For $1.10 A DAY

20th Anniversary Edition

Private Thomas O'Connor
Canadian Expeditionary Force
1917-1919

Marc Leroux

Dedication

To my mother, first born of Tom and Grace.

This is dedicated to Thomas O'Connor, Private, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1917-1919, and to all the others who served their country in the Great War.

> *"Honour the Canadians who on the fields at Flanders and of France, fought in the cause of allies, with sacrifice and devotion."*[1]

Special thanks to Gerry Leroux, and Carole and Bill Barton, who were invaluable in helping in tracking down details that were not easily accessible from the United States. A very special thanks to Penney Adams for proofreading, doing the original cover design as well as the cover for this reissue and supporting me through this project. Also, many thanks to the participants of the on-line CEF Study Group (www.cefsg.com) and the Great War Forum for their extraordinary help (www.1914-1918.org).

1 Canadian Monument, Ypres Belgium

Preface to the 20th Anniversary Edition (2024)

Welcome to the 20th Anniversary edition of "For $1.10 a day", the story of Regimental Number 3205073 Private Thomas O'Connor, a soldier with the 31st Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (C.E.F.) who served with the Canadian Overseas forces in 1918-1919. Tom O'Connor was my grandfather, my mother's father. In several respects he was a conflicted man. He never talked about the war to his children, yet he kept momentous of it in the attic. He was a proud member of the Huntingdon Legion, and marched in Remembrance Day parades, yet in conversations with his children he quite understandably deplored war. A man who was proud of his service, and didn't want anyone else to have to experience it for themselves.

When I first wrote this, it was to try to understand what he had experienced, and I got quite involved in learning more about World War 1, starting the Canadian Great War Project (canadianGreatWarProject.com) now operated and maintained by the University of Victoria. For my work in creating this resource I was honoured to receive the Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation, presented by The Honourable Laurence MacAuley.

Over time, my interest remained, but my available time was greatly reduced by increasing work responsibilities, and my studies in the Great War became almost non-existent. This year, newly retired, I enrolled in Program 60, The Ohio State University's program that allows seniors over 60 to audit courses at no cost. I took a course in "The Experience of War in the Twentieth Century", and my interest was reignited (Merci, Professeur Cabanes). As a result, I decided to re-read and update this book, the first time since 2007, and was encouraged by how most of the facts and assumptions presented held up with what I have learned since then. That said, there were some inaccuracies, also things that I have since learned, and a few spelling and grammar mistakes[2] that I corrected. New material has been published, including Tim Cook's masterful "Shock Troops of the British Empire, Canadians Fighting in the Great War 1917-1918", volume 2 of his History of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War published in 2008. I didn't have to re-write much, but I did make quite a few additions and clarifications, totaling about 12 additional pages. And I had fun doing it. There are still things I may go back to; the citations need to be put in place, something I didn't do properly 20 years ago, although all the material I referenced is listed at the end.

Anyone who serves in the Military deserves our sincere respect. Those that served in any war, and especially in the First World War, experienced horrors we cannot imagine. A famous poet once said "And a lot of guys went, and a lot of guys didn't come back. And the ones that came back weren't the same again.[3]". He was speaking about Vietnam, but the sentiment applies to any conflict. I'm sure that my grandfather carried the scars of the war for all his life. I am pleased to reissue this. I hope you enjoy it.

Marc Leroux
Blacklick, Ohio September 2024

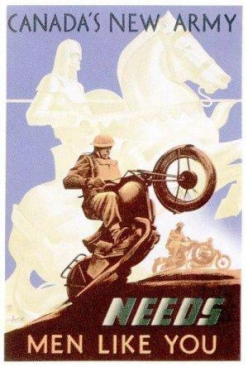
[2] As anyone who knows me can well imagine.
[3] Bruce Springsteen's introduction to "The River," as included on the album Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band: Live 1975–85, recorded on September 30, 1985 at the LA Memorial Coliseum in Los Angeles, California.

Preface to the original

It has been called the "Great War", and "The War to End All Wars". It was neither. It was a start to 75 years of continued fighting, lasting until the end of the Cold War. To most Canadians, the World Wars are forgotten, and the headlines of today: Israel, Gaza, and Ukraine[4] are the reference for combat. Few today have knowledge of Dieppe or Juno Beach from the Second War, much less Passchendaele, Vimy Ridge or the Scarpe from the First. Over 650,000 men served with the Canadians during the conflict of 1914-1919, over 65,000 gave their lives. All the Canadians who served in the First World War are now dead. We owe it to them to remember and honour their sacrifice.

The First World War brought many changes to the way wars were fought. It introduced trench warfare, airplanes, that at first provided reconnaissance and were later used to strafe the enemy and bomb cities and troops. By late 1916, armored vehicles and tanks were being used at the front, evolving the concept of a cavalry which had disappeared from military thinking three years earlier. Submarines, too, came into prominence, challenging surface ships and disrupting supply lines with a stealth and lethality previously unimagined. Poison gas, introduced early in the war and used by both sides, added a horrifying new dimension to the battlefield, indiscriminately maiming and killing soldiers with invisible clouds of lethal chemicals. The war introduced a new level of carnage not seen before. High explosive shells killed from a great distance, obliterating or destroying beyond recognition those nearby. Fully half of the British and Commonwealth troops killed in the war were never found or properly identified. It also changed the basic notion of warfare. Civilian populations became a part of the war with the occupation of Belgium and France, and indiscriminate long-range bombing did not differentiate between military or civilian targets. Rules of conventional warfare were ignored. Stretcher bearers became targets at the front, Hospitals and Hospital Ships such as the Llandovery Castle were attacked, the red cross on trains carrying casualties became targets for arial bombing.

The war also ushered in a new social environment. The class system in Britain was scrutinized by the influx of soldiers from the "colonies", who had discarded it, and as the war progressed Officers were promoted on merit rather than birth. This war was a factor in women's rights, primarily in the right to vote. The advances made in motor vehicles and airplanes changed the way that we live and work. Russia contributed the social revolution, strikes for better pay and working conditions. Maps were redrawn, as was the political system in several countries. The war also shaped Canada as a nation, lessening the influence that England had on the dominions and hastening the move to a self-governing nation.



The Canadians that served in the First World War were not professional soldiers. They were young men from the cities, towns and farms; the late American historian Stephen Ambrose popularized the very apt term "Citizen Soldiers" to describe these types of men. They came from all over Canada, some 650 from the South-West Quebec area, and approximately 40,000 of our American cousins[5], who didn't wait for the United States to join the war in 1917. Many of the men volunteered, some induced by emotional ties to

[44] In the original version, these were Iraq, Bosnia and Afghanistan, also mostly forgotten
[5] The numbers range from 20,000 to 40,000. Historian Norm Christie puts it at 40,000.

England, some for the adventure, still others because their country asked them. As the horrors of war became apparent and casualties skyrocketed, enlistments started to drop. In the end, Prime Minster Robert Borden divided the country by invoking the Military Service Act in late August 1917, enabling conscription of men aged 18 to 35..

Private Thomas O'Connor 1918

This is the story of one man, Thomas O'Connor, a 27-year-old farmer who was born in the Chateauguay Valley of southwestern Quebec. He served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) in Canada, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Wales and Scotland.

There are several factors that led to me writing this, dating back almost 40 years. It started in my youth I spent a lot of time at my Grandparents farm, outside of Huntingdon, Quebec. In the attic was my Grandfathers World War 1 helmet, bayonet, gas mask and a picture of him in uniform[6]. There was never any doubt in my mind that he was a heroic soldier.

In 1986 I spent some time in the French town of Lille, close to the Belgium border, an area where much of the fighting during the war occurred. My hosts asked if I had seen the Canadian National Vimy Memorial that was just down the road. I hadn't, and they explained that it was a memorial to Canadians who had served in the First World War. They explained the circumstances that led to the creation of the memorial, told me about the maple trees, imported from Canada that lined the approach and I remember thinking that they knew more about parts of Canadian history than I did. That was what started my appreciation, and study, of Canadian history.

Finding out about my grandfather in the Great War has been a project that has sat on the shelf for much too long. I decided I wanted to do this around 1995. In 2003-2004 I made the time.

A helmet, a photo, documents archived in a government facility, and words cannot reconstruct what happened 90 years ago. Veterans from the war were reticent to talk of their experiences, and Tom O'Connor was no different[7]. The story in these pages has been pieced together from the military documents of Private Thomas O'Connor, and many other historical and contemporary sources.

The title, "For $1.10 a Day", comes from the amount that Privates in the Canadian Expeditionary Force were paid: $1.00 pay with an additional 10 cents for overseas service[8]. The flag on the cover is a Canadian Ensign[9], the closest that Canada had to its own flag[10] in 1917 and one of the various flags

[6] The picture on the left was likely taken in Calgary, Alberta in January 1918. This was a common practice for newly inducted soldiers.

[7] My mother said that he would talk to my uncle, Bruce Anderson, who served with the US forces in Korea, and with friends at the Huntingdon Legion.

[8] The average wage for Canadian workers in 1917 was between $0.25 and $0.50 per hour

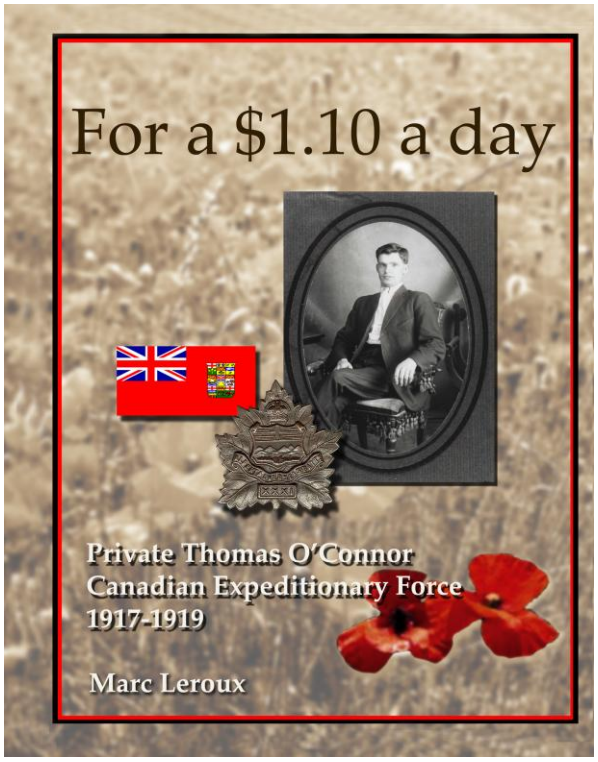
[9] This Canadian ensign was carried by the 42nd Battalion at Vimy Ridge and is currently mounted in my home office. The missing pieces at the edge of the flag were cut out by soldiers after the battle, to keep as commemorative pieces.

carried by Canadians during the war. The crest is from a cap badge of the 31st Battalion, 2nd Infantry that Thomas O'Connor served in.

It is impossible to be certain about events that happened over 90 years ago, so there are many suppositions, effectively guesses, that have been made. A basic presumption that has been made is that Thomas O'Connor, like most of the conscripted men, served in the Infantry as a front-line combat soldier, and not in a support role. Within this document the word "likely" implies something that, in all probability, happened. It is something that can be verified or has been sourced from multiple documents. The word "possibly" indicates something that cannot be substantiated through verification but is reasonable to assume based on other events or factors. "Typically," relates to anecdotal references to other soldiers in similar circumstances. Where there are question marks (?) in transcripts of documents, it is because the words could not be made out.

There is a strong likelihood that there are errors in this manuscript. They are entirely mine and I trust they will not distract the reader to any great extent.

Marc Leroux
Blacklick, Ohio



Cover to the original release

[10] In 1914 the official flag of Canada was the Union Jack. On February 15, 1965, Canada adopted the Maple Leaf as the National flag of Canada. The Union Jack is still used and may be flown alongside the Maple Leaf flag for ceremonial purposes.

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Introduction

By 1914, despite ongoing diplomacy, it seemed inevitable that Europe would go to war. The imperialistic tendencies of the European powers ensured this would happen; the war had been simmering for 15 years. In 1879 the independent Teutonic states were unified into a single Germany by Kaiser William I. Germany had isolated France from their foreign policy in the 1880's, seeing France's expansionist policies as a threat. By the late 1880's, France and Russia had forged an economic alliance and by 1895 had established a mutual protection treaty. Germany, in the middle of these two powers, aligned itself with Austria-Hungary and Italy. By 1904, Great Britain, with its empire at its peak, had abandoned its historical conflict with France and entered friendly discussions. In 1907 Britain had secured an alliance with Russia. Germany felt threatened by having non-aligned nations on two fronts, coupled with the British mastery of the seas. In 1908, Austria had officially annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbia protested this, which led to a Serbian alliance with Russia. Tensions were rising between Austria and Serbia; the Austrians were looking for an excuse to start a war with Serbia.

Despite optimism in diplomatic solutions, by the early 1900's almost every country in Europe believed that a War was coming. No one could conceive the magnitude of the slaughter they would be unleashing.

On June 28th, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated in Sarajevo, and the Serbian government was blamed. This touched off a conflict between Austria and Russia, who sided with the Serbs. Germany, bound by a military pact with Austria, entered the fray. Other countries aligned against Austria and Germany, and on August 3rd, Germany declared war on France and invaded via neutral Belgium. Britain, which had guaranteed Belgium's neutrality, was alarmed not only by this violation but also by the threat that a German presence on the Belgian coast posed to its naval dominance. As a result, Britain sided with France and entered the war on August 4th. Because of Britain's involvement, Canada, a Dominion in the British Empire with no say in its foreign policy, could not remain neutral either legally or morally, and by August 8th, 1914, Britain accepted Canada's offer of 25,000 troops.[11].

Canada was at war.

If you drive north from Arras, France, on the road to Lille, you will see two massive white columns rising in the distance. Turning onto the road leading up to these columns, you will notice the maple trees lining the way. Without realizing it, you have crossed onto Canadian soil, land forever granted to Canada by a grateful French nation after the First World War, in recognition of the sacrifices made here. This land, soaked with the blood of a young nation's soldiers, is where the Canadian National Vimy Memorial stands, perched on a ridge overlooking the Plains of Douai. It was here, in April 1917, that the Canadian Corps secured a crucial victory during the Battle of Vimy Ridge—a victory that has since become a defining moment in Canada's national identity.

11 Morton, A Military History of Canada

Typically, when anyone reflects on Canada's involvement in World War I, they think of Vimy Ridge. Because of the successful and dedicated participation of Canadian troops in the battle, it is often referred to as the moment that sparked "The Birth of Canada," when Canadian forces earned global recognition and respect. On Easter Monday, April 9, 1917, the Canadian Corps captured more ground, more prisoners, and more guns than any previous Allied offensive in two-and-a-half years of fighting. Many of the men who had enlisted early in the war did so because of their British heritage, eager to fight for the British Empire. However, after Vimy, these men—who had once seen themselves as British—returned home proud Canadians, part of a nation that had begun to forge its own identity through the sacrifices of its people.

Vimy Ridge Memorial, France

Without downplaying the importance of Vimy Ridge, the battles that took place the following year, in August through November 1918 in northern France, were much more strategic and forced an earlier-than-expected end to the war. These were the battles where the Allied troops, spearheaded by the Canadians and Australians, and with the participation of fresh American troops, broke through the enemy lines and pushed the Germans back into Belgium, starting the retreat that eventually ended in the Armistice on November 11th, 1918.

It was these later battles that Thomas O'Connor fought in, while in France in 1918.

This is his story. The First World War was fought on multiple fronts: Africa, the Balkans, the Eastern (Russian) and the Western Front. This is not intended to be a history of the war. Tom O'Connor fought in the Western Front area of Northern France, and this story is restricted to that area. I can't do justice to the circumstances he found himself in. I can only try to give some sense of the horror of the situation he found himself in.

Call up

In 1914, many Canadians were emigrants or only one generation removed from their British

roots. When war was declared on August 6, 1914, there were 30,000 volunteers from Militia ranks that immediately joined the army, most of these young men who had been born in England. Many of them were looking for a "Great Adventure". Most expected that the war would last 6 months and were afraid they would arrive too late to join the fight. Many thought that this would be a trip "home" to see parents and other relatives. The first contingent of Canadians arrived in England in mid-October 1914. By 1916 there were over 300,000 recruits, but losses in France were beginning to mount.

In the First World War, the Canadian troops, along with the other Commonwealth[12] countries including Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, became part of the British Army. While the Canadian Government insisted[13] that Canadians remain together as a Canadian Corps, they fought at the direction of a British Military staff.

In April 1917, the four Canadian Divisions, under the command of General Sir Julian Byng, a career British soldier and future Governor General of Canada, fought together for the first time at Vimy Ridge, just north of the French town of Arras. Some British troops and Artillery were present, but this was a "Canadian" operation. The Ridge represented the high ground in the area, and French troops had tried repeatedly to take it from the Germans, with fatalities of close to 50,000 over two-and-a-half years. On April 9, 1917, the "Byng Boys" succeeded in taking the Ridge in an extraordinary display of innovative tactics and personal courage. As a result of this, and subsequent battles, the Canadians, along with the Australians, became the lead assault troops of the British Army[14]. The success of the troops at Vimy was instrumental in bringing the Canadian Divisions under the control of newly Knighted General Sir Arthur Currie, a Vancouver real estate agent and former Militia commander. For the first time in history, a Canadian was commanding Canadian troops.

At Vimy, casualties were high, with 3,000 dead and 7,000 wounded. Enlistment was on the decline and there were limited reinforcements available for losses of this magnitude. Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden was in Europe in May 1917, and spoke to Canadian soldiers in France, and those hospitalized in England. He recognized the urgent need to provide support for the troops, and adequate replacements for the killed and wounded. Upon his return to Canada, he announced that he would be introducing Conscription, a highly unpopular act that threatened to divide Canada. The Military Service Act was passed in August 1917, and bitterly divided the country.

Of the 400,000 men registered as fit for service under the Military Service Act, only 100,000 were actually called to service based on the criteria for the 1st draft of enlistees: unmarried males aged 18 to 35. Of this number, 47,000 went overseas and 24,000 saw combat in France before the Armistice in November 1918[15]. The first conscripts arrived in France in mid-August 1918 and were quickly sent in to reinforce the front-line battalions after their severe losses at Amiens and Arras during the German offences in the spring of 1918.

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[12] The term Commonwealth is used, although in a practical sense it did not come into usage to describe the relationship between England and the Dominions until 1917.

[13] Much to the displeasure of Field Marshal Douglas Haig, in charge of the British Army.

[14] For a comprehensive perspective, I highly recommend Tim Cook's Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918

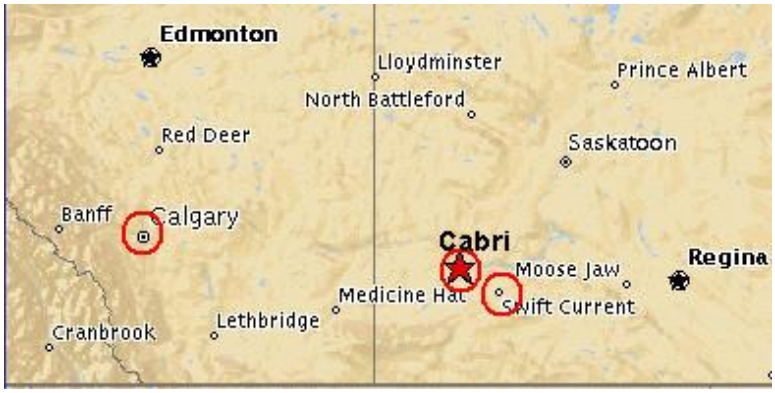
[15] Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, Colonel A Fortescue Duguid

In 1917, Thomas O'Connor was working on a farm outside of Cabri, Saskatchewan, likely having traveled west from Huntingdon prior to 1915, possibly as early as 1906. Work was scarce in the east those days and many men traveled across the country to find some in the newly expanding western part of Canada[16]. It is unknown if he went west on a permanent basis, but it is likely he did this seasonally on one of the "Harvest Trains[17]" that ran from Eastern Canada, to earn extra money as a migrant farm worker.

Cabri is a small village, located approximately 40 miles northwest of Swift Current that was founded in 1916. In 1917 there were approximately 600 residents in the village and the surrounding area. He received his call up as the first group of conscripts under the Military Service Act and traveled to Swift Current for his military medical checkup on Nov. 8, 1917[18]. At the time he was 27 years, 3 months old. The examination paints a fairly complete picture of him:

- Date of Birth[19]: 31 October 1891
- Height 5' 6.5" (194 cm, close to the average height, 5'7" for Canadian soldiers[20])
- Weight 150 Lbs. (68 kg, average for Canadian soldiers)
- Eyes Grey
- Hair Auburn
- Last vaccinated 1906 (left arm)

His physical development, at that time, was listed as 'poor', but good enough for overseas service. He was assigned Regimental number 3205073.



16 A search of the Huntingdon Gleaner archives (1863-1941) listed 41 entries for Saskatchewan, 52 for Alberta. Research into the soldiers from the southwest area of Quebec shows that over 20% enlisted in areas west of Ontario.

17 Harvest Trains first ran on July 28, 1890, to provide workers for the western Autumn Harvest

18 This requires some explanation. While the MSA became law on August 29, 1917, it had been passed by Parliament earlier that summer. While he could not officially become part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force until the law came into effect, the Government had already started the process of registration and classification, hence the date of August 8 preceding the official passage of the MSA.

