

Corporal George Tremaine Cowan, MM, (Number 24582) of the 13th Canadian Infantry Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*) of the 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 above: *The image of the shoulder-patch of the 13th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada) is from the Canadian Expeditionary Force Study Group web-site.*)

His occupations prior to military service recorded as those of salesman (on his enlistment papers) – salesman of exactly *what* is not specified - and of accountant (on the *Morwenna's* passenger list), George Tremaine (recorded as *Fremaine* by *Ancestry.ca*) Cowan left his home in St. John's, Newfoundland, in May of 1913 on board the SS *Morwenna* – the ship to be later torpedoed and lost in May of 1915 – for passage to Montreal where the ship docked on the 12th of that same month.

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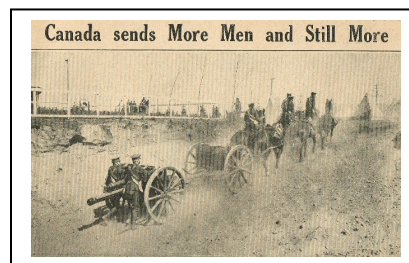
While some of his documents show that he both enlisted and attested on September 23 of 1914 in Valcartier, Québec, having already undergone a medical examination on August 29, almost a month previously, pay records show that the first remuneration for services rendered to the Canadian Army was paid to him on September 22, suggesting that, in fact, this was the date of enlistment.

Private Cowan was thereupon attached to the 2nd Company of the 5th Battalion of the Royal Highlanders of Canada, a militia formation which, when the Canadian Division* was formed, was re-designated as the 13th Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*) of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade.



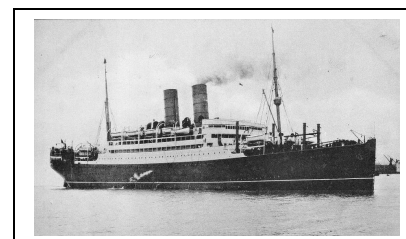
(Right: *The personnel of the Battalion wore a Black Watch kilt, one version of the tartan being shown here. – from the canadiansoldiers.com web-site*)

(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 war) from *The War Illustrated**)



**Known simply as the Canadian Division until the formation of the 2nd Canadian Division. It logically then became designated as the 1st Canadian Division.*

Only two days after his enlistment, on September 25, Private Cowan and the other personnel of the 13th Battalion were transported from Valcartier to the port area of Québec City where the unit embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Alaunia*, a requisitioned vessel of the *Cunard Line*.



(Right: *The photograph of Alaunia is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

Private Cowan and the 13th Battalion were not the only military personnel to take passage to the United Kingdom on *Alaunia* at this time. Also on board were a part of the 14th Battalion of Canadian Infantry, the Headquarters personnel of the Canadian 3rd Infantry Brigade, and a part of the Divisional (later 1st Divisional) Train.

Alaunia is documented as having sailed from Quebec on the same September 25, but only to drop anchor just *upstream*, at Wolfe's Cove, there to wait for five days to pass before the ship finally slipped down-river. The vessel then again stopped, on this second occasion at the Gaspé on October 2; there the convoy of thirty-one troop-carriers formed for the trans-Atlantic crossing and finally sailed from Canadian waters on the following afternoon, Saturday October 3*.

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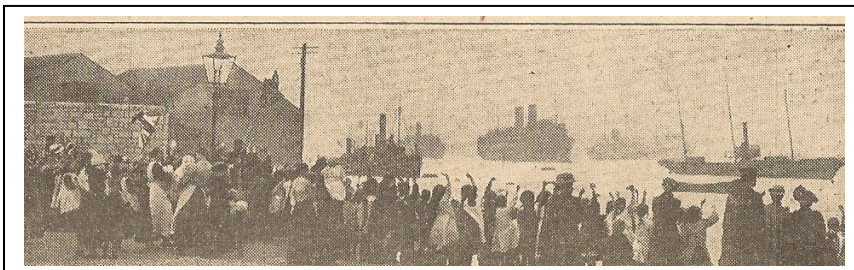
****On October 5, as the formation passed along the south coast of Newfoundland, the small Bowring Brothers' steamer Florizel, sailed to meet and join it, carrying the First Five-Hundred of the Newfoundland Regiment.***

The convoy reached its destination, the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport, on October 14. However, such was the poor organization that some troops were to remain on board their ships for several days before disembarking*.

