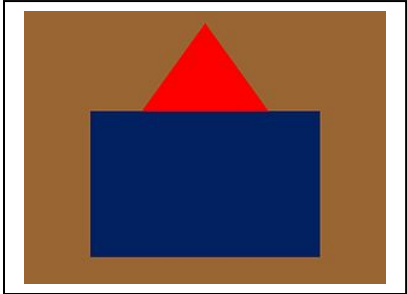




Private George Blackmore Ackerman (served as *Hackman*, this the name recorded by *Library & Archives Canada*), (Number 877440, 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) Canadian Infantry) is interred in Bucquoy Road Cemetery, Ficheux: Grave reference IV.F.25.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a locomotive engineer, George Ackerman (*Hackman*) emigrated from the community of Brigus in the then-independent Dominion of Newfoundland to live in Sydney, in the Canadian Province of Nova Scotia\*.

(Right: *The image of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) shoulder flash is from the Wikipedia Web-site.*)



*\*The name George Hackman, labourer, appears on the March 26, 1914, passenger list of the SS Bruce which sailed from Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, to North Sydney, Nova Scotia, on that date. The same name appears – on this case the occupation recorded as that of a soldier – some twenty-six weeks later, on May 25 of 1916, on the passenger list of the SS Kyle, undertaking the same journey. If both these data refer to the same George Hackman of this abbreviated biography, then he may well have been returning from leave at home in anticipation of his departure for overseas service.*

George Blackmore Hackman underwent a medical examination, enlisted and attested - his mark rather than a signature appearing on the document - in Sydney, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, all on March 13 of 1916, and was *taken on strength* by the 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Cape Breton Highlanders) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on that same day.

Some six weeks later, on April 26, the formalities of Private Dooley's enlistment came to a conclusion, the Commanding Officer of the 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Parker Day, declaring (on paper) that... *having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

By the time of his C.O.'s approval, it is almost certain that Private Hackman had already made the short journey to the town of Broughton\*, only some twenty kilometres distant, to the south of Sydney. It was there that his unit was to undergo its training before being despatched overseas.

*\*Broughton had been a 'company town', developed towards the end on the nineteenth century by the Cape Breton Coal, Iron & Railway Company. Apparently too much money had been spent as the company went bankrupt in 1907 and the town was soon abandoned. At the outset of the Great War it was taken over by the Canadian Army and, more particularly, by the 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Cape Breton Highlanders).*

However, his posting to Broughton was now to last less than another four weeks: By that time, the authorities had decided to create a Nova Scotia Highland Brigade to comprise the 185<sup>th</sup>, the 85<sup>th</sup>, the 193<sup>rd</sup> and the 219<sup>th</sup> Battalions. On May 23 of 1915 these four formations were assembled\* to train together at Camp Aldershot, Nova Scotia, where the Brigade then spent all summer before receiving its colours on September 28, two weeks before its departure for overseas service.

*\*The 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion apparently travelled by train to Camp Aldershot on May 26.*

On October 11 of 1916, the 35 officers, 52 sergeants and 953 other ranks of the unit boarded His Majesty's Transport *Olympic* – sister ship to *Britannic*, sunk in the Mediterranean later that year, and to the ill-starred *Titanic* – in Halifax harbour. In the nominal list of the day, Private Hackman is listed as a soldier of the Machine-Gun Section.

Private Hackman's Battalion was not to take passage alone for the trans-Atlantic crossing; also on board *Olympic* were the 85<sup>th</sup>, 188<sup>th</sup>, 219<sup>th</sup> and 193<sup>rd</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry, one-half of the 166<sup>th</sup> Battalion and almost three-hundred other military personnel. Not that the ship was over-crowded – she was one of the largest afloat at the time.





(Previous page: *HMT Olympic*, on the right, lies at anchor along with *HMHS Aquitania*, centre, at *Mudros Bay* in the autumn of 1915. – from a photograph originally from the *Imperial War Museum*, London)

Having eventually sailed on the morning of October 13, *Olympic* docked six days later, on October 19, in the English west-coast port of Liverpool.

