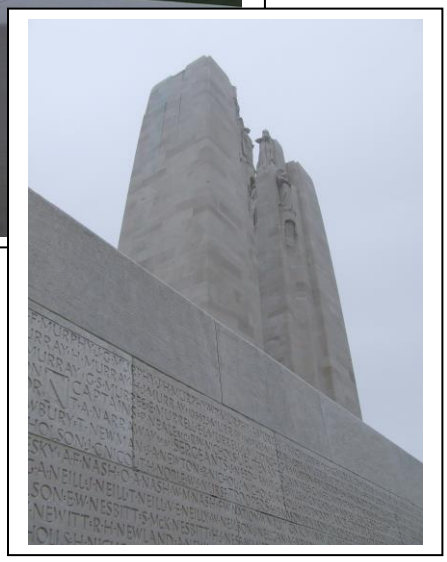


Private Thomas Joseph Tobin (Number 877265) of the Royal Canadian Regiment, Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on *Vimy Ridge*.

(Right: *The image of the cap badge of the Royal Canadian Regiment is from the Wikipedia web-site*.)

(concluded)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *labourer*, Thomas Joseph Tobin appears to have left behind him no history of either his early life in the Dominion of Newfoundland nor of his crossing of the Cabot Strait to Canada. All that may be said with any certainty is that by the spring of the year 1916, he was a resident of – and employed in - the community of North Sydney, Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, for that is when and where he enlisted.

His first pay records and a medical report indicate that it was on March 2 of that year, while he was still in North Sydney, that the Canadian Army began to remunerate the by-then Private Tobin for his services. The unit by which he was *taken on strength* on that same day was the 185th Overseas Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Eight days later, on March 10 and while still in North Sydney, Private Tobin subsequently underwent a medical examination – a procedure which found him…*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force.* He also attested on that same day before a local justice of the peace.

However, it was then to be almost a further seven weeks, not until April 26, before the formalities of his enlistment were officially concluded: it was on that date that the commanding officer of the 185th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Parker-Day declared – on paper – that…*877265 Pte. Thomas Tobin…having been finally approved and inspected by me this day…I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

By this time, Private Tobin had likely already spent the intervening weeks since his attestation on March 10 undergoing some basic training in the town of Broughton*, only some twenty kilometres distant to the south of the industrial city of Sydney. In fact, Broughton is recorded as having been the venue of his medical examination and of his attestation on April 12.

Broughton had been a 'company town', developed towards the end of the nineteenth century by the Cape Breton Coal, Iron & Railway Company. Apparently too much money had been spent on it as the company went bankrupt in 1907 and the town was to soon be abandoned. At the outset of the Great War it was taken over by the Canadian Army and, more particularly, by the 185th Battalion (Cape Breton Highlanders).

Private Tobin's posting to Broughton was not to last any longer than just over two months. By that time, the authorities had decided to create a *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade*, this to comprise the 185th, the 85th, the 193rd and the 219th Battalions of Canadian Infantry. On May 23 of 1915 these four formations were assembled to train together at *Camp Aldershot*, Nova Scotia, where the *Brigade* then spent the entire summer before receiving its colours on September 28, two weeks before its departure for *overseas service*.

It would appear that training was not the only activity in which Private Tobin participated during that period at *Aldershot*, although we are not given to know exactly what those extra-curricular exercises may have been. He is documented as having been *Absent Without Leave* for perhaps as many as thirty-six days during that time for which the Battalion authorities saw fit to deprive him of twenty-nine days' pay and to hold him in detention for seven days.

It may be that this latter punishment – the detention meted out in October - was preventative in nature as the departure of the 185th Battalion for *overseas service* was by then imminent.

Apart from this having been a time of training – and absenteeism - the period spent at Aldershot had also been the occasion for Private Tobin to pen a Will on August 23, a document in which he was to bequeath his all to his sister Anne. It may also be that, as of the first day of October, 1916, and just prior to his crossing of the Atlantic, Private Tobin allocated a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay, also to his sister.

At seven o'clock in the evening of October 11, 1916, the one-thousand thirty-eight officers and *other ranks* of the 185th Overseas Battalion embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* in the harbour at Halifax. Earlier that day the 85th and the 188th Battalions had gone on board, to be followed on the morrow by the 219th and the 193rd.

(Right below: *HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor along with HM Hospital Ship Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay in the autumn of 1915. Olympic was sister-ship to Britannic, to be sunk a month later in the eastern Mediterranean, and also to the ill-starred Titanic.* – from a photograph from the *Imperial War Museum, London*)

On October 13th - at about eleven o'clock in the morning - it was the turn of the half-battalion of the 166th – five-hundred three *all ranks* - the final unit, to march up the gangways before *Olympic* cast her lines and sailed towards the open sea. For the trans-Atlantic passage she was carrying some six-thousand military personnel.

The vessel arrived in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on October 18, some five days later, and the troops disembarked on the following day again. The 185th Battalion was thereupon transported south-eastwards by train to *Witley Camp* in the southern reaches of the county of Surrey.

The 185th Battalion (*Cape Breton Highlanders*) is documented from then on as having provided re-enforcements for Canadian forces already on the Continent. This practice was to last until February of 1918 when the remaining personnel of the unit was absorbed into the Canadian 17th (*Reserve*) Battalion.

The Cape Breton Battalion's organizers had originally anticipated that it would be sent – in the company of the other three units of the *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* – into *active service* on the Continent, but this was not to be*.

Before the end of the Great War, Canada was to have despatched overseas more than 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 presumptions 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 new units that had by then been designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.

