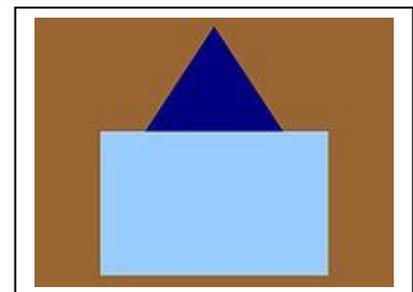


Private Frederick Charles Rumsey (also found as *Ramsey*) (Number 249680) of the 58th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on *Vimy Ridge*.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 58th Battalion is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of an *electrician*, Frederick Charles Rumsey may have left the Dominion of Newfoundland as early as 1907 on board the SS *Bonavista* en route to Montréal. Whether the Rumsey family all travelled together is not clear: perhaps not, although the parents and four brothers are documented as living in Montréal by the time of the 1911 Census, while a sister was likely living in the United States by then*.

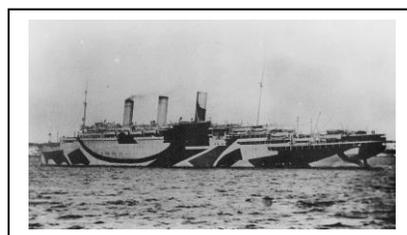
**There also appears to be a fair amount of movement across the Canada – United States border among family members during the twelve years following the 1911 Census, including Frederick Charles before his enlistment.*

By the time of his enlistment in 1916, Frederick Charles Rumsey was residing in the city of Toronto, at 344, Jarvis Street. It was on May 29 that not only did he enlist, but he also underwent a medical examination and his attestation on that same date at a (the?) Toronto Recruiting Depot.

Two days later, on April 1, Private Rumsey was *taken on strength* by the 208th Overseas Battalion (*Canadian Irish*) and the unit's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Herbert Lennox, then brought to a conclusion the formalities of his enlistment when he declared, on paper, that...*Frederick Charles Rumsey, having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this attestation.*

What happened after enlistment is difficult to ascertain. There was by that time a large military complex which had been established at Toronto's Exhibition Park so it may have been there that the 208th Battalion trained while awaiting further orders. But it was during this time that Private Rumsey familiarized himself with the Battalion authorities by being *Absent Without Leave* on three occasions. Perhaps it was not considered to be too serious an offence: he forfeited a total of five days' pay, but there appear to be no further consequences recorded.

It was not to be, however, until some fourteen months following*, on April 26 of 1917, that Private Rumsey's Battalion was to board a train in Toronto and travel as far as Truro, Nova Scotia, there to rest for the best part of two days before completing the journey to the east-coast port and city of Halifax on May 3. There the 208th Overseas Battalion took ship onto His Majesty's Transport *Justicia* on the same May 3, 1917.



**It may have been that the 208th Battalion was having problems finding enough recruits. Some units for this reason were eventually disbanded even before having left Canada. Others were to go overseas in the sure and certain knowledge that they were to serve only as reserve pools once having arrived in England. In fact, of the two-hundred fifty-seven overseas battalions authorized, only some fifty were ever to see active service on the Continent during the Great War.*

(Right above: *The photograph of HMT Justicia in her war-time dazzle camouflage, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries. She was later torpedoed and sunk in July of 1918.*)

Private Rumsey's was not the only unit to embark at that time: also on board taking passage to the United Kingdom on *Justicia* were the 182nd, 190th, 223rd and 245th Battalions of Canadian Infantry and detachments of the 141st, 216th and 230th Battalions; there was as well the 25th Draft of Canadian Engineers. Even though some of the battalions were surely under-strength, the vessel must have been carrying close to, if not over, her intended capacity of four-thousand troops.

Justicia sailed on the same May 3 and, after an eleven-day Atlantic crossing, docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool on May 14. From dockside the 208th was transported by train to Westenhanger, in the area of the Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* in the English county of Kent, from where, upon its arrival on May 14, the battalion personnel apparently marched overnight before undergoing several days of quarantine at *Otterpool*. It then was ordered transferred to another Canadian camp.

This next camp had been established at Witley, on the border of the counties of Surrey and Hampshire where the unit's twenty-seven officers and six-hundred fifty other ranks arrived on May 27*.

**Apparently, troops arriving from Canada were – in theory – to be submitted to a period of twenty-eight days quarantine in case of infectious disease. However, it seems that this regulation was somewhat flexible, and whether or not the 208th Battalion on this occasion made up those sixteen missing days once it had arrived at Witley, appears not to be documented.*

Two episodes of importance to the 208th Battalion occurred during the unit's posting to *Witley Camp*:

The formation – as its name suggests - had recruited many men of Irish extraction, particularly from the province of Ulster – a part of which today forms Northern Ireland. Thus in July 16 of 1917 the Battalion Colours were taken to Belfast, by five officers and forty *other ranks*, and deposited in St. Anne's Cathedral.



(Right above: *St. Anne's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Belfast.* – photograph from 2014(?))

Then, on November 9, three officers accompanied by fifty *other ranks* were despatched to London to represent the Canadian Expeditionary Force in England at the annual Lord Mayor's Show. The Battalion War Diary offers no further details; one may only surmise whether or not Private Rumsey was involved on either occasion.

The 208th Battalion – temporarily attached to the 13th Canadian Infantry Brigade of the 5th Canadian Division* - continued to train at *Witley Camp* until early in 1918. By that time it had been decided to disband the unit and to transfer its personnel as re-enforcements to other battalions. This came about on January 11 of 1918, with 'A' and 'B' Companies – one of which therefore included Private Rumsey – being ordered to the 8th Canadian (*Reserve*) Battalion which was stationed at that time at *Shorncliffe*. 'C' and 'D' Companies went elsewhere.

****Four Canadian Divisions eventually served on the Western Front. The 5th Division, stationed in the United Kingdom, was employed to re-enforce these formations.***

(Right below: 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)

Shorncliffe, as already seen, was a large Canadian military complex which had been established in Kent, on the Dover Straits in the vicinity of the town and harbour of Folkestone. Through Folkestone it was that the majority of the troops arriving at *Shorncliffe* eventually passed on their way to the Continent - and on to the *Western Front*. It was almost seven weeks following his arrival at *Shorncliffe* that Private Rumsey was to do likewise.



On February 27 of 1918, he was recorded as having been *struck off strength* from the 8th Canadian (*Reserve*) Battalion to be *taken on strength*, at least on paper, by the 58th Battalion and as also having been despatched overseas, on this occasion to France, a short distance across the English Channel.



