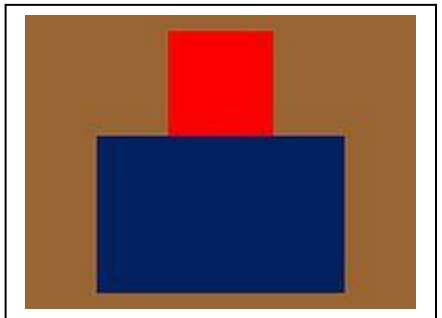




Private Samuel Summerton (also found as *Somerton* and *Sumerton*), Number 715203 of 'D' Company, 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Duisans Military Cemetery, Étrun: Grave reference VI.H.69..

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (New Brunswick), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is from the [bing.com/images](http://bing.com/images) web-site*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of an electrician, Samuel Summerton may have been the young man found on the passenger list of the ore-carrier *Storstad*\* sailing from Wabana (*Bell Island*) to North Sydney, Cape Breton, where it arrived on June 2, 1915.

*\*In May of 1914, Storstad rammed the SS Empress of Ireland in the St. Lawrence River. The passenger ship sank in a matter of minutes and more than one-thousand lives were lost. Storstad managed to limp into harbour at Montreal.*

*Then in March of 1917, Storstad was herself sunk, by the German submarine U-62, with the loss of three crew members.*

From North Sydney Samuel Summerton moved to the not-distant industrial city of Sydney. The date of his arrival there is uncertain; however, he was indisputably there by early December of 1915, for that was where and when he enlisted.

His first pay records show that it was on December 8, 1915, that the Canadian Army\* first began to remunerate Private Summerton for his services to the 106<sup>th</sup> Overseas Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*), by which unit he had been *taken on strength* on the same date.

*\*Apparently it was not to be until 1940 that the term Canadian Army officially came into use.*

On the same day he was attested, his oath witnessed by a local justice of the peace. On the morrow, December 9, and still in Sydney, he then underwent a medical examination which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. Likely soon afterwards he was on a train southward-bound for the town of Truro where to 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion had its headquarters (but also see \* below).

According to an account written by one of the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion's other recruits, the first young men who had enlisted in Cape Breton, once having been transferred to Truro for the express purpose of, ostensibly, undertaking training, had been boarded in either local hotels on in the Y.M.C.A..

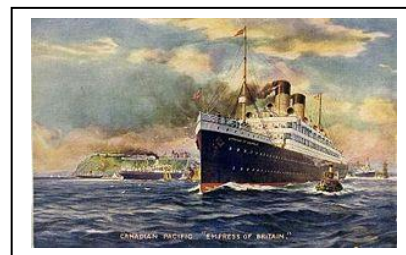
There was, however, apparently – this from the same source – to be very little training undertaken: at Truro there had apparently been no barracks, no firing range and no parade ground, and it appears that shovelling snow and marching had comprised much of the exercise for the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion's Truro detachment during the first sixth months of the unit's existence\*.

*\*While it may be supposed that Private Summerton was in Truro during this period, this may not be altogether correct as he is recorded as having entered hospital in Sydney for three days, May 8 to 11 of 1916, to be treated for a case of tonsillitis.*

Three months were now to pass before the formalities of his enlistment were to be brought to a conclusion on March 8 by the Commanding Officer of the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*), Major Robert Innes - not long afterwards to be promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel - when he declared – on paper – that...*Samuel Summerton...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

A further fifteen weeks after this episode, after the short train-journey from Truro to the capital city, Private Summerton and his 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Empress of Britain* in the harbour at Halifax. The date was July 15 of 1916.

The unit was not to travel alone during its trans-Atlantic crossing; also taking passage on the vessel were the 93<sup>rd</sup> and 105<sup>th</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry, the 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Regiment (*Halifax Rifles*), the 5<sup>th</sup> Draft of the Royal Canadian Dragoons and the 8<sup>th</sup> Draft of 'C' Battery of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery.



(Right: *The image of the Empress of Britain is from the Wikipedia website.*)

The *Empress* sailed later on the same July 15, and docked some ten days later again in the English west-coast port of Liverpool, on July 25. From there Private Summerton's unit was transported by train to the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* which had by that time been established on the Dover Straits in close proximity to the town and harbour of Folkestone in the county of Kent.



Some ten weeks following, the mandatory period of training by then having been completed at *Lower Dibgate Camp*, the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion might well have been expecting its cross-Channel transfer to *active service* on the Western Front. But this was not to be\*.

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

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

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

At the very end of August of 1916 of the *Great War*, the Canadian Corps had commenced its involvement in the *First Battle of the Somme* and from the very outset – but particularly after the middle - of the month of September, many of its battalions had incurred heavy losses. It was to fill the depleted ranks of those battered units that much of the personnel of the Canadian units which had remained in England was now to be deployed.





(Preceding page: *Dead of the Somme awaiting burial* – an unidentified photograph)

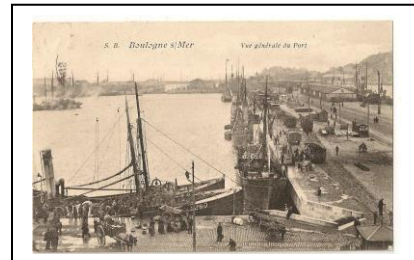
On September 27 Private Summerton was called to *active service* and to this end was *struck off strength* by the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion to be then *taken on strength* – on paper – by the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*) whose parent unit by this time was already serving on the Continent.

On that night of September 27-28 he crossed the Dover Straits via nearby Folkestone and the French port of Boulogne on the coast opposite, some two hours sailing time distant. By the evening of that second date, having travelled south by train from Boulogne, he had reported *to duty* to the Canadian Base Depot at *Rouelles Camp*, in the vicinity of the French industrial port-city of Le Havre.

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

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

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



Once there, Private Summerton remained at the Base Depot for ten days before then being despatched on October 8 to his unit in the field. While his own papers document his arrival to the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion as having transpired on either the 10<sup>th</sup> or the 13<sup>th</sup> of that month, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary records that it was in the area of the community of Bertaucourt and then of Longuevillette that, on October 9...*Reinforcements this date...2 Officers...also 87 other ranks from 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion Reserve Battn....* before, on October 10...*Reinforcements this date 164 O.R. from 106<sup>th</sup> Battn.*

Likely a soldier of this second detachment, Private Summerton had arrived *to duty* in the cauldron of the *First Battle of the Somme*.

\* \* \* \* \*

The 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion (*New Brunswick*) was an element of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, and it had been serving in the *Kingdom of Belgium* since September of 1915. After having landed in Boulogne in mid-month, and having been transported through northern France, the Division had immediately been posted to a sector in-between the by-then battered city of Ypres and the Franco-Belgian frontier.