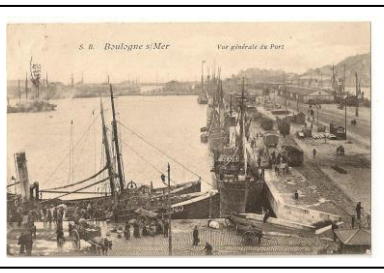
By the time of Private Tobin's arrival in England, the Canadian Corps had been involved in the *First Battle of the Somme* for two months during which time it had suffered horrendous losses. It was to fill the depleted ranks of those battered units that three-quarters of the newly-arrived *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* were to be deployed.

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

This distribution of re-enforcements was, however, to take some time even though a number had already crossed the English Channel by the end of the year, 1916. In the case of Private Tobin well over seven months were to have passed before he was to be ordered to proceed to the Continent.

It was on May 27, 1917, that the call came for Private Tobin to report to *active service* in France. Having been *taken on strength* - on paper – by the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion, he crossed from England on that day – likely through the harbours of Folkestone and Boulogne - to report, also on that same May 27, to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Base Depot by then established in the vicinity of the coastal town of Étaples. He was one of one-hundred eleven *other ranks* to arrive at the Depot on that day.

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



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

He was now to remain at Étaples for eighteen days before being despatched to join his new unit. However, while two-hundred fifty-six re-enforcements were ordered on their way on that June 14 to various battalions – of which thirty-four destined for the RCR – Private Tobin was not to proceed directly to the Royal Canadian Regiment. He is recorded as having joined the 3rd Entrenching Battalion in the area of Bois-des-Alleux and Mont St-Éloi on June 16.

(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 – partly destroyed in 1793 and further again in the war – are visible in both images.* – from *Le Miroir* and (colour) from 2016)

It would be a further six months before he was to report to the RCR Battalion.

Private Tobin now remained with the 3rd Entrenching Battalion* until September of that year, 1917. The laying of pipe-lines, the installation of water-supply systems, the construction of anti-aircraft gun emplacements, the reparation of roads and the operation of a light-railway were now to be his lot for the subsequent three months.

Then on September 15 and 29, the 3rd Entrenching Battalion War Diarist made the following entries in his journal:

15th – At midnight September 15th all personnel on the strength of 3rd Entrenching Battalion absorbed on the strength of Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp.

29th – All reinforcements for 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade transferred to 3rd Canadian Divisional Training Depot.

These units, as the name suggests, were employed in defence construction and other related tasks. They comprised men who not only had at least a fundamental knowledge and experience of such work but who also had the physique to perform it. However they also came to serve as re-enforcement pools where men awaiting the opportune moment to join their appointed unit might be gainfully employed for a short period of time.

(Right above: *Unspecified Canadian troops engaged in road construction, this also being a task to which entrenching battalions were assigned*. – from *Le Miroir* or *Illustration*)

(Right: *A light-railway line in the throes of construction by Canadian troops somewhere in France* – from *Le Miroir*)

While there appears to be little information available *a propos* the 3rd Divisional Training Depot (also perhaps known as *School*), the following may be correct*: It officially came into being on the date recorded above to replace what had proved to be an unwieldy system of four Canadian Infantry Depots – one per Division – and four Entrenching Battalions. At first situated in the rear area of Villers-au-Bois just to the north-west of Arras, on October 9 this new unit had been moved to the vicinity of the community of Calonne-Ricouart, some twenty-five kilometres to the north-west again.**

Except that it apparently was now to become a branch of the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp, also based there.

****It was also just eighty kilometres south-east of Étaples and of the new single Canadian Infantry Base Depot which had replaced the four Divisional ones (see above)…and surely linked to there by railway.***

(continued)

In Private Tobin's dossier it is documented that he – finally - arrived to join the RCR Battalion on December 12 of that 1917. There are no details in the Reinforcement Camp's War Diary other than that he was one of six-thousand three-hundred fifty-seven *other ranks* to be sent from there to various infantry units during that month.

*** * * * ***

The Royal Canadian Regiment, although having been the senior regiment in the Canadian Army at the outbreak of the *Great War*, had not been among the first units to be despatched overseas to the United Kingdom in October of 1914. In fact, it *had* been sent overseas, but in a different direction, to languish for a year on the British island possession of Bermuda.

(Right above: *Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, Ploegsteert Sector, where the 1st and 3rd Canadian Divisions served in the winter of 1915-1916, a mine crater from the time of the 1917 British offensive showing in the foreground* – photograph from 2014)

After that posting, in the summer of 1915, the Royal Canadian Regiment had been brought home to Canada, there to take the same ship onward to the United Kingdom where it had there been attached to the 7th Infantry Brigade of the newly-forming but not yet active 3rd Canadian Division.

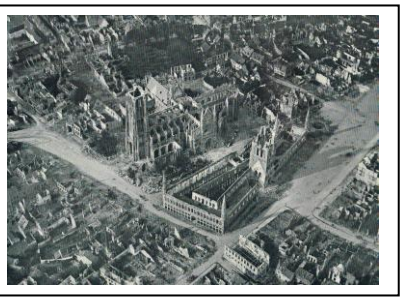
The RCR* as part of the 7th Brigade had then been transferred to the Continent on November 1 of 1915. The unit was eventually to serve with the aforementioned fledgling 3rd Canadian Division which, when having come into being, was to be sent to the Franco-Belgian frontier area in tandem with the 1st Canadian Division and then, at the end of March of 1916, to the *Ypres Salient*.**

The RCR was – and still is today – a regiment, a force which may comprise any number of battalions: today, in 2017, there are three. Some British regiments, for example, however, eventually recruited as many as twenty or more battalions to serve at the Front during the Great War. Only a single battalion - normally one-thousand strong but during the Great War oft-times comprising a lesser number - of the Royal Canadian Regiment ever served at the front during the Great War.

