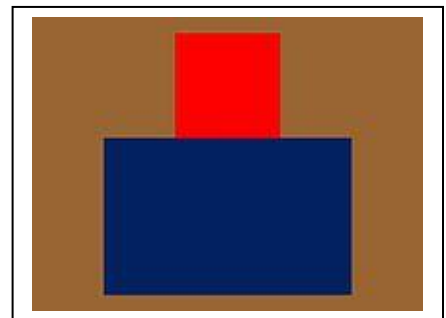




Private Domas (also found elsewhere as *Damas* and *Dumas*) White, Number 817427, of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Abbéville Communal Cemetery Extension: Grave reference IV.C.20..

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (New Brunswick) is from the Wikipedia Web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupations prior to military service recorded as having been those of fireman, labourer and carpenter, Domas White appears to have left little information behind him a *propos* his early years while living with his parents and six (eight? - see below ) siblings in the community of Stephenville, Bay St. George, in the Dominion of Newfoundland. He is, however, later to be found on the passenger list of the SS *Lintrose* on its crossing of December 22, 1914, of the Cabot Strait from Port aux Basques to North Sydney, Cape Breton, in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia.

He, Marshall and David – likely brothers – their occupation recorded as fireman (of a locomotive?), once having landed, were to continue their journey by train to the community of New Glasgow, some two-hundred forty kilometres distant. They were likely on their way there to seek employment.

Nonetheless, by September of 1915, some nine months later, Domas White had moved to the neighbouring province of New Brunswick, perhaps to the town of Sussex but surely, at least on some later date – perhaps with the military – to the city of Saint John.

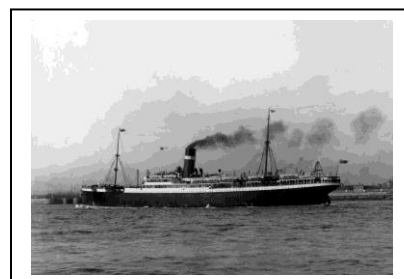
According to a medical examination document in his personal files, it was in Sussex that Domas White enlisted on September 15. Five days later he underwent the medical examination in question, a procedure which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. On the same September 20, not only did he undergo attestation, his oath witnessed by a local Justice of the Peace, but all the formalities of his enlistment were brought to a conclusion by the officer commanding the 64<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Henry Flowers, when he declared – on paper – that...*Domas White...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation\**.

*\*Perhaps an unusual situation in that Private White had already been taken on strength, on the day of his enlistment, not by the 64<sup>th</sup> Battalion, but by the 104<sup>th</sup> Battalion which was mobilizing in Sussex at that time. Perhaps the fact that the 104<sup>th</sup> had not been officially authorized by that September date had something to do with it.*

It appears logical that the 104<sup>th</sup> Battalion would train at the military establishment of *Camp Sussex* where it had mobilized even though perhaps some of it seems also to have been undertaken in Fredericton. However, as of February 6 of 1916, Private White himself was then to train - some of it likely at the newly-built *Barrack Green Armoury* - in the city of Saint John as he was transferred on that date to the 140<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Saint John Tigers*).

Perhaps the transfer had been at his own request for he almost certainly by then had made the acquaintance of a young Miss Annie Gibson (see also further below) of St. Patrick Street in Saint John. The couple became husband and wife on August 10 of 1916.

It was then to be on September 25, 1916, that the 136<sup>th</sup> and 140<sup>th</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* in the harbour at Halifax. Two days later the vessel weighed anchor and, after an apparently uneventful voyage of some nine days, on October 6 *Corsican* docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool.



(Preceding page: *The photograph of HMT Corsican is from the Maritime Quest web-site.*)

From Liverpool the 140<sup>th</sup> Battalion was transferred from dockside by train, apparently to the Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* established on the *Dover Straits* in the vicinity of the harbour and town of Folkestone, Kent.

*Cæsar's Camp* itself, to where the battalion was posted, stands on a hill north of the town, a site associated with camps and castles during much of its three-thousand year-old history, and the Canadian Army was to continue that tradition during the period of the *Great War*, *Cæsar's Camp* being a subsidiary facility of *Shorncliffe*.



(Right above: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 2016*)

Not that the newly-arrived 140<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to linger at *Cæsar's Camp* for very long: four weeks less a day after its arrival the unit was to be divided and ordered to either the newly-forming 13<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion (*New Brunswick*) at *Camp Bramshott* or to the RCR & PPCLI Depot at Seaford on the south coast of the country.



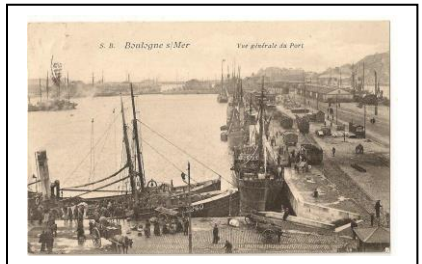
(Right above: *The community cemetery at Seaford in which are buried a number of Canadian soldiers, including two Newfoundlanders: Frederick Jacob Snelgrove and Ebenezer Tucker – photograph from 2016*)

Private White was to go neither to *Bramshott* nor to Seaford; by that time he was already in France, serving with the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*) to which unit he had been transferred – both bureaucratically and physically - from the 140<sup>th</sup> Battalion at *Cæsar's Camp* on (or perhaps just prior to) October 27\*.



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

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



He had crossed the Dover Straits on one of the nights preceding October 29 and continued on to the newly-established Canadian Base Depot of *Rouelles Camp* in close proximity to the French industrial city of Le Havre, situated on the estuary of the *River Seine*. On that above date he was *taken on strength* by the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

(continued)

***\*The Base Depot War Diary notes incoming personnel arriving there from Shorncliffe on October 27: ...7 officers and 656 other ranks...***

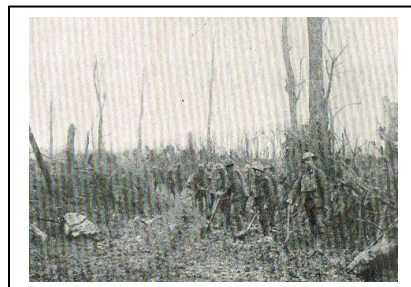
Private White was to remain stationed at the Base Depot for some four weeks before he was ordered despatched, on November 22, not to the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, but to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Entrenching Battalion. He and his draft of eighty-six *other ranks* – all destined for the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion - reported to this temporary posting three days later, on November 25, at a time when the unit was based in the area of Hersin, some thirty kilometres to the north-west of the city of Arras.