**(Preceding page: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)**

More than six months were now to pass before the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to see any major infantry action.

That autumn of 1915 and the winter which followed must have started to become somewhat monotonous and uncomfortable – as were to be all the winters of the *Great War*: what was said about war being...*ninety per cent boredom and ten per cent terror*...must have appeared, to many of those in the trenches, to be correct.

For that entire period the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was in that same *St. Eloi Sector* south of Ypres, in theory spending one week in the front line, a second week in the support lines, and a third week in reserve – although, of course, it never worked out exactly that way.

And occasionally there was even a bath and a bed.

In reserve one could count on everything from a variety of inspections from those higher up the military ladder – and every now and then from a leading politician or a member of a royal family – to being seconded into a variety of working-parties. While in support there were more working-parties, route marches, training on new equipment, inspections from lesser lights on that military ladder, more inspections for trench foot and other medical problems, and carrying ammunition and the like from the rear to the front.



**(Right above: *A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets – from Illustration*)**

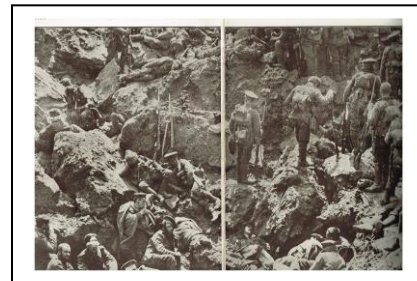
At the sharp end of the stick, of course, activities became more restricted by the size of one's environment. For one thing, keeping one's head down, if one wished to retain it, meant that all there was to see was the wall of the trench and the sky – this for days on end. If one left the relative safety of the front line positions it was to go on patrol – usually at night – or on a raid – usually at night - or on a wiring-party – usually at night – thus a good night's sleep was not necessarily a common thing – or even a bad night's sleep for that matter.

Food and water at times were temporarily scarce, sanitary facilities as well, and one's company at times was augmented by a corpse or two or more lying close by in No-Man's-Land. And death always stood at one's shoulder - apparently an average of two thousand died on the Western Front each and every day of the War: *wastage*, Douglas Haig called it.

Of course, things were never as concise or time-tabled as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves posted in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

(continued)

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division's first co-ordinated infantry offensive action was to take place from March 27 of the spring of 1916 up until and including April 17 – these the *official* dates – when the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be involved in the so-called *Action of the St-Éloi Craters*. The craters had been formed when, on that March 27, the British had detonated a series of mines - underground galleries filled with explosives. The explosions had then been immediately followed with an assault by British infantry units.



(Right above: *The occupation of a crater in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps in the St-Éloi Sector – from Illustration*)

The Canadian role had been to take over from the British to occupy the *presumed* newly-won territory; however, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which turned the just-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, plus a resolute German defence, greeted the newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on or about April 5-6.

This had been the first major encounter with the enemy that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was to experience and it had likely come as a shock to the new-comers. After some three weeks of fighting up to the knees – and at times reportedly the waist - in mud and water, at first the British – and then the Canadians who were to relieve them – had been held in check by the German defenders and had incurred a heavy casualty list.

It appears from the Battalion War Diary, however, that the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been only very *marginally* involved. During the period of the Canadian activity, the unit was... *standing by*, was... *in camp*, or for five days in a row... *Battalion in trenches, Large working parties working on trenches. Weather fine*. Apart from the casualties incurred due to his artillery, the Battalion appears to have had no contact with the enemy.

Then some seven weeks later, from June 2 to 14, was to be fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the areas of *Sanctuary Wood, Railway Dugouts, Maple Copse, Hooge and Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps. The Canadians had, it would seem, been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions dominating the Canadian trenches when the Germans had delivered an offensive, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity which, fortunately, they had never exploited.



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

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





The British Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, had reacted – perhaps a bit precipitately - by organizing an almost impromptu counter-attack on the following day, an assault intended, at a minimum, to recapture the lost ground of June 2.

Badly organized, this operation was to prove a horrendous experience: many of the intended attacks were never to go in – those that had done so, had been launched piecemeal and the assaulting troops had been cut to shreds. The enemy was to remain in the captured Canadian positions and the Canadians had been subsequently left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.

Then for ten more days there had been some desperate fighting, at first involving mainly units of the newly-arrived Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division\*, although it is fair to say that the critical situation had very soon drawn in troops from the other Canadian Divisions.

*\*Officially coming into service at midnight of December 31, 1915 and January 1 of 1916, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, while then awaiting the arrival from England of its final infantry battalions, had trained for a period in and behind the Ploegsteert Sector before, in March and April of 1916, becoming responsible for a south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had thus been engaged in relieving other battalions during the course of the encounter and it had been heavily shelled on occasion. However, it had not been in the forward area during much of the infantry activity and had been withdrawn altogether by June 13, the day of the final Canadian counter-attack.

By the time that the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered to move up to the front again on June 14, the action at *Mount Sorrel* and its vicinity was all but over. During the night of June 12-13 the Canadians had once again attacked and, thanks to better organization and a well-prepared and co-ordinated artillery barrage, had taken back almost all of the lost ground. Both sides had thereupon found themselves back much where they had been just eleven days earlier.



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

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



Thus, after having played its role at *Mount Sorrel*, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been relieved and had withdrawn to *Camp "D"* on June 20.

The second half of that following month of July was to be spent at first in *Alberta Camp* and then further back again, at Brigade Reserve in the *Vierstraat Sector*. To compensate for this likely monotonous period of relative rest, the Battalion had then been posted back into the forward trenches for twenty-two of the first twenty-four days of August.

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

Having retired again to *Alberta Camp* near Reninghelst on August 25, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had prepared to leave Belgium. The Regimental War Diarist has noted in his entry of that day: *All ranks in the best of spirits anticipating the move and eager to effect all details in the number of days training, SOMME OPERATIONS.*

The training area for the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be at Tilques, back over the border in northern France and in the vicinity of the larger centre of St-Omer. It had required three successive days of marching for the unit to reach its billets at Éperlecques by August 28 before it then had commenced training on the morrow. One of the first items on the agenda of December 29 was to be the replacement of the Canadian-made Ross rifles by its British counterpart, the short Lee-Enfield Mark III\*.