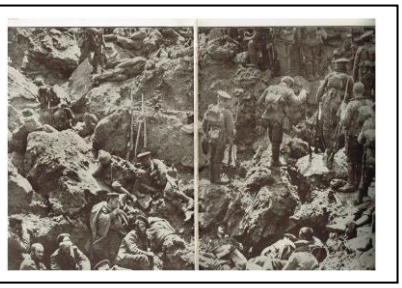
*****The 3rd Canadian Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. Unlike the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions and, later, the 4th Canadian Division, it was not formed in the United Kingdom but, in an almost ad hoc fashion, of units already serving on the Continent at the time, and of others which were to arrive from England as late as February of 1916.***

The first months of 1916 had been relatively peaceful for the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division in the frontier area. It was to be in March, 1916, that the entire Division had been transferred to the *Ypres Salient*, a lethal place at the best of times, to an area to the south-east of the city and in the vicinity of such places as the village of *Hooge*, and those that soon were to go by English names such as *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Maple Copse* and *Mount Sorrel*.

(Right below: *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*)



However, in April it had been the 2nd Canadian Division, in a neighbouring sector to the south of Ypres, which was to receive the attention of the German Army for a few days. For the 2nd Division this period was not to be as tranquil as that being experienced elsewhere during the same time by the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion and the other units of the Canadian 3rd Division.



The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* was to *officially* taken place from March 27 up until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi* was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it had been there that the British had excavated a series of galleries under the German lines, there to place explosives which they had detonated on that March 27, having then followed up with an infantry assault.

After a brief initial success the attack had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were to be replacing the exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than had had the British, and by the 17th of the month, when the battle had been called off, both sides were to be back where they had been some three weeks previously – and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.

(Right above: *A purported attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines* – from *Illustration*)

However, as previously noted, this confrontation had been a 2nd Canadian Division affair and the personnel of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the artillery duels some kilometres away.

Its *own* first major infantry action, some seven weeks later, was to be the confrontation with the Germans at *Mount Sorrel*, in the south-east area of the *Ypres Salient.*

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Salient* remaining under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This had been just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, in the areas of the village of *Hooge* and of those other places of English-sounding names as listed in a closely-previous paragraph. They are still referred to by the local people as such today.

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

(continued)

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, had overrun the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans had been unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were to manage to patch up their defences.

However, the hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day – perhaps too precipitately-ordered by the Canadian Corps' British commander, Sit Julian Byng - delivered piece-meal and poorly co-ordinated, had been a costly experience for the Canadians.

(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)

Ten days later the Canadians had again counter-attacked, on this occasion better informed, better prepared and better supported. The lost terrain for the most part had been recovered, both sides had returned to the positions in which they had been eleven days before – and the cemeteries, inevitably, were that much fuller.

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

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

(Right below: *A century later, reminders of a violent past at the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres: The area today is protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature. During the first week of June, 1917, on the opening day of the Battle of Messines Ridge, a British mine detonated under its summit was to remove most of any resemblance to a hill.* – photograph from 2014)

The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had been caught in the maelstrom of June 2 and had remained in the forward area until the night of June 5-6 when it had been relieved and had retired to Camp "B", well to the rear. The unit was not to serve again during the action at *Mount Sorrel* where it had, by the time of its retirement, incurred some one-hundred forty-five casualties.

Thus the RCR Battalion returned to the everyday routines of trench warfare for some two months, after which time the unit – as was to be the case of most of the other Canadian Battalions – had been withdrawn, with the other units of the 3rd Canadian Division, on this occasion for special training in '*open warfare*' for which special training areas had been prepared in northern France.

After those days of training the Canadians would then be ordered even further south into France, there to play a role in the British summer offensive of 1916, a campaign that had not lived up to its creators' over-optimistic expectations.

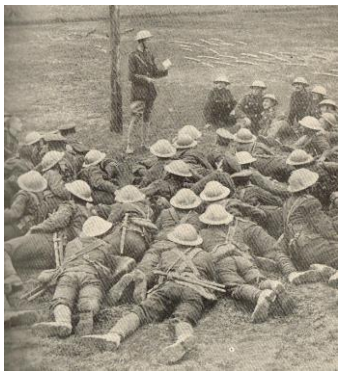
(Right below: *Canadian troops likely in trenches built for training purposes – they are too prim and proper to be the real thing when compared to the photograph on a subsequent page – and here equipped with Short Lee-Enfield Mark III rifles*, during the late summer or early autumn of 1916* – from *The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

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

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

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

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



On that first day of *First Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had issued 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 Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on July 1, 1916, at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

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

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

(Right: *Seen from its northern edge, the village of Courcelette just over a century after the events of the First Battle of the Somme* – photograph from 12017)

The RCR had arrived in the area of the provincial town of Albert in the late evening of September 13 and just two days later, on September 15, had been ordered to move forward in order to attack a German strong-point, the *Zollern Graben*, on the following day.

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

By four o'clock in the morning of September 17, when it had been withdrawn, the RCR had incurred some two-hundred eighty casualties and the *Zollern Graben* was still in the hands of the Germans.

