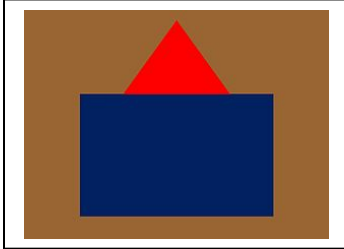




Sergeant Benedict Joseph Doyle (Number 469893) of the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is commemorated in Orchard Dump Cemetery: Reference, 2nd Canadian Division Cemetery Memorial 8*.

****Originally, his remains were interred in another burial ground, but these graves were destroyed in later battles as the stele (above left) attests.***



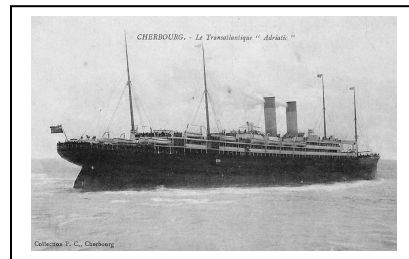
(Right above: *The image of the shoulder flash of the 25th Battalion is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

There appears to be little or no information available as to how it was that Benedict Joseph Doyle came to be in the town of Sussex, King's County, in the Canadian province of New Brunswick in September of 1915. Born in King's Cove, Newfoundland, he had moved with his family to St. John's, the capital city of the Dominion at or about the age of eight years, likely receiving his education at St. Patrick's Hall School. After that...

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a grocer, Benedict Joseph Doyle is recorded as having both enlisted and presenting himself for medical examination in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on September 2 of 1915. On a pay-sheet that confirms his enlistment on that September 2 is also the evidence that he was... *taken on strength* on that same day by the 64th Battalion which was recruiting throughout the Maritime Provinces.

It may be that the Battalion (or at least one of its Companies) was based in or near Sussex, Kings County, New Brunswick, as this is where Private Doyle attested and was... *finally approved and inspected* by an officer on September 9, thus bringing to a conclusion the formalities of his enlistment.

Where Private Doyle was despatched for his initial training with the 64th Battalion unfortunately appears not to be documented but it may well have been there at Sussex where he had gone to attest. Some seven months were then to pass before he was recorded as having embarked on March 31 of 1916 onto the requisitioned *White Star* liner *Adriatic* in the harbour at Halifax for passage overseas to the United Kingdom.



(Right above: *The photograph of Adriatic is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries.*)

The personnel of the 64th Battalion were not the only military passengers on the vessel: the 73rd Battalion of Canadian Infantry, an unidentified Draft of the Coburg Heavy Battery and the 8th Canadian Field Ambulance – this latter undertaking the ship's medical services during the crossing – were Private Doyle's fellow passengers, almost twenty-five hundred souls all told.

Adriatic sailed on April 1, one of a convoy of three troop transports – the others also liners now in the service of the King, *Baltic* and *Empress of Britain* – and escorted by the elderly cruiser *Carnarvon*.

The vessel docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool at three o'clock in the afternoon of April 9. It is certain that some of the personnel immediately left by train for the Canadian Camp at Bramshott in the southern county of Hampshire, but all that seems to be recorded of Private Doyle is that he must have been stationed at or near the Kentish community of Lydd by June 10 to 12*.

**However, some battalions arrived at Bramshott to then be designated as 'reserve' – as was the case of the 64th - and transferred to the Canadian establishment at Shorncliffe.*

(continued)

The aforementioned are the dates and the place on and at which he was reported as being *absent without leave*, a misdemeanour for which he was thereupon awarded twenty-four hours' detention and the loss of nine days' pay*.

**The sentence may have been influenced by the fact that he had also been absent during December of 1915 while still in Canada and there had incurred seventy-two hours' detention.*

On June 24, Private Doyle was transferred to the 12th Canadian (Reserve) Battalion based at Shorncliffe – just south of the port and town of Folkestone, also in Kent - there to prepare for a posting to *active service* on the Continent in the near future. In fact, that *near future* was to be only days away.



(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*)

On June 28, 1916, Private Doyle was... *taken on strength* of the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) and crossed the English Channel, likely from nearby Folkestone to Boulogne – although this is not confirmed - on the French coast, some two hours' sailing-time away.



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

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

From the ship on which he had taken passage, Private Doyle was transported to the Canadian General Base Depot in the vicinity of the French port-city of Le Havre on the estuary of the River Seine. It was then to be a further three weeks, on July 21, before he was despatched from there to join his unit.