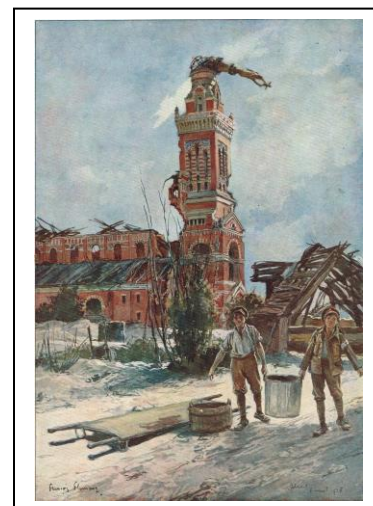
(Right above: *Canadian troops likely in trenches built for training purposes – they are too prim and proper to be the real thing – and here now equipped with steel helmets and with Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles\*, during the late summer or early autumn of 1916 – from The War Illustrated*)

*\*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.*

A week later the Battalion had marched to the railway-station in Arcques to entrain for the journey south to Conteville. A day spent resting in billets was then to be followed by five more on foot *not* resting, by a march which had terminated on September 11 at the *Brickfields (la Briqueterie)*, a large military camp in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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

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





On that first day of the campaign all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions having been 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 and about August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette.



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

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had arrived in the area four days prior to the attack at Flers-Courcellette – other units had reported there on only the day before – thus those interim days were to be spent in preparation. For the attack of September 15, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been in reserve at the outset and, as such, had not moved forward until five o'clock in the afternoon, twelve hours after the initial assault, at which time it was then to re-enforce the efforts of the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Battalions.



On the following day, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, according to its War Diary, had moved to the relative security of a succession of shell holes, apparently to stay there all day and... *where the most intense shelling was endured by the battalion throughout this entire day.*



(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*)

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

On the 17<sup>th</sup> the unit had been ordered moved once more and had taken up positions in a sunken road, to once again remain there all day. The only exception had been 'B' Company which was to assist in an attack delivered by the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion before it had *also* moved there. The attack in question... *met with considerable opposition and rifle and machine gun fire was very heavy.*



(continued)

(Preceding page: *Regina Trench Cemetery – Regina Trench was adjacent to Kenora Trench, another daunting German strong-point – and some of the ground on which the Canadians fought during that autumn of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)

On September 27 the Battalion had been ordered forward yet again, on this occasion to play a role in *the Battle of Thiepval Ridge*, more specifically on the right flank, in the area of *Regina Trench*. The operation had proved to be a further costly misadventure, all for the price of another one-hundred eighty-two casualties.

Then, on October 10, the unit had been withdrawn from the *First Battle of the Somme*.

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had retired towards the westward, then had turned to the north to pass behind, to the west of, the battered city of Arras. On the way, before turning to the north, it was to spend two nights in billets at Longuevillette.



As seen on a previous page, it was to be there at Longuevillette on October 10 that Private Summerton's re-enforcement draft had reported *to duty*.

(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*)

\* \* \* \* \*

By October 15 the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had moved into the *Angres II Sector*, in the area of Lens, and up into the front lines. On the next day, the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Battalion War Diarist entered simply: *Battalion in trenches Conditions quiet, weather wet*.

The conditions were not to be quiet for long: on the morrow the enemy exploded a mine opposite a trench held by 'D' Company of the Battalion – of which Company Private Summerton was a soldier; the remainder of the day was to be spent repairing damage and consolidating the defences. There were no casualties reported on that October 17 but the incident may have reminded some of the troops – perhaps particularly the newcomers - that things could still be bad, even *away from the Somme*.

During this period of late autumn, 1916, and the winter of 1916-1917 there was little in the way of concerted infantry action by either side. There were at least two large raids conducted locally by the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and patrols and wiring parties were still an everyday part of life, but this seems to have been the extent of offensive operations in all that time.



(Right above: *A carrying-party loading up – one of the duties of troops when not serving in the front lines: The head-strap was an idea adapted from the aboriginal peoples of North America. – from Le Miroir*)

Most casualties were due to the ever-present enemy artillery fire, but snipers were also a constant danger and disease and living conditions – perhaps particularly the ubiquitous lice – were to take an additional toll, thus keeping the medical services busy.

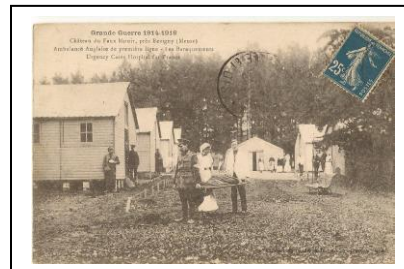
(Right below: *A detachment of Canadian troops going forward during the winter of 1916-1917 – from Illustration*)

Private Summerton was to be one of those in need of medical attention although in his case lice were not the cause of the problem. On December 15 he was evacuated to the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance, at the time established in the vicinity of Hersin-Coupigny, where he was diagnosed as suffering from *acute nephritis*.



From there he was forwarded, perhaps via the 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance at Fosse 10, to the 18<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at LaPugnoy for further treatment; there he arrived on December 17.

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



(Right below: *Within the bounds of LaPugnoy Military Cemetery lie the remains of just over thirteen-hundred soldiers of the Great War, many of them having died of wounds in nearby casualty clearing stations. – photograph from 2017*)

Having remained at LaPugnoy for three days, Private Summerton was transferred again, on this occasion to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian General Hospital at Boulogne, where he was one of one-hundred ninety-eight admissions on the day. Almost as many, one-hundred ninety-one, were discharged six days later, on December 27, Private Summerton again one of that number; but he was not now to return to his unit: he was on his way to England.



On the day of his release Private Summerton was placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Valdivia* for the short cross-Channel journey to the United Kingdom.

(Right: *The image of Valdivia in her war-time garb is from the People's Collection Wales web-site.*)



Having arrived back in England, perhaps in Folkestone through which he had passed some eleven weeks before, Private Summerton was then transported to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Southern General Hospital in the city of Bristol. He was admitted there on December 29 and was to remain there for almost ten weeks.

The period of time that he was to spend in convalescence at the Canadian Convalescent Hospital in Bromley, Kent, was to be comparatively short. Released from Bristol on March 6, 1917, he was to remain at Bromley for a mere three days before he was judged to be... *fit for Physical Training*...and discharged from there on March 9 to the New Brunswick Regimental Depot at Shoreham-on-Sea on England's south coast.



He reported to *duty* on the following day, March 10, 1917.

Although it was likely to make little difference to Private Summerton at the time, during the period of his hospitalization and convalescence he had no longer been on the nominal roll of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion but, on or about the date of his arrival back in England, had been transferred to be the responsibility of the *Canadian Casualty Assembly Centre* whose job it was to handle the numbers of sick and wounded while they were being treated in the United Kingdom\*. He remained on their books until his transfer to the New Brunswick Regimental Depot.