It is almost certain that Private Rumsey passed through nearby Folkestone and its French counterpart on the coast opposite, Boulogne, from where he and his draft of one-hundred forty re-enforcements for the 58th Battalion then made his way to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Base Depot in the coastal town of Étapes by the end of the same day



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

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

****By this time each Canadian Division had a Base Depot to organize its own re-enforcements – thus the 3rd Base Depot was responsible for re-enforcements for the 3rd Canadian Division. The system was apparently not very satisfactory as, by the spring of 1918, there was once again just a single Canadian Infantry Base Depot.***

On March 1, 1918, Private Rumsey was one of a re-enforcement draft of one-hundred thirty-eight *other ranks* destined for the 58th Battalion that was despatched from the Base Depot to the nearby Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp. There the contingent was to await further orders to join the unit in the field.

(continued)

Those orders came on April 1 and according to his own personal records, Private Rumsey reported *to duty* with his new battalion on the following day. The unit at the time had been posted to the area of *Farbus Wood*, some seven kilometres from *Vimy Ridge*, and was hard at work improving *support* positions in the area.

* * * * *

The 3rd Canadian Division had officially come into being at mid-night of December 31 of 1915 and January 1 of the year 1916. Whereas the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions had been formed, organized and equipped before leaving England for *active service* on the Continent, the 3rd Canadian Division had been formed almost on an *ad hoc* basis, from infantry units that had already been serving in Belgium by that date and from others in reserve that were yet to arrive from the United Kingdom.

As for the artillery, the Division was to have none of its own guns until July of 1916. Until that time its support was to be supplied by Royal Artillery units that had, just prior to that, been attached to the Lahore Division of the Indian Army.

The 3rd Canadian Division's 9th Brigade of Canadian Infantry, with which the 58th Battalion was to serve, was not to arrive on the Continent until February 21-22 of 1916. In fact, not one of its four battalions – the 43rd, 52nd and 60th were the sister units of the 58th – sailed from England until on or about February 20.

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

The 58th Battalion had been stationed at the Canadian military complex in the vicinity of the Hampshire villages of Liphook and Bramshott, the latter lending its name to the camp, when it was ordered overseas for a second time. On February 21, after a train-ride the day before to the English south-coast port-city of Southampton, it had taken ship to Le Havre, on the estuary of the River Seine, where the Canadians by then had their continental Base Depot.



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

On that same day, February 22, the Battalion took another train, this one to transport the unit to the north of France. By the evening of the 23rd it had taken up billets in or near the community of St-Sylvestre Cappel, there to drill and undertake route marches for the next six days, until the end of the month – 1916 was a leap year.



On March 1 the 58th Battalion had traversed the Franco-Belgian frontier to report to the camp known as *Aldershot Huts*. There it was to undergo a nine-day initiation course run by the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigades and there it was to begin to appreciate life in – and out of - the trenches of the Western Front: the rigours, the routines...and the perils.

(Right: *Troops on the march, here crossing a pontoon bridge, in the north of France: This is surely from the early period of the Great War as there is not a single steel helmet in sight. – from a vintage post-card*)



**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 same year, 1916, but by that time equipped with steel helmets and also the less-evident British-made Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles – from Illustration*)

On March 10 the Battalion began to serve tours in the lines of the *Ploegsteert Sector*, this going north from the border area as far as Messines where the territory then became the responsibility of the 2nd Canadian Battalion. The 58th Battalion remained near Ploegsteert for almost three weeks, under the watchful eye of the by-now veteran troops of the 1st Canadian Division with whom they shared the *Sector*.

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

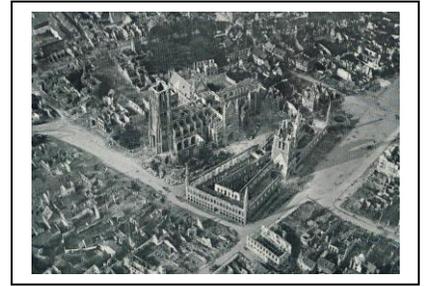
As it approached the remnants and rubble of the medieval city, the front line became a bulge which encircled the entire eastern area of Ypres and its outskirts. This bulge was the *Ypres Salient* – or just, *the Salient* – and had already earned a reputation as being one of the most lethal theatres of the *Western Front*. It was into the south-eastern sector of *the Salient* that at the end of the month of March the 3rd Canadian Division was to be thrust.



But first, for the first time since the Battalion had left the United Kingdom thirty-three days before, on March 24 the unit...*paraded for baths*.

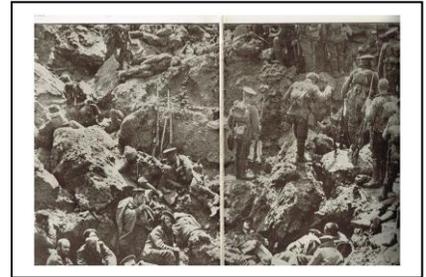
Even though the 58th Battalion War Diary for the next number of weeks was to report a relatively *quiet Salient*, even so, the newcomers must have noticed an increase in belligerent activities and, as a consequence, a longer casualty list than it had known in the *Ploegsteert Sector*.

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



At this same time, for the 2nd Canadian Division, the end of March and the first weeks of April were not to be as tranquil as those being experienced during the same period by the battalions of the 3rd Canadian Division.

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.



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

After a brief initial success the attack soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the exhausted British troops. They were to accomplish no more than had had the British, and by the 17th of the month, when the battle was 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 was a 2nd Division affair and the personnel of the 58th Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the distant noise of the German artillery – if at all.

In March and April of 1916 the Canadian 1st Division had also been transferred from the *Ploegsteert Sector* to the area of *the Salient*, to the southern outskirts of Ypres. It was still adjacent to the Canadian 2nd Division, but now to its left-hand and northern flank. Thus the 3rd Canadian Division, in its southeast sector, was now just to the left of the 1st Canadian Division: the Canadians had become a single entity. This re-positioning was to be an advantage some eight weeks later.

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 which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans delivered an offensive, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity which fortunately they never exploited.

(continued)

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

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 a dismal failure, many of the intended attacks never went in – those that did went in piecemeal and the assaulting troops were cut to pieces - the enemy remained where he was and the Canadians were left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.



(Right below: *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*)

For its own part, on June 2 the 58th Battalion had been in the Belgian town of Poperinghe, some twelve kilometres to the west of Ypres. In fact, it had been scheduled to have another bath – the time allotted, from one o'clock to six in the afternoon.



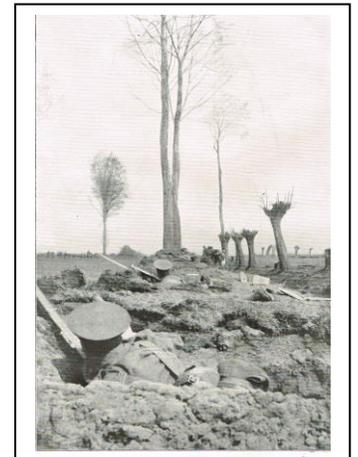
But the bath was not to be.

