

Private
Frederick
Joseph
Carbery – the

name is spelt variously, particularly as *Carberry* - (Number 18481) of the 1st Battalion (*Western Ontario*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on *Vimy Ridge*.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 1st Battalion (Western Ontario) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *coal-miner*, Frederick Joseph Carbery appears to have left behind him little information *a propos* his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Alberta. All that may be said with any certainty is that he was present in the city of Edmonton during the month of August, 1914, for that is where and when he enlisted.

It is his first pay-record that allows us this information, for August 20 is the date on which the 101st Regiment (*Edmonton Fusiliers*) of Canadian Militia, by which unit he was *taken on strength* on that same day, began to remunerate him for his services. The Regiment had begun recruiting upon the Declaration of War and by the end of that August had enrolled its full complement of some twelve-hundred officers and men. It was thereupon ordered transferred to the newly-established military complex at Valcartier, Québec, to prepare for overseas service.

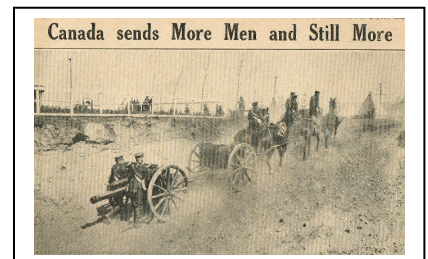
It was at Valcartier that the entire personnel of the 101st Regiment (*Edmonton Fusiliers*) was transferred to the newly-authorized 9th Canadian Overseas Battalion as a result of the Government's new military policy and for legal reasons*.

**Canadian Militia Regiments were, by law, unable to serve outside the borders of the country. However, this did not preclude them from recruiting on behalf of the newly-forming Overseas Battalion into which the majority of the militiamen in Canada transferred within months after the Declaration of War.*

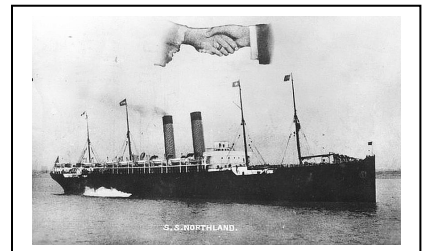
Thus it was at Valcartier on September 7 – a second source has September 4 - that Private Carbery underwent a (second?) medical examination – which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force*. It was also there that he was attested on September 23, just prior to embarkation, and that it was declared – on paper – by a captain representing the Battalion's Commanding Officer, that...*F. Carberry...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

The formalities of Private Carbery's enlistment were thus drawn to a conclusion.

(Right: *Canadian artillery being put through its paces at the Camp at Valcartier. In 1914, the main Army Camp in Canada was at Petawawa. However, its location in Ontario – and away from the Great Lakes – made it impractical for the despatch of troops overseas. Valcartier was apparently built within weeks after the Declaration of War. – photograph (from a later date in the Great War) from The War Illustrated*)



The ship on which the 9th Battalion embarked for passage to the United Kingdom was the SS *Zeeland**, one of the convoy of troop carriers which was to transport the first Canadian contingent – the Canadian Division – overseas to the United Kingdom.



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**Although the name 'Zeeland' is Dutch, it was felt that this nevertheless sounded too Germanic; the ship was therefore renamed 'Northland'. During the first years of the Great War she continued to ply her trans-Atlantic commercial runs, but in 1917 she was*

requisitioned for use solely as a troop transport ship and she continued as such until 1919.

(Preceding page: The image of the Red Star liner Northland (Zeeland) is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.)

On what day the 9th Battalion boarded ship is not clear*, but it was likely on or before October 1, and it surely took place in the port at Québec. In fact, some of the vessels were embarked upon as early as September 25, after which they sailed upstream to nearby Wolfe's Cove where they then anchored.

Northland was not a particularly large vessel; even so, Private Carbery and his 9th Battalion were not to cross the Atlantic unaccompanied. Also on board ship were three units of Canadian Engineers: 1st Divisional Engineers and the 1st and 2nd Field Companies.

