



Private Michael Slattery, MM, (Number 458270) of the 87th Battalion (Canadian Grenadier Guards), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Villers Station Cemetery, Villers-au-Bois: Grave reference VIII.F.1..

(Right: The image of the Canadian Grenadier Guards cap badge is from the Regimental Rogue web-site.)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a shipper, Edward Slattery has left behind him little information *a propos* his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Québec except that, according to the 1911 Census, by that time his parents and seven of their children – an unconfirmed source suggests that there were altogether nine Slattery children – were living at 40, Colbourne Street in the Ste-Anne District of Montreal. The family had emigrated, likely in 1899.

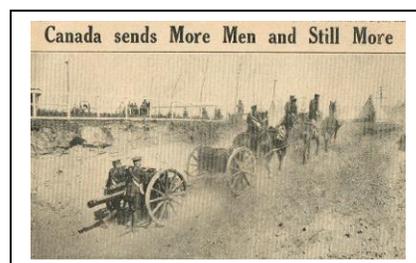
It is also certain, of course, that he was still resident in Montreal – by then at 437, Magdalen Street - in July of the year 1915, as that is both where and when he enlisted.

It was on the twenty-seventh day of that month that Michael Slattery presented himself for enlistment*, for a medical examination – which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force* – and also then for attestation. The entire procedure of enlistment was then brought to a conclusion by the end of the day when the commanding officer of the 60th Overseas Battalion (*Victoria Rifles of Canada*), Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Arthur DeLong Gascoigne, declared – on paper – that...*Michael Slattery...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

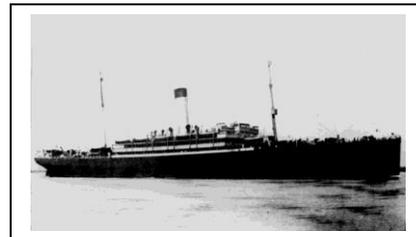
On Michael Slattery's attestation papers it is recorded that he had served with the Irish Rangers. Given his young age, and that this unit came into being only in August of 1914, any service that he rendered could have been of only very short duration. In fact, in April of 1915 the Irish Rangers began to recruit on behalf of the newly-forming 60th Overseas Battalion and provided the men for an Irish-Canadian Company. This was "C" Company, to which Private Slattery was attached on July 27, 1915.

Private Slattery was to train for the three succeeding months at *Camp Valcartier*, just to the north of Quebec City. This posting came to an end on October 25 when the 60th Battalion returned to Montreal, to the Guy Street Barracks, where it was to await the order to proceed to 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 – and away 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*)*



The requisitioned Allan Line vessel *Scandinavian* was not a particularly large vessel. Apart from Private Slattery's 60th Battalion, there was to be only the 1st and 2nd Army Troop Company to embark on her for passage to the United Kingdom. Embarkation took place in Montreal on November 6 of 1915 and the ship sailed later on that same day.



Nine days later, after an uneventful Atlantic crossing, on November 15 *Scandinavian* put into the harbour and Royal Navy port of Plymouth-Devonport on the English south coast.

(Preceding page: *The image of the SS Romanic in White Star Line livery - before she became Scandinavian of the Allan Line in 1912 - is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

(Right: *The harbour of Plymouth-Devonport as it was almost a century after the Great War, and a lot less busy than at that time - photograph from 2013*)



From Plymouth the 60th Battalion was transported by train to the not-far distant – in Canadian terms – county of Hampshire and to the then-established Canadian military complex named for the second of the two villages of Liphook and Bramshott in the vicinity of which it now was.

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



Training for the newcomers at *Camp Bramshott* now lasted for a further fourteen weeks until the morning of February 20 when the unit left there in three trains *en route* to the south-coast port-city of Southampton. Having taken three ships there, Private Slattery and his comrades-in-arms sailed for the Continent to reach the French industrial port-city of Le Havre, situated on the estuary of the River Seine, in three detachments during the course of the next day.



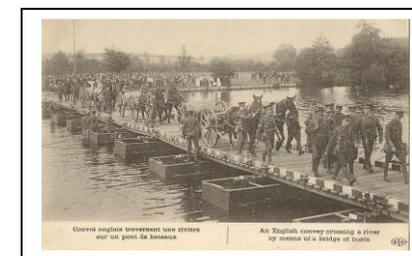
Private Slattery was now on *active service*.

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

The 60th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles of Canada*) was now a component of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the lately-formed Canadian 3rd Division which had come into official being at mid-night of December 31, 1915 and January 1 of the New Year, 1916. Some of its units had already been on the Continent at that time, some having been there for some months; others, such as the 60th Battalion, were yet to cross from England.

