



Private John Patrick Travers (elsewhere found as *Traverse* and *Travis*) Number 222849 of the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Highlanders*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Crest British Cemetery, Fontaine-Notre-Dame: Grave reference A.9..

(Right: *The 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion emblem, worn as a head-dress cap badge, is from the Wikipedia web-site*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *driller* working in the iron-ore mines of Bell Island, John Patrick Travers has left behind him little, if any, information pertaining to his early years living in the Dominion of Newfoundland. He and his six siblings had been born and raised in the community of Coachman's Cove in White Bay, but his father had passed away in 1899 and the family's mother had re-married, to a Mr. Edward Power of Bell Island. When this wedding took place, however, or when the family apparently moved to Bell Island, is not to be found in the usual sources.

His first military pay records show that it was on October 15 of that 1915, that the newly-forming 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Highlanders*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force began to remunerate him for his services. However, according to his attestation papers, John Patrick Travers had by that time already been serving for some nine months in the 78<sup>th</sup> Regiment (*Pictou Highlanders*) of the Canadian Militia\*.

*\*The Canadian Militia had been formed to assure the defence of the Dominion of Canada after the departure of British forces in and about 1871. Its mandate did not allow for its personnel to operate outside the borders of the country thus, at the onset of war in 1914, the Canadian Overseas Battalions were organized, units which were often recruited for by – and in fact often soldiered by personnel transferred from - the pre-War Militia forces.*

On October 19, four days later, Private Travers underwent a medical examination in Halifax, a procedure which found him to be...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. Ten days later again, while still in Halifax, he was attested, his oath witnessed by a local justice of the peace and by the second-in-Command of the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant A.H. Borden.

It had then not been until December 20, 1915, that an officer with an indistinguishable signature, but apparently representing the Commanding Officer of the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion, brought the formalities of Private Travers' enlistment to a conclusion when he declared – on paper - that...*John Travers...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with correctness of this Attestation.*

The 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion had its headquarters in the *Armouries* at Halifax and it was there and on the neighbouring Common that the unit had begun training as of October 14, 1915. While 'A' Company was to be quartered in the *Armoury* building itself, the other three such units were to inhabit tents for the next several months until huts were to be constructed on a part of the same *Common*. Private Travers, attached to "B" Company, was one of those to spend a miserable winter under canvas.

By the following spring, the authorities had decided to create a *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* to comprise the 185<sup>th</sup>, the 85<sup>th</sup>, the 193<sup>rd</sup> and the 219<sup>th</sup> Battalions. On May 23 of 1915 these four formations were assembled to train together at *Camp Aldershot*, Nova Scotia, where the *Brigade* then spent all summer before receiving its colours on September 28, two weeks before its departure for *overseas service*.

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On October 11 of 1916, the thirty-four officers and one thousand one *other ranks* of the 85<sup>th</sup> Overseas Battalion, C.E.F., embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* in the harbour at Halifax. On that same day the 185<sup>th</sup> and the 188<sup>th</sup> Battalions were also to march on board, to be followed on the morrow by the 219<sup>th</sup> and the 193<sup>rd</sup>.



(Right above: *HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor along with HMHS Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London*)

On October 13<sup>th</sup> - at about eleven o'clock in the morning - it was the turn of the half-battalion of the 166<sup>th</sup> – five-hundred three *all ranks* - the final unit, to file up the gangways before *the vessel* was to cast her lines and set her bow towards the open sea. One of the largest ships afloat at the time, for the trans-Atlantic passage *Olympic* was carrying some six-thousand military personnel.

The vessel docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on October 18, six days later, and the troops disembarked on the following day. The 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was thereupon transported south-eastwards to *Witley Camp* in the county of Surrey whereupon there were now to follow several more months of training.

The organizers who had envisaged the formation of the *Nova Scotia Highland Brigade* had expected that it would serve as a whole in *active service* on the *Western Front*: this was not to be, the *Brigade* being disassembled in December of 1916. Three of its four battalions were now to remain in the United Kingdom, there to be employed as reserve units to furnish re-enforcements for the depleted Canadian battalions on the Continent.

The 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Highlanders*) was to be the exception\*.

*\*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.*

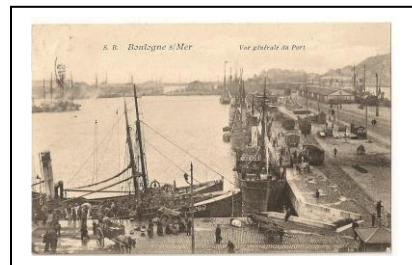
*However, as it transpired, only some fifty of these formations were ever to be sent across the English Channel to the Western Front. By far the majority remained in the United Kingdom to be used as re-enforcement pools and these were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by units that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

The 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion, however, stationed at Witley for the next several months, was to pass through the English-Channel port of Folkestone on February 10 of that 1917 to embark on His Majesty's Transport *London* for passage to the Continent.



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

The Battalion disembarked at noon of that same day in Boulogne to march to the nearby *St. Martin's Rest Camp*.



Days later, by February 14, the unit had travelled inland to report to the vicinity of Gouy-Servins where it was to remain in training until the second day of March. It then moved in succession to the areas of Chateau de la Haie and the *Bouvigny Huts* for more of the same (see below)\*.

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

*\*A goodly number of sources at this point in the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion's history appear to err, often by omission it must be said, rather than by commission - the author pleads guilty of the same mistake. While these sources record the Nova Scotia unit as being with the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, this omits the fact – confirmed by the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary – that it was as an element of this latter formation that the 85<sup>th</sup> Brigade would serve until after the action of April 9 on Vimy Ridge:*

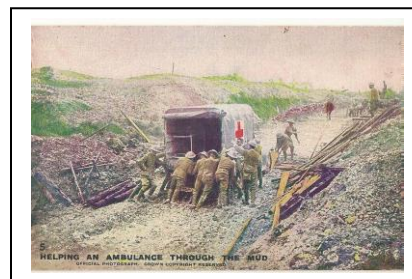
Excerpt from 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary: *Operational Order No. 51 issued at 11.15 a.m., 12.IV.17 – On relief the 85<sup>th</sup> Bn will pass to command of G.O.C. 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade...*

During that period at the *Bouvigny Huts*, certain of the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion personnel became transferred temporarily to three other battalions. A platoon of two officers and twenty-six *other ranks*, on March 26, thus found themselves in the forward area serving with the 73<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion.