On or about September 30, most if not all of the vessels* at Wolfe's Cove sailed slowly downstream to the rendezvous point at the Gaspé. From the Gaspé the thirty-one transports and their naval escorts sailed on October 3 of that 1914 bound for the United Kingdom. On October 5, as the formation passed along the south coast of Newfoundland, the small Bowring Brothers' steamer *Florizel* sailed to meet and join it. She was carrying the *First Five-Hundred* of the Newfoundland Regiment to war.

**There may have been one which did not: the last-minute charter, SS Manhattan, which was to carry a large number of horses.*

Following a smooth – from all points of view – crossing of the Atlantic, the convoy entered the English south-coast naval harbour of Plymouth-Devonport during the afternoon of October 14*. Many of the arriving units, however, were obliged to remain on ship for days before their debarkation could be effected.

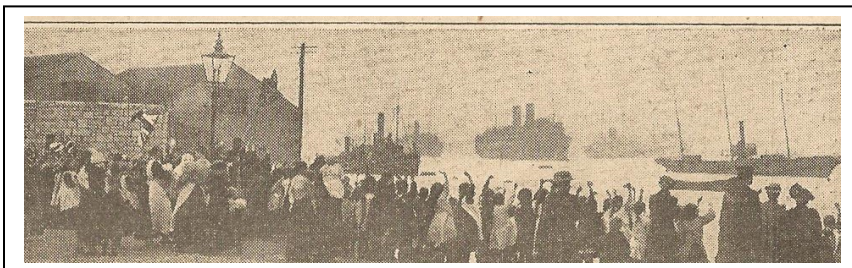
**The original destination had been the much larger port-city of Southampton, but a submarine scare had forced a change in plans and Plymouth-Devonport, smaller, unprepared, with fewer railway facilities, and undergoing renovation and construction was the alternative. It was to be some ten days before the last units disembarked.*

It was on October 18 that the turn of Private Carbery's Battalion to come ashore came about. It was a Sunday morning and there was to be a church service. However, it was some six miles distant – almost ten kilometres – and the twelve miles to and from *Zeeland* to the place of worship were undertaken on foot.

Then at four-thirty that afternoon the first troops left the ship for a second time, for the journey to their encampment and marched to the North Road railway station. At ten minutes to seven that evening their train was on its way.

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The station at Market Lavington was reached five hours later, from where the unit was then to



march for almost two hours to *Pond Farm Camp*, a subsidiary of the British military complex there on the Salisbury Plain.

Within days the entire *Canadian Expeditionary Force* was to be transported to this area where – with a few exceptions - it would remain for the following sixteen weeks, some of the troops under canvas for the entire period.

(Right above: *Some of the ships of the convoy which had carried the Canadian Expeditionary Force to England, at anchor in Plymouth Hoe on October 14, 1914 – from The War Illustrated*)

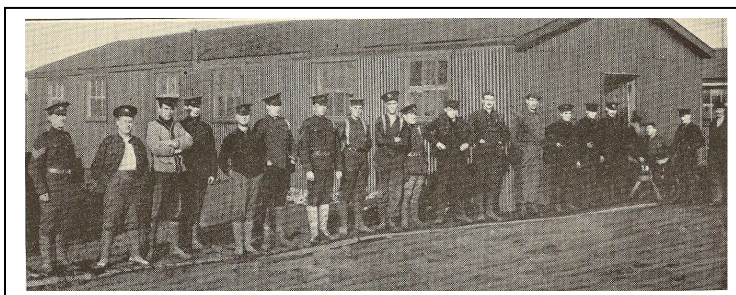
By the morrow of its arrival at *Pond Farm Camp* – and later at the *Sling Plantation* at *Bulford Camp* - a daily routine had been established, a routine that was to be followed until the time of the unit's departure for France.