Once having disembarked in England, the 185<sup>th</sup> Battalion was transported to Witley Camp in the English county of Surrey. There it saw the dispersal of its personnel to other battalions, primarily the 85<sup>th</sup> – this unit having arrived with Private Hackman's 185<sup>th</sup> on *Olympic* and now forming in England - the 73<sup>rd</sup> – already serving on *the Somme* at the time - and the 25<sup>th</sup> (*Nova Scotia Rifles*). It was to the latter to which Private Hackman was assigned\*.

However, his transfer to the 25<sup>th</sup> – and at the same time to the Continent - was not to occur until May 27 of 1917, some seven months later, when he again took ship for the crossing to France, likely via the English south-coast port of Southampton and the French port-city of Le Havre, at the estuary of the River Seine.

*\*The practice after the early period of the Great War was to assign re-enforcements arriving at the Canadian camps in England – for the most part - to Reserve Battalions for training, thence to the various battalions already serving on the Continent; the troops were then shipped across the English Channel in re-enforcement drafts to those serving units to which they had been assigned – up until May of 1917, via the large Canadian Base Depot at Le Havre.*



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

*After May of 1917 the arrivals were despatched to one of four Infantry Base Depots newly-established at Étapes, until a year later again, 1918, when the four were amalgamated into, once more, a single Canadian Infantry Base Depot. This Depot remained at the coastal town of Étapes.*

The English Channel once crossed, Private Hackman's draft was temporarily *taken on strength* at one of the new Canadian Infantry Base Depots only recently established in the vicinity of the French coastal community of Étapes. From there he was despatched on an unrecorded date to report *to duty*, one of a draft of one-hundred forty-seven *other ranks* to do so on May 15, according to the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary, or May 16, according to his own documents.

\* \* \* \* \*

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

(Right: *While the caption claims that these troops to be 'English', this could refer to any unit in British uniform – including Empire (Commonwealth) units. This is early in the war as there is no sign of a steel helmet. – from a vintage post-card*)



In early April of 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had undergone its baptism of fire in a major infantry action. It was at a place to the south of Ypres named St-Éloi where, at the end of March, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then attacked. The newly-arrived Canadian formation had been ordered to follow up on the presumed British success, to hold and consolidate the newly-won territory.

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



Towards the end of that confrontation the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had relieved another battalion and subsequently had incurred a total of some eighty-five casualties, a greater toll than the unit had known on any single occasion up until that date.

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

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

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

From the middle of June up until August 27 of 1916, 20, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been in reserve well to the rear, so well to the rear, in fact, that it had been deemed safe enough for His Majesty the King and his son the Prince of Wales to pay a visit on August 14. Some two weeks later, the unit was withdrawn into northern France to the vicinity of Steenvoorde, and to the village of Moule.



(continued)



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

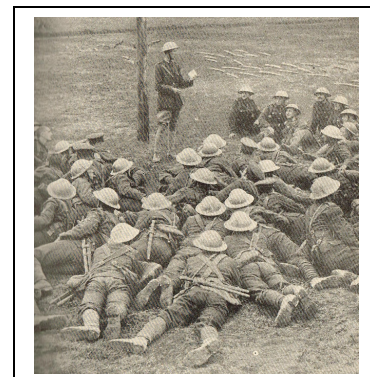
By that September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault having cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

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



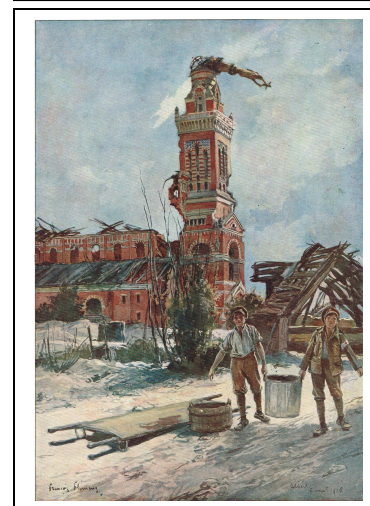
On that first day of *1<sup>st</sup> Somme*, all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been troops from the British Isles, those exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight hundred personnel of the *1<sup>st</sup> Battalion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

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



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

Meanwhile, having departed from Moule on September 4, and after having then travelled by train and subsequently on foot for the following six days, on the evening of September 10 the *25<sup>th</sup> Battalion* had arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the Brickfields (*La Briqueterie*) in the close proximity of the provincial town of Albert. On the *11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>* the unit trained – at times in co-operation with aircraft – and provided working-parties.