Three days later, the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for March 28, 1917, reads partially as follows: *Our aircraft active all day. Artillery active. A few Bosche shells...about 9.30 p.m.. Great motor transport activity loading...*

*Casualties:- ...“B” 222849 Pte. Travers J Shrapnel wound buttock while on duty in front line with 73<sup>rd</sup> Battalion*

Having been evacuated from the field to the rear area, it may have been that Private Travers received treatment for two days in an unspecified casualty clearing station. Thus it was on either March 28 – the day of his injury – or on March 30, that he was admitted into the 26<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Étapes with...*shrapnel (in) outer & back part of left thigh (severe).*



(Right above: *transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and man-power – from a vintage post-card*)

There at Étapes on April 5 he was operated on to remove the metal, at the same time as a decision was likely being made about his immediate future.

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Two days after the extraction of the shrapnel, on April 7, Private Travers was on his way back to the United Kingdom, having been placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Newhaven*. On the morrow, now back in England, he was taken for further medical attention to the Military Hospital at Bethnal Green on the eastern outskirts of London where he was to remain for the following five weeks plus two days.



(Right above: *A part of Étaples Military Cemetery, the largest British and Commonwealth burial-ground in France, within the bounds of which repose some eleven-thousand dead of the Great War, most of whom died in the nearby hospitals – photograph from 2010*)

The Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Bromley in the county of Kent was his next stop, on May 15. Apparently the doctor supervising his treatment was not completely satisfied with the progress made...*Wound extensive and needs more rest – Transfer to Ramsgate.* He arrived there on May 19.



(Right: *The image of a peace-time Newhaven, before donning its white garb with red cross, is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Ramsgate, on the coast of the same county of Kent, was at the time the location of the *Granville Canadian Special Hospital* which oversaw the rehabilitation of cases in need of extra-ordinary convalescent care. What exactly it was that was on offer to Private Travers is not specified – perhaps massage therapy which was one of its services – but it must have been effective as on May 21 there was entered into Private Travers' case history...*There is no reason why this man should have further treatment.*

He nonetheless continued to undergo therapy for the next twelve days before, on the final day of the month, he was considered fit enough to be discharged *to duty*.

The Canadian military establishment known as *Camp Bramshott* was one of the largest such complexes built during the *Great War*. Constructed in the county of Hampshire it was to serve a number of functions, one of which was to be the base for the Nova Scotia Regimental Depot where Private Travers was now to be posted physically – bureaucratically he had been the Regimental Depot's responsibility since his arrival to England on *Newhaven* on April 7.



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

He was immediately sub-posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Command Depot, also stationed there and designed to accommodate and assess military personnel not attached to any unit – such as those released from hospital or who were superfluous to needs – and to decide upon what employment, if any, might be assigned to them.

It may not have been seven weeks before a decision was to be taken in the case of Private Travers; however, it was a full fifty days before it was put into practice. He was to return to the fighting on the Continent and to that end, on July 20-21, he was *struck off strength* from the 2<sup>nd</sup> CDD and *taken on strength* by the 17<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion, this unit also stationed at *Bramshott*.

Now there was to be a further long training – and waiting – period before Private Travers returned to the fighting of the *Western Front*. In fact, it was to be November 10 before the call came: when it did, it was to be from his former unit, the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Highlanders*).

On the night of November 10-11 he crossed the Channel to France – on this occasion likely via the English south-coast port of Southampton and the French industrial city of Le Havre situated on the estuary of the River Seine - to report to the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Base Depot, established by that time at Étapes where he had been hospitalized more than seven months previously. He was one of five-hundred fifty-two arrivals to the 4<sup>th</sup> CIBD on that November 11.



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

Having been nominally *taken on strength* by the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion on November 13 while he was still at the Infantry Base Depot, Private Travers was to be one of five-hundred twenty-three *other ranks* to be despatched to various units on the following day.

It was a large re-enforcement draft which reported *to duty* with the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion on November 23, just after the unit’s retirement from *Passchendaele* to the northern French community of Raimbert: twenty-one officers and two-hundred twenty-two *other ranks*, which permits the reader some idea of the Battalion’s losses during the preceding weeks in Belgium.

Although it is not recorded among Private Travers’ files, the nine days between the draft’s departure from Étapes and its arrival at Raimbert had almost certainly been spent at the *Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp* in the vicinity of Calonne-Ricouart. The Canadian Corps as a whole had been fighting during the conclusion of the wretched campaign of the *Third Battle of Ypres; Passchendaele*, and an excerpt from the *Reinforcement Camp’s War Diary* allows an idea of the intensity of the confrontation:

*16/11 to 31/11 – During this period, nearly all units of the Canadian Corps, having returned to the LENS Area, every effort was made to fill up the deficiencies in strength of units.*

*During the month of November, the C.C.R.C.*

- a) *Received from Base 383 Officers and 8093 Other Ranks reinforcements.*
- b) *Despatched to Units 209 Officers and 9578 Other Ranks reinforcements.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile, in the absence of Private Travers from among its ranks, the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Highlanders*) had continued to play its role in the great conflict.

From the time of its disembarkation on the Continent in February, 1917, it appears that the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion as an entity was to move forward to the front line for the first time only on April 8, the eve of the attack on *Vimy Ridge*. The Nova Scotia unit apparently had been officially designated as a *working unit*, to be employed in reserve on the day of the assault, its tasks and duties to be things other than fighting. However, due to its Commanding Officer's insistence, it had nevertheless been undergoing exercises for several weeks prior to the offensive, training on prepared sites at the *Bouvigny Huts* - in meticulous fashion – and its officers briefed on the upcoming operation.

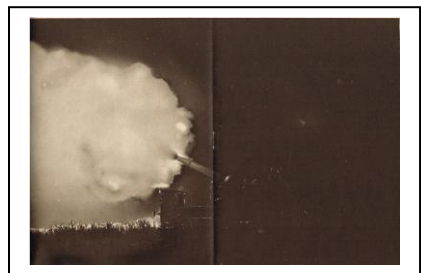
This insistence on the part of Lieutenant-Colonel Borden, and these preparations, were to stand the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion in good stead for what was to follow.