The British Army regulations of the day were such that troops were to undergo some fourteen weeks of training after the time of enlistment; at that point they were to be considered as fit for *active service*. Thus the newly-arrived Canadians of the infantry battalions were to spend the remainder of October and up until the first week of February, 1915, in becoming proper *Soldiers of the King* – even if they were *colonials*.

The months of that late autumn and of the following winter were to be just as hectic in other ways: There were to be visits from politicians and generals – and one even from the King and Queen, with the requisite preparations for such an occasion.

Then on February 4, 1915, almost the entire

Canadian Division marched to a review area where it was inspected by His Majesty, King George V and the War Minister, Lord Kitchener*. Only days later, Private Carbery was to be on his way to the Continent and to *active service* on the *Western Front*.



But he was no longer to be a soldier of the 9th Battalion.

**For whom the Canadian city of Kitchener, Ontario, was named in 1916 – it had been called Berlin until then.*

(Right above: *Canadian troops during the autumn of 1914 at Bulford Camp, Wiltshire, adjacent to the 1st Canadian General Hospital Headquarters – from The War Illustrated*)

(continued)

On April 29 of 1915, the 9th Battalion was re-designated as the 9th Reserve Battalion*, its function to now remain in England, to receive troops from Canada and to serve as a reinforcement pool. But its destiny had been evident by the end of that January as drafts were already being sent to those battalions which were now to leave on *active service*.

**Before the end of the Great War, Canada was to despatch overseas two-hundred fifty battalions – although it is true that a number of these units, particularly as the conflict progressed, were below full strength. At the outset, these Overseas Battalions all had presumptions of seeing active service in a theatre of war.*

However, as it transpired, only some fifty of these formations were ever to be sent across the English Channel to the Western Front. By far the majority remained in the United Kingdom to be used as re-enforcement pools and they were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by units that had by then been designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.

Such was to be the case with the 9th Battalion: its personnel was eventually all to be transferred to other battalions in the field. The unit was finally absorbed by the newly-forming 9th Reserve Battalion (Alberta) in January of 1917, and then this new 9th Reserve Battalion (Alberta) by the 21st Reserve Battalion (Alberta) on October 14-15, 1917.*

**And also the other Battalions of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade*

Private Carbery was not one of those to leave for France with the Canadian Division in early February of 1915; he remained with the 9th Battalion for another eleven weeks until he was *struck off strength* in April 26, to be *taken on strength* – bureaucratically - by the 1st Battalion when he landed in the French city of Rouen on that same day.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

The reason for Private Carbery not joining the 1st Battalion in February had likely been due to a medical problem: a venereal one. He had been admitted into the 1st Canadian General Hospital, at that time established at Bulford and in the vicinity of the 9th Battalion camp, apparently on two occasions: from January 20 to 25 with venereal sores; and then for a longer period of fifty-five days, from February 8 until April 3, for treatment for chancroid (*soft sores*) and for genital warts.

There appears to be little or no information about Private Carbery's movements after his disembarkation in Rouen. It is likely that he and the other soldiers of his re-enforcement draft were thereupon taken by train northwards to the Franco-Belgian frontier and then into Belgium. By that time the Canadian Division was fighting to survive and the arrival of re-enforcements on April 27 merited only a brief mention in the 1st Battalion War Diary. It cannot be said with any certainty whether or not Private Carbery was one of this small draft of eleven *other ranks* (see also below).

* * * * *

More than two months before Private Carbery's arrival on the Continent, the 1st Canadian Infantry Battalion (*Western Ontario*) had travelled overnight on February 7-8, to arrive at the Avonmouth Docks, Bristol, and to board the troop-transport *Architect*. The personnel, transport and equipment had been all loaded by half-past six on the morning of the 8th -

although for some unrecorded reason it would be a further seventeen hours before the ship was to sail.

