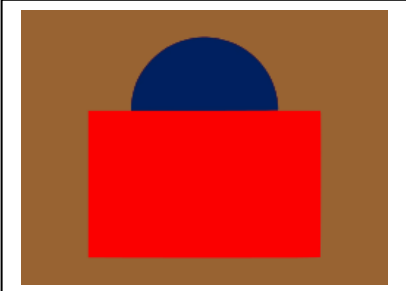




Private Harrison Henry Walsh, Number 1057368 of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Royal Montreal Regiment*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Sucrerie Cemetery, Ablain St-Nazaire: Grave reference II.C.5.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder patch of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Royal Montreal Regiment) is from the Wikipedia Website.*

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *blacksmith*, Harrison Henry Walsh\* grew up in the area of Harbour Grace in the company of numerous brothers and sisters. His father, Mark Walsh, married twice (see also further below) and although three of the five children of the first union died at a very young age, two were to survive to know their half-siblings from the second family.

*\*The name is often found as 'Welsh' in a great number of sources, including official ones.*

Harrison Henry was the seventh of eight children of the second marriage – his half-brother Stephen was some twenty-four years older, born 1859 and married in 1879 – so it is unlikely that they ever shared the same dwelling-place.

It may be that Harrison Henry Walsh was the young man recorded on the passenger list of the SS *Bruce* for its crossing of the *Cabot Strait* of December 12, 1912, from Port aux Basques in the Dominion of Newfoundland to the port of North Sydney, Cape Breton, in the Canadian Province of Nova Scotia. He was on this way, not for the first time, to the nearby industrial city of Sydney for employment in that trade of blacksmith.

If this were he, and this requires confirmation, there appears to be no further information *a propos* our young man's later travels. All that may be said with any certainty is that he was resident in the city of Montreal in the province of Québec in early 1917, for that was where and when Harrison Walsh enlisted, at the Montreal Mobilization Centre in the Number 4 Military District.

Whereas the formalities of enlistment in the majority of cases took days, weeks and even months to be completed, Harrison Henry Walsh appears to have undergone everything on a single day: February 19, 1917. His first pay records show that it was on that day that he was first remunerated for his services to the 245<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Canadian Grenadier Guards*) by which unit he was also on that day *taken on strength*, presumably after the medical examination, also likewise dated, had pronounced him to be...*fit for the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force*.

Attestation also took place on that day, his oath witnessed by a local justice of the peace before it was all brought to a conclusion when the Officer Commanding the 245<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Colquhoun Ballantyne declared – on paper – that...*Harrison H. Walsh...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

In 1913 construction had begun on a new armoury on Esplanade Avenue in Montreal, built for use by the Canadian Grenadier Guards Regiment of the Canadian Militia who took possession of the place in April of 1914. Apparently within a week of the Declaration of War in August of 1914, the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Royal Montreal Regiment*) had begun recruiting and three-hundred sixty-eight of the above-mentioned Grenadier Guards Regiment had enlisted, to sail to the United Kingdom in the first week of that October.

Later, at the time of Private Harrison's enlistment, the Esplanade Armoury had served as one of the two recruiting centres for his 245<sup>th</sup> Battalion and had also logically also been employed to accommodate its training.

Three months after that enlistment, Private Walsh and his comrades-in-arms were transported by train towards the east-coast port of Halifax and for embarkation onto His Majesty's Transport *Justicia*, a ship that was still being constructed and fitted for a German company by *Harland and Wolff* in Belfast at the time that the *Great War* had broken out. Subsequently requisitioned by the British government, she was to be used as a troopship during the years 1917 and 1918 until July of that latter year when she was torpedoed – six times in the space of two days - off the coast of Scotland and sunk; fortunately she had been travelling empty and few – although too many all the same - lives were lost.

Private Walsh's 245<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to take passage alone to the United Kingdom. Also travelling on board the vessel were the 182<sup>nd</sup>, 190<sup>th</sup>, 208<sup>th</sup> and 223<sup>rd</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry – all under strength – a detail of the 141<sup>st</sup> Battalion and the 25<sup>th</sup> Draft of the Canadian Engineers Training Depot.



(Right above: *The image of Justicia garbed in her war-time dazzle paint is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

Embarkation was to take place on May 3 after which *Justicia* sailed on the same day. Some eleven days later the vessel docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool from where the 245<sup>th</sup> Battalion was transported southwards to the county of Sussex and to the Canadian military complex established by then in the vicinity of' Shoreham-on-Sea.

Immediately upon its arrival at *Shoreham Camp* on May 14, the entire personnel of Private Walsh's unit was transferred to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Reserve Battalion (*Québec*) whose mandate was to train new arrivals, and those returning to service from hospital, before forwarding them to the infantry battalions already on the Continent which were in need of re-enforcements\*.

*\*Before the end of the Great War, Canada was to have despatched overseas 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 they were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by units that had by then been specifically designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.*

However, before this could happen to him, Private Walsh was in need of medical attention. Sent to the British Hospital Hut at *Shoreham Camp* on June 1, he was forwarded from there to *Etchinghill* Military Hospital three days later; on the morrow he was transferred to *Barnwell* Military Hospital near Cambridge to be treated more like a detainee than a patient\*: he had incurred a venereal problem.

