



Private Stanley Frederick (also simply *Fred*) Cornick (Number 208443) of the Royal Canadian Regiment is buried in La Chaudière Military Cemetery: Grave reference VII.D.5.

(Right: *The image of the cap badge of the Royal Canadian Regiment is from Wikipedia.*)

(continued)



His occupations prior to military service recorded variously as those of clerk, marine engineer, and also machinist at a munitions works, Stanley Frederick Cornick would appear to be the young man who arrived in Halifax on February 3 of 1916, having travelled on board the SS *Stephano* from St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland. The vessel's passenger list also records him as intending to journey onwards to the Nova Scotian community of New Glasgow where he was later to enlist*.

**One source – a 1917 letter (no other date) to the Daily News – has Stanley Cornick and a friend volunteering for military service in St. John's but both being rejected. He had therefore emigrated to New Glasgow to work at a munitions plant from where he made a second attempt – successful – to enlist.*

This he is recorded as doing on March 19, less than seven weeks following his arrival in Nova Scotia. Assigned the number 902057, Private Cornick was *taken on strength* on the same day as his enlistment by the 193rd Battalion (*Cumberland Highlanders*). On the day afterwards he then underwent his medical examination and attestation. The formalities of his enlistment and attestation were brought to a conclusion almost three months later by the Officer Commanding the Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel John Stanfield, who on June 12 declared – on paper – that...*having been approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

Meanwhile, decisions had been taken concerning the 193rd and three other battalions, the 85th, 185th and the 219th: they were to be formed into the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade. Private Cornick may have trained for a while either in New Glasgow or perhaps Truro, where the 193rd Battalion was based, but during the last week in May all four of these units were ordered to Aldershot Camp to train together. There the Brigade then spent all summer before receiving its colours on September 28, two weeks before its departure for *overseas service*.

From this point on, his story becomes a little more complex.

On September 1 of that 1916, Private Cornick was still based at Aldershot, but on that date he was transferred from the 193rd Battalion to the 246th Battalion. Then, on the 19th of that month, he was recorded by that unit, the 246th, as being *Absent Without Leave* and furthermore, apparently on that same day, was *struck off strength* and declared to be a deserter. Private Cornick was thereupon discharged – once more on paper.

However, in fact, far from being a deserter, by September 19 Private Cornick was on his way across the Atlantic Ocean to the United Kingdom. He had once more been transferred, on that same September 1, and on this further occasion to the 97th Battalion (*American Legion*) also at Camp Aldershot, having undergone a further medical examination and, also again, attestation on September 17.



He had also once more undergone those final formalities, on this occasion with the 97th Battalion's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Willis L. Jolly.

He had then embarked on the morrow, September 18, in the harbour at Halifax onto His Majesty's Transport *Olympic*, the vessel sailing on the following day.

(Right above: *HMT Olympic on the right lies at anchor along with HMHS Aquitania, centre, at Mudros Bay in the autumn of 1915, during the Gallipoli Campaign. – from a photograph from the Imperial War Museum, London*)

Private Cornick had had plenty of company for the voyage: not only was the 97th Battalion on board but so were the 100th, the 107th, the 108th and the 144th Battalions, as well as the 13th Brigade (the administrative personnel, four Batteries and an Ammunition Column) of the Canadian Field Artillery. The ship was thus likely carrying some six-thousand military passengers overseas.

Olympic docked in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool on September 25th and the 97th Battalion was transported southwards by train. Private Cornick's destination was the Otterpool Camp at the Canadian establishment at Shorncliffe, Kent – likely for a few days of quarantine. From there, some five weeks later, on the final day of October, he was *taken on strength* at the combined Regimental Depot of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the Royal Canadian Regiment, and sent to South Camp at Seaford in East Sussex.

(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*)



By this time, as of his arrival in the United Kingdom, he had been assigned a new number, 208443*, a single source suggesting that, by this time, his original papers had been mislaid.

He had also been required to pass yet another medical examination while he was stationed at Otterpool as, apparently, the preceding – and second – set of papers, once completed, had then been left unsigned by the examiner.