The 1st Battalion War Diarist was to describe the events of February 9 and 10 as simply...*Open Sea*. On the morrow the vessel was documented as having...*Arrived ST. NAZAIRE at 12 Midnight*. By mid-afternoon of the following day again, the 1st Battalion had been put on a train for the tedious journey to the north of the country. It was there, in northern France, in the *Fleurbaix Sector*, that the Canadian Division – and thus the 1st Canadian Infantry Battalion – was to spend the following two months.



(Right above: *While the caption reads that these troops are ‘English’, this could mean 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)

On February 18, having marched to, and having been billeted in, the border town of Armentières, the 1st Battalion had commenced a period of instruction and had been introduced into the trenches, there to be temporarily attached to British units so as to become familiar with the routines, rigours and also the perils of life at the Front.

On that February 20 of 1915, a Private Chapman had been slightly wounded and thus had become the 1st Battalion’s first casualty on the *Western Front*.

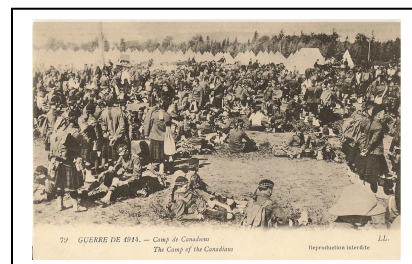
Some seven weeks later, on April 6, the unit had marched westward from the *Fleurbaix Sector* before turning to the north-west. After an eight-hour march which had skirted the Franco-Belgian frontier, it had arrived and had encamped in the vicinity of the community of Ouderzeele. There the Battalion would remain to train for the following twelve days when it was to be on the march once again.

The entire Canadian Division, having become accustomed by that early April of 1915 to existence in the trenches, had thereupon been ordered to occupy positions in a theatre known as the *Ypres Salient* – or simply as *the Salient*, it to become one of the most lethal and wretched places of the entire *Great War*. The positions which were now to become a Canadian responsibility were being held by French colonial troops, at the time in a sector to the north-east of the already-devastated medieval city of Ypres.

Thus it was on April 18 that the Battalion – and the other units of the Canadian Division – had turned eastward, had crossed the frontier on that same day, and had moved into the *Kingdom of Belgium*. In two days’ time the 1st Battalion had then moved into camp on the western outskirts of Ypres. On April 21 it had...*Cleaned billets. Held under orders to move at a minute’s notice.* (Excerpt from 1st Battalion War Diary entry for April 21, 1915)

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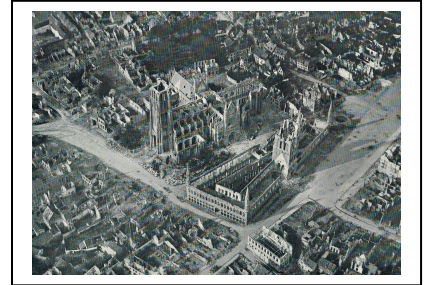
(Right: *The caption reads merely ‘Camp of Canadians’ but it is from the early days of the Great War, thus likely in either northern France or in Belgium. The troops are from a Canadian-Scottish unit.* – from a vintage post-card)



On the morrow, April 22, the Germans had struck*.

**Most of the units of the Canadian Division, as it was with the 1st Canadian Infantry Battalion, had arrived in the Ypres Salient only days before the attack; in fact, others were still on the move to their new posting at the time.*

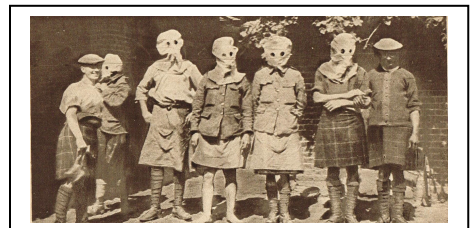
(Right: An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of Second Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled *Ypres-la-Morte* (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from *Illustration*)



The 2nd Battle of Ypres was to see the first use of chlorine gas by the Germans during the Great War. Later to become an everyday event, and with the introduction of protective measures such as advanced gas-masks, the gas was to prove no more dangerous than the rest of the military arsenals of the warring nations.

