



Private Stephen Henry Taylor. Number 3030954, of the 87th Battalion (Canadian Grenadier Guards), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Cabaret Rouge British Cemetery*, Souchez: Grave reference 1X.D.3..

****Whence was brought home Canada's Unknown Soldier.***

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

His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of a painter and later machinist, Stephen Henry Taylor appears to have left behind him little record of his early years spent in the area of Carbonear, Newfoundland, with his parents and two sisters, nor of his emigration to the American state of Massachusetts.

The town of Lynn, Essex, in the state of Massachusetts is where he is recorded as having married a Miss Charlotte M. Kendig on February 24 of 1912. It appears not to be recorded if the couple became parents, the only later information of his time there being that in 1917, Stephen Henry Taylor filled out an American Draft Card which allows the reader to know that by then he was employed by the *United Shoe Machinery Corporation* of Beverly, Massachusetts – today a component of the *Black & Decker Corporation* – and that the couple was residing at 23 or 25, North Federal Street in Lynn.

A second American document allows us to know that in early November of that 1917, Stephen Henry Taylor passed through the city of Boston on his way north of the border to Toronto where he was to enlist in the Canadian Armed Forces.

There is no record as to why he decided to join the Canadian Army* instead of the American military – the Americans had entered the Great War in April of 1917 – but it is documented that Stephen Henry Taylor presented himself at a mobilization centre in Toronto on November 5, 1917, on which date he enlisted and attested, his oath witnessed by a local justice of the peace.

**The term Canadian Army, although frequently employed during the time of the Great War, apparently came into being officially only in 1940.*

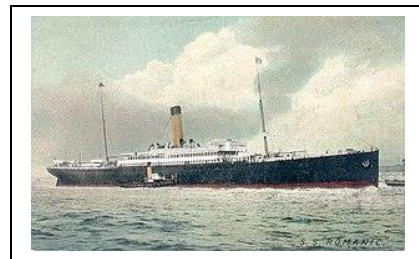
Two days afterwards, he underwent a medical examination, a procedure which pronounced him to be...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. On that same November 7, the Officer Commanding the 1st Depot Battalion of the 1st Central Ontario Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel John J. McLaren, brought the formalities of Private Taylor's enlistment to a conclusion when he declared – on paper – that...*Stephen Henry Taylor...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

Since the task of the various Depot Battalions in Canada was to instil only a minimum of training and discipline into its incoming recruits before despatching them to the Canadian Reserve Battalions in the United Kingdom to complete the job, it is not surprising that Private Taylor was to spend only some thirteen weeks in uniform in Canada before being ordered overseas*.

**It might have been an even shorter period had the Halifax explosion of December 6, 1917, not wrecked the only major port facilities on Canada's east coast.*

Private Taylor's 1st Depot Battalion of the 2nd Central Ontario Regiment - he had apparently been transferred to this second unit by that time – embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Scandinavian* on February 3, 1918, in the harbour at Halifax. A number of contingents of other military units, particularly Canadian Railway Troops, were to sail on that same day, but the records are too incomplete to be able to say with certainty which, if any of them, took passage with Private Taylor's unit.

(Right: *The photograph of the SS Romanic – this and ‘New England’ her former names before her sale to the Allan Line Company in 1912, there to become ‘Scandinavian’ - is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)



Having eventually sailed on February 5, the vessel docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool eleven days later, on February 16.

The day that Private Taylor’s unit had embarked in Halifax had also been the day on which he and it had been transferred – bureaucratically – to the 8th Reserve Battalion (*Central Ontario*). Thus on the day of its landing in the United Kingdom, the detachment had been transferred by train to the south-eastern county of Kent and to *East Sandling*, a subsidiary camp of *Shorncliffe* – this the 8th Battalion’s current station – *Shorncliffe* the large Canadian military complex situated in close proximity to the coastal town and harbour of Folkestone.



(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*)

The 8th Reserve Battalion, formed a year earlier in early 1917, had only just itself been transferred to *East Sandling* from its former station in the *Shorncliffe* complex, and in two months’ time was to move once more, on April 9, to *Witley Camp* in the southern extreme of the county of Surrey. There Private Taylor was to remain for a further twenty weeks before his services were to be required on the Continent.

By this stage of the *Great War* the armies of the warring nations – certainly those which had been involved since the outset in the summer of 1914 – were running short of manpower. The recruiters were now thus accepting into the services personnel which would have been refused at an earlier period: Stephen Henry Taylor would likely have been one of those.

His eyesight was poor. However, during his posting to *Witley Camp* he had been screened by the Royal Army Medical Corps and glasses had been prescribed. With these he was now considered to be *fit for duty* on the *Western Front*.

On August 29, Private Taylor was once again transferred, on paper, to the 116th Battalion, at the time already stationed in France. On that day he began the short journey which was to see him transferred physically to the other side of the English Channel – likely via the south-coast port of Southampton and the French industrial port-city of Le Havre – to report *to duty* to the Canadian Base Depot, by that time established in coastal town of Étapes, on either August 30 or 31.