Excerpts from 58th Battalion War Diary entry for June 2, 1916: *Battalion in waiting, ordered to “stand to” at 10 a.m. ready to move on hour’s notice... 3 p.m. ordered to “Stand to” ready to move at once... 5 p.m. ordered to proceed to Camp “F”... 5.45 p.m. ordered to proceed to BELGIAN CHATEAU...and took up positions in trenches... 9.30 p.m. ordered to move to YPRES RAMPARTS...*



(Right above: *Some of the reconstructed ramparts and the moat which today once more protect the medieval city of Ypres: The ramparts are hollow and subterranean, as they were at the time of the Great War when the massive walls afforded protection for troops billeted inside, including those of the Newfoundland Regiment during eight weeks of 1916. – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *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 summer of 1916. – from Illustration*)



The movement was completed by two o'clock in the morning from which time carrying-parties worked to supply bombs (*grenades*) and small-arms ammunition to the troops in the front-line positions.

(Right below: *Maple Copse Cemetery, adjacent to Hill 60, in which lie many Canadians killed during the days of the confrontation at Mount Sorrel – photograph from 2014)*

At nine o'clock in the evening of June 3, the 58th Battalion was ordered forward to the area of the village of Zillebeke and there to man *support* positions. These were occupied, all the time under fire from the enemy artillery, until June 10 - during which time two companies had also held positions at *Maple Copse* in the forward area. The unit was then relieved.



The relief lasted some twenty-four hours before the Battalion was ordered back up to the front. The move was complete by half-past three on the morning of June 12 and the unit began to ready itself for what was to come: an attack on the German positions during the following night.

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



Excerpts from the 58th Battalion War Diary entry for June 13, 1916: *Ordered by Brigade to make a bombing attack...with the object of retaking old Front Line. Heavy artillery support in early evening. 1.30 a.m. the attack was made, and was a complete success. The enemy retaliated with heavy and light artillery...*



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

Thus ended the *Battle of Mount Sorrel*, each side – apart from a small German gain at *Hooze* – back where it had been prior to the confrontation. Only the cemeteries had changed much: they were that much larger. The enemy had continued with a heavy artillery concentration for the following days – a barrage which created a number of extra casualties – but there was to be no further infantry activity. On June 14th the 58th Battalion withdrew to the area of Zillebeke and Belgian Chateau.

For the two months which succeeded the confrontation at *Mount Sorrel*, things reverted to the everyday routines of trench warfare. There was no concerted infantry action by either side, such activity being once again limited to raids and patrols - although the opposing artillery was still active.

The 58th Battalion remained in the same south-eastern sector of the Salient until the fourth week of August when British units began to replace the Canadians. For the most part these troops had been involved in the fighting of the British summer offensive to the south, in France, and now the Canadians were to be called upon to replace *them*.

The 58th Battalion began to retire on August 23, spending several days in the Belgian town of Poperinghe – baths, route marches, football, no casualties – before moving west to the vicinity of the French town of Steenvoorde where billets had been arranged. There the unit remained in training for eleven days before, having transferred there by foot and by motorized transport, on September 7 it entrained at the station at Arcques.

The train departed from the station at precisely...6.29 p.m....so the 58th Battalion War Diarist has recorded. At four-thirty of the following morning, having spent ten hours to complete a journey of about one-hundred kilometres, the train deposited the unit at Auxile-Château. An excerpt from the Battalion War Diary entry for that September 8 continues: *Men a bit jaded from long night in train. Gave them hot tea at 8 a.m. and an hour's rest. Bucked up wonderfully and finished the march to billets...at 12 noon in good style. No marching casualties. Good billets, band concert in evening, everyone happy...*

Five days of marching later, on September 14, after a bath and a pay parade, the 58th Battalion proceeded some fifteen kilometres to the town of Albert, just behind the front. There the unit bivouacked, expectant of an issue of clean clothing on the morrow. The Battalion had arrived at *the Somme*.

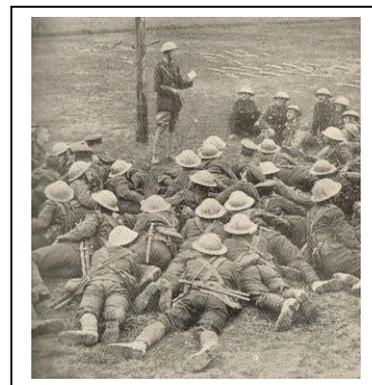
By mid-September of 1916, the 1st *Battle of the Somme* had by that time been ongoing for some two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand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

On that first day all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles who were serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at Beaumont-Hamel.



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

As the battle had progressed, troops from the Empire (*Commonwealth*) were brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians 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 Courcellette.



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

(continued)

Having arrived in Albert on September 14, and then at the nearby *Ulna Hill* encampment on September 15, the 58th Battalion was apprised that it had only twenty-four hours to wait until it was to be ordered forward to continue the ongoing general offensive.

However, the unit's advance was to be dependent on the success of the Canadian 7th Brigade capturing its objective. This was not to happen, the order for the 58th Battalion was thus rescinded and the unit was to spend that day digging new positions, and the *next* one *sitting* in them.

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

On the following day again, September, 17...*found out that we were not quite in our right position, re-distributed Battalion... Barrage fire very heavy. ...had a working-party of 400 digging a jumping off trench... Everyone fairly cheerful.*

Everyone, perhaps, except the casualties: on that day the War Diary reported – all ranks - thirteen *killed in action*, sixty-eight *wounded* and three *missing in action*.

It was to be September 20 before the Battalion was to leave the relative security of the trenches to attack the enemy positions. In the meantime the German guns had claimed a further forty-eight *killed, wounded* and *missing*.

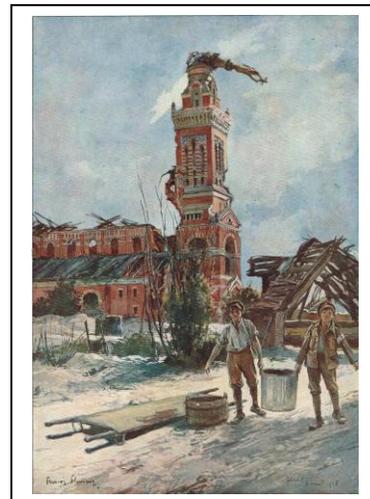
(Right: *The village of Courcellette, a main objective of the attack of September 15 - just over a century after the events of the 1st Battle of the Somme* – photograph from 2017)

The assault of September 20 was a small bombing raid rather than a part of a full-fledged offensive. Small parties of the 58th and 43rd Battalions were to storm a German trench from both ends and to thus establish communications.

The mission was not accomplished and casualties for the day – for the 58th Battalion alone – amounted to another fifty-eight *all ranks*. Two days later, having thus spent a week in the trenches, the unit retired on September 22 to *Brickfields Camp*, in close proximity to the town of Albert.