Three weeks later, another major action was to follow: the attack of October 8-9 on the *Regina Trench* system was not a success but, on the contrary, a further expensive failure; these German positions would not be definitively taken until November 10-11. By that latter time, however, the RCR was to have retired the *Lens Sector*, some fifty kilometres to the north.

In fact, the unit was to be moving in that direction within days of having fought on October 8 at *Regina Trench*.

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

(Right below: *Wounded at the Somme being transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention* – from *Le Miroir*)

During the five weeks of its sojourn at *the Somme* the Battalion had lost, *killed* and *wounded*, about four-hundred fifty *all ranks*. Over two-hundred more had been reported as *missing in action*, the War Diarist having optimistically predicted that most of them would be later found in field ambulances and casualty clearing stations. The accuracy of that forecast does not appear to have been documented.

(continued)

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

The RCR Battalion had begun to withdraw from *the Somme* on October 10. The Battalion War Diarist makes no mention of any motor transport or train having been employed so it may be assumed that the unit, as with many others, had retired from there on foot.

Its route had taken the unit westward at first, before it had then turned northward so as to pass to the west of the by-now shattered city of Arras and beyond.

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

It was on the 24th of that October of 1916 that the unit had eventually arrived in the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector* to the north-west of Arras. The War Diarist on that date was to report the Battalion's strength as having been three-hundred eighty-six *all ranks*, less than forty per cent of regulation battalion numbers. *The Somme* had taken its toll.

The RCR, in its new quarters in the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector*, once more had begun the daily pattern of life in and out of the trenches*, a routine which had then lasted until the middle of February of the following year, 1917.

(Right: *Canadian soldiers while off-duty perusing the program of an upcoming concert 'somewhere on the Continent'* – from *Le Miroir*)

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.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *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*)

Thus the winter of 1916-1917 was to pass in that manner for the Royal Canadian Regiment. The Battalion War Diary is fairly repetitive in its entries: little in the way of infantry action except patrols and the occasional raid – by both sides. All activity was to be local and most casualties due to German artillery – some two-thirds of all casualties on the *Western Front* were apparently due to artillery action - and snipers*.

However, during that winter of 1917, medical facilities were kept busy much more by cases of sickness and, perhaps surprisingly, by dental problems.

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

Then in February the unit had been ordered into Divisional Reserve at Bruay where it had begun five weeks of training for the upcoming British offensive; not that it had been all work: the War Diary reports sports events and concerts among the litany of parades, lectures, marches, drills, work-parties and visits from military and political personages.

(Right below: *A Canadian carrying-party loading up before moving up to the forward area, one of the many duties of troops when in support or reserve* – from *Le Miroir*)

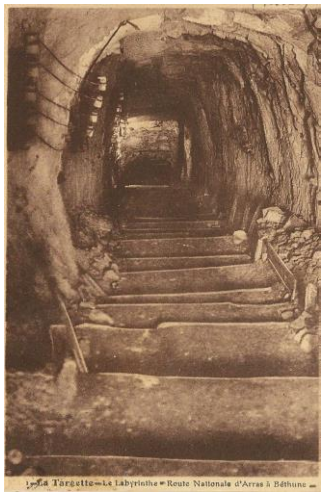
On March 21 the RCR had moved forward into the trenches once again; after five weeks in reserve perhaps the change was to be a bit of a shock to the Battalion's collective system: the War Diarist notes that the new quarters… *LA MOTTE Camp, is composed of Bivouacs, with nine tents for officers. We are its first occupants. It can be greatly improved*.

But he also enters that… *"C" Company relieved the right Company of the 58th Battn. taking over the exact frontage from which we are expected to jump off*. Such an observation illustrates the recent policy of informing junior officers and senior NCOs of the plans of intended actions, knowledge that these personnel were to pass down to the men under their command.

And it surely had been becoming clear to the men of the RCR that there *were* to be intended actions; the forward and rear areas in the Neuville St-Vaast Sector had been hives of ongoing activity for which the unit had supplied working-parties and carrying-parties each day: dumping-areas had been cleared, bivouacs had been sand-bagged, stone had been laid for walks, new trenches had been dug and old ones deepened, troops familiarized with the newly-excavated tunnels and other positions, water-pipes and communication lines buried, artillery and machine-guns sited…

(continued)

(Right: *Just one of the network of tunnels, this one in the area of Neuville St-Vaast–La Targette, which became known as the Labyrinth* – from a vintage post-card)



On April 1 the RCR Battalion had retired to Villers-au-Bois for a week, there to organize for the first day of the offensive. On April 7, the first of the unit's Companies had moved into one of those tunnels which had been hewn out of the chalk; it was hoped that these galleries would reduce the number of casualties with the men sheltering there until the last possible moment, and that it would also nurture the element of surprise.

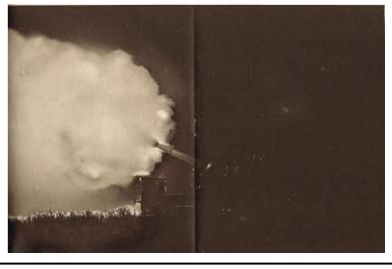
The men of the RCR were to remain underground for well over twenty-four hours.

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

As the days had passed, the artillery barrage had grown progressively heavier; on April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion had described it as…*drums*.

By this time, of course, the Germans had been aware that something was in the offing and their guns in their turn were to be throwing retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft had been very busy.