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

On each of those two preceding dates, some six-hundred fifty re-enforcements arrived from the United Kingdom at Étaples. On September 2, Private Taylor was to be on his way again, on this occasion one of the twelve-hundred ninety-four *other ranks* despatched to the *Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp*, established since early May of 1918 at Aubin St-Vaast, some forty kilometres to the south-east of Étaples.

On September 6, only four days following his arrival there, Private Taylor was *struck off strength* by the 116th battalion, to be *taken on strength* by the 87th Battalion (*Canadian Grenadier Guards*) whereupon he was immediately ordered to join his new unit. He reportedly did so later on that same day.

* * * * *

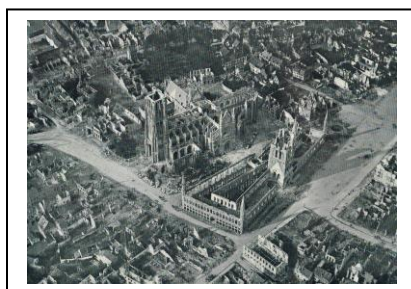
The 87th Battalion (*Canadian Grenadier Guards*) was an element of the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 4th Canadian Division, the last such Canadian formation to be despatched to *active service* on the *Western Front* during the *Great War**.

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



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

The 87th Battalion had arrived in France just more than twenty-four months prior to Private Taylor, on August 12 of 1916, having landed, likely as had he, in the French port-city of Le Havre. Three days later the formation had been on its way north, to the area of the Franco-Belgian frontier and then beyond, to serve six weeks in a sector to the south-west of the vestiges of the medieval city of Ypres (today *leper*).



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

On October 3, 1916, having been withdrawn from Belgium only days before 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 had by now become a campaign of the autumn as well.

(continued)

Having travelled from the north at first by train and then on foot, the unit had arrived in the vicinity of the provincial town of Albert a week later. There the Battalion was to bivouac, at the large military *Brickfields Camp*.

Meanwhile, by late August and early September of 1916, when Canadian troops had first made their appearance in that particular theatre of the War, the *First Battle of the Somme* had already been ongoing for 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 space of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

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



On the first day of *First Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions having been 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 July 1, 1916, at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

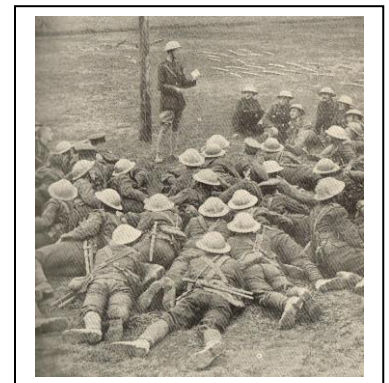
(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette – photograph from 2015*)



As the battle had progressed, other 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 the New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on and about August 30 to become part of a third general offensive.

Their first major collective contribution had been in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette, a confrontation which was to occur some seven weeks before the arrival of the 87th Battalion on the scene.

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



The 87th Battalion was to serve in the forward trenches as of October 17, but it had not been until six minutes past mid-day on October 21 that the unit would eventually put in its first attack and capture the *Regina Trench* strong-point, an objective which had previously proved to be impregnable.

(continued)

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 nearby 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 had passed with little incident; however, during the second tour, the Battalion had been part of a further attack on November 18. *Regina Trench* having by then been definitively captured, the objective on this date had been to occupy a number of adjacent German positions. The operation had been only partially successful, however, and the unit had incurred a total of another two-hundred thirty-two *killed, wounded and missing in action*.

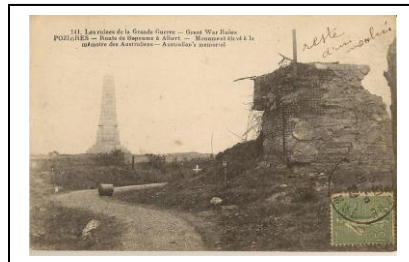
(Right top and right above: *Some of the remnants of the village of Pozières as it was immediately after the Great War, in 1919 – and as it is a century later. The Australian War Memorial may be seen in both images. – from a vintage post-card and the colour photograph from 2016*)

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

Having then been relieved on the day following the attack, on November 22 the 87th Battalion had begun to march away from *the Somme*. By December 4 the unit had marched by a semi-circular itinerary – to the westward and then to the north - to Fréwillers, some twenty-five kilometres north-west of the city of Arras.

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

**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: 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 and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration)



***In fact, there was apparently so little of anything of military interest at the time that the officer acting as War Diarist for the month saw fit to make entries, altogether comprising less than a single page, for sixteen days.*

Casualties were to be few during this period, and due mostly to enemy artillery and mortar fire*. The Canadian medical facilities would be kept much busier by sickness and, more particularly – and perhaps more surprisingly – by dental problems than they were to be by the work of their adversaries on the other side of the Front.