(continued)

*\*Apparently the place was surrounded by barbed wire and the patients deprived of any contact with local residents. Suspicion and fear was the order of the day with the patients lectured and told to get themselves... ‘into a condition worthy of manly men’.*

Fortunately for him, *his* was not a severe case and after eleven days, on June 16, Private Walsh was released *to duty* and ordered returned to his unit.

The only other episode at *Shoreham Camp* recorded on his *Active Service Form* is dated August 8 of that summer of 1917. On that day Private Walsh was awarded...3 days FP (Field Punishment) #2 & 1 days pay AWL (Absent Without Leave) – *while on Active Service... 15/8* – this likely the day of the sentencing.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion had already sent drafts of re-enforcements to units on the Continent during that preceding spring and summer: the 87<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Canadian Grenadier Guards*), the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion (*Ontario*), the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) and the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Royal Montreal Regiment*) were all to receive detachments. It was to this last-named that Private Walsh was posted on September 26, 1917.

He crossed the English Channel on the night of September 26-27, likely landing in the port of Le Havre, before making his way to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Base Depot in the vicinity of the coastal town of Étaples on the second date\*.

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



*\*No re-enforcements are reported in the Depot War Diary as having arrived on that date from England, thus he may have been one of the draft of one-hundred forty-seven to have reported on the following day, September 28.*

On September 30 Private Walsh was on his way again, to the *Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp*, newly organized and newly opened at Villers-au-Bois. There, however, he was to languish for almost six weeks, until November 8, before being despatched to join his new unit.



(Right above: *Villers Station Cemetery, Villers-au-Bois, was used primarily by medical facilities in the area during the years 1916-1918. Today within its bounds lie over twelve-hundred Commonwealth dead – the majority Canadian – and also thirty-two former adversaries.* – photograph from 2017)

This, according to his personal dossier, he did on November 15, 1917, in the Hersin-Coupigny area, not long after the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had completed its retirement from the *Third Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele*.

\* \* \* \* \*

The 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Royal Montreal Regiment*) had by that time been serving on the Continent since February of 1915 as an element of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the (1<sup>st</sup>) Canadian Division\*. After its arrival from Canada via England, it had at first served in northern France in the *Fleurbaix Sector* just south of Armentières, before having been ordered into the *Ypres Salient* in April of that same 1915.

*\*Before the advent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division this formation was often simply designated as the Canadian Division.*

(Right: An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle - showing 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*)



Only a bare two months after its arrival on the Continent, and only days after it had moved into a north-eastern sector of the *Salient*\*, the Canadian Division had distinguished itself during the *Second Battle of Ypres* in the spring of 1915.

*\*In fact, certain units were still not in position on the day of the first German attacks.*

(Right: The Memorial to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – the *Brooding Soldier* - just to the south of the village of Langemark, stands where the Canadians withstood the German attack at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915. – photograph from 2010)



On April 22 of that year 1915, at five o'clock in the afternoon, the Germans had released chlorine gas in front of French colonial troops at the northern end of the *Ypres Salient*. The gas had then reportedly caused some six-thousand casualties in a very short space of time and had provoked a rout of the stricken defenders.

The Canadians, in the line just to the right, not having been affected to the same degree, had been ordered to fill the void left by the retreating French troops and to forestall a German break-through.



(Right above: *Entitled: Bombardement d'Ypres, le 5 juillet 1915 – from Illustration*)

For its part, the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be called into action on April 22, the first day of the German attack, and had thereupon taken up defensive positions to the north-east of the city at *Wieltje*\*.

*\*Up until this date the Battalion War Diary had been a neat, detailed, type-written journal; as of April 22 it is a hastily-scribbled effort scratched in pencil, promising that the details will be appended at a later date. But, if nothing else, it shows the desperate situation of the next few days.*

Companies of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion then had made a stand with the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion at St-Julien (*Sin-Juliaan*) for the next two days before having been obliged to retire by the force of the German artillery activity. On several more occasions on the following days the Battalion – and the Canadians in general with some British forces – were to retire to a series of reserve trenches.

*(Right: Troops, in this case the Liverpool Regiment, in 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 spring and summer of 1916. – from Illustration)*



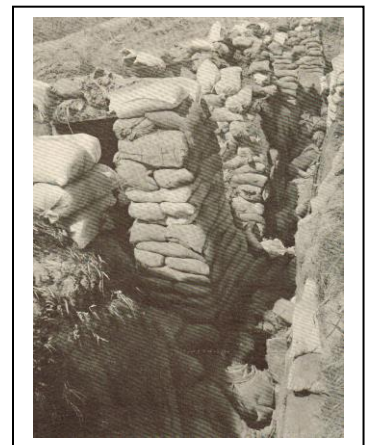
However, as history has recorded, the front had eventually been consolidated and the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be able to retire on the night of May 4-5 – a second document in the same source has 3-4. Only two weeks later it was to be in action once again.

At the beginning of May the British had responded to a French request for support during their operations in the Artois region, and the Canadians had thereupon been ordered further southwards\* in mid-month to the area of Festubert and, in June, to nearby Givenchy-les-la-Bassée.