But on this first occasion, to inexperienced troops without the means to combat it, the yellow-green cloud of chlorine had proved overwhelming.

(Right: The very first protection against gas was to urinate onto a handkerchief which was then held over the nose and mouth. However, all the armies were soon producing gas-masks, some of the first of which are seen here being tested by Scottish troops. – from either *Illustration* or *Le Miroir*)



The cloud had been noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon of April 22. In the sector subjected to the most concentrated use of the gas, the French Colonial troops to the Canadian left had wavered and then had broken, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered. Then a retreat, not always very cohesive, by the entire unit had become necessary.



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

By the 23rd the situation had become relatively stable – at least temporarily - and the positions in the vicinity of Sint-Juliaan were to be held until the morning of the 24th when a further retirement had been imperative. At times there had been breaches in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans had been unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or else they had not had the means of exploiting the situation.

And then the Canadians had closed the gaps.

It had been at twenty minutes past two in the morning of April 23 that the 1st Battalion had eventually...received orders to move. Marched via BRIELEN over YSER CANAL... Received orders to attack on PILKEN village... Entrenched. Held entrenched positions for

the remainder of day. Withdrew at night and occupied trenches thrown up by local reserve during the day. (1st Battalion War Diary entry for April 23, 1915)

Remained in trenches occupied the night before. Marched via WIELTJE to FORTUNE. Dug in. (1st Battalion War Diary entry for April 24, 1915)



Advanced and constructed support trenches 200 yards south of FORTUNE, supporting an attack on ST. JULIEN... Received orders to retire by route taken on April 24th, 1915, and held west bank of YSER CANAL, covering from 3rd to 5th pontoon bridges. (1st Battalion War Diary entry for April 25, 1915)

(Right above: The Yser Canal at a point in the northern outskirts of Ypres almost a century after elements of the Canadian Division – including the 1st Battalion - were withdrawn to its western bank – west is to the left – photograph from 2014)

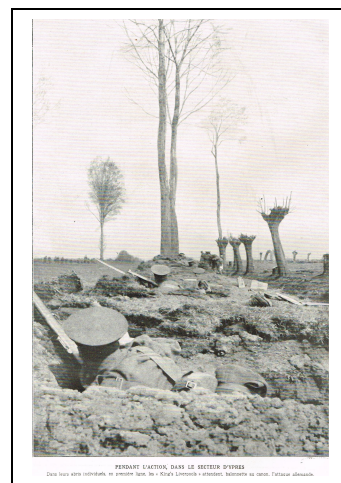
Held YSER CANAL as above. (1st Battalion War Diary entry for April 26, 1915)

Held YSER CANAL as above. Draft of 11 men arrived. (1st Battalion War Diary entry for April 27, 1915)

As conjectured in a previous paragraph, this draft may have included Private Carbery, particularly since there appear to have been no further re-enforcements forth-coming for another month.

If, in fact, he did report to duty on the Yser Canal on that particular day, then Private Carbery's was to be a rude introduction to the war on the Western Front.

(Right: Troops – in this instance British – in hastily-dug trenches in the Ypres Salient. These are still the early days of the year as witnessed by the lack of steel helmets which only came into use in the spring and summer of 1916. – from Illustration)



Same as April 27, 1915. Advanced EAST and constructed trenches on farms... and also assisted Rifle Brigade*. (1st Battalion War Diary entry for April 28, 1915)

****The Germans were now to attack other sectors in the Ypres Salient, some of those held by British forces among which was serving a Canadian battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.***

Withdrew and went into billets at VLAMERTINGUE. Route taken the same as on April 23, 1915. (1st Battalion War Diary entry for April 29, 1915)

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(Right: The Memorial to the 1st Canadian Division – the Brooding Soldier – stands just to the south of the village of Langemark (then Langemarck) at the Vancouver Crossroads

where the Canadians withstood the German attack – abetted by gas – at Ypres (today Ieper) in April of 1915. – photograph from 2010)

For the 1st Canadian Infantry Battalion, and for many other Canadian units, the *Second Battle of Ypres* had drawn to a close. A few days were now to be allowed for rest and for re-organization before training and re-enforcement was to begin, the Canadian battalions to be withdrawn into northern France for these purposes.