****Originally destined to dock in Southampton, the convoy was diverted to Plymouth-Devonport because of a submarine scare. The harbour at the time was undergoing a major transformation to its facilities; thus the docking problems.***

The 13th Battalion, however, was not such a one, as it set foot on land on October 15. Thereupon it boarded trains late that evening and was transported to Patney Station, Salisbury Plain, arriving there at three in the morning.

Unfortunately for the Canadian new-comers, their camp on West Down South was to be found some sixteen kilometres distant from the railway station – and it was also to be found on foot. To its credit, the Battalion made the march in less than three-and-a-half hours.



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

Army regulations were such that troops were to undergo some fourteen weeks of training from the time of enlistment; at that point they were to be considered as being fit for *active service*. Thus the newly-arrived Canadians 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**.



****In fact, a large percentage of those joining the Colours at this early stage of the Great War had recently emigrated from the British Isles.***

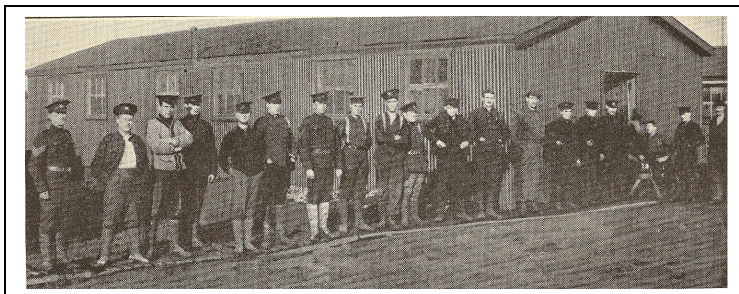
(Right: George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India – from Wikipedia)

On February 4 the Canadian Division marched to a review area where it was inspected by His Majesty, King George V and the War Minister, Lord Kitchener*. The next few days were spent in final preparation for departure and at seven-thirty in the evening of February 10, the 13th Battalion boarded a train to take it to the English west-coast port of Avonmouth.

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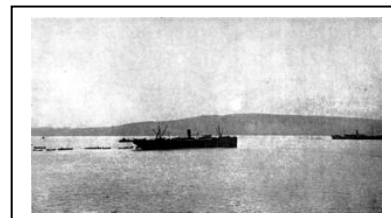
****For whom the Canadian city of Kitchener was named in 1916 – it had been called Berlin until then.***

(Right above: Canadian troops during the autumn of 1914 at Bulford Camp, Wiltshire – from *The War Illustrated*)



At Avonmouth, Port of Bristol, the 13th Battalion boarded HM Transport *Novian*, the ship then sailing as part of the Canadian Division Armada at dawn on the morning of February 12. It was apparently a very rough and unpleasant voyage, the ship's captain taking the decision to head out to sea and into the wind to avoid serious injury to the horses: but it also prolonged the agony for the wretchedly-ill troops.

Three days later, on February 15, the vessel dropped anchor in the French port of St-Nazaire on the coast of Brittany, its passengers looking forward to standing once again on *terra firma*. Many were still feeling the ill-effects of the voyage and were apparently less than happy to then be kept on board ship for that night before being transferred to trains early on the morning of the 16th.

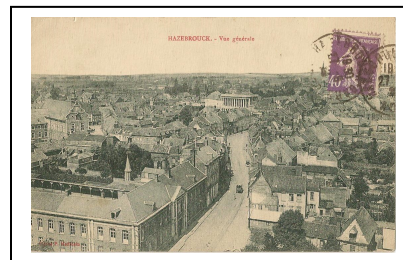


They were then even less overjoyed to learn that it was they who first had to unload the ship, the dockers having gone on strike.

But the horses were apparently no worse for wear.

(Right above: *The accompanying caption records this photograph of Novian as having been taken during the Gallipoli Campaign in 1915.* – from the *Wikipedia* web-site)

From the railway station in the port of St-Nazaire the 13th Battalion was to move north to the town of Hazebrouck. It then took more than two days and two nights to travel six-hundred eighty kilometres – travelling in those well-documented and uncomfortable wagons of the period labelled '40 HOMMES-8 CHEVAUX' – to do so. At Hazebrouck the unit... *got off stiff and sore after our long and cramped journey, fell in and marched eight miles, through pouring rain, to FLETRE* (from 13th Battalion War Diary).