The Division was not to have its own artillery until later that year, however, much of it for the moment being temporarily supplied by Royal Artillery units.

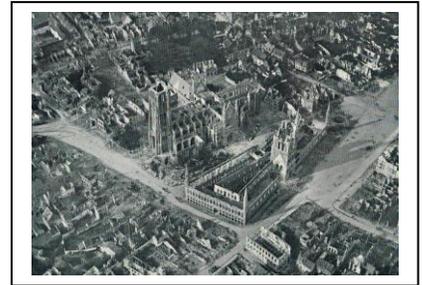
In the evening of February 22 the 60th Battalion, once more travelling in detachments, left Le Havre by train to travel northwards. By ten o'clock in the evening of the next day it the final unit of the three found itself in the area of the Franco-Belgian border, at Godeswaerwelde, having taken a long twenty-two hours by train...*a cold & trying journey*, says the Battalion War Diary... to make what is a journey of about perhaps three-hundred kilometres.



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

At first stationed in a quiet sector to the southern part of the front, a month later, in March, the 3rd Canadian Division had been handed the responsibility for another area. This new posting was to prove a great deal more exciting than the one Private Slattery was now to leave behind.

The 60th Canadian Infantry Battalion was to operate in an area to the south-east of the remnants of the medieval city of Ypres. It had been posted to the *Salient*.



The *Ypres Salient* was to prove to be one of most lethal theatres of the *Great War*, to be fought over from October of 1914 up until October of 1918. Over the course of the conflict the area was to be the site of four major battles and many other hard-fought lesser engagements.

In the meantime, just following his arrival in *the Salient*, on April 21 of 1916 Private Slattery was attached to the 3rd Canadian (Divisional) Signals Company for instruction. What exactly the *instruction* was to comprise has not been recorded in his personal files, only that he was to return to his unit after seven weeks, on June 9.

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



The 60th Battalion was operating in a sector comprising the vestiges of the village of *Hooge*, of *Maple Copse*, *Railway Dugouts* and *Hill 60* as well as *Sanctuary Wood*, all to become well-known names in Canadian history only weeks later.

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

From June 2 to 14 was fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the area of *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60* and those other places, between the German Army and the Canadian Corps. The Canadians had apparently been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans delivered an offensive, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity which fortunately they were never to exploit.



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

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

On June 2, the first day of the emergency, the twenty-five officers and six-hundred ninety-seven *other ranks* of the 60th Battalion were ordered to move forward from the rear, towards the area of the German advance.

On the following day it was then to support the 52nd Battalion in the ordered counter-attack. Heavy casualties ensued among the Battalion personnel during the advance of that June 3 and a proposed continuation of the operation for the evening was eventually cancelled. On the 4th the unit moved forward to relieve the PPCLIs* in what had by then become a holding operation.

****Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment, named for the youngest daughter of the Duke of Connaught, Governor General of Canada at the time.***

Two days later the enemy advanced on the Canadian northern flank, on this occasion in the area of *Hooge* where mines were detonated under the Canadian positions. On this occasion Byng decided not to counter-attack but to prepare instead for a co-ordinated strike on a later date, and the 60th Battalion remained in its trenches. Over half of the remaining Battalion strength was relieved later that night, the remainder retiring some twenty-four hours later again.

(Right above: *Maple Copse Cemetery – the majority of the dead are Canadian - a century after the action at nearby Mount Sorrel, Hill 60 and Sanctuary Wood – photograph from 2014*)

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



By the time that the 60th Battalion next moved forward on the night of June 13-14, the Canadian counter-attack had already gone in some twenty-four hours before, and had recaptured most of the lost ground. Although German artillery fire was to be heavy at times, there was little further infantry action, the position of the lines after June 13 apparently having returned to mostly as they had been *before* the engagement. But the cemeteries were a lot more occupied.

Although it is documented that he returned *to duty* from his signalling course on June 9, it has not been recorded as to when Private Slattery was to find himself in action with his Company once more.

On June 15, the 60th Battalion moved westward along the Ypres-Poperinghe Road to *Camp 'A'* where the unit was to remain until the final day of the month. There it began once again to settle into the routines and rigours – and the perils - of trench warfare*.

(Right: A typical British Army Camp during a winter period somewhere on the Continent – from a vintage post-card)



*During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less 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 usually withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former being 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: Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in late 1916, by then equipped with helmets and with the less visible Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifle – from Illustration)

The first three weeks of the month of July followed this set pattern for Private Slattery's 60th Battalion: at first the front line, next in support at Ypres, then to reserve near the northern French community of Steenvoorde where the personnel trained and also played sports. On the 26th the unit moved forward once more and the pattern of postings resumed, this time in reverse order.