But even being relieved was not accomplished in safety at *the Somme*: during its withdrawal to *Brickfields* the 58th Battalion was to incur yet another seven *killed*, twenty-six *wounded* and five *missing*. The total count for its first tour in the trenches of *the Somme*, including sick, had been about three hundred.

From then until October 2 the Battalion was on the march in the rear area. The British High Command had planned a further *push* during this period and in order to free billets for the incoming troops whose lot it was to be to do the pushing, marches had been planned for those units by now in need of a reprieve, to places far removed from the forward area.



The day after its return to the area of Albert, on October 3, the 58th Battalion was once more ordered into the forward area, on this occasion to relieve the 18th Canadian Infantry Battalion in the vicinity of the Miraumont Road.

This was to be a six-day tour and, as it transpired, it was to be the *final* tour for the unit at *the Somme*. The end was not to come, however, before the Battalion had fought in the major engagement of October 8.

This attack was to be on the German defensive system known as the *Regina Trench* which had already proved its value to the enemy and which, up until this time, had resisted all efforts to capture it. It was to continue to do so for a further month.

One of the first obstacles – apart from artillery-fire, machine-gun fire and rifle-fire – was, as ever in this war, the wire: Excerpt from 58th Battalion War Diary entry for October 8, 1916: *...Wire was encountered by all three Coys...at from 10 to 20 yards in front of REGINA TRENCH. On the right the entanglements was barbed concertina wire about 4 feet in height and 4 feet in depth, lightly staked to the ground.*

On the centre the same kind of wire well staked with iron screw pickets and coils of loose wire placed on top, approximately 4 feet in height and five feet in length. On the left the entanglements appeared to have been more strongly built than on any other portions of the front. The entanglements had not been damaged by our artillery fire to any appreciable extent...



(Right above: *Barbed-wire entanglements, in late 1917, which formed part of the German defensive positions known as the Hindenburg Line – from Illustration*)

Early gains were later ceded to German counter-attacks and the Battalion lost heavily during the operation. It was not until two days later that the War Diarist had counted the losses – these for the entire tour from October 3 to 9 inclusive but, of course, the greatest number from October 8: *thirty killed in action, one-hundred forty-four wounded and shell-shocked, and one-hundred eleven missing in action.*



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

(Right: *Wounded troops being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the 1st Battle of the Somme – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)



(continued)

On that final day of the tour, October 9, the Battalion withdrew to the *Tara Hill Camp*; on the next it moved to *Brickfields*; two days later again, on October 12, at ten minutes past one o'clock in the afternoon, it began the long march away from *the Somme*. The battle still had some five weeks to run, but that would be the task for other units; some of the new battalions were to be Canadian and they were even then just still arriving.

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



The Battalion proceeded to make its way westwards as far as Montigny where it remained for several days and then northwards, passing to the west of the city of Arras via Villers-Brulin to arrive at its destination, Bruay, on October 25.

By the end of the month the unit had moved once more – into front-line trenches.

This entire area, the sectors from Arras in the south to Béthune in the north – and the multitude of mining communities, large and small, of the region - were now to become more and more a Canadian responsibility as the troops withdrew from *the Somme*.



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

For the personnel of the 58th Battalion the late autumn and then winter of 1916-1917 had been one of the every-day grind of life in and out of the trenches. There had been little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides. This latter activity was encouraged by the High Command who felt it to be a morale booster which also kept the troops in the right offensive frame of mind: the troops who were ordered to carry them out in general loathed these operations.

Casualties were, overall, light; even while posted in the forward areas the War Diarist was often able to record...*Casualties – nil*. During this entire period the medical services were much more occupied with cases of sickness and the need for dental work than they were with the victims of military activity.



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

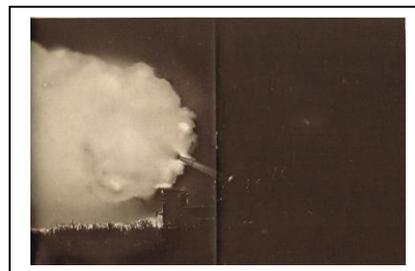
(continued)

Towards the end of the month of March the 58th Battalion had been withdrawn well to the rear, to the vicinity of Divion, there to undergo intensive training. The exercises continued when the unit moved into *Lamotte Camp* on the last day of the month and while it remained there until April 8*.

**It had not been training alone: the entire Canadian Corps at some time or another during this period had undergone these special preparatory exercises in a number of areas behind the lines.*

Among these exercises were to be some novel developments: use of captured enemy weapons; the familiarization of each unit and of each man with his role in the upcoming battle; the construction of plaster scale-models and 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 the final five days, the unit had been sent to become familiar with ground that had been re-arranged so as to resemble the terrain to be attacked. As those days passed, the troops would have become aware of the increase in artillery activity as the preparatory barrage grew in strength and fury. It must have by then been evident to all that the offensive for which they had all been preparing was now imminent.



(Right above: *A heavy British artillery piece spews its flame into the middle of the night. – from Illustration*)

On the evening of April 8 the seven-hundred fifty-six *all ranks* of the 58th Battalion moved up into their assembly trench. However, they apparently were not to pass via those well-documented tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety. Moving over-ground, the Battalion was in position and – since it was not to be involved in the initial attack - beginning to dig in by one o'clock in the morning of April 9.

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

On April 9 in that spring of 1917, the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *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 effort at Arras proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive of *Le Chemin des Dames* was to be a disaster.

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity – there was even a British brigade serving under Canadian command - stormed the slopes of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, burdened with all the paraphernalia of war, on the advance across No-Man's-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration*)

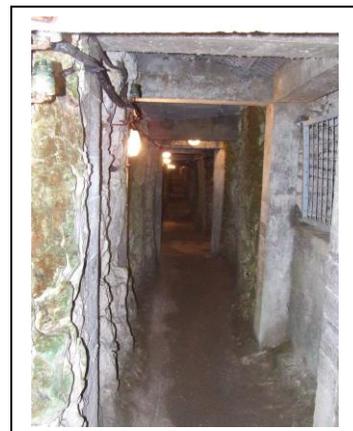


Excerpt from the 58th Battalion War Diary entry for April 9, 1917: *...Intense bombardment of enemy positions commenced at 5.30 A.M. Battalion position about 2200 yards from Front Line. 7th and 8th Brigades went over and captured all objectives at comparatively small cost. Enemy return fire was not heavy...some gas shells but with little effect...*

It was not until the following day, April 10, after it had been reported that the Canadian Corps had captured all its objectives that...*We expect to be sent in to relieve a Battalion of the 7th C.I. Bde. soon...*

The *soon* in question was to be April 11 and the Battalion was immediately ordered to attack German positions, an attack which was not successful. But the Germans were on the retreat and two days afterwards those same enemy trenches, now empty, were in Canadian hands – by default. The Canadians were now to follow the German retreat.