(Right: *A heavy British artillery piece continues its deadly work during a night before the attack on Vimy Ridge*. – from *Illustration*)



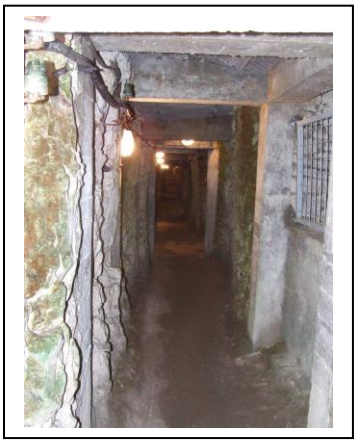
It should be said that a great deal of the artillery used in the assault on Vimy Ridge was British and that a British Division – see elsewhere - also participated. Almost fifty per cent of the personnel who had been employed for that day were British, not to mention those whose contribution – such as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

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.

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

(Preceding page: *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 – and with a British brigade under 2nd Canadian Division command - had stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.



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

For no reason other than that it is one of the more legible entries to follow, an extract of the experience of "A" Company during the opening of the attack of April 9 is here included as being representative of the events of the assault undertaken by the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion.

(Excerpts from the Battalion War Diary entry of April 9, 1917) - *3.12 a.m. "A" Company under Captain Munn reports Co. in Assembly trenches.*

5.30 a.m. Raining. Barrage opens.

While the other three Companies were in communication with Headquarters at a relatively early hour, apparently not so "A" Company, not until… *1.40 p.m. Message from "A" Co. delivered by wounded runner stated that they had captured four machine guns, were in touch with Units on both flanks… and that they had sent a patrol over the Ridge.*

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

2.15 p.m. "A" Co. (left Co.) is in its objective. Strength 1 Officer and approximately 50 other ranks with no N.C.O.'s. It is in touch with "C" Co (right) who's (sic) approximate strength is 1 Officer and sixty other ranks… "A" Co. has sent a patrol over the ridge from which as yet no report has been sent. There is a small gap between "A" Co. and the P.P.C.C.L.I. owing to the shortage of men. We command the whole situation at present, but unless reinforcements and supplies of every sort, more especially S.A.A. **(small-arms ammunition)** ***available, machine Guns, shovels etc., are sent up at first opportunity, it will be difficult to withstand another counter attack.***

(continued)

It had been the 3rd Canadian Division – of which the Royal Canadian Regiment was an element - and also the 4th Canadian Division, whose objective had been *Vimy Ridge* itself; the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions – the latter with that aforementioned British brigade under its command – had been issued responsibility for objectives on the right-hand and southerly side of the main slope.

Of the some ten thousand plus Canadian casualties of the assault*, the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had incurred fifty-six *killed in action*, one-hundred sixty-five *wounded*, and sixty-five *missing in action* on the first day.

This the count by mid-night of April 12

There had been no attempt to capitalize on the successes of April 9 as the orders had been not to advance, but *to consolidate* – and in fairness it should also be said that the state of the ground because of the weather and the relentless artillery fire had made it impossible to move supplies and guns forward. Evacuating the wounded was to be another problem as an over-worked road and railway system had found it difficult to respond to all demands.

(Right above: *The railway advances in the wake of the troops on Vimy Ridge and, as it is built, supplies are brought forward and the wounded are evacuated*. – from *Illustration*)

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

The five-week *Battle of Arras* having sputtered to a halt in mid-May, the Royal Canadian Regiment was once again to face the grind of trench warfare. However, for many of the other units, those of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions which were now to serve in sectors from Vimy in the south up to Béthune to the north this monotonous work was about to be spiced up: the Canadian Corps High Command had some offensive work planned.

The British High Command* had long since by this time decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention – and also his reserves - from *that* area, it had also ordered operations – raids, both minor and major - in the sectors of Canadian responsibility 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*)

It should be remembered that during the Great War the British High Command was in control of not only its own troops but also those from all the British Dominions, colonies and territories.

In the meantime the RCR Battalion had undertaken, on June 8, one of those aforementioned raids. It had been on German positions in the *Avion Sector* just to the south of the city and mining-centre of Lens. Having taken place in the evening of that day, the operation had been of short duration and had involved very few casualties.

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

No further raids appear to have been mounted by the RCR Battalion in the weeks which were to follow, thus it had once again been a period of the routines and rigours as described in preceding pages, with much of it to be spent in the rear areas.

Two months later, on August 15, a major attack had been launched by troops of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions in the suburbs of the mining-centre and city of Lens and just to the north of the place, at a small rise known to Canadian history as *Hill 70*.

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.

(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)

Yet *Hill 70* had been high enough to have been considered - by no-one less than the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – as 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*.)

Objectives 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 that time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.

(Preceding page: *Canadian troops in the vicinity of Hill 70 a short time after its capture by the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions* – from *Le Miroir*)

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

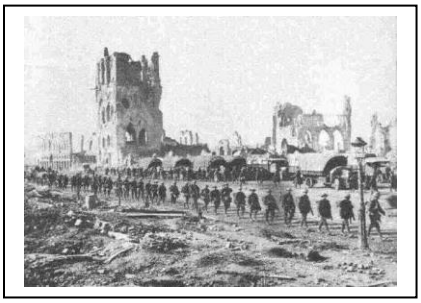
(Right: *A Canadian 220 mm siege gun, here in the summer of 1917 under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action by personnel of the Canadian Garrison Artillery* – from *Le Miroir*)

The Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion, however, was not to be a part of this particular offensive and on that day had in fact been busy in training exercises in the vicinity of the community of LaPugnoy (sic).