On August 11, by then equipped with the British-made Lee-Enfield Short rifle which had replaced the Canadian Ross*, the Battalion occupied the forward trenches at *Hill 60*, scene of some of the fighting two months beforehand. There it relieved the 10th Battalion, also of Canadian Infantry.

(Right: *Hill 60* a century after the great War, today preserved - as much as nature will allow - by the Belgian Government – photograph from 1915)



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****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.

On the following day the German artillery bombarded the Canadian positions heavily in support of some strong battle patrols sent across No-Man's-Land. However, for the most part these local attacks were repulsed before having reached the Canadian-held trenches, or were contained where they had reached their objectives. They were then driven away.

For the rest of the front-line tour, the Battalion War Diary reports the time for the most part as being... *relatively quiet.*

The 60th Battalion was to move again to the front in the *Ypres Salient* only days after having been relieved, on August 20, for yet another four-day tour, whereupon, having been replaced by British forces, it marched back to Ypres from where it was transported by train to *St. Lawrence Camp*. The 60th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles of Canada*) was never again to return to *the Salient*.

On August 27 the unit, in the company of the other battalions of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade, arrived, on foot via Poperinghe, at billets in the area of Steenvoorde. According to the Battalion War Diarist, the 9th was the... *Last Brigade of 1st, 2nd, or 3rd Can. Division to leave the Ypres Salient.*

Private Slattery's unit remained in its billets in the area of Steenvoorde until September 7, undergoing training in attacking entrenched positions and also in co-operation with aircraft – although apparently more often than not these exercises were cancelled due to the poor weather.

Private Slattery himself, however, during this time had contrived to attract the notice of the 60th Battalion authorities: charged *with...Drunk & creating disturbance after 9 p.m on 5/9/16...he was awarded fourteen days of Field Punishment Number 1.* Of course, when and how he was to serve this sentence with the Battalion to be on the move on September 7 is not clear, but he was to forfeit his pay and daily field allowance for those fourteen days – for a total of fifteen dollars and forty cents.

(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)



(continued)

On September 7 the 60th Battalion was taken by bus to Arques where it boarded a train which carried it southwards, to Auxi-le-Chateau, in which community it arrived at five o'clock on the following morning, September 8.

From Auxi-le-Chateau Private Slattery and his comrades-in-arms were now to march for five of the next six days, to arrive at the large camp which had been established at – and was named - the *Brickfields (La Briqueterie)*, in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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

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

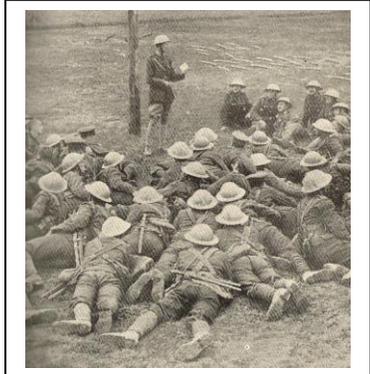
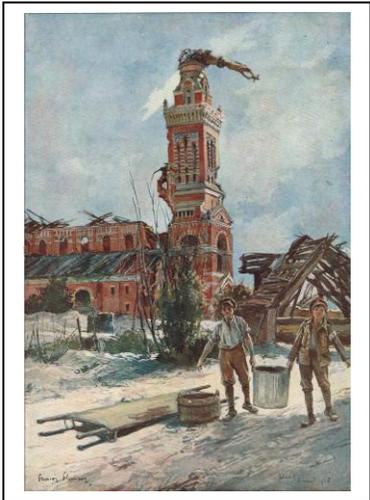
On that first day all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose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

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

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

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

The 60th Battalion reported to the *Brickfields* at six-thirty in the evening of September 14 where it bivouacked until the next day. During that night the Battalion personnel were undoubtedly disturbed by the noise of the heavy British artillery barrage which was preceding the early-hour attack of the morning of the 15th.



The unit, however, was not one of those which went into action in those early hours of that September 15. During the day it merely moved to another camp, *Usna Hill*, where once more it was to spend a night under canvas.

On September 16, Private Slattery's 60th Battalion was ordered forward into the area of the Albert-Bapaume Road and close to the remnants of the village of La Boisselle. Further along the way to these positions, the unit was equipped for an attack which the Battalion was to put in at six-thirty that evening, in support of a planned earlier attack on the German *Zollern Graben Trench* system.

