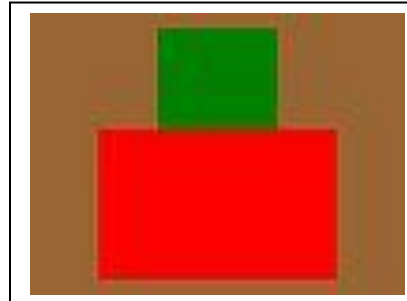




**Private John Seward, MM, Number 10821 of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment), Canadian Expeditionary Force, lies in Sancourt British Cemetery: Grave reference I.D.12..**

**(Right: The image of the shoulder-patch of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment) is from the Wikipedia web-site.)**

**(continued)**



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *labourer*, John Seward was just possibly the twenty-five year-old young man – J. Seaward - documented as having crossed from the Dominion of Newfoundland to North Sydney on October 31 of 1913. He had travelled on the SS *Bruce* from Port aux Basques to Cape Breton from where he was to take the train for the onward journey to Toronto. But if this were our John Seward, then a period of almost ten months was now to elapse before his story took up the thread again.

A first pay-record shows that it was on August 12 of 1914 that the 12<sup>th</sup> Regiment (*York Rangers*) began to compensate Private Seward for his services. The 12<sup>th</sup> Regiment was a Canadian Militia Unit and it was to be this unit which would forward him to a battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force\*. One may surmise that he enlisted somewhere in Greater Toronto, but there appears to be no record of exactly where this was.

*\*The Canadian Militia had been formed with its principal purpose being the defence of Canada and it had no legal mandate to operate outside the borders of the country. However, these units were permitted to recruit for the Overseas Battalions newly authorized after the Declaration of War in August of 1914; they actively did so and, in fact, the majority of the first volunteers for these Overseas Battalions were to be men of the Canadian Militia regiments.*

In September of that 1914 the 12<sup>th</sup> Regiment (*York Rangers*) despatched some of its personnel to *Camp Valcartier*, Quebec, to join the ranks of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Central Ontario Regiment*) which was in that month on the point of sailing to the United Kingdom for overseas service.

(Right: *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*)*



On the twenty-third day of that same month, Private Seward underwent a medical examination, a procedure which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. He thereupon was attested on that day and the formalities of his enlistment brought to a conclusion when the commanding officer of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Hodgette LaBatt, declared, on paper, that...*Jon (sic) Seward...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

One day later again the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion – divided into two train-loads – left *Camp Valcartier* to make the journey to the not-far-distant city of Quebec where, in the late afternoon, the unit boarded the Canadian Pacific Railway's vessel *Tyrolian*. Private Seward's 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion appears to have been the only military unit that the ship was to carry overseas.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The ship Lake Erie of the Beaver Line was sold to the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1903 to be re-named Tyrolian by the company in 1913. – the image of Lake Erie from an un-identified web-site*)

If *Tyrolian* followed the example – or perhaps it was she who set it – of other vessels, then, having weighed anchor in the *Port of Quebec*, she then was to *drop* it again only minutes later. Early in the morning of September 25, having embarked all her military personnel passengers, she then sailed *upstream* some two kilometres from Quebec City to spend the next few days afloat in Wolfe's Cove opposite the Quebec Citadel.

Unlike a number of other transports which were to remain in proximity of Quebec until September 30, *Tyrolian* sailed from there on September 26 and was then to drop anchor on the morrow further downstream, at the Gaspé. There the gathering convoy of thirty-one transports and its naval escort organized itself for the trans-ocean voyage before finally sailing from Canadian waters on October 3.

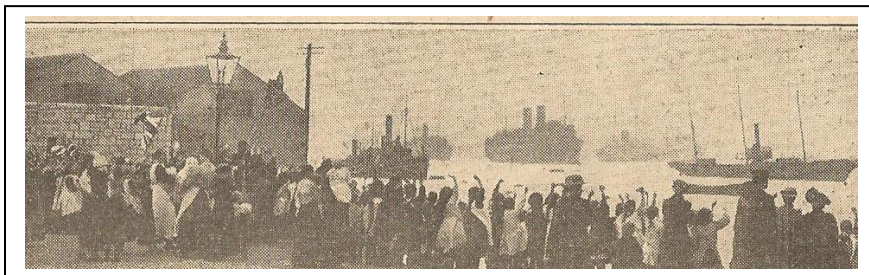
Whether Private Seward was aware of it or not is not documented but, on October 5, as the formation was passing along the south coast of Newfoundland, the small Bowring Brothers' steamer *Florizel*, carrying the *First Five-Hundred* of the Newfoundland Regiment overseas, sailed to meet it and to join it.

The convoy reached its destination, the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport, on October 14. However, such was the poor organization of the port at that time, that some troops were to remain on board their ship for several days before disembarking. In fact the convoy had been sailing for Southampton but a submarine scare had brought about a change in plans and Plymouth-Devonport, undergoing refitting and renovations, was used – *faute de mieux*.

Private Seward's Battalion was one of those to spend the longest amount of time in the harbour on board ship: those nine days must have seemed *more* than long as the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to set foot on land until October 23. Thereupon it boarded two trains in mid-evening to be transported to the large military encampment on Salisbury Plain.

The entry by the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diarist for that October 24, 1914, notes: *Arrived at Lavington...half Battalion at 1.00 A.M. and...half at 2.30 A.M.*

*Bustard Camp*, the *unit's* destination, was yet a further three to four hours' march distant. This was to be undertaken on foot, the *Camp* eventually to be reached at four and six o'clock in the morning.



(Right above: *A part of the convoy carrying the Canadian Expeditionary Force at anchor in Plymouth Hoe on October 14, 1914 – from The War Illustrated*)

(continued)

The Army Regulations of the day were such that troops were to undergo some fourteen weeks of training from the time of enlistment; at that point they were to be considered as being fit for *active service*. Thus the newly-arrived Canadians 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*\*.

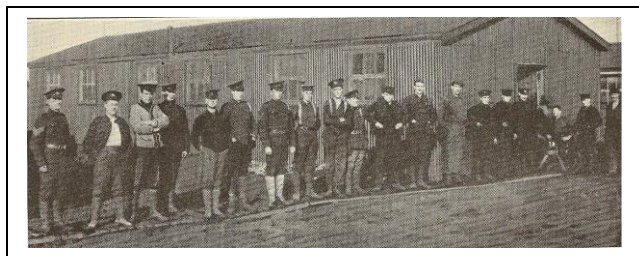
*\*In fact, a large proportion – perhaps a majority - of these first Canadian troops had been born in the United Kingdom.*

On February 4 the Canadian Division\* marched to a review area where they were inspected by His Majesty, King George V and the War Minister, Lord Kitchener\*\*. The next few days were spent in final preparation for departure before, on February 8, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion boarded a train at Amesbury to take it to the English west-coast port of Avonmouth.

*\*Designated as such until, logically, the advent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, when it became the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division.*

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

(Right: Canadian troops during the autumn of 1914 at Bulford Camp, Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire – from *The War Illustrated*)



There is now a void in Private Seward’s *active service* form. It would appear from the single line available – *On Nom. Roll 17/8/15* – that he was not to serve with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the *Western Front* until that date. By extension it would thus seem that he was to remain behind in England, perhaps to have been transferred to a reserve battalion for supplementary training.

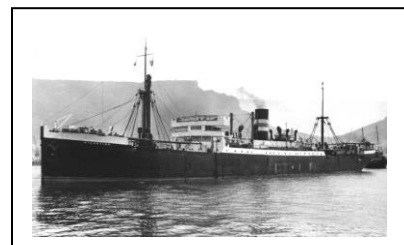
On or about that August 17, at a time when the fighting Companies of the Battalion were serving in the front-line trenches of *Ploegsteert Wood* and adjacent sectors, a draft of one-hundred ninety-eight *other ranks* arrived to bolster the numbers of the unit after the losses of that spring of 1915. It may have been that Private Seward was one of its number.

In the meantime, his Battalion had been busy.

\* \* \* \* \*

At Avonmouth, Port of Bristol, on the same February 8, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion – by then a component of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade – had boarded HM Transport *Atlantian*, the ship then having sailed late that evening at thirty minutes before midnight as part of the Canadian Division Armada.

(Right above: *The image of the Harrison Line vessel Atlantian, to be requisitioned as a troop transport, is from an unidentified web-site.*)



While for many ships and for their Canadian Division passengers – both animal and human - it was apparently to be a very rough and unpleasant voyage, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diarist appears to have made no comment about it whatsoever.

Then, some three days later, on February 11, the vessel had dropped anchor outside the French port of St-Nazaire on the coast of Brittany. Having remained on board all that night, it had then been at noon on the following day that the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had finally disembarked. By five o'clock of that evening, the unit was to be travelling northwards, again by train\*, to the area of the Franco-Belgian frontier.

*\*The Battalion's first fatality on active service occurred during the journey when a Private Norris fell off the train and was killed.*

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a component of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian Division. It was to be designated as such until the advent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division some five months later when it then, logically, had *officially* become the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – although traditionalist sources at times were to continue to refer to it as simply the *Canadian Division*.

The Division had then, only days after its arrival in France, been posted to the area of the Franco-Belgian frontier, and had entered into the trenches for the first time near the northern French town of Armentières. It was subsequently to serve in the *Fleurbaix Sector*, there to learn its trade with the 19<sup>th</sup> (British) Brigade, just to the south of the border in France where it was to remain for the next two months.