What followed, of course, was to be the Canadian attack of April 9, 1917 on *Vimy Ridge*, an operation in which the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion would play a conspicuous role late in the afternoon.

However, prior to this as yet unforeseen duty, the tasks of the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion on that day were as follows: *Construction and filling Dump at Strong Points 5 and 6; Construction of deep dug-out...; Digging C(ommunication) T(rench) from front Assembly Trench...; Party to carry wire and assist Brigade wiring party on construction...; Party to carry forward ammunition for Stokes Guns; Prisoners of War Escort Party; Battle Police...*

As the final days before the attack had passed, the artillery barrage had grown progressively heavier: on April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion was to describe it as...*drums*. By this time, of course, the Germans had been aware that something was in the offing and their guns in their turn had thrown retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft had been very busy. Even while still at the *Bouvigny Huts*, the personnel of the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion must have been well aware of the immensity of the operation – its first - which lay before it.

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



*\*It must be said that a great deal of the artillery used in the assault on Vimy Ridge was British and that a British Division – only a single Brigade employed on April 9 – 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.*

(Right: *the Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

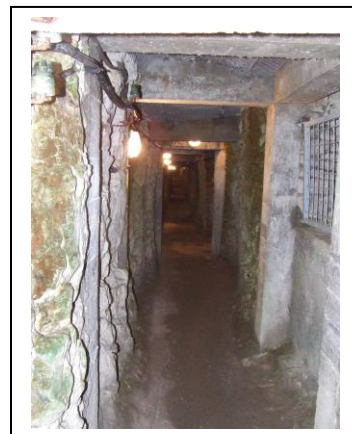


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On that April 9 of 1917 the British Army had launched an offensive not only in the vicinity of *Vimy Ridge*, but also in a large area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields of the previous year; this was to be the *Battle of Arras*, intended to support 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 that of the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

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

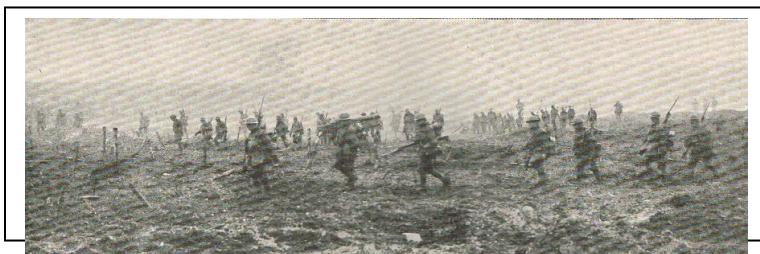
(Right: *One of the few remaining galleries – Grange Tunnel - still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years later – photograph from 2008(?)*)



On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity, had stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

The attack on *Vimy Ridge* had taken place on the opening day of the five-week-long *Battle of Arras*. The days and weeks that followed were to be less auspicious than had been April 9 and 10, and the realities of life in the trenches was to take hold once more. That early success was not to be repeated until the summer of 1918.

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



Then the caprices of war had played a role. At three o’clock on the afternoon of April 9, Lieutenant Colonel Borden, Commanding Officer of the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion, had been ordered to despatch two of his four Companies, one to each of the 87<sup>th</sup> and 102<sup>nd</sup> Battalions whose assault was being jeopardized by the enemy from positions on top of the crest. He was also ordered to be in position with the rest of his command at half-past four in two of those well-known tunnels for further orders.

Those orders had arrived thirty minutes early: *BATTER trench...is strongly held by fresh enemy... (You) Will attack it with 2 companies of 85<sup>th</sup>...*

*4.15 p.m. – G.O.C. (General Officer Commanding) arranges assault on BATTER...by 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion...*

*6.30 p.m. – 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion attacked without a barrage, and reached their objectives without much opposition.*





(Excerpts from 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for April 9, 1917)

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

Apparently the objectives in question were known collectively as *Hill 145* which, once taken, had been consolidated into a strong-point by the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Today the Canadian National Memorial at *Vimy Ridge* stands atop it.



(Right: *A part of Vimy Ridge and the Canadian National Memorial as seen from La Chaudière in what was on April 9, 1917, German-occupied territory – photograph from 1915*)

On April 13 the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade had been relieved and the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion had returned to the *Bouvigny Huts* where it had been quartered in March. From this time forward, until the end of the *Great War*, it was to serve as a component of the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade (see *Operational Order* some pages above).

By April 18 the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion had moved from the *Bouvigny Huts* to not-so-distant *La Targette* (also at the time referred to as *Aux Reitz*). There it had found that it was to replace the 73<sup>rd</sup> Battalion which would be disbanded on or about April 16. Two days later, on April 18, the War Diarist of the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to make the following entry in his journal: *Transport of 73<sup>rd</sup> Bn. transferred to this unit. On the next day again he added: More...personnel of 73<sup>rd</sup> transferred to this unit.*



(Right above: *French and British Commonwealth dead lie in cemeteries at La Targette. – photograph from 2014*)

The unit was not to enjoy its respite for long. On April 21 the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion had moved from *La Targette* to *Canada Camp* at *Chateau de la Haie*; there, on the following day, it had been ordered to form part of a composite Canadian brigade which was to support a British attack. The unit was *...to be ready to move forward on half hours notice any time after 6 a.m. 23/4/17.*

The Battalion was to be left...*standing to...*all that April 23 - and presumably then all night - before it had then moved forward at eleven o'clock on the next morning. The move was not to be completed until three o'clock in the morning of the next day again, April 25, when it had found itself in positions fronting the *Lens to Vimy railway line*.



(Right above: *After four years of conflict, this was what was to be left of the once-village of Vimy by the War's end. – from a vintage post-card*)

(continued)

By that time, plans had apparently changed: for the remainder of that day - and the next - the unit was to spend most of its time digging a new front-line trench. A few spare hours were spent in simulating an attack on the German positions opposite in order to divert the enemy's attention from the adjacent sector where the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions were going to put in a real attack on April 28.

For its troubles on that April 26, the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to receive much unwelcome artillery attention which had resulted in a number of casualties.