This first attack proved to be a failure and, in going forward to reinforce the 42nd Battalion which had undertaken it, the Private Slattery's unit suffered heavy casualties from both artillery and machine-gun fire. Some of the troops managed to move up into what should have been the Battalion's jumping-off point for the six-thirty attack, but others were ordered to take shelter in shell-holes.

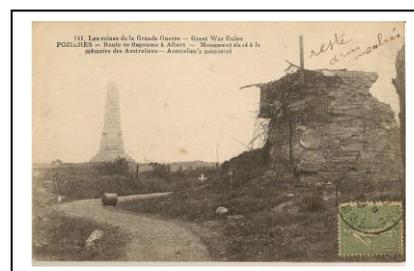
Battalion casualties for this operation – which lasted from September 16 to 23 by which date the unit had withdrawn in stages to *Brickfields* – numbered approximately three-hundred *all ranks*.

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



On September 24 Private Slattery and his Battalion began to march. Other further British-led offensives were scheduled for September 25, 26 and October 1. In the first, the *Battle of Morval*, there was to be no Canadian involvement; and in the *Battle of Le Transloy*, the third operation, the Canadian Corps was to serve as the Reserve Army; only in the second affair, the *Battle of Thiepval*, were Canadian units to be among the assault troops.

(Right and right below: *Some of the remnants of the village of Pozières as it was after the Great War, in 1919 – and as it is a century later. The Australian War Memorial may be seen in both images. – colour photograph from 2016*)



But the 60th Battalion, having played a role in the attack of just days before, was not to be asked to do so on this occasion: it went for the aforementioned march – to Warley, then Toutencourt where the unit was to spend three days in training, to Harpenville and then Bouzincourt. From there Private Slattery's Battalion paraded back to the *Brickfields* area on October 1...just in time to provide working-parties to repair roads and to bury cable in the areas of La Boisselle, Pozières and Courcellette.



(Right: Seen from the north, the village of Courcellette just over a century after the events of the 1st Battle of the Somme – photograph from 2017)



On the night of October 4-5 the Battalion was moved forward once more, into Brigade Support positions where it was to remain until October 7. A further offensive had been planned, although on this occasion it was the single 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade rather than full Divisions, Corps or even Armies which were to undertake the attack.

The objective was a strong German defensive position known as *Regina Trench* and for the attack two of the 60th Battalion's four Companies were to be attached to the 43rd and 58th Canadian Infantry Battalions. The remaining two Companies were to follow-up in support.

The assault began at ten minutes to five on the morning of October 8 following a preliminary artillery barrage. At the outset the attack went well enough – the Germans would later successfully counter-attack – and objectives were reached and occupied. In the late afternoon the 60th Battalion was then ordered to relieve the two attacking battalions in the captured positions and to take responsibility for what was now the new front line.

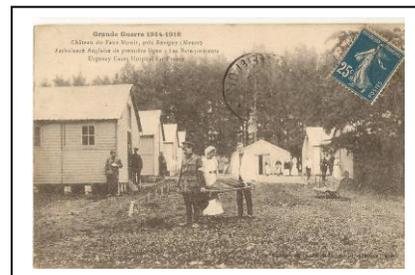


(Right above: *Regina Trench Cemetery* and some of the ground surrounding, the position finally wrested from the Germans by Canadian troops in November of 1916 – photograph from 2014)

The unit remained in these newly-acquired trenches and dug-outs until the night of October 9-10 when it retired to bivouacs at *Tara Hill Camp*. Hours later it withdrew further to *Brickfields Camp* where, on the morrow, October 11, the 60th Battalion War Diary counted the cost of this latest tour – in fact, he mentions only *other ranks*: twelve *killed in action*; seventeen *missing in action*; and sixty-seven *wounded*.



(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*)



On the following day again, October 12, the 60th Battalion began a ten-day march away from the *First Battle of the Somme*. But Private Slattery was not among its ranks; he was being released from hospital on that day and was to re-join his unit on yet the next day at Val de Maison (see immediately below).

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

He had been admitted for medical attention to an unidentified facility on October 6. His records then document him as having passed through two Canadian Field Ambulances – the 2nd CFA at Vadencourt and the 9th CFA at nearby Val-de-Maison - on the same day, October 12, and as having been released *to duty* at the same time. His complaint had been an abscess.

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

The 60th Battalion was to retire from *the Somme* by a semi-circular itinerary, towards the west before turning northwards so as to pass to the western side of the city of Arras. Its trek took the unit through Warloy, Val de Maison - where it remained for days in training and was re-joined by Private Slattery - Hérissart, Bonneville and beyond until, on October 23 in the late afternoon it arrived in Marœuil.