*\*The CCAC was apparently to prove not a very efficient system and after some sixteen months of operation – May of 1916 until the last of August, 1917 – it was disbanded.*

Two days after his arrival at Shoreham, on March 12 he was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Command Depot at not-far-distant St. Leonard's on the Sea, Hastings. The Command Depot's function was to accommodate soldiers – many just released from hospital but not solely those – who were at the time not attached to any unit. At the Depot an assessment would be made as to what use, if any, was to be made of the individual in question\*.

*\*In some cases, of course the decision was made that the soldier was no longer able to contribute to the war-effort, and that repatriation was the only possibility.*

It was to be some two months hence before a decision was eventually taken on Private Summerton. On May 24 he was *struck off strength* by the 3<sup>rd</sup> CCD to be *taken on strength* on the following day by the 13<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion (*New Brunswick*) by this time based back at Shoreham-on-Sea.

Private Summerton was to remain posted to the 13<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion for the next 15 months although the Battalion itself was to be transferred to other locales on two occasions during this period: to the area of nearby Seaford in October of 1917, before being ordered to the Canadian military complex of *Camp Bramshott* in the county of Hampshire in April of 1918.



(Right above: *The community cemetery at Seaford in which are buried a number of Canadian soldiers, including two Newfoundlanders: Frederick Jacob Snelgrove and Ebenezer Tucker – photograph from 2016*)

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



The only hint of a reason for the extended length of Private Summerton's posting to the 13<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion is the entry of September 1, 1917, made by a Medical Board while he was still serving with the above-mentioned unit at Shoreham, that he was suffering from debility. There are no further details.

(continued)

Thus it was not to be until August 16, 1918, that Private Summerton was *struck off strength* by the 13<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion to be immediately despatched for *overseas service* once more, on this occasion likely via Southampton and Le Havre, to report to the Canadian Infantry Base Depot, by this time re-organized and established in the vicinity of the French coastal town of Étaples. Upon his arrival there on August 18 he was *taken on strength* – on paper – by his former unit, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*).

Five days afterwards Private Summerton was on his way to the *Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp* some thirty kilometres to the south-east of Étaples and newly located in proximity to the community of Aubin St-Vaast. From there six days later again, on the 29<sup>th</sup>, he was sent to report to his unit which, so the War Diary records, he did on August 31.

That War Diary, in the entry of that day while the Battalion was resting behind the lines at Berneville to the west of Arras, confirms that...*85 other ranks arrived as reinforcements. Weather fine.*

\* \* \* \* \*

In the meantime the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had spent the winter of 1916-1917 following the routine of trench warfare, perhaps only two incidents having been worthy of anything more the habitual sparse entries: on January 16 Battalion personnel had mounted a raid on the German positions opposite, had bombed a number of dug-outs, had taken a handful of prisoners and had incurred seven dead and fifteen wounded; following that some seven weeks later, on the morning of March 3, an impromptu local armistice had been arranged to evacuate the wounded from No-Man's-Land, the result of an operation on the previous day – the Germans having delivered them to half-way across the divide before the Canadians were to complete the job.

*\*So says the War Diary, but since no such operation is noted for March 2, it must have been undertaken by another unit.*

Then the spring had arrived and with it the time for the campaigning season to begin in earnest. On March 24 the Battalion had left its quarters at Bois des Alleux where it had been spending five days in Brigade Support. It had thereupon marched to Grand Servins... *Poor billets...* recorded the War Diarist.

The reason for the move had been to undergo special – and in some cases novel – training for an upcoming British attack in the area of Arras. It had been planned that the Canadian Corps was to advance in a sector close to where the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had recently been operating, in an area where the ground sloped upwards to the top of a German-occupied rise which dominated the entire Douai Plain. The crest of the rise today still goes by the name - in French - of *la crête de Vimy* – in English, *Vimy Ridge*.



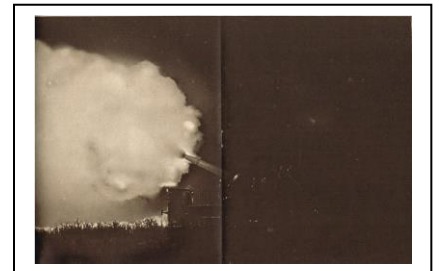
(Right above: *Seen from the La Chaudière Sector in what was German-occupied territory until April-May of 1917, a part of Vimy Ridge, today of course dominated by the Canadian National Memorial – photograph from 2015*)

The special training in question was to comprise a variety of new ideas in soldiering: 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 frontal 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 these final days had passed, the artillery barrage had grown 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 had been well aware that something was in the offing and their guns in their turn had been throwing retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft had been constantly busy overhead.



(Right above: A heavy British artillery piece continues its deadly work during a night before the attack on *Vimy Ridge*. – 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 – see elsewhere - 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 all to happen.*

On April 9 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was to be the so-called *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 having been the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign was to prove to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive of *le Chemin des Dames* would be yet a further disaster.

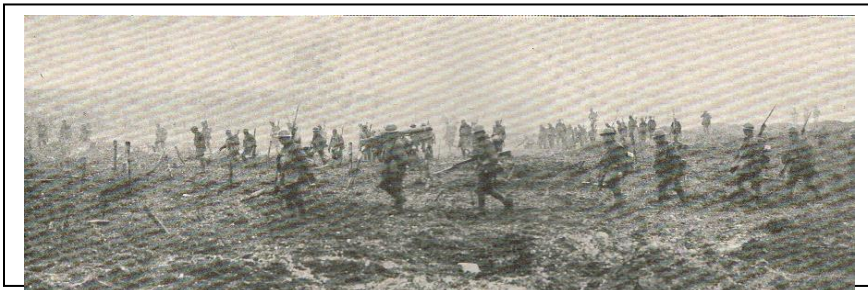
(Right above: *The Canadian National Memorial* which, since 1936, has stood on *Vimy Ridge* – photograph from 2010)

On that April 9, in driving snow and rain, the four Canadian Divisions, on this occasion acting as a single, autonomous entity – there was even a British brigade under Canadian command – had stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

(continued)



(Right: *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*)

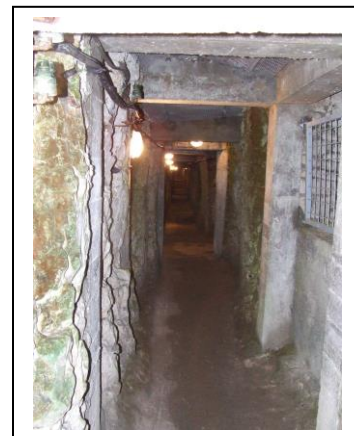


In the months before the operation, several kilometres of tunnels had been hewn out of the chalk under the approaches to the front lines of *Vimy Ridge*, underground accesses which had afforded physical safety and also the element of surprise during those hours – and in some cases, the days – which were to lead up to the attack.