19 This is off by a year. His birth record in the Parish registry list his birth as 31 Oct. 1890. BMS200 database, record 6882127.

20 Personal database, the source for www.canadiangreatwarproject.com.

Map of Cabri/Calgary area

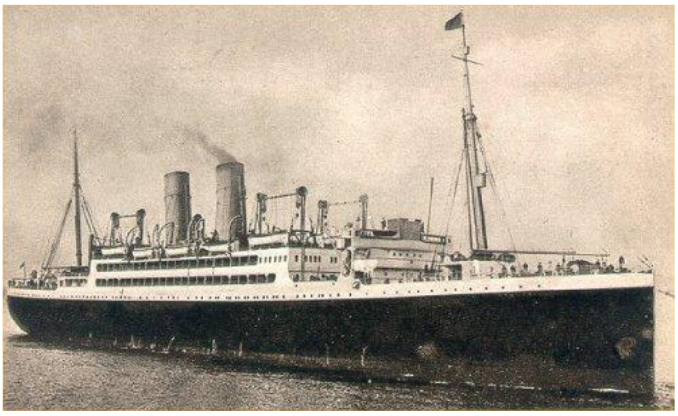
He was told to report for enlistment in early January, in Calgary. It is likely that he cleared up his affairs in Cabri, and then traveled to Calgary. He likely spent Christmas and New Years (1918) with his sister Maggie who was living in Calgary[21] at the time.

Tom O'Connor didn't have to serve. Even though he was conscripted, farmers were entitled to an exemption. It wasn't until July of 1918 that all exemptions were eliminated, and by that time it would have been too late for conscripted soldiers to have seen action in France.

Thomas O'Connor was enlisted into the First Depot Battalion, Alberta Regiment of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (C.E.F.) as a Private soldier and assigned the Regimental number: 3205073. This was to be part of the newly formed 5th Canadian Division, eventually broken up to replace casualties incurred at Passchendaele in late 1917. On January 2, 1918 he stood, raised his right hand, and along with many other conscripts took his oath:

> *"I do make Oath, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs and Successors, and that I will in duty bound honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, in Person, Crown and Dignity, against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and all of the Generals and officers set above me. So help me God."*

Pte. Thomas O'Connor received basic training in Calgary, while awaiting transport to England. For troops stationed in Canada, this typically involved physical training, primarily marching, military training and basic weaponry. It wasn't all work, there are records of the Battalion holding a dance one weekend, another weekend that had Battalion boxing matches. On Sunday, 10 February 1918, he, along with others from the First Depot Battalion, traveled by train to Quebec City under the command of Captain W. E. Trueman[22]. They likely stopped a number of times on the trip, and marched though some of the small towns. This provided both exercise for the troops, and a patriotic display for the townsfolk.


SS Melita circa 1918

Transport to England

On February 19, 1918, Pte. Thomas O'Connor was aboard the SS Melita

[21] His older sister Margaret (1886-1963) lived at 340 14th Ave. West, Calgary. She married Albert Evans in Calgary in June 1921
22 Calgary Herald, February 11, 1918

enroute to England[23], boarding Quebec City, with one final stop in Halifax before heading overseas. The Melita was a new ship; this was the return portion of its maiden voyage. It was rated for 1,800 passengers and it is likely that at least 50% more troops were put on board, possibly as many as 5,500: comfort being secondary to the need to transport troops efficiently. It's difficult to imagine what the soldiers thought they left Halifax and the land disappeared behind them. For many, this was their first view of an ocean. The largest body of water that Tom O'Connor grew up near was Lake St-Anicet, an expansion in the St. Lawrence River where on any but the foggiest mornings you can easily see the other side. He had probably also seen Lake Superior from the train heading west but had never experienced anything as vast as the Atlantic. One thing is very likely though. most accounts state that a lot of the men became seasick, often for days. Undoubtedly, the private soldiers on board were cramped, which did not help the situation. The Canadian Pacific Ocean Services owned the Melita, but they had turned it, and all other ships, over to the British Military for the duration of the war. Most Canadian ships were registered in Britain and were therefore appropriated by the British at the start of the war. Canadian Pacific had no say in the matter, nor was the Canadian Government consulted, which became a key issue in Canada demanding more autonomy from Britain. The Melita was capable of traveling at about 15 knots which was the recommended sped for both fuel conservation but also faster than the German submarines, but nonetheless it was still a target. The crew, and undoubtedly the soldiers kept a sharp eye for them. At night the ship was darkened, running lights were off, and smoking was not allowed on deck for fear of giving their positions away to the subs. The ship safely arrived at Liverpool, England on or about March 2nd, 10 to 12 days being the typical time for a trans-Atlantic crossing. German U-Boats were usually very active around Ireland, and the overactive imagination of the soldiers on board typically related sightings of 3 or more, even when the official records showed that none had been seen.

Map of the British Isles showing route to Bramshott

It is likely that the arriving troops received a cursory medical exam and were quarantined for a period of time to protect other troops from contagious diseases. There is evidence that Pte. O'Connor received a dental exam on February 27th, likely at a Military camp near Liverpool.

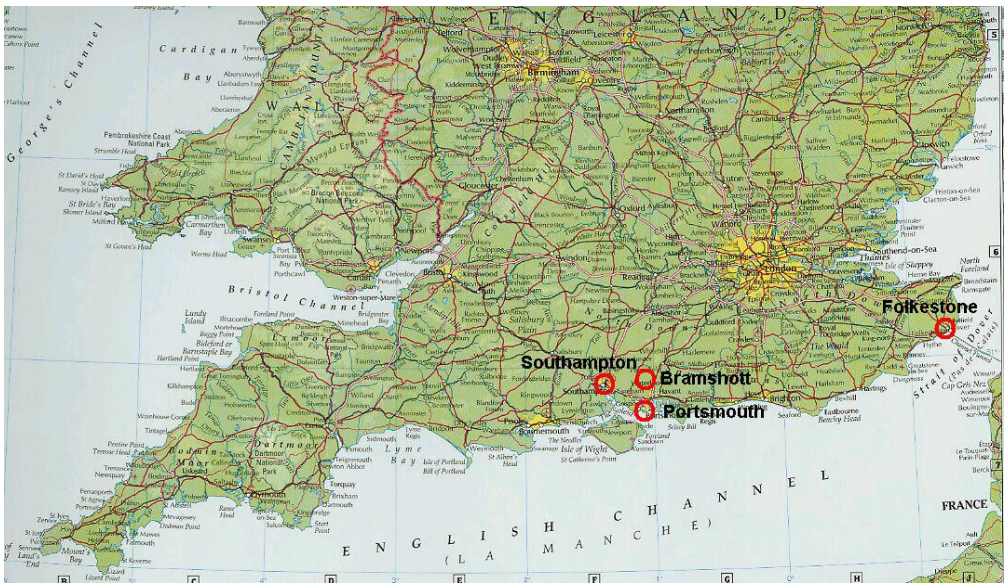
By 1918, the training ground for the CEF had moved from Salisbury Plain to Bramshott, England. Bramshott is in the south of England, not too far from the facilities on Salisbury

[23] The documentation for Thomas O'Connor lists Halifax as the debarkation point. The Melita did not stop in Halifax in 1918, so it is presumed that Thomas O'Connor embarked at Quebec City and Halifax was listed as the last Canadian point passed by the ship.

Plains and closer to the European launch points of Folkestone, Southampton and Portsmouth.

One soldier describes the trip from Liverpool to the camps after disembarking from the ship:

> *"A tedious period of waiting then followed and it was afternoon before we boarded trains that conveyed us over nearly every railway system in England to our destination"*[24]



Map of Southern England showing training camps and ports

Many Canadians wrote home about trips through England, universally marveling at the small size of the trains. Pte. Thomas O'Connor arrived in Bramshott, England March 4, 1918, assigned to the 21st Infantry regiment and underwent 5 months of military training in preparation for combat service. Little has been recorded in Pte. O'Connor's records about this time. Typically, arriving troops spent the initial weeks with basic training, focusing on physical training including several forced marches, the lengths increasing every week. It also included firearm training, often with blank ammunition, live rounds being scarce. Foot and arm drills and entrenching training, with special instruction in bayonet fighting, grenade throwing, machine-gunnery, signaling and map reading were staples of the training. Basic training was typically followed by five weeks of company training, two of battalion and two of division training.

The training made the instruction they had received in Canada appear to be trivial, but it could not prepare the men for actual combat. In his war diary, Donald Fraser, who underwent basic training in 1915, had the following to say:

> *"After a four months' training in Kent, England, where we had a very enjoyable time, first at Dibgate in the vicinity of Shorncliffe, then at Lydd where we had a rush shooting practice and finally at Otterpool*

24 Sergeant Leonard McLeod Gould, 102nd Canadian Infantry Battalion

where water was very scarce, we were considered fit and skilled in the art of warfare, ready to meet the hated Hun. When I think of it, our training was decidedly amateurish and impractical. It consisted mainly of route marches and alignment movements. Our musketry course amounted to nothing; we had only half an idea about the handling of bombs. We were perfectly ignorant regarding rifle grenades."[25]

The accommodation at the camp was crude. The men likely lived in tents, and the cots were likely just planks on some blocks[26].

Troops training at Bramshott

It is very likely that Thomas O'Connor had his first exposure to a rapidly changing world, unlike any in his experience. He possibly saw airplanes for the first time in his life, was exposed to London, at that time the largest city in the world, and encountered multiple cultures such as English, Australians, South Africans, and people from India.

It is likely that he was able to take two weeks leave prior to going to France. There is no documentation in his record to substantiate this, but the period that he was stationed at Bramshott was longer than the normal training time, and other documentation from the period indicate that a two weeks of leave was customary, but not always allowed. Many soldiers visited relatives, and many families opened their homes to overseas soldiers. Many took part of their leave in the "Big Smoke", the name commonly used to refer to London. It is likely that Tom O'Connor, without known relatives in England or Ireland, saw St. Paul's., the Houses of Parliament, heard Big Ben and saw other famous landmarks. He likely saw one of the plays or shows that London was famous for, possibly "The Bing Boys" or "Chu

25 Fraser, The Journal of Private Fraser

26 Bird, Ghosts have warm hands

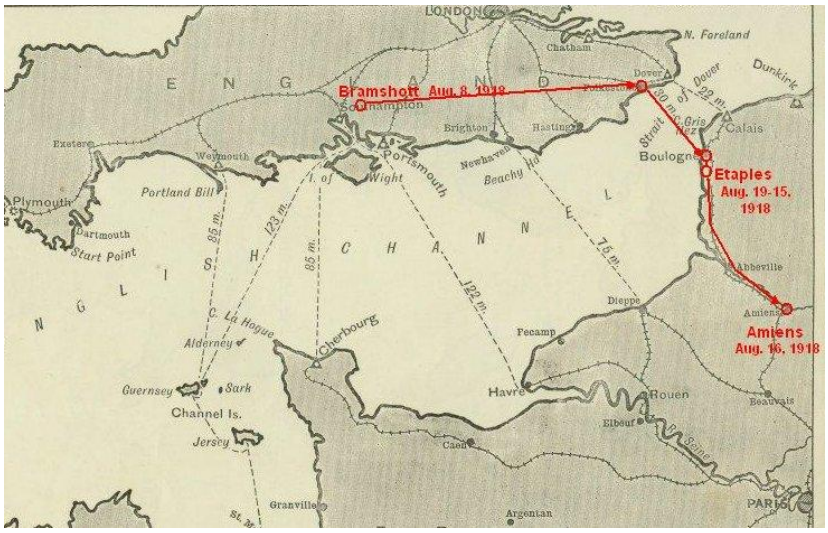
Chin Chow" which were immensely popular in 1918.

Prior to leaving for France, all soldiers were told to pack all personal and government items that they would not be bringing to France (books, letters, personal clothes) into a Kit Bag that would be stored until their return to England[27].

Transport to France

On August 8, 1918, Pte. Thomas O'Connor crossed the English Channel to France. It is likely that he was shipped from Folkestone, but possibly from Southampton or the Portsmouth Naval Base. In all likelihood, he landed at Boulogne-Sur-Mer, but possibly Calais. Like all soldiers coming from England, he had 7 days of intensive combat training at the (infamous[28]) Etaples training facility. Subsequently, Tom O'Connor was assigned to the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, 6th Canadian Brigade, 31st Battalion (Alberta).

The 31st Battalion was stationed at Rosieres, just outside of Amiens. Under the supervision of Lieutenant Knott[29], he likely made his way using rail or bus transport, and some marching, along with 100 other reinforcements to join his unit on August 16, 1918. In many respects he was fortunate. The weather at that time was warm and dry, with cool evenings, so he wasn't marching through the mud that characterized much of France and Belgium during the war. He was also fortunate that he was joining his regiment while they were recuperating from the Battle of Amiens that had started at the beginning of August.



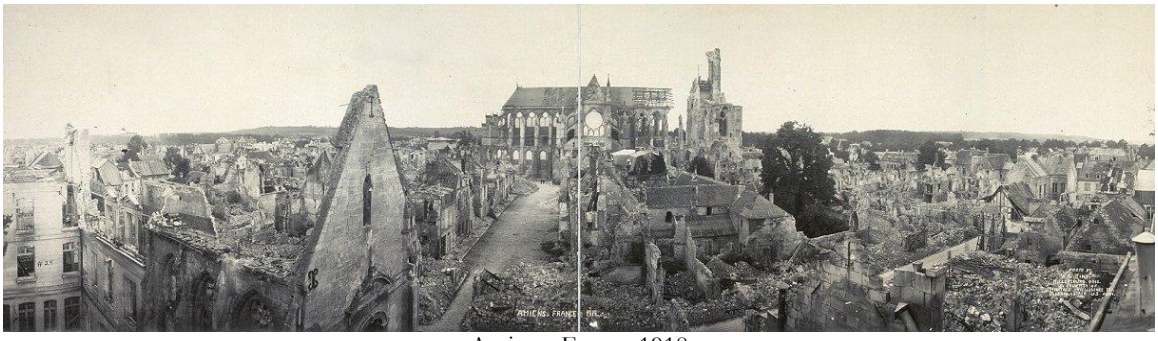
Map of Southern England and Northern France showing
The path to the Front and approximate dates

One can only imagine his thoughts as he traveled through France. He likely saw many aircraft, some engaged in aerial combat. There were probably remnants of destroyed trucks and tanks on the side of the roads. He was passing though towns that had been devastated by 4 years of war; many had only burned-out shells of buildings remaining.

27 A process immortalized in the 1915 Felix Powell/George Asef song "Pack up all your troubles in your old kitbag"

28 The training camp at Etaple was known for overcrowding, a punishing training regimen and brutal discipline from the instructors. It is the site of the only wartime mutiny by British troops. British and Australia/New Zealand (ANZAC) troops mutinied against the discipline and poor camp conditions.

29 31st Battalion War Diaries, National Archives of Canada


Amiens, France 1918

As a farmer, he would have appreciated the fertile farmland he was passing and been shocked by the damage they had incurred with trenches, bombing and troop movements. Fertile fields would have looked like gigantic mud pits. Animals, horses and mules, would be lying where they died. The roads would have been crowded with troops, wagons, and artillery. He would have seen the ranks of wounded, moving back from the front, and as he got closer, the constant thunder from artillery shelling must have been frightening.

Soldiers are trained to march, and as a rule, they hate marching. A World War 1 soldier carried a "kit" that contained much of the following:

- Rifle. By 1917 the CEF had standardized on the British built Short Magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE) Mark II, an 8 lb. 10.5 oz., 10 shot 303-caliber rifles. In well-trained hands they could sustain 15 shots per minute.

- Two Mills grenades. The design of these has evolved into the grenades used today.

- 150 - 220 rounds of ammunition
- Wire cutters, used to cut through barbed wire when attacking enemy trenches.
- Field dressing: initially with a bottle of iodine, which was quickly eliminated when the commanders at the front recognized that broken glass caused more damage than the iodine cured.
- Water bottle (filled whenever possible). Many soldiers carried two.
- Haversack (backpack)
- Entrenching tool. This was used to dig trenches, open rations and many other day-to-day activities. Sharpening the edges of the blade could turn the shovel into a lethal

weapon and was used by troops repelling any trench attack by the Germans.

- Steel helmet. It wasn't until March 1916 that steel helmets were issued to all ranks. Helmets would not protect a soldier against a bullet but were effective against shrapnel.
- Bayonet. The Pattern 1907 bayonet, approximately 22 inches in length, featured a 17-inch (43 cm) steel blade with a double-edged spear point. With the scabbard it weighed about 1.5 pounds

Brodie Helmet and Bayonet with scabbard

- Gas mask. By 1918, the CEF used the Small Box Respirator (SBR) gas mask, which was the standard for British and Commonwealth forces in the later years of World War I. It weighed about 2.5 pounds and had 2 glass eyepieces. It was uncomfortable and provided very limited visibility but was very effective against most gas used by the Germans. Soldiers hated to wear them, but necessity forced them to love the fact they had them
- Greatcoat. Warm, but heavy.
- Ground sheet
- Blanket
- Mess tin
- Towel
- Shaving kit
- Extra socks, but never enough to always have a dry pair
- Message book
- Preserved food rations

Small Box Respirator

In total, this was over 65 pounds, or slightly less than 45% of the weight of Pte. Thomas O'Connor.

Canadian Soldiers in full kit, circa 1917

The rations, sometimes called "Iron Rations", that they carried were like the following

- 1 Tin of Tinned Beef (better known as 'Bully Beef') in the classic Fray Bentos brand tapered tin with side-key opening, a can of Meat and Vegetables, normally called "Tinned Turk" or "Dog Meat".
  Alternatively, a can of "Pork and Beans" was carried.
- 2 Packs (3 ounces each) of plain biscuits contained in an inner cello-like bag and wrapped in the appropriately labeled outer paper wrap)
- 1 Ounce of Meat Extract--These might have been either the Bovril Style Brown paper wraps or OXO cubes
- 1 Pack (5/8 ounce) Tea Ration. This is a small cardboard box containing a cello bag of brew-up tea. Some are waxed, some lacquered to keep water-resistant
- 1 Pack (1/2 ounce) of Salt

Bully Beef was tinned corned beef. It had two drawbacks: the frequency that it was served (breakfast, lunch and dinner) and that in the summer heat it would turn into a mass of congealed fat. If anything, the Pork and Beans were worse. The degree that pork was included was often overstated, and what was present would often dissolve into a liquid state, resulting in "Grease and Beans" [30].

The log entry for the date he joined his battalion, August 16th showed the following:

Weather Bright and hot throughout the day
In the morning all Companies carried on with Physical Training and Games
The C.O. and assistant Adjutant inspected the recent draft
In accordance with instructions from 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade, and our O.O 279 (attached) the Battalion was to move back to the 2nd line east of Marcelcave, map reference <illegible> sheet 1/400000. This was later suspended and in accordance with instructions from 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade and our O.O.280 the Battalion was ordered to be prepared to move at short notice to forward area to support 1st Canadian Division in an attack in conjunction with the French on our right and the Australians operating on our left.
At 11:00 pm our O.O.280 was cancelled, and in accordance with our O.O.281 we moved back to <illegible> S.E. of Marcelcave, map reference sheet Rosieries 1/400000 arriving at our area at 2:20 am morning of 17th instant.

Proceeded	*Returned*
1 Other Rank to England on leave	*Lieut. J. K. Knott, returned from England*
	100 Other Ranks Reinforcements
	1 Other Rank from Hospital

[30] My mother once commented that her father would never allow pork and beans in the house when she was growing up.

Canada's 100 Days

In the March of 1918, the Germans mounted a massive series of attacks against the Allies (German Spring Offensive, or *Kaiserschlacht)*, before the Americans could provide an influx of reinforcements. By August, the Germans had advanced far enough into France to start shelling Paris using long range siege guns, but they were tired, they had sustained losses, supply lines had trouble keeping up, and they were beginning to run short of replacements.

The Allies decided to counter by attacking the Germans at Amiens in the beginning of August, with a goal of gaining just enough ground to force an end the war in 1919. They followed up with attacks at Arras, coupled with offensive actions by the British, Australians, French and Americans all along the Western Front. The Canadians broke through the German lines on August 8, 1918, starting a drive that would end the war at the Belgium city of Mons 3 months later on 11 November 1918, the day the Armistice was signed. The Canadians were the "Shock Troops" that led this attack, and historians sometimes refer to this as "Canada's 100 Days"

A more detailed account of the 100 Days see Appendix VII.

Pte. Thomas O'Connor at Arras

Private O'Connor joined the 31st Battalion on August 16, after the Battle of Amiens, while the Battalion was undergoing a period of rest. This was not long-lived. The same evening that he joined the regiment, they received orders to move back to an area near the village of Marcelcave, arriving there at 2:30 am on the 17th. The troops were allowed to rest on the 17th. The log entry for the day was as follows:

> *Weather Cloudy, clear, very hot in afternoon*
> *The men were allowed to rest until 10:00 am, when they dug themselves in*
> *The afternoon was spent in sports*[31]
> *The C.O. visited all the Companies and found everything in order.*

August 18th was a Sunday, so religious services were held. The Commander of the 2nd Infantry Division, Major-General Henry Edward Burstall, visited the camp during the afternoon.