The War Diarist in his entry also noted that each man was carrying his thirty-six kilos (eighty pounds) of kit, all the way to the Battalion's billets.

(Right above: *The northern French town of Hazebrouck, likely at a period between the two World Wars* – from a vintage post card)

(continued)

Four days later, on February 23, the 13th Battalion was once more on the march: *Paraded at 8 a.m. and marched to ARMENTIERES, 17 miles, very hard on the feet, roads paved with cobble-stones nearly all the way. Arrived at ARMENTIERES at 2.30 p.m. and were billeted in the Workhouse.* (Excerpt from the 13th Battalion War Diary)

(Right: *Troops – in this case likely British – on the move either in or towards Belgium in the early days of the Great War. Canadian units – apart from distinguishing badges and flashes – were to wear the same uniforms and, except for their rifles and machine-guns (which were later to be replaced) – had much the same equipment.* – from a vintage post-card)



On the next day again the troops began to undergo their first experiences of the trenches under the supervision of the British troops already there*.

**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 the forward area, the latter furthest away.*



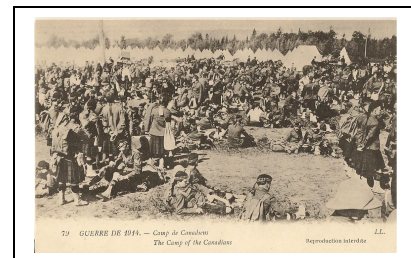
Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

(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)*

On March 2 the 13th Battalion was ordered to march to the area of Sailly (likely *Sailly-sur-la-Lys*). There it was to experience more of the everyday drudgery of the front lines, the support area and the reserve sectors during the following twenty-four days. Judging from the sparse 13th Battalion War Diary entries for that time, there was very little to report.

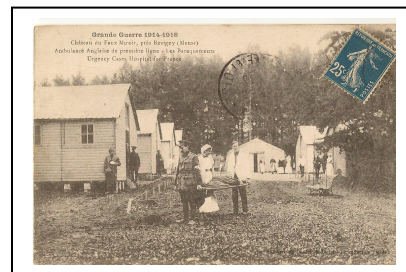
(Right below: *The caption reads merely ‘Camp of Canadians’ but it is from the early days of the Great War, thus likely in either northern France or in Belgium. The troops are from a Canadian Scottish unit.* – from a vintage post-card)

The first seven weeks of *active service* passed much as described above for the 13th Battalion. In a more personal vein, Private Cowan experienced medical problems: On April 2 he was admitted into the 3rd Canadian Field Ambulance at Estaires and diagnosed as with gastritis; presumably it was a mild case as he was discharged back to *duty* only two days after admission.



(Preceding page: A British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some, and likely at a later period of the War – from a vintage post-card)

Only days later, on April 13, he was once more in a Canadian Field Ambulance, the *First*, which had been established at Poperinghe. Five days after his admission, once again to be treated for gastritis, Private Cowan became inflicted with tonsillitis and thus, on this second occasion, was not to be released until May 15. By that time the crisis of the *Second Battle of Ypres* had passed (see below).



Meanwhile, on April 7 his 13th Battalion had begun the transfer which was to see it posted to the *Ypres Salient*. On the 15th of the month the unit crossed the Franco-Belgian frontier and, after travelling by bus on the morrow, found itself near the villages of St-Jean and St-Julien to the north-east of the already shattered medieval city of Ypres.



(Right: Troops being transported towards the area of the front by bus – from Illustration)

During the first five days of the 13th Battalion's posting to *the Salient* all was quiet, the Battalion War Diarist even remarking that the... *Weather all that could be desired*. Then the dam broke - although it was gas rather than water which, for a few days, threatened to sweep all before it. The date was April 22, 1915.

(Right below: An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2nd 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* saw the first use of chlorine gas by the Germans during the *Great War*. Later to become an everyday hazard of the *Great War* - and after the introduction of protective measures such as advanced masks (*helmets* as they were first called) - 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 proved overwhelming.