*\*Most of the Canadian units had already been in northern France in the area of Bailleul – resting, re-organizing and re-enforcing after Second Ypres - when the orders had arrived.*

*(Right below: German trenches nick-named the Labyrinth – complete with corpses - captured by the French during their Pyrrhic victory at Notre-Dame de Lorette – Over one-hundred thousand French troops became casualties during this campaign in the Artois. – from Illustration)*

At Festubert the British gains were to be negligible, an advance of some three kilometres, and in the ten days during which the action had lasted, the British High Command was to contrive to divest itself of what had remained after the *Second Battle of Ypres* of its small, professional Army. There had also been a lot of good will lost between that High Command and the Indians and Canadians who had also incurred heavy casualties\* – the Canadians particularly so after their losses during the aforementioned *Second Ypres*.



*\*The Meerut Division losses totalled twenty-five hundred and those of the Canadian Division some twenty-two hundred. Those of the 14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion had been reasonably light, however, sixty-seven all told.*

After Festubert some of the Canadian forces had moved north almost immediately, into positions in the *Ploegsteert Sector* on the Belgian side of the frontier. There they were to remain until September and October of the following year when once again their services were to be required in France.

**(Right: A one-time officer in the Indian Army pays his respects to the fallen at the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle. – photograph from 2010(?))**



The 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, however, was to be posted in June to the area of Givenchy-les-la-Bassée\*, a small village not far distant south of Festubert.

Having been ordered into the forward trenches on two occasions during that month to support British efforts – and having endured the same sort of losses, although lesser in number, from repeating the same mistakes - by July 1 the unit had been back north in billets in the area of the Franco-Belgian border with the other battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division in the *Ploegsteert Sector*.

**\*Since the place is oft-times referred to simply as Givenchy it is worthwhile knowing that there are two other Givenchys in the region: Givenchy-le-Noble, to the west of Arras, and Givenchy-en-Gohelle, a village which lies in the shadow of a crest of land which dominates the Douai Plain: Vimy Ridge.**



**(Right: Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, Ploegsteert Sector, in the foreground a mine crater from the time of the 1917 British offensive – photograph from 2014)**

During the period of 1915-1916 now to be spent in Belgium, there would be only two occasions on which units of the Canadian Divisions had been required to fight concerted infantry actions – the first the *Action at the St-Éloi Craters* and the second, the confrontation at *Mount Sorrel\** – otherwise there were to pass some fourteen months of the routines and rigours – and perils - of trench warfare\*\*.

**\*In only the second of these engagements was the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion to any extent engaged.**

**\*\*During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less 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.**

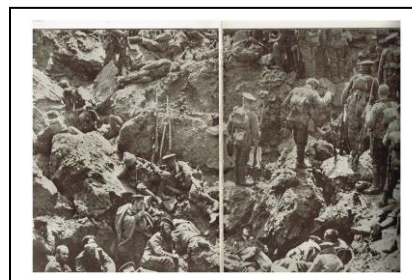


**Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a position at times for weeks on end.**

**(Right above: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, by that time equipped with steel helmets and Lee-Enfield rifles – from Illustration)**

The ***Battle of the St. Eloi Craters*** – the action to involve troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division – was to ***officially*** take place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St. Eloi (*St-Éloi, Sint-Elooi*) was – and is - a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it was to be there that the British would excavate a series of galleries under the German lines. These tunnels were then to be filled with explosives which had been detonated on that March 27.

After an initial success the attack had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were to be replacing the exhausted British troops. They had had no more success than their British comrades-in-arms, and by the 17<sup>th</sup>, when the battle had been called off, the Germans were to be back where they had been some three weeks previously and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.



(Right above: *Advancing in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine – from Illustration*)

Some six weeks later it was to be the turn of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division to undergo *its* first major confrontation.

From June 2 to 14 was to be fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and also for the area of *Sanctuary Wood, Maple Copse, Railway Dugouts* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps\*. The Canadians had apparently been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions dominating the Canadian trenches when the Germans had delivered an offensive, to overrun the forward areas and, in fact, to rupture the Canadian lines, an opportunity which fortunately they had not exploited.



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

*\*It was an area of the Ypres Salient which had recently become the responsibility of the newly-arrived 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division – officially in existence since New Year’s Day, 1916, but not entirely operational until March of that year - that the Germans attacked. However, the situation soon became serious enough for units of the other Canadian Divisions to become involved.*



(Right above: *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*)

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





The British Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, had reacted – perhaps a little too precipitately - by organizing a counter-attack for the following day, June 3, an assault intended to, at a minimum, recapture the lost ground. Badly organized, the operation had been a more than sobering experience: many of the intended attacks had not gone in – those that *had* done so, had gone in piecemeal and the assaulting troops had been cut to shreds - the enemy had remained *in situ* and the Canadians had been left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.

As for the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, on the day of the German attack, June 2, the unit had been serving in Divisional Reserve. However it had soon been called forward to the area of Zillebeke to where, during the night of June 2-3, it had advanced in individual companies and details. Having then advanced again on the following day the unit had during that period recorded very heavy casualties – three-hundred seventy-nine *all ranks*.

On June 4 the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been relieved and had retired, leaving behind two officers and fifty *other ranks* – all volunteers – to bury the dead. For the week that had followed, the unit was to remain in the rear area.