**Historians suggest that some two-thirds of all casualties on the Western Front during the Great War may be attributed to artillery action.*

(Right: This assembly of French trench mortars of Great War vintage, here stands at the entrance to the Army Museum at les Invalides, Paris. – photograph from 2015)



On March 26 the 87th Battalion had been relieved from its then-current tour in the front-line positions and had subsequently withdrawn to a rest area in the vicinity of the Chateau de la Haie. From the next day until April 2 the unit was to undergo extensive training for the upcoming British offensive, so whether there had been much rest enjoyed is to be speculated – but then again, no-one had been shot at.

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

On April 3, the 87th Battalion had been ordered to move to the forward area.

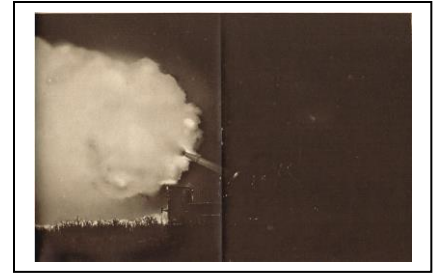
On April 4, 5 and 6 it had supplied working parties and dug trenches.

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



As those final days before the offensive had passed, the artillery barrage had been 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 had *also* been well aware that...*something was in the offing*...and their guns in their turn had by then been throwing retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft had been very busy.



(Right: 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.*

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

On April 9 of 1917 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.

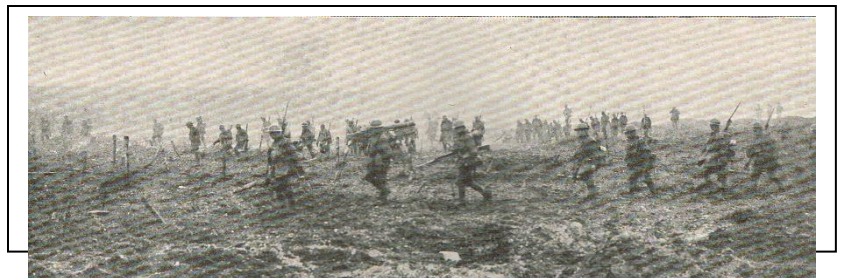


While the British campaign had proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive at *Le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

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

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity – there was even a British brigade operating under 2nd Canadian Division command - stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

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



Excerpt from the 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.*

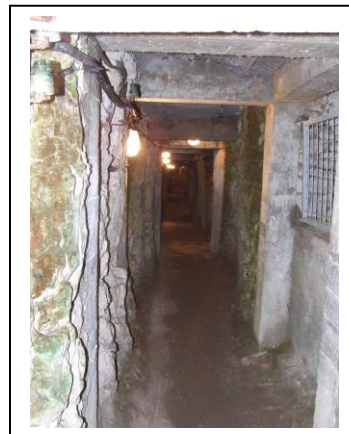
Excerpts from 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary entry for April 9, 1917:

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.

(Right: Grange Tunnel - one of the few remaining galleries still open to the public at Vimy Ridge one hundred years later on: They were hewn out of the limestone to ensure secrecy and, at the same time, the security of the attacking troops. – photograph from 2008(?))



On that day the 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 of the day 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 – like the enemy artillery - 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)



There had been, on that second day, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted breakthrough – but such a follow-up on the previous day's success had proved logistically impossible, thanks mostly to the inclement weather. And in fact, the Germans were to retreat to prepared positions in what had been their third defensive line where they had once again become their resolute selves.

The remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* was not to be fought in the manner of the first two days and by the end of the offensive little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success.

The Canadian 87th Battalion, now posted into the *Lens Sector*, had then again reverted to that routine of life in the trenches.

The first week or so of that earlier month of June had proved to be an active time for the 87th Battalion: the seven days from the 5th until, and including, the 12th of the month were to be particularly animated with a succession of eight raids undertaken by the Battalion in the area to the east of and overlooked by *Vimy Ridge*.



(Right above: *This was to be typical of the northern French mining-centre and city of Lens by the end of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

The attack of June 8 was to be a major affair involving three units – the 75th, the 87th and the 102nd Battalions – in the area of La Coulotte, and had been preceded by a heavy Canadian artillery barrage. The German response – delivered in a like manner – had caused a total of some two-hundred casualties among the troops of the three attacking battalions.



(Right above: *Canadian troops operating in the forward area during the spring or summer of 1917 – from Illustration*)

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



The proceedings of those two days, June 8 and 9, had cost the 87th Battalion a total of one-hundred thirty-nine casualties.

In contrast to June of 1917, much of the month following had been spent in reserve in the reserve area of the 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 were all the order of the day. The Battalion had even lined the sides of the road on one particular date when His Majesty King George V was passing by.



