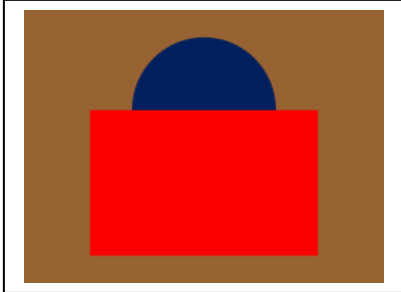




Private James Caravan (Number 464491) of the 14th Canadian Infantry Battalion (*Royal Montreal Regiment*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the stone of the Menin Gate, Ypres (today *Ieper*): Panel reference, 24-26-28-30.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 14th Battalion (Royal Montreal Regiment) is from the Wikipedia web-site*)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *fisherman*, James Caravan is also documented as having left the Dominion of Newfoundland – his destination Vancouver, British Columbia – on board the SS *Glencoe* on January 20 of 1912, and sailing from Port aux Basques to North Sydney, Nova Scotia. However, here the trail evaporates for almost four years, until fifteen months after the declaration of war.

(continued)

According to his papers, James Caravan presented himself for medical examination in the British Columbia community of Prince Rupert on October 12, 1915. Having been declared...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*, he then underwent enlistment and attestation, his oath being attested by a local justice of the peace on that same day.

During the following period of some five-and-a-half weeks, Private Caravan was attached to the 6th Regiment of the Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles, a unit of the Canadian Militia* which began to remunerate him for his services on that aforementioned October 12.

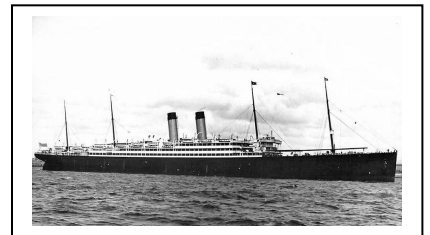
He was then *taken on strength* by the 62nd Battalion (*British Columbia*) on November 19*. His attestation apparently became official and the formalities of enlistment brought to a close on November 29, the day that the Officer Commanding the 62nd Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel John Herbert D. Hulme declared – on paper – that...*James Caravan...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

**Militia units in Canada had been formed to serve in defence of the country; thus these units were unable, by law, to serve outside the frontiers of the country. But they could recruit and pass along these aspiring soldiers to the newly-forming Overseas Battalions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force – in fact, militia personnel formed the majority of the first-formed Overseas Battalions.*

This would appear to be the case with Private Caravan as he was transferred from the 6th Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles to the 62nd Battalion (British Columbia) on November 18, 1915.

It appears that much of the 62nd Battalion's training was undertaken in the area of the community of Vernon as there are a number of photographs in the provincial archives of the unit there in 1915. However, it appears that Private Caravan was eventually based in or near the city of Vancouver as it was there that he underwent a second medical examination – the reason not cited but perhaps for vaccinations - on March 11, likely since it was soon to be from Vancouver that the 62nd Battalion was to travel eastwards by train across the country to Halifax.

On March 20 of 1916 the thirty-six officers and one-thousand fifty *enlisted ranks* of the 62nd Battalion boarded His Majesty's Transport *Baltic* in the harbour at Halifax, and there they and the other embarked troops waited for some twelve days for the arrival of the *Empress of Britain* from Montreal. *Baltic* then traversed the Atlantic en route to the United Kingdom in the company of the *Empress*, the *Baltic's* sister-ship *Adriatic*, and the elderly British cruiser *Carnarvon*.



Private Caravan and the 62nd Battalion were not alone to take passage on *Baltic*. Other units on board were: the 56th Battalion of Canadian Infantry; the 6th (*Laval University*) General Hospital; candidates for the Canadian Officers Training Corps; Naval personnel; three civilian doctors; and officers and *other ranks* from details.

(Preceding page: *The photograph of the White Star Company liner Baltic is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Having eventually sailed from Canada on April 1, the convoy docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on April 9. The military personnel, more than eight thousand in all, had all disembarked by the following day and the 62nd Battalion was taken by train to the Canadian military complex by then established in the vicinity of the villages of Bramshott and Liphook in the southern English county of Hampshire.



