Ploegsteert Sector as late as August 1, some three months later, but there are no records to show where he may have been serving during that interim.**



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

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



**By this last-mentioned date the unit had retired from the fighting of the *Second Battle of Ypres* (see further below) and was serving in Divisional Reserve in the area of the Belgian village of Vlamertingue.**

\* \* \* \* \*

**The 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*) was an element of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the (1<sup>st</sup>) Canadian Division\*. In mid-October of 1914 the Division had been the first force to arrive in the United Kingdom from Canada and then had been the first Canadian formation to set foot on French soil, which it had done in February of 1915.**

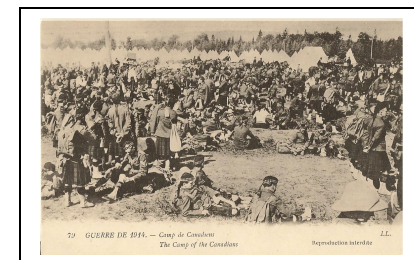
**\*Until the time that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was formed – and at times afterwards as well - it was referred to as simply the Canadian Division.**



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

**(Right below: 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)**

**For the first weeks of its service on the Continent, the Canadian Division was to be posted to the *Fleurbaix* Sector in northern France and just south of the border town of Armentières. There, for the first two months of the Canadian presence on the *Western Front*, the situation had been relatively quiet and the personnel of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion had begun to become familiar with the rigours, the routines – and some of the perils - of life in the trenches\*.**



**(continued)**

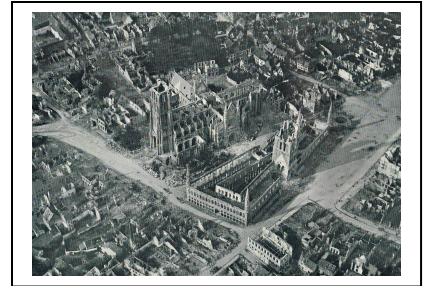
***\*During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was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



**In mid-April the Division, having moved north into the Kingdom of Belgium, had eventually taken up positions in the Ypres Salient, an area which would prove to be one of the most lethal theatres of the Great War. And whereas the first weeks of the Canadian presence on the Continent had been relatively quiet, the dam was about to burst - although it was to be gas rather than water which, for a few days, would threaten to sweep all before it.**

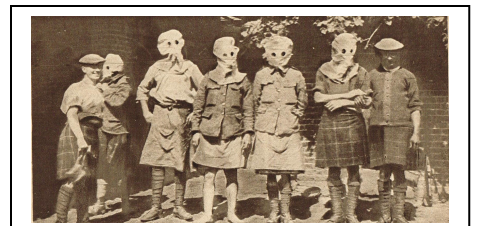


**The date was April 22, 1915.**

***(Right above: An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2<sup>nd</sup> Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration)***

**The Second Battle of Ypres was to see the first use of chlorine gas by the Germans during the Great War. Later to become an everyday event, and with the introduction of protective measures such as advanced gas-masks, the gas would prove no more dangerous than the rest of the military arsenals of the warring nations. But on this first occasion, to inexperienced troops without the means to counter it, the yellow-green cloud of chlorine had proved overwhelming.**

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



**(continued)**

The cloud had first been noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon of April 22. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left at first had wavered, then had broken, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered, particularly that of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion which had been obliged to call forward Number 3 Company, at the time in reserve. Then a retreat by the unit, not always very cohesive, had become necessary.



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

By the 23<sup>rd</sup> the situation had become relatively stable – at least temporarily - and the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan were to hold until the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> when a further retirement was to become necessary. At times there were to be breaches in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans had been unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or else they did not have the means to exploit the situation. And then the Canadians had closed the gaps.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been relieved on April 25 and had withdrawn to some former French reserve trenches. Called forward again on the 28<sup>th</sup>, it had remained in the area of the front until May 1 when it was to be withdrawn into divisional reserve in the area of Vlamertinghe, to the west of Ypres. On May 3 the unit had been ordered to retire into northern France, to the area of Bailleul, there to re-enforce and to re-organize.