This exercise in deception would be repeated on April 28 before the unit then had retired into support positions on the following day, to an area where it was to remain until May 2 when it had moved forward once more. On May 6 the Battalion had then been withdrawn entirely from the forward area into reserve.



(Right above: *Canadian troops under fire in the Lens Sector of the front during the spring or summer of 1917 – from Illustration*)

During that four-day tour the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion had not been involved in any infantry action but it had not been inactive: even in the front lines there was always a call for working-parties. The Battalion War Diary records:

*Work done during tour:- BADDECK TRENCH was completed – GRENADIER TRENCH was deepened – HALIFAX TRENCH improved – Block advanced – BORDEN TRENCH deepened and completed across the whole front. Casualties during tour – from 2<sup>nd</sup> the 6<sup>th</sup> inclusive – 2 OFFICERS and 20 Other Ranks*

The following days and weeks were to be spent in much the same manner: back and forth from reserve to the front-line trenches with time spent in-between the two, in support. Casualties were to be relatively light, almost all caused as ever by enemy gun-fire. When not in the firing-line the Battalion personnel supplied man-power for working-parties and carrying-parties.



And the weather for the most part was apparently...*fine and warm.*

(Right above: *A Canadian carrying-party loading up before moving up to the forward area, one of the many tasks allocated to troops when they were not manning the front lines: The use of the head-band - the 'tump'- was adopted from the North American indigenous peoples. – from Le Miroir*)

Thus it was, in early May of 1917, that the role of the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) in the *First Battle of Arras* had sputtered to its close.

The British High Command had well before this time decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium; the opening phase - the *Battle of the Messines Ridge* - was scheduled for the first week of June.

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

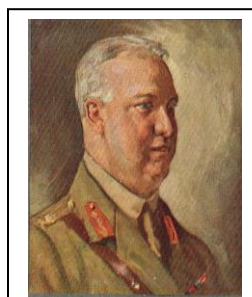
(Right: *Canadian troops advancing through No-Man's-Land under fire in the Lens Sector during the summer of 1917 – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)



The Canadian Corps would be a major contributor to the aforementioned operations in the area of Lens, the best-documented action of which was to be the confrontation fought at *Hill 70* by troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions. Thus, troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division – and therefore the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion - had not been involved in this particular operation other than peripherally.

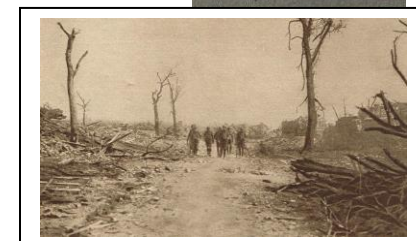


(Right above: *This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. This successful operation showed the progress that had been recently made, particularly in artillery tactics. – photograph from 1914*)



(Right: *The portrait of Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie, Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Corps at this time is from Illustration.*)

After *Hill 70* the Canadians apparently had expected, and had planned, further actions in the area, but to the north the ongoing *Third Battle of Ypres* was not proceeding according to expectations and the British were running out of reinforcements. The Canadians – and the Australians and New Zealanders - were to be ordered to provide the necessary man-power.



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

While not having been heavily involved in the Canadian-led summer campaign of 1917 in the mining area of the *Lens-Béthune Sectors*, the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be slated to play its part in that other ongoing offensive, the one in Belgium, and once again in the *Ypres Salient* – a battle that has come to symbolize both the savagery and the pity of war.

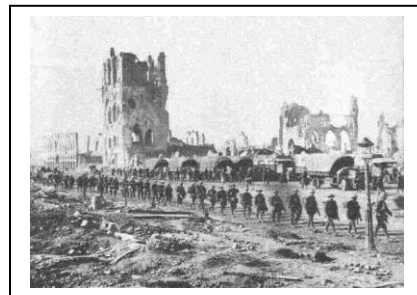


(Right above: *The northern French city and mining-centre of Lens was to be the victim of four years of incessant bombardment – by both sides – and looked like this by the end of the conflict. – from a vintage post-card*)

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Thus during the month of September, the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion, while awaiting further orders, had still been stationed in northern France, in training, in taking care of the everyday business of trench warfare and in otherwise preparing for its role in what would prove to be one of the most murderous battles in history.

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



Officially designated the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign has come to be known to history simply as *Passchendaele*, having taken that name from a small village on a ridge that was – *ostensibly* - one of the British Army's objectives.

(Right below: *Somewhere, perhaps anywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)

From the time that the Canadians were to enter the fray, it would be they who had shouldered a great deal of the burden. During the week of October 26 until November 3 it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions which had spearheaded the assault, with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was to be true with troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division finally having entered the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.

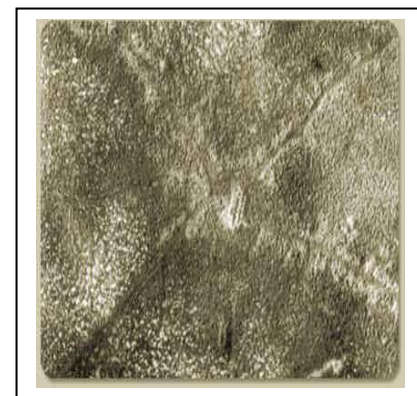


(Right: *The village of Passchendaele as seen from the air in 1916, after two years of war – from Illustration*)



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

Meanwhile, having left the area of Bruay by train on October 12 for billets at Staples in northern France, the Nova Scotia Highlanders unit was there to wait a further eleven days before having been transferred by bus from there to *St. Lawrence Camp* in the area between the Belgian town of Poperinghe and the smaller community of Brandhoek.