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

During this period of what was to be seven weeks, the personnel of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Entrenching Battalion was to be engaged in carpentry work and in the conveyance of supplies to and from the local dumps. Those not so occupied were, it would appear, condemned to hours of infantry exercises, route marches and drills – including the use of bombs (*grenades*) for which live munitions were apparently employed.

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



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

On January 6, Private White was to be one of one-hundred fifty *other ranks* to be sent on their way to various units. He is recorded on his *Active Service Form* as having arrived to report to his new unit on the morrow, January 7, 1917, his new unit serving at that time in the area of Fosse 10, Lens.

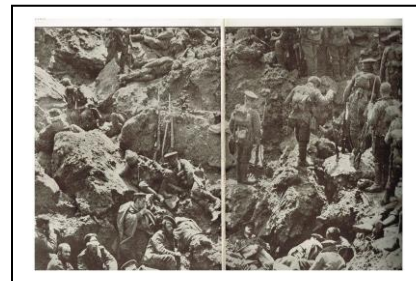
\* \* \* \* \*

The 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion (*New Brunswick*) was an element of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, and it had been serving in the *Kingdom of Belgium* since September of 1915. After having landed in France, to thereupon be transported northwards, the Division had immediately been posted to a sector in-between the by-then mutilated city of Ypres and the Franco-Belgian frontier.



(Preceding page: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration)*

From March 27 up until and including April 17, 1916 – these the *official* dates - the Battalion was to be involved in the *Action of the St. Eloi Craters*. The craters had been formed when, on that March 27, the British were to detonate a series of mines - galleries filled with explosives, under the German lines. The explosions had been immediately followed with an assault by British infantry units.



(Right above: *The occupation of a crater in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps in the St-Éloi Sector – from Illustration)*

The Canadians were to take over from the British to occupy the *presumed* newly-won territory; however, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which was to turn the just-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, plus a resolute German defence, had greeted the newcomers who would assume control of the operation from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6.

This was to be the first major encounter with the enemy that the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division would experience and it had likely come as a shock to the new-comers. After some three weeks of fighting in mud and water, at times up to the waist, at first the British – and then the Canadians who had then relieved them – had been held in check by the German defenders and had incurred a heavy casualty list.

It appears from the Battalion War Diary, however, that the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion itself had been only very *marginally* involved. During the period of the Canadian action, the unit was... *standing by, was...in camp*, or for five days in a row...*Battalion in trenches, Large working parties working on trenches. Weather fine*. Apart from the casualties incurred due to his artillery, the New Brunswick unit appears to have had no contact with the enemy.

Then from June 2 to 14 was to be fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the areas of *Sanctuary Wood, Railway Dugouts, Maple Copse, Hooge* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps. The Canadians had, it would seem, been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions dominating the Canadian trenches when the Germans had delivered an offensive, had overrun the forward areas and, in fact, had ruptured the Canadian lines, an opportunity which, fortunately, they were not to exploit.



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

The British Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, reacted – perhaps a little bit too precipitately - by organizing an impromptu counter-attack on the following day, an assault intended to, at a minimum, recapture the lost ground of June 2.

Badly organized, this operation was to prove a horrendous experience: many of the intended attacks were never to go in – those that *had* been delivered had gone in piecemeal and the assaulting troops had been cut to shreds; the enemy had thus remained in the captured positions and the Canadians had been left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.



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

Thereafter, for ten more days, there had been some desperate fighting, at first having involved mainly units of the newly-arrived Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division\*, but soon the critical situation was to draw in troops from other Canadian formations.

*\*Officially coming into service at midnight of December 31, 1915 and January 1 of 1916, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division had trained for a period in the Ploegsteert Sector before, in March and April of 1916, becoming responsible for a south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion would be engaged in relieving other battalions during the course of the encounter and it had been heavily shelled on occasion. However, it had not been present in the forward areas during much of the infantry activity and had been withdrawn altogether by the day of the final Canadian counter-attack.

By the time that the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be ordered moved up to the Front again on June 14, the action at *Mount Sorrel* and its vicinity had been all but over. During the preceding night of June 12-13 the Canadians had once again attacked and, thanks to better organization and a good artillery barrage, had on this second occasion taken back almost all of the lost ground. Both sides had now found themselves back much where they had been just eleven days earlier.



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

(Right: *The Canadian memorial which stands atop Mount Sorrel just to the south-west of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) whose spires and towers may be perceived in the distance – photograph from 1914*)



(Right: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 and the first week of June, 1917 – when the detonation of a British mine under its summit had removed any similarity to a hill - in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooge, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: It is today kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government. – photograph from 2014*)



Thus, after having played its role at *Mount Sorrel*, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been relieved and had been withdrawn to *Camp "D"* on June 20.

The second half of that following month of July had now been spent at first in *Alberta Camp* and then further back again, at Brigade Reserve in the *Vierstraat Sector*. To compensate for this likely monotonous period, the Battalion was then to be posted back into the forward trenches for twenty-two of the first twenty-four days of August.

Having retired again to *Alberta Camp* near to the village of Reninghelst on August 25, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion prepared to leave Belgium. The Regimental War Diarist has noted in his entry of that day: *All ranks in the best of spirits anticipating the move and eager to effect all details in the number of days training, SOMME OPERATIONS.*

The training grounds for the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be at or near Tilques, back over the border in northern France and in the vicinity of the larger centre of St-Omer. It would require three successive days of marching for the unit to reach its billets at Éperlecques by August 28 before then having commenced training on the morrow. One of the first items on the agenda of August 29 had been the replacement of the Canadian-made *Ross Rifle* by its British counterpart, the short *Lee-Enfield Mark III*.

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

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



A week later the Battalion had marched to the railway-station in Arcques to entrain for the journey south to Conteville – it was to take over twenty-three hours to complete the hundred-kilometre journey. A day spent resting in billets was followed by five more on foot *not* resting, by a march which would terminate on September 11 at the *Brickfields (la Briqueterie)*, a large military camp in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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

On that first day all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions having been the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1, 1916, at a place called Beaumont-Hamel.

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

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

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

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had arrived in the area four days prior to the attack at Flers-Courcelette – other units had reported there on only the day before – thus those interim days were to be spent in preparation. For the attack of September 15, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been in reserve at the outset and, as such, would not move forward until five o'clock in the afternoon, twelve hours after the initial assault, at which time it had re-enforced the efforts of the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Battalions.