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

This he did two days later again, on July 23, 1916, when, as one of the draft of forty-two *other ranks* to arrive from the 64th Battalion via Le Havre, he reported to *duty* with the 25th Battalion at a place identified in the Battalion War Diary only as *Field*. However, the 5th Brigade, of which the 25th was a battalion, was at the time in the area of St-Éloi*, just to the south of the remnants of the medieval city of Ypres.



(continued)

Private Doyle's arrival apparently corresponded to the end of a period spent by the parent unit in reserve as the War Diary entry of the day then goes on to record that the... *Battalion proceeded to trenches relieving the 26th Battalion, 6th Brigade**.

**The trenches in question were in the Vierstraat sector, perhaps half-a-dozen kilometres to the south-west of the city of Ypres (today Ieper). This concurs with the aforementioned disposition of the 5th Brigade.*

Whether or not Private Doyle and his fellow new-comers were thrust headlong into the fray on their first day on the *Western Front* appears not to be documented; however, it would surely not have been long before he was to be introduced to the rigours and the routines of trench warfare*.

**During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, perhaps a hundred metres or so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.*



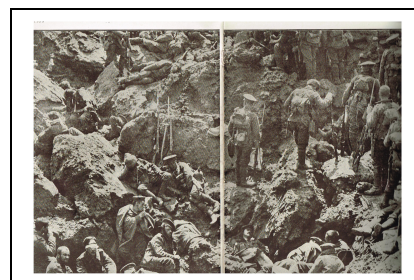
Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

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

* * * * *

The 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force had already been serving in France and Belgium for some ten months by this time, since September of the previous year, 1915. It was a unit of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2nd Canadian Division, and had been in service on the Continent continuously since its arrival on the Western Front.

In early April of 1916, the 2nd Canadian Division had undergone its baptism of fire in a major action. It had been at St-Éloi – near to where Private Doyle had reported - that, at the end of March, on the 27th, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then followed up with an infantry assault. The newly-arrived Canadian formation had been ordered to capitalize on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.



(Previous page: *An attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines, perhaps at St-Éloi – from Illustration*)

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which turned the just-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and a resolute German defence greeted the newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.

Then in June the Battalion had been involved in the fighting in the area of *Mount Sorrel, Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60, Railway Dugouts* and *Maple Copse*, all just to the south-east of the city of Ypres. The Canadian 3rd Division had been the main recipient of the enemy's offensive thrust but the 25th Battalion of the 2nd Canadian Division had played a role sufficiently important for the name *Mount Sorrel* to become the first battle honour won by the unit during the *Great War*.



(Right above: *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*)

* * * * *

From August 4 to 20, the period just subsequent to Private Doyle's arrival for duty, the 25th Battalion was in reserve well to the rear, so well to the rear, in fact, that it was deemed safe enough for His Majesty the King and his son the Prince of Wales to pay a visit on August 14. Six days later, on August 20, the unit was sent forward for a four-day tour in the trenches after which it was withdrawn not only from the *Ypres Salient* but from Belgium into northern France to the vicinity of Steenvoorde. From there Private Doyle and his comrades-in-arms were ordered to march westward to the area of the village of Mouille via Buyssecheure on August 27 and 28.

The following week at Mouille was spent in becoming familiar with the British Lee-Enfield Mark III rifle which was replacing the Canadian-made Ross rifle, and in training for a Canadian role in the British summer campaign of 1916, an offensive which to that date had not been proceeding exactly to plan.

By that 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 costing the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

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

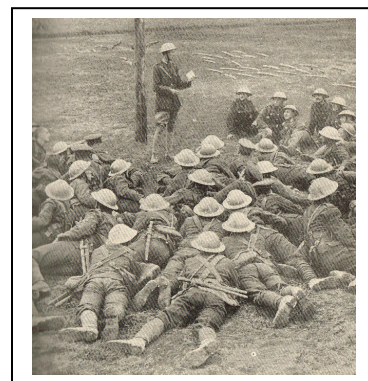
(Right below: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcelette – photograph from 2015*)

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



(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-Courcelette (see below), September 1916. – from *The War Illustrated**)

Meanwhile, at one o'clock in the morning of September 5 a train carrying the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) pulled out of the station at Arques. At approximately six o'clock on the evening of September 10 the unit arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the Brickfields (*La Briqueterie*) in the proximity of the provincial town of Albert. The first five hours or so of Private Doyle's transfer to *the Somme* had been made by train: the remaining five days had been done on foot.