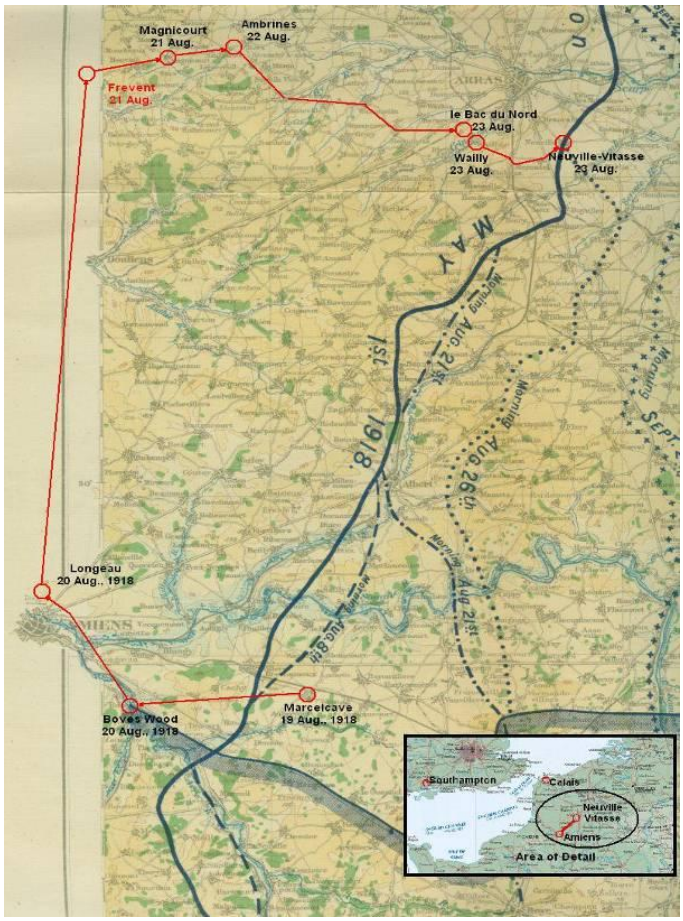
The Battalion then prepared to move, in secret, to Neuville Vitasse.

Canadian troops in the Great War were entitled to two tots of rum per day. These served various purposes; a pick-me-up prior to a long march, a sedative to help troops sleep during artillery shelling, a way to counter the cold and damp, a boost of courage prior to an attack, and a pain killer, before morphine could be administrated. The Corporal responsible for the troops in his company administered the rum. It could be withheld for any number of reasons, including discipline, and the soldiers were typically grateful to receive it. The troops

[31] The 31st was quite proud of their achievements in sporting events. One appendix in their regimental history is reserved for the honours they won in inter-company competitions.

likely had their tot before moving out to Neuville Vitasse.

The Battalion moved, by foot and by bus, from Marcelcave to Neuville Vitasse, close to Arras, arriving there on August 23. The movement started with the march from Marcelcave, to Boves Wood (close to the Luce River). This was over a battlefield that the Canadians had fought on 10 days earlier, and there were still unburied bodies and dead animals in the field; the stench rose with every footfall. The Battalion then marched to Longueau, then to Frevent arriving at 6:00 am on the 21st. They went by bus to Magnicourt (near Lens) where they were billeted by 10:30 am. From Magnicourt they proceeded by bus to le Bac du Nord, and then marched via Wailly to Neuville Vitasse, under attack from artillery and enemy planes. The route was not direct, purposely to deceive the Germans.[32]



Movement from Amiens to Arras

Neuville Vitasse is located in a position that had been previously held by Germans, and the Allies were now using the German trench system.

Trenches were first introduced at the battle of the Marne in September 1914, where the German commanders insisted that the troops keep the ground they had gained in Belgium and France at all costs. They built trenches to provide them protection from the advancing French and British troops. The Allies found it impossible to break through these defenses, and to counteract the Germans, the Allies built trenches themselves, starting the war of attrition that characterizes the Great War.

Front line trenches were approximately 5 feet deep by 6 feet wide and were dug by hand. There were sandbags at the top of the trenches, raising the height to about 7 feet. In practice, they were often so narrow that two men could not pass each other standing sideways, and so shallow that men had to crouch while moving through certain sections. A step was built into the trench so soldiers could "step up" to fire out of it. As troops advanced and retreated, they frequently encountered and re-used existing trenches,

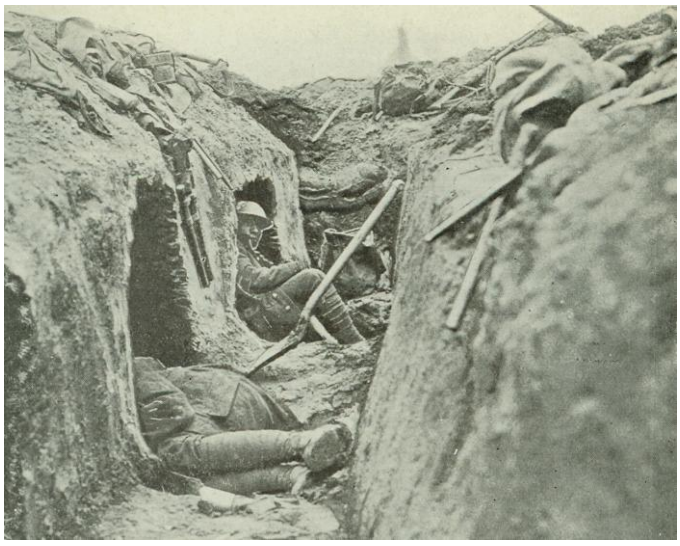
[32] The movements of the 31st Battalion were extracted from the 31st Battalion war diaries in Libraries and Archives Canada as well as Horace C. Singer's "History of the 31st Canadian Infantry Battalion" (1938).

regardless of which side had originally built them. Barbed wire was typically placed in front of trenches to prevent enemy advances, and when attacking soldiers became caught in the wire, they were often easy targets for machine-gun fire. Early in the war, artillery was used to try to break the wire, but it often had the unintended effect of lifting the coils and tangling them when they fell back to the ground, making it even harder for troops to penetrate. However, as the war progressed, the introduction of shrapnel shells and better fuses made artillery more effective in cutting the wire, enabling attacking forces to advance more easily.

Front Line Trench

The trenches at Neuville Vitasse had "been disused for a long time and were in an appalling state of neglect"[33]. It is very likely that the troops spent a considerable amount of time cleaning up the trenches and building new dugouts.

There is a lot of literature on the state of trenches in World War 1. The general conclusion is that they were atrocious, constantly muddy and water filled, the men constantly cold and wet. Trench foot, caused by the cold, wet conditions was common, as were lice. No one was immune to lice, which at best caused constant itching and also disease such as "Trench Fever", which caused a continual and heavy drain on manpower. Rats, some as big as cats, had free run of the trenches. Ammunition was scarce so men were forbidden to shoot the rats. Alternative measures to control the rats were tried, with elaborate traps being constructed, or ferrets purchased to kill rats. Trenches were a target for the enemy, the artillery often tried to get shells to land inside of the trench, which focused the resulting blast towards the troops.



"Relaxing" in a trench

At the front lines, soldiers were constantly subjected to enemy artillery. It is not possible to describe the effects of shelling in a way that can be comprehended. The noise is deafening,

33 McLeod, 102nd Canadian Infantry BN CEF War Diaries

the ground shakes, and then silence; it is like everything stops, even time for an instant, and to be exposed to this for hours, days and weeks on end took its toll on everyone. A shell landing close by creates a concussion that seemed like it would tear a man apart. One account reads:

> *"The concussion or whatever it is called created a terrific strain on the tissues. I felt as if I was being pulled apart, as if some unseen thing was tearing me asunder, particularly the top half of the body,, and especially the head. I know I could not have stood a fraction more without bursting, the outward pull on the tissue was so immense. Getting over the daze I quickly pulled myself together and got out of range for the time being. The incident passed off, although the bursting effect on my body rankled in my mind. It is the greatest body strain I have ever experienced."*[34]

In addition to the effects of being shelled and shot at on a constant basis, Pte. Thomas O'Connor had to put up with the possibility of "trench foot". Trench foot, which was the rotting of the flesh on the foot, was a dangerous, yet common disease on the front. Soldiers were constantly exposed to wet conditions. Despite "duck boards" placed at the bottom of the trench they often had up to a foot of water in them. When the temperature was near freezing, soldier's feet would swell and blister. Eventually the sensory nerves would be damaged, and the foot would go numb. The treatment was to raise the limb, apply moderate heat, and wait. In some cases, the condition would be too severe, gangrene would set in, and the limb would be amputated. For many of the others, permanent nerve damage occurred. Ill-fitting boots, immobility, cold and wet, all conditions that a front-line infantry soldier found himself in, made the condition more likely. Inspections were held regularly to ensure that soldiers were keeping their feet in good condition. Whale oil was applied to feet to help "waterproof" them.

Soldiers would dry their feet as often as possible and would roll their wet socks up and keep them under their armpits to dry them more quickly. There were individuals who preferred to risk the complications of trench foot to being at the front, so men who appeared to be neglecting their feet would be charged with cowardice and brought before a court-martial, possibly facing the death penalty.

German Prisoners escorted by members of the 31st Battalion

On August 23rd, the 31st Battalion took over the right front line at Neuville Vitasse at 3:00 am, replacing the (British) 44th Imperial Infantry Brigade. At 5:00 am, the VI Corps pushed

34 Fraser, The Journal of Private Fraser

the right flank forward, followed at 7:00 by the 31st Battalion moving forward to close the line. There was considerable fighting, with enemy shelling and machine gun fire causing "considerable difficulty", the men hiding in shell holes. At nightfall the 31st Battalion captured 25 German soldiers in hand-to-hand fighting, using bayonet's rather than gunfire to preserve the element of surprise. [35]

Another company of the 31st attacked and overcame German troops at a Sugar Factory outside of town. This opened the road for other Battalions to advance.


Remains of the Sugar Factory

The ground where they were attacking was marshy, swamp-like, which increased the difficulty of moving forward, all the while under heavy machine gun fire.

The history of the CEF[36] contains the following entry for the date:

In a daylight raid on 23 August, the 31st Battalion captured a sugar factory south of Neuville-Vitasse, and on the following evening gained partial control of the town, which was still in German hands. German sources reveal that Neuville-Vitasse was evacuated early on the morning of 24 August. The decision not to undertake a protracted defence was reported to have been taken by the German 39th Infantry Division because "the commitment of the Canadians, the best British troops, had been recognized".[37]

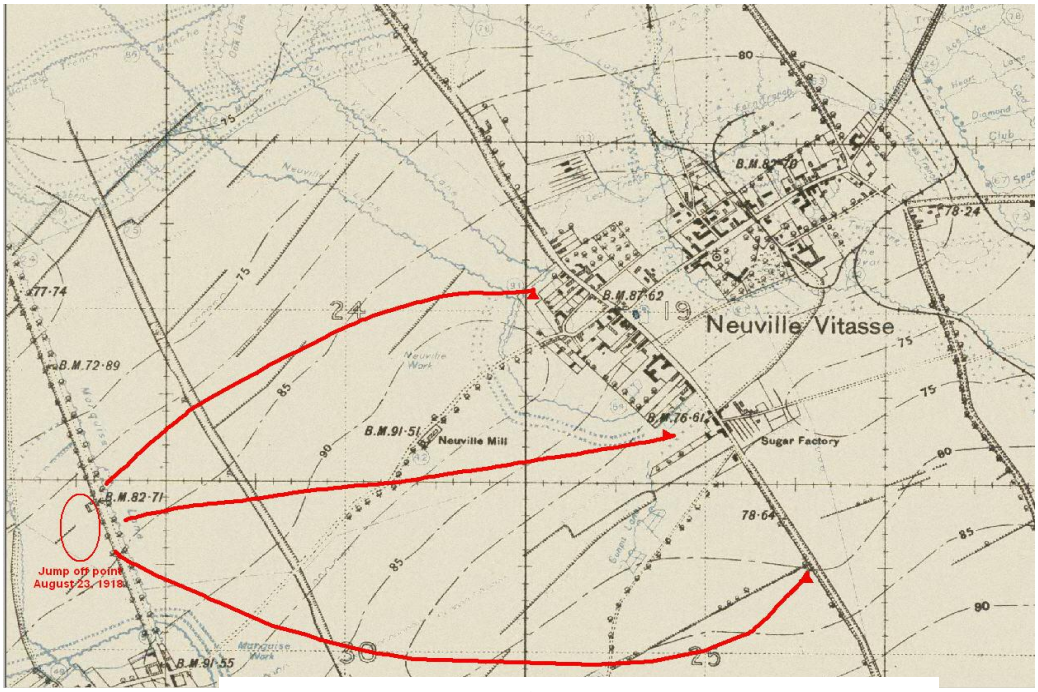
The 31st Battalion log entry for August 23rd is as follows:

Weather Little misty, later clear and bright, showers in evening
At 3:00 am received instructions from 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade that VI Corps on our right would attack at 4:55 am. By 7:00 am they had reached their objective and we pushed out our patrols to come up with their left flank "A" and "B" Companies pushed forward and engaged the enemy in Neuville Vitasse and to the right. Our bombardment was very heavy, enemy retaliation very heavy in places during afternoon. In the evening the enemy shelled our original line fairly heavy. Enemy machine guns in Neuville Vitasse, caused considerable trouble. Our Battalion experienced some sharp fighting in and around the ????, Map ref. Neuville Vitasse 1/40000 at W.19.S., capturing 25 prisoners and some machine guns. Enemy holding in fairly heavy strength with instructions to hold line at all costs.
Our causalities were fairly light

Proceeded *Returned*

[35] Singer, History of the 31st Canadian Infantry Battalion
[36] Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919 / by G.W.L. Nicholson (1962)
[37] Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1918

10 O.Rs. to Hospital	*Lieut. A.K. Well from St Nicholas as T/M*
2 O.Rs. to England on leave	*Lieut. N.P. Morgan as Reinforcement*
2 O.Rs. to C.C.R.C	*62 O.Rs. Reinforcements*
2 O.Rs. to 6th Cdn. Inf. Bde.	*1 O.Rs. from C.C.R.C.*
	2 O.Rs. from 6th Cdn. Inf. Bde
	1 O.R. from Hospital
	2 O.Rs. from England on leave



Initial advance of the 31st Battalion -23 August 1918

A soldier fighting on the right flank of the 31st battalion wrote:

> *"Our route now lay due east, parallel with the Arras-Cambri Road, along which were dotted the frequent bodies of men, mules and horses, whilst in the middle of the road lay the wreckage of more than one armoured car, testifying to the destructive fire which the enemy maintained on this main artery of communications."*[38]

On August 24, the 31st pushed forward again. The Germans retaliated with shelling, machine gun fire and poison gas. August 25th was a hot day, and the front lines experienced heavy machine gun fire and some sniping from the Germans. The day was spent consolidating the positions on the line. In the evening, it got very cool and around 11:00 pm, showers set in.

August 26th was the start of the 3rd Battle of the Scarpe, and it was a cool day with heavy showers. The German General Staff considered the positions near Arras to be so strong and well-fortified that any attack would have very limited success. To ensure their success, they

38 McLeod, 102nd Canadian Infantry BN CEF War Diaries

moved an additional division into the area. This was the situation that faced the Canadians, who would attack this stronghold in conjunction with the British Third Army. The 31st Battalion was initially in reserve, but later in the day moved up and captured the village of Guemappe. By evening the fighting had died down. The last entry in the Battalion log for the day was:

The enemy was very quiet and everyone enjoyed a good nights sleep.

On August 27th, the 31st Battalion moved forward to Chérisy and on the 28th to Remy. In the 3 days since the start of the battle, they had advanced approximately 2,500 yards (2.3km).

On the 29th, the 7th Canadian Battalion relieved the 31st Battalion, and the 31st moved back to the area around Wailly. As they moved back, the troops encountered French civilians returning to their homes that had so recently been shelled by artillery fire[39].

The next day, the troops spent the day cleaning their equipment and clothes, and resting up and on Sunday, September 1st, the 31st Battalion moved from Wailly to Archicourt. The Battalion log for the day is as follows:

Weather, Cool, cloudy, threatening rain
In the morning the various companies made a thorough cleanup of their billets, which were in a very dirty condition.

Church Parades were held at 2:00 PM
The C.O. and adjutant proceeded to 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade to attend Battalion Commanders conference.
Our Band gave a concert in the evening which was appreciated by all the men.
The night was very quiet, no Enemy Aircraft came over our area

Proceeded	*Returned*
2 O.Rs. to Hospital	*2 O.Rs. from leave to England*
2 O.Rs. to Div. Gas. Course	*2 O.Rs from C..C.R.C*
Capt. F.M. Petrie on leave to England	*6 O.R.s. reinforcements*
2 O.R. on leave to England	

The Church Parade referred to was the weekly Church Service. Attendance at the services was compulsory and feelings about them were mixed. Some found them impressive, others chafed at the 'requirement' of attending rather than the choice to do so, and some questioned the benefit of giving sermons on morality to men whose task was to kill the enemy.[40]

39 Singer, History of the Thirty-First Battalion

40 Brown, The Imperial War Museum Book of the First World War

6th Brigade Church Parade
Some are watching a dogfight in the skies overhead

Prior to Church Parade, the men would be required to become "presentable". Getting clean in France was a major undertaking. There was a lot of water available, but most of it was in the form of rain or mud. When springs were encountered, the engineers could set up portable showers. One account describes the delight that the troops had in the shower facilities, where they were able to pass 150 men through three showers in one hour: just over 1 minute per man!

A typical wash-up experience

On September 2nd, the regiment moved up to Neuville Vitasse, and immediately to the front line at Chérisy in preparation for the assault on the Drocourt-Queant line. They arrived around noon on the 3rd, and had a wet lunch, hunkered down in a hard rainfall. There was heavy shelling that night and again the next day, also heavy bombing by German aircraft. On Sept 4th, there was heavy shelling in the afternoon with artillery and machine guns very active between 11:00 and midnight.

September 6th saw continued shelling of the front lines by the Germans. The log for the day

is as follows:

Weather, Cool cloudy, frequent light showers before dawn, heavy rain in the afternoon
The Assistant Scout Officer patrolled the CANAL bank on our front, and discovered an enemy post east of the CANAL at Foot Bridge Head.
Enemy aircraft very active during morning, also enemy shelled Front and Support lines with High Explosive and Gas. From 10 am until 12 noon, front was fairly quiet, except for occasional machine gun fire. From 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm enemy shelled Battalion Headquarters and roads in rear of Battalion position with all calibers. During the late afternoon enemy aircraft was fairly active and in aerial combat put one of our machines down in flames and forced another to land.
From 7 pm until 9 pm enemy shelled our area with light and heavy caliber, and heavily shelled Nuissy and Maralle.
Our snipers accounted for 5 of the enemy during morning and evening.
From 10 pm until 12 midnight enemy machine gun fire was very heavy, but shelling was light.
Enemy aircraft bombed roads in rear of battalion position. No damage was done.

By September 7th, the Germans were becoming very aggressive, with heavy artillery shelling and gas attacks. The ground was wet causing the gas to hang like a mist, without dissipating. This required prolonged periods (4 to 6 consecutive hours) of wearing gas masks, at best an uncomfortable situation.