(Right above: *A photograph of a Canadian working-party carrying supplies of all kinds to the troops in forward positions: The use of the head-straps – known as 'Tumps' – was an idea borrowed from Canada's indigenous peoples. – from Le Miroir*)

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



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

(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*)

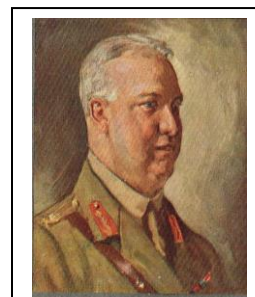
(Right: *Canadian troops advancing across No-Man's Land in the summer of 1917 – from Le Miroir*)



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 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 the city of Lens itself.

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



(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*)



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



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

(Right above: *A Canadian heavy 220 mm siege gun, here hidden under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action by gunners of the Canadian Garrison Artillery – from Le Miroir*)

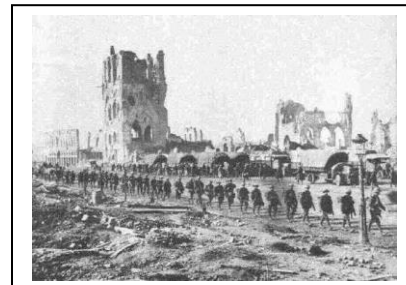


(Right: *Canadians soldiers in the captured rear area of Hill 70 during the days after the battle – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

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

This Canadian-led offensive campaign had 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 was to be looking for reserves to make good the exorbitant losses.



The Australians and New Zealanders, and then the Canadians, had been ordered to prepare to move north, thus the Canadians were to be obliged to abandon their plans.

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

In the middle of October the Canadians had been ordered north into Belgium and to the *Ypres Salient*. Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign – ongoing since the end 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 *ostensibly* - one of the British Army’s objectives.



(Right above: Somewhere, perhaps anywhere or everywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration)

From the time that the Canadians had entered 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 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which would spearhead the assault, with the 1st and 2nd 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 2nd Division having finally entered the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.

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

Meanwhile, October 11 had been the first day of the transfer north of the 87th Battalion, a move which was to bring it, after a year’s absence, and for a second occasion, to the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium.

(continued)

By the 22nd of the month the unit was to be in *Toronto Camp* in the area of Brandhoek, a village to the west of Ypres itself and half way along the road to Poperinghe.

(Right: *Just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the above monument: further down this area, according to the 87th Battalion War Diary, is where the unit was in trenches on October 30 of 1917. – photograph from 2010*)



On the 27th, thirty-two officers and six-hundred eighteen *other ranks* of the Battalion had moved to the vicinity of Potijze, north-east of Ypres, to be quartered in shelters and dugouts. There, for a further six days, they had mostly been engaged in providing work parties and, at least on one day, had sent one-hundred men to carry some of the many wounded to the rear.



(Right above: *Canadian troops performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir*)

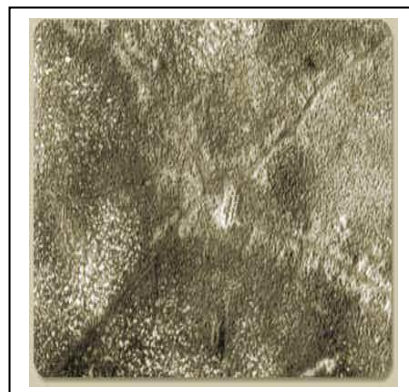
Back at Brandhoek on November 2, the unit had entrained on the following day again for Caestre, in northern France. After further days of training and inspections, the Battalion had found itself back in Toronto Camp, Brandhoek, on November 10. From there it had been ordered to Ypres, from Ypres to Potijze, from Potijze to Abraham Heights, and from there to *Crest Farm* on the outskirts of the no-longer existent community of Passchendaele itself, all in the space of two days: there at *Crest Farm* the 87th Battalion had relieved companies of three other Canadian battalions.



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

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

According to the Battalion War Diary entry for November 16... *The total casualties for the tour were 4 Officers and 172 O.R. which is exceedingly heavy for four days in holding the line, and shows the intensesness of the situation in the vicinity of Passchendaele.* It had been an almost- ceaseless enemy artillery bombardment which had inflicted the vast majority of these losses on the unit.



On the next day, November 17, the 87th Battalion had been relieved and was to begin to retire to France – on foot and by motor transport.

Six days again, on the 23rd, after a march of some twenty-eight kilometres from Cantrainne, it had been billeted in the proximity of La Thieuloye, to the north-west of Arras and far from the forward area. By December 21, however, the Battalion was once more to be at the front, now in the *Chaudière Sector* - and Christmas Day of 1917 would turn out to be just another day in the trenches*.

**On December 3 and 4 the personnel of the Battalion were encouraged to exercise their right to vote in the Canadian National Election ongoing at the time. Also offered was the opportunity to invest in War Bonds, thus allowing those fighting in the conflict the opportunity to pay for it as well.*

(Right: *The Canadian National Monument on Vimy Ridge as seen looking southwards from the Chaudière Sector – photograph from 1914*)



In contrast to Christmas Day, New Year's Eve had been celebrated by everyone taking the train to Neuville St-Vaast for a bath.