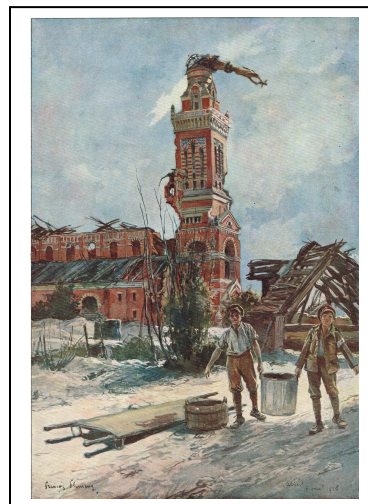


(Right below: *Canadian soldiers at work in Albert, the already-damaged basilica in the background – from *Illustration**)

Several days followed during which the Battalion worked at or in the vicinity of the *Brickfields Camp*. That is not to say that life could not be dangerous behind the lines: a five-hundred man working-party incurred eleven casualties from shell-fire on September 13, of which two were fatalities.

On the morrow the Battalion was ordered forward into dug-outs in assembly areas. On the morning of the next day again, September 15, the Canadians were going to the attack.

Excerpt from 25th Battalion War Diary entry for September 15, 1916: *5th Brigade attacked and captured the Town of Courcelette... the 25th Battalion moved forward as though on General Inspection the young soldiers behaving like veterans, going through very heavy artillery barrage without a quiver...*



The following two days were spent consolidating the gains of the 15th, before the Battalion was relieved on the 18th. At this time it withdrew, eventually reaching the camp at the Brickfields on the following day, the 19th.

(continued)

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



Of the six-hundred ninety personnel who went over *the top* on the day of the assault, the War Diary recorded thirty-six dead, one-hundred ninety-one wounded and seventy-seven as *missing in action**.

**It seems likely that some of the missing later returned to duty as a later Diary entry records two-hundred fifty-eight casualties all told.*

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



On September 27 Lance Corporal Doyle (see below) and the 25th Battalion once more made their way to the front lines forward of Pozières, on this occasion relieving the 14th Battalion, Canadian Infantry. The following days were spent consolidating positions and also taking shelter from the heavy German artillery fire which was to cause a number of casualties.

On October 1 the Battalion – its operational strength by then apparently reduced to two-hundred all ranks and twelve machine-guns – *received orders to attack and capture “at all costs” enemy trenches known as KENORA and REGINA... “B”, “C” and “D” Companies... were to proceed over KENORA up to REGINA, which they did, but by the time they had got to the wire the casualties had been so heavy that only one officer was left... and about thirty men... (War Diary Appendix)*



The attack was a failure and the survivors were obliged to fall back to *Kenora Trench*. Total casualties during the action were one-hundred twelve.

(Right above: *Ninety-eight years later, the land on which the action was fought, as seen from Regina Trench Cemetery – photograph from 2014*)

It was during this period spent at *the Somme* that Private Doyle was promoted on two occasions: on September 22 to the rank of lance corporal; on October 1, to the rank of corporal.

On the night of October 1-2 the 25th Battalion retired from *the Battle* - and from the area of - *the Somme*. At first making its way westwards on foot the unit then turned northward to pass to the west of the battered city of Arras and then some thirty kilometres beyond and to the north-west. On October 15 Corporal Doyle and his Battalion passed into Brigade Reserve at or in the vicinity of Bully.

(Right above: *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*)



The winter of 1916-1917 had been one of the everyday grind of life in and out of the trenches. There was to be little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides.

This latter activity was encouraged by the High Command who felt it to be a morale booster which also kept the troops in the right offensive frame of mind – the troops who were ordered to carry them out in general loathed these operations.



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

The 25th Battalion remained in the area and in the trenches of places such as Bully-Grenay, Angres and Bruay for the next four months or so before returning southward to Neuville St-Vaast. One of the neighbouring communities, in German hands at the time, was the village of Vimy.

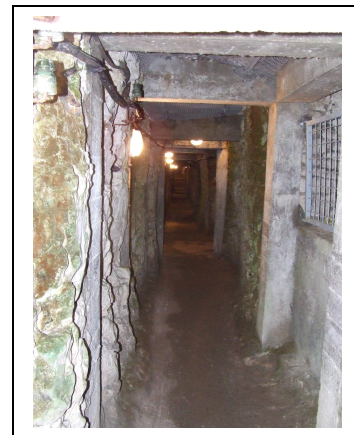
Towards the end of the month of March, on the 23rd, the Battalion was withdrawn well to the rear, to Maisnil-Bouche, there to undergo intensive training. The exercises were to last until, and including, April 7, only two days before the training was to become the real thing. On the final five days, the unit had been sent to become familiar with ground re-arranged so as to resemble the terrain to be attacked.