(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 the day after receiving a reprimand for being... *Deficient in Gov't Kit*, on May 25, 1916, Private Caravan was one of a reinforcement draft on its way to France. He likely sailed from Southampton on the night of May 26-27 to the port-city of Le Havre at the estuary of the River Seine where he reported to the Canadian General Base Depot which had been established in the vicinity of nearby Rouelles. There he was *taken on strength* by the 7th Battalion.



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

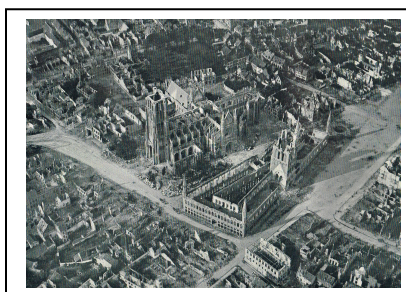
Eleven days later - his transfer to the 7th Battalion rescinded - he left the Base Depot as one of a draft of one-hundred fifty *other ranks* despatched to join the 14th Battalion (*Royal Montreal Regiment*) to which he had been attached perhaps as late as that same day. Private Caravan *reported to duty* with his new unit by then in Divisional Reserve on June 6 – a second source cites June 7.

* * * * *

The 14th Battalion (*Royal Montreal Regiment*) had by that time been serving on the Continent since February of 1915 as an element of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the (1st) Canadian Division*. After its arrival from Canada via England, it had at first served in northern France in the *Fleurbaix Sector* just south of Armentières, before having been ordered into the *Ypres Salient* in April of that same 1915.

**Before the advent of the 2nd Canadian Division it was often simply designated, logically enough, as the Canadian Division.*

(Right: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle - showing the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration*)



(continued)

Only a bare two months after its arrival on the Continent, and only days after it had moved into a north-eastern sector of *the Salient**, the Canadian Division had distinguished itself during the *Second Battle of Ypres* in the spring of 1915.

**In fact, certain units were still not in position on the day of the first German attacks.*

(Right: *The Memorial to the 1st Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier - just to the south of the village of Langemark, stands where the Canadians withstood the German attack at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915. – photograph from 2010*)



On April 22 of that year 1915, at five o'clock in the afternoon, the Germans had released chlorine gas in front of French colonial troops at the northern end of the *Ypres Salient*. The gas had then reportedly caused some six-thousand casualties in a very short space of time and had provoked a rout of the stricken defenders.



The Canadians, in the line just to the right, not having been affected to the same degree, had been ordered to fill the void left by the retreating French troops and to forestall a German break-through.

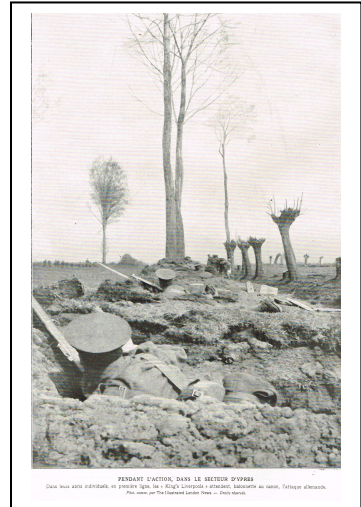
(Right above: *Entitled: Bombardement d'Ypres, le 5 juillet 1915 – from Illustration*)

For its part, the 14th Battalion was to be called into action on April 22, the first day of the German attack, and had thereupon taken up defensive positions to the north-east of the city in the vicinity of *Wieltje**.

**Up until this date the Battalion War Diary had been a neat, detailed, type-written journal; as of April 22 it is a hastily-scribbled effort scratched in pencil, promising that the details will be appended at a later date. But, if nothing else, it shows the desperate situation of the next few days.*

Companies of the 14th Battalion then had made a stand with the 13th Battalion at *St-Julien (Sin-Juliaan)* for the next two days before having been obliged to retire by the force of the German artillery activity. On several more occasions on the following days the Battalion – and the Canadians in general, with some British forces – were to retire to a series of reserve trenches.

(Right: *Troops, in this case the Liverpool Regiment, in trenches in the Ypres Salient. These are still the early days of the year as witnessed by the lack of steel helmets which came into use only in the spring and summer of 1916. – from Illustration*)



(continued)

However, as history has recorded, the front had eventually been consolidated and the 14th Battalion was to be able to retire on the night of May 4-5 – a second document in the same source has 3-4. Only two weeks later it was to be in action once again.