The Battalion War Diary notes that the objectives of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had not been located on *Vimy Ridge* itself, the prising of which from the grasp of the Germans had been made the responsibility of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions.

The War Diary also notes that, as was to be the case with a goodly number of other units, the advance of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion to the...*Jumping Off Trenches*...had been made over-ground, not through any of those well-known tunnels.

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



The objectives of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion – indeed, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division – had been in the *Thelus Sector*. Thélus was – and is – a small village further down the slope and to the right-hand side – south in the direction of Arras - of the attack.

The creeping barrage having come down at 5.30 am, the first wave of the assault had thereupon *jumped off* and...*at Zero plus 32 minutes the light signal (3 white Very lights (flares)) was fired showing that Bn. had reached and occupied their objective. The casualties in the attack were slight and during the rest of the days the Coys. spent the day in clearing the trench and making shelter for the men.* (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of April 9, 1917)

Little further progress was to be made after the successes of that first day, the terrain having proved too difficult for the advance of guns and the necessary equipment – and, as usual, the Germans had been quick to recover, although no serious attempt was to be made by them to retake *Vimy Ridge*. The Battalion had remained in the forward area consolidating its position until having been relieved on April 15\*.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *Canadian sappers, having just laid a narrow-gauge railway line across the battle-field to bring forward supplies, also use it immediately to evacuate the wounded of both sides. This photograph taken on the field at or in the vicinity of Vimy Ridge. – from Illustration*)

*\*Even had the Canadians not been ordered to consolidate rather than to advance and exploit their early success, the recent weather had ensured that the ground was impassable as were the relatively few roads and tracks which had been mutilated by the constant traffic of the past days and weeks.*

Six days after the assault of April 9, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been relieved to withdraw from the forward area. It had then been ten days, until April 25, before it was to be ordered forward again, into support positions where, towards the end of April, its personnel was to then be employed in digging new trench positions so as to be in a position to support Canadian upcoming attacks going in at Arleux-en-Gohelle and later at Fresnoy.

These costly operations had gone ahead – the first a relative success, the second a lot less so - but apparently the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to be heavily involved. Once again, most of its casualties seem to have been due to enemy artillery action.



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

After the five-week *Battle of Arras* had thus stuttered to its conclusion – officially on May 15 - the remainder of the month of May and most of June having been spent by many Canadian units, including the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, withdrawn from the line, the time to be partially used for re-enforcement and for further re-organization.

On July 1, Dominion Day, however, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be on its way up to the forward area and by the following day was to be serving in Brigade Reserve, once again in the *Angres Sector* in the vicinity of the mining centre of Lens. On the 6<sup>th</sup> the unit had once more been in – or in the area of - the front lines and by the 20<sup>th</sup> the Battalion War Diarist was to be recording the preparations being made for... *the coming show*.

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 reserves as well - from this area, it had also ordered operations to take place in the sectors of the front running north-south from Béthune down to Lens.



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

(continued)

**(Preceding page: *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*)**

For the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the end of July and the beginning of August of 1917 were to be a succession of days of training. The Canadian Corps, since *Vimy Ridge*, was from now on always to fight as an autonomous entity; its now-apparent military capability was also to be exploited to a much greater extent than had been the case in earlier days.

One of the primary objectives of the Canadian efforts was to be the so-named *Hill 70* in the northern outskirts of the mining centre and city of Lens. On August 14, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion and other 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division units had moved to their assembly areas. On the 15<sup>th</sup> the attack had gone in.



**(Right: *After four years of bombardment – by both sides – this was the city of Lens by war's end. – from a vintage post-card*)**

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 had been high enough to have been considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than that of Lens itself.

**(Right above: *The monument to commemorate the capture of Hill 70 by the Canadians stands some hundred metres or so from its apex, this point just to the left from where the roads intersect. – photograph from 2014*)**

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

Objectives were to be limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the seeming 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 16<sup>th</sup> several strong counter-attacks were to be launched against the Canadian positions, positions which by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.



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

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





As far as the actions of the 26 Battalion at *Hill 70* are concerned, excerpts from Appendix Number 5 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary give a general idea: *At 4.25 a.m. on Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> August the Artillery opened up and the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the Right and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion on the Left advanced to the attack, closely followed by the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Battalions respectively. The objective...was the BLUE Line. ...the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Battalions, which were to pass through the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Battalions...would also advance at Zero hour until clear of the German Front Line so as to avoid the enemy barrage. This proved most successful and the casualties...were very light.*

*The Blue Line was captured on scheduled time, namely, at 4.51 a.m.*

*At 5.24 a.m. the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Battalions passed through...and advanced on the GREEN Line which they captured at 5.42 with the exception of the Left Company of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion which was held up...by Machine Gun fire and Bombers. ...this Company, however, captured their objective by 7.15 a.m. The whole of the GREEN objective was now in our hands...*

At this point the Germans had counter-attacked the positions held by the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion but had been driven off.

*The remainder of the day was spent in consolidating the positions gained and clearing the battle-field. The consolidation was carried out...and Machine Guns were placed in Strong Points.*

Having repulsed several further German attempts to re-gain the lost ground - those counter-attacks accompanied by heavy bombardments and hostile aeroplane activity on both August 16 and 17 - the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been relieved and was to retire into the area of the former British front line.



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

This Canadian-led campaign had apparently been scheduled to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium had been proceeding less well than expected and the High Command had been beginning to look for reinforcements to make good its by-then exorbitant losses. The Australian Imperial Force, as well as the New Zealand Division and then the Canadians themselves, all had been ordered to prepare to move northwards; thus the Canadian Corps had been obliged to abandon its plans.

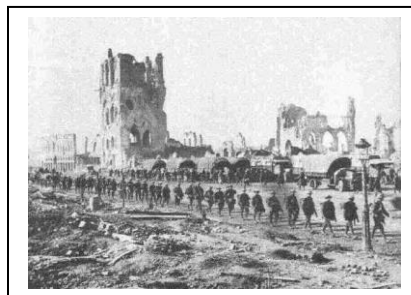
There were therefore to be no further major Canadian-inspired actions in the Lens-Béthune sectors and the troops yet again were to settle back into that monotonous but nonetheless at times precarious existence of life in – and behind – the forward area. On most days, according to the Battalion War Diary, it had the artillery of both sides which had been most active – but, of course, the infantry had usually been the target.