Even so, the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diarist has recorded the following: *A large reinforcement of 150 men arrived on June 6<sup>th</sup>, and these were largely drawn upon to make up working parties of 150 sent out the following day. The part of the parties was to assist-in consolidation after the assault then pending. Before the assault took place the Regiment received a further 300 reinforcements and was again called upon to furnish large parties for difficult and dangerous jobs...*



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

On the evening and night of June 12, Canadian attackers had moved forward into assembly positions and had gone over the top hours later, before dawn of the 13<sup>th</sup>. The 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had not been a component of the attacking force but it was to accompany the attackers during the assault.

Its tasks had been many and varied: carrying small arms ammunition and bombs; stretcher-bearing and evacuation of wounded to dressing-station; supplying rations and water; wiring and carrying wire; and providing entrenching material – all of this to be accomplished while under fire.

The casualties are recorded in the War Diary: nineteen *killed in action*; twenty-two *wounded*; twenty-eight *missing in action*.

(Right: *A century later, reminders of a violent past close to the site of Hill 60 – it had even resembled a hill until a British mine reduced the summit to very little pieces in the first week of June, 1917 - to the south-east of Ypres, an area today protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature – photograph from 2014*)



Then the drudgery of trench warfare was to once again become the soldier's everyday lot – but perhaps after *Mount Sorrel*, for many it would have come as a welcome respite.

For the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion things were to remain thus until August 11 when it had marched directly from the lines to the area of Steenvoorde, a commune in northern France some twenty kilometres slightly to the south-west of Ypres. On the following morning the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade – in a column almost ten kilometres long – had begun the trek towards the training area of the British 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

(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 photographs of the real thing – 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.*

The 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had arrived at the training area on the morning of August 13 and had remained there in intensive exercises for two weeks. Then, on August 27, it had marched to the larger centre of St-Omer from where it was then to entrain for the journey southward to Conteville. Having arrived in *that* community at eleven-twenty in the evening, there was yet a three-and-a-half hour march to undergo before it had eventually reached its billets.



Perhaps the numerous four-hour route marches of the previous weeks had not been for nought. The 14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion (*Royal Montreal Regiment*) was now on its way to *the Somme*.

(Right above: *The once-impressive railway station at St-Omer, today in sore need of revitalization, through which the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Canadian Infantry, passed on August 27, 1916 – photograph from 2016*)

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 was to cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

(continued)

On the first day of *First Somme*, all but two small units had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions having been the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

As the battle had progressed, 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 and about August 30 to become part of a third general offensive.

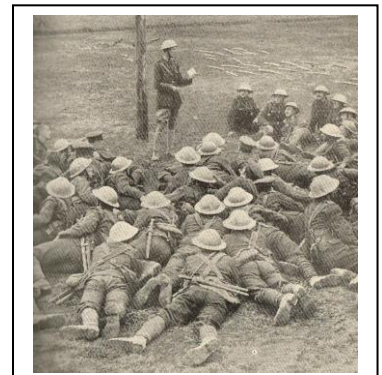
Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette.

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



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

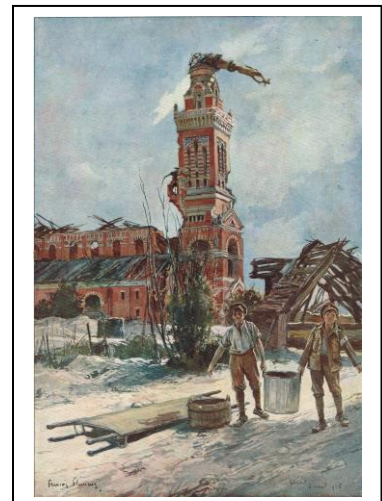
It was to be five days after having left St-Omer, on September 1, before the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion would march – as it had done for the last four of those five days - into the large British military camp at *the Brickfields (la Briqueterie)*, in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert – and also within range of the German artillery. Bivouacking there for a single night, on the morrow the unit had again marched, to billets in Albert itself.



The following afternoon, September 3, had seen the 14<sup>th</sup> battalion move into reserve positions at la Boisselle and on the following day again, into the front-line trenches of *the Somme*.

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

The unit had been ordered to relieve troops of other units in the proximity of *Mouquet Farm* on September 6 and to physically improve the positions then occupied, a task undertaken with a greater or lesser degree of success. The relievers had incurred heavy hostile shell-fire and infantry attacks, and had suffered considerable losses before having been relieved in turn on September 7. The casualty count – *all ranks* - for the two days had amounted to: forty-five *killed in action*; one-hundred twenty-one *wounded in action*; and thirty-three *missing in action*.



(continued)

On September 9 the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to begin a fifteen-day period during which it was not to be involved in any infantry action: the afore-mentioned offensive of September 15 was to be undertaken by troops other than those of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion. It, and a goodly number of other troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, were to go on a multi-day march.



It was to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions, serving in the British Reserve Army, which would play a role at Flers-Courcelette on September 15 and the days following.