On October 24 not only did the personnel of the Battalion receive a bath accompanied by clean underwear, but also orders to relieve a battalion of the London Regiment in close support and reserve trenches. This had been accomplished by midnight and early next morning the German mortars welcomed Private Slattery's unit to the sector as well.

The late autumn of 1916 and the winter of 1916-1917 were to be of the everyday grind of life in and out of the trenches. There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids – major and minor - by both sides.

This latter activity was encouraged by the High Command who felt it to be a morale booster which also kept the troops in the right offensive frame of mind – the troops who were ordered to carry them out in general apparently loathed these operations.



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

Casualties were to be few during this entire period and, as ever, it was the enemy artillery to which those that occurred were mainly due – some two-thirds of all *Great War* casualties were to be the result of shell-fire. It was to be sickness and, perhaps surprisingly, dental work which were to keep the medical facilities busy during the winter of 1916-1917.

Private Slattery, however, was not again to be a patient of the Canadian Army Medical Corps; but he *was* to be a student of the *Signalling Corps* – again - and was to undertake a course during this period for three weeks less a day, from December 4 until Christmas Eve when he re-joined his unit.

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Apparently Christmas Day of 1916 was worth re-joining for: (Excerpt from the 60th Battalion War Diary entry for December 25, 1916) *Great preparations made to give the men a Happy Christmas Day. Extra food was bought out of the Regimental Funds and supplemented by Christmas cakes and Christmas stockings and comforts sent out by friends of the Battalion for every man. The men had a fine dinner and a very happy day, including a concert in the evening...*

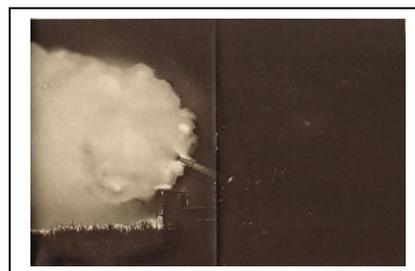
Thus quickly passed the festive season as the New Year in those days was not of great importance – in a celebratory sense - to any units except the Scottish regiments.

According to the 60th Battalion War Diary entries for the winter months, it would appear that Private Slattery's unit was not to take part in any raid – it was, in fact, the *Germans* who came to visit on one occasion; usually the most perilous thing to be reported was the at times frequent gas alert. New gases, mustard and phosgene, were coming into use and the means of delivery was now by gas shells – thus the vagaries of the wind were no longer of much importance. Even so, there does not appear to have been any crisis on the 60th Battalion front.

The month of March 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.*

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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.



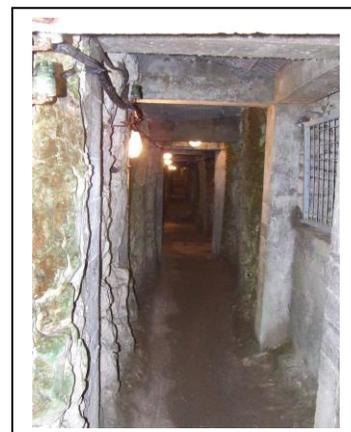
While the British campaign proved an overall disappointment, the French offensive at *Le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

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 4th or 3rd 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 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which had stormed the *Ridge* itself. On the immediate right of that attack was the 2nd 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.



On those first two days of the First Battle of Arras, however, the 60th Battalion was to play only a very peripheral role in the fighting on *Vimy Ridge*. (Excerpt from 60th Battalion War Diary entry for April 9, 1917) *Battalion...in support. Moved from Assembly Trench to old front-line trenches at 11.15 pm... Very few dugouts available for the men.*

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As for the next day: *In old front line trenches in reserve to the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade.*

(Right: *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*)



On April 11 the 60th Battalion itself was to be relieving units which had fought during the previous two days, on the 13th finding itself in the area of the village of La Chaudière on the Douai Plain and looking up at *Vimy Ridge* from what, four days before, had been German-occupied territory.