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



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

There had been, on the first days, April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted, and highly unlikely, *breakthrough* – but such a follow-up of the previous day's success proved to be logistically impossible.

Thus the Germans were gifted the time to close the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

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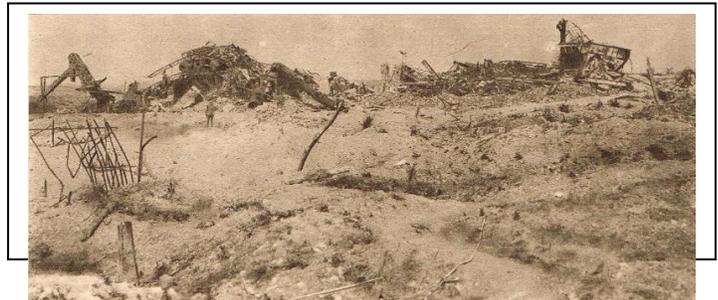
(Right: *German prisoners being escorted to the rear by Canadian troops during the attack on Vimy Ridge – from Illustration*)



Nor was the remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* to be fought in the manner of the first two days and, by the end of those five weeks, little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success.

The 58th Battalion was not to play a role at either Arleux or Fresnoy, and although it had been posted on several occasions to the forward area, a cursory glance at the Battalion War Diary reveals that for the unit, after those few post-*Vimy Ridge* days, the remainder of *the Battle of Arras* had been a relatively tranquil affair.

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



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

(Right above: *An example of the conditions under which the troops were ordered to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

One of the primary objectives was to be the so-named *Hill 70* in the outskirts of the mining-centre and city of Lens.

(Right: *Canadian troops advancing under fire across No-Man's Land in the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)



Those expecting *Hill 70* to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear. Yet it was high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than the city of Lens itself.

(Right: *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*)



(continued)

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

These defences held and the Canadian artillery, which had been employing newly-developed procedures, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* remained in Canadian hands.

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



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

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

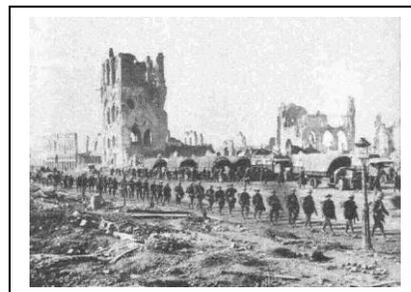


However, the British offensive further to the north was proceeding less well than intended and the Canadians were to be needed there. All offensive activities in the *Lens Sector*, apart from the ceaseless patrolling and the less-frequent raids, were suspended in early September.

Since the responsibility for the attack on *Hill 70* had been assigned to the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions, the 58th Battalion had had no part to play in its capture. Apart from a three-day period of minor operations at the end of June, the number of casualties incurred during all the summer months of 1917 had been few – very few. It was to continue that way for the unit until the middle of October.

It was during the final weeks of October that the Canadians began to become embroiled in the offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – at least ostensibly - one of the British Army's objectives.

(Right above: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)



(continued)

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. From the week of October 26 until November 3 it was to be the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair the reverse was true with troops of the 2nd Division finally entering the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.



(Right above: *An unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield during the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

(Right: *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 58th Battalion had been posted in the rear area to billets in the communities of Ourton and Dieval in the days preceding the orders to transfer northward into Belgium. From there on October 15 – at half-past three in the morning its personnel had begun to march to the railway station at Tinquès. It had arrived there at seven o'clock on that same morning and was on its way by train some ninety minutes later.

It was, however, to be a further twenty-two hours before the Battalion was in billets at St-Sylvestre Cappel on the Franco-Belgian frontier. Having then remained in that area for six days, it was once more to travel by train, leaving at four in the morning to travel to the vestiges of the railway station just outside the southern ramparts of Ypres. From there the unit marched across the city to the camp established in the north-eastern suburb of Wieltje.



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

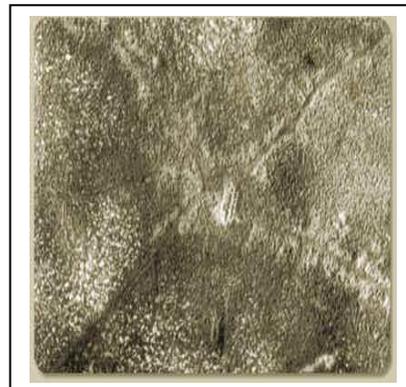
During the next few days after its arrival the unit gradually made its way forward until October 24 when it reported to the front lines. On October 25 it remained in situ, some of the day's casualties being caused by Canadian artillery firing *shorts*. On the evening and night of the 26th the Battalion moved forward once more, into its assembly and jumping-off positions, in readiness for the morning of the 27th.



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

(continued)

There may have been more than a little apprehension on the part of the 9th Brigade Command before the attack as evidenced by the following entry into Appendix Number 26 of the Brigade War Diary a propos the undertaking: *This operation had been undertaken already by other troops, but, owing to the strength of the position and the state of the ground, the attack had failed.*



The operation was no less than the taking of the village of Passchendaele in four stages, the first two to be carried out by the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions, the final two by the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions.

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

The attack of October 27 began with the barrage at *Zero Hour*, at twenty minutes to six. At first things were reported as proceeding well, but about ninety minutes into the attack progress was being held up, particularly by machine-gun fire – in fact, in some places the troops were to be forced back as far as their jumping-off positions.

Around about noon, however, positions which overlooked the 58th Battalion's objectives were captured and held by other units, thus allowing for a successful attack by the 58th Battalion which stormed the enemy positions – trenches and concrete pillboxes. These were obstacles whose capture had been deemed absolutely essential to the success of the entire offensive.

(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which today stands on Passchendaele Ridge in the outskirts of the re-constructed village – photograph from 2015*)



But it had been only after severe fighting by the three attacking battalions of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade – and heavy losses - that the breakthrough had been made. During the action and the remainder of this tour – October 24 to 28 inclusive - the 58th Battalion was to incur the following casualties: fifty-eight *killed in action* and four to *die of wounds*, two-hundred thirteen *wounded*, and twenty-seven *missing in action*.



(Right: *Just a few hundred to the south-west of a re-constructed Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the monument pictured above – this, according to 9th Brigade maps of the plan of attack, is the land up which the four Canadian Divisions advanced at the end of October and beginning of September of 1917. – photograph from 2010*)

(continued)

On October 28 the Battalion retired to the area of Wieltje; two days later it moved to the west by bus, via the communities of Vlamertinghe and Poperinghe, to area of the Belgian border village of Watou. The Battalion War Diary entry of October 31 reported: *Casualties – nil. Wind North East 5 miles per hour. No parades. Battalion resting.* Quite a contrast.