(Right above: *Seen from the north, the village of Courcelette just over a century after the events of the First Battle of the Somme – photograph from 2017*)

(Right: *One of the tanks employed during the First Battle of the Somme, here withdrawn from the field and standing in one of the parks where these machines were overhauled and maintained – from Le Miroir*)



*\*Some of the first tanks ever to be used in battle had apparently been a positive element during the fighting of mid-September on the Canadians' Front.*

It was likely to free up billeting space for the new formations now arriving in the immediate area of Albert and Brickfields, that the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion would march as far afield as Warloy, Hérisart, Montrelet – where four days of training was to take place – La Vicogne, Vadencourt – for two more days of training – before returning into reserve at *Brickfields Camp* where it was to remain until September 24-25.

Since the offensive of September 15-17 there was now, alas, much more billeting space available for the returnees of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

Over the course of the three days of September 26, 27 and 28, the Battalion was to storm the position by the name of *Kenora Trench*. It or parts of it would be taken on three occasions, but for a number of reasons – not least of all German artillery and counter-attacks – the survivors of these assaults had been obliged to pull back from the gains that they had made. By the time that the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion would be relieved it had been involved in continuous action for some forty-three hours – and had finished back much in the place from where it had first advanced\*.

*\*This action had been a part of the larger operation known to history as the Battle of Thiepval Ridge.*

(Right: *Some of the wounded being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the First Battle of the Somme – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)



In the War Diary Appendix to this operation it is noted that the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had incurred a total of three-hundred seventy-four casualties: *killed in action, wounded in action, died of wounds, gassed, shell-shocked and missing in action.*

This number, added to the one-hundred ninety-nine incurred earlier in the month, on September 6-7 at *Mouquet Farm*, plus smaller losses at other times, had rendered this three-week period a more than expensive one for a unit which, on August 1, two months earlier, had numbered seven-hundred sixty-nine *all ranks*.

From the front lines the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had passed back through Albert to report to the reserve area at Warloy. An interlude of several days was now to elapse and it was not to be until October 6 that the Battalion would be once more even in Brigade Support, this to be followed by Close Support - although even while in these fairly safe positions further casualties had been inevitable.

And thus the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion's role in the *First Battle of the Somme* was to draw to a close. By October 10 the unit had been back at *Brickfields* and in bivouacs; October 14 and 15 had been spent in supplying working-parties in Brigade Support for one last time; then on the morrow, October 16, the Battalion had begun to march to the westward and away from the sound of the guns.

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



At first to the west, then northwards by a semi-circular route, the Battalion had circumnavigated the western side of the city of Arras and marched beyond. At five twenty-five in the evening of October 27 it had arrived at its destination: Brigade Reserve in the area of Berthonal, to the north-west of Arras. It had been on the march for nine of the previous eleven days.



Having been one of the first Canadian units to serve at *the Somme*, the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had also been one of the first to retire from it. The sectors to which the entire Canadian Corps was now eventually to be posted would be those running roughly down the *Western Front* from Béthune in the north almost as far as Arras in the south.

In-between these two poles was the large mining centre of Lens and myriad smaller communities, their existence before the *Great War* also mainly dependent on the coal seams passing underground.



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

It was to be December of that 1916 before the final Canadians retiring from *the Somme* were to make their way, mostly on foot, to this area which by that time had been becoming more and more a Canadian responsibility.

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

In the trenches the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had once more settled into the rigours and the routines – and tedium - of trench warfare – perhaps, however, a welcome respite for those who had experienced *the Somme*; infantry action for the most part was to be on a local scale – patrolling and raids – with only occasionally the latter having been delivered at battalion strength.

Casualties for the most part had been due to enemy artillery – shell-fire apparently to be responsible for some two-thirds of *all* casualties on the *Western Front* - with snipers also taking their toll; but in fact, during this period it was to be myriad sicknesses and, perhaps surprisingly, more than that, dental problems which would keep the medical services occupied during this time.

During the winter months of 1917 the War Diaries had reported an increase in the time spent by the Canadian units in reserve positions, be they Corps, Divisional or Brigade. In reserve there had been the usual attractions of lectures, musketry, physical training, church parades, inspections – by politicians and officers of rank - training, courses, working-parties and carrying-parties. But there had also been sports to be played and even the occasional concert to enjoy.



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

**(Right: *Canadian troops in front of a temporary theatre peruse the attractions of an upcoming concert. – from Le Miroir*)**



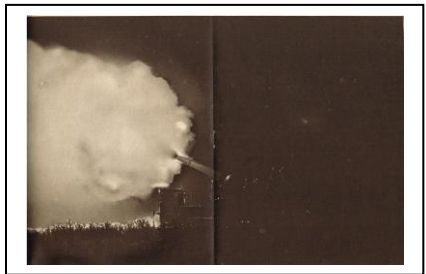
Towards the end of March, however, there had been more than the usual training, there had been more construction under way, and officers and NCOs were to be withdrawn to attend special lectures. Something had apparently been in the offing.

For the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, intensive training had begun for individual detachments: rifle-grenade and bombing sections; machine-gun and Lewis-gun sections; intelligence and signals personnel; and for others drill, musketry and bayonet practice.

But there was to be more: this was to be a programme of sometimes novel exercises undertaken by most, if not all, of the battalions of the Canadian Corps before the upcoming British offensive: learning the topography of the ground to be attacked; the use of the enemy's weapons which, when captured, were to be turned against him; the by-passing and thus isolation of strong-points instead of the costly assault; the coaching of each and every soldier as to his role on the day; the increased employment of aircraft in directing the advance; the concept of a machine-gun barrage; and the exchange of information between the infantry and artillery so as to co-ordinate efforts...