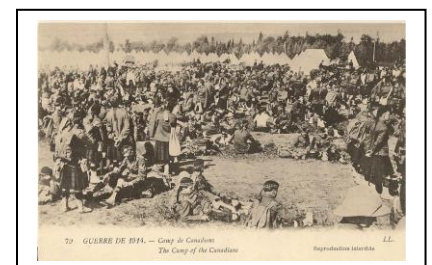


Those two months later, on April 18, at twenty-five minutes past ten in the morning, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion – in fact, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade – had begun to cross the border into the *Kingdom of Belgium*.

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

The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade had crossed the frontier to the west of the Belgian town of Poperinghe where it had then remained for two days before having advanced eastwards to Vlamertinghe for a *further* two days. It was at that moment that the Germans had decided to launch their attack in an effort to take possession of the nearby city of Ypres.

Having at that time relieved French formations, none of the units of the Canadian Division had been serving in the *Ypres Salient* for more than a few short days. During this meagre period of Canadian tenure *the Salient* had proved to be relatively quiet. Then the dam had broken - although it was gas rather than water which, for a few days, threatened to sweep everything before it.

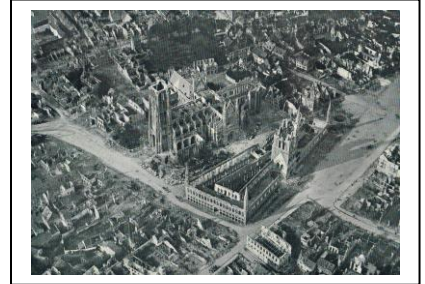


(continued)

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

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

**(Right: *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*. Gas was later to become an everyday event and, with the introduction of protective measures such as advanced masks, it was to prove no more dangerous than the rest of the arsenals of the warring nations. But on this first occasion, to inexperienced troops without the means to combat 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*)**



**That 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 on the Canadian left had wavered and then had broken, to leave the left flank of the Canadians uncovered. At that moment a retreat, not always very cohesive, had become necessary while, at the same time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade were to be ordered moved forward in order to support the efforts of the French and of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade.**

**(Right below: *Almost a century after the Great War, Vlamertinghe Military Cemetery, in the reconstructed village, within the bounds of which lie two soldiers of the Newfoundland Regiment – photograph from 2012(?)*)**

**At the time, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had still been at Vlamertinghe, a community to the west of Ypres and at least ten kilometres distant from the forward area. There was also the city of Ypres to be traversed. The unit began to march towards the fighting at thirty minutes past mid-night on April 23. It found it: by the evening of the same day the Battalion War Diarist was recording a total of just over five-hundred casualties.**



**(continued)**

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



By that second day, April 23, the situation of the Canadians had become relatively stable – at least temporarily - and the positions in the vicinity of St-Julien (Sint-Juliaan) were to hold firm until the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> when a further retirement had become necessary.

At times there had been breaches in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans had been unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or else they had not had the means of exploiting the situation. And then the Canadians had begun to close the gaps.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had continued to retreat in front of the German onslaught before digging-in in the area of Wieltje. There the unit was to remain until its relief on the evening of April 25. Having retired through the village of St-Jean (*Sint-Jaan*), the unit had then taken up positions in reserve trenches on the east bank of the *Yser Canal*.

It had remained in that position during all that night in the company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of Canadian Infantry. Early the following morning, April 26, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had crossed to take up further positions on the west bank of the waterway where it was now to remain for the next three days.

(Right: *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 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion returned to its billets at Vlamertinghe on April 29. There the unit was greeted by a re-enforcement draft of fifteen officers and five-hundred twenty-three other ranks – losses had been heavy.

The Battalion was now to remain for three days in the vicinity of Vlamertinghe after which time it was withdrawn further - in fact, back into France.

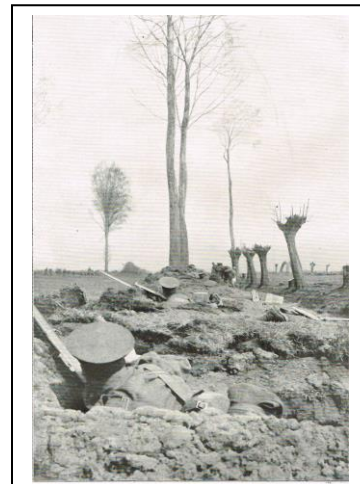
(Right: *The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion retired to its western bank – to the left – photograph from 2014*)



Thus at nine o'clock in the evening of May 2, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had begun to march the twenty-five or so kilometres to the northern French town of Bailleul on just the other side of the Franco-Belgian frontier. There it was to spend the next number of days regrouping and re-organizing.

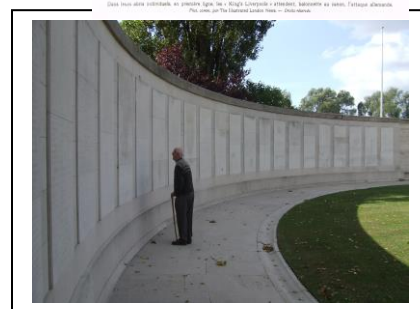
Only days later again, on or about May 16, the unit had been ordered to move down the line, further into France via St-Floris and Essars, towards the areas of Festubert and Givenchy. The French were about to undertake a major offensive just further south again and had asked for British support.

**(Right: Troops in hastily-dug trenches at Ypres. It was to be 1916 before any of the belligerent armies equipped its troops with steel helmets. – from Illustration)**



There at Festubert, a series of attacks and counter-attacks were to take place in which the British High Command would manage to gain three kilometres of ground but also was to contrive to destroy, by the use of the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what after Ypres had been left of the British pre-War professional Army. The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but – having a lesser number of troops – would not participate to the same extent. It nonetheless, proportionally, was to suffer heavily.

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 any better than the British, each contingent – a Division – having incurring over two-thousand casualties before the offensive had drawn to a close.

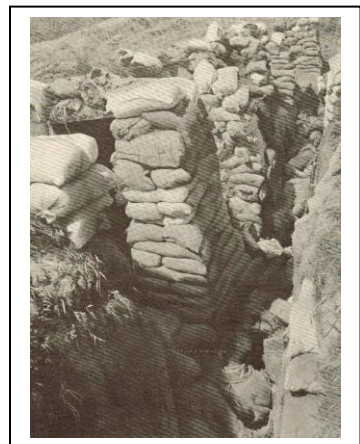


The French effort – using the same tactics - had likewise been a failure but on an even larger scale; it was to cost them just over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded and missing*.

*\*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 to those who fell, at the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle. – photograph from 2010(?))**

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had entered into the reserve trenches at Festubert on May 22. It had still been there three days later, on May 25, when the War Diarist was to enter the following into his journal: *In reserve trenches at Festubert, heavy shelling all day and night at frequent intervals. Have had all the time considerable trouble to keep up our communications as the shrapnel cuts our wires. The signalling section are doing excellent work...*



**(Right: German trenches nick-named the Labyrinth captured by the French at their pyrrhic victory at Notre-Dame de Lorrette – Over one-hundred thousand French troops died during this campaign in the Artois. – from Illustration)**



Soon afterwards, during the month of June, Canadian troops were to be fighting not-so-many kilometres away to the south, at Givenchy-les-la-Bassée, still in support of the ongoing French campaign. Because the actions had been fewer and had been less ambitious there were to be fewer casualties, but casualties there had been...and they were to be incurred for the same reasons as at Festubert.

By June 17, the Canadian Division had been beginning to retire from the area of Givenchy\*, the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion having been among the first to do so.

*\*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.*

As a part of that withdrawal from Givenchy, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to march on June 17 to billets in or near to the community of Oblinghem, two kilometres removed from the larger community of Béthune. From there on June 25, it had begun to move towards and into Belgium, to the *Ploegsteert Sector*, just across the frontier.

Having reached the area of Ploegsteert – it is also the name of a community - there the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion would remain – as would the entire Canadian Division. In the next months it would become 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.

(Right: *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*)



The Canadian Division\* was to remain in that border area of West Flanders until March and April of the following year when its services were to be required in the southern area of the *Ypres Salient*.

*\*With the arrival of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division on the Continent in September of 1915, the Canadian Division became designated as the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division.*

It was during this relatively benign period in the *Ploegsteert Sector* and at positions such as *Ploegsteert Wood* and the picturesquely-named *Piggeries* that the afore-mentioned large draft of almost two-hundred re-enforcements had reported to duty with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, possibly with Private Seward among its ranks.

\* \* \* \* \*

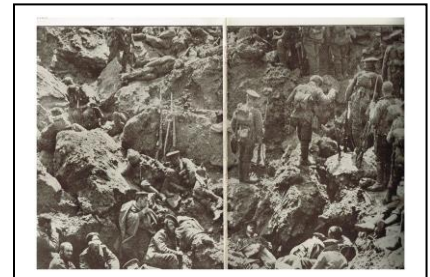
For the following number of months, up until June of 1916, on the fronts for which the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian and the lately-arrived 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division\* were responsible – including the normally lethal *Ypres Salient*, sectors into which both formations were ordered in April and March respectively of 1916 - neither side made any concerted attempt to dislodge the other from its muddy quarters in the trenches\*\*.

