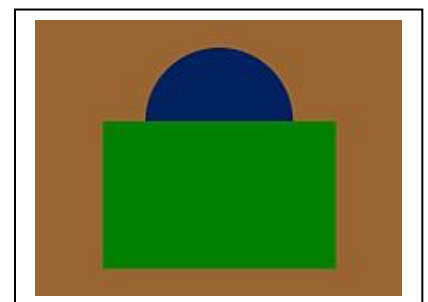


**Private John Baldwin (Number 129122 of the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Machine Gun Company) having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *shipper*, John Baldwin had found his way to Vancouver by the time that he presented himself there for medical examination on August 20 of 1915. He then attested three weeks later, on September 10, perhaps enlisting on that same day but likely earlier. The unit into which he was recruited was the 72<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (*Seaforth Highlanders of Canada*), of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, the formation of which had been authorized just weeks earlier, on July 10.**



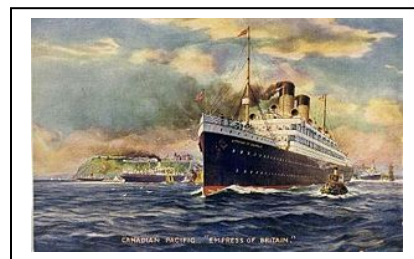
**(continued)**

(Preceding page: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Seaforth Highlanders of Canada) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

*Unfortunately, the service record of Private John Baldwin seems not to be available from the usual sources – his Regimental Number 129122 is not recognized by Library & Archives Canada. What follows, therefore, is based upon unit records to which have been add the personal details of him which have been gleaned from other sources – mostly Family Trees from Ancestry.ca.*

For the next seven months, until the time of their departure for overseas service, Private Baldwin and his Battalion paraded and drilled at the Beatty Street Armoury in Vancouver. Then, in April of 1916, the unit was to travel by train across the country to the east-coast port of Halifax.

The unit boarded His Majesty’s Transport *Empress of Britain* on St. George’s Day, April 23 of 1916. The vessel sailed two days later, docking in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on May 5.



(Right: *The image of RMS Empress of Britain is from the Wikipedia Web-Site.*)

Private Baldwin’s 72<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had not taken passage to the United Kingdom alone: also on board were the 76<sup>th</sup> and 87<sup>th</sup> Battalions of Canadian Infantry, the Number 3 Party of the 224<sup>th</sup> Battalion and a reinforcing draft of the 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Canadian Field Artillery.

From Liverpool it seems likely that the Battalion was transported immediately to the large Canadian military complex established in the vicinity of the village of Bramshott in the southern county of Hampshire. If not, it may have spent a short period at Shornecliffe, adjacent to the English-Channel town of Folkestone in the county of Kent.



Whichever the case, the 72<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was at Bramshott at the beginning of that June.

(Right above: *Royal Canadian Legion flags amongst others adorn the interior of St. Mary’s Church in the English village of Bramshott. – photograph from 2016*)

It was at that time that the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Machine-Gun Company came into being – each Brigade to have one such unit - the Company’s War Diary for June reading partially thus:

**BRAMSHOTT – organized at beginning of June, drawing men from 51<sup>st</sup>, 72<sup>nd</sup>, 73<sup>rd</sup>, 87<sup>th</sup>, 87<sup>th</sup>, & 71<sup>st</sup> Bns, C.E.F.**

**5/6 Establishment complete – 10 officers, 141 O.R.**

It is thus most likely that Private Baldwin was transferred to the newly-formed unit at this moment.

(continued)

The 12<sup>th</sup> M-G Company was then immediately attached to the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division which had been formed as late as April of that year and which was to leave the United Kingdom for service on the Continent in August\*.

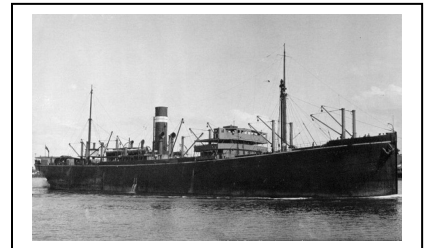
*\*Private Baldwin's previous unit, the 72<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, had also been an element of the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division, since that April, and was to serve with it until the end of the War.*

On August 12, the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Machine-Gun Company left Bramshott, arriving in Southampton on the same day. There the unit waited there until August 15 before sailing on board HMT *Nirvana* to the French port-city of Le Havre where it disembarked on the morrow.



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

Spending little if any time at the large Canadian Base Depot there, the 12<sup>th</sup> Company boarded a train and travelled northwards to cross the Franco-Belgian frontier.



(Right: *The image of Nirvana is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries Web-Site.*)

On the following day its personnel was billeted in the Belgian community of Poperinghe, to remain there for a week.

The following six weeks were spent in that same area of Belgium – the only region to remain unoccupied during the War – to the south and south-west of the *Ypres Salient*, St. Éloi and Kemmel two of the places named in the War Diary. At least one-half of the Company personnel was briefly attached to the battle-tryed 58<sup>th</sup> Machine-Gun Company (*Imperial*)\* – perhaps to acquaint themselves with their newly-acquired Vickers guns\*\*.



(Right above: *A Canadian machine-gun section on the Western Front in 1917 – from Illustration*)

*\*The term Imperial was used by the Canadians in reference to British troops.*

*\*\*Early during the Great War the Canadians were equipped with heavy and obsolescent Colt machine-guns.*

But on October 3 the Company was marched to the railway station at Arques from where it journeyed south, via Abbéville, to de-train at Candas. From there, it now marched via such places as Beauval, Bonneville, Rubempre and Warloy, to finally billet nine days later, on October 12, in the provincial town of Albert.



(Preceding page: *Canadian soldiers in Albert, the already-damaged basilica in the background – from Illustration*)

Private Baldwin and the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Machine-Gun Company had arrived at the cauldron that was 1<sup>st</sup> Somme.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of the Somme had by that time been ongoing for well over three months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties of which some nineteen thousand dead.

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

As *First Somme* had progressed, 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 contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette.



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

The 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Machine-Gun Company's War Diary records that the force was divided into four sections; unfortunately in *which* section Private Baldwin served was *not* noted.

Having spent six days in Albert, on October 18 the various sections were seconded to other units and in the days that followed were engaged in supporting actions in the areas of Courcellette and Regina Trench. During that time other transfers were made but nothing appears to show where exactly Private Baldwin was on October 27.



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

(Right: *Ninety-eight years later, the land just to the north of the village of Courcellette as seen from Regina Trench Cemetery – photograph from 2014*)

The War Diary entry for that October 27 is brief: *Two O.R. were killed. Lieut. CC. DREW was evacuated sick.*



The son of William Baldwin and Maria Baldwin (*née Cole*) of Cape St. Francis, Torbay, Newfoundland – where he was born - he was also brother to Mary-Ann (deceased at the age of one day), of Robert-Marshall, of William, of Arthur-Thomas and of Agnes.



Private Baldwin was reported as having been *killed in action* on that October 27, 1916. It was further reported that he was killed in a shell explosion and that his body was not recovered for burial.

John Baldwin had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty-five years and two single month: date of birth, July 27, 1890.

(Above right: *The Canadian National Memorial which commemorates Private Baldwin's sacrifice stands on the site of the battle for Vimy Ridge which was fought on April 9-10, 1917, more than five months after his death. – photograph from 2010*)

Private John Baldwin was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



**Note:** *After several revisions of the organization of the Canadian machine-gun units, the Canadian Machine-Gun Corps was formed on April 16 of 1917. It was not to be disbanded until 1936.*

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 27, 2023.