...and at *Vimy Ridge* and elsewhere, the use of tunnels and underground approaches to mask from the enemy the presence of troops and also to ensure the same troops' security.

As those final days before the offensive were to pass, the artillery barrage had been growing progressively heavier; on April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion was to describe it as...*drums*\*. By this time, of course, the Germans had *also* been well aware that...*something was in the offing*...and their guns in their turn had by then been throwing retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions - and their aircraft had been very busy.



(Right above: A heavy *British* artillery piece spews its venom into the middle of the night during the course of the preparatory bombardment before the *First Battle of Arras*. – from *Illustration*)

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

On April 6 the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had moved into front-line trenches in the *Thelus Sector* and had remained there.

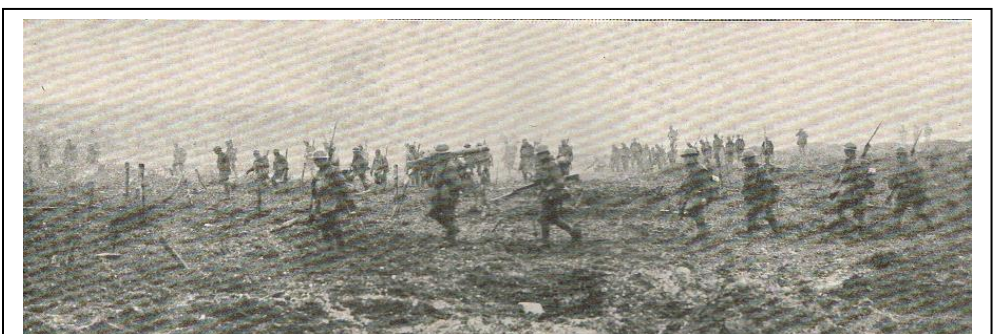
On April 9 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, one of the few positive episodes having been the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, *Easter Monday*.



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

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

(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, equipped 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*)



On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time having operated as a single, autonomous entity – the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division with a British brigade under its command – had stormed the slopes of and about *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared them almost entirely of its German occupants.

Several kilometres of those tunnels had been hewn out of the chalk under the approaches to the front lines of *Vimy Ridge*, underground accesses which had afforded physical safety and also the element of surprise during the hours – and in some cases, days – leading up to the attack. But whether the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to avail of their protection is not clear.

Excerpt from Battalion War Diary Appendix for April 9: *At Zero Hour, 5.30 a.m., the assault on my Battalion Sub Sector was made with No 3 Company on the right flank, furnishing the two leading waves, No 1 Company 3<sup>d</sup> wave and “Mopping Up” Parties, No 4 Company on the left flank and No 2 Company in similar position to No 1 Company on the right. Simultaneously the 15<sup>th</sup> battalion on my right and 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion on left flank, advanced.*

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

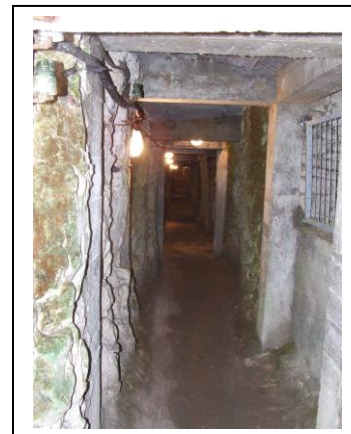
The 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been issued the responsibility of prising three objectives from the grasp of the enemy: the first, *Eizeker(?) Trench*, had been strongly defended by the Germans but was to be finally cleared; the *Black Line* had been taken with less trouble than expected; and the *Red Line* had been captured by ten past seven in the morning of that first day, apparently thanks to a well-delivered artillery bombardment of the position.

Thus the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been able to retire to a less-exposed position rearwards on *Vimy Ridge* at 9. 40 a.m....*in accordance with orders.*

The 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had gone to the attack numbering seven-hundred one *all ranks* in the field at *Zero Hour* on that April 9, 1917; at the end of the day its total casualty count had been two-hundred eighty-eight – some forty per cent of its strength.

The Germans, once having lost *Vimy Ridge* and the advantages of the high ground, had then retreated some three kilometres in front of the Canadians whose further offensives were to be less successful than that of Easter Monday\*; while some progress at times was to be made – at Arleux-en-Gohelle, for example - German counter-attacks had often re-claimed ground from the British and Canadian troops – as at Fresnoy in early May.

*\*The positions to which they had retired had apparently been prepared, and some historians feel that the enemy had already anticipated withdrawal from the Ridge which was not, in fact, the ultimate defensive position that had been supposed.*





(Preceding page: *A memorial to the fallen of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division stands in a field on the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Thélus. It was set there during Christmas of 1917. – photograph from 2017*)

After the official conclusion of the *Battle of Arras*, on or about May 15, some of the Canadians had been re-posted not far to the north, to the mining area of the city of Lens and other communities. Others had remained *in situ*, among them the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had remained in Divisional Reserve for the following eight days, then had marched to *Thelus Cave*, on the southerly flank of *Vimy Ridge*, by then of course in Canadian hands. There the unit was to relieve the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Battalion and to act as Brigade Support, having subsequently supplied working-parties for bearing materials to the front line and for constructing dug-outs.