The diary entry for September 7th is as follows:

Weather, Clear, cool, later bright and warm
At 1:00 am enemy started a concentrated bombardment of Blue and Yellow Cross gas, mixed with High Explosives, covering the entire Battalion area, including the villages of Baralle and Huissy. The bombardment lasted off and on throughout the night up until 6:00 am. Owing to the rain during yesterday afternoon, the gas hung very low and caused considerable trouble. "A" and "B" companies were in their gas helmets for 6 hours, "C", "D" and Battalion. Headquarters for 4 hours.
From 6:00 am until 12 noon enemy did very little shelling. Enemy aircraft fairly active, dropping some bombs on "A" company. No damage was done.
The C.O. attended a conference of Battalion Commanders at Brigade Headquarters, and on his return brought instructions to the effect that Battalion would be relieved from the front during night of 7th/8th.
The enemy appears to be very active with his artillery and is resorting to a great deal of gas shelling.
From 2:00 pm until 4:00 pm front very quiet. During late afternoon and early evening enemy aircraft fairly active in large formations. Our Aircraft fairly active. Enemy artillery fairly active from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm on Battalion front with High Explosive and gas.
In accordance with our 0.0No.255, copy attached, Battalion was relieved from Front Line, and moved back to Brigade Reserve in Buissy Switch, N. & W. of L. & W. gridline through W.17 & 18 Central. Considerable difficulty was experienced in making the relief owing to heavy shell fire and gas

Proceeded	*Returned*
11 O.R.wounded	*Lieut. P. Hunter from C.C.R.C.*
1 O.Rs. to Hospital	*2 O.Rs. from Div. Gas. School*
1 O.R. to Corps. Inf. School	*1 O.R. from C.C.R.C.*
4 O.Rs.to 6th Cdn. Inf. Bde.	*1 O.R. from leave to England*

1 O.R. on leave to England *1 O.R. reinforcement*

Wounded

On the 8th of September, the 31st Battalion was instructed to move back to Buissy Switch, their replacement at the front line was completed by 3:00 am, but it took place under heavy fire, shelling and gas. The log for the day is as follows:

> *Weather, cool bright in morning, cloudy and showers later.*
> *The relief was completed by 3:00 am and companies were allocated dispositions as per the attached sketch.*
> *From 4 am until 6 am our artillery and enemy artillery was very active. Battalion Headquarters was heavily shelled for about 15 minutes had several direct hits on it, but no damage done. Owing to heavy gas causalities suffered by "B" company, remainder of company was sent out to transport lines to receive reinforcements and be reorganized.*
> *The afternoon was very quiet. It rained very heavily, during the afternoon, and put the trenches in a bad state.*
> *In the early evening, enemy artillery was very active on all roads in Battalion Area and again from 10 pm until midnight, mixing High Explosive and Gas.*
>
> | *Proceeded* | *Returned* |
> |---|---|
> | *Lieut. D.N. McKenzie wounded* | *1 O.R. from Hospital* |
> | *7 O.Rs. to Hospital (Gas)* | *1 O.Rs. from leave to England* |
> | *6 O.Rs. to Hospital (Sick)* | *31 O.sR. Reinforcements* |

Poison gas was first used by the Germans against Algerian-French and Canadian troops on April 23, 1915 at the 2nd Battle of Ypres, and was used by both sides until the end of the war. By 1918, the usage of gas was commonplace and the shells that contained the gas were labeled as yellow or blue cross, the colour designating the type. Canadian historian Jake Granatstein wrote "We like to think of Canada as pure, but Canadians gassed everything that moved whenever they could". Indeed, General Sir Arthur Currie, commander of the Canadian Corps in 1918 said:

> *We gassed him on every opportunity and on one occasion ninety per cent. of the gas in France was being thrown at the Boche by the Canadians. We never forgot that gas at the second battle of Ypres, and we never let him forget it either. We gassed him on every conceivable occasion, and if we could have killed the whole German army by gas we would gladly have done so.*[41]

Soldiers hated gas, something that they had to be constantly prepared for. Tim Cook writes: "Poison gas was a most terrifying weapon, largely because it seemed so alien. Soldiers could well understand bullets or shrapnel, but poison gas—which corrupted the lungs, the eyes, and with later variants, the genitals—was even more fearsome. This was not "fair" war, in which soldiers fought soldiers; instead,

[41] Text of speech by Sir Arthur Currie, The Last Hundred Days of the War, The Empire Club of Canada Addresses (Toronto, Canada), 29 Aug 1919, p. 303-317, link.

science was weaponized and unleashed to kill anonymously"[42]

Pte. Thomas O'Connor was wounded immediately preceding or during the 3:00 am withdrawal from the front lines. The Germans used two types of gas against the 31st that night. Yellow cross (dichloroethylsulphide or "Mustard" gas) and blue cross (diphenylchloroarsine, an asphyxiant that could be fatal in concentration) were both used extensively[43]. From the length of his hospitalization, Thomas O'Connor was likely exposed to yellow cross "Mustard" gas. The regimental history for the 31st Battalion describes these two days (September 7-8) as follows:

> *At 1 o'clock on the morning of Saturday, September 7th, the German batteries commenced an intensive bombardment of the positions held by the 31st Battalion. Gas shells were employed which drenched the entire area occupied by the unit as well as the villages of Baralle and Buissy in the immediate rear. The bombardment continued with unabated violence until 6:00 p.m. It then died down; but, owing to the dampness of the ground, the gas hung low and caused considerable trouble, the men being compelled to wear their gas masks all the time. By 7 o'clock, however, the fumes had sufficiently dispersed to permit of the removal of the respirators. Unfortunately a change of the wind occurred shortly afterwards, blowing light concentrations of the deadly vapour across the Battalion positions and causing numerous casualties. From 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. the enemy again shelled the lines of the Alberta Regiment with great violence, using both gas and high explosive, and causing further casualties.*
>
> *The losses suffered by the Battalion during these two bombardments were the heaviest it had ever experienced in a single day from hostile artillery action while simply holding the line. Five officers and 102 other ranks had to be sent back suffering from the effects of gas poisoning, and on account of these casualties the unit was withdrawn from the line to the brigade reserve positions in the Buissy Switch.*

The yellow cross, "mustard" gas was the most feared, as it would blister any part of the body that it came in contact with, including the lungs if inhaled. It was oil based, and could linger on clothes for days, being transmitted from person to person. Hands, arms, necks, faces, and genitals were all commonly affected areas. Exposing the face could cause temporary blindness.

[42] Tim Cook, The Secret life of Soldiers, How Canadians survived the Great War", Chapter 5, 2018
[43] There are estimates that 70% of Western Front gas attacks against the Allies in 1918 were with Mustard Gas.

Interlude: 2013

In August 2013 I had the opportunity to spend a weekend in France, touring various battlefields and visited some 20 Cemeteries where the men from the Chateauguay Valley, as well as other Canadians and Newfoundlanders[44] had fought, and where many were buried. It was an overcast, rainy weekend, one that will forever stand out in my memory. In addition to the battlefields and cemeteries, I had the opportunity to visit the Vimy Ridge Memorial and battlefield. I also visited Mons and saw the location where Pte. George Price, the last Canadian killed in the war had died and visited the cemetery where he is buried, one of the few Commonwealth War Grave Commission cemeteries where both Commonwealth and Germans are buried together.

It was a remarkable, and moving, experience.

On my list was to find the approximate location where Thomas O'Connor had been wounded in 1918. What greeted me was a beautiful pasture, one I'm sure my grandfather would have appreciated. As I went to get some photographs a very friendly horse came up to say hello to me.

Where History Meets Today, the approximate location where Tom O'connor was wounded

End Interlude

[44] In World War 1 Newfoundland was a Dominion of Great Britian. It did not join Canada until 1949.

The American artist John Singer Sargent[45] captured the horror of war in his powerful painting *Gassed*[46], now housed in the Imperial War Museum[47] in London. The painting vividly illustrates three key aspects of a soldier's experience in war. At the bottom, we see Death: soldiers lie lifeless, scattered across the battlefield. The central focus, with another similar scene in the background, shows blinded and bandaged soldiers, victims of a gas attack, walking in single file with their hands on the shoulders of the men in front, being led to a medical station. In stark contrast, in the distant background on the left, soldiers are barely visible playing football (soccer), dressed not in uniforms but in full athletic gear. Barely seen in the sky are two planes in a dogfight.

Through this juxtaposition, Sargent encapsulates the three realities of a soldier's life: Death, Wounds, and Life. Death loomed large in their minds—approximately 14% of the CEF soldiers serving in Europe were killed. The probability of being wounded was even higher, with over 40% suffering injuries. Yet, amid this ever-present danger, soldiers had to focus on living. Despite the grim reality, they often adopted a philosophical attitude, expressed in the common phrase, "When your number's up," accepting that death was beyond their control.

"Gassed" – John Singer Sargent, 1919

The subjects for the picture were British soldiers that Sargent sketched on September 19, 1918, just outside of Arras. The painting is large, 20 feet (611 cm) wide by 7 ½ feet (231 cm) high, resulting in almost life size figures.

Gas was a vile weapon of the Great War, feared by all. In 1925, the Geneva Convention would be expanded to ban chemical weapons.

In total, there were approximately 1.3 million casualties, 97 thousand fatal, on both sides, due to gas attacks during the war. Late in the war, in mid-October 1918, a German Corporal

[45] Born to American parents in Italy in 1856, he spent most of his life in France and England. He died in 1925 and is buried in Surry, England.

[46] Gassed is a painting commissioned by the British War Memorials Committee in May 1918 with the intent that it would be part of a memorial to the British in the war, now realized in the Imperial War Museum.

[47] The main branch of the Imperial War Museum is housed in the largest remaining building of Bethlam Hospital, where patients were treated for mental disorders. The name of the Hospital is the origin of the term "Bedlam", and it is somehow appropriate that the Imperial War Museum is housed there.

fighting near Ypres Salient was temporarily blinded by gas, one minor component of his hatred for the Allies when he became Chancellor of Germany in 1934[48].

By 1918, all troops at the front had gas masks. They were hot, uncomfortable and they drastically reduced their visibility. Additionally, they had limited effectiveness and while the troops recognized their necessity of them, they were often reluctant, and therefore slow, to put them on. Frequently gas was delivered by artillery shell and arrived unexpectedly; troops would sometimes inhale gas prior to recognizing the threat and putting on a mask. With their lungs already irritated, they would sometimes take the mask off prematurely to improve their breathing, which compounded the problem. There were a number of reported cases of soldiers under fire being caught in holes or on barbed wire and having to remove their masks to be able to see to extricate themselves.

Recuperation

The records for the hospitalization of Pte. T. O'Connor are sparse; they show the dates of admittance and transfer only. His gassing would have been considered serious, but not critical. The basic principle of medical aid in France in 1918 dictated that the wounded would be moved to the rear, but only as far as necessary. The objective was to minimize congestion on the roads, so only the seriously wounded would make it back to a General Hospital 80 miles away. He was not evacuated to England, as many were at that time, due to the shortage of Hospital space in France.

On September 8th, Pte. Thomas O'Connor was transported to the Boulogne-sur-Mer area and admitted to the 54 General Hospital, known as "London General Hospital" in Aubengue/Wimereux (now part of Boulogne-sur-Mer) on September 9th, 1918. After he was initially wounded, he would have been transferred to the Regimental Aid Post, a small post set up at the rear of the combat area. He was likely given some tea, perhaps a tot of rum, and quickly passed up to the Advanced Dressing Station. There, his wounds would have been lightly dressed and then he would have been moved back to the Casualty Clearing Station. They would have done a quick evaluation and put him on a train, with other wounded, for Boulogne.


Soldier receiving treatment for gas

Being placed on a hospital train to the rear lines might not have provided the sense of relief one would expect. There were persistent rumors that the Germans did not always respect the protection granted by the Red Cross emblem on hospital trains. It is well-documented that hospital ships were deliberately targeted by submarines, with the most infamous attack against Canadians being the sinking

[48] John Toland, Adolf Hitler

of the Llandovery Castle in June 1918. Hospitals near Boulogne-sur-Mer and other coastal areas were also bombed[49], and hospital trains themselves were not immune to attack. Many soldiers were acutely aware of these violations of international law, which added to the anxiety and danger of their journey to safety.

Pte. Thomas O'Connor was hospitalized at the 54 General Hospital until October 4th. At the start of the war, and up through 1917, the hospital was capable of holding 1,040 patients, but by 1918 had been expanded to hold 2,500. This did not mean additional space, but rather the space per patient was compressed. 32 doctors, 70 nurses or Voluntary Aid Dispensers (V.A.D.'s) and 200 orderlies staffed the hospital. The survival rate for patients admitted to a general hospital was very high, around 92%, and 33% of the men admitted were able to return to the front.

Pte. Thomas O'Connor recuperated for approximately 8 weeks. This was the effective norm for troops hospitalized for mustard gas wounds in France by 1918. General Foulkes, the wartime commander of the Gas Brigade, wrote in his memoirs:

> *"further experience showed that under skilled medical treatment 80 per cent of the average mustard gas casualties evacuated from army areas could be cured in eight weeks, and a considerable proportion could be made fit for duty in four weeks"*[50]

On October 4th, Pte. Thomas O'Connor was transferred to the 1st Convalescent Depot battalion in Boulogne-sur-Mer. He then went to the 12th Convalescent depot battalion in Aubengue on October 6th until October 30th. The period of October 30th to November 8 was spent in a Rest Camp at St. Martins.

On November 8th Pte. Thomas O'Connor was assigned to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp at Etaples to redo combat training before returning to the front. A marked difference between 1918 and the early years of the war was the amount of training received. In 1915, Canadians received little training, and the result was high casualties. By 1917, the Canadian Corps recognized that better training resulted in fewer casualties, and Generals Byng and later Currie was quick to address this. Starting at Vimy Ridge, under the leadership of General Sir Julian Byng, Canadians received intensive training before attacks, practicing on scale models of the ground they would be attacking. The British command wasn't as quick to react. Prime Minister Bordon, in the presence of British Prime Minister George Lloyd in early 1918, was openly critical of the lack of perpetration by the British Army command at Passchendaele in November 1917.

While Tom O'Connor was recuperating, the 31st Battalion had advanced to Mons, which was taken in the final 3 days of the war.

News of an Armistice was issued to the CEF command staff at 6:00 am on November 11th.

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[49] Nursing Sister Eleanor Jean Thompson from Valleyfield, Quebec, , who used to babysit me when I was a toddler, was awarded the Military Medal, one of only 9 awarded to Canadian Nursing Sisters throughout the war, for her actions during an aerial bombardment at No. 6 Canadian General Hospital.

50 Foulkes, Gas! The Story of the Special Brigade (Blackwoods, 1934)

Word of it reached the troops near the front lines by 9:00. The Canadian troops were instructed to push ahead and retrieve as much ground as possible before the cease-fire was given.

At 11:00 the order for "cease-fire" was given. The 31st Battalion Operation Report states:

> *The order cease fire was given, the enemy put up a white flag, shot up white flares, about 60 of them got out of their posts at the command of their Officer, emptied the water out of their machine guns and marched away in formation.*

The fighting was over. The reaction of the troops had to be one of incredible relief: the horror was over, and they were going home. One soldier in Mons remarked, "A strange and peaceful calm followed. Not a cheer went up from anyone". Andy McNaughton, a commander of Artillery group was somewhat more cynical: "Bloody fools! We have them on the run. This means we shall have to do this all over again in twenty-five years"[51].

The last British soldier[52] killed in World War I was Canadian Private George Lawrence Price, who was shot by a German sniper at 10:58 AM on the outskirts of Mons. Price is buried in St. Symphorien Military Cemetery, near Mons, Belgium. This cemetery, initially constructed by the Germans, is one of the few that it includes the graves of both Commonwealth and German soldiers. Private Price's grave is situated in a row adjacent to German soldiers' graves, perhaps underscoring the spirit of reconciliation and the idea that, in death, all men are equal.

Grave of Pte. Price, the last Canadian killed in the war.

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, in the year 1918, the fighting was over.

Alas, the end for the soldiers was not to be as quick as everyone hoped. The fighting was over, now the politics came into play. Pte. Thomas O'Connor rejoined the 31st Battalion at Boussoit, outside Mons on November 14th to participate in the largest march of the war, 280 miles in one month.

To the Rhine

[51] 21 years later, McNaughton would go on to command the Canadian Corps as they entered World War II.

[52] The last soldier killed in World War I is often cited as Sergeant Henry N. Gunther of the U.S. Army, who was reported killed at 10:59 AM on November 11, 1918. However, timings are subject to scrutiny, and there is some disagreement over whether Private George Lawrence Price of Canada or Sergeant Gunther was the last to fall. Regardless of the exact timing, both deaths are tragic, senseless, losses

On November 12th, 1918, the 1st and 2nd Divisions of the Canadian Corps became part of the Fourth British Army and began its advance towards the Rhine as part of the British Army of Occupation in Germany. To the Canadian leadership this was viewed as a prestigious assignment, to the men it was a delay in returning to Canada, and while they were disciplined troops, they were unhappy that they were being placed in a position where they might have to continue fighting German insurgents and a population chafing at the restrictions imposed on them.

The German Army still numbered several million men: beaten in the field, yet still a strong military presence. The occupation of the German border was deemed necessary due to widespread concern among the Allies that Germany might not fully adhere to the conditions of the Armistice, particularly regarding disarmament and territorial adjustments. Amongst other conditions, within 15 days, the German Army was to withdraw all forces France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Alsace–Lorraine, which had been occupied by Germany since the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. They also had to repatriate all civilians and POW's, surrender war materiel, including artillery, machine guns, aircraft and submarines, rail locomotives and rolling stock and road trucks. The terms of the Armistice were negotiated by politicians but would be enforced by the soldiers. The allies would establish an army of occupation along the Rhine River, including troops from American, British, French and Belgium forces.

Pte. Thomas O'Connor rejoined the 31st Battalion just outside of Mons on November 18th and participated in the march across Belgium. The map on the following page shows the route taken from Mons to Beuel, now part of the city of Bonn, Germany. The 31st Battalion formed the vanguard of the Canadian Corps during the march through the hilly terrain of central Belgium[53], in full gear (minus helmets), carrying their 65-pound packs.

Starting on November 17th, the 31st Battalion made some initial moves from Boussoit, on the outskirts of Mons, to Bracquegnies (now Strépy-Bracquegnies) and then to Trivieres where the British Army had first encountered the Germans in 1914, and where their first casualties had occurred. Both of these were short marches of less than 4 miles, and then the first longer march to Gosselies, approximately 12 miles.

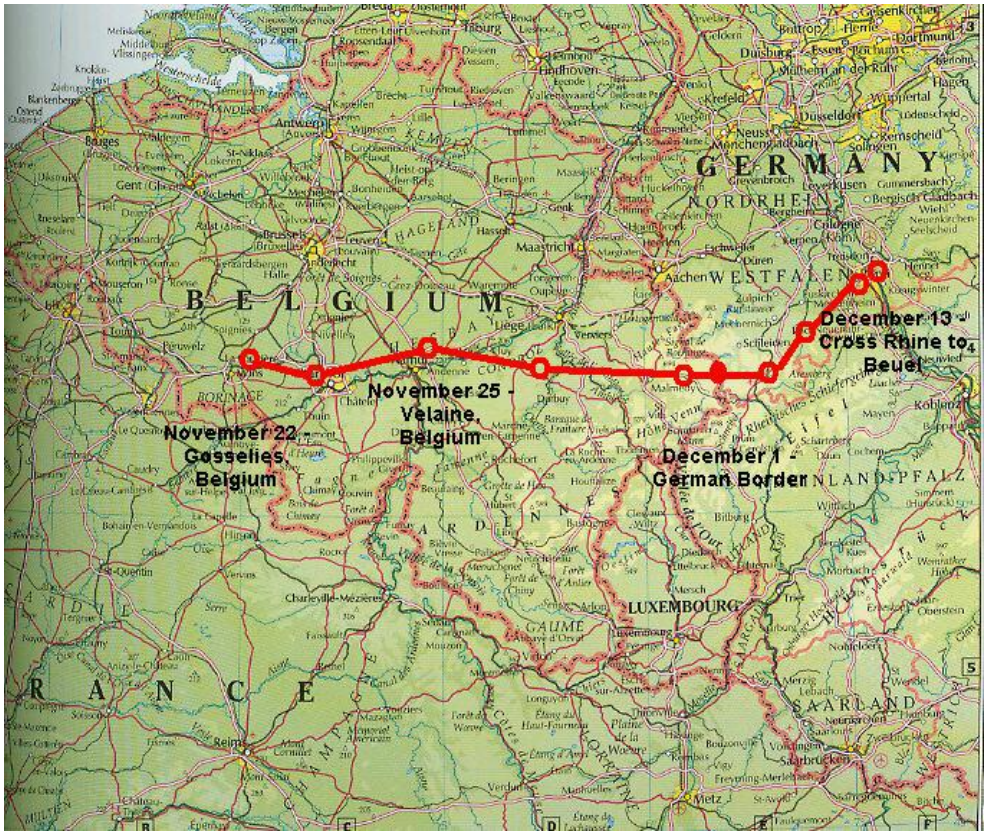
The 31st Battalion left Gosselies, Belgium on November 22, and on subsequent days, in good weather, marched to Jumet. On November 25th, rain set in making the roads wet and slippery and the men uncomfortable. The rain continued until November 29th, making the roads rough and muddy. The daily marches became longer, up to 16 miles in 4 ½ hours, and the conditions were quite hard; the men becoming very tired with little time to recover. November 29th was a bright, cool day and the troops responded.

The troops were received with enthusiasm throughout the march across Belgium. The Belgium people had been liberated, and they were grateful. The troops were given warm welcomes and flowers. People shared whatever food they had, and some fine wines that had

[53] During the writing of this, I had the opportunity to discuss this march with a native of Belgium, familiar with the route taken. His very understated comment was "They certainly could have chosen an easier route!"

been kept hidden from the Germans for four years. In one town, the local band turned out and played at such a tempo that the men had trouble keeping in step[54].

On the 26th of November, 1919, in Temploux, Belgium, the men rested and received their Christmas pay. For Pte. O'Connor, this amounted to the sum of $13.00, about a half month's pay.



The march towards the Rhine

On November 30th, with the weather bright and cool, the 31st Battalion marched 16 miles to the town of Ottre. The length of the march was a record for the Battalion to that point, and the log for the day reports "Everyone was cheerful. Few men fell out during the march". The next morning, December 1st, the 31st Battalion moved another 10 miles from Ottre to Beho. They became the first Canadians to reach the German Border. The Battalion log reports "The people were not at all hospitable, and it was rather difficult to obtain billeting accommodation for the men".

Singer writes:

> *It is significant that, upon their return to the Rhineland, the retiring Germans were welcomed everywhere as victors. They deserved these tributes because, apart from some deplorable exceptions, they had proven*

54 Singer, History of the Thirty-First Battalion

themselves brave and gallant soldiers. They did not, however, merit the tribute which German history has endeavored to foist on them, namely that they were an unbeaten army.[55]

By this time, the troops had outdistanced their supply lines, and food had not reached the troops. The destruction caused by the war, and a logistical nightmare with horses and mules, as well as the motorized equipment floundering on muddy roads meant that the supply of rations could not keep up with the troops. The men rebelled, and their officers agreed: "No rations – no march[56]". Officers negotiated and purchased, at a high cost, a large cow. "It was not so young as it had been, and it must have led a hard life, but it is recorded that in the annals that it made a good and nourishing soup despite the somewhat drastic effects of eating the green meat"[57].