Much of January, most of February and the first two weeks of March, 1918, had been for the most part a quiet time, not only for the 87th Battalion but indeed for most of the Canadian 11th Infantry Brigade. On March 12 the unit had been preparing to leave *Alberta Camp* to go back to the front lines. It was to once again be posted to the *Lens Sector* where it had been serving on the first day of that spring.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans would come to victory in the spring period of 1918. Having transferred the Divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the Great War, they had delivered a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', launched 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 had descended for the most part on the British troops of the Fifth Army stationed there, particularly where they were serving adjacent to French forces.

(Right: *While the Germans did not attack Lens – some sources claim this to be neighbouring Liévin - in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily at the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir*)



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

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

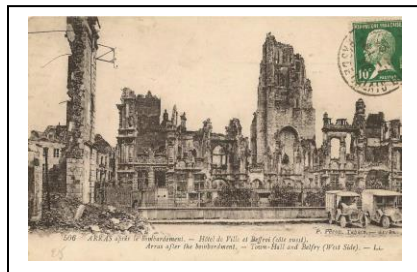
(Right below: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

It would appear that the 87th Battalion was to remain *in situ* in the *Lens Sector* until the end of the month of March when it had been transferred some kilometres south to the Arras Sector. It had then been despatched back and forth, as had many other units in the area to the north of the city itself. But the Battalion was not to be posted to *the Somme* to staunch the German onslaught of that spring; the unit would remain in the region to the north and north-west of Arras.



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

**The area just to the south and west of Arras was at the northern extreme of the German offensive. Unsure as to what the enemy's intentions were, the High Command moved Canadian Division units into the area to forestall any attack, if and when it occurred, to protect the avenue to the Channel ports and also the coal-fields in the area of Béthune.*



In the event, the offensive in that direction was stopped cold by the British Third Army before it reached Arras, but during the period of the crisis the Germans had stayed active enough to keep the British and Canadians wondering.

As for the situation to the north, it apparently was never deemed serious enough to warrant any Canadian movement in that direction.*

**And the Germans were also busy elsewhere on the Western Front; the offensives launched against British and Commonwealth forces were not the only battles to be fought. During this period Ludendorff, up until late spring, also attacked the French.*

By April 15 the 87th Battalion was on the western side of *Vimy Ridge*, behind the lines in the area of *Neuville St-Vaast*, all four of its companies having been found accommodation in the so-named *Cellar Camp*.

The calm which by late April was descending on the recent British battlefields was perhaps not particularly surprising: both sides had reached exhaustion point and now had needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible during these later years of the war – to re-enforce*.

The Allies (French and British and Commonwealth) from this point of view were to be a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had had two empires to draw from and the Americans had been belatedly arriving on the scene*.

**The arrival of those troops from the Russian Front was to represent the final substantial reserves available to the German High Command. On the other hand, as seen above, their adversaries would soon see not only a superiority but a supremacy in numbers. It was to be only a matter of time.*

A further month was to pass before the 87th Battalion had then been ordered forward, from the relative security of its posting of the time at Valhuon, to the area close to Roclincourt, perhaps half-way between the village of Vimy and the city of Arras. It had begun its tour there on July 10 and had been relieved – back into *support?* – a week later.

Five days later again it was to return to the front near Roclincourt - on this occasion to take part in two raids to...*inflict casualties and to obtain information* – until it in turn had been relieved on the final day of the month. Casualties incurred by the Battalion during that month of July would be light by the norms of the day.



(Right: *Arras Road Cemetery, Roclincourt, in which lie a number of Canadian dead and at least one Newfoundlander* – photograph from 2014(?))

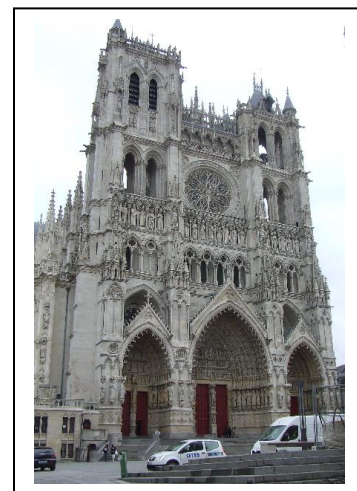
At the end of July the 87th Battalion had still been in the area of Roclincourt. However, that relatively quiet period of the preceding months was to change during the month of August. Under the new Allied Generalissimo, Foch, an immense combined offensive had been preparing to push the Germans back whence – and beyond where - they had advanced some four months previously*.

(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)



**Nobody knew it at the time of course and perhaps, after four years of static warfare, no one dared to think it, but this campaign - to become known as the Hundred Days – was to end with the Armistice of November 11 of 1918. (Although by that time there would be several such agreements as the Central Powers one by one were to leave the field.)*

In the previous April the German spring offensive had almost reached the gates of Amiens in the south and had advanced towards the Channel ports in the north before being stopped. That area in front of Amiens was to be the jumping-off point for the Allied attack of August 8*, thus the early days of August had seen a great transfer of Canadian troops from the area north-west of Arras to the new theatre of battle some ninety kilometres to the south. The move was to be rapid – and to be cloaked in secrecy.