(continued)

Even though it had been known by September that the Canadians were to be transferred north into Belgium, for the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion there was to be a more-than-nine-week interlude between the action at *Hill 70* and the transfer to its next theatre of operations. During this time the daily grind of life in the trenches had still been the rule - with several exceptions when the unit had been withdrawn to areas behind the lines, particularly for training, although the War Diary shows that sports had been becoming considered more and more a morale booster among the troops.

It was not until the 24<sup>th</sup> day of that October of 1917 that the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had entrained in or near the community of Tinqués to begin the transfer north into Belgium and once more to the *Ypres Salient* which the unit had left some thirteen months before.

Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign – ongoing since the last day of that July – has come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that had been – at least latterly ostensibly professed to have been - one of the British Army’s main objectives.



(Right: *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 below: *Somewhere, possibly anywhere or almost everywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917. – from Illustration*)

From the time that the Canadians were to enter the fray, it was they who had shouldered a great deal of the burden. For 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 had 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 – November 10 - the reverse was to be true with troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division (see below) finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.



(Right: *The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians which stands in the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele (today Passendale) – photograph from 2010*)

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had arrived in the vicinity of the northern French commune of Cæstre on the evening of October 24. Although this had been designated as a rest area, the War Diary entries record numerous activities, lectures and training exercises undergone in preparation for the unit’s subsequent move to the *Passchendaele Front*.

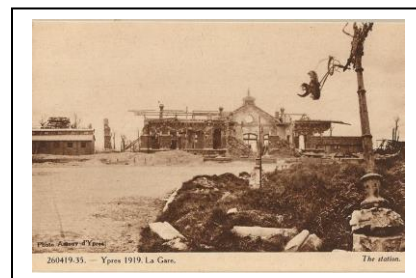


The unit was on its way again from Cæstre on November 3, having boarded a train which had crossed the Franco-Belgian Frontier to transport its charges into the ruins of what once had been the railway station at Ypres.

Having left the train at the station just outside the southern ramparts of the city where it still is today, the Battalion then had traversed the remnants of Ypres, past the Cloth Hall as in the image of the previous page, in a north-easterly direction to arrive at Potijze.

(Right below: *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*)

On November 4, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to move closer to the forward area. As the unit had been on its way forward, it had drawn supplies and ammunition to carry up to the front line. On the following day it had been ordered forward again, by eleven o'clock in the evening having reached the assembly areas from which it would go to the attack.



Excerpts from Operational Order, Number 180 – issued 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 1917: 1) *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division has been ordered to attack and capture PASSCHENDAELE on “Z” day.*

2) *The attack will be carried out by the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade on the Right and the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade on the Left: the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade will be in Divisional Reserve...*

...5) *The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion will assault on a 2 Company front with one Company in Support and one Company in Reserve.*

...9) *Consolidation...a) The forward slope should be held by posts in shell holes or short lengths of trench; these posts must be well scattered...in order that the enemy may have no good target for his artillery...*

b) *A main line will be dug just behind the crest of the ridge and so sited as to escape direct observation while denying the crest to the enemy should he succeed in breaking through our advanced posts.*

*This main line will also serve as the jumping off line for counter attacks.*

Excerpts from Appendix 3 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary:

6) *On this occasion...At 6 a.m. on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November the barrage opened and the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion advanced to the attack...*

*The whole of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade objectives were gained on schedule time, namely, by 6.58 a.m., and consolidation commenced.*

*By 10 a.m. the ground won by the Brigade had been well consolidated...*



(continued)



(Preceding page: *Just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the Passchendaele monument – this is the ground up which the Canadians fought during those weeks of October and November of 1917. – photograph from 2010*)

Casualties during the operation incurred by the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been forty-two *killed in action* and two-hundred seven *wounded*, all ranks.

(Right: *Canadian troops – not having proper bathing facilities - performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir*)



On November 10 the Battalion had retired back into Ypres; on the morrow it had withdrawn further westwards, to Brandhoek; and on November 12 and 13, it had then moved south, over the Franco-Belgian frontier, back to the area of Cæstre.

Three days later again, both the 26<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Battalions had moved into the rear area at Mont St-Éloi. There the units apparently had remained for the succeeding six days at which time, on November 22, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered into support positions at La Chaudière. There it was to stay until November 28 when it had been relieved by the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion and had retired to *Villers Camp*, in the vicinity of Villers-au-Bois.



(Right above and right: *The village of Mont St-Éloi, adjacent to Écoivres, at an early period of the Great War and again a century later - The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – destroyed in 1793 – are visible in both images. Mont St-Éloi is not to be confused with the St-Éloi in Belgium which was mentioned earlier. – from Le Miroir and (colour) from 2016*)



(Right below: *Villers Station Cemetery within the bounds of which lie some two-thousand Commonwealth dead of which one-half are Canadian – photograph from 2017*)

There at *Villers Camp*, the personnel of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*) was to be re-introduced to the everyday routines of life behind the front which they had left behind five weeks before – perhaps after *Passchendaele* it was all a welcome reprieve.



Although the officer responsible for the War Diary appears to have neglected it in all but a single short sentence in his journal, the month of December was to offer something a little different to all the Canadian formations which had been serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army had been open from December 4 until 17, and participation, in at least *some* units, had been in the ninety per cent range\*.

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

The winter of 1917-1918 was to pass much in the manner of the previous winters of the *Great War*, in stagnation. Any infantry activity had tended to be local: ever-present patrols and the occasional raid – an activity still much in favour with the British High Command; apparently loathed by those whose duty it was to undertake them. And most casualties, as usual, had still been due to the enemy's artillery-fire\* and to his snipers.

*\*Apparently between sixty and seventy per cent of all casualties on the Western Front were due to artillery fire.*

Some of the time that the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to spend in the forward area had been in the vicinity of Liévin, to the west of Lens; at other times it had been further to the south, in the Neuville St-Vaast Sector. The days, for the most part, were to be reported as... *quiet* – the exceptions to the rule having been described as... *very quiet*.

Then on March 21, 1918, the first day of spring, 1918, on an eighty-kilometre front to the south of Arras, the Germans had blown holes in the British defences and their storm troopers had poured through.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans were to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred westward the divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, they had launched a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21. The main blow had fallen at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it was to fall in great part at first on the British and Commonwealth troops there, particularly where they had been posted adjacent to the French.

*(Right below: While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and to oblige them to retain troops in the area – one source claims this to be nearby Liévin. – from Le Miroir)*



The German advance had continued for some two weeks, to finally peter out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was to be the result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and a great deal of French co-operation with the British were perhaps the most significant.