Canadian Troops entering Germany

As they approached the German border, attitudes among the civilian population changed. The retreating German Army had been treated as a victorious army, and the people they troops encountered, while not hostile, were not welcoming, despite the Canadians sharing what food they had, especially sweets, with the children they encountered.

The 31st Battalion crossed the border on December 4th, in a 5-mile march from Beho to Krombach. This was the first time that a British Dominion had entered a European country as a conqueror, a conspicuous position given because of the role that Canadians played in the war. With the weather fair and warm, but the roads still slick and muddy, they marched 16 miles into Germany to Manderfeld. The men didn't know what to expect from the German people and were pleased that most were accommodating.

Dec. 31st, 1918 - 31st Battalion Crossing the Rhine

[55] Singer, History of the 31st Canadian Infantry Battalion, Chapter 27
[56] W.W. Murray, The 2nd Battalion regimental history.
57 Singer, History of the Thirty-First Battalion

December 6th saw a march of 21 miles and continued marching on the 7th put the troops into Blankenheim. The Battalion logs report that "The men's feet were in bad shape, but they all came in with the battalion". The final push to the Rhine came with the march to Arloff on the 8th, then to Weidesheim, finally to Endenich where they rested, waiting for the rest of the 2nd Canadian Division to arrive.

Although they had actually crossed into Germany a week earlier, the "Official" crossing point was deemed to be the Rhine River. The 1st Canadian infantry and 2nd Canadian Infantry gathered at Endenich, with the 31st Regiment arriving on December 10. On December 13th they crossed the Rhine with colours flying and bayonets fixed, and the cold rain streaming off of their helmets. The men were proud of the position they had, they strode straight and tall, forgoing their greatcoats as General Sir Arthur Currie reviewed them. German civilians lined the streets and watched the Canadians march into Bonn. There is no record of the music that the 31st Battalion marched to, although other Battalions played "The Maple Leaf Forever" and "O Canada", perhaps an "indication that there was a new spirit of nationalism in this powerful land army that was the embodiment of the Canadian war effort.[58]"

The Battalion log for the day reads:

Weather: Heavy rain, warmer
In accordance with orders received from the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade and our O.O.No.16 and Appendix (Copies attached) the battalion moved to Beuel.
The whole division crossed the Rhine in column of route and the Corp Commander reviewed them on route from his saluting point on the Bridge.
The men made an excellent showing
Billets were very good but scattered
Preparations were made for a month's stop

The 31st Battalion had marched 280 miles from Mons in the month since the Armistice, mostly with full packs, in weather that was cold, often raining, over roads that had been damaged during the previous 4 years of combat, and were often muddy, wet and slippery because of the November rains. On only 1 day, December 8th, as they entered Germany, were their packs transported by lorry (truck) and they were relieved of part of their 65-pound burden.

From December 14th onward, the 31st Battalion was stationed at Beuel as part of the occupation force. Christmas Day was spent very quietly, with the weather being "Cold, Snow and Rain". The New Year, 1919, started with the weather being cold and clear. The men had a day off, with dinner being served at 5:00 pm, and a concert afterward. The CEF had some logistics problems in supplying turkeys for Christmas dinner, so the result was that these were served on New Years Day. To compensate, the men

Castle of the Drachenfels

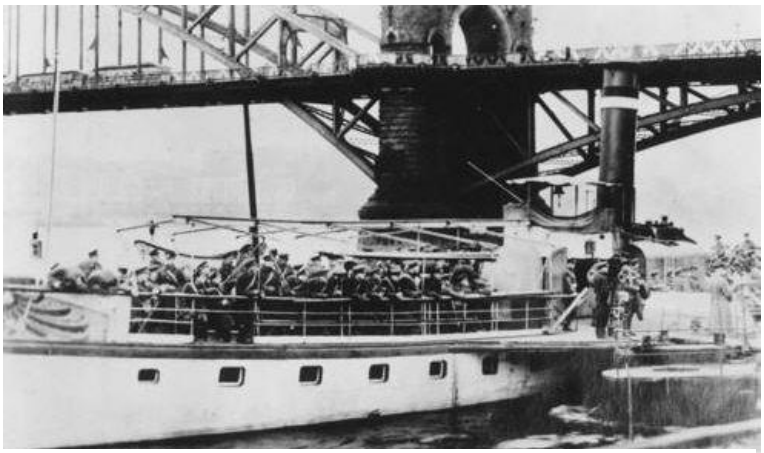
[58] Tim Cook, Shock Troops, Chapter 38.

pooled funds and purchased geese, suckling pigs and quantities of wine. None of the men went without a good meal during the holidays.

The 31st had the task of guarding Bonn, and their outposts extended up through a private game preserve owned by the Kaiser and included an area that held the ruins of the castle of the Drachenfels.

There were non-fraternization rules in place, but the troops had the opportunity to mingle with the local Germans. In almost all cases, the Canadians were viewed as peacekeepers and were treated with respect. The Canadians did their part by giving their chocolate rations to the German children, the locals responding by giving them preference in seating on local transport and in cafes.

In addition to the ongoing drills and training, the men had time for entertainment, with various lectures being held, visits to nearby Cologne and other local interest points. As a break in routine, on January 17th, a cool, rainy day, the entire Battalion took a river trip up the Rhine into the German wine country. Tourism did little to counter the frustration that the Canadian troops felt. There was no indication that the German population would revolt against the occupiers, and the men wanted to go home. Additionally, the Spanish Flu, a particularly virulent Influenza, was rampant, with over 45,000 Canadians affected, and 776 deaths attributed to it, a number that is likely on the low side.[59] Having survived the war, no one wanted to die of this, so far from home



31st Battalion C.E.F. on a trip up the Rhine

With the progress on the terms of the Armistice proceeding, and negotiations on the Peace Treaty progressing, the need for an Army of Occupation ended. On January 23rd, 1919, the 31st Battalions tour in Germany had come to an end. The troops marched to the train station in Beuel at 11:00 AM and embarked on a train to Namur, Belgium at 2:00 PM. Pte. O'Connor would have been assigned to one of the covered wagons (rail cars) that would have held "40 O.R. or 6 horses[60]" for the 22 ½ hour trip to Namur, Belgium. Although likely uncomfortable, it was a huge upgrade from the March to Beuel that the men had done in November. On disembarkment the men marched 7 km, to Mallone, Belgium.

Back to England

[59] Tim Cook, Shock Troops, Chapter 38.
[60] 31st Canadian Infantry Battalion, Operational Order 1, January 1919

This is the most confusing part of Tom O'Connor's wartime service to reconstruct. For the month after arrival in Germany, the 31st Battalion had garrison duty in and around Bonn, and this continued in Mallone, Belgium. On or around January 29, 1919, Private Thomas O'Connor returned to England.

There are 2 entries on 2 separate forms in his Service File.
One says, "Trans. to Eng. as miner for demob & posted to NSRD Ripon" dated 29 January 1919.
This translates to Transferred to England as miner for demobilization and posted to Nova Scotia Reserve Depot in Ripon, England.
On a second form, one entry states "S.O.S to A.R.D. Coal Miner.", initiated on January 30th, 1919, and dated 13 February 1919. Translated: he was taken off the 31st Battalion Nominal Role and transferred to the Alberta Reserve Depot.
The line immediately below states "Miner". The handwriting appears to be the same as the previous line.
Immediately below that is a (translated) line "Taken on strength into the Nova Scotia Reserve Battalion from field on 5 Feb. 2019". It is a disconnect, one saying transferred to the Alberta Reserve Depot, yet received by the Nova Scotia Reserve Depot.

The ambiguity continues as the 31st Battalion War Diaries do not show any transfers to England between January 28 and February 1, 1919. There is an entry for February 2, 1919, that 1 Other Rank was transferred to England for duty. The Battalion diaries were typically kept up to date with respect to movements of personnel, and while a slip of 1 day either way might occur, more than that was atypical, especially since the end of month records were considered very important.

There are several possibilities.

One is that for some reason he was assigned special duty. Miners were needed in the U.K, and someone had to do the job. There is nothing in the 31st Battalion Operational Orders for January or February that would indicate a request for this.

Another conjecture is that some men were promised an earlier return to Canada. This is pure speculation; I can find no literature to support or disprove these theories, and again, nothing is in the 31st Battalion Operation Orders.

A final possibility is that Pte. O'Connor was granted leave in the U.K. and upon completion was assigned to a work detail (mining) rather than transporting him back to the Battalion. This seems unlikely. First, nothing in the 31st Battalion Diaries indicates that any Other Ranks were granted leave for those dates, and the duration does not seem correct. Canadian "Other Rank" (non-Officer) soldiers were granted 10 days leave for every year of service. Pte. O'Connor should have been entitled to leave, but there is nothing in his service record to indicate that was the case.

Whatever the actual case, more literature is unearthed on a regular basis, and I hope that eventually this mystery will be untangled.

Records show that Private O'Connor was transferred to the 21st Reserve and sent to South Camp, Ripon, in Northern Yorkshire, England, on January 29, 1919. Ripon, one of England's smallest cities, has a history dating back to the 7th century and is often referred to as the "Cathedral City of the Dales." It has served as a garrison town for centuries.


Ripon Cathedral

It is possible that Private O'Connor was employed as a coal miner in the Ripon area. I cannot find any diaries for the Nova Scotia Reserve Depot, so this is speculation. In 1919, Britain, like Canada, was undergoing significant change. The population, having endured wartime deprivation, anticipated improved living conditions.

At the turn of the 20th century, coal was the primary fuel for industry and the war effort. By 1913, the United Kingdom was producing 284 million tons of coal annually. Coal was crucial for manufacturing weapons, armaments, and transportation. Mining coal was an arduous and dangerous occupation. During the war, miners were exempt from military conscription, leading to tension between families with loved ones at the front and those in reserved occupations.

By 1919, workers in industries such as mining felt shortchanged as they transitioned back to peacetime conditions. Government-regulated wages led to widespread strikes, with miners among the most active strikers. Troops were deployed to replace striking workers and maintain order. It is possible that "Colonial" troops were used to quell civil unrest, as they might have been more willing to act against local protests.

While there is no official record of Canadians being employed as miners, it is possible, and pure speculation, that troops performing in this role were promised an earlier return to Canada. While Ripon is not a noted mining center it is with reach of Yorkshire's broader coal-mining region.


St. Margaret's Church - Bodelwyddan

Kinmel Park

There is a 90-year-old legend in the North Wales town of Bodelwyddan. On some nights you can hear the sound of soldiers marching through the town, but if you look, none can be seen. The sounds are attributed to the spirits of the Canadian troops that rest in St. Margaret's Churchyard, Bodelwyddan. There are 208 Canadian soldiers buried there, most of them victims of the

influenza epidemic that was rampant in Europe and North America in early 1919. Four of the graves are different: they are the graves of soldiers that were killed when the Canadian soldiers in the Kinmel Park Army camp mutinied in 1919, 5 days after Thomas O'Connor was assigned there[61].

Although there were plans for demobilization in place, before the war ended, the sheer logistics of returning all the troops to Canada became obvious. Companies like Canadian Pacific had all their ships taken by the British Navy during the war, but after the war they had to get back to the business of making money. The British government offered several ships, a number reduced because the American Army had not anticipated an end to the war in 1918 and had no plans for demobilization in place. They and relied on British ships to bring their troops home. The sheer volume of Canadian troops dictated a lengthy timeframe. From the period of 1914 to 1918 the Canadian railways had transported a tremendous volume of troops from across Canada to maritime ports. In 1919 they were concerned about the state of the tracks, and the number of troops they could transport. With all the logistical issues, the initial estimate was that it would take 18 months to get the Canadian troops home; in reality most were home by mid-1919. There were practical problems, such as getting troops back from active occupation service in Germany, and emotional issues; many soldiers still had relatives in England and wanted to see them before going home. The decision was made to bring them back through the British Isles instead of directly from France as the American troops were.

Map of the British Isles, showing places stationed

Troop concentration camps were set up in England, Bramshott and Whitly being the predominant ones for combat troops, and in Wales, Kinmel Park for service battalions, mostly Forestry Troops and Railway Corpsmen, that had never seen combat, or indeed left England.

[61] There is a fifth grave located in Nova Scotia, one of the very few Canadian bodies that was repatriated.

Because he was posted to a Service Battalion in Ripon, Thomas O'Connor was assigned to Kinmel Park, the closest concentration camp for demobilization, on February 28th, 1919, to await transport back to Canada. He likely was assigned to a building called a "Spider" in Camp 2, Military District 12, which is towards the center of the camp. Each building had 3 rooms, connected to a shower/toilet area in the center. Each room held 16 to 18 people, with each person having a bed, which might have been a space on the floor as actual 'beds' were in short supply, and a locker that contained all clothing and equipment. Pte. Thomas O'Connor spent just over 2 months in England, 1 month awaiting transport, which was the average for all CEF troops.

For the 17,400 troops at Kinmel Park, conditions were far from ideal. The days were filled with exercises that the men thought meaningless, medical examinations, route marches and military discipline and training. For these Citizen Soldiers, the war was over, and they didn't see the need to continue the pretense of military activities. They were anxious to return to Canada, not just to their families, but they also realized that the first soldier's home would have the pick of the available jobs, and no one wanted to come home from the war and be unemployed. At Kinmel Park, there was the military bureaucracy to overcome, and inexperienced leadership who had not seen combat. Troops awaiting transport had to fill in some 30 different forms with approximately 360 questions. The food was bad; it had been compared to "pigswill". At night, the troops had access to "Tin Town" a nearby group of shops and pubs that had inflated their prices to take advantage of the, comparatively, well paid Canadian soldier[62]. What wasn't apparent to the civilians was that Kinmel Park was a camp for transient soldiers, and records were slow to keep up with the men stationed there, so the monthly pay was very irregular. After spending a month in camp, many soldiers were broke. Sir Edward Kemp, the Overseas Minister, commented on the camp: "You cannot blame the soldiers for kicking and complaining … You are living in paradise in Canada as compared to this place". The men felt that they were stuck in England, eating poor rations, doing pointless exercises, broke, with no way to influence their release.

Although warmer than most Canadian winters, the winter of 1918-1919 was one of the coldest that the Welsh locals could remember. With the camp situated right on the coast, the men were exposed to the constant, harsh, cold wind that came in off the sea.

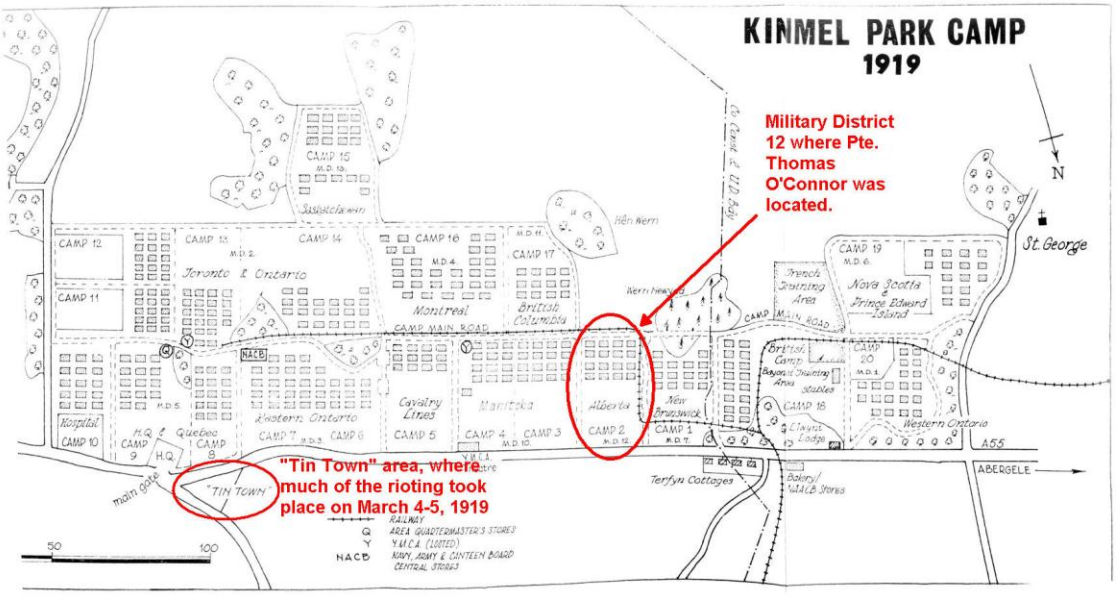
In late February it became common knowledge that several large ships had been reallocated to the American troops, who hadn't been overseas for as long as the Canadians[63]. As a last straw, at the beginning of March, General Sir Arthur Currie decided to transport the 3rd Infantry as a whole back to Canada, instead of the troops waiting at Kinmel Park, who were originally scheduled for these ships. There was no question that these were combat troops who deserved to return quickly, but they hadn't been overseas as long as many of the men stationed at Kinmel Park.

The Camp itself was understaffed and inexperienced. Some of the camp commanders had 3 months of service. Major H.W. Cooper testified at a hearing after the riots:

---

[62] Canadians received $1.10/day, while the British soldiers received 1 shilling, about 24 cents per day.
63 Coombs, Howard G., Dimensions of Military Leadership: The Kinmel Park Mutiney of 4/5 March 1919.

"I am 12 Sergts [Sergeants] below Establishment, 21 Cpls [Corporals] and 35 L/Cpls [Lance Corporals]. Seven of my Officers received their commissions in Nov. 1918."



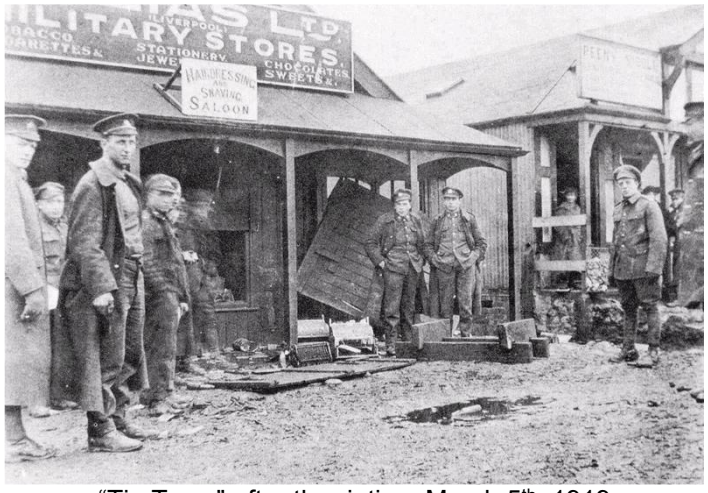
Kinmel Park Concentration Camp – 1919
From Julian Putkowski, "The Kinmel Park Camp Riots 1919"

On the evening of March 4, 1919, at around 9:00 PM, approximately 1,000 troops[64] rebelled and started a riot. The idea likely came from a strike that the British troops staged a few months earlier, resulting in their early demobilization. Once the riot started it quickly got out of control. It started with one of the canteens, spread to a sergeant's mess quarters and then into Tin Town where the troops took their revenge against the local profiteers. The mutineers remembered their debt to the Salvation Army, and these quarters were spared. The YMCA and the Navy and Army Canteen Board (NACB) were viewed to have inflated prices[65] and their buildings were looted and damaged. The overall damage was calculated to be in the thousands of dollars, with stolen or destroyed clothes, food, alcohol, cigarettes and tobacco and equipment.

On the morning of March 5th, the officers tried to take control of the situation. They organized some of the 'loyal' troops to encounter the mobs that had formed. Things quickly got out of control. Five Canadians, 4 Mutineers and one man, Private David Gillan, defending the camp, were killed in the subsequent encounters, and 28 wounded. In the aftermath, soldiers were arrested, and then quickly released fearing that arrests would lead to more outbreaks of violence. In the end 51 Canadians faced a court martial, 27 were convicted and sentenced anywhere from 3 months to 10 years. The government essentially covered the mutiny up, sealing all records of it for 100 years[66] and sending key witness' back

[64] Depending on the source, the number varies from 800 to 2,000 soldiers.
[65] A soldier remarked that he bought a pair of socks for 25 cents, only to unroll them and find a note from a woman who had donated them to be distributed freely to the troops. Morton, When You Number's Up.
[66] The National Archives of Canada has recently made the camp diaries available to the public.

to Canada for demobilization before they could testify. The British Military used the riot to distract the English public from their own issues. Other British riots, more severe than Kinmel Park, were covered up or censored, and the Canadians became the subject of press coverage.



"Tin Town" after the rioting, March 5th, 1919

Local newspapers covered the affair and added their own sensationalism. The London Times reported on March 7, 1919:

> *"The rioters then proceeded to the quarters occupied by the girls, who were in bed, and carried away their clothes. The girls were not injured, but had to remain in bed the next day because they could not dress themselves. Next day, the rioters were masquerading about the camp in girls' clothing."*

The Regimental Diaries report that, after investigation, the allegations of rioters going into the women quarters were unfounded; the clothes had been taken from the NACB store. The Times later recanted (March 8):

> *"The girls' camp was not attacked. As a matter of fact the girls were treated with the utmost chivalry. No man entered the girls' bedrooms while they were occupied."*

The Times also initially reported, and later recanted, that the rioters had killed a Victoria Cross winner. They did, however, accurately sum up the incident:

> *"In view of the splendid discipline and record uniformly maintained by Canadian troops since the beginning of the war in England and France, the 'incident' at Kinmel Park is regretted. It is considered that by comparison with others discipline amongst the Canadian troops is of a high order. It is also regretted that reports of the incident have been exaggerated."*

Although the means did not justify the end, the result of the mutiny was that troops stationed at Kinmel were given priority for returning to Canada, and by March 25th approximately 15,000 soldiers had been redeployed to Canada.