As with all the other units at the front, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion's time was divided between postings to the front-line trenches, to the support positions, and into reserve (see further below). Casualties were caused mostly by artillery fire<sup>\*\*\*</sup>, by snipers, and as a result of an infantry action such as the occasional raid on the enemy lines.

*\*The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916.*

It was during this quiet period, on November 29, that Private Seward was granted a seven-day furlough. The details, however, of where and how he decided to spend this time, do not appear among his personal papers.

*\*\*There was to be an altercation in late March and early April of 1916 in an area further south towards the Franco-Belgian frontier. However, the 'Action of the St-Éloi Craters' had at first involved British troops before Canadian battalions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division played their part – but, of course, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment) was a unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division and thus was to play no role whatsoever.*



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

*\*\*\*It is estimated that over sixty percent of the all the casualties on the Western Front during the Great War were due to artillery-fire.*

On June 2, 1916, the Germans attacked the only high ground in the Ypres Salient which remained under Canadian – and thus British - control. This was just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of Hooge, Railway Dugouts, Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60, Maple Copse and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action: *Mount Sorrel*.



*(Right above: Remnants of Canadian trenches – the iron-work reconstituted - 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 enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, overran the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans were unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences.

(continued)

But the hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, June 3, ordered by Sir Julian Byng, the British Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Corps, delivered piece-meal and poorly co-ordinated and supported, proved to be a horrendous and costly experience for the Canadians.

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



The German attack had primarily been on the part of the front held by the newly-arrived 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division but such was its ferocity that units from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions were called upon to help hold the line.

On the afternoon of June 2, the day of the German attack, the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion had been sent forward from the rear area to positions in the area of Dickebusch. It had moved forward again, not to the forward area but to the vicinity of *Chateau Segard* on June 3. There it was to remain until June 8, unperturbed by events until having been sporadically shelled on the two final days, June 7 and 8, before its relief. It then retired through the rubble of Dickebusch to *Camp 'C'* to rest and to prepare for things to come.

Those *things to come* commenced during the morning and afternoon of June 12 when the...units were at the disposal of their unit commanders for the purpose of organizing & equipping (sic) men for the attack.

*Bn. moved off commencing with C.Coy. at 6.15 remaining coys. and details followed at 15 minutes intervals. Bn. reported all settled in assembly trenches at 12.10 A.M. 13<sup>th</sup> June ready to support 13 & 16<sup>th</sup> Can. Bns. (Excerpts from 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for June 12, 1916)*

The opening bombardment for what was to prove to be the final attack of the confrontation at *Mount Sorrel* opened at fifteen minutes to one o'clock on the morning of June 13 with the first infantry advance coming forty minutes later. The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, however, was not in the opening wave of the assault but rather was in support of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade.

Despite the reported incessant enemy shelling – the mud for once apparently playing a positive role in absorbing much of the destructive force of many of the missiles – the Canadian attack was a success and the Germans were forced out of the positions which they had overrun eleven days previously during the first hours of their attack. Both sides were by now – apart from a small German gain in the area of *Hooge* – back where they had started on June 2.



It was *status quo* – except that the cemeteries were now a little larger.

(continued)

Some of the dead from that ultimate attack were of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion: twenty-three *killed in action* and one-hundred twenty-five *wounded ...practically* – so recounts the War Diarist – *all from shellfire.*

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

*\*It had apparently been much more of a hill before the first week of June of 1917 when a British mine blew off its summit on the opening day of the Battle of the Messines Ridge.*

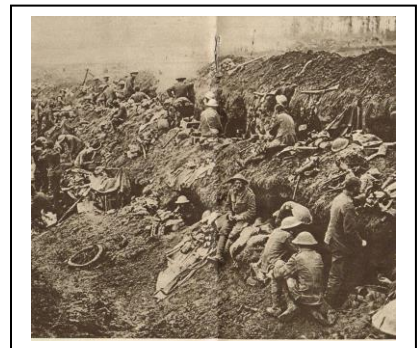
(Right: *Railway Dugouts Burial Ground (Transport Farm) today contains twenty-four hundred fifty-nine burials and commemorations.* – photograph from 2014)



June 14 was another day of heavy shelling, but the expected counter-attacks did not amount to much and were beaten off. Gradually, with each passing day, the Battalion War Diarist was able to begin to turn his attentions to such things as feet, church parades and baths.

The remainder of June, then July and August were all relatively quiet in *the Salient*, the Canadians being subjected only to what had by then become the routines, rigours – and perils - of trench warfare\*.

*\*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 (see below) in the autumn of 1916, only months later, by that time having been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles* – from *Illustration*)

But things were happening elsewhere on the *Western Front* and by the middle of August the Canadians of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion were in training in anticipation of a move southward into France, and to the area of *the Somme*. These exercises were to take place in northern France for some two weeks by which time the troops were considered to be prepared for what was optimistically being called *open warfare*.

By the end of the month the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Brigade had already arrived in the area of the battle-front and by August 31<sup>st</sup> its troops were relieving the 7th Australian Brigade and 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the front-line trenches facing Bapaume.

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



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

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

The *First Battle of the Somme* had by that September of 1916 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 space of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

On the first day of the offensive 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 serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

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



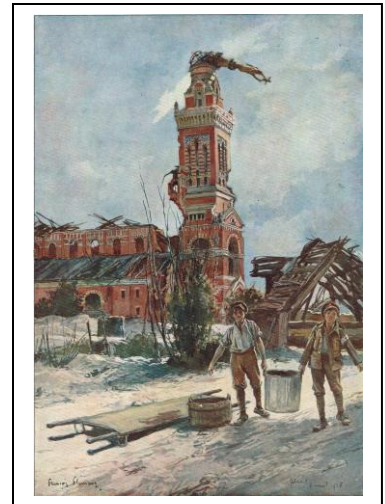
(Right above: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette. – photograph from 2015*)

For the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion the first taste of the forward lines at *the Somme* was to last for five days – from September 4 when it had moved up to relieve the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion, until September 9 when it in turn was relieved to withdraw to Albert, the large provincial town nearby and to *Brickfields Camp* in close proximity.

There had been no infantry action undertaken by Private Seward's unit on that first tour, but the enemy artillery facing it had been particularly horrendous.

As of September 11, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Central Ontario Regiment*) began to march. It was not to be involved in the upcoming offensive which was planned for four days hence, thus it was likely ordered on its way to free up billets for those incoming troops who were. Private Seward had thus marched for six days by the time his unit returned to Albert.

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



It remained there and at the nearby *Brickfields Camp* until only the following day, the 18<sup>th</sup>.

The offensive which had begun on September 15 had run its costly course by then and the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was thus ordered to move up to relieve other Canadian units in the trenches. It was at first warmly received by the German guns and then, on the morrow, September 19, by enemy infantry which attacked in force but which was repulsed. Two days later again, on September 21, the unit was withdrawn into Brigade Support.

On the day following, Private Seward was presented with a first Good Conduct Badge, an award given to those whose records exhibited no misdemeanours or offences for the two previous years\*.

*\*The Badge itself is a chevron akin to a lance corporal's stripe and is worn on the lower part of the left sleeve of the uniform with the chevron pointing upwards.*

A second prolonged route march was now in the offing for Private Seward and the other personnel of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Setting out on September 25, it followed much the itinerary of the previous trek of two weeks before – Warloy, Val de Maison, Halloy – where the unit was to now to spend five days undergoing instruction and training - Val de Maison, Contay, Albert and finally *Tara Valley Camp* where it bivouacked on October 5.

In its absence a further three offensives had gone ahead: the *Battle of Morval* of September 25 to 28 which did not involve any Canadian formations; the *Battle of Thiepval* of September 26 to 28 in which units of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions had fought; and now there was the still-ongoing *Battle of Le Transloy\**, the entire Canadian Corps, by now all four divisions, acting as the Reserve Army.



*\*During which the Newfoundland Regiment was to fight at Guedecourt on October 12.*

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

(continued)

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was still in its quarters at *Tara Valley Camp* on October 7 when its personnel was ordered to prepare for battle.

(Excerpts from the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for October 7, 1916) *The following issued to men:- (1) 170 Rounds (50 extra) S.A.A. (Small Arms Ammunition) to each man except Battalion Bombers (2) 4 Mills Grenades and 3 Sandbags tied to belt (3) 2 Days rations in addition to Iron-rations.*

*Each company carried:- (1) 1 Man per section, 12 bombs in sandbags (2) 3 Very Pistols and 48 Very lights (white) (3) 12 Very lights (Green) for C & D Companies (4) 12 Very lights (Red) for A & B Companies (5) 2 Sets of S.O.S. rockets (6) 9 Ground Flares (Red) for signalling to contact aeroplanes.*

*Battalion left position at 6.30 p.m. and relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion in the trenches. Relief complete 12 midnight.*

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



The Battalion was reported as having attacked the German trenches at ten minutes to five in the morning. ... *1<sup>st</sup> Objective gained, but battalion was driven back to assembly trenches by enemy counter attack at 1. 45 p.m.\*.* (Excerpt from War Diary entry for October 8, 1916)

*\*The War Diary Appendix a propos the operation cites a lack of ammunition and grenades as being a prime reason for the failure.*

After then having spent a heavily-shelled night in what had been the assembly trenches of the day before, on October 9 the Battalion was relieved and retired to Albert.

On the morrow, Private Seward and the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade began the long march away from the *First Battle of the Somme*.

