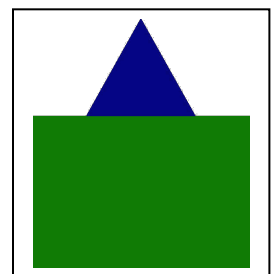




Sergeant Edward Bartlett Chafe (Number 132556) of the 73rd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge.

(Right: The image of the shoulder-patch of the 73rd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada) is from the Canadian Expeditionary Force Study Group Web-site.)



(continued)

His occupation previous to his enlistment recorded as that of a chauffeur-mechanic, his file also documents him as having had five years prior military service with the 3rd Regiment, Victoria Rifles of Canada, a Montreal-based militia formation. Edward Bartlett Chafe presented himself for medical examination in Montreal on September 16, 1915 – less than two weeks after the 73rd Battalion, to which unit he was subsequently attached, had begun its recruiting drive - and perhaps enlisted on that same day*.

**While some of his papers cite September 16 as the date of his enlistment, his Original History Sheet (Medical) and his first pay records both document September 20.*

The same problem occurs with his attestation: on the original paper both dates are showing, but with September 20 being the day on which his oath was certified by the magistrate.

Whichever dates were correct, the above formalities came to an official conclusion on that September 20. This was the day on which the Commanding Officer of the Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Peers Davidson, declared – on paper – that... *having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.* Private Chafe thereupon became a soldier of 'A' Company.

During the period of training and organization undergone in Canada from that September until April of 1916, Private Chafe began to rise rapidly through the ranks: it appears to be on November 1 that he received a first promotion, to the rank of lance corporal; and on December 8 there was further advancement, to the rank of corporal of 'A' Company, Number 1 Platoon*.

**There also appear to be discrepancies in the dates on which he was promoted, but not in the promotions themselves.*

On March 31 of 1916, having departed from Montreal by train two days earlier, the thirty-six officers and one thousand thirty-three *other ranks* of the 73rd Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force took ship for passage to the United Kingdom in the east-coast port of Halifax on board His Majesty's Transport *Adriatic*.



Corporal Chafe's Battalion was not to travel alone: having boarded the vessel were also the 64th Battalion of Canadian Infantry, the 8th Canadian Field Hospital – which was to assure medical services during the voyage – and also the *Coburg Heavy Draft Battery*, for a total passenger list of just under two thousand five hundred. In fact, *Adriatic* was part of a three-ship convoy – along with *Baltic* and *Empress of Britain* escorted by the Royal Navy cruiser *Carnarvon* – for a total of eight-thousand, five-hundred ninety-seven military personnel passengers taking passage.

(Right above: *The RMS (Royal Mail Ship) Adriatic leaving Liverpool, likely at the time of her maiden voyage in 1908 – from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site*)

(continued)



Adriatic sailed on April 1st and completed the trans-Atlantic passage on the 9th in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool. From there Corporal Chafe's Battalion was taken south by train to the newly-established Canadian military camp at East Sandling, a part of the complex at Shorncliffe, in the county of Kent. There it arrived on April 10, to remain in situ for the following month as a component of the 11th Canadian Reserve Brigade.

(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*)

It was also there that Corporal Chafe was to receive a third and final promotion, to the rank of sergeant*, some two weeks after his arrival in the United Kingdom, on April 26. By this time his unit was about to be transferred to another Canadian establishment.

**It was the rank of provost sergeant, in the military police of his unit.*

(Excerpts from 73rd Battalion War Diary): *On the 6th of May a move was made to Bramshott Camp where the Unit formed part of the 12th Brigade of the Fourth Canadian Division (Field)... Hard training was the order of the day. The practical value of the instruction in the trenches... appealed(?) greatly to all ranks.*

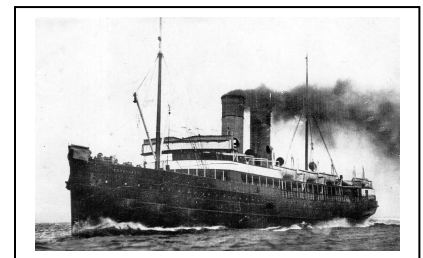
This complex was in the southern English county of Hampshire, in the vicinity of the villages of Bramshott and Liphook, the former lending its name to the camp. There Sergeant Chafe and his 73rd Battalion became an element of the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade of the fledgling 4th Canadian Division and began training for its future role on the Continent.

On July 7 of that same 1916 and while at Bramshott, Sergeant Chafe made out his will; in it he left his all to his wife, Blanche, whom he had espoused on September 25 of 1912. Blanche was of the Roman Catholic persuasion, and Edward Chafe – formerly of the Church of England faith – had been baptized into that denomination on the day of their wedding in the parish of Ste-Agnès in Montréal.