But *Passchendaele* had not quite finished with the 58th Battalion. After ten days of repose in the calm of Watou, on November 9, the unit was ordered to return eastwards to the forward area. On foot, by train and then on foot again, it returned to Wieltje on that day.

(Right: *In the stone of the Menin Gate at Ypres (today Ieper) there are carved the names of British and Empire (Commonwealth) troops who fell in the Ypres Salient during the Great War and who have no known last resting-place. There are almost fifty-five thousand remembered there; nevertheless, so great was the final number, that it was to be necessary to commemorate those who died after August 16 of 1917, just fewer than thirty-five thousand, on the Tyne Cot Memorial. – photograph from 2010)*



By this time the 3rd *Battle of Ypres* was floundering to its conclusion. Just days prior the Canadians had by-passed what once had been the village of *Passchendaele* and the front line had been established just to the north. It was to those positions that the 58th Battalion moved forward on November 11 to relieve the 10th Battalion of the 1st Canadian Division.

There for the subsequent three days it incurred casualties from enemy artillery and from a counter-attack on the 13th. On the morrow it once more – and for the final time – retired. Three days later the 58th Battalion was in northern France, in the area of *Auchy-au-Bois*, to the west of the larger centre of *Béthune* where the casualty list, apart from those reported as *sick*, was *nil*. It was to remain at *Auchy-au-Bois* for a month.

The month of December offered something a little different to all the Canadian formations which were serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army were open from December 4 until 17, and participation, in at least *some* units, was in the ninety per cent range*.

**Apparently, at the same time, the troops were given the opportunity to subscribe to Canada's Victory War Loan. Thus the soldier fighting the war was also encouraged to help pay for it as well.*

As they had been during the three previous winters, the months from December until March were to be quiet. When it had been in the forward area, many of those days and weeks had been spent by the 58th Battalion in the area of the city and mining-centre of *Lens* and of its suburbs – the *cités*, many of them named after saints: when posted to the rear, the Battalion had withdrawn to places such as *Raimbert* and *Neuville St-Vaast*, adjacent to *Vimy Ridge*.

And then it was the first day of spring, 1918.

(continued)

On March 21 the 58th Battalion was in the front lines of the *Méricourt Sector*. At or about this time the War Diarist reported increased – and perhaps unusual - activity in the enemy lines: shiny helmets in the enemy trenches, unconcealed movement in the German support and reserve lines, gas alarms sounded in the opposition camp, heavy mortar and artillery activity, and an enemy raid on March 28.

The situation continued thus during the days that followed and once more on April 2...*A large amount of movement by train and transport was observed in Enemy Reserves Area. Thus, likely as a result of all this activity...Companies are doing large amount of work strengthening the support positions.*



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

And it was on or about this date, April 2, 1918, that re-enforcements arrived from Étaples, Private Rumsey being one of that number.

* * * * *

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, they delivered a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', launched on March 21.

The main blow was to fall 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 posted there.

(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 on April 9, in Flanders, the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29th Division. It also was successful for a while, but petered out at the end of the month.*

(continued)

Towards the end of that same month, most of the military personnel of the four Canadian Divisions* began to move in a semi-circular itinerary - to the west of, then south of, and finally east of - to finish *in front of* the city of Amiens. There the Canadians and other Allied troops were to face the German forces in the positions where they had remained since the attacks of the previous March, April and May.

(Right: *The venerable 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(?)*)



**A very few units went in the opposite direction: they were to make themselves visible to give the impression that the Canadian Corps was once more moving into Belgium from where, logically, any future offensive would thus be launched.*

During the six days following its departure from Sus St-Ledger the 58th Battalion had followed that same circuitous route via such places as Dromesnil, Prouzel, Hébecourt, Bois de Boves (*Boves Wood*) before reaching Bois de Gentelles (*Gentelles Wood*) at five in the morning of August 6. Whereas the first part of the transfer had been made by motorized transport, the latter stages had all been made on foot, and by night*.

**While, at the outset, this huge transfer of troops had been under-taken by train and motor transport, the later stages had been accomplished on foot, in marches during the hours of darkness. The strategy had worked, for the attack of August 8 apparently took the Germans completely by surprise.*

(Right: *Boves West Communal Cemetery in which lie numerous Canadians and a single Newfoundlander, a Private Joseph Power – photograph from 2017*)



For the remainder of that August 6 and then August 7, the Battalion remained under cover and in bivouacs in *Gentelles Wood*. At nine-thirty on the evening of the 7th, Private Rumsey and his comrades-in-arms then moved forward to the assembly area in the front line...*preparatory to attack in the morning of the 8th.*

Excerpts from the 58th Battalion War Diary entry for August 8 of 1918: *...The Battalion was in their position by 2.10 A.M...the Companies were already (sic) for the attack at #.30 A.M. Plan of attack was as follows:- “B” Company was to assault, and to take German positions...and then push on and clear out enemy strong point at cross-roads... Patrols were then to move forward...along DEMUIN Road and protect Company attacking DEMUIN. “C” Company was to push through “D” Company, and attack and take Village of DEMUIN. “D” Company was then to pass through DEMUIN, and attack COURCELLES, and establish a line along high ground.*

(continued)

“A” Company was to remain in reserve until DEMUIN had fallen and then was to push South East from DEMUIN, assault high ground...and assist 116th Canadian Battalion by bringing fire to bear on ground East of HAMON WOOD...

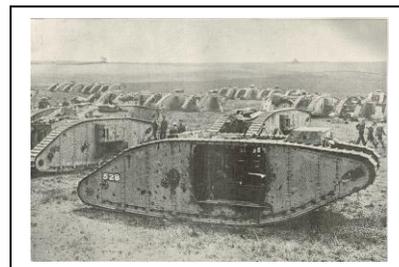
...Four tanks were allotted to precede the Battalion to work in conjunction with the infantry, paying special attention to cross-roads...and to clearing out of DEMUIN.

The opening barrage fired its first salvo at twenty minutes past four that morning. Initial progress had been inhibited by an early-morning mist and later by resolute German machine-gunners but...*This was eventually overcome, and with the exception of a little trouble when entering DEMUIN, and in cleaning up the village, the operation was concludes according to schedule. Four tanks...preceded the Battalion, and great credit to these is given by the men for their excellent work in clearing up enemy machine (-gun) nests and strong points. The whole operation was entirely successful...*

(Right below: In 1917 the British had formed the Tank Corps, a force which became ever stronger in 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again ‘somewhere in France’ – from Illustration)

At the end of the day, Private Rumsey’s 58th Battalion was ordered to retire to Hamon Wood...accomplished by 9.00 P.M.