It had remained in the area of Mazingarbe until July 4 when it had then moved forward to relieve companies of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Battalions in the front lines.

(Right above: *Canadian troops advancing to the front lines loaded with equipment for upcoming operations: the use of the head-band – the ‘tump’ – had been adopted from the North American aboriginal peoples. – from Le Miroir*)

The period from then until mid-July was to comprise little concerted infantry activity: there had been the usual patrolling at night, the occasional local raid – by both sides – and wiring parties working in No-Man’s-Land. And of course there had been the ever-constant artillery duel, the cause of a number of casualties. On the 12<sup>th</sup> day of that month the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be in turn relieved, having then been withdrawn to *Fraser Camp* and ordered into Divisional Reserve.



(Right above: *Canadian soldiers perusing the upcoming program at a make-shift theatre in a camp somewhere behind the lines – from Le Miroir*)

The unit had then remained in Divisional Reserve for some three weeks – much of the time in training and becoming familiar with varied new equipment - although it had been obliged to change camps – on foot – on two occasions. On the afternoon of August 3 it had been transferred to Brigade Reserve and ordered to move south, once again to the mining community of Mazingarbe to where it had reported later in the day.



(Right above: *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*)

The British High Command had by this time decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention – 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.

The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort and one of the primary objectives of this Canadian campaign was to be the so-named *Hill 70* in the outskirts of the mining centre of Lens.

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



Those expecting *Hill 70* to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear. Yet it had been high enough to be considered - by 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 Lens itself.

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



(Right: *This gentle slope rising to the left is, in fact, Hill 70. A monument to the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Infantry stands nearby in tribute. – photograph from 1914*)



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

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



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

(continued)

The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions had been confided the responsibility of the attack and two of the three battalions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade had been among the attacking forces. The 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, however, had been kept in reserve at the outset, to play a reinforcing role whenever and wherever the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Battalions were to find themselves in difficulty.

Having advanced to the assembly positions in the late evening of August 14, the six-hundred seventy-two personnel of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had not been called into action until just after mid-day of August 15, the day of the attack, when the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion had needed support when in a precarious situation.

Apart from that episode, the role of the Battalion had primarily been one of providing carrying-parties to supply ammunition to the troops in the forward area and then of evacuating wounded in the opposite direction.



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

A total of one-hundred fifty-one *killed, wounded and missing* would be incurred by the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion during the entire operation. A note to be found in the War Diary Appendix Number 7, concerning the action at *Hill 70*, is of a grim interest: *A most regrettable feature of the operations is the fact that the majority of the bodies, including that of one Officer, could not be discovered, notwithstanding the fact that the Battlefield was rigorously searched for same. It is presumed that they were either destroyed by shells, after they had fallen, or were covered over with earth and debris.*

This Canadian-led campaign had apparently been expected to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing – since the last day of July - British summer offensive in Belgium had been proceeding less well than anticipated and the British High Command had been starting to look for reinforcements to make good the by-then exorbitant losses.

The Australians – stationed further to the south than the Canadians – the New Zealanders\* and then the Canadians themselves had thus been ordered to prepare to move north. The Canadian Corps had been obliged to abandon its plans.

*\*The Australians and the New Zealanders, originally collectively known as the Anzacs, by this time were two independent forces.*

There were therefore to be no further major Canadian-inspired actions in the Lens-Béthune sectors and the troops yet again were to settle back into that monotonous but oft-times precarious existence of life in – and behind – the forward area. On most days, according to the Battalion War Diary, it had been the artillery which had fought it out – but, of course, the infantry was often to be the recipient of whatever had been on offer.



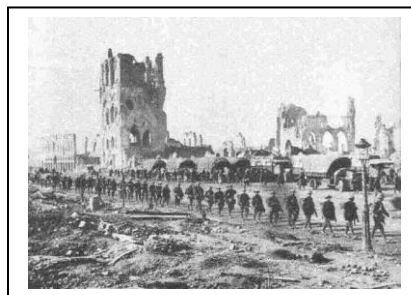
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(Preceding page: *Canadian artillery troops manhandling a gun into position 'somewhere in Flanders' during Passchendaele – from Le Miroir*)

Even though it had become known that the Canadians were to be transferred north into Belgium, for the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion there nonetheless was to be a nine-week interlude between the action at *Hill 70* and the transfer to its next theatre of operations. During this time the daily grind of life in the trenches had still been the rule - with several exceptions when the unit had been retired to areas behind the lines, particularly for training. But, also during this time, in the rear areas it was becoming apparent - this impression, as ever, gleaned from the Battalion War Diary entries - that sports were now being considered more and more to be a morale booster.

On October 20 of 1917 the Canadians of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered north into Belgium and once more to the *Ypres Salient* from where the unit had departed some fourteen months before. Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign – ongoing since the last day of that July – was to come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, having taken for a name that of a small village on a ridge that had been – at least latterly *professed* to have been - one of the British Army's main objectives.

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



From the time that the Canadians were to enter the fray, it was they who had shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions which had spearheaded the assault, with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions in reserve.