At the beginning of May the British had responded to a French request for support during their operations in the Artois region, and the Canadians had been ordered further southwards* in mid-month to the area of Festubert and, in June, to that of Givenchy-les-la-Bassée.

**Most of the Canadian units had already been in northern France in the area of Bailleul – resting, re-organizing and re-enforcing after Second Ypres - when the orders had arrived.*

(Right below: German trenches nick-named the Labyrinth – complete with corpses - captured by the French during their Pyrrhic victory at Notre-Dame de Lorette – Over one-hundred thousand French troops became casualties during this campaign in the Artois. – from Illustration)

At Festubert the British gains were to be negligible, an advance of some three kilometres, and in the ten days during which the action had lasted, the British High Command was to contrive to divest itself of what had remained after the *Second Battle of Ypres* of its small, professional Army.

There had also been a lot of good will lost between that British High Command and the Indians and Canadian forces who had also incurred heavy casualties* – the Canadians particularly so after their losses during the aforementioned *Second Ypres*.

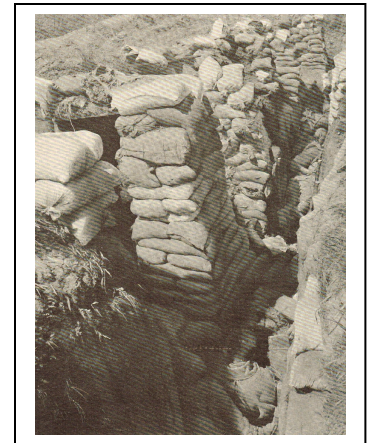
**The Meerut Division losses totalled twenty-five hundred and those of the Canadian Division some twenty-two hundred. Those of the 14th Canadian Infantry Battalion had been reasonably light, however, sixty-seven all told.*

After Festubert some of the Canadian forces had moved north almost immediately, into positions in the *Ploegsteert Sector* on the Belgian side of the frontier. There they were to remain until September and October of the following year when once again their services were to be required in France.

(Right: A one-time officer in the Indian Army pays his respects to the fallen at the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle. – photograph from 2010(?))

The 14th Battalion, however, was to be posted in June to the area of Givenchy-les-la-Bassée*, a small village not far distant south of Festubert.

(continued)



Having been ordered into the forward trenches on two occasions during that month to support British efforts – and having endured the same sort of losses, although lesser in number, from having repeated the same mistakes - by July 1 the unit was then to be back north in billets in the area of the Franco-Belgian border with the other battalions of the 1st Canadian Division in the *Ploegsteert Sector*.

**Since the place is oft-times referred to simply as Givenchy it is worthwhile knowing that there are two other Givenchys in the region: Givenchy-le-Noble, to the west of Arras, and Givenchy-en-Gohelle, a village which lies in the shadow of a crest of land which dominates the Douai Plain: Vimy Ridge.*



(Right: Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, Ploegsteert Sector, a mine crater from the time of the 1917 British offensive in the foreground – photograph from 2014)

During the period of 1915-1916 now to be spent in Belgium, there were to be only two occasions on which units of the Canadian Divisions would be required to fight concerted infantry actions – the first to be the *Action at the St-Éloi Craters* and the second, the confrontation at *Mount Sorrel** – otherwise there were to pass some fourteen months of the routines and rigours – and perils - of trench warfare**.

**In only the second of these engagements was the 14th Battalion to any extent engaged.*

***During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less 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 position at times for weeks on end.

(Right: A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, by that time equipped with steel helmets and Lee-Enfield rifles – from *Illustration*)

The *Battle of the St. Eloi Craters* – the action to involve troops of the 2nd Canadian Division – was to officially take place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St. Eloi (*St-Éloi, Sint-Elooi*) was – and is - a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it was to be there that the British would excavate a series of galleries under the German lines. These tunnels were then to be filled with explosives which had been detonated on that March 27.

(continued)

After an initial success the attack had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were to be replacing the exhausted British troops. They had had no more success than their British comrades-in-arms, and by the 17th day of the month when the battle had been called off, the Germans were to be back where they had been some three weeks previously and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.



(Right above: *Advancing in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine – from Illustration*)

Some six weeks later it was to be the turn of the 3rd Canadian Division to undergo *its* first major confrontation.

From June 2 to 14 was to be fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and also for the area of *Sanctuary Wood, Maple Copse, Hooge, Railway Dugouts* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps*.