**Both of Private Cornick's numbers are recognized by Library and Archives Canada.*

In the meantime, back in Canada, the authorities had apparently realized their error and had cancelled the charge of desertion against Private Cornick. The decision was retro-active to September 18 of 1916. Whether Private Cornick was ever made aware of what had transpired is not documented.

Towards the end of November 1916, on the 26th of the month, and while still at Seaford, Private Seaford attested once more. On the next day he was imposed upon to write a will, a document on which he bequeathed his everything to his mother, in preparation for his transfer to *active service*.

Private Cornick was soon to be posted to the Continent.



(Preceding page: *The community cemetery at Seaford in which are buried a number of Canadian soldiers, including two Newfoundlanders: Frederick Jacob Snelgrove and Ebenezer Tucker* – photograph from 2016)



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

On November 30, 1916, Private Cornick crossed the English Channel and proceeded to the Canadian General Base Depot in the vicinity of the French port-city of Le Havre. There he was temporarily *taken on strength* before being despatched on December 12 to the parent unit of the Royal Canadian Regiment where he reported *to duty* six days later, on December 18, 1916, and was attached to ‘A’ Company.

* * * * *

The Royal Canadian Regiment, although being the senior Regiment in the Canadian Army at the outbreak of *the Great War*, had not been among the first units to be despatched overseas – at least, not in the direction of Europe. In fact, it had been sent to languish for a year on the British island possession of Bermuda.

After it had been returned home in the summer of 1915 and subsequently forwarded overseas to the United Kingdom, it had been attached to the 7th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Canadian Division. The RCR* had then been transferred to the Continent on November 1 of 1915, immediately sent to the Franco-Belgian frontier area, and from there, at the end of the month of March, 1916, to the *Ypres Salient*.

**The Royal Canadian Regiment supplied a single ‘fighting’ battalion, perhaps a bit confusingly also referred to as the Royal Canadian Regiment, which served on the Western Front. This was the unit – battalion – in which Private Cornick was to serve in France.*

(Right below: *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*)

During the late autumn and winter of 1915-1916, after the unit’s arrival in Belgium, *the Salient* was relatively quiet and for those five months the RCR Battalion was to follow the routines and rigours of life in the trenches*. In April, the Canadian 2nd Division was to be involved in the altercation known thereafter as the *Action at the St-Éloi Craters*, but this confrontation was not to affect the units of the other two Canadian Divisions; the first major incident and baptism of fire for the Royal Canadian Regiment was to come two months later.



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****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, 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 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)

From June 2 to 14 was fought the battle for Mount Sorrel and for the areas of Sanctuary Wood, Railway Dugouts, Maple Copse, Hooge and Hill 60 between the German Army and the Canadian Corps. The Canadians had been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans delivered an offensive, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity which, fortunately, they never exploited.



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

(Right: 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)



The Commander of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, reacted by organizing a counter-attack on the following day, an assault intended to, at a minimum, recapture the lost ground. Badly organized, the operation was a dismal failure, many of the intended attacks never went in – those that did went in piecemeal and the assaulting troops were cut to pieces - the enemy remained where he was and the Canadians were left to count an extremely heavy casualty list.



(Right: Maple Copse Cemetery, adjacent to Hill 60, in which lie many Canadians killed during the days of the confrontation at Mount Sorrel – photograph from 2014)

The Royal Canadian Regiment was to serve in the forward area until June 7 at which time it was withdrawn into rest billets – having incurred a total of one-hundred fifty-nine casualties during this period - and was not subsequently involved in the final actions at *Mount Sorrel*. These engagements culminated with a second – and more successful - counter-attack by the Canadians on June 13, an offensive which left both sides in approximately the same positions that they had been occupying on June 2 when the affair had started.

Thus it was back to that trench warfare routine for some two months at which time the RCR Battalion – as was to be the case of most of the other Canadian battalions – was once more withdrawn, on this occasion for training in ‘*open warfare*’ in areas prepared for the purpose in north-west France. The Canadians were about to travel further south into France to play a role in the British summer offensive of 1916.

