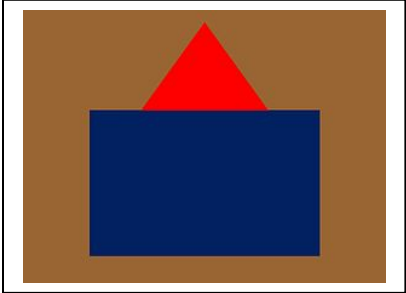




Private Dominic Bennett (Number 488745) of the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Thelus Military Cemetery: grave reference II.D.3.

Dominic Bennett is recorded as having enlisted in Sydney*, Cape Breton, on November 9 of 1915, apparently two days before undergoing his medical examination and also his attestation. On November 17, he was officially attached to the 63rd Regiment (Halifax Rifles), 1st Reserve Draft.



(continued)

(Previous page: *The image of the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) shoulder-flash is from the Wikipedia Web-site*)

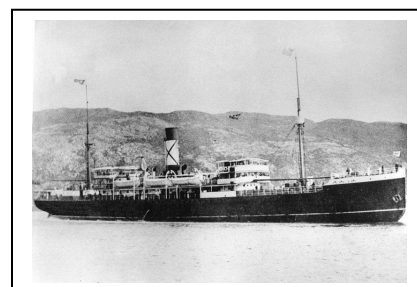
**Halifax is also noted on one of his papers as his place of enlistment.*

Private Bennett, however, had already seen military service back in his native Newfoundland, with the Newfoundland Regiment, having been one of the first of the young men to sign up soon after the declaration of war.

His occupations prior to military service recorded as that of both fisherman and sailor earning a monthly forty dollars, Dominic Bennett enlisted in St. John's – at the daily private soldier's rate of \$1.10, and for a single year of service* - on September 2 of 1914, before attesting some two weeks following, on the 14th. He was allotted the Regimental Number of 245 – thus one of the *First Five Hundred*.

**At the outset of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist.*

Private Bennett embarked in St. John's harbour on October 3 as a soldier of that *First Five Hundred* onto the Bowring Brothers' vessel *Florizel*. The ship sailed on the morrow to accompany the convoy carrying the First Canadian Division across the Atlantic, and arrived in the English south-coast port of Plymouth on October 14. There *Florizel* sat at anchor for some five days before the *other ranks* on board were finally disembarked on October 19.



(Right above: *The photograph of Florizel is shown by courtesy of the Admiralty House Museum, Mount Pearl.*)

Once in the United Kingdom, Private Bennett trained with the Battalion: firstly in southern England then in Scotland at Fort George (near right), at Edinburgh Castle, and at Stobs Camp in the vicinity of the town of Hawick, before a final few weeks of training at Aldershot in the summer of 1915.



(Far right above: *The Newfoundland Regiment parades at Stobs Camp and is presented its Colours on June 10, 1915. – courtesy of Reverend Wilson Tibbo and Mrs. Lillian Tibbo*)

The purpose of this period at Aldershot was to prepare what was now an up-to-strength 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment, for *active service* on the Gallipoli Peninsula at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. As a part of this preparation, the Regimental personnel were required to re-enlist, on this second occasion *for the duration of the war*.

Most of them did so on or about August 14 while in training at Aldershot, and on his file it was recorded that Private Bennet had done likewise. However, it would seem that such was, in fact, *not* the case.

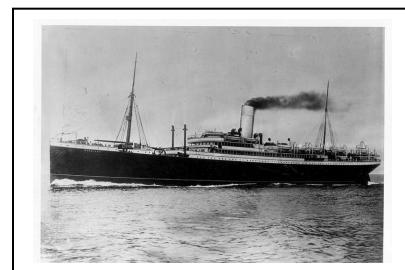
The evidence for this is that other files have him in hospital by this time: at first at the Castle, Edinburgh, on August 3; then at Glencorse from August 4 until August 6; and finally from then, until the 26th, in the Workhouse Military Hospital at Newcastle for treatment for a venereal problem. After those twenty-three days – by which time the Battalion was already en route, for Egypt as it transpired - Private Bennett was released to the new Regimental Depot.

