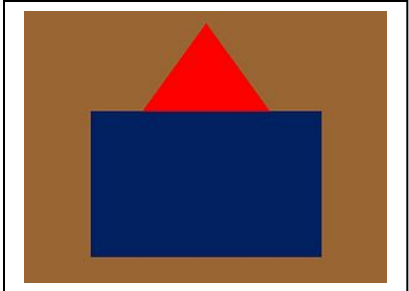




**Private Timothy Harding Brennan (Number 470196) of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, lies in Regina Trench Cemetery, Grandcourt: Grave reference, I.A.23..**

**His occupation previous to military service recorded as that of a labourer, Timothy Harding Brennan appears to have left no documentation in his files a propos his emigration from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Dominion of Canada. It is recorded, however, that he enlisted *twice* into the Canadian Infantry: once in 1914, and then again in 1915.**



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

On November 5 of 1914, three months after the *Declaration of War* by Westminster on behalf of the British Empire, Timothy Brennan presented himself in Halifax, Nova Scotia, for a medical examination and for enlistment and attestation. At that time he was attached to 'A' Company of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion\* (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force and was one of its first recruits, there being only two-hundred seventy-nine of them by November 16\*\*.

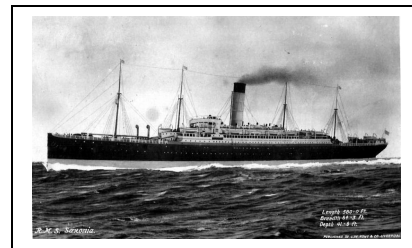
On this first occasion he was allocated the Number 67026\*\*\*.

*\*The unit had been formed only a week and a day earlier in Halifax, on October 28.*

*\*\*At the time of this enlistment, he declared that he had spent a year serving in the 68<sup>th</sup> King's County Regiment, a New Brunswick Militia formation. The Regiment had subsequently been disbanded in June of 1912.*

*\*\*\*This number is recorded among the files of Private Brennan's 1914-1915 military career, then seems to have disappeared; it is not to be found in the electronic version of the Canadian military archives.*

Having trained and organized in the Halifax area for the succeeding six months, the two-thousand, two-hundred seventy-four officers and men of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion and of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion from Québec - boarded His Majesty's Transport *Saxonia* in Halifax harbour on May 19. On the following day the vessel sailed for the United Kingdom.



(Right above: *The image of the R.M.S. – Royal Mail Ship - Saxonia is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries.*)

Private Brennan, however, was *not* on board the ship. Absent for the embarkation, he was thereupon *struck off strength* as a deserter.

The reasons for his actions do not appear among his documents, and neither is there any mention of subsequent punitive proceedings being undertaken by the Army. Moreover, it was apparently to be only just over four months afterwards that Timothy Brennan was facing a recruiting officer once more.

On September 11 of 1915 he again underwent a medical examination in Halifax\* and was pronounced as *fit*. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of that same month he both enlisted and attested, on this occasion in Sussex, New Brunswick, where his application to serve was certified two days later again, on September 17. He was thereupon attached to 'A' Company of the 64<sup>th</sup> Overseas Battalion which was recruiting mostly in the Maritime Provinces.

*\*A second source has Sussex, New Brunswick.*

(continued)

It was not until some six months hence that Private Brennan was to finally sail from Canada's shores. In the meantime, however, he apparently had absented himself without leave on a second occasion, albeit on this case for only twenty-four hours – on the night of January 1-2 of 1916 – and presumably had returned afterwards, prepared to face the consequences. The penalty appears to have been ninety-six hours detention.

On March 31, 1916, the 64<sup>th</sup> Battalion embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Adriatic* in the company of the 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance - which undertook medical responsibilities on the ship during the voyage - and the Coburg Heavy Draft Battery. The ship departed Halifax on the morrow to dock in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool eight days later again, on April 9.



(Right above: *The image of the SS Adriatic is from the Old Ship Pictures Web-site.*)

Upon its arrival in the United Kingdom, Private Brennan's unit was immediately transported by train to the large Canadian military establishment in the vicinity of the villages of Bramshott and Liphook in the southern county of Hampshire. It was apparently during this period that Private Brennan was prevailed upon to register a will which he did on April 26, leaving his all to his sister Helen.



(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*)

On June 24 Private Brennan was then ordered to the Canadian camp at Shorncliffe in the county of Kent and adjacent to the English-Channel town and harbour of Folkestone. There he was provisionally *taken on strength* by the 12<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion.



(Right: *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*)

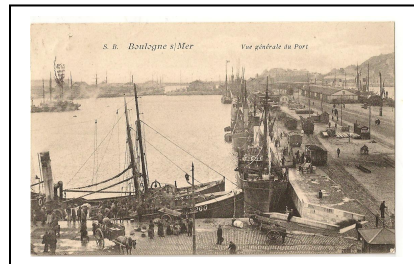
Four days later, on June 28, Private Brennan made the crossing of the Channel – likely from Folkestone to the French port of Boulogne on the coast opposite, some two hours' sailing-time away.