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

The information to be gleaned from the Battalion War Diary during the period of 2<sup>nd</sup> Ypres is at times understandably sparse. The number of casualties incurred was apparently not noted by the recording officer – neither does it seem to appear in the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary – but it was to be on April 28 that a re-enforcement draft of two-hundred seventy-six *other ranks* had reported *to duty* to the unit.

It was five days later again, after the arrival of this large detachment to bolster the Battalion's depleted numbers, on May 3, that Sergeant Meades was recorded by its Commanding Officer as being with his unit.

\* \* \* \* \*

On May 13 the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion began to move from the area of Bailleul in northern France - where since May 5 it had spent several days reorganizing and refitting - down the front to the south and into the areas of Festubert and Givenchy. The French were about to undertake a major offensive just further south again and had asked for British support.

(continued)

There at Festubert a series of attacks and counter-attacks would take place in which the British High Command were to manage to gain some three kilometres of ground but also would contrive to destroy, by using the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what was left by then of the British pre-War professional Army. The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but – not fielding the same numbers of troops – was not to participate to the same extent. It nevertheless would be dealt with harshly.

The role of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to relieve the 16<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalion after its attack planned for May 20 on a German-held position and was, moreover, to consolidate and to defend that same position. Despite heavy losses the 16<sup>th</sup> captured its objective, positions which then Sergeant Meades' Battalion occupied. On the following day, May 21, the men were to fight and repel a strong German counter-attack before then being relieved on the next day again.

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

The French effort – having used the same primitive tactics - was likewise to be a failure, but it was to be on an even larger scale: it would cost them just over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded and missing*.



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

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

On May 22 the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion marched away from Festubert to billets in or near to the community of Essars. The reprieve was to last for two weeks, until June 5, when the unit was ordered further to the south, to Givenchy-les-la-Bassée\*, a small village not far distant south of Festubert.

Ordered into the forward trenches on two occasions during that month to support British efforts – and incurring many of its casualties, although fewer, due to having repeated the same sort of mistakes as at Festubert – by June 24 the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion then retired from the area. At about the same time, over a number of days, so did the remainder of the entire Canadian Division.

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

(continued)

As a part of that withdrawal from Givenchy, the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to march to successive billets in Essars, in La Becque and then in Steenwerck, all three of these communities in the vicinity of Bailleul. From there it was to move eastwards and into Belgium, to the *Ploegsteert Sector*, just across the frontier.



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

Having reached the area of the town of Ploegsteert on July 5, there the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion remained – as indeed did the entire Canadian Division. In the next months it was to come to be well-acquainted with the Franco-Belgian area between Armentières in the east – any further east would have been in German-occupied territory – Bailleul in the west, and Messines in the north; given the route marches enumerated in the War Diary and the itineraries used, it would have been surprising had it been otherwise.

It was to be another eleven months before the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion would be involved in any further major altercation. Of course, local confrontations – brought about by raids and patrols - were to be fought from time to time, and artillery duels and the ever-increasing menace of snipers would ensure a constant flow of casualties.

In September of 1915 it was the turn of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division to land on the Continent and to also be posted to the *Kingdom of Belgium*. It was ordered to be stationed in the sector adjacent and to the north of the one held by the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the other units of the now-designated 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division.

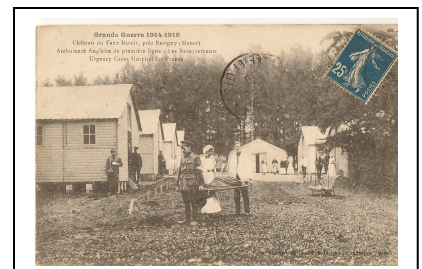
This area was several kilometres to the south of the city of Ypres and it was there, in the *St. Eloi Sector*, after some seven months of life in and about the trenches, that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was to fight its first major action of the *Great War*\*.

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, the first weeks of April were not to be as tranquil as those which were being experienced during the same period by the battalions of Sergeant Meades' 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the meantime, during the months preceding, life had not been un-eventful for Sergeant Meades of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*). The Battalion authorities had seen fit to grant him a nine-day period of leave, to begin on December 23 and to end when he had reported back to his unit on January 2 of the New Year, 1916.

Where he was to spend that Christmas and New Year period of 1915-1916 is not documented among his files. It may well have been Paris but this is only speculation. But wherever it was, this was likely the time and place when and where he had received an unwelcome Christmas present.