(Right: *The great 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 – The edifice houses a flag and other commemorations of the sacrifice of the Dominion of Newfoundland* – photograph from 2007(?))

(continued)

**It was to be the end of September before the Allied counter-attack would commence in the north on the front in Flanders where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving.*

The 87th Battalion had left its quarters in the proximity of Écoivres and Mont St-Éloi on the evening of August 3 and had been bussed some one-hundred twenty kilometres before it was to dismount at four-thirty on the following morning in, or close to, the community of Oisemont – still at a distance of forty-seven kilometres from Amiens.



(Right above and right below: The village of St-Éloi at an early period of the Great War and a century later - The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – destroyed in 1783 – are visible in both images. – from Le Miroir and (colour) from 2016)

The Battalion was then to be billeted in or in the vicinity of the villages of Heucourt and Prouzel on successive days having marched by night before, on August 6...*The Brigade Group began its move to concentration area BOIS DE BOVES. At five o'clock on the afternoon of the next day again the Brigade began a further, final movement into the BOIS DE GENTELLES.*



Excerpt from the 87th Battalion War Diary entry of August 8, 1917: *Notification received that zero hour was to be 4.20 A.M. and at 5.30 A.M. the Battalion started to move. It moved around the south end of the GENTELLES WOOD and then south and parallel to the ROYE Road, crossing the RIVER LUCE and taking up a position along Old German trench system... From here it could be seen that our attack was progressing favourably and many prisoners were being sent back. The Battalion moved again at 9.20 A.M...*



(Right above: The remnants of the community of Roye, this picture taken in 1917, even before the events of 1918 – from a vintage post-card)

The attack of August 8 was for the most part to be a great success – the Canadians having advanced an unheard-of eleven kilometres. It had continued in places overnight and, in general, had recommenced early in the morning of the morrow. On the 10th, the 87th and 54th Battalions had been operating in support of the 10th and 12th Canadian Infantry Brigades as the attack had continued, the other two battalions of the 11th Brigade having withdrawn temporarily.



(Right above: The caption records this as being a photograph of German prisoners taken by the Canadians, some of them carrying a wounded officer – Allied or German officer is not documented. Also to be noted is one of the newer tanks. – from Le Miroir)

(continued)

On the evening of the 11th, the unit had made its way to the village of Rosières and by August 19 had been reported as having advanced as far as the community of Hattencourt. There it was to be involved in an action which had as its objective to advance the line some five-hundred yards... *Line was secured without difficulty on left but strong resistance was met with on the right in vicinity of FRESHCOPSE where heavy bomb fighting took place... Our casualties reported to be light.* (Battalion War Diary)

In his entry of the following day, August 20, the War Diarist would write... *Our artillery continue to be very active carrying out harassing fire and destructive shoots. Special attention is paid to the bridges across the SOMME.* The attacks had been continuing and, as the objective of the current offensive had been to advance to the *River Somme*, it would appear that this goal was about to be realized.



On that same August 20, the 87th Battalion had retired into reserve.

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



(Right: *Canadian and German wounded from the first days of the battle – some cases more serious than others - waiting to be evacuated to the rear* – from *Le Miroir*)

On the night of August 24-25 the entire 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade had been withdrawn into reserve to be replaced in the line by elements of the French 34th and 35th Divisions. The Canadians were now to leave the area as they had come: quickly and discretely.

(Right: *French dead in the communal cemetery at Caix, just to the west of Rosières, the French having begun to relieve Canadian troops towards the end of the second week of the battle: Caix also hosts a British Commonwealth cemetery as well as a German burial ground.* – photograph from 2017)



Only days hence they would be fighting another battle to the east of Arras, the area from which they had departed just over three weeks previously.

As for the 87th Battalion, during the evening of August 27 it had boarded a train at Longeau Station and at sixteen minutes past eleven of that same evening, had begun the railway journey from there to Acq from where the personnel had then taken busses to Berneville. Two days later again, the unit had been organizing itself in the area of Neuville-Vitasse.

The early days of September were to be a busy time for the 87th Battalion. On August 26 the Canadian Corps had joined with British forces in opening a new front along the axis of the Arras-Cambrai road. This campaign was to be undertaken in several stages and had been designed to drive the enemy out of the prepared defensive system known – in English – as the *Hindenburg Line* and back across the *Canal du Nord**.

****The advance in front of Amiens was also to continue and at the end of September a further offensive was to erupt further north in Belgium.***

The 87th Battalion was not to become a part of this general advance until September 2 (see below) by which time some Canadian and British units had already been engaged for a week.

The following is from Appendices to be found in the 87th Battalion War Diary for the month of September, 1918:

Operational Order No. 138

a) The Canadian Corps will attack DROCOURT-QUEANT LINE and enemy positions in rear, on a date and at a time to be notified later*.

