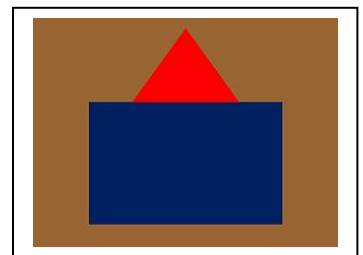




Private William Small, Number 68031 of the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in La Laiterie Military Cemetery: Grave reference III.A.3.

(Right: The image of the shoulder flash of the 25th Battalion is from the Wikipedia web-site.)



(continued)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *brakeman*, William Smart may have been the young man who crossed the Cabot Strait from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland on board the SS *Lintrose* on November 1 of 1913. He disembarked at North Sydney, Cape Breton, this apparently, according to the vessel's passenger list, being his intended destination.

Some thirteen months later, on December 1 according to his first pay records, he enlisted and was immediately *taken on strength* by the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*), a unit newly-authorized for overseas service*.

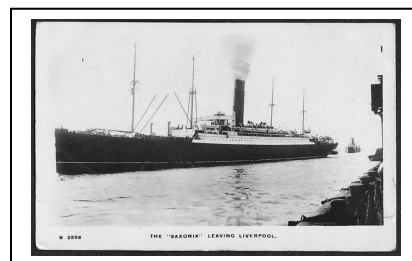
**Canada already possessed a number of Canadian Militia regiments, but these, by law, were unable to operate outside the borders of the country. Thus upon the outbreak of the Great War, new overseas battalions – for whom the militia regiments could recruit, and from which many soldiers transferred – were formed, some two-hundred fifty by the end of the conflict.*

Where he was on the day that he enlisted is not clear, but by December 3 Private Small was in the provincial capital city of Halifax, there for further formalities and processing. Having presented himself to undergo a medical examination which considered him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force...*, Private Small then also underwent attestation on the same day.

The formalities of enlistment were then brought to a conclusion some five days later again, on December 8, by the Officer Commanding the 25th Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel G.A. LeCain, when he declared – on paper - that...*W. Small...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

It was to be yet a further five months after his enlistment that Private Small and his 25th Battalion embarked for overseas, the unit having trained at the Halifax Armouries and on the adjacent Common during that period – although the exercises had been interrupted by an outbreak of diphtheria. And while 'A' Company had been billeted in the Armoury itself, the other three Companies, 'A', 'B', and 'C', had been obliged to make do with tents until wooden huts had been constructed – the completion of which, apparently, had been after the departure of the unit.

Private Small and his unit embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Saxonia* in the harbour at Halifax on May 20 of 1915 for passage to the United Kingdom. The 25th Battalion was to travel in the company of the 22nd Battalion from Québec, and also with a contingent of the 2nd Division Ammunition Park, for a total of some two-thousand three hundred military personnel all told.



Saxonia sailed on the same May 20, to dock in the English south-coast harbour and naval facility of Plymouth-Devonport at ten minutes past four in the morning of May 29.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *The image of the Royal Mail Ship Saxonia leaving the port of Liverpool is from the Wikipedia web-site. Requisitioned by the British for government service she was deployed for use early in the conflict as a floating prisoner-of-war camp before seeing use as a troop transport as of 1915.*)

(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*)



The new arrivals apparently soon were on board trains which then sped them across southern England to the county of Kent.

Once there, Private Small's Battalion proceeded to the large and newly-forming Canadian military establishment of *Shorncliffe* on the Dover Straits and in the vicinity of the sea-side town and harbour of Folkestone.

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

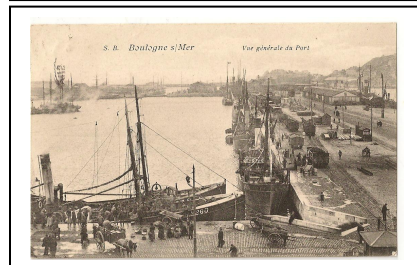


The 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) was a component of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2nd Canadian Division. The 1st Canadian Division had been serving on the Continent since February of that same 1915, having been deployed in northern France and subsequently in the *Kingdom of Belgium* during that time, and had distinguished itself during the *2nd Battle of Ypres* in the spring of that same year. By the late summer of 1915 it was now the turn of the 2nd Canadian Division to take a place in the line.