On April 8... *Battalion less 1 platoon per company moved from MAISNIL BOUCHE to concentration area at BOIS DES ALLEUX. In the evening the Battalion moved up to its position...via cross country route...* apparently not via those well-documented tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety.



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

On April 9 in that spring of 1917, the British Army 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 daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the War for the British, one of the positive episodes being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

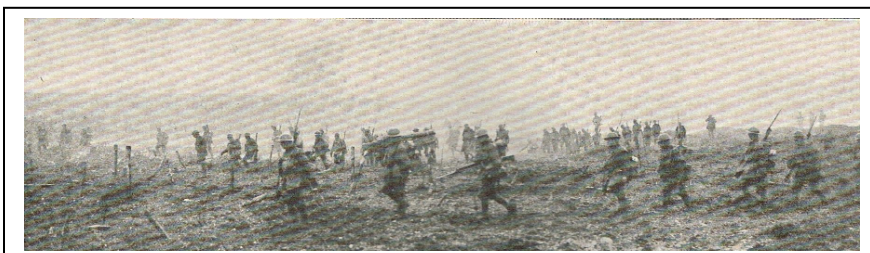


The French offensive was to be a disaster.

(Preceding page: *One of the few remaining galleries – Grange Tunnel – through which Canadian troops moved on the days and hours prior to the battle, is still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years later – photograph from 2008(?)*)

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

(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, 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*)



The Canadian 2nd Division was not responsible for the capture of Vimy Ridge itself, but for the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the southern slope and therefore on the right-hand side of the attack.

The Battalion's objectives apparently had soon been captured and much of the remainder of the day was spent in consolidating these newly-won positions.



On the day of the attack, April 9 – there is no precise time recorded – Corporal Doyle was promoted for a third time, to the rank of Acting Serjeant (*with pay*).

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

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

There had been, on the first days, April 9 and 10, the opportunity to advance through the shattered enemy defences – the highly-touted, and highly unlikely, *breakthrough* – but such a follow-up of the previous day's success proved to be impossible. Thus the Germans were gifted the time to close the breach and the conflict once more reverted to one of inertia.

Nor was the remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* to be fought in the manner of the first two days and, by the end of those five weeks, little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success.

After having been relieved on April 12 following the efforts of the attack at Vimy Ridge, the 25th Battalion was back in the front-line trenches on April 26.

**(Excerpt from Battalion War Diary Appendices and from the Battalion War Diary journal)
27th April, 1917 – INSTRUCTIONS FOR ATTACK ON ARLEUX LOOP**

THE ATTACK

The attack will be made by the 25th Battalion from the jumping off trenches at Zero under cover of a creeping shrapnel and machine gun barrage...

Front line – 28th At zero hour 4.25 am, C & D Coys attacked enemy objective. Owing to wire and stiff opposition on part of opposing troops considerable time elapsed before operation could be cleared up and our new front line definitely located. Eventually it was ascertained that both companies were holding their objective, having however suffered fairly heavy casualties.



Many German dead were found in new positions. D Company were engaged in heavy bayonet fighting with enemy in first stage. As soon as objective was satisfactorily cleared the advance posts were pushed forward and several hundred yards more of enemy ground was secured and our position protected...Two officers were killed, two wounded...and 100 O.R. killed and wounded.

(Right above: Just another small, nondescript community in northern France, re-constructed afterwards, this is Arleux-en-Gohelle almost a century after the battles of the Great War. – photograph from 2014)

The son of Thomas Doyle, master mariner and sea-captain, and of Margaret Doyle* (née Devine) of King’s Cove before the family moved in 1902 to 281, Water Street West in St. John’s, capital city of Newfoundland, he was also brother to Wm. V., and to Gerald-Stanley.**



Serjeant Doyle was reported as having been killed in action on April 28 of 1917, while serving during the attack at Arleux-en-Gohelle.

(Right: The photograph of Private Doyle is from the Ancestry.ca website)

Benedict Joseph Doyle had enlisted at the declared age of twenty years and nine months: date of birth November 1, 1894.

Serjeant (sic - see headstone*) Benedict Joseph Doyle was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).**

(continued)



****On April 26 of 1916 Private Doyle had written a will in which he bequeathed his all to his mother. In the same month he began to allot to her a monthly ten dollars from his pay.***

*****This brother is probably better known as Gerald S. Doyle, successful businessman and also a fervent lover of all things Newfoundland.***

******This memorial stone erected in Belvedere Roman Catholic Cemetery in St. John's commemorates the sacrifice of...Sergeant Bennett J. Doyle aged twenty-three years killed in action at Vimy Ridge, April 28, 1917, and buried in France.***



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 25, 2023.