As far as anything of military importance on that day was concerned, the Battalion War Diarist was sparing with his ink: *Nil* - wrote he.

The Canadian efforts had apparently been planned to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium had been proceeding less well than anticipated and the High Command had by now been beginning to look for reinforcements to make good the exorbitant losses.

The Australians and the New Zealanders, and then in their turn the Canadians, had been ordered to prepare to move northwards, the Canadians thus having been obliged to abandon their own plans.



It was to be just over seven weeks after the capture of *Hill 70*, on October 6, that the Royal Canadian Regiment had begun to make its way on foot and by train to the area of the Franco-Belgian border. Later that day the unit had been billeted in the northern French town of Bailleul.

But it was not to be until October 23, having travelled by a circuitous route, still on foot and by train, that the RCR was to find itself in the war zone of the *Ypres Salient*.

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

Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign into which the Canadians were about to be thrust – already ongoing since the last day of that July of 1917 – was to come to be better known to history as *Passchendaele*, having usurped that name from a small village on a ridge that was – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.

(Preceding page: *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 were to shoulder a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it had been the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which were to spearhead the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions in reserve.

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

(Right: *Just a few hundred to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the above monument.* – photograph from 2010)

From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 (other sources cite other dates) - the reverse had been true with troops of the 2nd Canadian Division having finally entered the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.

From that aforementioned October 23 until the end of the month, the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had been in reserve in the area of Sin Jaan (*St-Jean*), having contributed to carrying-parties, working-parties and stretcher-parties.

On October 30 it had been ordered forward and was to be involved peripherally in an attack by the 3rd Division.

Extract from the RCR War Diary entry for October 31, 1917: *Day fine and fairly quiet. The following moves and reliefs were carried out. Battalion Headquarters moved to WATERLOO Pill Box… ½ "A" Company and "C" Company moved from reserve to POMMERN CASTLE AREA taking over from 116th Battalion. "B" Company moved from the front line to old jumping off trench.*

…2 other ranks killed in action.

***…19 other ranks wounded in action.* There is no mention made of any…*missing in action*.**

The unit then had remained in the lines until having been relieved on November 4 – all of this at a cost of two-hundred fifty-eight casualties.

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

(continued)

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

November 4 was only two days before (*another*) date of the official close of *Passchendaele* – July 31, 1917 to November 6, 1917 – but that of course was not to mean that the guns stopped firing or that the soldiers of both sides stopped dying on that day. Some Canadian units had withdrawn from Belgium by that date but still many remained, among them the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion.

November 14 was the next occasion on which the RCR was to be back in the trenches intersecting what in peace-time had been the road leading north from Passchendaele (today *Passendale*) to the community of Westroosebeke*.

There it was to be almost continually shelled for three days and it had incurred fifty casualties before then having been withdrawn from its positions – and from the *3rd Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele* – on the morning of November 18.

The Battalion's positions were also atop the Passchendaele Ridge.

(Right: *In the stone of the Menin Gate at Ypres (today Ieper) there are carved the names of British and Empire (Commonwealth) troops who fell in the Ypres Salient during the Great War and who have no known last resting-place. There are almost fifty-five thousand remembered there; nevertheless, so great was the final number, that it was to be necessary to commemorate those who died after August 16 of 1917, just fewer than thirty-five thousand, on the Tyne Cot Memorial*. – photograph from 2010)

Two days later again, on November 20, the unit had been back in northern France, at Rely, a community some eighteen kilometres to the west of Béthune. There it was to remain, both resting and training, for a month, until December 21 when it had been bussed back to the *Lens Sector*.

By that latter date Private Tobin had reported *to duty* with the RCR Battalion at Rely. While much of it must have been new to him and for his fellow re-enforcements, for the veterans of the Battalion, those daily exertions of the grinding existence in the trenches of the *Great War* had by now begun once more.

*** * * * ***

The month of December of 1917, even though the Battalion War Diarist appears to have neglected it, had nevertheless offered something a little different – and a reminder of home - to all the Canadian formations which had been serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army were to be open during that month and participation, in at least *some* units, was to be 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 pay for it as well.

Private Tobin was not to spend even four weeks with his new unit before the furlough gods smiled upon him and he was granted fourteen days leave. Since in fact this period became sixteen days – and also since there were to be no official repercussions on this account – one may assume that those extra days were allowed for travel time. Although it has not been recorded among his papers, it is therefore likely that Private Tobin spent those two weeks in the United Kingdom.

(Right above: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

The tranquillity of the winter was to continue until the very end of the season, but no further. The first day of spring of 1918, with the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion still stationed in the area of the city and mining centre of Lens, was to bring to a close this relative calm.

(Right: *Not only had Lens been a major producer of coal prior to the Great War, but it was large enough to have been an important railway hub as well*. – from *Le Miroir*)

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans were to come to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred to the west the Divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the *War*, they launched a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21. The main blow descended at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops stationed there, particularly in the area adjacent to the French forces.

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

The German advance continued for some two weeks, to 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 French co-operation with the British had been the most significant.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *The 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 Canadians were to move troops, mostly of the 2nd Division, into areas at the northern extremity of the German offensive, there to forestall any further forward movement on that front towards the Channel ports by enemy forces; but there was not to be any major German infantry activity on the Canadian Front at or about Arras (see immediately below).

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 to be successful for a while, but had petered out by the end of the month.

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

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 the 2nd Canadian Division 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*.

That entire period was to be spent by the RCR Battalion in the sector of Lens, then in the southern suburb of Avion and, latterly, in the vicinity of the commune of Cambligneul, sixteen kilometres north-west of Arras.