(Right: *The Canadian National Monument on Vimy Ridge as seen looking southwards from the La Chaudière Sector: On April 9, 1917, this area lay behind the German lines – photograph from 1914*)

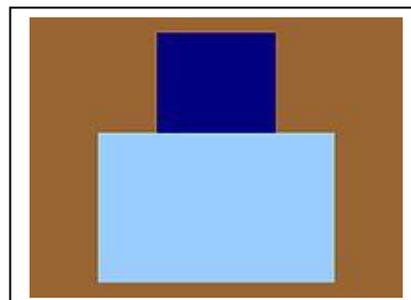


A day later the Battalion was relieved and, by April 16, the unit had retired well to the rear, to the vicinity of the community of Villers-au-Bois for further training. On the final day of its posting there, April 24, the 60th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles of Canada*) War Diarist recorded the following: *Received intimation that the Battalion is about to be disbanded and absorbed by the 5th C.M.Rs* and 87th Canadian Battalions respectively.*

**Canadian Mounted Rifles, which were by that time serving as dismounted infantry*

The image of the shoulder-patch of the 60th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles of Canada*) is from the Wikipedia web-site)

The three following days were served by the unit in *Grange Tunnel* (see colour photograph above) before the three ultimate days of its existence were spent back at Villers-au-Bois. The War Diary entry of April 29 is perhaps as scathing a criticism of a decision taken by his superiors that a serving officer is likely to make:



The disbanding of a force of 828 fighting men of all ranks, well trained, with a perfect organization to carry it throughout the war, for Political reason, seems most unjust, and shows little feeling, or respect for the Officers, N.C.Os. and men, who have been in the trenches for fourteen months, and those who have made the supreme sacrifice with their lives, and who rest in named, and un-named graves, in France and Belgium. If tried and efficient Battalions are to be broken up like this, in the midst of a great war, and on the very battlefields, it will surely be more discouraging than encouraging, to further recruiting in Canada.

It was apparently officially, according to his own papers, on April 24, 1917, that Private Slattery was transferred to the 87th Battalion (*Canadian Grenadier Guards*).

* * * * *

Since the Canadian battalions of the *Great War* often share a common general history, much of it has already been found in the preceding pages *a propos* the 60th Battalion. What follows, therefore, is an abridged version of the experience of the 87th Battalion up until April 24, 1917, at which time Private Slattery was *taken on strength* by that same unit.

The 87th Battalion (*Canadian Grenadier Guards*) was an element of the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 4th Canadian Division, the last such Canadian formation to be despatched to *active service* on the Western Front during the *Great War**.

**There was also to be a Canadian 5th Division but, once having been formed, it remained in the United Kingdom for the duration of the Great War, for training and re-enforcement purposes.*

(Right: *Reninghelst Military Cemetery, one of the few reminders of the Great War in the village where the 4th Canadian Division had its Headquarters towards the end of August, 1916 – photograph from 1916*)



The 87th Battalion had arrived in France on August 12 of 1916, having landed in the French industrial port-city of Le Havre. Three days later the unit and the entire 4th Canadian Division had been on their way north, to the area of the Franco-Belgian frontier and then beyond, to serve for six weeks in a sector to the south-west of the remnants of the medieval city of Ypres (today *Ieper*).



(Right above: *The remains of a school and of a fire-station in the city of Ypres where not even the cellars provided shelter – from a vintage post-card of 1919*)

On October 3, 1916, having been withdrawn from Belgium only days before in order to undergo training in north-western France, the 87th Battalion had been ordered by the British High Command to move south, to the area of *the Somme*, where the wretched British summer offensive was still under way.

The unit had travelled from the north at first by train and then on foot and had arrived in the vicinity of the provincial town of Albert a week later, on October 10. There the Battalion had bivouacked, at *Brickfields Camp*, a temporary ad hoc military complex on the outskirts of the town.

The 87th Battalion had been ordered into the forward trenches for the first time on October 17, but it was not to be until six minutes past mid-day on October 21, after days of waiting, that the unit had put it its attack and had captured the *Regina Trench* strong-point, an objective which had previously proved to be impregnable.



(continued)

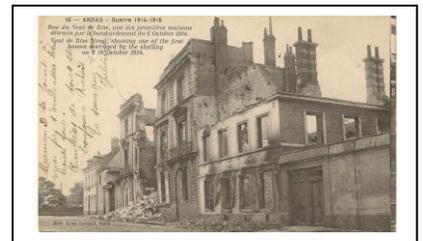
(Previous page: *Canadian wounded being bandaged on the field before being evacuated to the rear after the fighting at Courcellette – from Le Miroir*)

This success was unfortunately to be short-lived and *Regina Trench* had subsequently been ceded back to the Germans following a counter-attack.

The Battalion had then retired but had remained in the area of *Pozières* until October 30 when it was to move into billets, further to the rear, in the town of *Albert* itself.