Yet another five days were now to pass before, on October 28, the Battalion had been transported by rail to Ypres, there to then cross the ruins of the place, past the vestiges of the *Cloth Hall* (as in the image above)...*and marched to POTIJZE and had supper there; issued bombs etc., there and marched off, passing the starting corner...where guides met the Battalion at 4.45 p.m. Proceeded to the front line...* (Excerpt from Appendix A of the Battalion War Diary for October, 1917)

**October 30, 1917 – At Zero hour the first sound heard was the Brigade machine guns. On this all Companies pushed forward. They had hardly gotten clear of the tapes before they were met by heavy machine-gun and rifle fire from the direction of the enemy front line all the way along our front and from a portion of DECLINE COPSE South of the Railway, and from machine guns in the vicinity...**

**This machine-gun and rifle fire was taking place while our barrage was supposed to be playing on the enemy's front line. There was a continuous sheet of machine-gun bullets, and it is the opinion of all who took part in the attack that the first barrage on the 85<sup>th</sup> Bn's front was not only very light, but that very little, if any, of it fell on our side or on the enemy's trench.**

**(Right below: The monument to the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders) which stands in a field by the side of the road between Zonnebeke to Passendale (Passchendaele) in the area of which the unit had advanced – photograph from 2014)**

**The three Companies advanced, providing their own covering fire with rifle-grenades, Lewis guns and rifle fire until they had passed our old front lines. Then in No Man's Land, a fierce fire fight took place.**

**The rear waves pushed up and got their Lewis guns into action, while the rifle-grenadiers barraged the enemy's front line, which was quite evident and could plainly be seen, strongly manned by the enemy. The line was drawn closer and closer to the enemy by the men jumping from shell-hole to shell-hole but anyone who attempted to walk upright instantly became a casualty. There were several instances of this...**



**The fire fight continued for, some say ten minutes, and some say half an hour...(Excerpt from Appendix A of the Battalion War Diary of October, 1917)**

**Thus had passed the first minutes of the attack on the morning of October 30, 1917. The first objective would be reported as *taken* at just after half-past six that morning but the situation was to remain far from stable: enemy artillery was to be fierce, counter-attacks were to be forthcoming and re-enforcements were to be necessary.**

**It had not been until the evening of October 31 that the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion would be relieved. By that time it had incurred more than fifty per cent casualties among both officers and *other ranks*: a total of six-hundred eighty-eight went into action; three-hundred ninety-four had become casualties.**



**The unit had been shattered.**

**(Right above: The Canadian Memorial which today stands on Passchendaele Ridge – photograph from 2015)**

**The 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion had thereupon been withdrawn to the south from *Passchendaele* during the first week of November, 1917, and was soon to be once more back in France, in the area of Lens, and enduring the glamour of life in the trenches.**

By November 20, the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion had retired to the area of the commune of Raimbert, not far removed from the larger northern centre of Béthune. The time spent there behind the lines was to comprise the usual training, competitions, sports, lectures, church-parades, musketry, gas-drills, inspections, concerts, reinforcements, working-parties... the list in the Battalion War Diary does go on...

...and of course includes the arrival on November 23 of a large draft from the *Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp* at Calonne-Ricouart, a detachment which, among its two-hundred twenty-two *other ranks*, included Private John Patrick Travers returning to duty from hospitalization and convalescence.

(Right: 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*)



\* \* \* \* \*

The month of that December of 1917 was to offer something a little different – and undoubtedly a reminder of home - to all the Canadian military formations and units which were serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army were open from December 4 until 17, 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.*

The winter of 1917-1918 was for the most part to be a quiet period, much as had been the three previous winters of the *Great War*. The 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary suggests little offensive activity on the part of the unit and the number of casualties recorded per diem are low.

When it served in the front line and in support positions during those months, the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered posted into such sectors as Méricourt and Lens; when withdrawn into reserve – which it appears to have been for much of that winter – it was sent to Château de la Haie, Souchez, Petit Servins and to Raimbert.



(Right above: *The village of Souchez as it already was in 1915, before the arrival of the British and Canadians to the sector – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

On March 13 Private Travers' 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered forward into support positions in the Cité St-Pierre, one of the many mining districts encompassing the city of Lens. On March 18 the unit moved up into the front line where it was still serving on the 21<sup>st</sup>, the first day of spring, 1918.

The first day of spring: Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory during the first six weeks of that spring of 1918. Having transferred westwards the large number of divisions no longer necessary on the *Eastern Front* because of the Russian withdrawal from the *Great War*, the enemy then launched a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21.



(Right above: *While the Germans did not attack Lens – some sources have this image as being of Liévin, just to the west - the sector where the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was serving, in March of 1918, but they bombarded it heavily during the time of their offensive in order to keep the British and Canadians uncertain about their intentions and to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir*)

The main blow fell at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the former battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops serving there, particularly where they were adjacent to the French.

The impressive German advance continued for some two weeks, but petered out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was a result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and much appreciated French co-operation with the British were 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 29<sup>th</sup> and, temporarily, 34<sup>th</sup> Division. It was successful for a while, but was finally held by the end of the month.*



(Right: *British troops on the retreat in Belgian Flanders during 'Georgette' in mid-April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

At first there was to be a great deal of indecision displayed by the British and Canadian High Commands and units were being transferred, often in a circular fashion, with orders given soon afterwards countermanded.

The object of these movements to the areas just south and to the south-west of Arras had been two-fold: to relieve and release British troops to fight further south; and to secure the area of Arras in case a further offensive was launched in the direction of the Channel ports or towards the coal-fields in the area of Béthune. Arras later proved to be the northern limit of the German attack\* – but of course, no-one on the Allied side at the time was to know that such was the case.

(continued)

**\*An German attack in the direction of Arras was stopped cold by the British Third Army before it reached the city.**

Canadian forces were therefore ordered into the Arras sectors to forestall any such eventuality, and at times the situation apparently – and perhaps understandably – became a little confused. Eventually the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion found itself towards the end of March ordered into *the Neuville St-Vaast Sector* and into the area of St-Éloi, just north of Arras.



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

(Right and right below: *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*)



Towards the end of that April a relative calm descended on the front lines as the German threats both south and north faded – the offensives had won for the enemy a great deal of ground, but nothing of any real military significance in either of the two theatres of operation. Nor was the calm particularly surprising: both sides had been exhausted and needed time to once more reorganize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to re-enforce.



The Allies, from the point of view of available re-enforcements, were even so by now a lot better off than were their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were now belatedly arriving on the scene. An overall Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing a counter-offensive.



Thus the front was to remain quiet – until the second week in August.

(Right above: *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*)

If the front was quiet during the months of May, June and July – the everyday patrols and the occasional raid notwithstanding – the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion, until July 25, was not in any position to know: it had not been even *close* to the forward area. The War Diarist has recorded the unit to have spent eighty-one consecutive days at various places in the rear area – Monchy-Breton, Valhoun, Lozinghem and Écoivres – in training and the like. It was not to be until July 25 that it eventually relieved the 72<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion in the front line, *Fampoux Sector*, just north-east of Arras.