(Right above: *The city and mining-centre of Lens as it was by the end of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)

April 7 was the final day of a week-long posting to the front-line trenches in the *Lens Sector* and by that mid-night the RCR Battalion had been relieved by the PPCLI Battalion, it also a component of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade.

The following two months were spent well to the rear, in an area where games, parades and concerts were also a part of the routine of army life, although maybe not quite as frequent as the seemingly-everyday working-parties and carrying-parties.

(Preceding page: *A Canadian carrying-party delivering the trappings of war somewhere on the Western Front: Apparently the use of the head-band – known as the 'tump' - had been adopted in the Canadian forces from its use by the indigenous peoples at home.* – from *Le Miroir*)

(Right: *Cited as being an Official Canadian Photograph of a… 'violinist playing traditional music near Lens'* - from *Le Miroir*)

It was to be the end of July before Private Tobin's Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion was to see action at the front again, except on certain occasions when training exercises were held in forward areas, activities that were of necessity made to be as realistic as possible.

It may well have been that Private Tobin and his comrades-in-arms at times asked themselves not only why there was this very welcome and quiet period, but also what the purpose could be of all the drills, marches, exercises, study and use of German weapons, familiarization with new tactics, lectures, bayonetting, grenade-throwing, gas evasion and divers manoeuvres.

The answer to the latter question was to come in August.

The period of relative quiet after the efforts of the German spring offensives, *Michael* and *Georgette*, was due of course – certainly in the earlier stages - to the exhaustion of both sides by the end of that April of 1918. But not entirely*.

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, was also busy attacking the French.

(Right above: *A photograph, from 1917, of a Canadian soldier during training in the use of his 'gas-helmet': As may be imagined, it was difficult for the wearer to perform the duties of a soldier, particularly in the event of an attack*. – from *Le Miroir*)

But then it was to continue that way as the Allies and the newly-arriving Americans began in their turn to prepare for an offensive campaign – and therefore also as the German forces began to gird themselves for the inevitable retribution which was soon to burst upon them.

The arrival of those German divisions 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.

The newly-appointed Generalissimo of the Allied and Associate forces on the Western Front was Ferdinand Foch. His plan was to strike not only hard, but to strike often and ubiquitously, thus eventually overwhelming an already stretched enemy defence. Any retirement by the enemy was to be closely followed up, the pressure to be unrelenting.

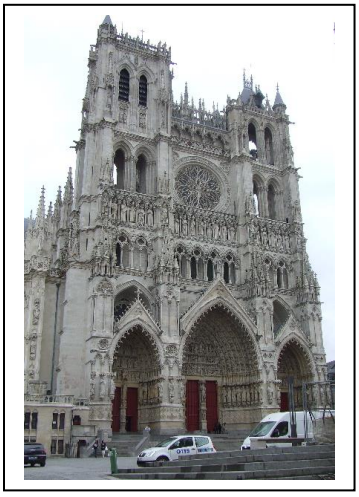
(Right: *Le Maréchal Ferdinand Jean-Marie Foch, this photograph from 1921, became Generalissimo of the Allied Armies on March 26, 1918.* – photograph from the *Wikipedia* web-site)

The month of July was quiet as well, although Private Tobin and his Battalion were still to be eventually posted into the forward area where they could be shelled and shot at. But in the days during which he had been withdrawn to the rear there also appeared to be the same continuous preparations for something grand in the offing.

A major Allied advance was soon to break upon the enemy – in fact, *several* offensives were now in preparation. The Canadian Corps was to be transported in only a matter of a few days by rail, by motor transport and on foot, from the sectors in the area of Arras to the forward area to the east of the city of Amiens to where the Germans had advanced some four months earlier, during their offensive of the spring of that year.

On July 30 the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion was ordered to parade…*in battle order*.

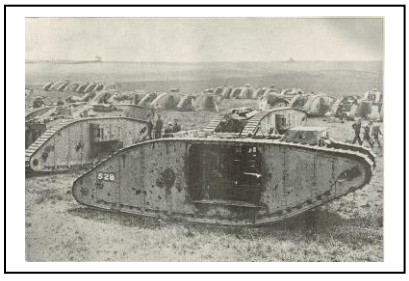
Then: on foot to LeSouich; by train to Doullens; from there to the cathedral city of Amiens by train on the first day of August; on the evening of the 2nd to billets in Sains en Amienois some four kilometres distant - and within enemy artillery range as several casualties, including fatalities, were to prove.



(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(?))

At Sains en Amienois Private Tobin likely spent three days in cleaning-up and in drying clothes, in training, in meeting French comrades-in-arms and also, on two of the three evenings given unto him, attending a concert performed by an unidentified – at least to the War Diary reader – band.

On August 6 the RCR Battalion was ordered to move: *GENTELLES WOOD full of troops. Whole Division and tanks* – recorded the War Diarist. From there three days later, on the 9th, it moved forward yet again, to *LeQuesnel Wood* on the Roye Road, expecting to attack on the next day*.



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

The first attack had already been delivered by then, in the early – and foggy – morning of August 8. But as the offensive had been planned as a continuous advance, it was necessary to have troops which were ready to continue the advance, allowing the previous units the time to regroup, re-enforce and to prepare for a further assault a few days hence.

(Right below: *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*)

Things, however, apparently went somewhat awry on this occasion as the Battalion sat awaiting orders all the following day and, in fact, it was not until the early morning of the 14th that Private Tobin and the others of his unit moved into the positions at Brigade Reserve recently vacated by the PPLCI* Battalion which had moved in order to deliver its assault from another quarter.