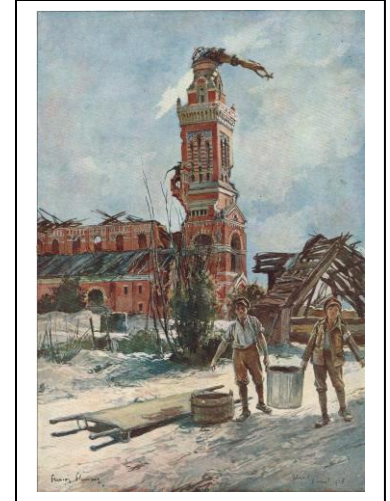
On the following day, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, according to its War Diary, had been ordered moved to the relative safety of a succession of shell holes, having apparently stayed there all day and...*where the most intense shelling was endured by the battalion throughout this entire day* (Battalion War Diary).

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

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

On the 17<sup>th</sup> the unit was to move once more and had taken up positions in a sunken road, to yet again remain there all day. The only exception was to be 'B' Company which would assist in an attack delivered by the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion before it, the Company, had also moved there. The attack in question had...*met with considerable opposition and rifle and machine gun fire was very heavy*. So had been the casualty numbers.

(continued)





On September 28 the Battalion had been ordered forward once again, on this occasion to play a role in *the Battle of Thiepval Ridge*, more specifically on the right flank of the advance, in the area of the strong German redoubt of *Regina Trench*. The operation had proved to be a further costly failure for the price of one-hundred eighty-two more casualties.

(Right below: *Regina Trench Cemetery* – *Regina Trench* was adjacent to *Kenora Trench*, another daunting German strong-point – and some of the ground on which the Canadians fought during that autumn of 1916 – photograph from 2014)

On October 3 the unit, having retired from the forward area, was soon to be preparing to disengage from the *First Battle of the Somme*. It had done so on October 10.

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to retire towards the westward, then to turn northwards to pass to the west of the battered medieval city of Arras. Having marched for the following five days, the unit had then passed into the area of what was from now on to become progressively a Canadian responsibility, the sectors to the north of Arras as far as the historic town of Béthune.



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

By the evening of October 15 the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had completed its relief of a British unit in the *Angres II Sector*, in the area of the city of Lens, and had occupied positions in the front lines. On the next day, the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Battalion War Diarist was to enter simply: *Battalion in trenches Conditions quiet, weather wet.*



(Right below: *This, after four years of bombardment by both sides, is what was to become of Lens before the Great War ended.* – from a vintage post-card of 1919)

The conditions were not to remain *quiet* for long: on the morrow the enemy had exploded a mine opposite a trench held by 'D' Company of the Battalion. The remainder of the day was to be spent repairing damage and consolidating the defences. There would be no casualties reported on that October 16<sup>th</sup> but the incident had likely reminded some of the troops – perhaps particularly any newcomers - that things could still be bad, even away from *the Somme*.



The next five months or so must have begun to seem somewhat monotonous – and uncomfortable because of a lack of heating fuel – for a great deal of the time, with a few instances of terror thrown in every now and then. For the most part the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to remain posted in that same *Angres II Sector*, in theory to spend one week in the front line, a second week in the support lines, and a third week in reserve – although, of course, it was hardly ever to work out exactly that way.

And sometimes there would even be a bath and a bed.

A unit in reserve could count on everything from a variety of inspections from those higher up the military ladder – and every now and then from a leading politician or a member of a royal family – to being seconded into a variety of working-parties.



(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*)

While in support positions there were yet more working-parties, route marches, training on new equipment, inspections from lesser lights on that military ladder, more inspections for trench-foot and other medical problems, and the conveyance of ammunition and the like from the rear to the front.

At the sharp end of the stick, of course, activities became more restricted by the size of one's environment. For one thing, keeping one's head down, if one wished to retain it, meant that all there was to see was the wall of the trench and the sky – this for days on end. If one left the relative safety of the front line positions it was to go on patrol – usually at night – or on a raid – usually at night - or on a wiring-party – usually at night – thus a good night's sleep was not necessarily a common thing – or even a bad night's sleep for that matter.

As seen above, it was on January 7 that Private White reported to his new unit in the reserve area of Fosse 10\*. On the following day, January 8, the Battalion War Diary records that the unit was to relieve the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in the trenches which suggests that on that day Private White had his first experience of that...*sharp end of the stick*.

*\*The word fosse in French signifies a ditch, but it is also the word for a mine shaft or pit. The area in which the Canadians were the Canadians were now operating to the north of Arras was the major coal-mining region of France and in and around the city of Lens was a number of mines of which Fosse 10 was but one.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Only a week and a day after Private White's presumed introduction to the front line, on January 16 of that New Year, 1917, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was manning support positions, once again in the *Angres II Sector*, having been re-posted there on the day before. It was also about to become embroiled in a raid on the German defences opposite.

The Battalion War Diarist has noted that, on that day...*Col. McKenzie applies to Brigade to carry out operation at 4.30 p.m. this date, this was granted, and attack\* by selected parties carried out successfully at the above hour...*

*\*Apparently a raid had been planned for January 16 since as early as January 4 but it had been postponed.*

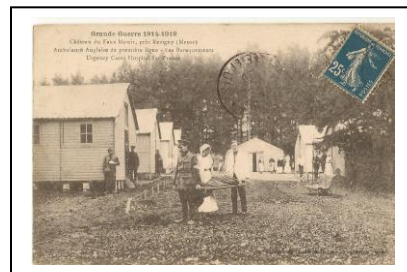
Casualties had been relatively light: twenty-two *all ranks* of which five had been *killed in action*, fifteen *wounded* and two remained *missing in action*. However, it has not been documented as to whether Private White was one of those to be involved in the action.

Then, seven weeks to the day after his arrival *to duty* with the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, on February 25, Private White became ill and reported to the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance established at the time in the rear area at Écoivres\*.

*\*This would had been the base of the main facility and headquarters of the unit. The field ambulances were also responsible for Advanced Dressing Stations and Rest Stations thus this may have been where Private White was sent at first.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The diagnosis was the not-unusual PUO (*Pain – or Pyrea (fever) - of Unknown Origin*) and after four days of treatment, Private White was then presumably deemed as on the road to recovery since he was forwarded on March 1 to the Corps Rest Station run by the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance based at Fresnicourt. He was one of fifty-seven *other ranks* to be admitted on that day.