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

(continued)

On the afternoon of October 14 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been ordered to move forward into dug-outs in assembly areas. On the next morning, September 15, the Canadians were to be going to the attack.

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

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

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

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



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



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

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



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

On the night of October 1-2 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had retired from *the Battle* - and from the area of - *the Somme* and made its way westwards and then northwards, passing to the west of and beyond the city of Arras to the region of the mining centre of Lens. It remained in the area and in the trenches of places such as Bully-Grenay, Angres and Bruay for the next four months or so before returning southward to Neuville St-Vaast.





One of the neighbouring communities, in German hands at the time, was the village of Vimy.

(Preceding page: *The city of Arras was to endure four years of bombardment during the Great War; the Grand'Place already looked like this by March of 1917 and more was to follow. – from Le Miroir*)

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

On April 8... *Battalion less 1 platoon per company moved from MAISNIL BOUCHE to concentration area at BOIS DES ALLEUX. In the evening the Battalion moved up to its position...via cross country route...* (25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary). It apparently did not pass via those well-documented tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety.

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

On April 9 in that spring of 1917, the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the War for the British, one of the positive episodes being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign was to prove an overall disappointment, the French offensive was a disaster.

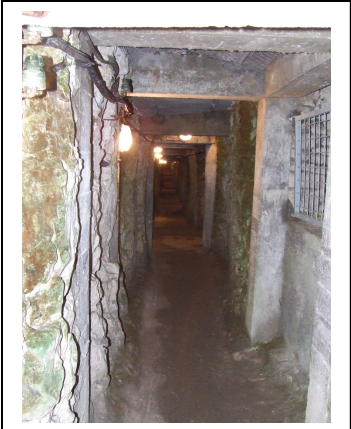
On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity, stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, burdened with all the paraphernalia of war, on the advance across No-Man's-Land during the attack at Vimy Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration*)



The Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was not responsible for the taking of Vimy Ridge itself, but for the clearing of the community of Thélus, further down the southern slope and therefore on the right-hand side of the attack. The Battalion's objectives were apparently soon captured and much of the remainder of the day was spent in consolidating these newly-won positions.

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



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

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

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



Nor was the remainder of the relatively short, five-week long, *Battle of Arras* to be fought in the manner of the first two days and, by the end of those five weeks, little else had changed and the Germans had recovered from the initial Canadian success – which was the situation into which Private Hackman reported *to duty* on that May 15-16, 1917.



(Right above: *Canadians under shell-fire occupy the third line of trenches on Vimy Ridge: the fighting of the next days was fought in the same conditions. – from Illustration*)

\* \* \* \* \*

After the official conclusion of the *Battle of Arras* on May 15 – this also the time during which Private Hackman reported *to duty* - the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered to an area not far to the north of Vimy, to the mining centre of the city of Lens and other communities. Sixteen days after that again, on June 1, Private Hackman's Battalion was withdrawn to a *Corps Rest Area* in the proximity of Crouy-Serviens, a community west of the city of Arras. There the unit was to rest, to re-enforce and to re-organize.



It also allowed the newcomers such as Private Hackman who were arriving in the reinforcement drafts the time necessary to become acquainted with some of the the routines and the rigours of life in the trenches\*.

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



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

*(Right above: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of, 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets – from Illustration)*

Having spent the entire month of June in the Rest Area, on July 1 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered to move forward once more and by the 3<sup>rd</sup> it had relieved two battalions of the British Leicestershire Regiment.

The British High Command had by this time decided to undertake a summer offensive in the Ypres Salient, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention from this area - and also his reserves - it had also ordered operations to take place at the sector of the front running north-south from Béthune to Lens.



The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort.

*(Right above: An example of the conditions under which the troops were ordered to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917 – from Miroir)*

One of the primary objectives was to be Hill 70 in the outskirts of the mining centre of Lens.



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

(continued)

Those expecting *Hill 70* to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear. Yet apparently it was high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie - to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than that of the city of Lens itself.

