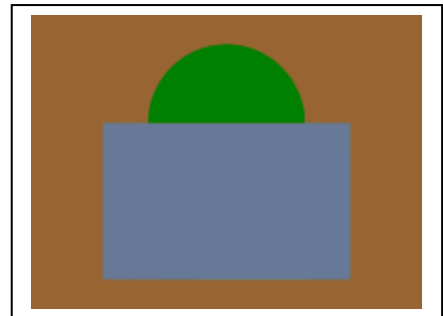




Private Herbert Tucker (Number 51457) of the P.P.C.L.I. (Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry) Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Menin Gate, Ypres (today Ieper): Panel reference 10.

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

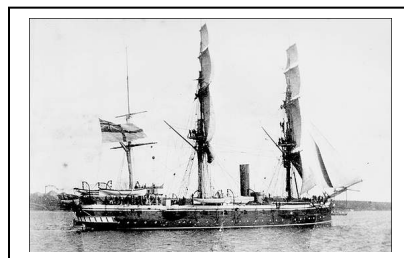
(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fireman**, Herbert Tucker was possibly the young man travelling in search of work as a labourer, whose name is found on the passenger list of October 2, 1909, of the SS *Bruce* sailing from Port aux Basques, Dominion of Newfoundland, to North Sydney, Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. Of his early life in Ship Harbour, District of Port de Grave, there appears to be no information among his papers except that he had spent some six years serving in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve**.

**Likely he who nurtures the fire under a steam boiler rather than he who puts out an undesirable conflagration.*

***Service comprised signing on for a period of five years of which four weeks per year were to be spent undergoing training on board HMS Calypso (later HMS Briton) – shown at right - which since 1902 had been stationed in the harbour in St. John's.*



All else that may be said with any certainty of Herbert Tucker is that he was in the city of Montreal in October of 1914, for that was where and when he enlisted.

His first pay records cite that October 23 was the first day for which the now-Private Tucker was remunerated for his service to the 23rd Canadian Infantry Battalion. It was also on this day that he attested – his oath witnessed by a local justice of the peace before he then began his training at the *Peel Street Barracks*. On the same day he also underwent a medical examination – or had done so two days earlier according to another source - a procedure which pronounced him as...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*.

Two of the new Battalion's four Companies were recruited in Montreal, the other two in Quebec City and at the outset training facilities were made available in both centres. However, the *Peel Street Barracks* proved too crowded and on December 9 Private Tucker found himself en route to Quebec where all four Companies were now to be concentrated in the Emigration Buildings*.

**The 23rd Battalion comprised for the most part English-speaking recruits, many drawn from the 1st Canadian Grenadier Guards Regiment and the 58th Regiment, Westmount Rifles, both Canadian Militia units. Apparently francophone volunteers were transferred to a sister battalion being formed at the same time, the 22nd Battalion – its number soon anglicized into the well-known 'Van Doos' – le Vingt-deuxième Régiment of today.*

Training itself was now undertaken mostly indoors, in some Canadian Pacific Railway sheds and, occasionally, on the frozen St. Lawrence River. But these activities were soon to be cut short: the unit was soon to be sent overseas – and so was Private Tucker, but not as a soldier of the 23rd Battalion.

The formalities of Private Tucker's enlistment had not yet been brought to a conclusion, but this was done so on January 10 when the Officer Commanding the 23rd Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frank William Fisher declared – on paper – that...*Herbert Tucker...having been finally approved by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

Only days later, on January 15, Private Tucker was to be one of a detachment of three officers and two-hundred fifty *other ranks* despatched to the other side of the frozen St. Lawrence. There, at St-Joseph de Lévis, the contingent was transferred to the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Overseas Battalion which was training in the area.

Not that Private Tucker would have undergone much training there; five-hundred reinforcements were about to be sent overseas to join the parent unit. Private Tucker and his comrades-in-arms had some five days during which to prepare and to take the train eastwards to the city of Halifax from where they were to sail.

The ship was the SS *Vaderland* – a Dutch name, but German-sounding, thus soon afterwards changed to *Southland* – a vessel at the time plying a commercial route from New York – a second source says Portland, Maine – to Liverpool. On January 20 the Re-enforcement Draft embarked, to then sail on the following day.