Like most of the soldiers that had the discipline that came from front line troops, Thomas O'Connor likely played no part in the mutiny. He was certainly able to have had a firsthand view of one of the most misunderstood and undocumented parts of the Canadian effort in the First World War.

The residents of Bodelwyddan provided a custom tombstone for Corporal Joseph Young,

who was killed during the rioting. It reads:

"Someday, sometime we'll understand"

Demobilization

Pte. Thomas O'Connor embarked on the SS Saturnia, which left Glasgow, Scotland on March 30, 1919. The Saturnia was a smaller, older and slower ship than the one that he had taken a year before. Saturnia had an interesting past. On her maiden voyage in 1910 she had hit an iceberg in the Gulf of St. Lawrence but was able to limp into port. The ship is also mentioned as being the possible "3rd ship" seen by survivors of the Titanic in 1912[67].

Postcard of SS Saturnia as a troop transport

By 1919, there was no danger from U-Boats, and icebergs were apparently avoided. The ship arrived in Halifax on April 11th, 1919, after a stop in St. John's, Newfoundland.
The medical examination of Pte. Thomas O'Connor just prior to his discharge contains the following pieces of information:

- Eyes: Blue (listed as grey on enlistment)
- Pulse: 78
- Arteries: good
- Weight: 150 pounds (68 kgs)

In the 523 days that he spent in the CEF, despite having lived on Army rations, being gassed, hospitalized and having marched well over 400 miles, he had not lost, or gained any weight.

Thomas O'Connor turned in his equipment and arms, retaining his helmet, bayonet and gas mask. He received a small allowance for clothing and approximately $250 as a service gratuity. On discharge, his proposed address was that of his sister, Maggie O'Connor, 340 – 14th Ave Calgary, Alberta, and although it is possible that he did go back to Calgary, he first

[67] There is little documentation to either substantiate or refute this.

made a stop in Huntingdon, Quebec. He arrived in Huntingdon on April 13 and was met at the station by the town band[68]. It is likely that his parents were present and possibly his brother Patrick, who had been married just a month previous. Very possibly Patrick's wife, Stella, and her younger sister, Grace, were also present.

The rest of the 31st Battalion was relieved from active occupation duty in early April, and they arrived back in Calgary on June 1st, 1919. It is possible, although unlikely, that Thomas O'Connor was one of the many former members that lined the streets and watched the Battalion take its last march back to the Regimental Armory, where the Battalion was disbanded. Acquaintances were renewed, and, for many, farewells were said as they headed back to their homes and families.

31st Battalion returning to Calgary - 1919

Aftermath

By mid 1919, the war was over for the Canadians. The soldiers had gone to do their duty, their cause had been just, and they had prevailed. Every soldier who came home had achieved something remarkable; they had survived. All had scars, physical or mental, for the devastation, carnage and waste that they had experienced. Most of the soldiers had forged tight bonds with the others in their company. Most had seen the death of their comrades.

The First World War is sometimes referred to as "a generation lost". In total, over 65 million individuals served in World War 1, on all fronts. 8.5 million died and an additional 30 million were wounded. 30% of the dead have no known graves.

The British Empire, including Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand supplied 8.9 million troops to the war effort. Of these, 900,000 were killed, 2.3 million wounded.

Canada provided 595,000 soldiers, approximately 13.5% of the male population of Canada at the time. Of these, 418,000 served overseas. 37% (155,799) were wounded, 14% (60,383) died. Approximately 11,285 Canadians who served in Europe in World War I have no

[68] The Huntingdon Gleaner, 17 April 1919, page 3

known grave; their names are inscribed on the Canadian Memorial at Vimy, or the Menin Gate monument at Ypres, Belgium[69].

The impact on Canada as a country was immense. In 1914, Canada was a Dominion of Great Britain with Home Rule, but it had no control over its foreign policy. The sacrifices made by Canadians during the war allowed Prime Minister Borden to assert greater influence on the British government, ensuring that Canadians fought together as a unified Canadian Corps, rather than being dispersed into British regiments. The Battle of Vimy Ridge played a crucial role in shaping a distinct Canadian identity; as many have said, "they went up as soldiers and came down as Canadians."

In 1919, Canada demanded and received separate representation and a signature on the Treaty of Versailles, marking a significant step in its growing autonomy. The contributions of the Canadian Corps, along with those of other Dominion forces, were key factors leading to the Balfour Declaration of 1926, which affirmed that Britain and its Dominions were "equal in status." This was later formalized in the Statute of Westminster in 1931, granting Canada full control over its external affairs—the final step in its path to becoming a fully sovereign nation.

The return home from the war was not what many soldiers had anticipated. Although Canadians at home had endured their own hardships, these were far less severe compared to the experiences of the soldiers. The public was eager to move on from the war, and returning soldiers, some of whom were severely wounded, served as stark reminders of the recent conflict. Once the parades of 1919 had ended, it became apparent that finding employment was often easier for non-veterans than for those who had served. Veterans, many of whom bore physical or emotional scars, faced discrimination in the job market. Businesses tended to favor candidates without such reminders of the war, making reintegration into civilian life particularly challenging for those who had served.

In prior wars, the Government had awarded public lands to soldiers returning from battle. By 1919 there were no more lands to give. Instead, the government allowed every soldier a $7,500 loan at the reduced rate of 5%. It is unknown if Tom O'Connor took advantage of this to buy his first farm

When we reflect on the incredible hardships endured by soldiers in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), it's remarkable to consider how they managed to withstand the relentless conditions at the front. Facing the constant noise and danger from artillery bombardments, machine gun fire, and the omnipresence of death, their resilience is almost beyond comprehension. If I had asked Tom O'Connor how he managed to endure such conditions, he might have simply replied, "It had to be done." This sentiment captures the stoic determination of their generation.

On November 11th each year, Canadians wear a poppy, bright, resilient, and enduring, to honor the men and women who have served in all wars. This symbol, inspired by the

[69] There are at least 10 men from the Huntingdon area who have their names on the Vimy Memorial, 1 at Menin Gate.

famous poem "In Flanders Fields" by Canadian Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae was adopted as the Flower of Remembrance first in France and the U.S. in 1920, and followed by Canada, Britain, and other Commonwealth countries in 1921, represents our profound gratitude and debt to those who have fought for freedom.

Our symbol of remembrance

The Treaty of Versailles imposed severe sanctions and reparations on Germany after the war. Sir Winston Churchill was deeply skeptical of the punitive measures, particularly the heavy reparations imposed on Germany. He believed that they would sow the seeds for future conflict. In 1942, perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, he wrote "The economic clauses of the Treaty were malignant and silly to an extent that made them obviously futile. Germany was condemned to pay reparations on a fabulous scale. These dictates gave expression to the anger of the victors, and to the failure of their peoples to understand that no defeated nation or community can ever pay tribute on a scale which would meet the cost of modern war.[70]"

These harsh measures contributed to significant unrest in Germany, fueling the rise of a new form of nationalism.

Twenty years after Canadian troops returned home, they found themselves once again engaged in a global conflict.

[70] The Second World War, Volume 1: The Gathering Storm, Chapter 1. First published 1948.. Winston S Churchill.

Postscript

By 1922, Thomas O'Connor was back in the Chateauguay Valley. On May 1st, 1922, he married Grace Walsh (1895-1980), the sister-in-law of his brother Patrick.

We don't know for sure, but it is likely that he and Grace lived on land owned by his brother Patrick and farmed it until he could afford to purchase it. In 1926 he purchased lot 114[71] on the Ridge Road in Godmanchester from Patrick, and in 1945 he purchased an additional 100 acres (lot 115[72]) next to it.

Tom and Grace raised seven children: Eileen O'Connor Leroux (1923-2010), Rita O'Connor Gallagher (1924-2006), Marjorie O'Connor Anderson (1926-2001), Emmett O'Connor (1931-2014), Cecil O'Connor (1932-2022), Vincent O'Connor (1933-1987) and Ansel O'Connor (1935-1987).

Thomas O'Connor died of a heart attack on August 4th, 1967 and is buried in the churchyard of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Huntingdon, Quebec. In the months before he died, he fixed the roof on the house and made sure that the woodshed was full, with enough wood to keep Grace through the winter.

He was a good man. I am proud to be his grandson.

Grace and Tom O'Connor, 45th Anniversary, March 1967[73]

[71] Lot 114 is east of where the house we are familiar with is, and incorporated the house where Hugh Cosgrove lived. The house was on the south side of the Ridge Road. I can remember seeing the barn across from Cosgrove's, the foundations of the house and the old pump that was still active until I was in my teens.

[72] Where the house we are familiar with is.

[73] This photo, the last of him I have, was taken 5 months before Tom O'Connor's death, at the Crossroads Restaurant in Moira, NY. My parents and aunts and uncles had taken them there for their 45th anniversary dinner.

Metals and Decorations

For his service to his Country, Pte. Thomas O'Connor was awarded the following medals:

War Service badge Class "A"	Victory Medal	British War Service Medal
The War Badge had various classifications. Class "A" was awarded to Canadians honourably discharged from the Expeditionary Force. Thomas O'Connor was issued Badge Number 147162.	The medal was awarded to all ranks of the fighting forces that served in a theater of war between August 5, 1914 and November 11, 1918.	The medal was awarded to all ranks of Canadian overseas military forces that came from Canada between August 5, 1914 and November 11, 1918.
		

These decorations are on display at the Huntingdon, Quebec branch of the Canadian Legion[74].

[74] Knowing the importance his service in the war, my grandmother wanted to bury the decorations with her husband. Her children convinced her to preserve them and donate them to the Legion.

Appendix I – Timeline

This section gives an overview of the time that Pte. Thomas O'Connor spent as a member of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1917 – 1919.

November 8th, 1917	Medical Exam Swift Current, Saskatchewan
January 2nd, 1918	Call up Calgary Alberta
February 10, 1918	Left Calgary by train
February 19, 1918	Embarked SS Melita, Quebec City
March 4, 1918	Arrived Bramshott, England, Assigned 21st reserve (Alberta) for training
August 8th, 1918	Transport to France, assigned to the 31st Battalion, 2nd Canadian Infantry Division
August 17th, 1918	Joined his unit. Participated in action at the front lines at the end of August and early September
August 23rd, 1918	Battle of Neuville Vitasse
September 2th, 1918	Second Battle of Arras, Battle of the Scarpe
September 8th, 1918	Shelled/gassed
September 9th, 1918	Hospitalized in Wimereaux (near Boulogne-sur-Mer)
October 4th, 1918	Transferred Boulogne Convalescent Camp
October 6th, 1918	Transferred Aubengue Convalescent Camp
October 30th, 1918	Transferred to Rest Camp St Martin (near Boulogne-sur-Mer)
30 October, 1918	Discharged St Martin. Sent to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp.
November 11. 1918	Armistice
November 18, 1918	Rejoined the 31st Battalion on the march to the Rhine as part of the Occupation Force
November 22nd, 1918	Left Gosselies, Belgium, near Mons
December 1, 1918	Part of the first Canadian troops to reach the German Border
December 10, 1918	Crossed the Rhine. Reviewed by General Sir Arthur Currie, Commander Canadian Corps.
January 21, 1919	Transferred to England (Bramshott)
January 29, 1919	Transferred to Ripon, to work as a coal miner
February 28, 1919	Transferred to Rhyl, Wales (Kinmel Park)
March 30, 1919	Embarked SS Saturnia, Glasgow, Scotland
April 11, 1919	Arrived Halifax, N.S.
	Demobolized
April 13, 1919	Arrived in Huntingdon, Quebec

Appendix II – Attestation Papers
Thomas O'Connor

ORIGINAL

FIRST DEPOT BATT'N ALBERTA REGT

M. D. 13 1st Alberta Depot Battalion Regiment

Regtl. No. 3205073

No. 1 Coy.

PARTICULARS OF RECRUIT

DRAFTED UNDER MILITARY SERVICE ACT, 1917

(Class 1)

1. Surname O'Connor
2. Christian name Thomas
3. Present address Cabri, Saskatchewan/
4. Military Service Act letter and number 491174 L.C.
5. Date of birth 31St/ October, 1891/
6. Place of birth Huntington, Quebec/ (town, township or county and country)
7. Married, widower or single Single/
8. Religion Catholic.
9. Trade or calling Farmer.
10. Name of next-of-kin Helen O'Connor/
11. Relationship of next-of-kin Mother.
12. Address of next-of-kin RR No3 Huntington, Quebec.
13. Whether at present a member of the Active Militia No.
14. Particulars of previous military or naval service, if any No.
15. Medical Examination under Military Service Act:—

(a) Place Swift Current, Sask. Date 8th November 17 Category A/ 2.

DECLARATION OF RECRUIT

I, Thomas O'Connor, do solemnly declare that the above particulars refer to me, and are true.

Thos O'Connor (Signature of Recruit)

DESCRIPTION ON CALLING UP

Apparent age 27 yrs 3 mths.
Height 5 ft 6 1/2 ins.
Chest measurement: fully expanded 36 ins.; range of expansion 2 ins.
Complexion Ruddy
Eyes Grey
Hair Auburn/

Distinctive marks, and marks indicating congential peculiarities or previous disease.

Nil

O. C. 2nd Depot Btln.
FIRST DEPOT BATT'N ALBERTA REG'T Regt.

Place Calgary, Alberta/ Date 2nd January, 1918/

M. F. W. 133.
500 M.—8-17.
1772—39—1168.

Appendix III – War Service Record

Two pages of the abbreviated war service record

Form R 122

LTR

Rank — Name: O'CONNOR, Thomas — Reg'l No. 3205073

Unit: 21st Res. Bn. Alta. — If in perm. Corps, What Unit? — Married or Single: Single.

Place and Date of Enlistment: Calgary 2nd Jan, 1918. — Place of Birth: Quebec.

Name and Address, Next-of-Kin: Helen O'Connor, R.R. No.3. Huntington Quebec. — Relationship: Mother.

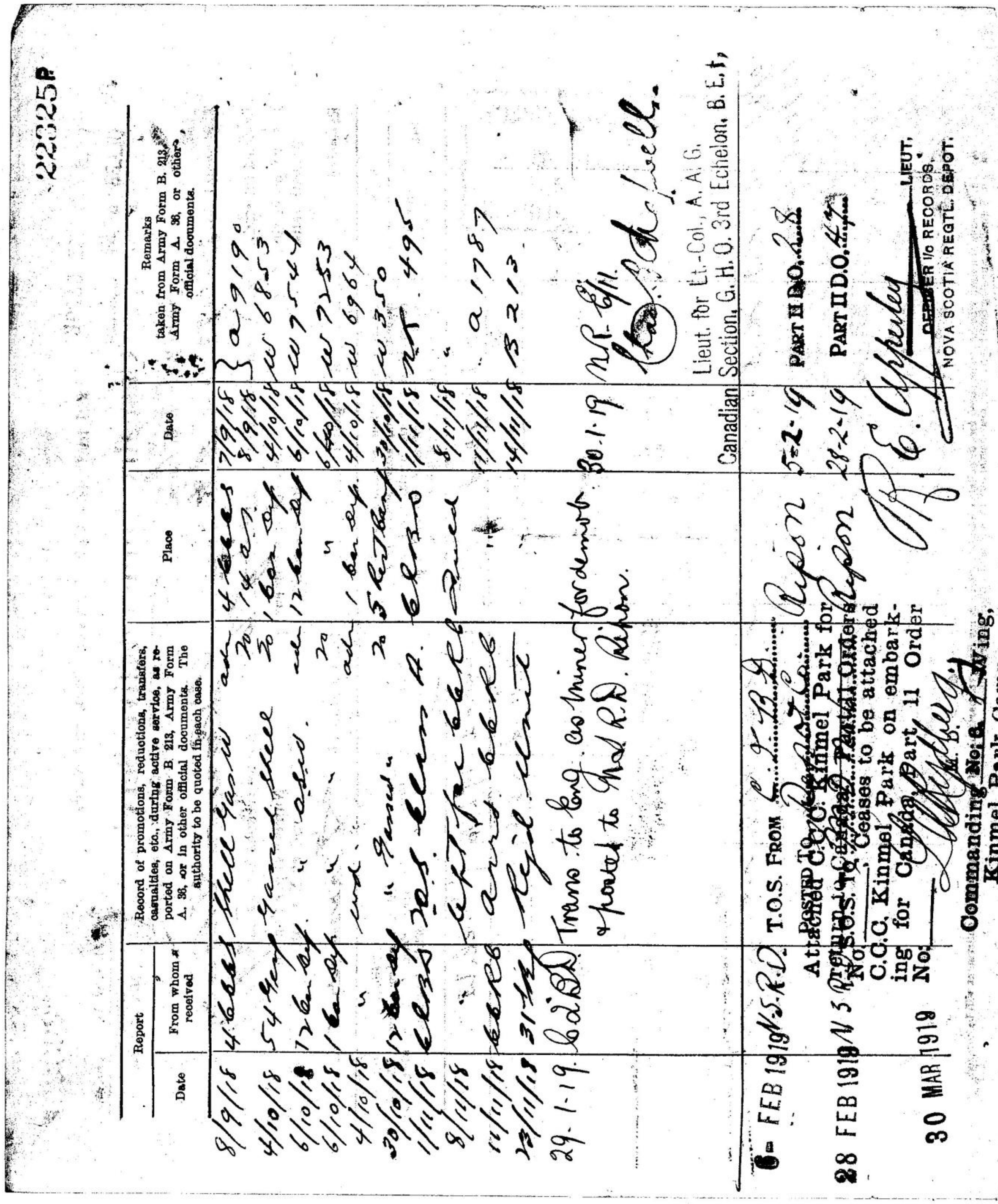
Assigned Pay Monthly $ — Payable to — Relationship

Separation Allowance $ — Payable to — Relationship

Discharge, Date and Place — Reason — Character

H/E R.B. 11582 O'CONNOR

Report Date	From whom received	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place	Date	REMARKS Taken from Official Documents.
11.3.18	21st Res.	Arrived in England		4-3-18	S/S MELITA
		T.O.S. From Canada.	OTT.	4.3.18	[illegible]
9-8-18	"	S.O.S. to 31st Bn.	"	8-8-18	A.II. 184
13 9 18	OR 31	wounded	Field	9 9 18	CLASS 14
13.2.19	31st Bn	S.O.S. to A.R.D. Coal miner		30.1.19	D.O. 8
6.2.19	NRD	TOS from field	Ripon	5.2.19	D.O. 28
		3 S. B. 4		30 3 19	
30.3.19	MD 6	Sal to Canada	Rhyl	30.3.19	DO 93
28.2.19	NRD	Sal to Rhyl MD 6		28-2-19	DO 47