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



Objectives were limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it was expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it proved.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> several strong counter-attacks were launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points. These defences held and the Canadian artillery, which was employing newly-developed procedures, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* remained in Canadian hands.

After weeks of relatively little infantry activity, this attack on August 15 in the area of *Hill 70* and the city of Lens was intended to be the precursor of weeks of an entire campaign. However, the British offensive further north was proceeding less well than intended and the Canadians were to be needed there. Offensive activities in the Lens Sector were for the most part suspended in early September.



(Right above: *Canadian troops under shell-fire in the area of Lens at some time during the summer of 1917* – from *Le Miroir*)

On two-thirty in the morning of August 14, the nineteen officers and five-hundred ninety-two *other ranks* of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion had moved from the rear to relieve units in the front line in the Lens suburb of *Cité St-Pierre*, there to prepare for the assault still some twenty-four hours away. That came about at five-thirty on the following morning, August 15.

The objectives were reached, taken, and then consolidated in the expectation of the usual German counter-attacks. The rest of that day, however, was apparently quiet, the Battalion's casualties totalling a relatively sparse fifty-three. The following twenty-four hours on the other hand, were to be a great deal *less* calm due to heavy German artillery fire and to infantry attacks. On that day the casualty numbers doubled.



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

(continued)

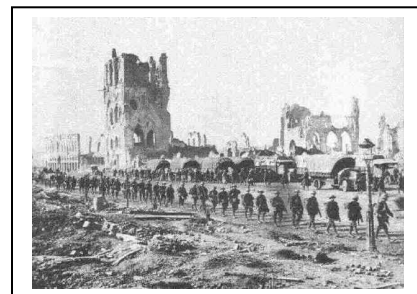


By the time that the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion retired on August 17, the unit had recorded some one-hundred fifty *killed, wounded and missing in action*. The Battalion was soon back in the forward area, to be relieved on the 22<sup>nd</sup> by which time a further fifty *killed, wounded and missing* had been added to the preceding total. But, whatever Private Hackman's role had been during either engagement, it appears not to be recorded.

September and early October, as explained in a preceding paragraph, were not to see a continuation of that Canadian summer campaign. Instead, the time was spent preparing the Canadian Corps for a move into Belgium.

It was not until the final weeks of October that the Canadians became embroiled in the offensive to the north-east of Ypres. Officially named the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign came to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was one of the British Army's objectives.

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



From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. From the week of October 26 until November 3 it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions who spearheaded the assault, with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair the reverse was true with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.



The strength of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion on that November 5 was reported as being twenty-one officers and five-hundred seventy-six other ranks, not much over just half of normal battalion numbers. Was it for that reason that they were seemingly less engaged than were other units?

(Right above: *an unidentified – perhaps unidentifiable – part of the Passchendaele battlefield in the autumn of 1917 – from Illustration*)



(Right: *Canadian troops performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir*)

During the three days that they were to spend at the front at this time, the casualties sustained by the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion were comparatively fairly light: seventeen *killed in action*, sixty-seven *wounded* and six *missing in action*.

What role Private Hackman had played in that *Passchendaele* affair was understandably not reported.



(Preceding page: *The Canadian Memorial which stands on Passchendaele Ridge – photograph from 2015*)

In the late evening of November 8 the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was withdrawn from the area of the front line, westwards of Ypres itself. Days later, on November 12, the unit was moved out of Belgium and further south again, on the 16<sup>th</sup> reaching Camblain l'Abbé, not many kilometres distant to the west of Vimy, and in much the same area where Private Hackman had first reported to the Battalion six months previously.

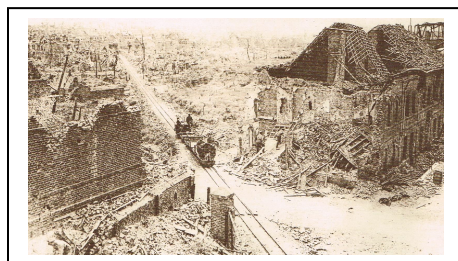
During this period a national election was taking place at home and military personnel serving abroad were also to have their say. Thus the polls were open from December 1 to 17 and an overwhelming majority of the Canadian Expeditionary Force voted. Perhaps a little curiously, there appears to be no mention of the event in the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary.