(continued)

*(Preceding page: a British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some, and likely at a later period of the War – from a vintage post-card)*

Some six weeks after his return from leave, on February 16 Sergeant Meades had been admitted into the 8<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station, established at the time at Bailleul. From there, two days later, he had been transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance, also at Bailleul, to be placed on board the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ambulance Train a day later again, on February 19, for an overnight journey to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Hospital by then established at the coastal town of Étaples.

From there he was to be immediately forwarded on the same day to Rouen and to the 9<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital where he had been admitted on the next day. By then he had been diagnosed as suffering with a venereal complaint.

On April 16, after almost two months of medical care, Sergeant Meades had been released to the Number 12 Camp at Harflour, not far distant from LeHavre or from the Canadian Base Depot to where he had subsequently been ordered on April 17. Despatched from the Base Depot to his unit on April 26, he is recorded as having re-joined the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion on April 28.

The incident has an epilogue: *The Canadian Army, at this time following the British example, did not take kindly to its personnel contracting a venereal disease – for both moral and pragmatic reasons. It thus obliged the delinquent personnel to contribute towards the cost of the treatment undergone in hospital.*

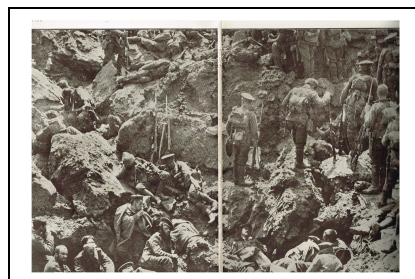
*Quite often, however, as in other areas, officers and other ranks were treated differently, with the diagnosis of an officer being recorded simply as NYD (Not Yet Determined), an arrangement which avoided any monetary penalty or social stigma.*

Sergeant Meades' pay records contain the following entry: *30/4/16 Forfeits 50 cents per diem whilst in Hospl. From 21/2/16 to 16/4/16 – 55 days.*

\* \* \* \* \*

By the time of Sergeant Meades' return to duty on April 28, the afore-mentioned operation involving the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division\* was a thing of the past. It had not been a happy experience, but in the Great War, not many things were.

*\*The Action at the St. Eloi Craters officially took place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it was here that the British had excavated a number of galleries under the German lines, there to place explosives which they detonated on that March 27. This was followed immediately by an infantry assault.*



*(Right below: A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps at St-Éloi – from Illustration)*

(continued)

***After a brief initial success the attack had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than had had the British, and by the 17<sup>th</sup> of the month, when the operation had been called off, both sides were back where they had been some three weeks previously – and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.***

***However, as previously noted, this confrontation had been a 2<sup>nd</sup> Division affair and the personnel of Sergeant Meades' 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the German artillery.***

**In late March and in early April of 1916 the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division had been transferred from the *Ploegsteert Sector* to that area of *the Salient* comprising the southern outskirts of Ypres. It had still been adjacent to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, but was now to its left-hand and northern flank. And the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division – having officially come into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916 – had recently taken over responsibility for a south-eastern sector of *the Ypres Salient*.**

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



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

**(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*)**



**The British Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, reacted by organizing a counter-attack on the following day, an assault intended to, at a minimum, recapture the lost ground. Badly organized, the operation was to be a horrendous experience: many of the intended attacks were never to be delivered – those that did went in piecemeal and the assaulting troops were thereupon cut to pieces - the enemy remained where he was and the Canadians were left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.**



**(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*)**

**(continued)**

On the first day, the events of that June 2 were to interrupt what had already been a busy day for the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion: route marches, bayonet exercises, gas-helmet drill and Company training had been followed by Battalion sports in the afternoon.

Then, at seven-thirty on that evening, after reports of a German break-through in the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division sector, orders were issued... *for the Battalion to 'stand to' and be ready to move at a moment notice... Soon after this the Battalion was ordered to proceed to the support of the Canadian 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion and made a forced march... to Zillebeke Etang...* (Excerpt from 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary)

The 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to be involved in the disastrous counter-offensives made by Canadian troops on June 3 and was, in fact, engaged in only defensive activities. Even so, the casualty count for the days of June 2 and 3 was to number forty-four.