From Albert the column moved westward, following a route which was to take the Brigade around to the west of the battered city of Arras and beyond. By the evening of October 25, Private Seward's Battalion had marched to – and was in the trenches in the vicinity of the villages of - Carency and Souchez, just to the south-west of the mining-centre and city of Lens.



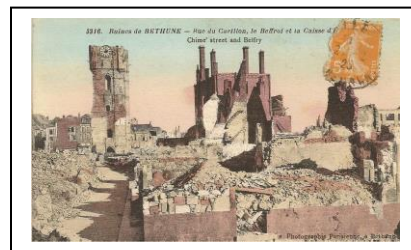
(Right above: *The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'Place) in Arras had already been steadily bombarded for two years by the end of the year 1916 – from Illustration*)



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The villages in the area surrounding Souchez already looked like this in 1915 when the British took over responsibility for the area from the French Army. – from Le Miroir*)

This area, comprising sectors from the town of Béthune in the north almost to Arras in the south was to become by Christmas of that year more and more the responsibility of the Canadian Corps. In the meantime, as the Canadian units withdrew after service at *the Somme*, it was towards this region that they marched, and in this region that they were to spend the upcoming winter of 1916-1917.



(Right above: *This image is of the historic northern town of Béthune by the end of the Great War, but by the winter of 1917 its destruction was already well under way. – from a vintage post-card*)

The months following the transfer of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion from *the Somme* were again to be of the everyday grind of life in and out of the trenches. There was to be little if any infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids – major and minor - of which the British High Command appears to have been becoming increasingly fond – and the participating infantry less so.

There was still a daily count of casualties, as ever caused mostly by the enemy's artillery-fire and by his snipers, but it was sickness, of all kinds, that kept the medical services busy: tonsillitis, influenza, bronchitis and pneumonia – and at times tuberculosis - conjunctivitis, scabies, trench-foot and frost-bite, venereal disease, debility, the list goes on...as well as the standard cuts and bumps, strains and bruises - and a perhaps surprising amount of dental work.

During this quiet time, all of the Canadian units were withdrawn in rotation to rest – but also to train – in the rear areas: parades; presentation of decorations; inspections; bayonet fighting; route marches; musketry; drill; instruction; physical training; familiarization with weapons both *ours* and *theirs*; visits from politicians, brass and per-times royalty; and on the lighter side, sports and the occasional concert – even a bath from time to time.



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

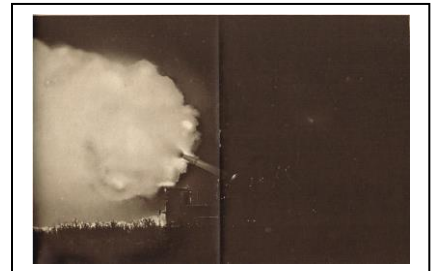
According to the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entries for the winter months, it would appear that Private Seward's unit was not to take part in any raid; usually the most perilous thing to be reported was the frequent gas alert. New gases, mustard and phosgene, were coming into use and the means of delivery was now by gas shells – the vagaries of the wind were no longer of much importance. Even so, there does not appear to have been any crisis on the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion front.



The month of March, apart from the last three days, was spent by the unit behind the lines either resting – of which there was not usually a great deal – or in training\*. Something, becoming obvious to all, was in the offing and the troops were busy digesting new ideas in soldiery: learning the topography of the ground to be attacked; the use of the enemy's weapons which, when captured, were to be turned against him; the by-passing and thus isolation of strong-points instead of the costly assault; the coaching of each and every soldier as to his role on the day; the increased employment of aircraft in directing the advance; the concept of a machine-gun barrage; and the exchange of information between the infantry and artillery so as to co-ordinate efforts...

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

As those final days were to pass, the artillery barrage was growing progressively heavier; on April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion was to describe it as...*drums*. By this time, of course, the Germans were *also* aware that...something was in the offing...and their guns in their turn were now throwing retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft were very busy.



(Right above: *A heavy British artillery piece spews its venom into the middle of the night during the course of the preparatory bombardment before the First Battle of Arras. – from Illustration*)

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

On April 9 of 1917 the British Army launched an offensive not only at *Vimy Ridge*, but also in a large area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields of the previous year; this was the (*First*) *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, one of the few positive episodes being that Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



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

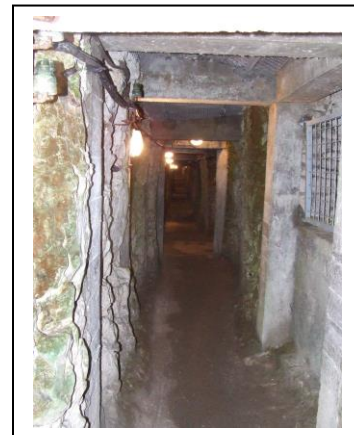
(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, has stood on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

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

The attack on *Vimy Ridge* took place on the opening day of the five-week-long *Battle of Arras*. The days and weeks that followed were to be less auspicious than had been April 9 and 10, and the realities and practices of life in the trenches were all too soon to take hold once more.

Those early hours of Canadian success were not to be repeated until the summer of 1918.

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



(Right below: *Canadian troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, equipped – or 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*)

On the first day of the operation it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions which were to storm the *Ridge* itself. On the immediate right of that attack was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division – plus a British Brigade - to which had been allotted the task of clearing the slope in the area of the village of Thélus.



Private Seward’s 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division was to operate yet to the right again, further south down the slope where it today still sweeps past the community of Roclincourt on its way towards the city of Arras.

(Right below: *Wounded were also evacuated by tram-line and light-railway systems which were built right behind the advancing troops. As seen here, at times prisoners aided with the evacuation – and enemy wounded were reportedly evacuated at the same time. – from Illustration*)

As for the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion, as April 9 had approached, and some days still before the offensive was to begin, after a short period in the forward area at the end of March, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been withdrawn again, to the area of Mont St-Éloi and Écoivres. The unit was to remain there until the early afternoon of April 8 when it was ordered forward into the assembly areas.



Private Seward and his comrades-in-arms were not, however, to move via those well-documented tunnels but by over-ground routes to the positions where they were reported to be in place by one-thirty in the morning of April 9.

(Excerpts of 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Central Ontario Regiment*) War Diary Appendix for April 9, 1917)

**Zero hour was 5.30 a.m. The enemy placed a rather feeble barrage on ELBE TRENCH and between that and ROCADE, but no hit was made on any of our ASSEMBLY Trenches, although one man was slightly wounded by shrapnel.**

**7.30 a.m. The Battalion advanced in the following order, A, C, B, D, Details. Not the slightest difficulty was experienced in finding the bridges, gaps in wire, &c. up to our front line. The companies advanced successively over the same ground and four bridges or crossing places had been made on this frontage, permitting all platoons to move at the same time. NO MAN'S LAND was crossed...(and)...the units found no difficulty in locating themselves in the German trenches... "A" Company reached its allotted position by 8.00 a.m. and by 9.00 a.m. the Battalion was in position... Only four casualties were recorded up to this point...**

**At 9.55 a.m. the barrage lifted off the left and at 10.05 a.m. off the right, of the Battalion frontage and the advance to the BLUE objective was begun... The advance progressed steadily, following the barrage, and the objective was reached on time. Some casualties occurred during this period, one or two due to our own shell fire. The enemy's artillery was ineffective, and there was very little Machine Gun or Rifle Fire...**

**12.26 p.m. At this time the barrage moved forward towards the BROWN objective and was followed immediately by B & D Companies... Some prisoners were captured in BOIS CARRE which was mopped up by "C" Co'y.**



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

**On three further occasions the barrage lifted to begin anew for further advances, but the fighting was by then very limited and by four o'clock in the afternoon there was little movement further forward. This was not because of German resistance: orders had been issued beforehand to consolidate those objectives taken - in anticipation of German counter-attacks - and to send out patrols to allow for sufficient warning to be given.**

**In fact the enemy's expected counter-attacks amounted to very little and even his normally ferocious artillery response was lighter than usual. Having lost *Vimy Ridge* the Germans retreated some distance to where they had already prepared defensive positions. Overall, on the day of the attack and during its aftermath, it is likely that the losses experienced by the Canadians were fewer than had been anticipated.**



**Certainly those of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been fewer than expected: From the first moment of the attack until noon on April 10, the casualties incurred by the unit had been in all fifteen *killed in action*, one-hundred eight *wounded* and eight *missing in action*.**

**(continued)**

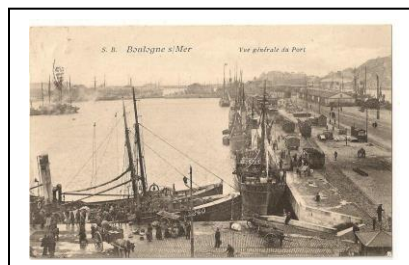
(Preceding page: *A memorial to the fallen of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division stands in a field on the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Thélus. It was set there during Christmas of 1917. – photograph from 2017*)

When it was exactly that Private Seward was wounded is not clear. By April 12 his Battalion had retired into support positions, was cleaning equipment, enjoying its first hot meal since April 8 and was preparing to attack the enemy on the morrow.

April 12 was also the date on which Private Seward was reported to have been admitted into the 13<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital in or in the vicinity of the coastal town of Boulogne, having at some time incurred a shrapnel-wound to the head. After a week of treatment he was released to the Number 1 Convalescent Depot, also in or near Boulogne, before, ten days later again, being sent to the nearby *Number 3 Large Rest Camp*.