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

That attack by the PPCLI eventually *did* go in and by four o'clock of the next morning, August 15, the 7th Brigade had captured the village of Parvillers. It was then relieved and… *Brigade moved by march route and lorry to LEQUESNEL AREA into bivouacs. In the late afternoon the Brigade moved to VALLEY WOOD AREA* (From the 7th Brigade* War Diary entry of that day).

(Right above: *Hillside Cemetery, Le Quesnel, within the bounds of which lie at least two Newfoundlanders in Canadian uniform* – photograph from 2015)

Battalion casualties *all told* for the period of August 8-16 inclusive had been: ten *killed in action*; sixty-five *wounded*; and three *missing in action*.

The 7th Brigade comprised the 42nd, 49th, RCR and PPCLI Battalions.

Just days later, by the evening of August 19, the entire 7th Brigade was withdrawing from the recent battle-field and was on its way back whence it had come only three weeks previously. It was not alone: by August 27 the final units of the Canadian Corps were moving back to the area to the east of Arras, their places in front of Amiens having been progressively taken over by elements of the French Army.

(Right above: *French dead in the communal cemetery at Caix, just to the west of Rosières, the French relieving 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)

The Canadians were to depart in much the same manner as they had arrived: at first on foot, then by motorized transport and by rail; they also moved rapidly and discreetly.

(continued)

By the time that the last Canadian troops arrived back in the area of Arras, the first had already gone to the offensive – an operation to become known to history as the *Battle of the Scarpe* - on a new front. As early as the evening of August 25… *a very wet and dirty night*… the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion had moved forward into its assembly areas… *trenches 1500 yards EAST of ARRAS.*

Excerpt from Appendix 15 of the Royal Canadian Regiment War diary for August 26, 1918:

The attack was to follow the axis of the main road from Arras to Cambrai. By mid-morning on the following day the neighbouring 8th Brigade had already attacked and was reported as having captured Monchy-le-Preux.

(Right above: *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)

Of interest to Newfoundland readers may be that on August 26 Monchy-le Preux was captured by troops of the 3rd Canadian Division. More than sixteen months earlier, on April 14 of 1917, the Newfoundland Regiment had been ordered forward into a battle that should never have been. While a desperate defence later in the day had earned ten men – nine from the Regiment – a medal each, the unit had suffered some four-hundred fifty killed, wounded, missing or taken prisoner.

After Beaumont-Hamel, April 14, 1917, was to be the costliest day of the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment's war.

(Right above: *The village of Monchy-le-Preux as seen today from the south-west. In 1917 the Newfoundlanders, already in the village, had advanced out of the ruins of the village to the east, away from the camera; in 1918 the Canadians, attacking from the west, encircled the place*. – photograph from 2014)

Whereas the attack by the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade had begun at three o'clock that morning of August 26, it was not until a quarter to ten, almost eight hours later, that the 7th Brigade – and thus the RCR, now accompanied by several tanks – began to move forward. By eleven o'clock the force was being held up as the Battalion's right flank was open and exposed to enemy fire.

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

The advance soon recommenced but enemy resistance by this time was stiffening: reports arrived of…*heavy machine gun and rifle fire* (11.30 am),…*Enemy artillery fire increasing* (11.45 am),… *Enemy snipers very active* (1.15 pm),…*Large enemy ait forces over*

***MONCHY, bombing Machine Gunning and registering their Batteries on occupied trenches* (3.30 pm).**

***…"A" Co. counter-attacked from front and rear and forced to take up a position in LONG TRENCH. "D" Co. moving forward met enemy party attacking "A" Cos. rear and forced them to withdraw, after inflicting heavy casualties.* (8.15 pm*),…Enemy Machine Gun and Rifle Fire still very heavy.* (11.30 pm)**

By the late afternoon of August 29, after four days of, at times, very heavy fighting, most objectives had been secured and the Germans had been driven back some eight kilometres. The RCR Battalion was thereupon withdrawn to billets in Arras while the *Battle of the Scarpe officially* was drawing to its close on August 30.

(Right above: *A further photograph of a what was to remain of Arras, this one of the first buildings to be destroyed in the four-year bombardment, on October 6, 1914*. – from a vintage post-card)

As the fighting had progressed, German resistance had become more pronounced and as usual, his machine-gunners were to give and to ask no quarter. RCR Battalion casualties from August 25-29 had been as follows: thirty-two *killed in action* or *died of wounds*; one-hundred fifty-seven *wounded*; seven *missing in action*.

In many cases there is to be found a casualty report among Canadian Military Records *a propos* the circumstances of a soldier's death. In the case of Private Tobin, however, this is not so; all that may be said – and even then perhaps without absolute certainty – is that he was killed on August 26, during the time of the events recounted above.

The son of Samuel Tobin, former fisherman (deceased February 2, 1904 of consumption) and of Esther Tobin (née *Spinn(e)y*, deceased by the time of enlistment), of St. Lawrence, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Agnes, to Andrew and to Ann-Maria (see sister Ann further above).

Private Tobin was reported as having been *killed in action* on August 26, 1918, during the fighting of the *Battle of the Scarpe*.

Thomas Joseph Tobin had enlisted at the *apparent* age of 23 years: date of birth at St. Lawrence, Newfoundland, February 22, 1893 (from attestation papers); however the Newfoundland Birth Register (original) cites the date as having been July 24, 1893.

Private Thomas Joseph Tobin 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.