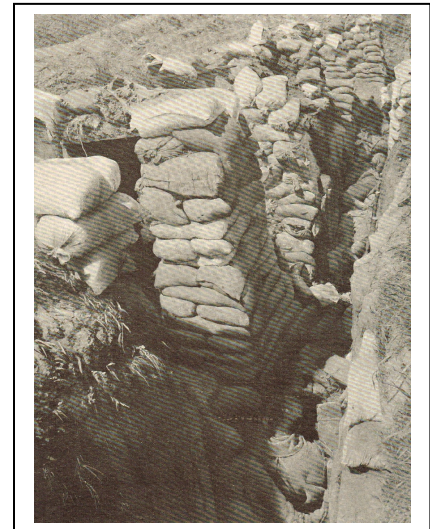
Private Carbery's 1st Battalion had left its camp at Vlamertingue on May 2, for some reason having started its trek at half-past nine at night. The column had reached the northern French town of Bailleul at three o'clock the next morning, having marched in the rain for most of the night. The troops had then apparently been, perhaps a little surprisingly, permitted the remainder of that day, and all the next, to rest.



The subsequent ten days were to be spent in training, although what exactly were the various exercises to be undertaken by Private Carbery and his comrades-in-arms does not appear to have been documented by the Battalion War Diarist. And then, on May 14, the Battalion had been ordered moved some thirty-five kilometres to the south-west, to billets in Calonne – another six-hour overnight march followed by a day-time rest. The Canadian Division – and thus the 1st Battalion – was about to become embroiled in a further confrontation with the Germans.

The orders given had been that the Canadian Division was now to be transferred further to the south into France and into the areas of the small communities of Festubert and Givenchy. The French were about to undertake a major offensive just further south again and had asked for British support.

(Right: A French photograph of some German trenches – complete with dead defenders and perhaps attackers - captured in the area south of Givenchy before it later became an area of British responsibility – from Illustration)



There at Festubert and then at Givenchy a series of attacks and counter-attacks was to take place by which the British High Command would manage to gain three kilometres of ground but would also contrive to destroy, by the use of the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what had by now left of the British pre-War professional Army.

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The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but, not having the same numbers of troops as the British, was not to participate in the operation to the same extent.

(Right: *The Post Office Rifles Cemetery at Festubert wherein lie some four-hundred dead, only one-third of them identified – photograph from 2010*)



The Canadians nonetheless had suffered heavily. They and the Indian troops - the 7th (*Meerut*) Division* also having been ordered to serve at Festubert - had hardly fared better, relatively, than the British; each contingent – a Division – was to incur over two-thousand casualties before the offensive drew to a close.

The French effort further south – having employed the same tactics - was likewise to prove a failure - but on an even larger scale: it was to cost over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded and missing*.

**The Indian troops also served – and lost heavily – in other battles in this area in 1915 before being transferred to the Middle East.*

(Right: *A one-time officer who served in the Indian Army during the Second World War, pays his respects to those who fell - at the Indian Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle. – photograph from 2010(?)*)



After several days at Calonne, on May 22 the 1st Canadian Infantry Battalion moved up to the forward area to act as a re-enforcement for the Canadian 2nd Infantry Brigade*. Later on during that same day, their role apparently having been fulfilled, Private Carbery's unit had re-joined the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade and had relieved the Canadian 8th Infantry Battalion in the front line.