(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*)

The writing of a will was often a precursor to a move overseas or to seeing *active service* for a first time. In the case of Sergeant Chafe it was both, as he sailed on HM Transport *Copenhagen* from Southampton, just over a month later, on August 12, before disembarking at Le Havre, the French port-city on the estuary of the River Seine, on August 13*.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The image of the vessel Copenhagen is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

****It was at or about this time that the entire newly-formed 4th Canadian Division was disembarking in France.***

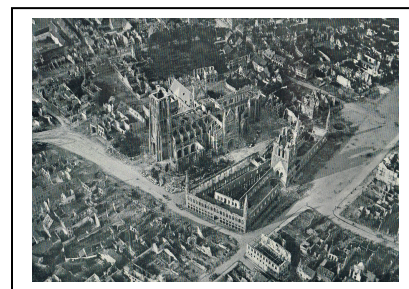
(Right below: The French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

Early in the war, the Canadians had established at Le Havre – and were to later do so at nearby Étapes - the first of what, by the end of the conflict, was to have become a number of base depots. They were at least partially built for the purpose of receiving re-enforcements shipped from the United Kingdom and then despatching them to their designated units or postings in the forward areas.



Thus the 73rd Battalion spent two days at the Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Le Havre before travelling northward on two trains. As with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions which had preceded it, the 4th Canadian Division was to serve at first, albeit only briefly, in the Kingdom of Belgium.

Having passed through the larger French centres of Arras and Amiens, Boulogne and Saint-Omer, the unit eventually detrained on Belgian soil in the town of Poperinghe. The 73rd Battalion had arrived in the rear area of the *Ypres Salient*, one of the most lethal theatres of the *Great War* and where Canadian forces had on several occasions been stationed since their arrival on the Continent.



In the case of the 73rd Battalion, any service in the trenches of *the Salient* or of other sectors in Belgium was to be limited. Possibly its worst experience – at least the only one entered into the War Diary – occurred on or about August 20 when... *On the Ypres Road they came under shell fire from the Germans when the following casualties occurred: 3 Officers Killed, 7 Other Ranks Killed, 16 Other Ranks Wounded*

(Above right: An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows 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)

Sergeant Chafe and 'A' Company apparently remained in the rear area until the end of the month when the entire Battalion was sent to the 58th Brigade of the British 19th Division for instruction in trench fighting, 'A' Company finding itself attached to the 6th Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment, there to absorb the lessons of trench warfare*.



(continued)

****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.

(Previous page: 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-made short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration)

Relieved on September 10, then once more sent forward to the same front-line positions on the 14th, the 73rd Battalion was subsequently – and finally - withdrawn on the 23rd, nine days later again. Sergeant Chafe's short experience of life in the *Ypres Salient* thus drew to a close. The Battalion casualties for the month had been three killed and twenty-three wounded – light for *the Salient*.

The troops which arrived to take the place of the Canadians of the 73rd Battalion on that September 23 were Irish; they had only recently been withdrawn from the area of *the Somme* where they had, for the previous two months, been fighting in the first battle to be called by that name.

After several convoluted days of changing billets, the 73rd Battalion was then to spend a week in the vicinity of Hellebroucq in training for upcoming operations.

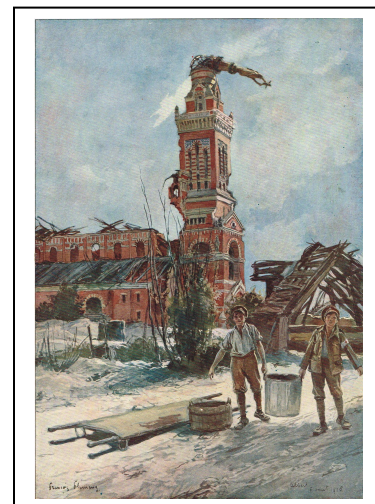
Meanwhile, during the period from August 27 until September 2, the date on which he was recorded as having returned *to duty* with his unit, Sergeant Chafe had been attending a grenade instruction course. He also, in his turn, was now ready to fight at *the Somme*.

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

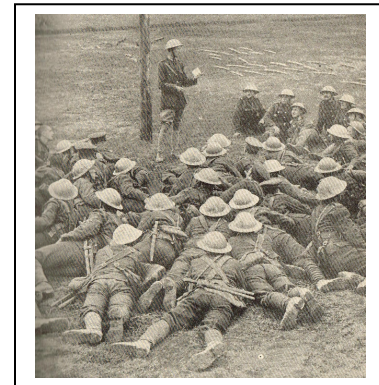
On October 3 the Battalion marched to nearby Arques where it entrained. On the following day it arrived in the rear area of *the Somme*, at Candas, from where it proceeded on foot in pouring rain to Beauval where billets had been prepared to receive it.