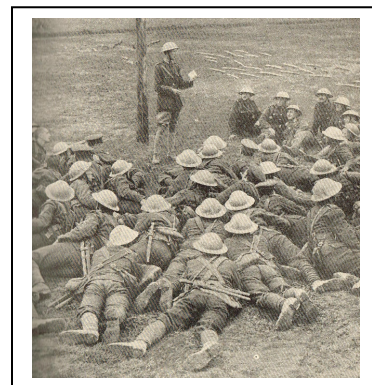
By September of 1916, the *First Battle of the Somme* had been ongoing for two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short space of only four hours - of which some nineteen thousand dead.

(Right: *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 *1st Somme*, 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 had lost so heavily on that day at Beaumont-Hamel.

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 had entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major collective 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, September 1916. – from *The War Illustrated**)

The Royal Canadian Regiment arrived in the area of the provincial town of Albert in the late evening of September 13 and just two days later, on September 15, was ordered to move forward in order to attack a German strong-point, the Zollern Graben, on the following day.

By four o'clock in the morning of September when it retired, the RCR had incurred some two-hundred eighty casualties and the Zollern Graben was still in German hands.

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



Another major action was to follow: an attack on the *Regina Trench* system of October 8-9 was not a success, but an expensive failure; the German positions would not be definitively taken until November 11.

By that time the RCR was to be in the Lens sector, some fifty kilometres to the north. In fact, the unit was to be moving in that direction within days of having fought at *Regina Trench*.

(Right below: *Regina Trench Cemetery and some of the surrounding area which was finally wrested from the Germans by Canadian troops in November of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)

During the five weeks of its sojourn at *the Somme* the Battalion had lost, *killed* and *wounded*, about four-hundred fifty all ranks; more than two hundred more had been reported as *missing in action*, the War Diarist optimistically predicting that most of these would be found in field ambulances and casualty clearing stations. The accuracy of that prediction does not appear to be documented.



(Right below: *Wounded at the Somme being transported in hand-carts from the forward area for further medical attention – from Le Miroir*)



The RCR Battalion began to withdraw from *the Somme* on October 10. The Battalion War Diarist makes no mention of any motor transport or train being employed so it may be assumed that the unit, as did many others, retired on foot. The route took it westward at first, then to turn northward so as to pass to the west of the by-now ruined city of Arras and then beyond.



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

It was on the 24th of that October of 1916 that the Battalion arrived in the Neuville St-Vaast Sector to the north-west of Arras. The War Diarist on that date reported the RCR Battalion strength as being three-hundred eighty-six all ranks, less than forty per cent of regulation battalion numbers.

The Somme had taken its toll.

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The winter of 1916-1917 was to be one of the everyday grind of life in and out of the trenches. There little if any concerted infantry activity apart from the constant patrolling and the occasional raids by both sides. This latter activity was encouraged by the High Command who felt it to be a morale booster which also kept the troops in the right offensive frame of mind – the troops who were ordered to carry them out in general loathed these operations.



(Right above: *A detachment of Canadian troops going forward during the winter of 1916-1917 – from Illustration*)

During this time, the RCR Battalion, in its new quarters in the Neuville St-Vaast Sector, had once more begun the daily pattern of life in and out of the trenches, a routine which was to last until the middle of February of the following year, 1917. At the time of Private Cornick's arrival *to duty* – an event which went unrecorded in the War Diary – the RCR Battalion was in the same area and was serving in reserve.



(Right above: *Canadian soldiers while off-duty perusing the program of an upcoming concert 'somewhere on the Continent' – from Le Miroir*)

Then the unit was ordered into Divisional Reserve at Bruay where it began five weeks of training for the upcoming offensive; not that it was all work: the War Diary reports sports events and concerts among the litany of parades, lectures, marches, drills, work-parties and visits from military and political persons.



(Right above: *A Canadian carrying-party loading up before moving up to the forward area – from Le Miroir*)

On March 21 the RCR Battalion moved up into the forward area once again, although perhaps not immediately into the front line; after five weeks in reserve perhaps the change was a bit of a shock to the Battalion's collective system: the War Diarist notes that the new quarters... *LA MOTTE Camp, is composed of Bivouacs, with nine tents for officers. We are its first occupants. It can be greatly improved.*

But he also notes that... *"C" Company relieved the right Company of the 58th Battn. taking over the exact frontage from which we are expected to jump off.* Such an observation illustrates the newly-introduced policy of informing junior officers and senior NCOs of the plans of intended actions, knowledge that these personnel were to pass down to the men under their command.