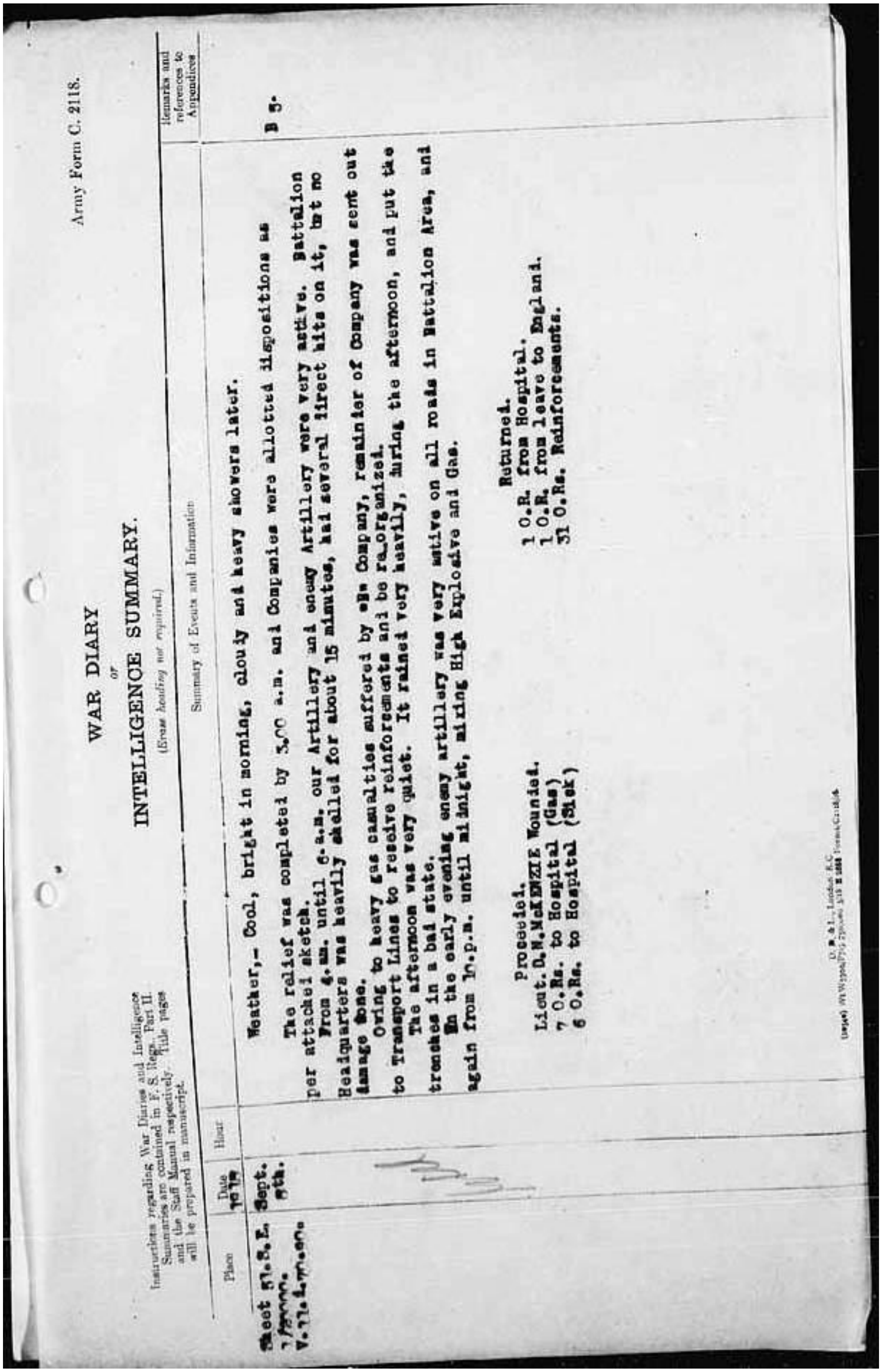


22325 P

Report: Date	Report: From whom received	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents.
8/9/18	4 CCCS	Shell Gas W adm	4 CCCS	7/9/18	} a 9190
		20	14 A.S.	8/9/18	
4/10/18	54 Gen	Gassed Shell 20	1 Can Inf	4/10/18	W 6853
6/10/18	12 Can Inf	" a.s.d. adm	12 Can Inf	6/10/18	W 7544
6/10/18	1 Can Inf	" " 20	"	6/10/18	W 7253
4/10/18	"	wd. adm	1 Can Inf	4/10/18	W 6964
30/10/18	12 Can Inf	" Gassed " 20	5 [illegible]	30/10/18	W 350
1/11/18	CCBD	TOS Class A.	CCBD	1/11/18	N.R. 495
8/11/18		Left for CCRC	Field	8/11/18	"
11/11/18	CCRC	Arrd CCRC		11/11/18	a 1787
23/11/18	31 Bn	Rejd Unit		14/11/18	B 213
29.1.19	C.C.B.D.	Trans to Eng as miner for demob & posted to N.S.R.D. Ripon.		30.1.19	N.R. E/11. [signature] Lieut. for Lt.-Col., A.A.G. Canadian Section, G.H.Q. 3rd Echelon, B.E.F.
6 FEB 1919	N.S.R.D.	T.O.S. From C.C.B.D. Posted to Depot Co.	Ripon	5-2-19	Part II D.O. 28
28 FEB 1919	N.S.R.D.	Attached C.C.C. Kinmel Park for return to Canada. S.O.S. to ... Part II Orders No. ...	Ripon	28-2-19	Part II D.O. 47
30 MAR 1919		Ceases to be attached C.C.C. Kinmel Park on embarking for Canada. Part II Order No. ... [signature] Commanding No. 8 Wing, Kinmel Park Camp			R. E. Apperley, Lieut., Officer i/c Records, Nova Scotia Regtl. Depot.

Appendix IV – 31st Battalion Diary September 8, 1918

The War Diary from the 31st Battalion on the day that Pte. Thomas O'Connor was gassed.



Army Form C. 2118.

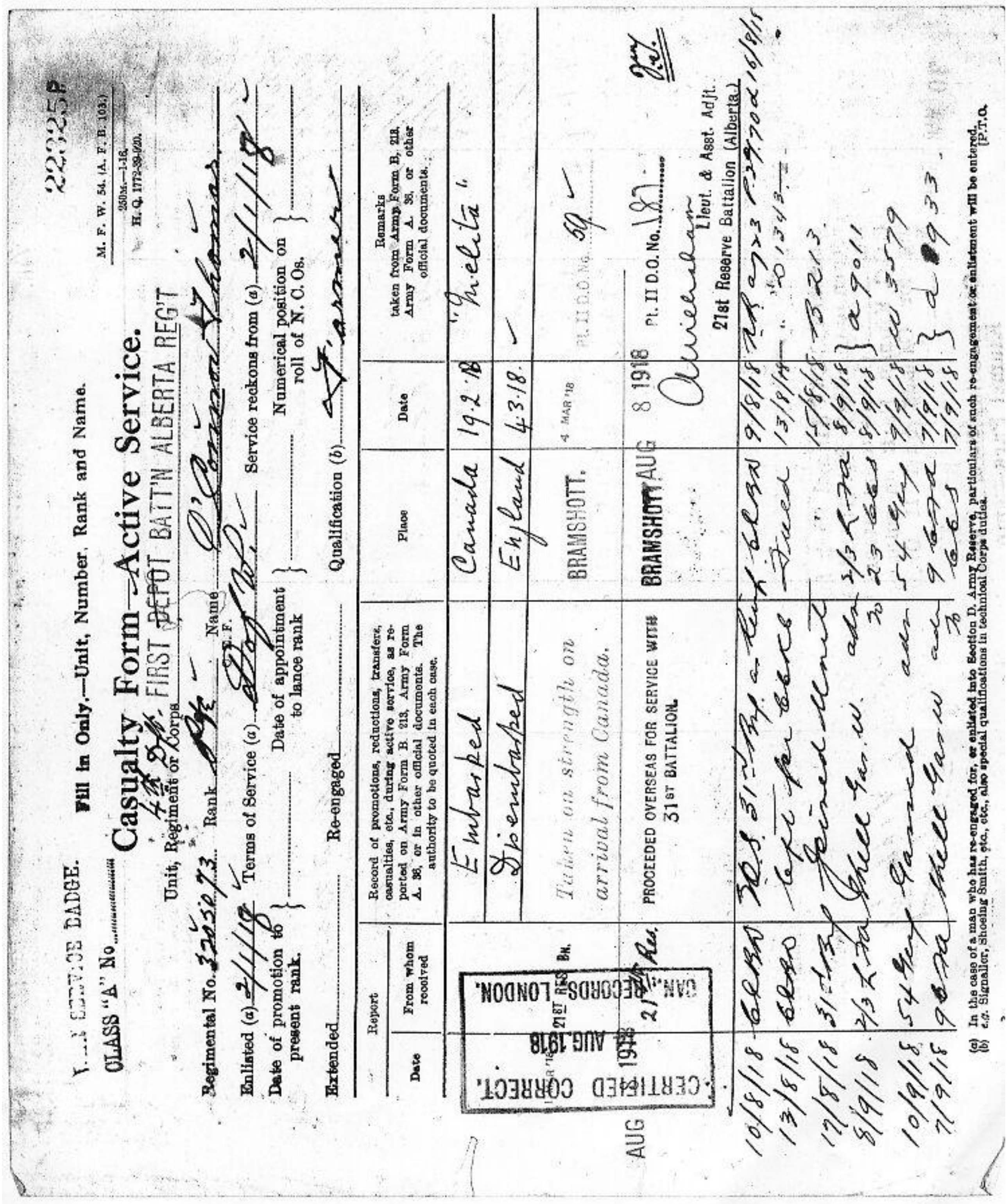
WAR DIARY
or
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.
(Erase heading not required.)

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II. and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

Place	Date 1918	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
Sheet 51.S.E. 1/20000. V.11.Lyn.c.	Sept. 8th.		Weather,- Cool, bright in morning, cloudy and heavy showers later.	
			The relief was completed by 3.00 a.m. and Companies were allotted dispositions as per attached sketch.	B 5.
			From 6.am. until 6.a.m. our Artillery and enemy Artillery were very active. Battalion Headquarters was heavily shelled for about 15 minutes, had several direct hits on it, but no damage done.	
			Owing to heavy gas casualties suffered by "B" Company, remainder of Company was sent out to Transport Lines to receive reinforcements and be re-organized.	
			The afternoon was very quiet. It rained very heavily, during the afternoon, and put the trenches in a bad state.	
			In the early evening enemy artillery was very active on all roads in Battalion Area, and again from 10.p.m. until midnight, mixing High Explosive and Gas.	
			Proceeded. Lieut. D.N.McKENZIE Wounded. 7 O.Rs. to Hospital (Gas) 6 O.Rs. to Hospital (Sick)	
			Returned. 1 O.R. from Hospital. 1 O.R. from leave to England. 31 O.Rs. Reinforcements.	

Appendix V – Casualty Form

The two page Casualty form for Pte. Thomas O'Connor.



A... SERVICE BADGE.

CLASS "A" No.........

Fill in Only.—Unit, Number, Rank and Name.

M. F. W. 54. (A. F. B. 103.)

22325P

250M.—1-16. H.Q. 1772-39-920.

Casualty Form—Active Service.

Unit, Regiment or Corps 4th D.B. FIRST DEPOT BATT'N ALBERTA REGT

Regimental No. 3205073 Rank Pte Name O'Connor Thomas

Enlisted (a) 2/1/18 Terms of Service (a) Dof W. C.E.F. Service reckons from (a) 2/1/18

Date of promotion to present rank .... Date of appointment to lance rank .... Numerical position on roll of N.C.Os. ....

Extended .... Re-engaged .... Qualification (b) Farmer

Report: Date	Report: From whom received	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents.
		Embarked	Canada	19.2.18	"Melita"
		Disembarked	England	4.3.18	
		Taken on strength on arrival from Canada.	BRAMSHOTT.	4 MAR '18	Pt. II D.O. No. 50
AUG 1918	21st Res.	PROCEEDED OVERSEAS FOR SERVICE WITH 31ST BATTALION.	BRAMSHOTT	AUG 8 1918	Pt. II D.O. No. 181 [illegible] Lieut. & Asst. Adjt. 21st Reserve Battalion (Alberta)
10/8/18	6 CRR	T.O.S. 31 Bn a Reft.	6 CRR	9/8/18	[illegible] 16/8/18
13/8/18	6 CRR	Left for base	Field	13/8/18	0.1343
17/8/18	31 Bn	Joined unit		15/8/18	B 213
8/9/18	2/3 LFA	Shell Gas W. adm	2/3 LFA to 23 CCS	8/9/18	A 9011
10/9/18	54 Genl	Gassed adm	54 Genl	9/9/18	W 3579
7/9/18	9 CFA	Shell Gas W adm	9 CFA to 6 CCS	7/9/18	D 9933

CERTIFIED CORRECT. 14 AUG 1918 CAN. RECORDS 21ST RES. BN. LONDON.

(a) In the case of a man who has re-engaged for, or enlisted into Section D, Army Reserve, particulars of such re-engagement or enlistment will be entered.
(b) e.g. Signaller, Shoeing Smith, etc., also special qualifications in technical Corps duties.

[P.T.O.

22325

Fill in only.—Unit, Number, Rank and Name.

M. F. W. 54. (A. F. B. 103.)
350M.—5-16
H. Q. 1772-39-920.

Casualty Form—Active Service.

Unit, Regiment or Corps 1st D.B. Alberta Reg.

Regimental No. 3205073 Rank Pte. C. E. F. Name O'Connor Thomas

Enlisted (a)........ Terms of Service (a)........ Service reckons from (a)........

Date of promotion to present rank .... Date of appointment to lance rank .... Numerical position on roll of N. C. Os. ....

Extended........ Re-engaged........ Qualification (b)........

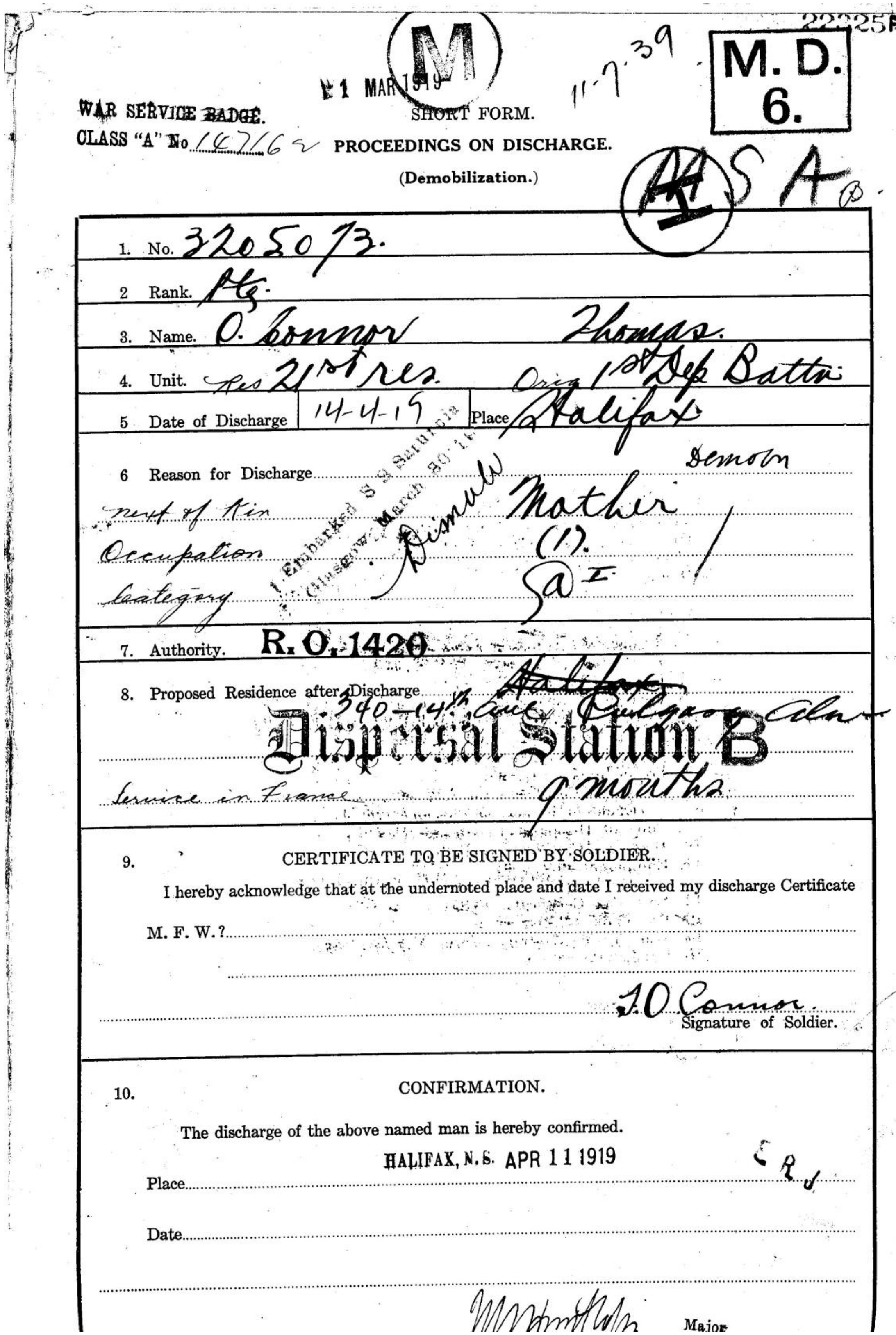
Report: Date	Report: From whom received	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents
30/3/19	—	T.O.S. 6 DoD & posted Disp. Ste. B	[illegible]	11/4/19	D.O. 105 [illegible]
14/4/19	—	S.O.S. on discharge	—	—	Do. 105 O/C Records

(a) In the case of a man who has re-engaged for, or enlisted into Section D. Army Reserve, particulars of such re-engagement or enlistment will be entered.
(b) e.g. Signaller, Shoeing Smith, etc., etc., also special qualifications in technical Corps duties.

[P.T.O.

Appendix VI – Discharge Certificate

The Discharge Certificate for Pte. Thomas O'Connor showing his proposed residence as Alberta.



22325P

M 1 MAR 1919

11-7-39

M. D. 6.

WAR SERVICE BADGE.
CLASS "A" No 167162

SHORT FORM.

PROCEEDINGS ON DISCHARGE.

(Demobilization.)

AAF SA B.

1. No. 3205073.

2 Rank. Pte.

3. Name. O. Connor Thomas.

4. Unit. Res 21st res. Orig 1st Dep Battn

5 Date of Discharge 14-4-19 Place Halifax

6 Reason for Discharge Demob

Next of Kin Mother

Occupation (1).

Category (a) I

Embarked S.S. Saturnia Glasgow March 30 19

7. Authority. R. O. 1420

8. Proposed Residence after Discharge ~~Halifax~~ 340-14th ave. Calgary Alta

Dispersal Station B

Service in France 9 months

9. CERTIFICATE TO BE SIGNED BY SOLDIER.

I hereby acknowledge that at the undernoted place and date I received my discharge Certificate

M. F. W. ?

T. O Connor
Signature of Soldier.

10. CONFIRMATION.

The discharge of the above named man is hereby confirmed.

Place HALIFAX, N.S.

Date APR 11 1919

Major

Appendix VII – Canada's 100 Days

By March 1918, the Germans were on the offensive. They had begun shelling Paris, using a long gun at a distance of 75 miles. From March to August 1918, the German Army continually attacked Allied positions at Champagne, Amiens, and Ypres. From March to May 1918, the Allies lost over 330,000 troops. In late May, the Germans began the advance to the Marne River. The first battle of the Marne, in 1914, had been a British victory that ended the German hopes for a quick win to the war. The second Battle of the Marne was the high point of their advance towards Paris. By this time the Germans were tired, they were outpacing their supply lines resulting in shortages of essential supplies, including ammunition, food, and medical supplies and they had taken too many causalities during this period; troops that could not be easily replaced. The stage was set for a counter offensive with the Allies taking the offensive. Their objective was to stabilize the front and prepare for another winter of stalemate. The intent was to bring in more of the American troops and ready for a push to end the war in 1919.

The Canadians, along with the Australians, changed that thinking in a series of 5 major engagements in the period of August to November 1918.

The battle of Amiens began on August 8, 1918. This was the first day of what war historians call "The Last Hundred Days." This was **the** secret attack of the War, and troop movements were made in such a way as to not attract attention, since the Germans recognized the movement of Canadian (or Australian) troops as a prelude for attack. The secrecy was complete and effective. The Canadian attack so surprised and disoriented the Germans that their commander-in-chief, General Ludendorff, is often quoted as saying that August 8, 1918 was "the blackest day of the German Army in the history of the war." Sir Julian Byng, the British general who had commanded the Canadian Corps at Vimy Ridge, told his successor, General Sir Arthur Currie, that the Canadian performance at Amiens was "the finest operation of the war."

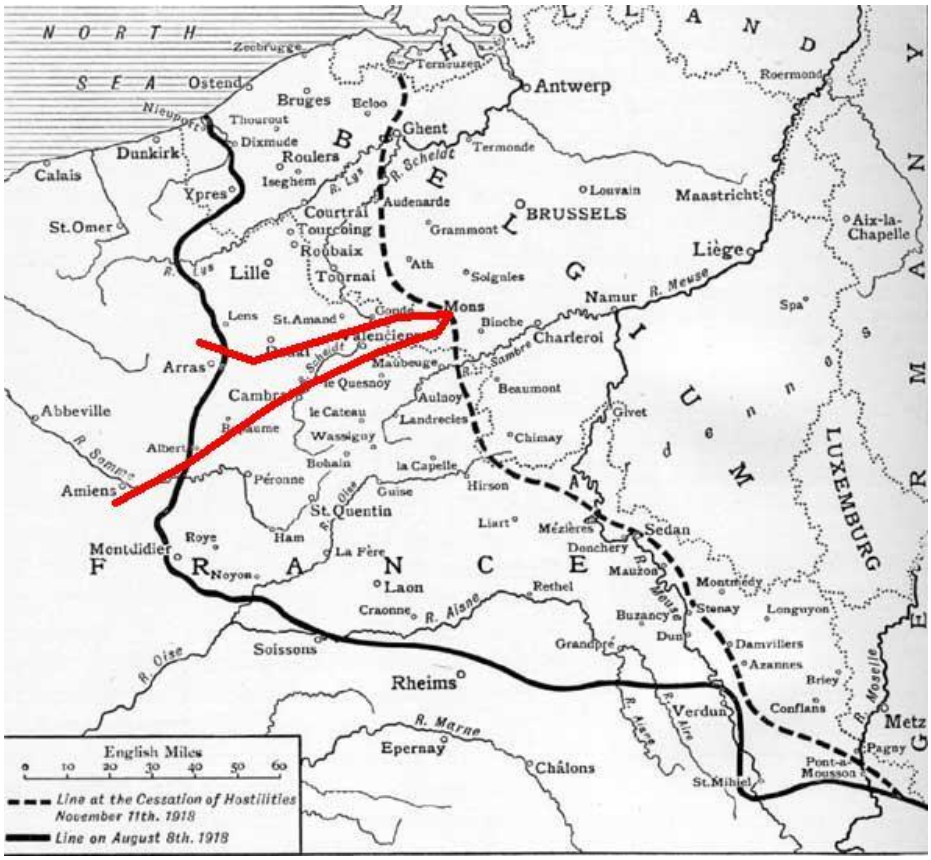
In the hundred days that followed the Canadian Corps' breakthrough of the German line, the Corps, under Currie's command, liberated 500 square miles of territory containing 228 cities, towns, and villages and captured 31,000 prisoners, 590 heavy and field guns and thousands of machine guns and trench mortars. Fifty German divisions, approximately one-fourth of the total German forces on the Western Front, were defeated. By nightfall on the first day of the battle of Amiens, the Canadian Corps' penetration of the enemy line was unequalled: no other engagement on the Western Front up to that time had achieved this kind of success as the result of a single day's fighting.