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

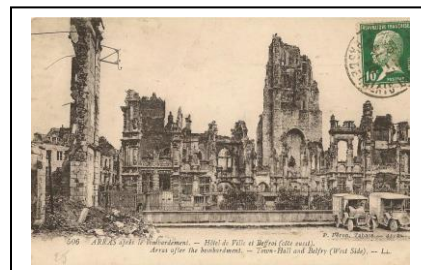
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(Preceding page: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

The War Diary suggests, however, that during this critical time, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had not been involved in the heaviest, if any, of the fighting – in fact, no Canadian unit had been. Posted mostly in the area of Wailly, just to the south-west of the city of Arras, the majority of the casualties incurred had been due yet again to incessant enemy artillery activity rather than to any infantry action.

The Battalion during the crisis was to remain posted in approximately the same area, to the south-west of Arras. Many other Canadian units had also been ordered to the area, orders and counter-orders ensuring a great deal of movement and, at times, not a little confusion. However, the Canadian Corps was not to send any forces to *the Somme*, the troops having gone no further south than the area of Arras\*.



(Right above: *The City Hall of Arras and its venerable bell-tower looked like this by the spring of 1918 after nearly four full years of bombardment by German artillery. – from a vintage post-card*)

*\*The Canadians had been retained in situ because the enemy objectives had not been evident to the British High Command – nor, as the battle progressed, were the Germans apparently to remain faithful to their original plans. The Canadians were held back to forestall any German attempt to break through to the Channel ports and to block a possible enemy advance in the direction of the coal-fields around Béthune.*

However, by the end of the first week in April, the situation to the south, on the *Amiens Front*, while still dangerously uncertain, had been becoming stable enough – the British 3<sup>rd</sup> Army having stopped dead an enemy advance towards Arras – to have allowed for the Canadians to be at least partially withdrawn from the positions that they had occupied to the south and south-west of Arras; nor, when it had come on April 9, does it appear that the enemy northern offensive was to warrant any move by the Canadians in that direction.

Thus a relative calm was again to descend on the front as the German threat had faded – for the enemy the campaign had won a great deal of ground, but nothing of any real military significance on either of the two fronts. Nor was the subsequent calm to be particularly surprising: both sides had been exhausted and in need of 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, nonetheless, to be a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans had been by then belatedly arriving on the scene. An overall Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he had been setting about organizing – although some historians find the term a bit flattering - a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

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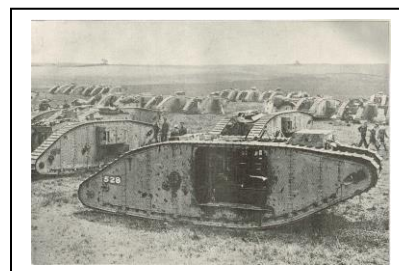


(Right: *Le Maréchal Ferdinand Jean-Marie Foch, this photograph from 1921, became Generalissimo of the Allied Armies on March 26, 1918. – photograph from the Wikipedia web-site*)



Towards the end of July, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion – and a large number of other Canadian units – were to begin to move in a semi-circular itinerary - to the west of, then south of, and finally east of - to finish in *front* of the city of Amiens, there to face the German forces where they had remained since the attacks of the previous March and April.

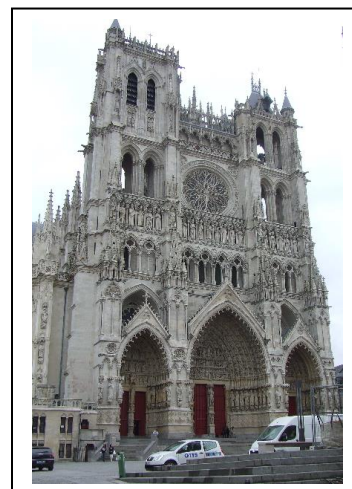
On August 2, while en route, the Battalion was to undergo two days of tactical training in co-operation with tanks. On the evening of August 3 it had received orders to move forward once more – on foot as usual\*.



(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*)

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

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



The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary entry for that August 8, 1918, reads as follows: *Weather very fine. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division attacked at 3.20 a.m.*

*The 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade passed through the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry brigade at the first objective at 8.20 a.m. The attack of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade was on a frontage of 2,200 yards.*



*The villages of WIENCOURT L'EQUIPEE, GUILLAUCOURT and all other objectives were taken with a large number of guns and prisoners.*

(Right above: *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*)

(continued)

The War Diary Appendix pertaining to the attack cites the success of the co-operation of tanks and infantry\*. It also notes that many of the casualties of the day were caused by enemy artillery, snipers, and – for the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion – by enemy aircraft operations.

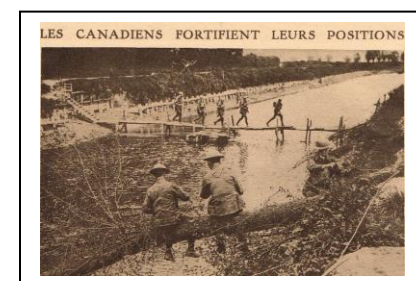
*\*This is borne out by the fact that on the flanks of the attack, the French on the right and the British on the left, neither of which had the use of tanks, experienced many more problems during the advance.*

By the time that the unit had been relieved and placed in reserve in the vicinity of Vrely on August 11, it had incurred – since and including August 8 - approximately forty personnel *killed in action* and a further two-hundred six *wounded in action*.

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



Having been re-enforced during the following days by some two-hundred fifty officers and *other ranks*, the Battalion had been ordered back to the front line on August 15 to relieve sub-units of the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Battalions. One of its companies had gone to the attack on the next afternoon and...*advanced our line about 500 yards in places*. When it was to withdraw two days afterwards it had a further fifty-four casualties in total to report.



(Right above: *August 8: captured positions on the Somme being consolidated by Canadian troops against a German counter-attack – from Le Miroir*)

On the next day again, August 16, the unit was to be – as were many other Canadian units – on the move away from the battlefield. They were to be returning to the *Arras Front* in much the same manner as they had arrived only weeks previously, using many of the same itineraries and with many of the first kilometres undertaken on foot.

Then, once again, trains and motorized transport had been brought into service. At the same time, fresh French units were to be relieving the Canadian forces as they had retired from the battle.

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



And once more, much of this movement was to be made under cover of darkness as it had been hoped to deceive the Germans yet again on this second occasion. The first night and part of the second night of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion's withdrawal had been undertaken by a march to Villers-Bretonneux before the unit had been put on busses to Amiens.

From there it was to march again – then transported by train to the community of Aubigny – before having completed the transfer by...*marching from there to HAUTEVILLE, taking over billets previously occupied by us in July.*

There was to be little respite for the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*). On the next day, August 24, it had...*left HAUTEVILLE at 7:00 p.m. and marched to BERNEVILLE, arriving at 10:00 p.m... Bombing planes quite active.*

Less than forty-eight hours later, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion and other forces of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division plus two other Canadian brigades of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division were now to play a part in the opening attacks of the new offensive along the Arras-Cambrai road.