Only six days after that July 25<sup>th</sup> move to the forward area, the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was on the move once more, having been relieved in turn on July 31 by a British battalion... *Proceeded by light railway to billets at AUBIN. The whole Corps is moving in a few days – in fact has started now. For where – no one knows but it looks like a big scrap ahead...* (Excerpt from 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion entry for July 31, 1918)



(Right above and right below: *Écoivres Military Cemetery as it was at the time of - or just after – the Great War, and as it is a century later – from a vintage post-card and (colour) from 1915*)

On the morrow, August 1, the War Diarist of Private Travers' 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion continued his journal as follows: *Fine. Word received regarding probable move by the whole Canadian Corps with a rumour of operations to follow. Nothing definite as to whether North or South\*. Preparations being made for a quick move, as it has to be done on the Battalions (sic) own wheels.*



*\*It was to be south. However, a small number of Canadian units were to be sent in the opposite direction, north, back into Belgium with orders to make themselves as conspicuous as possible, this in order to give the impression of a major operation soon to be undertaken in that area.*

That August 8, a week after the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion's departure from the area of Arras, would be the opening day of the Allied offensive, the greater part on this occasion British-, Commonwealth- and French-led which, in conjunction with other offensives elsewhere, were to result in the Armistice of November 11.

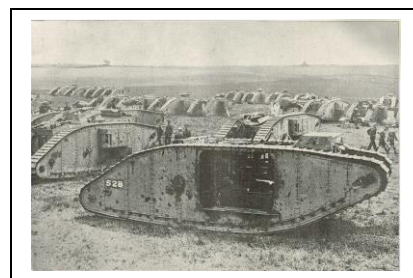
On the Allied side, this succession of battles was to become known to history as *the Hundred Days – Les Cent Jours*: what the Germans called it is less certain, although August 8 was to be, as far as Ludendorff – the German commander - was concerned, *the Black Day of the German Army (Der Schwartze Tag)*.

Just days before that August 8, the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion had travelled south-west by train to disembark at Hangest-sur-Somme – about half-way between Abbéville and Amiens – and from there had marched some twenty-five kilometres westward to the smaller community of Vergies.

This movement had taken place on August 3 and 4 by which time the Battalion War Diarist had become apprised of the reason for all this activity: *The scheme will be known as the L.C. (Llandoverly (sic) Castle) Operation, and will take place in a very few days, on a front of from 20 to 30 miles, East of Amiens, to a depth in places of eight miles.*

*The show will be staged by the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Corps, Australians, Canadian Corps, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> French Army, all under Field Marshal, Sir Douglas Haig. The principal objective of the operation, to relieve the pressure on AMIENS.*

**(Right: Tanks in ever-increasing numbers were to be used by the Allies in the last battles of the Great War. In 1917 the British formed the Tank Corps, a force which became ever stronger in 1918 as evidenced by this photograph of a tank park, once again 'somewhere in France'. Many of the troops to be involved in the fighting from this time onwards underwent training in the company of tanks. – from Illustration)**



**At nine o'clock on the evening of August 4, the Battalion had begun another long march of about twenty-eight kilometres to the eastward, to Briquemensnil, where it arrived at five in the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>.**

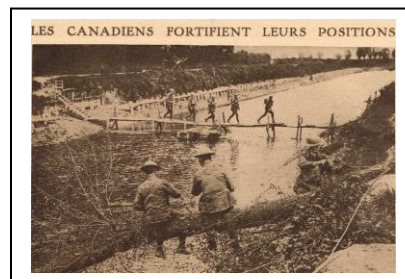
**(Right below: The historic gothic cathedral in the city of Amiens which the leading German troops had been able to see on the western skyline in the spring of 1918 – photograph from 2007(?))**

**Two days later again there had been a further overnight... hard march...to the Bois de Boves, some nine kilometres to the south of Amiens. Yet another trek that night – August 7-8 – was to bring Private Travers' Battalion to its assembly point in the Bois de Gentelles (Gentelles Wood) from where the Battalion attack of August 8 was to be launched on the following morning.**



**Whereas the first part of the transfer had been accomplished mostly by train and by motor transport, the second part had been done by night marches, and had passed around to the west and then to the south of Amiens to keep the movement from the eyes of any German aviation observers. It worked: the Germans were totally taken by surprise.**

**Thus the assault was to prove an overwhelming success, with territorial gains rarely seen since the opening weeks of the war in 1914\*. The 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion continued in its advance\*\* until August 18 when the unit was relieved and ordered withdrawn into Divisional Reserve – yet still, it would seem, according to the unit's diary, within artillery range.**



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

**\*Perhaps the opening day of the Battle of Cambrai, November 20, 1917, and the German offensive of that spring of 1918 had been the exceptions to the rule.**

**\*\*The advance was not, after the success of that first day, to be as rapid as planned. At the outset the Canadians and Australians, supported by tanks, had forged ahead; on the flanks the British and French, without that same support, had encountered considerable opposition. And on the second and third days, with many fewer tanks, the Canadian and Australian progress was to be much slower. The offensive was temporarily halted.**

The Battalion War Diarist reported twenty-seven killed and one-hundred fifteen wounded for the entire month of August, mostly in front of Amiens – still too many, to be sure, but far from those appalling figures at *Passchendaele*.

(Right: *In one of the many villages liberated from the Germans, Canadian and enemy wounded await evacuation to the rear. – from Le Miroir*)



The 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to return to the forward area until the night of August 31-September 1 when the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade was again despatched to the front line.

But the forward area to which it was now sent was no longer the *Amiens Front*. By that time, and in just as much secrecy as three weeks prior, the entire Canadian Corps had been transported, by many of the same itineraries, back whence it had come and was already positioned on the new *Arras Front* and ready to deliver a fresh attack.

A first offensive in this area to the east of Arras was launched by Canadian and British Divisions during the final days of August. On September 2, relieving some of the aforementioned Canadian battalions, units of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division - including Private Travers' 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion - passed in turn to the offensive, attacking the trenches of the *Drocourt-Quéant Line* and advancing along the axis of the Arras-Cambrai road as far as, and then capturing, Dury village.