The Regimental Depot had been established during that summer of 1915 in the Royal Borough of Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, there to serve as a base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion. It was from Ayr – as of November of 1915 until January of 1918 – that the new-comers from home were despatched in drafts, at first to Gallipoli and then later to the Western Front, there to bolster the four fighting companies of 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

Exactly when and where Private Bennett decided to leave the Regiment after the expiration of his one-year engagement does not appear in his documents. However, it *is* recorded that, his time having expired, he was re-patriated to Newfoundland on board the ship *Corsican* which sailed from Liverpool on October 8 to arrive in St. John's on October 15.

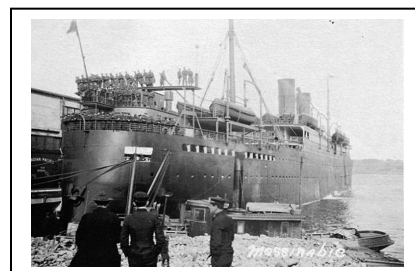


His papers have him as officially discharged from the 2nd Battalion at Newton-on-Ayr on October 14, 1915, his Commanding Officer appending the following to his record: *Has committed no offense of a non military character & appears to be a useful sort of man.*

(Right above: *The photograph of Corsican is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries Web-site.*)

Less than one month later, Dominic Bennett was in Sydney, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, enlisting into the 63rd Regiment (*Halifax Rifles*).

Some eleven weeks later again, Private Bennett was once more making his way across the Atlantic Ocean to the United Kingdom, on this occasion on board His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie*. Having embarked Private Bennett's unit, part of the 1st Draft, 63rd Battalion, in Halifax on January 22 of the New Year, 1916, *Missanabie* sailed on the same day, to dock in England on the 30th, and Private Bennett once more set foot



in the port of Plymouth.

(Preceding page: *The image of Missanabie is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries Web-site.*)

Also taking passage on this voyage were the following units: 2nd Draft, 66th Battalion; 3rd Division Cavalry Squadron; 3rd Divisional Cyclist Company; 5th Draft, C Section, 2nd Canadian Field Ambulance.

From Plymouth on the same day, Private Bennett and his comrades-in-arms took the train to East Sandling Camp* in the vicinity of the English-Channel town of Folkestone and in the county of Kent. There he was immediately *taken on strength* of the 17th Canadian Reserve Battalion.

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



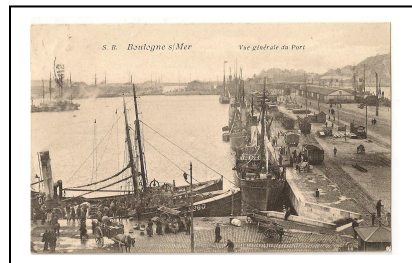
Less than a week after his arrival at East Sandling, Private Bennett once more found himself in need of medical attention – and for the same problem. From the Military Hospital where he was sent on February 6, he was transferred to Cherryhinton Hospital in the university city of Cambridge and admitted there on the next day. There he remained for a month before being discharged back to the 17th Reserve Battalion to which he reported on March 9.



**East Sandling was one of a number of subsidiary camps which came to comprise the Canadian military complex of Shorncliffe. The establishment was on the Kentish coast, just down the Dover Straits from the town and harbour of Folkestone from which many a Canadian soldier departed to active service on the Continent.*

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

Private Bennett's medical woes were not, however, at an end: On March 23 he was once again admitted into Shorncliffe Military Hospital and from there to the familiar Cherryhinton two days later. He was not to be released from there until May 25. Nor was his return to the 17th Reserve Battalion to be of a very long duration on this occasion either – but this for another reason: Private Bennett was to be sent across the Channel on *active service*.



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

(continued)

On June 7, 1916, a 17th Reserve Battalion reinforcement draft sailed from England to France – likely from Folkestone to the French port of Boulogne only two hours' sailing-time away on the coast opposite. There Private Bennett was transferred – on paper at least - from the 17th to the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) of the Canadian Infantry, and also transferred – by train – to the Canadian Base Depot at Le Havre, from there to be sent almost immediately to join his unit, the 25th, in the field. This he is documented to have done on June 9.



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

* * * * *

The parent unit of the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force had already been serving in France – but only for a matter of days - and Belgium for some twenty months by this time, since September of 1915. It was a unit of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2nd Canadian Division.

Upon its arrival in France, the 2nd Division had been ordered posted to Belgium, there to serve in the trenches of a sector of the front south of the remnants of the city of Ypres. There it found itself to be adjacent to the by-now veteran Canadian 1st Division which was by that time stationed further south again, in the Ploegsteert Sector and right up to the Franco-Belgian frontier.