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

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



On September 15, 1915, the 25th Battalion marched from *Shorncliffe Camp* in the late afternoon en route to nearby Folkestone where the unit boarded a troop transport for the short crossing to the Continent. Sailing at ten o'clock that same evening, the troops disembarked in the French port of Boulogne some two hours later, at one o'clock in the morning*.



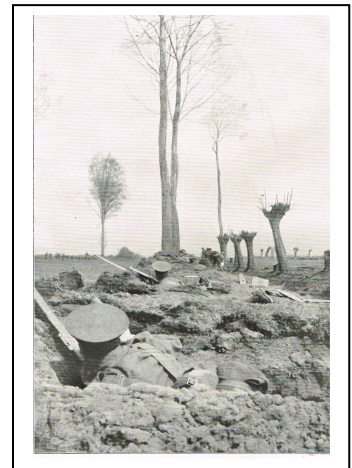
**There is a one-hour time difference between the United Kingdom and France.*

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

Later, on that same September 16, and after several hours rest, the Battalion marched to meet the station at Pont de Briques for the train which was to take them into northern France, not far from the frontier with Belgium which it was soon to cross, and not far distant from the large centre of Hazebrouk.

By September 23, the Nova Scotia Unit, by the 19th of the month based in the area of Locre (today *Loker*) and having had a first experience of the trenches, was relieving the 2nd Battalion, *the King’s Own*, in positions to the north of the Franco-Belgian border in the area of the Kemmel-Ypres Road.

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



The following months were to be a relatively quiet period for all the troops of both sides in the trenches in Belgium; there was, of course, a steady trickle of casualties, usually due to enemy artillery fire and to his snipers, but until the spring of 1916 there was only the daily grind of the infantryman’s life in – and out of – the trenches*.

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



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

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

For Private Small, however, this period of orientation was, unhappily, to be cut short.

(continued)

On a day when the unit was serving *in the field*, the entire 25th Battalion War Diary entry for October 3, 1915, was as follows: *Fine Day. Father Dougan held service for R.C.'s in Lochre Church and Capt. SHATFORD for other denominations in the Field south of Orderly Room:- One O.R. killed in action.*

The son of Reuben Small, miner, and of Mary Ann Small (née *Frampton*), both* originally from Fogo, then of Tilt Cove, Newfoundland – Reuben Small by 1921 of Wild Cove, White Bay, Newfoundland – he was also brother to Mary-Ann (born 23/12/1891, married to *McAdam* of Sydney Mines) - to whom, as of June 1 of 1915, he had allocated a monthly twenty dollars from his pay* - to Jemima 5/5/80, to Julia 26/8/81, to Sarah 20/1/83, John 15/5/84, Clara-Phœbe 23/1/86, James 23/5/88, William-Thomas 30/4/89, Janet 24/11/89, Clara-Rebecca 27/5/91, and 2/2/94 Dorcas**.

**The couple married in October of 1879.*

***It should be added that, although all these names – in sequence – are from the original Register of Newfoundland Births, the dates of birth are in several cases in too close a proximity for them all to be correct – and it does not appear to be a problem of baptismal dates.*

Private Small was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 3, 1915, while serving in the trenches in Belgium.

William Joseph (from Birth Register, see later in this paragraph) Small had enlisted at the *apparent* age of thirty-two years: date of birth at Tilt Cove, Newfoundland – from attestation papers – October 11, 1882; this date is confirmed by the (original) Newfoundland Birth Register although the place of birth therein is cited as Wild Cove in White Bay.

Private William Small was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 24, 2023.