From November 5 until the *official* end of the affair – November 10 (other sources cite other dates) - the reverse was to be true with troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division having finally entered the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

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



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

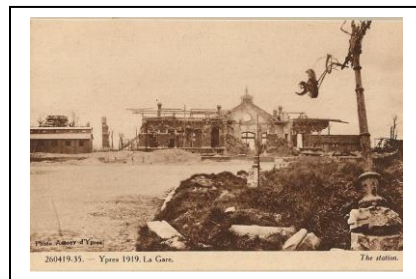


The 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to begin its transfer from the area of Lens and up into Belgium on October 20. It had thereupon marched for three days until it had reached the vicinity of the northern French community of Staple. There it had been billeted in nearby farms until October 31 while it was to undergo training.

On that October 31 the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had departed Staple at six-thirty in the morning, had boarded a train at Eblinghem at seven-forty-five, had arrived in the ruins of the railway station outside the southern ramparts of Ypres four hours later, and then had marched – perhaps as in a preceding photograph - through the shattered city and past the remnants of the venerable Cloth-Hall to Sin-Jaan and Wieltje to the north-east. There the unit had occupied some old trenches where they were to become the targets of hostile aircraft later that day and during the night.

(Right below: *The vestiges of the railway station just outside the ramparts of Ypres where the Battalion detrained – the image is from 1919 – from a vintage post-card*)

While many Canadian units were to suffer horribly serving at *Passchendaele*, the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion was apparently not to be one of them. Of the ten days that the just over five-hundred strong unit was to spend in the forward area, five were to be served in Brigade Reserve, three in Brigade Support and two in the front line where it had remained in the relative shelter of the trenches.



Casualties for the entire operation were thus to be comparatively light: eleven *killed*, three *died of wounds*, seventy-three *wounded*, fifty-eight *gassed* and seven *missing* – all ranks.



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

By November 12 the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion had returned to France where the daily grind of trench warfare was to once more take hold.

On November 14 it had moved from the area of Merville to that of Hersin-Coupigny where it was to remain for three days. But of course, as has been seen in a previous paragraph, it was on or about November 15 that Private Walsh had arrived with his draft from the Canadian Corps Re-enforcement Camp.



\* \* \* \* \*

By the 18<sup>th</sup> of that month Private Walsh and his new unit were settling into quarters in huts at a locale called *Marqueffles Farm*, only then to be ordered to march into Brigade Reserve, *Alberta Camp*, on the morrow.

A list compiled from the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of those days allows an idea of some of the proceedings which were to welcome Private Walsh and the other newcomers to *active service*: Physical Training and Bayonet Fighting, Gas Helmet Practice, Lecture on Trench Duties, Practice in Saluting, Platoon and Company Drill and Gas Helmet Inspection.

**(Preceding page: 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*)**

**His unit was to undergo a week of that intense training before moving forward to relieve the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the trenches of the *Avion Sector*.**

**Excerpts from the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for December 1, 1917: *FRONT LINE AVION SECTOR DEC. 1<sup>st</sup> – At 4.45 A/M. our Artillery, Trench Mortars, Stokes and Brigade Machine Guns opened up on the Barrage Line for five minutes with a view to dispersing raiding parties, which were becoming so frequent. The enemy artillery was very active during the day. About 6.00 P.M. our right front line Company was bombarded with the enemy's Heavy Trench Mortars. This was followed by a raiding party... Two men were killed and two were wounded in the Left Front Line Company...***



**The only other report is to be found among Private Walsh's papers simply cites...*KIA (Killed in Action) by Minenwerfer...*\***

**\*A *minenwerfer* was a short-range mortar commonly used by the German Army during the Great War.**

**(Right above: Not German but - dating from the time of the Great War - comparable French trench mortars which used to stand as shown, here in the entrance to the *Musée de l'Armée, Paris* – photograph from 2015)**

**The son of Mark Walsh (former fisherman(?), publican and grocer, deceased February 28, 1913) and of Rachel (also found as *Rachael*) Walsh (née *French*, deceased June 26, 1911) – of Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, where the couple had married on December 19, 1869 - he was also brother to Charles-George, to Mark, Sophia-Alice\*, Florence, Naomi-Rachel, Albert-William and to Robert-John\*\*.**

**\*She became *Mrs. Sophia Pike of Freshwater* and was declared on his attestation papers as his next of kin; she was also the beneficiary of his Will, penned before his departure from Canada, and the recipient as of May 1, 1917, of a monthly sum of twenty dollars from Private Walsh's pay.**

**\*\*Harrison Henry was also half-brother to Mary-Ann, to Jessie-Amelia (died young), Isabella-Margaret (died young), Emily-June (died young) and to Stephen. Their mother was Amelia Walsh (née Snow, deceased April 9, 1869) – the couple had married June 1, 1858.**

**Private Walsh was reported as having been *killed in action* on December 1, 1917, while serving in the trenches of the *Avion Sector*.**

**Harrison Henry Walsh had enlisted at the *apparent* age of thirty-three years and ten months: date of birth at Harbour Grace, Newfoundland (from both attestation papers and parish records), April 24, 1883.**

Private Harrison Henry Walsh 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 23, 2023.