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

His stay there lasted only a few hours after which he was transferred to the 6<sup>th</sup> British Red Cross Hospital (*Liverpool Merchants' Hospital*) situated in the coastal town of Étapes.

By this time he had been diagnosed as being a victim of tonsillitis\*.

*\*It should be remembered that in those days before the advent of anti-biotics, infection was a serious problem, whether incurred through sickness or from a wound, however minor. At times several weeks or even months of medical care were often required to nurse a patient back to health. All too often even this, alas, was not enough.*

More than two weeks were to pass at Étapes, during which time it was decided to invalid Private White back to the United Kingdom. On March 23 he was placed on board His Majesty's Hospital Ship *Newhaven* for the cross-Channel passage to England. Upon his arrival there he was transferred physically\* on that same day to Queen Mary's Military Hospital at Whalley, Lancashire.



(Right: *The image of a peace-time Newhaven is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

*\*Bureaucratically at the same time he was struck off strength by the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and transferred on paper to become the responsibility of the New Brunswick Regimental Depot at Shoreham-on-Sea, on the south coast of England.*

After a further seventeen days, on April 10, Private White was discharged from hospital in the northern county of Lancashire to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Woodcote Park, Epsom, in the southern county of Surrey. A month later – the last two weeks from April 23 to May 8 having apparently been spent at the Ontario Military Hospital in the nearby London suburb of Orpington - on that same May 8, he was subsequently admitted from there into another Canadian Convalescent facility, this in the area of Bromley, Kent.

His medical problems were not yet over as while at Bromley he was to complain of defective vision, whereupon Private White was transferred yet again, on this occasion back to not-distant *Shorncliffe* where he was taken into care to be treated for conjunctivitis at the Westcliffe Canadian Eye & Ear Hospital, which he was now to call home for another thirty-two days until his discharge on June 18.

Whether his release from Westcliffe was followed by the usual ten-day furlough granted to military personnel released from hospital in the United Kingdom is not clear; the dates seem to suggest otherwise as Private White is recorded as having reported to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Command Depot\* at Shoreham-on-Sea on June 20.

*\*A Canadian Command Depot was a base where military personnel – officers and other ranks – unattached to any particular unit, were posted while the authorities decided what their future, if any, in the Armed Forces was to be.*

The aforesaid decision of the authorities was that Private White should be *taken on strength* by the Canadian 13<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion (*New Brunswick*), also stationed at Shoreham, with the intention that at some later date he be despatched for a second time to serve on the Continent. He was to join the 13<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion from the 3<sup>rd</sup> CCD on August 9 of 1917 and some three months afterwards, having moved with the unit to the nearby Canadian camp at Seaford during the month of October, it was from there, Seaford, on November 17 that he was to be ordered to France to serve with his former 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*).

Private White on this occasion likely sailed to France through the English port-city of Southampton and its French counterpart, Le Havre, before reporting *to duty* – one of only four *other ranks* to have done so on November 18 - at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Base Depot established by that time in the vicinity of Étapes. Three days later he was despatched in a draft of one-hundred eleven to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp some sixty kilometres to the east at Calonne-Ricouart.

At Calonne-Ricouart Private White was to await two months for orders to re-join his unit. They came in early January of the New Year, 1918, whereupon he was despatched to the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of that month, to arrive with his unit on the morrow\*.

*\*Although, again, his arrival, while documented in his own papers, has not been noted by the Battalion War Diarist. In this officer's defence, it should be said that the unit was at the time in the trenches of the Neuville St-Vaast Sector, whereas the re-enforcements likely arrived and reported to the rear area.*

\* \* \* \* \*

During the absence of Private White the Great War had, of course, gone on, although for a while it had been a somewhat stagnant affair. During the period of the winter of 1916-1917 there was to be little in the way of concerted infantry action conducted by either side. There were to be, nonetheless, at least two large raids conducted locally by the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and patrols and wiring parties had of course been just another everyday part of life, but this seems to have been the extent of offensive operations in the Canadian sectors during those months.

Food and water at times were to be temporarily scarce – particularly during that winter of 1917, both for men *and* for animals -, sanitary facilities as well, and one's social life in the trenches at times was often augmented by a corpse or two or more lying close by in No-Man's-Land. And Death always stood at one's shoulder - apparently an average of some two thousand died on the *Western Front* each and every day of the Great War: 'wastage', Douglas Haig called them.

Most casualties, relatively few in number, were to be due to the ever-present enemy artillery fire, but snipers would also present a constant danger. Disease and living conditions as might be expected – perhaps particularly the ubiquitous lice and mites, prime sources of scabies – were to take an additional toll. But, maybe surprisingly, it appears to have been dental work that kept the medical services mostly occupied at this time.



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

Thus the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to spend the winter of 1916-1917 following the routine of trench warfare, perhaps only those two above-mentioned incidents having been worthy of anything more the habitual sparse entries in the unit's War Diary: on January 16, 1917, as seen above, Battalion personnel had mounted a raid on the German positions opposite, had bombed a number of dug-outs, had taken a handful of prisoners and in doing so had incurred seven dead and fifteen wounded; following that, some seven weeks later, on the morning of March 3, an impromptu local armistice had been arranged to evacuate the wounded from *No-Man's-Land*, the result of an operation on the previous day – the Germans having delivered them to half-way across the divide before the Canadians were to complete the job.

*\*So says the War Diary, but since no such operation appears to have been noted for March 2, it may have referred to an undertaking by another unit.*

Then it had been spring and the time for the campaigning season to begin. On March 24 the Battalion had departed Bois des Alleux where it had been spending five days in Brigade Support. It had thereupon marched to Grand Servins... *Poor billets...* recorded the War Diarist.



The reason for the move had been to undergo special – and in some cases novel – training for the upcoming British attack in the area of Arras. It had already been planned that the Canadian Corps would advance in a sector close to where the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had recently been operating, in an area where the ground sloped upwards to the top of a German-occupied rise dominating the entire Douai Plain. The crest of the rise today still goes by the name - in French - of *la crête de Vimy*: in English, *Vimy Ridge*.