(Right: *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*)



Excerpts from the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Highlanders*) War Diary Appendices pertinent to the offensive operations of September 2, 1918:

*...The task allotted to the 85<sup>th</sup> C.I. Battalion, NOVA SCOTIA HIGHLANDERS, was to break through the DROCOURT-QUEANT Line and DROCOURT-QUEANT Support Line...*

*...The Battalion plan of operations was that there be six waves of two lines each...the first two waves of "D" and "A" Companies...whose objective was...(a part of)...the DROCOURT-QUEANT 4<sup>th</sup> Line system (1<sup>st</sup> day objective)...the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> waves, made up of "C" Company, allotted the task of cleaning up the area between the 1<sup>st</sup> objective...and support lines...and to capture and consolidate the latter.*



*The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> waves made up of "B" Company, were to leapfrog "C" Company and capture...the Sunken Road...*

(continued)

(Preceding page: *Captured German ordnance and munitions taken during the Canadian advance of 1918 towards the Canal du Nord – from Le Miroir*)

**Account of the Action:- At zero hour, 5.00 a.m., the Battalion jumped off as ordered, but as no Tanks had, up to that time, appeared of our Battalion frontage, “A” and “D” Companies cleared the area, which was held by a strong machine gun post, between the jump-off and the barrage line... These posts...were untouched by our artillery fire.**



(Right above: *Some of the many prisoners taken during the fighting on the Drocourt-Quéant Line, some of them carrying wounded comrades, on their way to the Canadian rear area – from Le Miroir*)



(Right: *Vis-en-Artois British Cemetery: The cemetery contains 2,369 soldiers from this period of the Great War – originally mostly from 1918 - of whom only 885 have been identified. – photograph from 2010*)

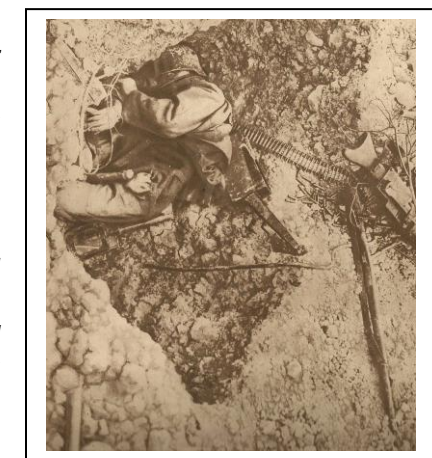
**In passing over the first 300 yards of our advance the Battalion losses amounted to approximately 50% of our total casualties throughout the whole action... However, in spite of heavy opposition from numerous machine-guns, with the arrival of the tanks the first objective was reported as having been taken by a quarter past six that morning.**

(Right: *Douglas Haig, C.-in-C. of British and Commonwealth forces on the Western Front inspects Canadian troops after their successful operation of September 2 against the German Drocourt-Quéant Line – from Le Miroir*)



The second objective was to fall at seven-thirty, seventy-five minutes later: ...**Particularly heavy direct and indirect machine-gun fire was here encountered, both from the flanks and from our direct front... The Bosche had established strong machine gun posts both in the Mill and its immediate vicinity, as well as along the Sunken Road...**

**The heavy enfilade fire became so intense that the attacking wave suffered heavy casualties... They pushed forward, assaulted and carried the final objective and established outposts... A heavy barrage from the enemy artillery was laid down on the final objective, causing considerable casualties, but no counter attack developed.**



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

(continued)

***This line was held by the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion until relieved by the troops of the 11<sup>th</sup> C.I. Brigade at 11.30 a.m., when the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was drawn back into their first objective, into Brigade Reserve...***

***(Right: Dury Mill British Cemetery - The losses in these final campaigns were among the heaviest of the war: 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. – photograph from 2016)***



***On the following day, the push continued virtually unopposed for a further six-and-a-half kilometres, some units advancing as far as the Canal du Nord.***

***(Right: The Canal du Nord almost a century later, at a point where it intersects the main Arras-Cambrai Road. The construction of the Canal was in fact still not completed at the time and parts of it were dry. – photograph from 2015)***



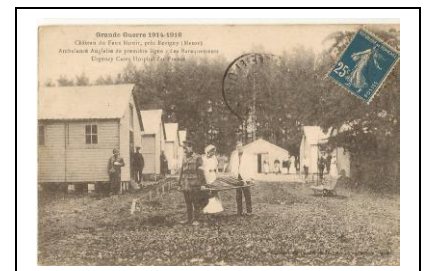
***On September 5 the unit retired, although to where exactly appears not to be documented. On the 8<sup>th</sup> the Battalion withdrew even further, to the area of Wailly south-west of Arras, to a hutted camp which, for the obvious reason, was known as Wailly Huts.***

***Excerpt from 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for September 17, 1918: C.O. was called to a conference at Brigade in the Afternoon and, as had been expected, brought back word of another show... This operation has, as its ultimate objective, the city of CAMBRAI...***

***The 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to remain in the area of Wailly until September 25. Apparently there were several other Canadian Battalions in the neighbourhood as the War Diary records a baseball game being played just about every day – games from which, for the most part, the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion team seems to have emerged victorious.***

***On September 25 the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved from its quarters at Wailly Huts to board a train. The War Diarist of the day takes up the story: ...the Battalion marched off at 5.30 p.m. arriving at Supply Station, ARRAS, at 7.00 o'clock. Battalion due to entrain at 8 p.m., but no word of the train had been received. Battalion was quartered in one of the large freight sheds in the station, with the rest of the Brigade in the surrounding buildings.***

***About 11.30 p.m. enemy aircraft came over and dropped a bomb in the yards about 2 feet from the edge of the building where the Battalion was quartered, killing 1 Officer and 9 other ranks and wounding 1 Officer and 53 other ranks. The wounded were immediately evacuated and the Padre was left behind to look after the burial for the Battalion.***



***(continued)***

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

Due to this incident and others elsewhere, it was late the following morning, September 26, before the Battalion arrived in its staging area. Some thirteen hours later, by half-past midnight of that night of September 26-27, Private Travers' unit had moved forward to the vicinity of Inchy-en-Artois to its assembly position.