****The date was to be September 2.***

On reaching the crest of the ridge just east of the sunken road, the leading Coys came under heavy Machine Gun and shell fire, frontally and on both flanks... At 1.30 P.M. the C.O. advised Brigade that we could not hope to get further without artillery and tank support and shortly after the G.O.C. stated that we could hold on to what we had and await orders...

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

The Battalion was to advance until the evening of September 4 when it had been relieved, eventually having retired to the area of Neuville-Vitasse during the afternoon of the following day. The unit, indeed the entire Canadian Corps, had incurred heavy casualties* and by this time re-organization, re-equipment and re-enforcement had been the priorities. Elsewhere the advance was to continue.

****For example, of the three-hundred thirty-seven dead interred in Dury Mill British Cemetery, only nine did not serve in a Canadian unit, and all but eighteen were to die on September 2 of 1918.***

(Right above: Dury Mill British Cemetery is to be found in fields just off the northern side of the Arras-Cambrai route nationale, not far to the east of Monchy-le-Preux. – photograph from 2016)

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



It had then been, of course, on only the day after the 87th Battalion's arrival in the area of Neuville-Vitasse, that – even though the unit's War Diary makes no mention of the arrival of any draft of re-enforcements – his own records show that, on September 6, 1918, Private Taylor had reported *to duty*.

* * * * *

For the next three weeks the 87th Battalion was to remain in quarters in the rear area of Neuville-Vitasse, girding itself for the next confrontation. The opening offensives of the campaign on the Arras Front had been in general very successful – and very costly: in places the advance had brought Canadian and British troops as far east as the west bank of the *Canal du Nord*.

However, it had proved to be logistically impossible for supplies, re-enforcements and artillery to follow up on this perhaps once-again unexpected success. Probing patrols and minor operations were mounted to keep the Germans off balance and to prevent any organized defence system to develop, but until September 27, any further large-scale attack was not to be undertaken on the Arras-Cambrai Front.

However, when the day eventually arrived, Private Taylor and his 87th Battalion were to be in the thick of it.

It was to be on September 24 that the 87th Battalion came into receipt of orders to move forward to the area of Bullecourt on the night of September 25-26. Having done so...*Operational Order 140*...was then received on September 26, the overall instructions of which were: *The 11th C.I.B. are attacking with objective, south end of BOURLON village and BOURLON WOOD.*

The 102nd on the right and the 87th on the left will attack with objectives west end of BOURLON WOOD; i.e. GREEN Objective...

...When barrage has lifted off BOURLON Wood...Coys will push forward patrols to ascertain if wood is held in strength. If fighting is necessary to clear it, patrols will withdraw and report accordingly...

...Zero hour will be advised later.

But of course, first of all, the crossing of the *Canal du Nord* had to be forced.

(Right above: *German prisoners evacuating wounded out of the area of the unfinished part of the Canal du Nord which the Canadians crossed on September 27, thus opening the road to Cambrai – from Le Miroir*)

(Excerpts from the 87th Battalion War Diary entry for September 27, 1918) *At 5.20 A.M. the hour fixed for zero the attack began. The enemy replied to our barrage with a heavy counter-barrage and several casualties were suffered in the assembly position. At 5.30 A.M. the Companies advanced. The CANAL DU NORD was crossed without difficulty but casualties were suffered by the Companies in moving forward...*



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



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



...at 8.20 A.M. they crossed the RED LINE and advanced to the attack...against the SUNKEN ROAD leading south from BOURLON which they took without difficulty...and cleared the southern corner of the village to the GREEN LINE... At 1.20 P.M. it was reported...that the Battalion was re-organized and ready to go on...

(Right below: *Some of the logistical problems encountered by the advancing Canadians as they crossed the Canal du Nord(?) in late September of 1918 – from Le Miroir*)



From that point the progress of the battle slowed as further objectives were exhibiting an enemy more resilient than had been the case earlier in the day. At eleven o'clock that evening the 87th Battalion had to be content with consolidating a railway line* that for a while earlier in the day had promised to fall easily into its hands but which subsequently was to prove more difficult to take.

**The line from Cambrai to Douai*

On September 28 the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade passed through the 11th Brigade to carry the fight forward. The 11th Brigade – and thus Private Taylor's 87th Battalion – remained much *in situ* during that day. However... At 10.25 P.M. a warning order was received. The 11th Brigade was to move forward in support of the 12th Brigade. (From 87th Battalion War Diary entry of September 28, 1918)

That move began at thirty minutes past seven on the following morning, that of September 29, when the 87th Battalion advanced to its assembly position. However... *the attack of the 12th Brigade was not going as well as expected; the 11th Brigade spent the day in the same location.* (From 87th Battalion War Diary entry of September 29, 1918)