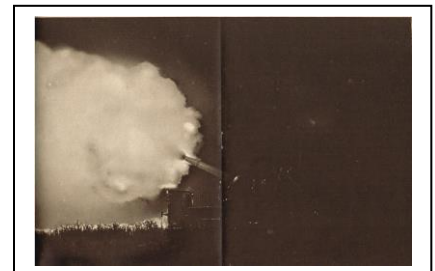
(Preceding page: *Seen from the La Chaudière Sector in what was German-occupied territory until April-May of 1917, a part of Vimy Ridge, today of course dominated by the Canadian National Memorial – photograph from 2015*)

The special training in question was to comprise a variety of new ideas in soldiering: learning the topography of the ground to be attacked; familiarization with 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 frontal 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 these final days had passed, the artillery barrage was to grow progressively heavier; on April 6, Good Friday, the War Diarist of another battalion would describe it as...*drums*\*.

By this time, of course, the Germans had been well aware that something was in the offing and their guns in turn had been throwing retaliatory fire onto the Canadian positions, with their aircraft constantly busy overhead.



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

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

It was to be as late as April 8 before the New Brunswick 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had moved forward towards the assembly areas for the attack, and not until four o'clock on the following morning that the last elements were to reach their jumping-off posts.

On April 9 the British Army had launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields of 1916; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras*, intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, one of the few positive episodes having been the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

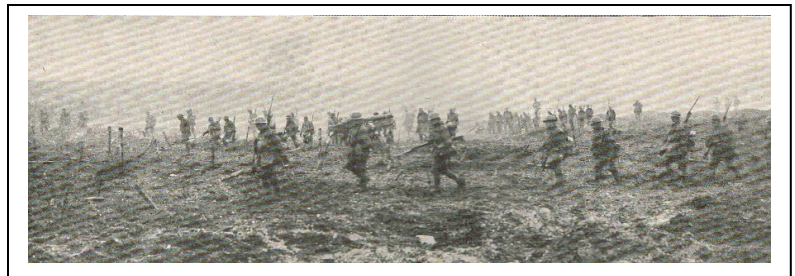
While the British campaign would prove an overall disappointment, the French offensive at *le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

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



(Right below: *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*)

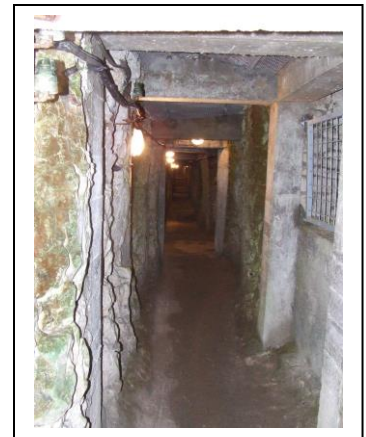
On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, on this occasion acting as a single, autonomous entity – there had even been a British brigade operating under 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division command – had stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.



Several kilometres of tunnel had been hewn out of the chalk under the approaches to the front lines of *Vimy Ridge*, underground accesses which would afford physical safety and also the element of surprise during the hours – and sometimes, days – leading up to the attack.

The Battalion War Diary has noted that the objectives of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion were not on the *Ridge* itself, the prising of which from the grasp of the Germans had been made the responsibility of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions.

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



The War Diary has also noted that, as was the case with many other units, the advance of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion up to the...*Jumping Off Trenches*...was to be made over-ground, not through any of those well-known tunnels.

The objectives of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion – indeed, of the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division – were to be in the *Thelus Sector*. Thélus was – and is – a small village further down the slope and to the right-hand side – southward in the direction of Arras - of the attack.

The creeping barrage having come down at 5.30 am, the first wave of the assault had jumped off and...*at Zero plus 32 minutes the light signal (3 white Very lights (flares)) was fired showing that Bn. had reached and occupied their objective.*

*The casualties in the attack were slight and during the rest of the days the Coys. spent the day in clearing the trench and making shelter for the men. (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of April 9, 1917)*

Little further progress was to be made immediately after the successes of that first day, the terrain having subsequently proved too difficult – due to the foul weather and an order...to consolidate (see \*\* below) - for the advance of guns and of the accompanying necessary equipment; and, as usual, the Germans had been quick to recover, although no serious attempt had been made by them to retake *Vimy Ridge*\*. The Battalion was to remain in the forward area consolidating its positions until relieved on April 15 when it had then retired.

*\*It appears that the enemy may already have been prepared to lose the Ridge – apparently it was not the defensive fortress the attackers feared it to be - as he had apparently readied positions some three kilometres further to the rear.*

*\*\*Even had the Canadians not been ordered to consolidate rather than to advance and exploit their early success, the recent weather had ensured that the ground was impassable as were the relatively few roads and tracks which had also been mutilated by the constant traffic of the past days and weeks.*



*(Right above: Canadian sappers, having just laid a narrow-gauge railway line across the battle-field to bring up supplies, now use it immediately to evacuate the wounded of both sides. This photograph taken on the field at or in the vicinity of Vimy Ridge – from Illustration)*

It had then been an all-too-short ten days, until April 25, before the unit would be ordered forward again, into support positions where, towards the end the month, its personnel had been employed in digging new trench systems so as to be in a position to support further Canadian attacks, these to be undertaken in late April at Arleux-en-Gohelle and later, twice in early May, at Fresnoy-en-Gohelle.

Both of these costly operations had gone ahead – the first a relative success, the second a lot less so - but apparently the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to be heavily involved. And once again, most of the unit’s casualties seem to have been due to enemy artillery action.

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

After the five-week *Battle of Arras* had stuttered to its conclusion – officially on May 15 - the remainder of the month of May and most of June had been spent by many Canadian units, including the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, withdrawn from the line, the time to be partially used for re-enforcement and for further re-organization.





On July 1, Dominion Day, however, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be once more on its way to the forward area and by the following day had arrived in Brigade Reserve, and yet again in the *Angres Sector* in the vicinity of the coal-mining centre of Lens.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of that month the unit had found itself back in – or in the area of - the front lines and by the 20<sup>th</sup> the Battalion War Diarist would be recording that preparations were already being made for... *the coming show*.

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 – and his reserves as well - 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.

(Right below: *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*)

For the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the end of July and the beginning of August of 1917 were to comprise a succession of days of training. The Canadian Corps, since *Vimy Ridge*, would from now on always fight as an autonomous entity; its now-apparent military capability to be exploited to a much greater extent than had been the case in earlier days.



One of the primary objectives was to be the so-named *Hill 70* in the northern outskirts of Lens. To that end, on August 14, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion and other units of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had moved forward to their assembly areas. On the morrow, August 15, the attack would go in.