Only hours later the Canadians were to storm and force the crossing of the Canal du Nord.

(Right above: *The Canal du Nord looking towards the area of the crossings made on September 27, 1918 – photograph from 2015*)

Excerpts follow from the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade report on the *Bourlon Wood Operation* of September 27, 1918, to be found in the Brigade War Diary and also from the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary, Appendix 'Cambrai', to be found in the entry for the month of October, 1918:

(Right: *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*)



*Assembly was completed by 4.10 A.M. (Brigade War Diary)*

*ZERO hour was 5.20 A.M. 27<sup>th</sup> September 1918 (Brigade)*

*The task of the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade was to leap frog the 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade on the RED Line...and clear the area up to and make good the BLUE LINE – then push patrols forward to gain a footing in the MARCOING LINE. The area allotted to this Brigade included the remaining trenches of the MARQUION LINE, the trench system around BOURLON, the Village of BOURLON, and the Railway within the Brigade Boundary... (Brigade)*

*...at fifteen minutes after Zero, Battalion jumped off in two lines of single Companies. On account of the heavy shelling of the tracks...the Battalion was to pass through INCHY WOOD and the Town of INCHY. In moving across the Canal touch was lost for a considerable time between the leading and rear Companies on account of heavy shelling. The Battalion also encountered considerable quantity of gas near the Canal...no casualties resulted... As soon as the Battalion passed the Canal, re-organization was effected and the advance was continued in Artillery...formation...(Battalion War Diary)*

*...The advance was continued and considerable machine gun fire was encountered from the heights in front of BOURLON WOOD and the Battalion reached the RED LINE at about 7.45 a.m...*

(continued)

***...The barrage was timed to lift from the trench forward of the RED LINE at 8.16, but it appeared to lift very soon after the Battalion reached the RED LINE, and the forward Companies pushed on to reach their objective in the remainder of the MARQUION SYSTEM...and just East of BOURLON Village. They were led by the Tanks and seemed to have no difficulty as far as the barrage was concerned and pushed forward. (Battalion)***

***(Right below: Almost one hundred years after the Great War, a German's eye view from the heights of Bourlon Wood of the ground over which the Canadians advanced on September 27, 1918 – photograph from 2015)***

***The remainder of the MARQUION SYSTEM was carried with small resistance but with a considerable number of casualties resulting from enemy shelling and machine gun fire from BOURLON WOOD. The leading Companies continued the advance, when it appeared as if the 18-pound barrage came back again to just forward of the RED LINE and caused numerous casualties among the men of these Companies. (Battalion)***



***The leading Platoons had gotten so far forward that they were entirely ahead of the barrage and succeeded in capturing B Trench behind the Tanks and getting under cover before the barrage reached them. The remaining Platoons suffered heavy casualties from our barrage...and were forced to take cover and wait for the barrage to lift...(Battalion)***

***...The three Tanks...now turned and came back through it...and...turned around again and led the rear Platoons of "B" and "C" Companies and the whole of "A" and "D" Companies against the Town. Very little resistance was encountered in the Town and the Battalion was able to report the GREEN LINE established on the Eastern outskirts of the village at 9.45 a.m., just as soon as the barrage permitted the gaining of the objective... The enemy now began to shell the Town very heavily, inflicting severe casualties particularly of "A" Company. (Battalion)***

***...the left flank of our position was threatened by large bodies of the enemy on the crest of the hill...and "B" and "C" Companies were brought up to support this flank. This...was held during the afternoon under constant machine-gun and rifle fire from the crest of the hill, and several attempts by the enemy to advance down the hill were repulsed by our fire...(Battalion)***



***(Right above: The monument to the sacrifices of September 27, 1918, made during the taking of Bourlon Wood, stands on the heights overlooking the village for which the Woods are named. – photograph from 2015)***

***(Right: 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)***



On September 28 at least a part of the unit was withdrawn to the area of *Quarry Wood*. The vestiges of the journal for that day report that the casualties of September 27 had been light, although the numbers are much greater than those of the morrow, September 28; on that day there were recorded no *killed in action* and sixteen *wounded in action*, one of whom was Private Travers.

As there is no report in his file of him having received medical treatment, he surely must have succumbed to his injuries before he could be evacuated from the field: thus was he later designated as having been *killed in action* (see below).

(Right below: *Quarry Wood Cemetery, Sains-les-Marquion, in which lie two-hundred seventy-three dead of the Great War, including at least one Newfoundlander, Private J.H. Blunden of the Canadian Machine-Gun Corps, killed in action the day before Private Travers – photograph from 2016*)

Excerpts which follow, drawn from the Appendix ‘*Cambrai*’ found in the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entries for the month of October, 1918, show that the events of the day – in the case of Private Travers and the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion – were not exceptional:

*Orders were received during the night that the attack would be continued next morning, 28-9-18...with the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade in support...\**



*\*It will be remembered that Private Travers’ 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a component of the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade.*

*Assembly complete at 6.00 a.m...*

*Strength. 18 Officers and 523 Other Ranks remained and took part in the operation.*

*Battalion moved off in four lines of Platoons single file, “A” and “D” leading, from right to left, with “C” and “B” following... The advance only proceeded to a position...where the Brigade was halted at 8.00 a.m.*

*About 10.30 a.m., orders were received that the 72<sup>nd</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Battalions were to advance North easterly across the ARRAS-CAMBRAI Road and take up a position in rear of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade which was carrying on the attack...*

The son of Peter Travers (also often *Traverse*), former fisherman (died of consumption, April 16, 1899) and of Winnifred Travers (née *Bailey* and later re-married, see further above) – to whom as of October 1, 1916, he had allotted a monthly twenty dollars from his pay – of Coachman’s Cove, Newfoundland, he was also brother to James\*, to Sarah and to three others – perhaps Margaret, Mary and Patrick.

Private Travers was reported as having been *killed in action* on September 28, 1918.

*\*James Travers enlisted and served in the (Royal) Newfoundland Regiment, Number 4651. He survived the conflict.*

(continued)



John Patrick Travers had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-six years: date of birth at Coachman's Cove, Newfoundland, March 19, 1889 (from attestation papers).

Private John Patrick Travers was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



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