Later that evening further orders were issued: *The 11th Brigade was to attack from the Railway south of BLECOURT and CUVILLERS, the 75th Battn. to the first objective. The 87th Battn. was to follow the 54th Battn. and swing to the right seizing the Village and Bridgehead of ESWARS*... The strength of the Battalion for this attack was 21 Officers 456 O.R.* (Excerpt from the 87th Battalion War Diary entry of September 29, 1918)

(continued)

**Eswars is slightly to the north-east of Cambrai and some twelve kilometres from where the Canal du Nord had been crossed only three days previously. The bridgehead referred to was on the Canal de l'Escaut which flows north-south through western Cambrai.*

An Officer from the 12th Brigade guided the Battn. up and the start was made at 3.40 A.M. Notwithstanding the darkness of the night, the assembly position was reached without difficulty at 5.15 A.M... The Battn. moved forward to the attack at 6.05 A.M. No reports were received as to the progress made by the leading Battalions... Heavy shelling was encountered when the CAMBRIA (sic) - DOUAI ROAD was reached... There was heavy shelling and heavy machine gun fire...and the situation was very obscure... (From 87th Battalion War Diary entry of September 30, 1918)



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

...At 12.55 P.M...reported that the Battn. had been very badly cut up... The Battn. was withdrawn for reorganization, the 54th Battn. taking over the line. At 4.30 P.M. orders were sent...to reorganize the remainder of the Battn. as one Company...its strength consisted of 4 Officers and 124 O.R. (From 87th Battalion War Diary entry of September 30, 1918)

On the morrow the remaining personnel of the 87th Battalion was reorganized into...two platoons...and was used to support the still-ongoing attack. It was relieved late in the day and retired through *Bourlon Wood* to the far side of the Canal du Nord, to the vicinity of Pronville.



During the days of September 30 and October 1, the casualty numbers were recorded as having been fifteen officers and three-hundred fifty *other ranks**.

**This action had been particularly gruelling to the point where it is worth recording the numbers of those from the Battalion who were later recommended – this is not to say that they were all awarded - for the following decorations: One Victoria Cross; one Distinguished Service Order; six military crosses; two Distinguished Conduct Medals; thirty-one Military Medals and two Croix de Guerre.*

(Right above: Bourlon Wood Cemetery wherein lie two-hundred fifty dead of the Great War, the majority of them Canadian – photograph from 2017)

At Pronville and later, by October 9, at 'Y' Camp, Marœuil, the priorities for Private Taylor's depleted unit were to be, logically, re-enforcement and reorganization. Once done, after a further five days, the Battalion was to take a train to return to the forward area, the journey reported as exceedingly long and uncomfortable – well over eleven hours to cover just over thirty kilometres. Perhaps to rub a little salt into the wound, the unit was then required to march to its billets, a further two and a-half hours distant at Écourt St-Quentin.

The 87th Battalion was now to become a factor in a combined British-Canadian drive northwards up the left (westerly) bank of the Canal du Nord. While the Canadians had traversed the waterway on September 27 and had driven the Germans back in front of them on the eastern side, there were still enemy forces northwards from those crossing points, forces which were holding or restricting access to such places as Palluel and Arleux, and further on, towards the city of Douai.

Patrols were pushed out along the Canal's western bank on October 16, and on the following day crossings had been effected – not only by Private Taylor's Battalion – in several places. The Battalion's advance then continued on the morning of October 18 until orders were received to come to a halt in order to allow another unit, the 102nd Battalion, to move through to take over the offensive. The 87th Battalion was...to reorganize and await further orders.



(Right above: *The western bank of the Canal du Nord ninety-seven years after the event, and seen here from the Arras-Cambrai main road, is to the left. – photograph from 2015*)

Excerpts from 87th Battalion War Diary for October 18, 1918: *At 1630 hours Battn. H.Q. moved to QUENNASON FARM on northern outskirts of Bugnicourt... Word was here received the Lieut. A.R. Grant, MM, and 3 O.R. of 'A' Coy had been killed and 4 wounded by the explosion of a shell...*

The son of William Henry Taylor, fisherman, and of Patience E. Taylor of Carbonear, Newfoundland, he was also brother to at least older sisters Emily Louise and Sarah Moore. He was also, of course, as mentioned above, husband to Charlotte (known as *Lottie*) M. Taylor (née *Kendig*) - of address as further above but also of Pearl Street before Rockaway Street, both in Lynn, Massachusetts – to whom on December 12 of 1917 he had willed his all, and to whom as of February 1, 1918, he had also allotted a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay.



(Right: *The sacrifice of Stephen Taylor is honoured in the stone of the Carbonear Cenotaph. – photograph from 2010*)

Private Taylor was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 18 of 1918 during the fighting to the south-east of the city of Douai. He was originally buried in Bugnicourt Communal Cemetery before his remains were later transferred to where they rest today.

Stephen Henry Taylor had enlisted at the *apparent* age of thirty-one years and five months: date of birth in Carbonear, Newfoundland, June 15, 1886 (according to only his attestation papers).

Private Stephen Henry Taylor was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to *criceadam@yahoo.ca*. Last updated – January 23, 2023.