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 the 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 – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than that of the city of Lens itself.

(Right above: *The monument which commemorates the capture of Hill 70 by the Canadians stands only some hundred metres or so from its apex, this point just to the left from where the roads intersect. – photograph from 2014*)

(continued)

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



Objectives had been limited and had for the most part been taken by the end of that August 15. Due to the seeming 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 had been launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.

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

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

As far as the actions of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion at *Hill 70* are concerned, excerpts from Appendix Number 5 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary give a general idea: *At 4.25 a.m. on Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> August the Artillery opened up and the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the Right and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion on the Left advanced to the attack, closely followed by the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Battalions respectively. The objective...was the BLUE Line. ...the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Battalions, which were to pass through the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Battalions...would also advance at Zero hour until clear of the German Front Line so as to avoid the enemy barrage. This proved most successful and the casualties...were very light.*

*The Blue Line was captured on scheduled time, namely, at 4.51 a.m.*

*At 5.24 a.m. the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Battalions passed through...and advanced on the GREEN Line which they captured at 5.42 with the exception of the Left Company of the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion which was held up...by Machine Gun fire and Bombers. ...this Company, however, captured their objective by 7.15 a.m. The whole of the GREEN objective was now in our hands...*



At this point the Germans were to counter-attack the positions held by the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion, but they had been driven off.

Thus...*The remainder of the day was spent in consolidating the positions gained and clearing the battle-field. The consolidation was carried out...and Machine Guns were placed in Strong Points.*



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

(continued)

Having repulsed several further German attempts to re-gain the lost ground - those counter-attacks accompanied by heavy bombardments and hostile aeroplane activity on both August 16 and 17 - the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been relieved and had retired into the area of the former British front line.

This Canadian-led campaign had apparently been scheduled to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium had by then been proceeding less well than expected and the High Command was to be looking for reinforcements to make good its exorbitant losses. The Australian Imperial Force, the recently independent New Zealand Division and then the Canadians themselves, all had been ordered to prepare to move northwards; thus the Canadian Corps was to be obliged to abandon its plans.

There would therefore 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 nonetheless at times precarious existence of life in - and behind - the forward area. On most days, according to the Battalion War Diary, it would be the artillery which had fought it out - but, of course, the infantry was more often than not to be the target.



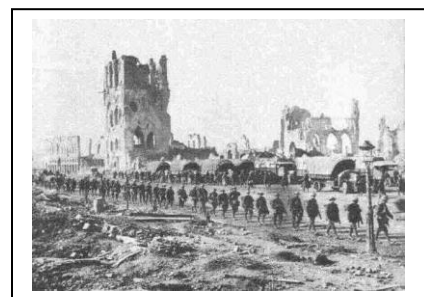
(Right above: *The venerable town of Béthune, at the northern end of the Canadian sectors, as it was by the conclusion of the Great War – from a vintage post-card of 1919*)

Even though it was known that the Canadians were to be transferred north into Belgium, for the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion there would now be a more-than-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 would still be the rule - with several exceptions when the unit had been retired to areas behind the lines, particularly for training - although the War Diary indicates that sports were being considered more and more to be a morale booster among the troops.

It was not until the 24<sup>th</sup> day of that October of 1917 that the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had entrained in or near the community of Tinquès to begin the transfer north into Belgium and once more to *the Salient* which the unit had left some thirteen months before.

Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign - ongoing since the last day of that July - has come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, having adopted that name from the small village on a ridge that was - at least was latterly ostensibly *professed* to have been - one of the British Army's main objectives of the campaign.



(Right: *An iconic photograph of troops as they file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres and past the historic Cloth Hall on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917 – from Illustration*)

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

From the time that the Canadians had entered the fray, it was to be they who were to shoulder a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it had been the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions which would spearhead 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 (see below) having finally entered the remnants of the village of Passchendaele itself.



**(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*)**

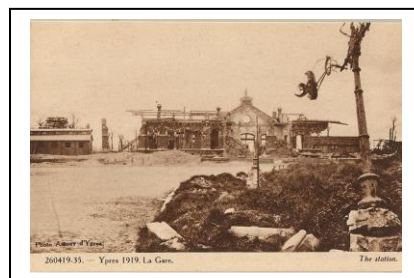
The unit had arrived in the vicinity of the northern French commune of Cæstre on the evening of the above-mentioned October 24. Although the locale had been designated as a rest area, the War Diary entries record numerous activities, lectures and training exercises undergone in preparation for the unit's subsequent move to the *Passchendaele Front*.



The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to be on its way again from Cæstre until November 3, then having boarded a train which had crossed the Franco-Belgian Frontier to transport its charges into the ruins of what once had been the railway station at Ypres. The station having been – as it still is today - just outside the southern ramparts of the city, the Battalion had then traversed the remnants of Ypres on foot in a north-easterly direction – and likely passing by the vestiges of the Cloth Hall as seen in the image of the previous page - to arrive in the vicinity of the once-community of Potijze.

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

On November 4, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to move closer to the forward area. Before the unit would move forward, it was to draw supplies and ammunition to be carried up to the front line. On the following day the unit had moved forward again; by eleven o'clock in the evening it had reached the appointed assembly areas.



Excerpts from Operational Order, Number 180 – issued 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 1917: 1) *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division has been ordered to attack and capture PASSCHENDAELE on “Z” day.*

2) *The attack will be carried out by the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade on the Right and the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade on the Left: the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade will be in Divisional Reserve...*

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

*...5) The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion will assault on a 2 Company front with one Company in Support and one Company in Reserve.*

*...9) Consolidation...a) The forward slope should be held by posts in shell holes or short lengths of trench; these posts must be well scattered...in order that the enemy may have no good target for his artillery...*

*b) A main line will be dug just behind the crest of the ridge and so sited as to escape direct observation while denying the crest to the enemy should he succeed in breaking through our advanced posts.*

*This main line will also serve as the jumping off line for counter attacks.*

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

Excerpts from Appendix 3 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary:

*6) On this occasion...At 6 a.m. on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November the barrage opened and the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion advanced to the attack...*

*The whole of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade objectives were gained on schedule time, namely, by 6.58 a.m., and consolidation commenced.*

*By 10 a.m. the ground won by the Brigade had been well consolidated...*

(Right: *Just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the Passchendaele monument of the previous page – this is the ground up which the Canadians fought during those weeks of October and November of 1917. – photograph from 2010*)

Casualties during the operation incurred by the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion were to be forty-two *killed in action* and two-hundred seven *wounded*, all ranks.