(Right above: *Canadian troops and German prisoners escorting and delivering wounded to the rear on light-railway wagons – from Le Miroir*)



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

From there he was, on some un-recorded date, discharged to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Étaples and thence eventually to his unit – but none of the relevant dates or any other information a propos appears to have been documented.

*Faute de mieux*, the continuing history of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion (*Central Ontario Regiment*) will be followed. Given the apparent mildness of Private Seward's wound one might surmise that his return *to duty* was not to be too long in coming.

\* \* \* \* \*

During the (*First*) *Battle of Arras*, the Canadian success at *Vimy Ridge* had been almost the sole exception to the rule\*, the rule being costly engagements more often than not accomplishing not a great deal. The attack at Arleux-en-Gohelle on April 28 had gained some ground for the Canadian attackers but at great sacrifice. The two confrontations at Fresnoy on May 3 and 8, in the former of which three of the four 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Companies played a role, were otherwise; the losses were again heavy - *but* in the end the Germans retained the village.



(Right above: *Vimy Ridge and the Canadian National Memorial as seen from the once-German perspective on the Douai Plain, La Chaudière Sector – photograph from 2015*)

(continued)

***\*This was so not only for the Canadians. The British and Australians experienced bloody reverses, not to forget the Newfoundland Regiment and its four-hundred eight-seven casualties on April 14 at Monchy-le-Preux\* (see immediately below).***

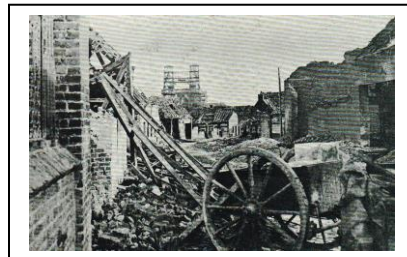
***\*On April 14, 1917, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment had been ordered into an attack which was militarily untenable. It had unsurprisingly failed and the enemy had organized a counter-attack. The remnant of the Battalion, its commanding officer, and a single soldier of the Essex Regiment – ten men in all – had held off this attack until reinforcements arrived. All ten had subsequently been decorated.***

***Although sources differ somewhat, the Newfoundland unit incurred losses of some four-hundred sixty on that day – killed in action, wounded, missing in action and taken prisoner – a count second only to that on the field at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1, 1916.***



***(Right: Seen from the west from the British point of view, and also from the Arras-Cambrai Road, this is the re-constructed village of Monchy-le-Preux almost a century after the events of 1917 and 1918. – photograph from 1914)***

**On May 6 the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion retired into Corps Reserve in the area of the community of Verdrel where it was to remain until the first days of June. It was then transferred into Divisional Reserve for six days of training before, on June 9, being ordered into trenches in the *Arleux Loop* to relieve the 15<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalion. The unit thereupon also served in support and reserve positions before the end of the month. There had been little fighting to be reported in the War Diary: *Killed in Action* and *Died of Wounds* (total) - nine; *Wounded* (total) - twenty-three; *Hospitalized Sick* (total) - sixty-four.**



**By the end of the month and into the next the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was back in Divisional Reserve and this rotational routine was to continue for the month of July: the casualty count was also to be very comparable to that of June. At the beginning of August the unit was in trenches in the area of Les Brébis and the coal-mining village of Loos.**

***(Right above: The remnants of the village of Loos (see below) as it was already in early 1915 – from Le Miroir)***

**The British High Command had long prior to this time – even before the *First Battle of Arras* - decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert the enemy's attention – and also his reserves - from *that* area, it had also ordered operations to take place in the sectors of the front running north-south from Béthune down to Lens.**



(Preceding page: *A further example of the conditions under which the troops were ordered to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort and an attack by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions at Lens on August 15 was an intended part of this campaign.



(Right above: *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 William 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 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. – photograph from 1914*)

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

Objectives were limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of the day 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 was employing newly-developed procedures, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* remained in Canadian hands.

But Private Seward's 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to play a major role, indeed *no* Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade was to play a part, other than peripheral, in the first day of the attack against *Hill 70*.

Before it moved forward up to the front area on August 10, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been undergoing training intermingled with a church parade; a pay parade; rifle, gas mask and boot inspections as well a further one by the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade's Commanding Officer; a change of clothing; and a bath. On the night of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> the Battalion was in turn relieved and fell back to *Les Brébis Camp* where...*Companies were issued with battle equipment and moved forward to Assembly Area...*

(continued)

The troops that had relieved the unit on that night were of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, also of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division. On the morrow, *they* and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, in conjunction with units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, were to launch an attack on *Hill 70* and other German positions to the north of the city and mining-centre of Lens.

The role of Private Seward's Battalion was to serve *in support* on that August 15.

(Excerpt from the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for August 16, 1917) *Battalion moves forward and relieves assaulting Units. Battalion consolidates and holds newly consolidated ground. All available men in rear area are sent forward to act as ration-carrying party to front line.*

It was to be the night of August 20-21 before the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be relieved from what had been at times a period of desperate fighting. During those four days that it had spent in the forward trenches the Germans had counter-attacked on four occasions, each assault, according to the Battalion War Diarist, having been repulsed by a combination of Canadian artillery and the tenacity of the unit's Lewis Gunners and riflemen.

The remainder of the month was to be spent in the rear area. However, those few days in proximity to *Hill 70* had resulted in a number of casualties: *Killed in Action* and *Died of Wounds* (total) – twenty-six; *Wounded* (total) – eighty-three; *Gassed* (total) – eighty-two; *Missing in Action* (total) – five.

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

Apparently the Canadian offensive campaign of the summer had been planned so as to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British offensive in Belgium was proceeding a great deal less well than expected and the High Command was looking for reinforcements to make good the exorbitant losses.



The Australians and then the Canadians were ordered to prepare to move north, thus the Canadians were to be obliged to abandon any further plans that they might have had.

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

There were therefore to be no further major Canadian-inspired actions in the *Lens-Béthune Sectors* and the troops yet again were to settle back into that monotonous but also at times precarious existence of life in – and behind – the forward area.

(Right: *Canadians soldiers in the captured rear area of Hill 70 during the days after the battle – from Le Miroir*)



(continued)

During this time the daily grind of life in – and out of - the trenches was still to be the rule. On most days, according to the Battalion War Diary, it was the artillery which fought it out – but, of course, the opposing infantry on both sides was quite often the target.

The first eleven days of September were spent in training behind the lines before Private Seward and his comrades-in-arms moved up to the forward area in the outskirts of Lens, to the *Cité St-Pierre*\*, on the night of the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>. There for most days the Germans shelled the area heavily, but there was little infantry action to report. On September 21 the unit was once more withdrawn to billets in the back area where the War Diarist entries show that sports were being considered more and more to be a morale booster among the troops.

For its part, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion played several games of baseball but whether Private Seward was a player of any great note or otherwise appears to have escaped the Diarist's notice.

Casualties for the month of September had once again been at a low level.

*\*The so-called Cités – often named after saints – were the suburban communities which had grown up around the numerous colliery pit-heads – ‘les fosses’ - in the area of Lens.*

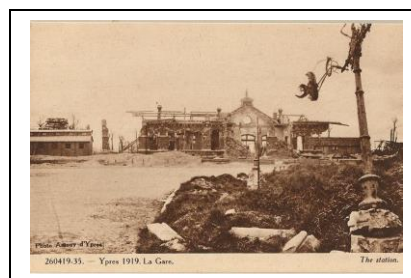
*(Right above: A Canadian carrying-party – some of the work done by troops when in support and reserve – on the Lens front during the summer of 1917: The use of the head-band – the Tump - to facilitate carrying had by that time been adopted from the indigenous peoples of North America. – from Le Miroir)*

*(Right: Canadian soldiers on the march in the rear area during the summer of 1917, reportedly – by the publisher - buying out-dated English newspapers from a young French girl – from Le Miroir)*

From October 6 to 13 the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was posted to the front-line trenches before withdrawing to ready itself for the imminent move into Belgium. Billeted in the communities through which the unit passed, the unit undertook a four-day trek to arrive on October 23 in the frontier commune of Ste-Marie-Cappel where it was now to remain in further training for six days.

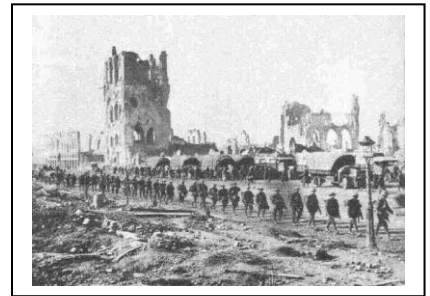
*(Right: The remnants of the railway station just outside the ramparts of Ypres where the Battalion detrained: the image is from 1919. – from a vintage post-card)*

(continued)





On November 2, 1917, Private Seward's unit entrained at nearby Bavinchove for the short railway journey to Ypres. From the remnants of the city's station it marched across the vestiges of the place to the camp awaiting it in the north-eastern area of St- Jean. *Passchendaele* now also awaited the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion.



It was not to be until the final weeks of October of 1917 that the Canadians were to become embroiled in the British-led offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially designated as 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*)

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

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 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair the reverse was true with troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division finally entering the remnants of *Passchendaele* itself.