The winter of 1917-1918 was spent in the same area; little if any confrontational military activity for that period is reported in the Battalion War Diary. What is reported is that on March 12, Private Hackman was awarded a first Good Conduct Badge\*.

*\*The Badge itself was a chevron such as those worn by non-commissioned officers, but worn with the apex pointing upwards. The first one was awarded after two years of service during which period the recipient's name had not found its way into his unit's misconduct records.*

Then on March 23 the unit was moved further south once more to the area of St-Aubin on the outskirts of Arras, where it took up its duties there on the next day. The Battalion was 'standing-by', ready to move on short notice, owing to expectations of an attack by the enemy.

Perhaps not many people realize how close the Germans came to victory in the spring of 1918. Having transferred the Divisions no longer necessary on the Eastern Front because of the Russian withdrawal from the War, the Germans launched a massive attack, Operation 'Michael' on March 21. The main blow fell at *the Somme* in the area of, and also just to the south of, the battlefields of 1916, and it fell for the most part on the British and Commonwealth troops there.



(Right above: *While the Germans did not attack Lens in the spring of 1918, they bombarded it heavily during much of the time of their offensive in order to keep the British uncertain about their intentions and thus to oblige them to retain troops in the area. – from Le Miroir*)

The German advance continued for a month, petering out just in front of the city of Amiens. The ultimate failure of the offensive was a result of a combination of factors: British and Commonwealth resistance, fatigue, logistical problems and French co-operation with the British were the most significant.





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

The War Diary records, however, that the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not involved in the heaviest of the fighting. Posted mostly near Wailly, just to the south-west of the city of Arras, the majority of the casualties incurred were due to enemy artillery activity rather than to infantry action. By the end of April the Battalion officers appear to have had nothing more important to discuss than whether to adopt the kilt as part of the regimental uniform.

Thus a relative calm descended on the front as the German threat faded – the enemy had won a great deal of ground, but there was nothing of any military significance on either of the two fronts. Nor was the calm particularly surprising: both sides were exhausted and needed time to once more re-organize and – less and less feasible in these later years of the war – to reinforce.

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

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



The Battalion remained approximately in that same area, to the south of Arras after the crisis and the months of May, June were spent in relative calm in the area of Neuville-Vitasse; July was likely even calmer as the unit was withdrawn further back to Bellacourt.

From the point of view of reserves, the Allies – French and British and Commonwealth - were a lot better off than were their German adversaries – they had two empires to draw from and the Americans were belatedly arriving on the scene.

An overall Commander-in-Chief had also been appointed, Foch, and he was setting about organizing a counter-offensive. Thus the front was to remain quiet – casualties were minimal – until the second week in August.

Days before August 8, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved by bus and on foot to the Bois de Blangy\*, an area just to the east of Amiens on the main road from there to St-Quentin, and was moved into the trenches. At 4.30 in the morning on that August 8, the advance – *the Hundred Days* as it became known - began which was to bring the Great War to a close on November 11.



(Right above: *Canadian troops advancing through the debris of the re-captured town of Albert on or about August 22, 1918 – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

***\*In fact, almost the entire Canadian Corps was moved in a matter of days, mainly by night, to face the Germans in the area in front of Amiens that they had captured four months earlier. The Canadian presence apparently came as a total, and unpleasant surprise to the enemy. During the third and fourth weeks of August the exercise was repeated, in reverse, and the Canadians then attacked in another theatre altogether (see below).***

**The Canadians moved forward some twenty kilometres in the space of three days.**

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



**By this time having returned to the Arras Front, in late August and then into September, the Canadians launched a further series of offensives along the axis of the Arras-Cambrai road. By September 3 they had broken through the Drocourt-Quéant Line and the Germans had retreated for the most part to the eastern bank of the Canal du Nord which had been incorporated into their Hindenburg Line defensive system.**

***(Right: Douglas Haig, C.-in-C. of British and Commonwealth forces on the Western Front inspects Canadian troops after their successful operation of September 2 against the German Drocourt-Quéant Line – from Le Miroir)***