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



On June 4 there was to be no concerted action by the Canadians; the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion spent much of its time consolidating positions and sending out reconnaissance parties, all the time receiving the attention of the German artillery. Casualties for June 4 amounted to a total of forty-eight.

The War Diarist's entry for the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the month records no infantry action undertaken by the Battalion. There were to be reported, nonetheless, thirty *killed, wounded or missing in action*.

On June 6 the War Diarist once again documents little activity in the area of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Nor does he report – but, then, why should he? – the detonation, by the Germans, of mines under the Canadian positions at *Hooge village*.



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

At *Hooge* the Germans were then to gain some territory before their advance was contained. In its positions elsewhere, the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered half-a-dozen casualties on that day.

Late on the night of the 7<sup>th</sup>, following an uneventful day – by the standards of the time – and with no casualties due to enemy activity, the Battalion withdrew to the south-west of Ypres to arrive in its billets at four o'clock in the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup>.

There Sergeant Meades' unit remained until the evening of June 11 when it then began a march which was to bring the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion back to the area of *Mount Sorrel*. There it was to serve in the now-imminent – and ultimately final - assault.

By midnight of that June 12-13, some twenty-eight hours after beginning that return march, the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion was in its allotted positions in the front and support trenches.

(Excerpts from the Battalion War Diary entry for June 12-13, 1916) *At 1. 30 a.m. immediately our artillery lifted to the old British trenches, our men, the first and second line under Major K.M. Perry, the third and fourth under Major G.E. McCuaig sprang up on the parapet and set off at a steady pace, over very rough ground and through a heavy barrage and succeeded in gaining the first objective...*

*As soon as the bombardment of the old British lines lifted at 1.50 a.m. the party again advanced at this stage the going was very heavy...*

*The attack proceeded briskly, bombing the enemy down the trenches, and directly the final objective was reached, Major McCuaig sent up a red flare...*

The affair was to be over by mid-morning, the remainder of the day to be spent in consolidation, in taking care of the wounded of both sides and of prisoners... and in the burial of the dead. The 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion retired later that night.

The engagements of the previous eleven days – from June 2 until the 13<sup>th</sup> – thus culminated with this second and more successful - having been better prepared and also supported by a competent artillery programme - counter-attack by the Canadians on June 13. It was to be the final offensive of the confrontation, a military *quid pro quo* which was to leave both sides in approximately the same positions which they had been occupying on June 2 when the affair had started.



(Right above: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 – and then of 1917 - in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooge, Sanctuary Wood, Railway Dugouts and of Maple Copse: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government. – photograph from 2014*)

The 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion's casualty count for June 12-13 of 1916 was a heavy one as reported by the unit's War Diarist: *fifty-eight killed in action or died of wounds, one-hundred fifty-two wounded in action and fifteen missing in action\**.

*\*In the Diary he is listed as Private Meades.*

**Casualty report: *Previously reported missing now killed in action – Attack South East of Zillebeke***

The names of Henry Michael Meades' parents have been as yet impossible to find as have been the names of any siblings.

The husband of Helen Agnes Meades (*née Burnley*) – to whom as of October 1, 1914, he had allotted a monthly thirty-five dollars from his pay (reduced to twenty-seven dollars on May 1, 1916)\* - at the time of his enlistment resident of Gray's Lane, Springhill, Nova Scotia\*\*, he was also father to Henry-Patrick, to Elsie-Cecelia, to Christina and to Clara-Helena, all born in the community of Springhill.

**\*A sergeant's pay was one-dollar thirty-five cents per day, plus a fifteen cents per diem field allowance.**

**\*\*She later moved to 6A Reading Street, Montreal, and then to 35, Troy Avenue, Verdun, also in Montreal.**

**Sergeant Meades was at first reported as *missing in action* on June 13 of 1916, during the fighting at *Mount Sorrel*. Later, on that same day, that report was amended so as to read *killed in action*.**

**Henry Michael Meades had enlisted at the *apparent* age of thirty years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, July 8, 1884 (from attestation papers).**

**Sergeant Henry (*Harry*) Michael Meades 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) (right). .**



**The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to [criceadam@yahoo.ca](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 25, 2023.**