For the Allied* forces it had been a good day: whereas in earlier battles progress – if any – had been measured in metres, on August 8 some units succeeded in advancing eleven kilometres.**



****In this battle, the term ‘Allied’ signifies British, Commonwealth and French forces.***

*****The first day of the Battle of Cambrai in November of 1915, and also of the German spring offensive, March 21, of 1918 were perhaps to be the only two exceptions to this rule since the autumn of 1914 when the two sides had created the trenches of the Western Front.***

The unit moved to Le Quesnel – by this time in the rear area – before, two days later, on August 11, being ordered up to the front once more, on this occasion to act as close support for the 116th Battalion.



(Right above: Hillside Cemetery, Le Quesnel, in which lie at least two Newfoundlanders who wore a Canadian uniform – photograph from 2015)

On August 15 Private Rumsey’s Battalion relieved the 116th Battalion in the front line by which time its casualty count was a further twelve killed and sixteen wounded. Only a single day – and ten more casualties - after having relieved the 116th, the unit was itself relieved, in this instance by the 10th Battalion of Canadian Infantry.



For the 58th Battalion, the *Battle of Amiens* had come to an end.

(Preceding page: *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*)

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



The Battalion was now to return to the *Arras Front* in much the same manner as it had arrived only those two weeks previously, by using many of the same itineraries and many of the first kilometres were undertaken on foot. Then, once again, in the area of Amiens, trains and motorized transport were to be brought into service.

And once more, much of this movement was made under cover of darkness as it was hoped to deceive the Germans about the movements of the Canadian Corps yet again on this second occasion.

At the same time, fresh French units now were relieving the Canadian forces as they retired from the battle. As for the British and other Commonwealth Divisions who had fought alongside the Canadians, they for the most part were to remain *in situ* as there was still a great deal of fighting to be done on this front.

Maison Blanche, Bouquemaison, Gouy-en-Ternois, Hermaville and Étrun hosted the 58th Battalion on successive days during its passage from one battlefield to the next. The final – albeit brief – stop at Étrun was, apart from billets, also to offer the added attractions of two parades: one for pay and the second for a bath.



(Right above: *Canadian re-enforcements, in the case troops of a Canadian-Scottish unit, arriving at the front led by a regimental pipe-band – from Le Miroir*)

It was likely as late as during the short interlude at Étrun on August 25 and 26 that the Battalion personnel was made aware of what lay in store – the orders were issued from Brigade at eleven-thirty, late on the evening of August 25. It could hardly have been much later: the attack was imminent.

The Allied Commander-in-Chief, Foch, had decided to strike often and continuously, keeping the pressure on an overstretched adversary. The French with British and American support had attacked at *the Marne*; the *Battle of Amiens* had been fought but was to continue under another official designation; and now the British and Canadians were to open a further front along the axis of the main road from Arras to Cambrai: the *Second Battle of Arras*.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *Some of the ground on which fighting was to take place at the end of August and beginning of September of 1918: The Arras to Cambrai road – looking in the direction of Cambrai – may be perceived just left of centre on the horizon. – photograph from 2015*)

Again the Canadian Corps was to be used in a major role; the Germans, having been deceived once about its whereabouts – and believing it still to be stationed somewhere on the *Amiens Front* – were about to find themselves mistaken for a second time.

At seven o'clock on the evening of September 26, the 58th Battalion was ordered forward into the trenches at *Orange Hill* from which it was to attack; by ten o'clock all was ready. The advance to the assembly positions was to begin in just three hours.

Excerpts from the 58th Battalion War Diary entry for August 27, 1918: *...The Battalion was to attack the BOIS DU SART, supported by artillery and tanks, four tanks being allotted to the Battalion. Zero Hour was fixed at 4.55 a.m...*

The task was a fairly difficult one as the men only left ORANGE HILL at about 2.15 a.m. had to march about 4 miles to their assembly position in the dark over absolutely country without guides and attack over territory never seen before. Heavy fighting took place in the wood, but by 6.50 a.m. "D" and "C" Company had pushed completely through, and a small patrol...had penetrated HATCHET WOOD. About 7.00 a.m. our patrols were driven...and the enemy again forced his way into the BOIS DU SART, but by 7.30 a.m. the whole of the wood was in our hands. "D" Company had suffered heavily, and there was still a great deal of machine-gun fire... The wood was heavily shelled with gas. One Company of the 49th Battalion...protected the left flank...took great pains in establishing a line and did the utmost to protect the 58th Battalion. This was the position at nightfall on the 27th.

The cost of the advance had not been light: Casualties (*all ranks*) – thirty-two *killed in action*, one-hundred ten *wounded* and seven *missing in action*.

Early on the following day the 58th Battalion had been relieved and had moved towards the rear. Not long afterwards it was recalled to act as *support* in an attack to be delivered by the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade.

(Right: *A German machine-gunner who also gave his all – from Illustration*)

Excerpts from the 58th Battalion War Diary entry for August 28, 1918: *...the 9th Cd. Inf. Bde. were to attack at 11.00 a.m...58th left support... The 52nd Bn. were to assault and take trenches south of BOIRY and then swing to the North and attack and take ARTILLERY HILL, the 58th Bn. giving necessary support. ...by 1.00 p.m. BOIRY had been cleared by us, and "D" and "B" attacked ARTILLERY HILL. At this point some trouble was experienced... Two pill boxes caused much trouble...*



(continued)

These two obstacles were later out-flanked by a Company of the 42nd Battalion upon request in mid-afternoon, the pill-boxes being subsequently silenced and their occupants captured.

The fighting for the day was, however, far from over. The Germans, having overcome the surprise of the initial assault, were by this time beginning to fight back, and artillery support added to the Battalion's collective machine-gun fire was necessary to disperse a threatened counter-attack. Re-enforcements arrived and by just after six o'clock the situation had been stabilized although the German guns were still active.

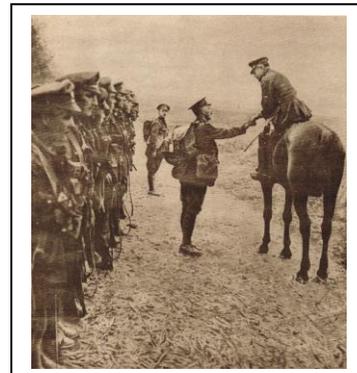
Casualties (*all ranks*) for that day had been sixteen *killed*, eighty-one *wounded* and *gassed*, and four reported as *missing in action*. But there were more to come on the morrow.

Relieved at four o'clock on the following morning, the entire 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade retired and Private Rumsey's unit made its way back to the not-distant small community of Feuchy to rest. The Germans decided that it be otherwise and a plane dropped a bomb just as "A" Company was arriving there: eight were *killed* and a further sixteen *wounded*. The Battalion later marched the twenty kilometres from there to huts at "Y" Camp in the area of Étrun, to the west of Arras.