On the first day of the battle, as many as 6,000 prisoners had been taken and 100 guns seized. However, tank losses had been heavy, and the RAF had suffered badly; the Germans had clear air superiority. On August 9, almost 24,000 German prisoners were taken and 200 guns captured. At this point, the remainder of the German Army regrouped, and the Allied advance slowed.

On 10 August, the French Third Army joined the offensive, but by this time the enemy was already withdrawing and retrenching.

On 12 August, the first phase of this offensive ended. German losses amounted to about 40,000 killed and wounded and 33,000 taken prisoner. British losses, which included the Canadian, Australian and New Zealand troops, were 22,000 while the French had 24,000 killed and wounded.

This was the first battle in a campaign that would continue for the last 100 days of the war. The Allies, led by the Canadian successes, would drive the Germans back, and the Canadians entered the Belgium city of Mons on November 10, 1918, the day before the Armistice was signed.



Map showing the "100 Day" Advance

After the Germans had successfully halted the Allied advance at Amiens on 12th August, Marshall Foch and General Sir Douglas Haig made plans for a new offensive at Albert on the Western Front. The first contingent of the United States Army had arrived in France and over 108,000 members would take part in the campaign.

General Sir Julian Byng and the British Third Army moved forward on 21st August. Counter-attacks by the German Second Army halted the advance that afternoon, but Lieutenant General Sir Henry Rawlinson and the British Fourth Army, to the south of Byng, was brought forward to take the small town of Albert. The following day, both Byng and Rawlinson were able to advance and by 23rd August, they had captured 8,000 German soldiers.

The German Second Army was now in full retreat along a 35-mile front. Bapaume was taken on 29th August and during the next four days British forces were able to move up to the Hindenburg Line.

After the Allied success in the Battle of Amiens, August 8-11, it was expected that the enemy forces would be severely exhausted. "If we let the enemy rest," said General Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, "it will regain its confidence and we will have to start using attrition tactics again." A renewal of the offensive brought the Canadians back into action, this time in the Arras sector.

The British 1st Army was to advance eastward from Arras, and the Canadian Corps, under the command of General Sir Arthur Currie, became the spearhead of the attack, as it had been in earlier battles.

The attack began on August 26, zero hour being 3:00 AM. The Canadians were able to surprise the Germans, and they made quick advances. By August 30, despite heavy counterattacks from the Germans, the Canadians had advanced 5 miles.

Between August 26 and September 2, the Canadian Corps launched a succession of attacks that breached the infamous Drocourt-Queant Line, in front of the Canal du Nord, part of the main Hindenburg Line. The rapidity of the advance caught the Germans by surprise, but they responded. The fighting was intense, and the Canadians suffered over 11,000 casualties.

On September 2, the Canadians attacked again, reaching Buissy Switch by midnight. On September 3, the Germans pulled back, allowing the Canadians to proceed another 4 miles without resistance.

The Corps had advanced to the main part of the Hindenburg Line near the Canal du Nord. The Canadians regrouped and were joined by the British. The combined British/Canadian offensive came on September 27. General Currie, always wanting to spare troops where necessary, came up with a plan that was so daring the British command would not approve it. The plan was raised to Field Marshall Haig, who perhaps remembered Curries very successful alternative strategy at Hill 70 in 1917 and overruled the British Command and approved the plan. Following the largest single day bombardment of the war, the whole Canadian Corps was funneled through a 2,600-yard dry section of the Canal du Nord. The Canadians crossed the canal and broke through three lines of German defenses, capturing Bourlon Wood. The Hindenburg Line was breached.

Further fighting led to the capture of Cambrai in early October, and then the Canadians advance through Belgium to Mons. They took the city on November 10, 1918, the day before the Armistice.

Between August 8th and November 11th, 1918, the Canadian Corps had an impressive record: 47 German divisions defeated, nearly a quarter of the German troops on the Western Front, 31,537 prisoners taken, 500 square miles including 228 cities, towns and villages liberated,

Arthur Currie, one of the greatest military geniuses of all time, was criticized for taking Mons and expending Canadian lives so close to the end of the war. It should be noted that

November 11 was an Armistice or cease-fire, not surrender by the Germans. No one knew what the conditions of the final agreement would be and many thought that the Germans might keep the land in Belgium that they occupied at the end of the war. We will never know what went through Curries' mind, but we do know that the people of Mons appreciated their liberation. After 4 years of occupation, the reception from the inhabitants was phenomenal. It is alleged that troops fell asleep in the town square with the townsfolk dancing around them.

Appendix VIII – The 31st Battalion

Thomas O'Connor was conscripted into the 5th Canadian Division, First Depot Battalion, Alberta Regiment and was shipped to England with this Battalion. Once in England, the troops in the Depot Battalions were assigned to Infantry Battalions, Pte. Thomas O'Connor going to the 21st Infantry Regiment.

After the losses that the Canadian troops incurred at Passchendaele in 1918, the 5th division was broken up for reinforcements for the 4 Divisions that were in France/Belgium. The 21st Infantry Regiment provided reinforcements to the 6th Regiment, Pte. O'Connor being assigned to another Alberta Battalion, the 31st Battalion, part of the 2nd Division, 6th Infantry Regiment CEF.

History

Lieutenant-Colonel A.H. Bell commanded the 31st Battalion, known as "Bells Bulldogs", throughout most of the war. The Battalion was formed on November 17th, 1914 shortly after war broke out. Volunteers quickly filled out the Battalion, and it reached battle strength by November 26th, with 36 Officers and 1,134 other ranks. They trained and paraded around Calgary until May 1915, when the Regiment boarded trains bound for Quebec City. After arrival they rested for a few days and then boarded ships for England starting on May 17th arriving in England 5 days after sailing.


Lieutenant-Colonel A.H. Bell

The 31st went to Dibgate Camp in Kent, which was 4 miles west of Shorncliffe, for combat training. On September 15th they moved to Southampton and embarked on ships to France. They arrived in Boulogne beginning on the 17th and went via train St. Omer where they then continued on foot to the front. They joined the line on the 30th of September 1915 at Weexton Farm near St. Sylvester Chappelle.

The 31st saw continuous action through the war and formed part of the occupation army in Germany. They returned to Calgary on June 1st, 1919 and were disbanded shortly after.

31st Battalion Battle Honours

The 31st Battalion participated in the following battles:

1916	1917	1918
Mount Sorrel June 2-13	Vimy Apr. 9-14	Somme 1918 Mar. 21- Apr. 5
Somme July 1-Nov. 18	Hill 70 Aug. 15-25, 1917	Amiens Aug. 8-11
Flers Courcelette Sep. 15-22	Passchendaelle Oct. 12, Oct. 26, Nov. 10	Arras Aug. 26-Sep. 3
		Drocourt-Quéant Sep. 2-3
		Cambrai Oct. 8-9
		Mons Nov. 4-11

Statistics

Total number of men that passed through the Battalion from 1915-1919	4,487
Total number of reinforcements	4,000
Number of individuals that passed through the Battalion from 1915-1919	2,713
Killed in Action or missing, presumed dead	708
Died of wounds (less POW fatalities)	195
Died whilst Prisoners of War	6
Died of Disease	24
Accidental Deaths	7
Other Deaths	1
Total fatal Causalities	941
Non-fatal wounds, enemy fire	2,103
Non-fatal wounds, gas	209
Total non-fatal causalities	2,312

Appendix IX – The cost of war

The following is extracted from an article[75] written by a British Veteran, Jack Cavanagh, in 1997 that outlines some of the costs associated with the War. It is included only to give the reader a sense of the horror that Canadian soldiers must have felt.

In 1938 which was twenty years after the cessation of hostilities, there were still 442,000 men still alive who were so maimed, gassed, nerve-racked, or otherwise ruined in health, that they could not work at all, or only with diminished efficiency, and were wholly or partly dependent on the State for money to live.

Over one hundred and twenty seven thousand widows still mourned their men that they had last seen in uniform, and two hundred and twenty four thousand parents and other dependents were still suffering through the loss of sons and relatives who were their breadwinners. There were 8,000 with one or both legs missing, 3,600 with one or both arms missing, together with 90,000 with limbs damaged to a marked degree.

Ten thousand men had eyesight injured by poison gas, and explosions, with 2,000 of these being completely blind.

Head injuries accounted for 15,000 with many wearing metal plates to protect them, and 15,000 had been deafened by explosions of various kinds. Most soldiers who had served near the front line, or in the artillery suffered from some impairment of their hearing.

Severe exertion due to heavy labour in the trenches produced hernias in 7,000 men making them unfit for manual work, whilst some 2,000 still suffered the effects of Frostbite with in some cases loss of toes and fingers.

Thirty two thousand more suffered from various unclassified wounds causing disability of various kinds. Many of these men (14,000) still had wounds unhealed that required treatment including amputation even at this late stage. Much of this was due to a condition called Latent Sepsis which was very common in the wounded of the Great War especially in France and Flanders. Almost without exception soldiers wounded on the Western Front had wounds which were grossly infected, due to the manured soil in which they occurred. Even after these wounds had healed, many still contained organisms deep within the tissues which were liable to flare up, many years after, to cause amputation and even death.

These are the figures for the wounded, but the legacy of diseases contracted during their service, such as Malaria, Dysentery, and other tropical diseases, still persisted in 1938, the year before the next great conflict began.

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[75] Cavanagh, J. (1997). *Twenty years on – Counting the human cost in 1938*. Hellfire Corner. Retrieved from http://web.archive.org/web/20140605101039/http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/jack.htm. Note, this was retrieved via wayback machine; the article is no longer on Hellfire Corner.

One hundred thousand men were afflicted with diseases too numerous to classify, with 41,000 suffering from bronchitis and tuberculosis often as a result of gassing.

Consumption, or pulmonary tuberculosis of the lungs to give it its medical term, was rife in the Royal Navy especially in the submariners. This filled many sanatoriums after the War, with something similar occurring after the Second World War but not on the same scale.

Heart disease in addition to hernia affected 38,000 due to excessive labour at the front, with the terrible conditions of the front line convincing the not too easily convinced Ministry of Pensions doctors that the 28,000 cases of severe Rheumatism deserved a disability pension. Many more who suffered got no pension at all, there being many cases of grave injustice done at this time. These included many of the 25,000 still suffering from shell shock and other neurasthenias, with 3,200 of these still in asylums, their minds broken beyond repair.

The cost to the country was enormous with one shilling in every pound (i.e. 1/20th) of the national budget still going to keep these war victims, which makes it unbelievable that they, mankind, were going to start another one!!

Appendix X – In Flanders Fields

Colonel John McCrae (1872-1918) was born in Guelph, Ontario, and studied medicine at the University of Toronto, where he graduated at the top of his class. He enlisted and fought in the Second Boer War in South Africa. Upon his return, he pursued a fellowship at McGill University in Montreal.

McCrae had a distinguished academic and medical career. He served as a special professor of pathology at the University of Vermont, an associate in medicine at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, and a lecturer in pathology and medicine at McGill University. He also worked as a pathologist at Montreal General Hospital and as a physician at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Infectious Diseases in Montreal.

When the First World War began in 1914, McCrae enlisted as the Brigade Surgeon with the 1st Brigade of the Canadian Field Artillery. He was responsible for a field dressing station at Essex Farm, near Ypres, close to the front lines, where he treated the wounded during the Second Battle of Ypres in the spring of 1915. In addition to his medical duties, McCrae also occasionally served in the artillery when required.

In the summer of 1915, McCrae was transferred from the artillery to the No. 3 Canadian General Hospital in Wimereux, France, where he served as second-in-command under Colonel John Elder. On January 24, 1918, McCrae was appointed consulting physician to the First British Army, the first Canadian to be honored with this role. Unfortunately, just four days later, on January 28, 1918, McCrae died of pneumonia, complicated by meningitis.

McCrae was buried at Wimereux Cemetery in France. His funeral was a solemn affair, with both generals and nursing sisters standing side by side to silently honor him as his cortege passed.

Funeral Cortege for Col. McCrae, Wimereux, France January 29, 1918

While an extraordinary soldier and physician, Colonel McCrea is best known for his poem "In Flanders Fields". It is a lasting legacy of the terrible battle in the Ypres salient in the spring of 1915 and to the war in general.

McCrea had spent seventeen days during the 2nd Battle of Ypres, treating injured men -- Canadians, British, French, and Germans at Essex Farm in the Ypres salient. On May 5, 1915, a former student and friend, Alexis Helmer, who had served with McCrea in the prewar militia, was visiting the aid station and killed by shellfire. McCrea collected his body and prepared it for burial. McCrae later wrote:

Preserved Operating Theatre, Essex Farm

"I wish I could embody on paper some of the varied sensations of that seventeen days... Seventeen days of Hades! At the end (Operating)of the first day if anyone had told us we had to spend seventeen days there, we would have folded our hands and said it could not have been done."

The next day, McCrea officiated at the service for the burial of Alexis Helmer. McCrea sat on the back of an ambulance parked near the field dressing station and composed the poem.

A young NCO, delivering mail, watched him write it, and when he finished writing, he took his mail from the soldier and, without saying a word, handed his pad to the Sergeant-Major. Cyril Allinson was moved by what he read:

"The poem was exactly an exact description of the scene in front of us both. He used the word blow in that line because the poppies actually were being blown that morning by a gentle east wind. It never occurred to me at that time that it would ever be published. It seemed to me just an exact description of the scene."

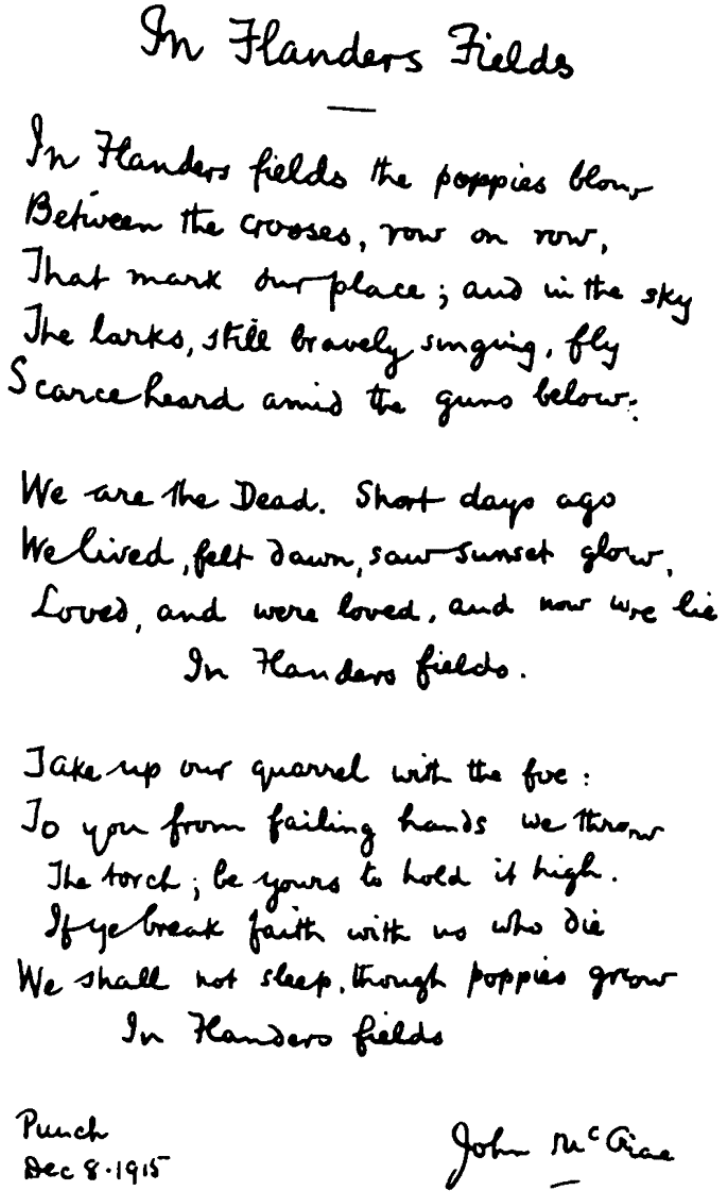
Colonel John McCrae was reportedly dissatisfied with his poem In Flanders Fields and discarded it. A fellow officer, however, retrieved the poem and, without McCrae's knowledge, sent it to newspapers in England. The Spectator in London rejected it, but it was later published by Punch magazine on 8 December 1915.

Like many novels and films produced after the war, In Flanders Fields evokes the dead soldiers as a powerful metaphor for unresolved guilt, grief, and loss. The poem captures the haunting presence of the fallen, symbolizing the emotional and psychological aftermath of the war.

The cemetery at Essex Farm, where McCrae served as a field surgeon, was shelled repeatedly throughout the war. As a result, the grave of Alexis Helmer, the inspiration for the poem, was lost. Helmer is commemorated on the walls of the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium, one of the 6,983 Canadian soldiers listed on the memorial who were killed before 1917 and have no known grave.
The Menin Gate Memorial itself commemorates 54,395 British and Commonwealth soldiers who died in the Ypres Salient and remain missing.

For his contributions as a surgeon during the war, the main street in Wimereux, France, is named Rue McCrae in his honor.

McCrae's famous poem has since become one of the most enduring symbols of remembrance for the war and its fallen soldiers.



In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields

Punch
Dec 8. 1915

John McCrae

Appendix XI – The Missing

The Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium, lists 6,983 Canadian soldiers who were killed before 1917 and have no known grave. The Menin Gate Memorial itself commemorates a total of 54,395 British and Commonwealth soldiers who died in the Ypres Salient and remain missing.

The Menin Gate in early evening

In addition to those honored at Menin Gate, 11,285 Canadian soldiers with no known graves are listed on the Vimy Memorial in France, while 820 Newfoundlanders are inscribed on the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial. Another 991 Newfoundlanders are included among the 34,888 Commonwealth soldiers commemorated at the Tyne Cot Memorial, which records those who died after August 15, 1917.

The 10,732 Australian soldiers with no know graves are listed on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial in France. Additionally, the Australian War Memorial in Canberra includes the Roll of Honour, which commemorates Australian soldiers from all wars, including those with no known graves.

Vimy Memorial

The New Zealand Memorial to the Missing at Tyne Cot Cemetery in Belgium commemorates 1,179 New Zealand soldiers who fell in the Ypres Salient and have no known grave. The New Zealand Memorial at Longueval (Caterpillar Valley Cemetery) in France commemorates 1,205 soldiers who died on the Somme with no known graves. In New Zealand, the Auckland War Memorial Museum and National War Memorial in Wellington also commemorate the war dead, including those with no known graves.

France honors its missing soldiers through memorials such as the Mémorial des Morts pour la France at Notre-Dame de Lorette, near Arras, and the Douaumont Ossuary, near Verdun. These memorials recognize the 710,000 French soldiers whose remains have never been recovered.

The United States has seven memorials in France and the UK, listing 4,452 men with no known graves. These include:

Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery (954 names on the Walls of the Missing),
Somme American Cemetery (333),
Aisne-Marne American Cemetery (1,060),
Oise-Aisne American Cemetery (241),
Suresnes American Cemetery (974),
St. Mihiel American Cemetery (284).

In the United Kingdom, 563 names are memorialized at Brookwood American Cemetery.

In Italy, the Redipuglia War Memorial lists over 100,000 men with no known graves.

Austria, Germany and Russia, unlike many Western nations, did not develop centralized memorials for soldiers with no known graves after World War I or II, focusing instead on collective remembrance.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) has erected headstones for unknown soldiers where remains have been found but not identified, with the simple inscription: "A Soldier of the Great War, Known unto God."

Graves of Canadian Soldiers whose name is not known. The second grave from the right is an empty grave, the body from it is interred in Ottawa as Canada's unknown Soldier.

Since 1920, an Unknown Soldier interred in Westminster Abbey, London, has represented the unidentified war dead of Canada and other Commonwealth nations.

In 2000, Canada created its own memorial for the Unknown Soldier. On May 28, 2000, the remains of an unknown Canadian soldier, exhumed from Caberet Rouge Cemetery near Vimy Ridge, were repatriated and reinterred at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in front of the National War Memorial in Ottawa. Soil from each Canadian province and territory, along with soil from France, was included in the interment. The headstone of the soldier's original grave now resides in the Canadian War Museum. The gravesite in France bears a unique marker indicating it was the soldier's original resting place.

Tomb or the Unknow Soldier, Ottawa, Ontario. Photo courtesy of W. Thomas Leroux.

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Cover Gallery[76]

For this 20th Anniversary release, my wife, Penney Adams, came up with a variety of new cover designs. The choice of which to use was not easy, and we finally decided on the one that we felt best memorializes, the man, Private Thomas O'Connor, Regimental number 3205073, 31st Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1918-1919.

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