On November 10 the Battalion was to retire into Ypres; on the morrow it had withdrawn further westwards, to Brandhoek; and on November 12 and 13, it would move south, over the Franco-Belgian frontier, back to the area of Cæstre.

(continued)



**(Right below: 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*)**

Three days later again, on November 16, the 26<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Battalions had moved in tandem, southward to the rear area at Mont St-Éloi. There they both had remained for the succeeding six days at which time, on November 22, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be ordered into support positions at La Chaudière (see photograph further above) in sight of *Vimy Ridge*. There it was to stay until November 28 until relieved by the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion and withdrawn to *Villers Camp*, in the vicinity of Villers-au-Bois.



**(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 – partially destroyed in 1793, the work continued during the Great War – are visible in both images.***



***Mont St-Éloi is not to be confused with the St-Éloi in Belgium which was mentioned earlier. – from *Le Miroir* and (colour) from 2016)***

During that time, there at *Villers Camp*, at the end of November of 1917, the personnel of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*) was to be re-introduced to the everyday routines of life behind the front that they had left behind some five weeks previously – perhaps after *Passchendaele* those monotonous routines were to come as a welcome reprieve.



**(Right below: *Villers Station Cemetery – established to serve the nearby medical facilities - within the bounds of which lie some two-thousand Commonwealth dead of which one-half are Canadian – photograph from 2017)***

On November 22, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had moved into Brigade Support positions in the *La Chaudière Sector* (see photograph further above) to relieve the 28<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion. There the unit was to remain until November 28.

Although the officer responsible for the War Diary appears to have neglected it in all but a single short sentence in his journal, the month of December was to offer something a little different to all the Canadian formations which had been serving overseas at the time: the Canadian General Election. Polls for the Army were to be open from December 4 until 17, and participation, in at least *some* units, had been in the ninety per cent range\*.



(continued)

*\*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 help pay for it as well.*

After the Christmas period, the winter of 1917-1918 was to pass much in the manner of the previous winters of the *Great War*, once again in stagnation. Any infantry activity had tended to be local: there were to be the ever-present patrols and the occasional raid – an activity still very much in favour with the British High Command, and apparently still loathed by those whose duty it was to undertake them. And most casualties would, as usual, still be due to the enemy's artillery-fire, to his snipers and now, ever increasingly, to his bombing aircraft.

This then, was the setting into which Private White marched on January 21 of 1918, after almost eleven months absence from his 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

\* \* \* \* \*

It has been seen that at the time of Private White's return, January 21, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been serving in the trenches in the Neuville St-Vaast Sector adjacent to Vimy. There the unit was now to remain until February 8, its *trench strength*, even after re-enforcement, being only twenty officers and five-hundred seventy-six *other ranks*, a little less than sixty per cent of establishment battalion strength.

Some of the time that the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion spent in the forward area was then to be a little further to the north, in the vicinity of Liévin, to the west of Lens. The days, for the most part, were reported by the officer War Diarist as...*quiet* – the exceptions to the rule being described as...*very quiet*.

It appears that things may even have been a little *too quiet* for Private White on at least one occasion, from nine o'clock in the evening of March 13 until six o'clock the following morning, as he was apprehended and reported as having been *Absent without Leave*. He subsequently forfeited three days' pay but was even then perhaps fortunate since he was at the time on *active service*.

Then on March 21, 1918, the first day of spring, 1918, on an eighty-kilometre front to the south of Arras, the Germans blew holes in the British defences and their storm troopers poured through.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans were to come to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred westward the divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, they would launch a massive attack, Operation '*Michael*', on March 21.



The main blow was aimed at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it was to fall in great part at first on the British Fifth Army stationed there, particularly where its troops were serving adjacent to the French.

(continued)

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

The German advance then continued for some two weeks, to finally peter out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was to be the result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, German fatigue and logistical problems, and a great deal of French co-operation with the British were perhaps the most significant.



*\*A second but lesser such offensive, ‘Georgette’, fell in northern France and in Belgium on April 9, in Flanders, the area where the Royal Newfoundland Regiment was serving with the British 29<sup>th</sup> Division. It also was successful for a while, but also had petered out by the end of the month.*

It should be added that during this entire spring period of 1918 it was not only the British armies which were to receive the attention of the Germans. There were attacks made on the French as well.

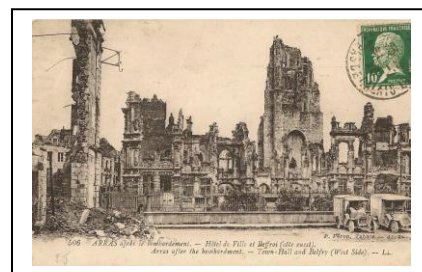
(Right above: *British troops on the retreat in Flanders in April of 1918 – from Illustration*)

The War Diary suggests, however, that during this critical time, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not to be involved in the heaviest, if any, of the fighting – in fact, *no* Canadian unit was to be. Posted mostly in the area of Wailly, just to the south-west of the city of Arras, the majority of the casualties incurred were due yet again to incessant enemy artillery activity rather than to any infantry action.



(Right above: *Wailly Orchard Cemetery wherein are buried a number of Canadian dead, mostly casualties of the spring of 1918 – photograph from 2015*)

Private White’s Battalion during the crisis was to remain posted in approximately that same area, to the south-west of Arras. Many other Canadian units would also be ordered to the area, orders and counter-orders ensuring a great deal of movement and, at times, not a little confusion. However, the Canadian Corps was not to send any forces towards *the Somme*, the troops having gone no further south than the area 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*)



*\*The Canadians had been retained in situ because the enemy objectives had not been evident to the British High Command – nor, as the battle progressed, were the Germans apparently to remain faithful to their original plans. The Canadians were held back to forestall any German attempt to break through to the Channel ports and to block a possible enemy advance in the direction of the coal-fields around Béthune.*

However, by the end of the first week in April, the situation to the south, on the *Amiens Front*, while still dangerously uncertain, was even so gradually becoming relatively stable – the British 3<sup>rd</sup> Army having stopped dead an enemy advance towards Arras – enough to have allowed for the Canadians to be at least partially withdrawn from the positions that they had occupied to the south and south-west of Arras; nor, when it then came about on April 9, does it appear that the enemy northern offensive was sufficiently alarming to warrant any move by the Canadians in that direction.