(Right above: *Southland*, by this time requisitioned as a troopship, still afloat after having been torpedoed in September of 1915: Although forty men were lost, the vessel survived to continue in service until June 4, 1917, when she was torpedoed again and sunk with a loss of four lives. – image from Wikipedia)

Eight days later, after an uneventful crossing, *Vaderland* docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool and on the morrow, January 30, Private Tucker disembarked. The detachment thereupon boarded a train which was to transport it to the eastern side of the Salisbury Plain where it was to be posted to the Candahar Barracks*, Tidworth.

**Named for the city of Kandahar in Afghanistan and sometimes, perhaps understandably, mis-spelled by Canadians as Canadahar.*

Now once again, Private Tucker had little time to wait before he was to be ordered overseas. On this occasion the wait was to be twelve days, the sea in question was the English Channel, and the destination was to be *active service* in the *Kingdom of Belgium*.

By what itinerary Private Tucker and his draft travelled to the Continent does not appear to be recorded in his dossier; however, he and it reported *to duty* on February 20, a day when the PPCLI Battalion had just retired from front-line trenches to billets in the village of Dickebusch, just to the south-west of Ypres.

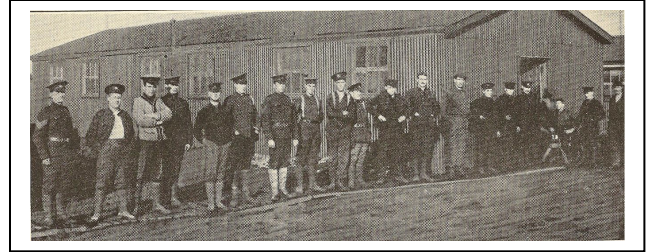
Private Tucker was now on *active service*.

* * * * *

The PPCLI was not to serve with the other *Canadian* forces until November of 1915 when it became a battalion of the then-forming 3rd Canadian Division. Up until that time, its history as a unit on *active service* had been as part of a British infantry brigade.

(continued)

The Battalion* of the PPCLI Regiment had officially sailed from Canada on October 4, 1914, on the convoy carrying the first Canadian troops overseas. The unit had then spent the first weeks of its time in the United Kingdom at *Bustard Camp* on the Salisbury Plain, before then having been transferred to Winchester on November 16.



There it had become attached to the British 80th Infantry Brigade of the 27th Division.

(Right above: *Canadian troops during the autumn of 1914 at Bulford Camp, Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire – from The War Illustrated*)

**The PPCLI 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, eventually sent 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 off-times often comprising a lesser number - of the PPCLI Regiment ever served at the front.*

Only five days before that Christmas of 1914 the PPCLI Battalion had marched from Winchester to Southampton where it had embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Cardiganshire* and crossed the English Channel to the French port-city of Le Havre. The vessel had docked in the early afternoon, the Battalion personnel then to spend the night in a nearby camp before having boarded a train on the following evening. The Battalion War Diarist has described the event:



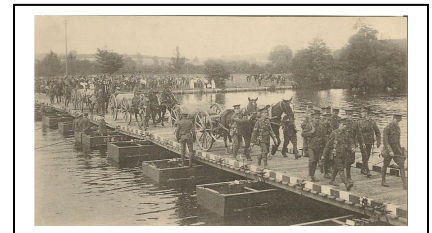
...The whole Battalion had to entrain in one train of 48 trucks. Officers 1, Men 24, Horses 10, VEHICLES 13. Very tight fit, some of the men being unable to sit down.

(Right above: *The image of HMT Cardiganshire is from The Library web-site. Having survived the Great War, she was sunk in 1940, during the Second World War.*)

The Battalion had then travelled northward, to finish detraining at Arques at half-past midnight on December 23, then to march for a further two-and-a-half hours to its billets in and in the vicinity of the village of Blaringhem.

This community was to be its home for the following two weeks before a two-day trek* into Belgium was next to find the PPCLI in the area of Dickebusch (today *Dikkebusch*) just to the south-west of the already-battered medieval city of Ypres.