**The 1st Battalion was a component of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade but, when necessary, the battalions could be – and were – attached away from their parent brigade.*

Whereas a number of the Canadian battalions – those of the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Brigades – were to be involved in offensive operations against the Germans – without a great deal of success and also having incurred heavy casualties – the 1st Canadian Battalion, according once again to its War Diarist – was to spend the whole of its seven-day tour of duty in constructing new positions, in improving those already existing – and in avoiding heavy German artillery fire.

On May 28 the Battalion had been relieved in turn and had retired to *Indian Village*, a cluster of houses behind the lines yet still close enough to be heavily bombed on the days that had followed. Three days later, on the final day of the month, Private Carbery and his 1st Battalion had retired further, to the area of Croix de Fer.

For the Canadian Division the engagement at Festubert was over: it was now to move several kilometres to the south to serve at the lesser action at Givenchy-les-la-Bassée*.

**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.

It was to be on the morning of June 15 that Private Carbery's 1st Battalion had moved into the front-line trenches at Givenchy to put in an attack on German positions at six o'clock on the evening of the same day.

(Right below: The main north-south road at nearby La Bassée at the time of the fighting at Festubert and Givenchy-les-la-Bassée in the summer of 1915 – from Le Miroir)

In the meantime it had spent the first six days of the month not only resting, but enjoying the luxury – and likely the necessity - of a bath. This had been followed by inspections, a route march, lectures about bombs (grenades), physical training, and a change of lodging on June 10 with new billets and bivouacs in and about the hamlet of Le Preol.



Minor movements in preparation for a return to the forward area had been made in the ensuing days but, perhaps more important had been the exchange that took place on June 13: the Canadians had turned in their *Ross Rifles*, which had served so unsatisfactorily in the poor conditions at Ypres, and were now to be equipped with the *British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifle*. The following day had been spent in instruction on the use of the new weapon - and a lecture by the Medical Officer on sanitation.

Then had come June 15. After a morning of preparation and the mid-day march to its positions, by three o'clock Private Carbery's unit had reported itself as in position.

6 P.M., JUNE 15, 1915, GIVENCHY – Advance against German front began. Forward Coy reached German second line trench but owing to exposure of flanks were obliged to fall back before a violent counter-attack to original front-line British trench. This movement was completed by 9.30 P.M. Battalion remained in front line trench (British). (1st Battalion War Diary entry for June 15, 1915)

Casualty report: ***“Previously reported Missing, now for official purposes presumed to have died.”***

From information available, it is believed he was killed by a mine explosion about 6 A.M. June 15th 1915*

****There is, however, no report of any mine explosion made in the Battalion War Diary. In fact, the Battalion was not present in the forward area at that hour of the morning – nor was there any artillery action reported.***

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The son of Andrew Carbery, fisherman, and of Sarah Carbery (née *Lahey*)* of Turk's Cove, Trinity Bay, he was also brother to Edward-John, to Mary-Catherine and to an infant child born in October of 1888**.

**There appears to be no further information a propos his parents and on his attestation papers, Frederick Joseph Carbery named his uncle, Peter J. Carbery, as his Next-of-Kin, and allocated to him the monthly sum of fifteen dollars from his pay.*

***It is possible that Sarah died soon after this last birth as Andrew re-married in 1893. His second wife was a Mary Ellen Duffitt with whom he had a son, Bernard, who was born in November of 1894 and a daughter, Lucy, in 1895.*

Private Carbery was reported as *missing in action* on June 15, 1915, and then, on September 26, 1916, as...*Presumed to have died on or since 15/6/15.*

Frederick Joseph Carbery had enlisted at the *apparent age* of thirty-two years* and one month: date of birth at Turk’s Cove, Newfoundland, August 23, 1880 (from his attestation papers); however the – original – Newfoundland Birth Register cites November 10, 1885.

**Which makes no sense whichever birth-date one chooses...*

Private Frederick Joseph Carbery was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal) (right).



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 25, 2023.