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

It was not to be until November 5 that the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered to move to the forward area, in the interim having provided large carrying-parties for the usual multitude of tasks. Twenty-two officers and six-hundred thirty-seven other ranks moved up to the *Pommern Area*, from there to advance that night to an assembly point where Companies and Platoons were sent to re-enforce the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry for the attack of the next day, November 6.



(Right: *Just a few hundred to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the monument pictured below – this ground lies in the direction of Zonnebeke – a kilometre or so away - where the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was positioned on and about November 6, 1917. – photograph from 2010*)



(continued)

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diarist later recorded that on that day...*All objectives taken and consolidated...The shelling through out (sic) the day was intense.*

Battalion casualties...*for the show...as reported by the War Diarist in his entry of the following day, had been: Killed in Action (total) – twenty-eight; Wounded and Gassed (total) – one-hundred two; Missing in Action (total) – ten. On that same day, November 7, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was withdrawn into the camp at St-Jean (Sint-Jaan).*



(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which today stands on Passchendaele Ridge – photograph from 2015*)

For Private Seward's unit the *Third Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele*, after five days, had drawn to its conclusion.

(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 (see below). – photograph from 2010*)



(continued)

(Right: *In Tyne Cot Cemetery there lie just fewer than twelve-thousand dead of which some seventy-five hundred remain unidentified; on the Tyne Cot Memorial – the panels on the wall – are commemorated a further thirty-five thousand who have no known grave. Among them are to be counted many of those who 'had the honour' of attacking Passchendaele Ridge. – photograph from 2010*)



It was now to take the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion six days to travel out of the proverbial frying pan and into the fire: from the slaughter-house that was *Passchendaele* to the front-line trenches of the *Liévin Sector* some seventy kilometres to the south – although at the time the fire of Liévin was perhaps a great deal more preferable to the pan of *Passchendaele*.

Thus a short railway journey on November 8 followed by a succession of motor-bus rides travelling by a somewhat semi-circular itinerary to the west before turning southwards had seen the Battalion leave the *Ypres Salient*, then Belgium itself, before passing through north-western France. Upon its arrival Private Seward's unit had relieved a battalion of the British Lincolnshire Regiment in forward positions on November 14.

This was to be an eight-day tour, most memorable for many undoubtedly being the killing by a sniper of the Officer Commanding the Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel A.T. Thompson. Shot on November 19, he was buried on the following afternoon.

The remainder of the month of November was spent by the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the rear area of Gouy-Servins, there its hard work in training having been rewarded on the last day of the month by a concert in the evening.

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



The first days of December were spent in the same vicinity before there was a change of venue to the *Alberta Huts* encampment in the area of Souchez where the daily routine was to remain much the same, until December 12, as it had been in the days prior to this further move.

(Right above: *The village of Souchez already looked like this in 1915 when the French passed control of the area over to the British. – from Le Miroir*)



Then the unit once more moved to the front, to the *Avion Sector* – nothing unusual reported – until the late evening of December 18 when the Battalion was relieved.

During the period prior to this last-mentioned relief, the Canadian Armed Forces in Europe and the United Kingdom had been afforded the opportunity to cast a vote in the Canadian National Election ongoing at the time. It would appear that the polls were open on dates from December 4 to 17 – inclusive – and that a high number, greater than ninety per cent, of Canadian military personnel exercised its franchise.

In several cases this event was not entered into the various War Diaries, although it is hard to believe that the vote did not take place in these units. One of these journals was that of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Central Ontario Regiment*).

(Excerpt from 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for Christmas Day, 1917) *DIVION – “B” & “C” Companies held their Xmas dinner in the ECOLE DES GARCONS, DIVION, Menu consisting of Turkey, Potatoes, Carrots, Nuts, Cigarettes, Cigars, Candy, Plumpudding, pie, Maple Sugar, Coffee & Beer. Sgts. acted as waiters. The Tables & Benches made by the Pioneers fell down badly...*

Dinner for the upper echelons and Signals of the unit was served on New Year’s Eve, an event at which they...*did enjoy themselves as only members of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion can enjoy themselves.*

And now it was back to the business at hand.



(Right above: *This is what was to become of Lens before the Great War ended – from a vintage post-card*)

(continued)

The first three weeks of the New Year, 1918, were spent in the rear area at Divion where the Battalion had passed Christmas Day. Then Private Seward's unit was returned to the forward area in the environs of the city and mining-centre of Lens until February. After that, although the venues were to be varied, the pattern of *reserve, support and front* continued to be observed for the next three months.

The daily patterns of existence also remained the same – to which, of course, given the time of year, was added the problem of keeping warm. Apart from occasional leave granted, the routine of the day – rain, snow, mud, patrols, wiring, raids, shelling, mustard-gas, phosgene-gas, sniping, bombing, carrying-parties, working-parties, inspections, church, sports, concerts, musketry, drills, route-marches, cuts, scrapes, tooth-ache, colds, 'flu and the occasional bath - was to prove much the same during this fourth winter of the Great War as it had been during the previous three.

It was to be on the first day of the spring of 1918 that everything was to change once more.

Perhaps not many people realize how very close the Germans were to come to victory in that March and April of 1918. Having transferred the numerous Divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the war, on the *Western Front* the Germans would launch a massive attack, designated as Operation '*Michael*', 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 had fallen for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops there, particularly where they were serving adjacent to units of the French Army.

(Right above: *While the Germans were not to 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 to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir*)

The German advance was to continue for over a month before petering out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive would be the result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British were to be the most significant.

*\*A second but lesser such offensive, 'Georgette', was to fall in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in Flanders, the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division – and for a while with the 34<sup>th</sup>. It also had been successful for a while, but was struggling by the end of the month.*



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

(continued)

It was not until four days later that any sense of urgency appears in the Battalion War Diary, the entry of March 25, and even that came late in the day following a report on a 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion vs. 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion baseball game won by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion: *Warning order "Prepare to Move" in six hours received at 11.20 P.M.*

Private Seward and his unit were *standing to*, prepared to move at half-past five on the following morning, March 26, but at ten to six, one hour and twenty minutes later, the orders were cancelled. Instead, a bathing-parade was held: it took some six hours to complete.

Although it is unlikely that many of those receiving the torrent of orders from High Command understood the reason for it, it is also unlikely that many of the upper echelons *giving* those orders were cognizant of the full picture.

The northern extremity of the German attack terminated in the area of the city of Arras but artillery bombardments as well as several raids were undertaken further to the north again, as far up as Lens, in order to keep the British – and thus the Canadians – unaware as to the enemy's intentions. The High Command thus had to anticipate any eventuality, one of which might possibly have been a full-scale attack on the *Arras Front*.

Thus at the onset of the crisis, after a short period of several days, numerous Canadian units were to find themselves moving southward to the south and west of Arras to block any German offensive moving in the direction of the Channel ports. Private Seward's 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was among those to do so.

For the next two weeks or so the unit was bussed to various locales and marched to others in the area of the newly-proposed defensive positions from the south of Arras to the westward – from Neuville St-Vaast towards Dainville. The entries a propos these movements in the various War Diaries exhibit a period of some weeks more than a little hectic, but as the days passed it also becomes more clear that the enemy had few aspirations in the area other than to keep their opponents occupied and *in situ*.

The attack – *Georgette* – in the north does not appear to have elicited the same response from the Canadians who were stationed not far distant from the southern flank of that second offensive. There was to be no movement in the direction of that additional danger despite the *Backs to the Wall* communique released by Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of all British – and thus also Empire (*Commonwealth*) – forces in Western Europe.



By the second week in April, things in the Canadian theatre of operations were beginning to revert back to normal. The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion and others were re-located in such areas as Mont St-Éloy and Écoivres and the Battalion War Diarist was reporting discussions on such things as: the purchase of sporting equipment, leave to England, a Regimental Band concert, the Battalion's Commanding Officer's dinner with the Corps Commander and, of course, the weather.



(Preceding page above and below: *Écoivres Military Cemetery – adjacent to Mont St-Éloi - seen at the time of - or just after – the Great War, and as it appears a century later – from a vintage post-card and (colour) from 1915*)

However, by this time, the situation to the south on the *Amiens Front*, while still dangerously uncertain, was becoming stable enough for the Canadians to be at least partially withdrawn from the positions to the south and south-west of Arras that they had occupied some weeks before.

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

For the remainder of April and into May the unit was posted to forward areas in the *Fampoux Sector* and to such places as Bray, St-Laurent, Izel-les-Hameaux, St-Aubin and Anzin when withdrawn to the rear. By that time the two German offensives had been brought to a standstill and the Battalion was able to spend a great deal of its time in the rear area – almost all of June being spent in reserve at Cambigneul.



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

The Allies from this point of view were a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were belatedly arriving on the scene. An overall Allied Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing a counter-offensive.



Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

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

In the meantime, on the final day of June, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had moved back to the area of Écoivres. There was apparently not to be a great deal of training done as on most days the unit had supplied men for working-parties, but details pertaining to their duties are not given unto us by the War Diarist.

This work had continued until the twelfth day of July at which time Private Seward and his unit were ordered forward once again into the trenches of the *Fampoux Sector*.

(continued)

A few almost peaceful days had then ensued – the men still had to work but at least the *enemy* appears to have left them alone – then a few in reserve and a last week-long tour in support before, on the night of July 31-August 1, busses had transported the Battalion to Warlus, seven kilometres to the west of Arras, where it arrived just before three o'clock in the morning.