In November the unit had moved back into the area of *Regina Trench* on two further occasions: the first was to pass with little incident; however, during the second tour, the Battalion had been part of a further attack on November 18. *Regina Trench* having been definitively captured by that time, the objective on this date had been to occupy a number of adjacent German positions. The operation had been only partially successful and the unit had incurred a total of another two-hundred thirty-two *killed, wounded and missing in action*.

Relieved on the day following the attack, November 19, it was to be three days later again, on November 22, that the 87th Battalion had begun to march away from *the Somme*. By December 4 the unit had marched – as had all the Canadian units - in a semi-circular itinerary – to the westward and then to the northward. Its destination had been the community of *Frévillers*, some twenty-five kilometres north-west of the city of *Arras*.



(Right above: *One of the earliest houses to be destroyed in Arras, by German shell-fire on October 6, 1914 – from a vintage post-card*)

The 87th Battalion had followed in the footsteps of all the other Canadian Infantry battalions and had moved into the sectors from just to the north of *Arras* as far up the line as the venerable town of *Béthune*. Almost this entire region was a coal-mining area, for the French by far the most important in the country, and was thus a prize coveted by both sides.



As the Canadians moved in it became more and more their responsibility and remained so for much of the remainder of the *Great War*.

(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*)

As recounted beforehand, the winter of 1916-1917 had been a quiet one and the 87th Battalion had spent it in much the same manner as had *Private Slattery's* former unit. On March 26 the 87th Battalion had been relieved from its then-current tour in the front-line positions and had been withdrawn to a rest area at *Chateau de la Haie*.

(continued)

From the next day until April 2 the unit had undergone extensive training for the upcoming British offensive, so whether there was much *rest* to be enjoyed is to be speculated – then again, no-one had been shot at.

On April 3, the 87th Battalion had moved to the front area.

On April 4, 5 and 6 it had supplied working parties and dug trenches.

On April 7, the final elements of the Battalion had moved forward to the front area.

By ten o'clock on the evening of April 8, the 87th Battalion had reported itself to be in its battle positions.

Excerpt from the 87th Battalion War Diary of April 9, 1917: *Easter Monday, zero hour 5.30 A.M. The Battalion, 520 strong all ranks, went "over the top" supported by a strong artillery barrage.*

Excerpts from 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary entry for April 9, 1917:

12.25 p.m. - 87th Battalion report that a party of 75th Battalion who were out in front of BASSO (Trench) were counter attacked by the enemy, and believe that some of our men were taken prisoners.

12.55 p.m. – The 87th Battalion advise that they are sending out a Lewis Gun Officer, with 4 guns, and 20 men to clean up the situation around the Old German Front Line & proceed on to BASSO after this is accomplished.

2.00 p.m. – O.C., 87th Battalion reports one Machine Gun of the 11th Machine Gun Coy. operating sixty yards left of crater where LIEUT. Hannaford and his party are established.

The 87th Battalion assault had enjoyed only mixed results at first, even some of the successful attackers having been forced to retire because their flanks had become vulnerably exposed. Eventually, however, the advance had continued, one of the last actions having gone in at a quarter to seven in the evening to clear two more trenches of the enemy.

By the late evening of April 10 the Canadian Corps had cleared the area of *Vimy Ridge* of the few remaining pockets of resistance and had begun to consolidate the area in anticipation of the expected German counter-attacks – which, in fact, were never to amount to very much.

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



On April 30-May 1, 1917, the 87th Battalion War Diarist recorded the arrival of five-hundred eight *other ranks* and fourteen officers as re-enforcements from the 60th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles of Canada*). Private Slattery's transfer was now complete.

The 87th Battalion had reverted to that routine of life in the trenches in the *Lens Sector*. June had been fairly active, particularly the evening of the 8th when three battalions had fairly successfully raided the enemy lines. The 'Brass' was pleased: on the debit side had been a count of one-hundred thirty-nine casualties.



(Right above: *A further photograph of a Canadian working-party carrying supplies of all kinds to the troops in forward positions – from Le Miroir*)

In contrast to June, much of July was to be spent in reserve in the area of Chateau de la Haie. Parades, lectures, drills, inspections, visits from Brigade and Divisional Commanders as well as from the High Command, sports and working parties had all been the order of those days. The 87th Battalion had even lined the sides of the road on one particular date when His Majesty King George V was passing by.

In addition to all this, on the final day of July, Private Slattery was awarded a ten-day period of leave – there are no further details to be gleaned from his papers.