(Right below: *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*)

Excerpt from the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for August 26, 1918: *Battalion in action. The 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> C.I. Brigades went over at 3:00 a.m. and we followed up in support to them at 5:45 a.m. Not much enemy shell fire. We passed about a mile beyond our own front line and took up position there...*

Excerpt from 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary Appendix for August 26, 1918: *...at the minutes to ten we moved to positions in lines... At 10. o'clock we started to advance, meeting really stiff resistance from Machine Guns and Snipers in German front line. After putting these...out of action our advance was easy until we reached the high ground in front of the SENSEE River...where we were forced to halt because the right flank had not come up...*



The Germans had once more been taken by surprise and once again a good advance had been made; in fact...*At 8:25 a.m. the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade was reporting that they had taken the final objective and were preparing to assault GUEMAPPE and the ridge East of the COJEUL River.* These objectives and others had been taken later that day by the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Brigades while the three brigades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had been re-organizing and readying themselves for a further attack on the morrow.



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

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be in action for the two following days before its retirement on August 29 to the area of Neuville-Vitasse. The advance had apparently become more difficult after the first day; enemy resistance had been progressively stiffening and the wire in some areas had been left uncut and had not been easy to pass through.

(continued)



Casualties had been heavy and the finally the Battalion was to retire to the *Ulster Trench* line where it had established a couple of outposts and defensive positions, there to await orders.

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



When these orders arrived at about eleven o'clock on the evening of August 28, the Battalion was to withdraw, which the unit had done some hours later, at three o'clock the next morning.

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

Having reached Neuville-Vitasse, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was soon to be once more on the move, on to Achicourt later that evening and on to Berneville on the next day. A period of training was now to follow, exercises which would take the unit back to Achicourt, on to the area of Upton Wood and then to Hendecourt, some eighteen kilometres to the south-east of Arras. The unit was to remain there for five days, from September 7 to 12 before ordered to nearby Cagnicourt.



There at Cagnicourt it was to be posted in close proximity to a number of batteries of heavy six-inch and eight-inch howitzers which apparently had orders to fire all night, much to the discomfort of the infantrymen of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion alongside who were trying to sleep.

(Right: *A photograph dated February of 1918 of a gun-team of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Siege Battery positioning one of their BL 6-inch 26 cwt\* howitzers – from the Wikipedia web-site*)



Agnez-les-Duisans, whereas Hendecourt lies eighteen kilometres to the south-east of Arras, is about ten kilometres to the north-west. The transfer of Private Summerton's Battalion from the former to the latter on September 15 entailed an afternoon and evening march, a journey by train and then a further ninety-minute march to billets, these arrived at by one o'clock in the morning. As the War Diarist has remarked in his entry for that September 16... *Very hard march as men were tired after train journey.*

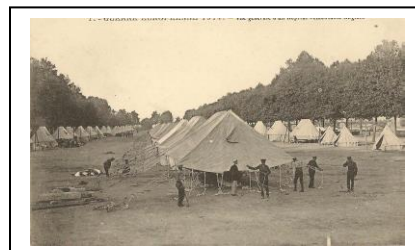
The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion then rested, re-equipped, and was re-enforced on that September 16 before training re-commenced on the morrow. In the meantime, the officers had discovered that a casualty clearing station was in the area and some of these gentlemen were intent on making the acquaintance of the nursing sisters stationed there – one may safely presume that it was *off limits to other ranks.*

All good things, so it is said, come to an end – even for officers – and only two days after the move to Agnez-les-Duisans, on September 18, Private Summerton's Battalion was to take the train whence it had come and was then to march to the area of Bullecourt – two kilometres distant from Hendecourt – and beyond, to relieve Scottish units in the front line. This it did on the next day.

It was apparently...*Quiet all day...*for four of the next five days. September 25 was much less so, as the Battalion War Diary entry for that date attests: *Heavy counter-attack on posts at daylight...Rear post attacked at 9:00 a.m. but enemy driven off. S.O.S. sent up but not answered. Quiet until about 3:30 P.M. when another attack was made after heavy bombardment...post fell back to shell holes in rear.*

*Casualties very heavy. Post re-established at 9:30 P.M. Battalion less posts relieved...complete 11:00 P.M...*

(Right: A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity was to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War: Other such medical establishments were sometimes of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card)



One of those casualties was Private Summerton, wounded during that September 25. Having incurred...SW (shrapnel wounds) *Abdomen & fractures L (left) Leg...*he was evacuated from the field to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Casualty Clearing Station back at Agnez-les-Duisans.



(Right: *The main thoroughfare in Agnez-les-Duisans almost a century after the above events – photograph from 2014*)

The son of John Summerton\*, former fisherman (deceased likely May 31, 1899) and of Margaret (known as *Maggie*) Summerton\*\* (née *Miller*) of Portugal Cove, Newfoundland – the couple married in 1883 - he was also brother to Elizabeth, Edward John, David and possibly Edmund.

*\*He was apparently a widower who, at the age of thirty-three, married Margaret, twelve years his junior.*



*\*The name is invariably spelled as Somerton in the graveyards of Portugal Cove.*

Private Summerton was husband to Mary Ann Susan Grant of Sydney, whom he had wedded in Truro on July 10, 1916, only days before his departure overseas. The couple were apparently to parent no children. As of October 1, 1916, he had allotted to her a monthly twenty dollars from his pay until July 1, 1918, when the sum had been reduced to fifteen dollars.

Widowed, she subsequently re-married, to McDonald of King's Road, Sydney.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *The photograph of Private Samuel Summerton of the 13<sup>th</sup> Platoon, 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) is from the [www.angelfire](http://www.angelfire.com) web-site - A short history and photographic record 106<sup>th</sup> Overseas Battalion, C.E.F., Nova Scotia Rifles.*)

Private Summerton\* was reported by the Officer Commanding the CCS as having *died of wounds* prior to his arrival at the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Casualty Clearing Station at Agnez-les-Duisans on September 25, 1918.

*\*On two of his medical documents he is referred to as Lance Corporal Summerton but nowhere else among his documents – except in the photographic documents of the above-mentioned web-site, but not in the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion’s nominal roll of July 1916\* – is his rank documented as anything other than that of a private soldier.*

*\*Where he is Private Somerton.*

Samuel Summerton had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-two years: date of birth at Portugal Cove, Newfoundland, December 26, 1893 (from attestation papers); the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cites December 21 of the same year.

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

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