A sleepless night perhaps, but many of those to follow were not to offer any great amount of rest. There was now a battle to be fought.

The Battalion having moved on to Grand Bullecourt, on August 3 its personnel was informed of what lay in store for it, although the details have not been recorded in the War Diary. Private Seward and his unit were to be on the way on the morrow.

(Excerpt from 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for August 4, 1918) *Instructions issued for move, by March and Strategical Train, to St. Maulvis, Somme. Reveille at 3.00 a.m. First Line Transport moved independently at 4.00 a.m. Battalion marched out at 6.00 a.m...to PETIT HOUVIN STATION, arriving there 10.20 a.m. Train departed at 11.30 a.m. via ST\_POL – ETAPLES – ABBEVILLE – NOYELLES where 40 minutes were allowed for watering animals. Detraining station Nesle-Normandeuse\*, reached at 10.00 p.m. Battalion, less "A" Company, who acted as Fatigue Party, left at once for St. Maulvis, arriving at 2.00 a.m. on the 5<sup>th</sup> inst. Battalion settled in Bilets by 3.00 a.m...*

*\*Well west of the city of Amiens with St Maulvis then at some ten kilometres distant in the direction of Amiens.*



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

On the following evening and night there was a second transfer, on this occasion to *Boves Wood*, to the south-east of Amiens: (Excerpt from 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for August 5, 1918) *Battalion marched out at 7.30 p.m. and reached embussing point at 7.30 p.m. Battalion loaded into busses and moved off at 10.00 p.m. The Bus Column of 270 Busses travelled all night, passing through city of Amiens and debussing at SAINS EN AMIENOIS at 5.30 a.m. of the 6<sup>th</sup> inst...*

At *Boves Wood* the unit joined other elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade before bivouacking in the forest for the night. It was there that Private Seward and his Battalion remained for the best part of the following day before, during that evening and night, moving up to the appointed assembly points in the *Gentelles Wood*.

The day-time of the next day, August 7, was spent once again under the cover of a wooded area, hidden from the view of any German aerial observers while preparations were being finalized for the attack on the next morning.

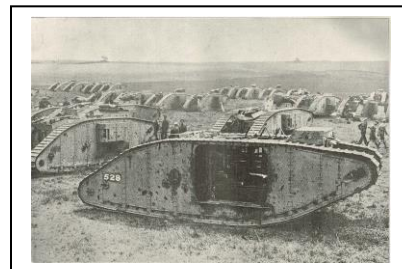
(continued)

The 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion had not been alone during those days of early August, 1918: a large number of other Canadian units – indeed, almost the entire Canadian Corps – had by that time begun to move in a semi-circular itinerary to the west of Amiens, then south, then east again to finish in front of the city. There it was to join with British and other Commonwealth forces, with tanks, and also with elements of the French Army.

This movement was to be effected in only a matter of days, much of it on foot, and all of the latter stages during the hours of darkness.

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

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



*Zero hour* had been designated as twenty minutes past four on the morning of August 8 by which time the supporting tanks were already moving forward. The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, being in support, was to be the second such unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division to move forward into the attack.

(Excerpt from 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for August 8, 1918) *Battalion advanced for Attack on Objective as allotted by O.O. - (Operational Order) - No. 42. Zero hour was 4.20 a.m. Battalion reached Objective by 11.30 a.m. Casualties were about 125. 1 Officer was killed and 6 Officers wounded. Excellent work was effected by Officers of “A” and “D” in keeping their direction in thick mist at the opening of the Battle. Battalion Transport moved up from BOVES WOOD in the morning and received orders at 6.35 a.m. to move up and join the Battalion east of AUBERCOURT...*

The gains along the entire front, had been prolific: On the first day the advance on the Canadian Front had been as much as eleven kilometres, a feat unheard of since the opening months of the Great War in 1914 – although the opening day of the *Battle of Cambrai*, 1917, as well as the German advances during that spring of 1918, may well have been harbingers of what was now transpiring.



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

On the following afternoon, having moved up to assembly points near Le Quesnel, Private Seward's Battalion, in tandem with the other battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Brigade, resumed the attack to take the villages of Beaufort and Rouvroy. But by this time, enemy resistance was beginning to stiffen. (Excerpt from 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for August 9, 1918) *Casualties very heavy... Many gallant acts were performed by all ranks in face of extremely severe machine gun fire.*



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

Despite the opposition, several villages were taken on that day. Rouvroy had been the final prize and thus was the locale where the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to spend the following day, August 10 – *clearing the Battlefield and burying the dead* - while troops of the British 32<sup>nd</sup> Division moved through towards the forward area - not that this was an entirely comfortable pause for the personnel of the Battalion as it was shelled for most of the day, on occasion even, apparently, by its own guns.



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

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to remain in the area of Rouvroy not only for that single day, August 10, but also for the six which were to follow.



(Right below: *French dead in the communal cemetery at Caix, just to the north-west of Rouvroy: Caix also hosts a British Commonwealth cemetery as well as a German burial ground. – photograph from 2017*)

It had originally been planned to pursue the attack wherever and whenever possible; however a request for a three-day pause in the advance had been received from the Australians and the French – made on August 11 and acceded to on the morrow - and the opportunity was seized upon by most Canadian units as an opportunity to re-enforce and to re-organize for things to come. Clothing and boots were repaired and a quantity of new socks was also – and somehow – acquired by the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion.



Until – and including – August 16, enemy shelling, at times heavy, was a daily event, and so, except on the 16<sup>th</sup> itself, was the arrival of re-enforcements for the Battalion. On that days, orders were received that the advance was to continue and that to that end troops were to be...*ready to advance at any minute*. Later that evening the unit moved, although it appears that it was to retire rather than to advance, to the village of Folies.

It is not recorded if it received the same welcome as did its sister 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion which was to withdraw on the same day and to arrive in Folies thirty minutes after Private Seward's 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion...*Battalion arrived in FOLIES at 6.00 P.M. Men living in Bivouacs. The Band played from 7.00 P.M. to 8.15 P.M. WEATHER – Fine & Warm.* (Excerpt from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for August 16, 1918) Much better than being shot at!

(continued)

Even though in the days that followed certain officers were sent forward to liaise with other units, and even though re-enforcements were still forthcoming from the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp to the north, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to venture forward again or to participate in any upcoming operations on the *Amiens Front*. On the contrary, it gradually withdrew until, on the morning of August 26, at Prouzel Station, it entrained for the return journey to the area of Arras whence it had come some three weeks earlier.

Private Seward travelled by train to the community of Tinqués, reached that afternoon. The remainder of the move was by *motor-lorry* and by late evening his Battalion had been quartered at the *Baudimont Barracks*, Arras, in the north-western outskirts of the city.

(Right below: *The city of Arras endured four years of bombardment during the Great War; the Grand'Place (Grande Place) (to compare with the earlier picture of Arras in 1916) looked like this by March of 1917. – from Le Miroir*)

This activity was all part of a general Canadian retirement. During the days just prior to, and also during the fourth week in August, the Canadian Corps in its entirety was to retire in much the same manner and using the same itineraries by which it had arrived in front of Amiens – and this move was to be kept as secret as had been the first.



The places of Canadian units now being withdrawn from the Amiens Front were to be taken by French forces – and the advance was to continue.

(Right: *British and other Commonwealth forces were not withdrawn as were the Canadians from in front of Amiens in August of 1918. In tandem with French troops they continued the offensive, as here in the attack against St-Quentin. – from Le Miroir*)



The Canadian Corps had been ordered to be prepared for offensive operations to commence on August 26, just to the east of Arras. These were to be undertaken in tandem with British forces astride the axis of the main road leading from Arras to Cambrai. By the second day of the advance, more Canadian battalions were to have joined the fray and, two days later again, August 29, units of all the Canadian Divisions were to have seen action on this new front\*.



*\*This was to occur, but not necessarily – as will be seen below - on the dates that had been originally planned.*

And once again, the subterfuge which masked that huge transfer of some twenty-thousand personnel and all the accompanying material had worked: it appears that the Germans were unprepared for the appearance of the Canadian Corps on this second front.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *Some of the ground on which fighting took 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*)

At *Baudimont Barracks* the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion received orders that it was to proceed to *Telegraph Hill* in the area of *Neuville-Vitasse* by four o'clock on the next afternoon, August 27, in preparation for an offensive to begin on the next day, August 28.

As it happened, the attack planned for August 28 was to be postponed twice but there appears to have been no official reason documented in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion journal for this alteration to the schedule. The following excerpts are drawn from the War Diary entry for August 29, 1918, of the unit's sister battalion, the 3<sup>rd</sup>: *The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade will attack tomorrow at dawn...*

*This Brigade will attack the line now held by the enemy and establish a jumping-off position East of UPTON WOOD, as close to the DROCOURT-QUÉANT Line as possible, for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigades to jump off from. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigades will attack...through the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade...*



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

The advance finally took place on August 30 and despite certain setbacks and stiffening enemy resistance – from his artillery and particularly from his machine-gunners who neither asked for nor gave quarter – was an overall success with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigades passing through the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade on August 31 to continue the offensive. At that point, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, as a component of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, was relieved and fell back to the area of *Heninel*, into trenches which had been part of the line just days before.