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion itself was to *remain* in approximately the same area, to the south-west of Arras even after the crisis, moving at times those few kilometres to nearby Berles-au-Bois and Bretencourt and, when in reserve, a little further to the west again.

Thus a relative calm again descended on the forward areas as the German threat faded – for the enemy, the campaign had won a great deal of ground but nothing of any real military significance on *either* of the two British fronts, or indeed during the attacks against the French.

Nor was the subsequent calm particularly surprising: both sides were exhausted and needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to re-enforce.

The Allies from this point of view were a lot better off than their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were by now belatedly arriving on the scene. An overall Commander-in-Chief had been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing – although some historians find the term a bit flattering - a counter-offensive. Thus the front in general was to remain relatively quiet – until the second week in August.

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

(Right below: *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)*

During that interim, on that part of the Front held from time to time by Private White's Battalion, the War was to continue much as it had in other *quiet* periods: on May 7, the unit, having been in the front-line trenches in the area of Bretencourt for the preceding four days, had undertaken a raid.



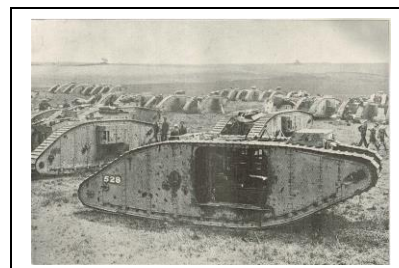
The unit's War Diary entry for that day reads as follows: *Trenches – Battalion in Front Line. Rainy today. Battalion carried out raids on enemy posts at 3.00 a.m. this morning, capturing two prisoners and 1 Light Machine Gun. 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion also made a raid, capturing 1 Machine Gun.*

In June it was once again *quiet*, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion stationed to the south west of Arras, in the area of the village of Wailly. The unit had been in the front line since the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month and was to be relieved on the next day, June 15 – just in time for a semi-final baseball game\*. But the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had stirred up things in the adjacent trenches, making a raid on the night of the 13-14: thus Private White's Battalion had followed suit although, perhaps fortuitously, the enemy positions on this occasion had been found to be abandoned.

*\*The result of the baseball game: 11 to 1 for the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion against the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Whether or not Private White was a baseball player has not been recorded; nor has his role in the above operations.*

Towards the end of July, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion – and a large number of other Canadian units - began to move in a semi-circular itinerary - to the west of, then south of, and finally east of - to finish *in front of* the city of Amiens, there to face the German forces where they had remained since the attacks of the previous March and April. On August 2, while en route, the Battalion underwent two days of tactical training in co-operation with tanks. On the evening of August 3 it received orders to move forward once more – on foot as usual\*.

(Right: *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' – from Illustration*)



*\*While, at the outset, this huge transfer of troops had been under-taken by train and motor transport, the later stages had been accomplished on foot, in marches during the hours of darkness. The strategy had worked, for the attack of August 8 apparently took the Germans completely by surprise.*

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



The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary entry for that August 8, 1918, reads as follows: *Weather very fine. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division attacked at 3.20 a.m.*

*The 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade passed through the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry brigade at the first objective at 8.20 a.m. The attack of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade was on a frontage of 2,200 yards.*

(continued)

***The villages of WIENCOURT L'EQUIPEE, GUILLAUCOURT and all objectives were taken with a large number of guns and prisoners.***

The War Diary Appendix pertaining to the attack cites the success of the co-operation of tanks and infantry. It also notes that many of the casualties of the day were caused by enemy artillery, snipers, and – in the case of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion – by enemy aircraft operations.



***(Right: A group of German prisoners, some serving here as stretcher-bearers, being taken to the rear after their capture by Canadian troops: a tank may be seen in the background – from Le Miroir)***

Excerpt from the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for August 9, 1918: ***At 10.30 on the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> we again moved off and assembled in the front and to the rear of the town of CAIX for the attack, starting for our new objective about 1.00 p.m... We advanced slowly and crossed the old AMIENS defence line which had already been captured at this point by the 1<sup>st</sup> Division... We carried on from there, “A” Coy. being the right front line Coy., and “B” the left. We crossed a deep Railway Cutting between CAIX and VRELY and came up the eastern side of the cutting. Here we halted to allow the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion to get ahead of us. While here we were subject to a heavy shelling with both light and heavy enemy artillery...suffered heavy casualties here. ...We were heavily shelled on the front edge of the village of VRELY, but had no casualties. We then pushed on...from here without further incident and entered the village of MEHARICOURT... We were finally ordered by the Commanding Officer to remain in this village...***

***(Right: British and Commonwealth dead in the cemetery at Caix, just to the west of Rosières: Caix also hosts a French military plot as well as a German burial ground. – photograph from 2017)***



It was likely on either August 8 or possibly August 9 that Private White was wounded, hit by shrapnel in the left buttock.

At what hour of that day he was admitted has not been recorded, but on August 9 he was reported as being at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian General Hospital in the town of Abbéville. There the medical staff considered him as being...*dangerously ill.*

The son of Calixte (also found as *Callisse* or perhaps *Chalice*) White, fisherman, farmer, lumberman and carpenter, and of Elizabeth White (née *Bennett*) of Stephenville, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Mary-A., to Remmie (*Rémy?*), Richard, Mary-T., Adolph, William and, as seen above, likely also to Marshall and to David.

He was also husband to Annie White (née *Gibson*)\* of Saint John, New Brunswick, to whom as of October 1 of 1916 he had allotted a monthly twenty dollars from his pay, and to whom on October 27 of the same year, he had bequeathed his all. The couple appears to have parented no children.

***\*She was to later marry again, on May 28, 1919, to Harry Frederick Drew of Saint John, New Brunswick.***

**Domas White had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-one years and five months, date of birth in Stephenville, Newfoundland, April 4, 1894 (from attestation papers); however, a copy of the 1911 Census of the District of Bay St. George records the date as having been April 18, 1893\*.**

***\*If his presumed brother Marshall was indeed aged twenty-two, as recorded on the SS Lintrose passenger list (see further above), at the time of the crossing to North Sydney in 1914, then the year of Domas White's birth was likely 1894 as a sister Mary had been born in December of 1891.***

**Private Domas (or Damas or Dumas)White 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.**