(Right above: *Canadian troops in a captured village: wounded German prisoners on stretchers are awaiting their evacuation to the rear area. – from Le Miroir*)

Private Rumsey's next posting to the front line began only days later on September 2. On that day his Battalion marched forward to Tilloy-les-Mofflaines and bivouacked there on its way to Vis-en-Artois the following day. Bivouacking once more for a night, the unit then awaited the next evening before moving forward into support positions at Saudemont to relieve the 47th Battalion.



(Right: *After the successful operation of breaking the Hindenberg Line at Drocourt-Quéant, Canadian troops are here being inspected by the Commander-in-Chief of the British and Commonwealth Forces in Europe, Douglas Haig. – from Le Miroir*)

As had happened at Amiens, the British and the Canadians fighting in the 2nd Battle of Arras had advanced quickly: between Boiry where the 58th Battalion had fought in Late September, and Saudemont, where it was now to serve in support, there is a distance of about eight kilometres. Some formations were at this time approaching the *Canal du Nord*, even farther to the east.

As is evidenced by the number of casualties registered by the War Diarist during the almost eight days – from September 4 to 11 (inclusive) - served at Saudemont, there was little infantry action. The Germans were still in the process of retreating and, although they still maintained a presence on the west bank of the *Canal du Nord*, they were soon to be retiring in force to the east bank and to the defensive positions that the waterway – even though it was dry in places – offered them.

On September 11 the Battalion retired once more, at first to Wancourt for a week before moving in busses even further back, again to the huts at “Y” Camp, Etrun. Six more days were to pass, Private Rumsey’s unit resting, cleaning-up, undergoing musketry drills and inspections and taking yet another bath before moving off, on September 24, in full marching order. By two o’clock in the morning of September 27 it was leaving a train at Quéant before marching to its billets some two miles distant.



(Right above: *The Canadian Memorial to those who fought at the Drocourt-Quéant Line in early September of 1918: It stands to the side of the main Arras-Cambrai road in the vicinity of the village of Dury and of Mount Dury. – photograph from 2016*)

September 27 was the day on which the Canadian Corps attacked the *Canal du Nord* – from west to east - in the morning and forced a crossing. On that same day the Germans were cleared from a large area of the east bank, from this bridgehead the Canadians then advancing as far as the village of Bourslon and the wood adjacent to it.

(Right: *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*)



(Right below: *The same area of the Canal du Nord as it is almost a century after the Canadian operation to cross it – photograph from 2015*)

The *Canal* defences had already been breached by the time that the 58th Battalion was called upon to move forward at eleven o’clock that morning.



Later, at twenty minutes past one that afternoon...orders were received to move forward to positions east of the *Canal du Nord* and by 4.00 p.m. the move had been completed... The Battalion rested here for the night, orders having been received for the 3rd Canadian Division to attack the following morning... This attack was to continue for a long four days; and while the enemy was retreating, he was still fighting. His artillery and his machine-gunners in particular were making the price of success an expensive one.



(Right: *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 Bourslon Wood at the end of September, 1918 – photograph from 2016*)

(continued)

Excerpts from 58th Battalion War Diary for September 28, 29, 30 and for October 1, 1918: **September 28 – The Battalion moved off at 5.00 a.m. supporting the 52nd Canadian Battalion... Messages were received from the 43rd and 52nd Battalions...that they were held up before reaching their objective. In consequence of this, a message was received for the 58th Canadian Battalion to attack and take the MARCOING LINE at 7.00 p.m. The Barrage opened at 7.00 p.m. and the infantry attacked about five minutes later. After very severe fighting this was finally accomplished...**

September 29 – In the morning the attack was resumed with a view to clearing ST. OLIE, the angle formed between the BAPAUME-CAMBRAI and ARRAS-CAMBRAI Roads, and establishing posts south along the MARCOING LINE to the Canal*... By 1.00 p.m. contact had been established with the King's Liverpool Regiment... By 3.00 p.m. the 116th Canadian Battalion had captured ST. OLIE...

***This is no longer the Canal du Nord being recorded here, but the Canal St-Quentin which passes north-south through the western outskirts of Cambrai.**

(Right: Some of the logistical problems encountered by the advancing Canadians as they cross a canal in late September of 1918 – from Le Miroir)

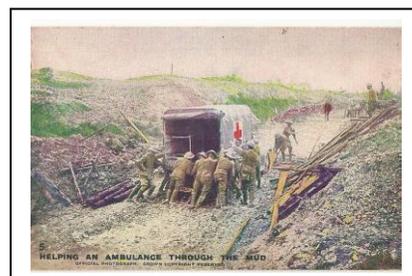


September 30 – The Battalion remained in support to the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, who had taken over the front line. Companies were reorganized as far as possible, but owing to losses in Officers, the Battalion was only able to form three Companies...The total strength of the Battalion at this time being 320. A reinforcement of 3 Officers and 29 men drawn from the Bands arrived on the night of the 30th, bringing the total strength up to approximately 350.

October 1 – Battalion moved up to the attack at 06.00 hours, objectives being to hold bridgeheads on CANAL ST. QUENTIN North of CAMBRAI and protect the right flank of the attack... The attack met with very strong resistance East of TILLOY...and was unable to proceed further in front of it to the objective. The Battalion was relieved at 21.00 hours...

Over the space of these four days the casualties had been heavy: forty-six killed in action, two-hundred forty-five wounded and eighty-nine missing in action.

(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)



Casualty report:- Previously reported Missing, now Killed in Action – He was killed whilst participating in an attack on the outskirts of CAMBRAI. No details relative to the actual manner of his death are available*.

***Reported as being missing in action on October 1, 1918, this was amended to killed in action on October 31 of the same year. Apparently on October 10, 1918, there was an unconfirmed report of his burial but it was still unconfirmed as of May 31, 1921.**

The son of Henry Rumsey, former trader, deceased during the period 1911 to 1914, and of Sarah Jane Rumsey (née *Goodyear*) – to whom as of March 23 of 1917 he had willed his everything, and to whom as of May 1, 1917, he also had allotted a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay – the family before 1910 of 40, Pleasant Street, St. John’s. Newfoundland – she later of 143, rue de la Gauchetière, Montréal, then of 2488, rue Christophe Colombe of the same city – he was also brother to Henry-Thistle, to William, to James, to Bertha and to Herbert-C. who died in 1892 at the age of two months.

Private Rumsey was reported as *missing in action* on October 1, 1918, before on October 31, 1918, being declared as having been *killed in action* on that same October 1, in fighting at Cambrai.

Frederick Charles Rumsey had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-five years and eight months: date of birth (from attestation papers) in St. John’s, Newfoundland, September 16, 1890; from George Street United Church, St. John’s, Parish Records, September 18, 1890.

Private Frederick Charles Rumsey was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 26, 2023.