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



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

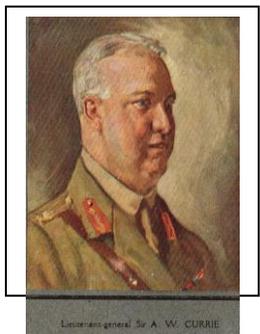
(Right above: *An example of the conditions under which the troops were ordered to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)

(Right: *Canadian troops advancing 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 have been considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than the city of Lens itself.



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

(continued)

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

(Right: *This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15th Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. – photograph from 1914*)



These defences had held and the Canadian artillery, which had been by then employing newly-developed tactical procedures, was to inflict heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* had remained in Canadian hands.

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



The assault on *Hill 70* had been made the responsibility of several formations of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions. The 87th Battalion of the 4th Canadian Division, was therefore not to be directly involved in any part of this operation but, nonetheless, it had been active elsewhere in the outskirts of Lens during that same period, partially in the area of the Lens-Lievin Road where it today still crosses the Béthune to Lens railway line, and partially in the western outskirts of the city of Lens itself.

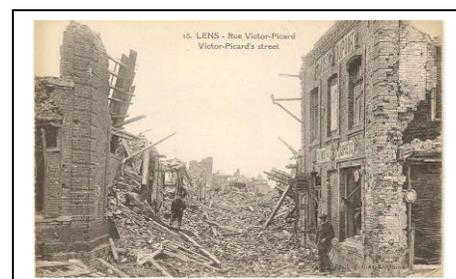
The subsidiary actions ordered at this time had, of course, been undertaken in order to support the attack at *Hill 70*.

(Right: *The city and mining-centre of Lens was in the area of the front line for most of the Great War. This photograph of a Canadian-built light railway running through the rubble of the place was taken in 1917 – from Le Miroir*)



(Right below: *This was Lens by the end of the Great War although much of the damage had been done by the spring of 1918. – from Le Miroir*)

(Excerpts from the 87th Battalion's War Diary entries of August 13 and 14, 1917) ...Orders received that attack of 1st and 2nd Divisions would take place on morning of August 15th. Orders also received from Brigade, that we would endeavour to push closer to the school and establish outposts in enemy front line at this point... Patrols succeeded in gaining the enemy front line but...on the left were forced out by determined resistance on the part of the enemy and the wire. ...it was later decided to withdraw...



14/8/17 - Day spent in making final arrangements for operation... *About 7.20 P.M. orders received from Brigade that in addition to patrols and party attacking line adjoining GREAT PETER STREET we would send one platoon to attack trench leading southerly...*

The son of Patrick Slattery, miner, and of Elizabeth (known as *Lizzie*) Slattery (née *Barker*) – to whom as of November 1, 1915, he had allotted a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay, and to whom, on February 2, 1916, he had willed his all – formerly of Tilt Cove – and perhaps, cited but unconfirmed, also of Harbour Grace – Newfoundland, then later of Montreal, Québec, he was also brother at least to Mary-Margaret, to Edward*, Patrick, William, Francis, James and Gerald.

Private Slattery was reported as having been *killed in action* on August 14, 1916, during fighting in the suburbs of the city of Lens.

**His brother Lieutenant Edward Slattery, DCM, MM & 2 Bars of the 3^d Battalion (Toronto Regiment), was reported as having been killed in action on August 30, 1918, in fighting during the Battle of the Scarpe. He is buried in Valley Cemetery, Vis-en-Artois: Grave reference A.10.*

(Right: *The photograph of the grave-stone of Lieutenant Slattery in Valley Cemetery was taken in 2017*)



Michael Slattery had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and four months: date of birth in Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, February 17, 1897 (from attestation papers); but also in February, 1896 (1911 Census)*.

**A sister Mary Margaret is recorded as having been born in Tilt Cove on February 10, 1896 – were she and Michael a twin? (she is not included in the 1911 Census) - but a brother, Patrick, is recorded in the 1911 Census as having been born in March of 1897.*

Private Michael Slattery was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

(continued)



The *London Gazette Supplement* (Number: 30312, page 10039) of September 25, 1917, 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... 458270 Pte. M. Slattery, Inf.



On a Canadian Military Honours and Awards Citation Card there appears the date, September 2, 1917, on which it was officially awarded and the following: *For bravery and devotion to his work, when acting as a linesman, on account of heavy shelling, telephone lines were disconnected on several occasions, particularly on July 28th/ 29th this man repeatedly exposed himself to great danger in order to repair the lines and keep up communication. His work kept him practically in the forward area and it was chiefly through his noble conduct the communication was maintained almost continuously – authorized 7/8/17.*

There appears to be no further documentation *a propos* the decoration among Private Slattery's own papers, nor apparently in the 87th 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. Last updated – January 24, 2023.