The Canadians had apparently been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions dominating the Canadian trenches when the Germans had delivered an offensive which was to overrun the forward areas and, in fact, to rupture the Canadian lines, an opportunity which fortunately they had not exploited.



(Right: *Remnants of Canadian trenches dating from 1915-1916 at Sanctuary Wood – photograph from 2010*)

**This was an area of the Ypres Salient, and recently having become the responsibility of the newly-arrived 3rd Canadian Division – officially in existence since New Year's Day, 1916, but not entirely operational until March of that year - that the Germans attacked. However, the situation was soon to become serious enough for units of the other Canadian Divisions to become involved.*



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

The British Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, had reacted – perhaps a little too precipitately - by organizing a counter-attack for the following day, an assault intended to, at a minimum, recapture the lost ground. Badly organized, the operation had been a more than sobering experience: many of the intended attacks had not gone in – those that *had* done so, had gone in piecemeal and the assaulting troops had been cut to shreds - the enemy had remained *in situ* and the Canadians had been left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.

(continued)

As for the 14th Battalion, on the day of the German attack, June 2, the unit had been serving in Divisional Reserve. However it had soon been called forward to the area of Zillebeke to where, during the night of June 2-3, it had advanced in individual companies and details. Having then advanced again on the following day the unit had recorded very heavy casualties – three-hundred seventy-nine *all ranks*.

(Right: *Railway Dugouts Burial Ground (Transport Farm) today contains twenty-four hundred fifty-nine burials and commemorations. – photograph from 2014*)



On June 4 the 14th Battalion had been relieved and had retired, leaving behind two officers and fifty *other ranks* – all volunteers – to bury the dead. Three days later, on June 7, Private Caravan reported to duty with his new unit.

The 14th Battalion War Diarist also recorded the following: *A large reinforcement of 150 men arrived on June 6th, and these were largely drawn upon to make up working parties of 150 sent out the following day*. The part of the parties was to assist-in consolidation after the assault then pending. Before the assault took place the Regiment received a further 300 reinforcements and was again called upon to furnish large parties for difficult and dangerous jobs...*



**The date on another page in the War Diary has this draft as having arrived on June 7, thus it may have been Private Caravan's detachment. On June 6 only twenty re-enforcements were reported.*

As for the three hundred mentioned above, they reported to duty on June 11.

(Right above: *Maple Copse, the scene of heavy fighting in June of 1916, and its cemetery wherein lie numerous Canadians – photograph from 2014*)

On the evening and night of June 12, Canadian attackers had moved forward into assembly positions and had gone over the top hours later, before dawn of the 13th. The 14th Battalion, having spent until June 12 in Divisional Reserve, had not been a component of the attacking force but it was to accompany the attackers during the assault.

Its tasks had been many and varied: carrying small arms ammunition and bombs; stretcher-bearing and evacuation of wounded to dressing-stations; supplying rations and water; wiring and carrying wire; and providing entrenching material – all of this to be accomplished while under fire.



The casualties are recorded in the War Diary: nineteen *killed in action*; twenty-two *wounded*; twenty-eight *missing in action*.

(continued)

(Preceding page: *A century later, reminders of a violent past close to the site of Hill 60 – it had even resembled a hill until a British mine reduced the summit to extremely small pieces in the first week of June, 1917 - to the south-east of Ypres, an area today protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature – photograph from 2014*)

The son of Noah Caravan (elsewhere *Carevan*), former fisherman deceased November 15, 1909, and of Susan Caravan (née *Bradbury*) deceased March 7, 1909, of Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, he was also brother of Arthur – drowned April 10, 1913 – of Charles – whom he records as next-of-kin* on his attestation papers – of Stephen, Thomas, Albert, William-Albert and of Edith*.

**On his 1916 pay records his sister Edith of the Knox Hotel, Prince Rupert, British Columbia, is named as his next of kin.*

Private Caravan was reported as having been *killed in action* on the night of June 12-13 of 1916 during the fighting at Mount Sorrel.

James Caravan had enlisted at the age of twenty-four years: date of birth in Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, September 22, 1891.

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

(Right below: *The sacrifice of Private James Caravan is honoured on the War Memorial in the community of Bay Roberts.* – photograph from 2010)



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 23, 2023.