It was in that area that, during the six months following its appearance on the Continent, the 25th Battalion personnel were to become acquainted with the routines and 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, a hundred metres or so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest the forward area, the latter furthest away.*



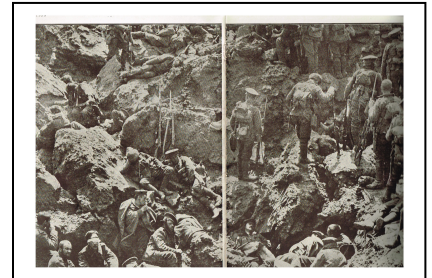
Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

(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 and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration*)

It was not to be until the early spring of 1916 that the 25th Battalion underwent its major baptism of fire.

The *Battle of St. Eloi Craters* officially took place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St. Eloi was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it was here that the British had excavated a series of galleries under the German lines. Having then filled them with explosives, they detonated them on that March 27 and followed up with an infantry attack.

After an initial success the assault had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were relieving the exhausted British troops. They had no more success than their British comrades-in-arms, and by the 17th, when the battle was officially called off, the Germans were back where they had been some three weeks previously and the Canadians had taken some fifteen-hundred casualties.



Towards the end of that confrontation the 25th Battalion had relieved another unit and subsequently had incurred a total of some eighty-five casualties, a greater toll at any one time than the Battalion had experienced 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 in June the Battalion had been involved in the fighting in the area of *Hooge, Mount Sorrel, Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60 and Maple Copse*, all just to the south-east of the city of Ypres. The Canadian 3rd Division had been the main recipient of the enemy's offensive thrust but the 25th Battalion of the 2nd Canadian Division had played a role sufficiently important for the name *Mount Sorrel* to become the first battle honour won by the unit during the Great War.



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

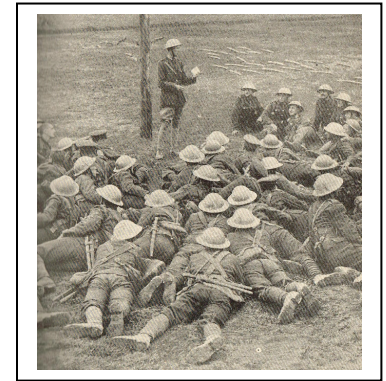
* * * * *

Battalion holding front line trenches at Zillebeke, heavily bombarded day and night, enemy artillery very active on our front and support trenches, 14 O.R. wounded. Draft 41 O.R. arrived. (Battalion War Diary entry for June 9, 1916)

This, then, was where and when Private Bennett reported *to duty* with the 25th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*).

From the middle of June up until August 27 of 1916, the 25th Battalion was 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, it the unit was withdrawn into northern France, to the vicinity of Steenvoorde and on to the village of Mouille.

During the following week at Moule the unit trained in becoming familiar with the British Lee-Enfield Mark III rifle which had replaced the Canadian-made Ross rifle, and at the same time preparing for a Canadian role in the British summer campaign of 1916, an offensive which to that date had not been proceeding exactly to plan.



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

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

On that first day of *1st Somme*, all but two small units 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 *1st Battalion* of the Newfoundland Regiment which had lost so heavily on that day at Beaumont-Hamel.



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

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



Meanwhile, on the evening of September 10 the *25th Battalion* had arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the Brickfields (*La Briquetterie*) in the proximity of the provincial town of Albert.

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

On the morrow the Battalion had been ordered forward into dug-outs in assembly areas. On the following morning again, that of September 15, the Canadian Corps was to be going to the attack.

(continued)

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

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



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

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

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

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



On the night of October 1-2 the 25th Battalion had retired from *the Battle* - and from the area of - *the Somme* and had made its way westwards and then northwards, to the region of the mining centre of Lens. It there 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, just to the east of Neuville St-Vaast and occupied by the German at the time, was the village of Vimy, overlooked by an elongated ridge which dominated not only the village itself, but the entire Douai Plain.

(Right: *the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)



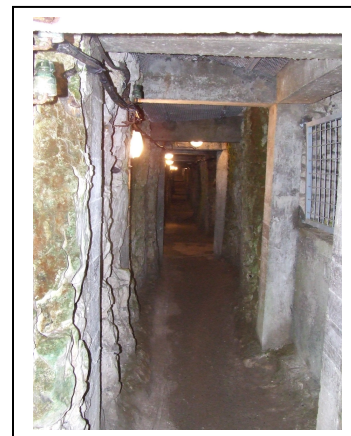
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On April 9 in that spring of 1917, the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties,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

The French offensive was to be a disaster.