This relief of August 31 was to be short-lived; during the day of September 1, the following Operational Orders were received by the Commanding Officer: (Excerpt from 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of September 1, 1918) *Attack on DROCOURT-QUEANT LINE. Objectives of 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalion to capture BUISSY and BARALLE and Bridge Heads of CANAL DU NORD on our immediate front... Battalion to pass starting point at 5.15 a.m. of 2<sup>nd</sup> inst...*



(Right above: *Captured German ordnance and munitions taken during the Canadian advance of 1918 towards the Canal du Nord – from Le Miroir*)

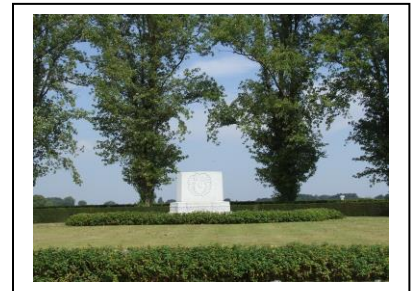
(Right: *Prisoners taken during the fighting on the Drocourt-Quéant Line, some carrying wounded comrades, on their way to the Canadian rear area – from Le Miroir*)



**(Excerpt from 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of September 1, 1918) *Battalion marched off in Battle Order at 5.00 a.m. with Lewis Guns and Pack Mules... Battalion reached Assembly Position...at 7.20 a.m. At 8.00 a.m. Positions of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Brigade Units had been ascertained and advance commenced. Advance checked between towns of CAGNICOURT and VILLERS LES CAGNICOURT. Battalion held up from 9.00 a.m. until after 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade's attack on BUISSY SWITCH at 6.00 p.m. Many casualties during the day from machine gun fire...***

**A further attack by the Battalion was ordered later that day but then cancelled...*just accomplished in time to prevent Companies being hopelessly committed in an impossible night attack...***

**(Right: *The Canadian Memorial to those who fought at the Drocourt-Quéant Line in late August and 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*)**



**As the western bank of the Canal du Nord was approached, German resistance again stiffened to protect the lines of retreat to the further side; at times it obliged the Canadian attackers to withdraw. Private Seward's Battalion was then to receive a series of orders and counter-orders which appears to have hindered the unit as much as the Germans did. Progress had been slowed and casualties reported as heavy. However, by the end of the day, September 3, patrols were apparently being sent as far as the waterway\* itself.**

***\*The waterway was still under construction at this time and in places was devoid of any water. Thus it was perhaps not quite as formidable an obstacle as its name implies.***

**On September 4 the Battalion remained much where it had stopped on the previous day. Relief was also on the way in the form of the 29<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion, and the changeover was completed in the very early hours of September 5. Thereupon the unit withdrew, eventually marching to the village of Cherisy later that morning, and thence by bus to the *Wailly Huts* encampment, well to the rear and to the south-west of Arras.**

**After three days at the *Wailly Huts* – cleaning-up; baths; clothing, boot, tailoring parades; re-enforcements; canteen; inspection by C.O.; talks and lectures; and pay – the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion marched the ten kilometres to billets at Montenescourt, this community now to be its home for a week.**

**Private Seward's return to the forward area occurred on September 15: the day did not pass without incident, although the circumstances were surely far from being unique. (Excerpt from 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of September 15, 1918) *Battalion parade ready to move off at 8.45 a.m. Battalion less Transport march to ACQ, arriving at 11.00 a.m. Entrained at 1.50 p.m. Detrained at CROISELLES at 5.20 p.m., and marched to Trench Billets near HENDECOURT, arriving at 6.45 p.m... Warm weather caused many men to fall out, mostly the new draft men, ignorant as yet of the march Discipline of this Battalion. Marked aerial activity during the night. Many bombs dropped. No casualties in this Unit. One Hun shot down in flames. Warm and dry. Very little breeze.***

After three days in Brigade Reserve in the Hendecourt area, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was moved up towards Cagnicourt, perhaps three kilometres or so closer to the Canal du Nord, and some six kilometres from there to the Canal itself. By this time the Canadians had pushed up to the waterway itself, leaving only isolated pockets of the enemy on the western side. It was seven days later again before the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved once more, up to an area called the *Buissy Switch* and close to where a crossing of the Canal du Nord was about to be forced.

It was at nine o'clock in the evening of September 26 that Private Seward's unit moved forward into its assembly positions in front of the village of Inchy where they were reported as being in place just prior to mid-night. On the following morning the Canal du Nord was to be stormed by troops of all four Canadian Divisions.

Some three weeks before this time, in early September, once the advancing formations had arrived in the area of the *Canal*, there had been no immediate attempt to force a crossing. In fact there had still been German forces on the western side which were putting up a strong resistance as was, as ever, the enemy artillery. And, as had happened at Amiens, the Canadian and British advance had begun to outrun a stretched logistical service.

A halt had thus been called while plans were being conceived for an attack across both the flooded and the waterless parts of the waterway. It was to be the last week of the month before all the preparations had been finalized.

(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*)



(Excerpt from 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of September 27, 1918) *Battalion attacked in first phase of CAMBRAI Battle. Zero hour 5.20 A.M. Visibility low at Zero. Barrage was excellent and Battalion made a good start, "D" Company reaching their objective in twelve minutes. "A" and "B" Companies went through at "D" Company's objective...*



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

*Attack progressed favourably and Companies reached their objectives on time... Orders received to stand fast for the night... Casualties, 9 Officers and 132 Other Ranks; Prisoners taken, 75; Guns captured, six 7.7; two 7.7 H.V. (high velocity); three 10.5 and many Machine Guns.*



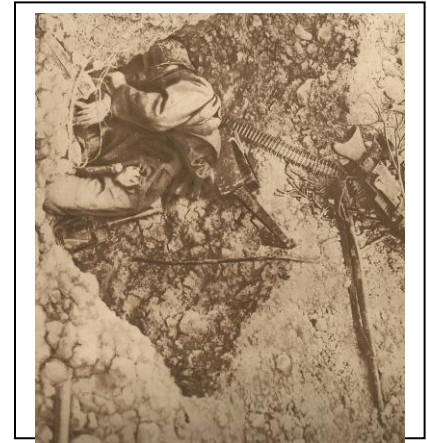
(Right above: *Two German field-guns of Great War vintage stand on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City, the one in the foreground captured during the fighting at Bourslon Wood – photograph from 2016*)

By noon on that September 27, it was being reported that the follow-up forces were now making the crossing of the Canal completely unopposed. By late afternoon the Canadians had cleared *Bourlon Wood* at a distance of four-five kilometres to the east of the waterway, and had then turned to the high ground north-east of Cambrai. From there on the next day patrols were being sent to the outskirts of Cambrai itself and as far as the next watery obstacle: the *Canal de l'Escaut*.



(Right above: *Bourlon Wood Cemetery is the last resting-place of two-hundred thirty-five soldiers of the Great War of whom two-hundred twenty-one wore a Canadian uniform. – photograph from 2017*)

Then the advance was slowed – and at times stopped - by a combination of factors: the enemy had re-organized his resistance and, once again, his machine-gunners were able to hold off the Canadian infantry attacks; the British forces with whom the Canadians had worked in tandem since the *Battle of the Scarpe*, were to suspend their operations; flooded ground and unexpected wire was encountered; and the casualty count was rising to some twenty per cent.



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

On September 30 a number of orders was received by the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion: the attack by the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division was to continue but for the moment Private Seward's unit was to remain *in situ*. But not for long.

(Excerpt from 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of October 1, 1918) *Battalion attacked ABANCOURT at Zero hour viz. 0500 o'clock and fought forward with unsurpassed bravery under murderous Machine Gun and Artillery fire. Objectives not gained, but the Battalion did not have to give up one foot of ground that it had won. Battalion was relieved on night of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> by the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion, and proceeded to DELENEY MILL area.*

Casualty report: *"Killed in Action" – Was employed as a runner, and while proceeding with an important message, accompanied by three comrades, the latter were all wounded. He continued on alone for about 200 yards when he was hit in the forehead by a machine gun bullet and instantly killed.*

John Seward appears to have left behind him very little family information: to his recorded next-of-kin, brother Isril (sic) of New Perlican, Newfoundland, as of September, 1914, he had allocated a monthly ten dollars; and he names an Edward Seward as guardian of son Alick (sic). It has not as yet been possible to trace these persons, other than that they are also recorded as having been from New Perlican.

Private Seward, MM, was reported as having been *killed in action* during the fighting at Arancourt on October 1, 1918.

John Seward had enlisted at the approximate age of twenty-six years and three months: date of birth (from attestation papers) in New Perlican, Newfoundland, June 5, 1888\*.

*\*The only John Seward to be found in Church of England records for New Perlican, is John Thomas Seward, son of Edward and Isabelle Seward, born October 4, 1886.*

Private John Seward, MM, 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 *London Gazette Supplement* (Number: 31142, page 1247) of January 21, 1919, documents the following:

*His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to confer the Military Medal for bravery in the Field to the undermentioned Non-Commissioned Officers and Men, Canadian Contingent... 10821 Pte. Seward, J. 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. 1<sup>st</sup> C. Ontario R.*



On his Canadian Military Honours and Awards Citation Card there appears the date, September 2, 1918, the date on which his Military Medal was officially granted. But there is nothing else; apparently, after March of 1918, it was not often that a citation accompanied the awarding of a Military Medal.

There appears to be no further documentation *a propos* the decoration among Private Seward's own papers, nor apparently in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary.

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 24, 2023.