**Some of the Canadian equipment in the early stages of the conflict left much to be desired – apparently both in quality and quantity. The War Diarist wrote of the march that... Lack of boots much felt, many men marching with no soles at all to their boots.*



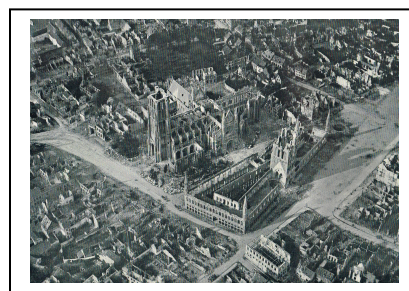
(continued)

(Preceding page: Troops – said to be British, but the Canadians were soon wearing British Uniforms – on the march in the north of France during the early period of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

The Battalion had taken its place in the forward area of the St. Eloi Sector on the evening of that same day, January 6, 1915. Its personnel was soon to learn about the rigours, routines and perils of life – and death* - in the trenches.**

***The first to be killed in action, on January 8, 1915, according to the PPCLI War Diary, were Number 252, Corporal W. Fry and Number 1284, Lance Corporal H.O. Bellinger, likely victims of the heavy enemy shelling reported during the early morning – although Wikipedia names a Private Guy Dwyer from Hanover, New Brunswick, as having been the Battalion’s first combat casualty of the war on February 4, 1915.**

(Right: An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of Second Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the Great War there was to be very little left standing. – from Illustration)



****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 being the 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 posting at times for weeks on end.

(Right above: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – weapons which the PPCLI had already adopted in November of 1914 – from Illustration)

(Right: Troops – in this instance British – in hastily-dug trenches in the Ypres Salient: These are still the early days of the year as witnessed by the lack of steel helmets which came into use only in the summer of 1916. – from Illustration)



(continued)

* * * * *

Forty-five days after the arrival of the PPCLI parent unit for service in Belgium, on February 20, Private Tucker reported to duty at Dickebusch.

The PPCLI remained stationed in the vicinity of Dickebusch, St. Eloi Sector, while in the forward area; at Westoutre while in reserve; and near to the town of Poperinghe when withdrawn further back into Divisional Reserve. Then at the beginning of April it moved forward again so that by April 14 it was replacing troops of the Rifle Brigade on the eastern side of the *Ypres Salient*, in trenches in *Polygon Wood*.

(Right: *Dickebusch New Military Cemetery is the last resting-place of six-hundred twenty-four dead of the Great war; within the bounds of the nearby Extension lie a further five-hundred forty-seven.* – photograph from 2014)



At the same time, French troops in the adjacent sectors counter-clockwise – to the north-east of the city - were being replaced by the Canadian Division. Some Canadian units were still in the process of establishing themselves in their new positions when the Germans attacked on April 22, for the first time using chlorine gas to precede their infantry onslaught.

(Right below: *The Memorial to the 1st Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier – stands just to the south of the village of Langemark (then Langemarck) at the Vancouver Crossroads where the Canadians withstood the German attack – abetted by gas – at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915.* – photograph from 2010)



Close though the positions held by the PPCLI were to the ruptured Canadian and French lines, the Battalion War Diary notes little activity on the part of the unit; at the end of the month, by which time the situation had been stabilized, the PPCLI Battalion was still lodged in and about *Polygon Wood*. From April 22 to 30 (inclusive), in contrast to casualties in the Canadian sectors, those of the PPCLI had been light: sixty *killed, wounded and missing* all told.



However, eight days later, the unit was to be called upon to resist a major German attack: In an action designated among its Battle Honours as *Frezenberg*, on May 8 the PPCLI Battalion held the new, hastily-prepared positions of the *Bellewarde Ridge* all day until its relief at mid-night by the King's Royal Rifles. By then the unit had incurred, dependent upon the source, some four-hundred casualties of which one-quarter were reported as having been *killed in action*.

(continued)

(Preceding page: A former non-commissioned officer of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry stands in front of the monument to the PPCLI Battalion which is to be found in the area of the Bellewaarde Ridge. The stone commemorates the action of May 8, 1915. – photograph from 2013(?))

Private Tucker was one of the dead.

Burial report: *Buried in a common grave with some comrades at Bellewaarde...near Ypres. Ground fell into enemy's hands and grave was not marked.*

The son of Lavinia Patience Tucker (née Snow, likely died of consumption in 1903) and of William Robert Tucker, fisherman, perhaps re-married to Barbara – the family originally from Ship Cove in the District of Port de Grave, in or about 1916 William Robert's address in Glace Bay, Cape Breton before his return to Ship Cove – he was also the youngest sibling of Robert-John, Emily, Walter and of Sarah-Elizabeth.

Private Tucker was reported as having been *killed in action* during the fighting at the Bellewaarde Ridge on May 8, 1915.

Herbert Tucker had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-four years and nine months: date of birth at Ship Cove, Port-de Grave, Newfoundland, February 14, 1890 (from attestation papers); the original Newfoundland Birth Register has January 14, 1890.

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



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