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

(continued)

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



Upon his disembarkation in France, Private Brennan was nominally transferred to the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) of Canadian Infantry, and also physically transferred to the Canadian Base Depot situated in the vicinity of the port-city of Le Havre where he reported on June 29.

It was almost two weeks later that a re-enforcement draft left the Base Depot on July 12, 1916, Private Brennan among its ranks, to seek out the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion parent unit.

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



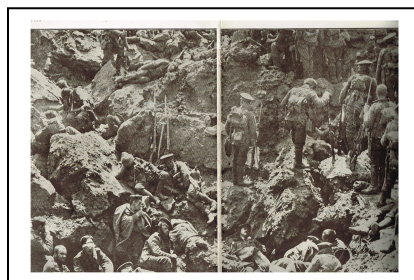
On the following day – there is no mention of re-enforcements either on or about that date in the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary - the contingent apparently reported *to duty*; if so, it was while the unit was serving in the forward trenches in the *Ypres Salient*\*.

\* \* \* \* \*

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

In early April of 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had undergone its baptism of fire on a large scale. It was at a place named St-Éloi where, at the end of March, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then followed up with an infantry attack. The newly-arrived Canadian formation was 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 turned the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and a resolute German defence greeted the newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6. Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.



**(Right above: An attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – from *Illustration*)**

Then in June the Battalion had been involved in the fighting in the area of the village of *Hooge, Mount Sorrel, Sanctuary Wood, Hill 60* and *Maple Copse*, all just to the south-east of the city of Ypres.

(continued)

The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division had been the main recipient of the enemy's offensive thrust but the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had played a role sufficiently important – it had manned the front lines at Zillebeke during three days - 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, 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, it was withdrawn into northern France to the vicinity of Steenvoorde, to the village of Moule.



It was also the time when the Canadian-made Ross Rifle was replaced by the British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III. More training – and practice with the new rifle – was undergone in the first days of September before the unit entrained on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) was on its way south, to fight in the *First Battle of the Somme*.

Having travelled all night, the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion arrived in the commune of Conteville – to the north-east of Abbéville - at six-thirty in the morning of September 5 and marched to its billets in nearby Mesnil-Domqueur.

The remainder of the unit's transfer to *the Somme* was to be made on foot and thus, for five successive days, Private Brennan marched towards the provincial town of Albert.

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 which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short space of only four hours - of which some nineteen thousand dead.



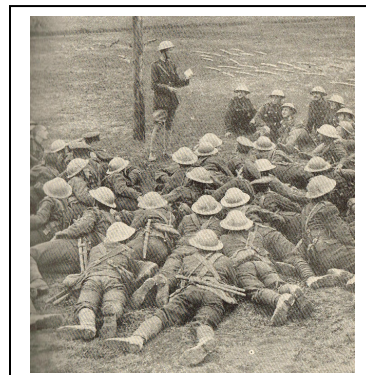
(Right above: *The Canadian Memorial which stands by the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette* – photograph from 2015)

On that first day of *1<sup>st</sup> Somme*, all but two small units in 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 had lost so heavily on that day at Beaumont-Hamel.

(continued)

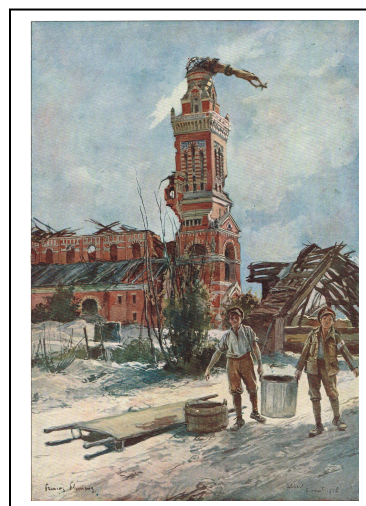
As the battle had progressed, other troops, from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major 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, on the evening of September 10, Private Brennan's Battalion had arrived at the large military camp which had been established at the Brickfields (*la Briqueterie*) in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

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



On the morrow the Battalion was ordered forward into dug-outs in assembly areas. On the next morning again, that of 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 some of the missing later returned to duty as a later Diary entry records two-hundred fifty-eight casualties all told.*

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



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

(continued)

On September 27 Private Brennan and the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion once more made its way to the front lines forward of Pozières, on this occasion relieving the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Infantry. The following days were spent consolidating their positions and also taking shelter from the heavy German artillery fire which caused a number of casualties.



(Right: *Wounded troops being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of the Somme – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)

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 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*)

The son of Timothy Brennan, fisherman, and Mary Brennan – to whom as of June 1, 1915, he had allocated a monthly twenty dollars from his pay - of Bay Bulls Road, the Goulds, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Helen (Mrs. James Putt? (*Butt?*)). Private Brennan was reported as having been *killed in action* on October 1 of 1916

Timothy Harding Brennan had enlisted on the first occasion at the apparent age of twenty-four years: date of birth, October 25, 1889.

Private Timothy Harding Brennan was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

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.