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And it must have been clear to the men of the RCR that there *were* intended actions; just behind the front in the Neuville St-Vaast sector was a hive of ongoing activity for which the unit supplied working-parties and carrying-parties each day: dumping areas were being cleared, bivouacs were being sand-bagged, stone laid for walks, new trenches dug and old ones deepened, troops familiarized with the newly-excavated tunnels and other positions, water-pipes and communication lines buried, artillery and machine-guns sited...

On April 1 the RCR Battalion retired to Villers-au-Bois for a week, there to organize for the first day of the offensive. On April 7, Private Cornick's "A" Company moved into one of those tunnels which had been hewn out of the chalk; it was hoped that these galleries would reduce the number of casualties with the men sheltering there until the last possible hours or even moments, and that it would also abet the element of surprise.

The men of the RCR Battalion were to remain underground for well over twenty-four hours.

On April 9 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 few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of Vimy Ridge on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive was a disaster.

(Above right: *the Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, stands on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity – and in fact in command of British troops - stormed the slope of Vimy Ridge, by the next evening having rid it almost entirely of its German occupants.

(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, equipped with – or burdened 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*)



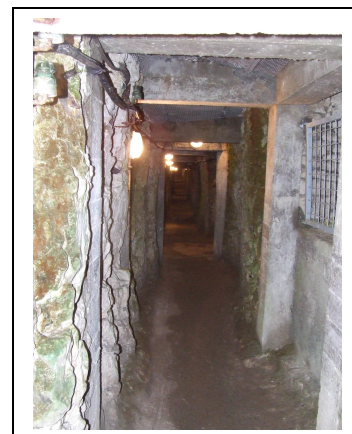
(Excerpts from Battalion War Diary of April 9, 1917) 3.12 a.m. "A" Company under Captain Munn reports Co. in Assembly trenches.

5.30 a.m. Raining. Barrage opens.

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'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies were communicating with Headquarters at a relatively early hour: apparently not 'A' Company: 1.40 p.m. Message from "A" Co. delivered by wounded runner stated that they had captured four machine guns, were in touch with Units on both flanks... and that they had sent a patrol over the Ridge.

2.15 p.m. "A" Co. (left Co.) is in its objective. Strength 1 Officer and approximately 50 other ranks with no N.C.O.'s. It is in touch with "C" Co (right) who's (sic) approximate strength is 1 Officer and sixty other ranks... "A" Co. has sent a patrol over the ridge from which as yet no report has been sent. There is a small gap between "A" Co. and the P.P.C.C.L.I. owing to the shortage of men. We command the whole situation at present, but unless reinforcements and supplies of every sort, more especially S.A.A. (small arms ammunition) available, machine Guns, shovels etc., are sent up at first opportunity, it will be difficult to withstand another counter attack.



One of the many casualty reports of the day, that of Private Cornick, reads simply as follows: *Killed during the advance on Vimy Ridge.*

(Right above: *Grange Tunnel - one of the few remaining galleries still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years after the attack. It was here that Private Cornick was to spend the last two evenings of his life. – photograph from 2008(?)*)

The son of Sylvester William Cornick, accountant then latterly Manager, *Newfoundland Consolidated Foundry Co. Ltd.*, of St. John's, and of Martha Ward Cornick (née *White*) of 87, Springdale Street, St. John's, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Stanley-Morris (elsewhere –*Norris*, deceased 1895), Amy-Clara, Elsie-Emma and to Lilla-May.



Private Cornick was reported as having been *killed in action* at Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917.

(Right above: *The sacrifice of Private Cornick is commemorated on a family memorial which stands in the Old Anglican Cemetery on Forest Road in the city of St. John's Newfoundland. – photograph from 2015*)

Stanley Frederick Cornick had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty years and two months: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, May 9, 1896.

Private Stanley Frederick Cornick 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. Last updated – January 27, 2023.