On the succeeding days the unit marched again: to Bonneville, to Toutencourt, to Warloy-Baillon where it underwent a period of training; then on the 13th through the provincial town of Albert to the military camp at Tara Hill where it... *Bivouaced* (sic) *in a muddy field (War Diary)*... and provided various working parties for the next dozen or so days.

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



By that October of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for three months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which was to cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.



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

(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 in mid-September of 1916. – from The War Illustrated*)

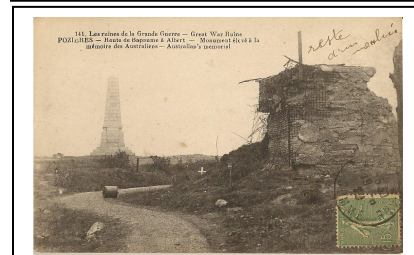
As the battle had progressed, other troops from the Empire (*Commonwealth*), were brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their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

The 73rd Battalion had arrived in the area of *the Somme* at a later stage of the offensive than had many other Canadian units; indeed, by the middle of October, many of the first on the scene were already in the process of being withdrawn, in several cases necessitated by the high incidence of casualties.



(Right above: *Evacuating Canadian casualties to the rear in hand-carts after the battle – somewhere on the Somme – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)

On October 26, Sergeant Chafe's Battalion, by now ready to fill the void left by the departing battalions, moved forward to an area between the once-villages – by then mounds of debris - of Pozières and Contalmaison.



(Right above and right: *A post-War image of what was left of Pozières: the monument receding into the mist still stands - as is shown in the photograph immediately below – in commemoration of the sacrifice of the Australian troops fighting at the Somme in 1916. – above from a vintage post-card; below – colour - from 2016*)



There the unit remained near Pozières in Brigade Reserve until October 30 when it moved forward once more, 'A' Company being *in support* at a junction of two trench systems.

This was to prove to be a short tour which terminated on the night of November 2-3; there had been no infantry action to report, although the enemy artillery was apparently active at times: casualties were eight *killed*, forty-three *wounded* and twenty-six others evacuated to hospital for divers reasons.

During the following week while behind the lines... *Special training carried on in conjunction with the rest of the Brigade, in practising for a general attack with the whole Brigade involved, 72nd and 73rd to lead in this attack...*

On November 11 the... *Regiment proceeded into the trenches...*

In fact, according to the Battalion War Diary, the attack by the Canadians was not to be delivered as planned. Instead, the various units were ordered to dig new trenches and to consolidate older positions in expectation of an enemy counter-attack, a fear re-enforced by information elicited from German prisoners.

It would appear that neither side moved, and that the Canadians spent two days preparing for something that never came about. Maybe the extremely heavy artillery-fire delivered by both sides influenced the decision not to attack.

On the night of November 13-14, the 73rd Battalion was withdrawn, its place taken in the line by the 47th Battalion. The numbers of casualties incurred during this two-day period had been, all told, fourteen *killed* and thirty-eight *wounded*.



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

The son of Samuel Chafe, school-master, and Annie Chafe (née *Bartlett*) of Brigus, Newfoundland, he was also husband to Blanche (née *Gosselin*) of 109, Westmount Boulevard, Montréal*.

**Her later addresses include 297, Rivard Street; 597, Mentana Street; 258, St. Antoine Street; 13, Boyer Street; and 353, Drolet Street.*

Sergeant Chafe was reported as having been *killed in action* on November 11 of 1916: *While in a trench near Courcellette, he was instantly killed by a piece of shrapnel through the heart. (Casualty Report)*

Edward Bartlett Chafe had enlisted at the apparent age of thirty-three years and four months: *declared* date of birth at Brigus, Newfoundland, May 10, 1882; a copy of Brigus Church of England Parish Records cites May 10, 1888, six years later*.



(continued)

(Preceding page: *The War Memorial in the Newfoundland community of Brigus honours the sacrifice of Private Edward Bartlett Chafe. – photograph from 2009*)

****The same records also document his parents marrying on December 27, 1886.***

The Casualty Report in its third-last paragraph also cites: *Albert Communal Cem Extn, Mem't (sic) to above & others.* Five graves in this cemetery were subsequently destroyed by shell-fire and each of those buried there, is now represented by a special memorial: however, the name of Sergeant Chafe appears on none of these five stones.



(Right: *The Communal Cemetery Extension in the town of Albert* – photograph from 1915)

Sergeant Edward Bartlett Chafe was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

The photograph of Private(?) Chafe is from the Ancestry.com web-site.



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 27, 2023.