**The Canal du Nord had then been crossed of September 27, Bourlon Wood had been taken and, despite some still-fierocious resistance, the Canadian advance, slowed at times, was still moving forward. By the beginning of October the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was approaching Cambrai itself.**

***(Right above: German prisoners evacuating wounded out of the area of the unfinished part of the Canal du Nord which the Canadians crossed on September 27\*, thus opening the road to Cambrai – from Le Miroir)***



***\*Two days later, on September 29, the British – the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, by that time a Battalion of the 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Infantry Division - the French and the Belgians struck at Ypres.***



***(Right above: The same area of the Canal du Nord as it was almost a century after the Canadian operation to cross it – photograph from 2015)***

**(continued)**



**(Right: Two German field-guns of Great War vintage stand on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City, the one in the foreground captured during the fighting at Bourlon Wood – photograph from 2016)**



**(Right: German prisoners, some wounded, taken during the advance in October of 1918, with their Canadian captors – from Le Miroir)**

The exact date on which Private Hackman was wounded appears not to be recorded among his documents, but on October 9 an action took place during which the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion incurred a large number of casualties.



The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry of October 9, 1918, records the following:

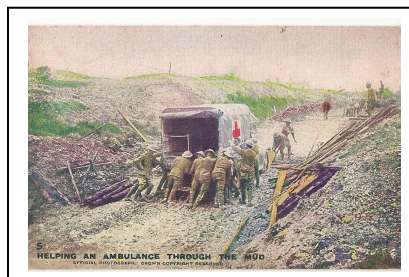
***Oct. 9<sup>th</sup> At 0130 in accordance with O.O.No.295, the Battalion attacked the CANAL DE L'ESCAUT. "C" and "D" Companies establishing bridgeheads at 3.24.d.6.7. and 3.30.a.8.5. "A" and "B" Coys. Continued the attack and reached their objective in short time and consolidated their positions.***

***Patrols were sent out to exploit the success and later the Cavalry went forward. The ground exploited by the Cavalry was consolidated by the Battalion during the afternoon and evening.***

***Weather fair. Casualties – 15 O.R. killed and 85 O.R. wounded.\****

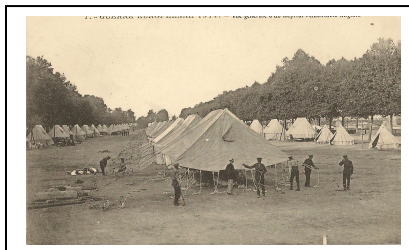
***\*The following day saw no casualties, and on October 11, three were reported as killed in action and one wounded.***

**(Right: transferring sick and wounded from a field ambulance to the rear through the mud by motorized ambulance and manpower – from a vintage post-card)**



It was surely at or about this time that Private Hackman was wounded, sustaining shrapnel wounds to the stomach.

While it is not documented where he received immediate attention – likely at an advanced dressing-station - he was eventually transferred to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Boisleux au Mont to the south of Arras.



**(Right: a British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and when the necessity arose – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War – from a vintage post-card)**

(continued)

The son of George B. Ackerman (also *Akerman*) and Martha Jane Ackerman of North River and Brigus, he was also brother to William John\*.

*\*The evidence points to his being brother also to Elizabeth-Ann, to Mary, Henry, Isa-Jane, Robert, Fred and to Maud but spelling inconsistencies unfortunately render this information inconclusive\*. If this is indeed the same family, then his mother's maiden name was Roberts.*

*\*Both Robert and Fred served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force and survived the War.*

Private Hackman was reported as having died of wounds in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Casualty Clearing Station on October 11, 1918\*.

*\*The date was corrected from the original October 12.*

(Right: *The Brigus War Memorial honours the sacrifice of Private Ackerman (Hackman).* – photograph from 2012)



George Hackman had enlisted at the *apparent age* of thirty years and four months: date of birth at Brigus, Newfoundland, November 12, 1885.

Private George Blackmore Hackman\* was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

*\*It is not clear when – or if - the problem with his surname was ever resolved: although 'Ackerman' appears on his Commonwealth War Graves Commission head-stone, elsewhere he continues to be referred to as Private Hackman.*



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