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

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



From April 2 until April 7, the 25th Battalion had been in intense training on ground that had been re-arranged so as to resemble the terrain to be attacked. On the 8th it had moved forward – although apparently not via those well-known tunnels, kilometres of which had been excavated for reasons of both surprise and safety.

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



The Canadian 2nd Division was not responsible for the 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.

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



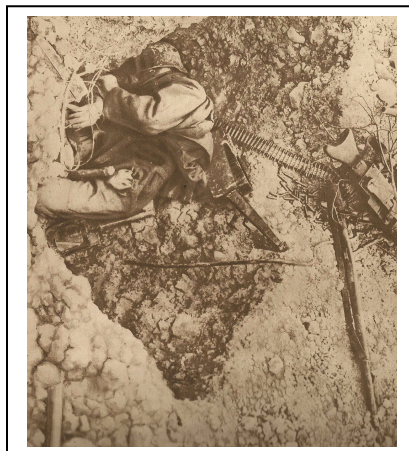
Thélus was taken by seven o'clock of the morning of April 9, some sixty minutes after the first wave of the attack – five-thirty in the morning - and a second objective, the village of Les Tilleuls a half-hour later again, the Battalion War Diarist recording that... *After hard*

fighting with enemy machine gun posts and bombing posts, 2 hours and 10 min after zero hour, the battalion successfully entered, cleared and consolidated the captured position.

(Right: A German machine-gunner dead at his post – from Illustration)

The War Diarist also documented the casualties of the day: *forty-seven killed, one-hundred sixteen wounded – of whom several were to succumb to their injuries – and ninety more missing.*

The son of Lewis Bennett and Mitlallary (sic) Bennett (née Gaudet?), he was also brother to at least Aaron of Black Duck Brook – named as his nearest relative in his Newfoundland papers in which he recorded himself as having *no dependants*. His Canadian documents cite Mrs. Lucy Jesso (Jesseau?)* of Port au Port as his next-of-kin.



**Perhaps Lucy Benoit of Black Duck who married John Jesso (Jesseau) in 1874 in which case she was possibly Dominic Bennett’s aunt.*

Private Bennett was reported as having been *killed in action* on April 9 of 1917. He was subsequently buried at Thelus, on April 14.

Dominic Bennett had enlisted at the *declared* age of twenty years in Newfoundland and of the *apparent* age of twenty-one years and six months in Nova Scotia: date of birth at Port au Port, Newfoundland, May 17, 1894.

Private Dominic Bennett was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal)*.

**Both sets of his papers – Newfoundland and Canadian - document him as entitled to these medals, but each set names a different recipient. His brother Aaron received two medals, but whether Mrs. Jesso also did is not clear – although, of course, he was not entitled to two sets.*



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 28, 2023.

(continued on following page)



Magistrate's Office,

St Georges of
March 16th 1918

From
Magistrate R. MacDonnell Esq.
Acting Recruiting Officer
1st Royal Newfoundland Regiment
St Georges

245

To
J. M. Howley Esq.
Capt 1st Royal Newfoundland Regiment
Dominion of Newfoundland
St John's

Dear Captain

I am asked to find the whereabouts of one Dominic Benoit (or Bennett as they are now called) who has been away from here for some two years or over. I recruited him in 1914-15 and I believe he first joined our R.N.R. but left after his first year of service (You may remember that all recruits were only enrolled in both arms of our Service at that time for 12 mo only with option to leave at end)

This Chap was home here after serving that time or more. I did not see him but heard that he went as a Soldier but did not hear if he joined the Royal Newfoundland Regt or the Canadian's. but as he has not been heard of here for a long time (more than 24th now) I cannot get such information as I require. I may say that a man named Dominic Benoit was in the Canadian Service and was reported as dead, but no particulars to be sure of the identification has reached here, and as name is not plentiful and by all never heard of outside St Georges, Dominic Benoit not being by any means a plentiful name even amongst the many Benoit's here (I know of 12 or 13) I will thank you to find if he is now in your Regiment or if he ever was and perhaps you may have means of finding of him if both Canadian's or else