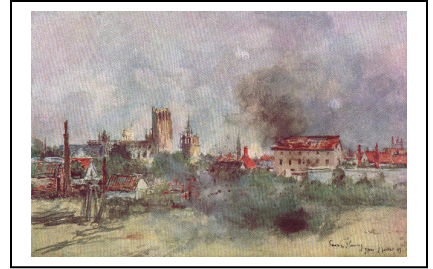


(Right: The very first protection against gas was to urinate on a handkerchief which was then held over the nose and mouth. However, all the armies were soon producing gas-masks, some of the first of which are seen here being tested by Scottish troops. – from either Illustration or Le Miroir)



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The cloud was 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 wavered then broke, leaving the left flank of the Canadians uncovered, particularly that of the 13th Battalion which was obliged to call forward Number 3 Company, at the time in reserve. Then a retreat, not always very cohesive, by the entire unit became 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 held until the morning of the 24th when a further retirement became necessary. At times there had been breaches in the defensive lines but, fortunately, either the Germans were unaware of how close they were to a breakthrough, or else they did not have the means to exploit the situation.

And then the Canadians closed the gaps.

The 13th Battalion was relieved on April 25 and was withdrawn to some former French reserve trenches. Called forward again on the 28th, it remained in the area of the front until May 1 when it was withdrawn into divisional reserve in the area of Vlamertinghe, to the west of Ypres. On May 3 the unit moved into northern France to re-enforce and to re-organize.



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

The information to be gleaned from the Battalion War Diary during this period is sparse. The number of casualties incurred is not noted – neither does it seem to appear in the 5th Brigade Diary – but it was on April 28 that a re-enforcement draft of two-hundred seventy-six other ranks reported *to duty* to the unit.

By the time that Private Cowan reported back to the 13th Battalion on or about May 15, the unit had moved down the line to the south, over the Franco-Belgian frontier, and to the areas of Festubert and Givenchy. The French were about to undertake a major offensive just further south again and had asked for British support.

There at Festubert a series of attacks and counter-attacks took place in which the British High Command managed to gain three kilometres of ground but also to destroy, by using the unimaginative tactic of the frontal assault, what was left of the British pre-War professional Army. The Canadian Division was also to contribute to the campaign but, not fielding the same numbers of troops as the British, was not to contribute to the same extent. The Canadians nonetheless suffered heavily again.

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The role of the 13th Battalion was to relieve the 16th Battalion after its attack planned for May 20 on a German-held position, before then consolidating and defending that same position. Despite heavy losses the 16th captured its objective, positions which then the 13th occupied. On the following day, May 21, Private Cowan and his comrades-in-arms fought off a German counter-attack before then being relieved on the following day again.

The Canadian Division and Indian troops, the 7th (Meerut) Division* also having been ordered to serve at Festubert, had fared hardly better than the British, each contingent – a Division - incurring over two-thousand casualties before the offensive drew to a close.



The French effort was likewise a failure but on an even larger scale; it cost them just over one hundred-thousand *killed, wounded and missing*.

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

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

On May 22 the 13th Battalion marched away from Festubert to billets in or near to the community of Essars. It was there, during this period away from the turmoil of the forward area, that Private Cowan was to receive a first promotion, to the rank of lance corporal, on May 27.

For Lance Corporal Cowan's unit, the reprieve was to last for two weeks, until June 5, when it was ordered further south to Givenchy-les-la-Bassée*, a small village not far distant from Festubert. Ordered into the forward trenches on two occasions during that month to support British efforts – although incurring fewer casualties – on June 24 the 13th Battalion was retiring from the area. At about the same time, over a number of days, so was the entire Canadian Division.

**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.*

As a part of that withdrawal from Givenchy, the 13th Battalion was to march to billets in Essars, in La Becque and then Steenwerck in the vicinity of Bailleul. From there it moved eastwards and into Belgium, to the *Ploegsteert Sector*, just across the frontier.



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

Having reached the *Ploegsteert* area on July 5, there the 13th Battalion remained – as did the entire Canadian Division. In the next months the Canadians came to be well-acquainted with the Franco-Belgian area between Armentières in the east – any further east would have been in German-occupied territory – Bailleul in the west, and Messines in the north; given the route marches enumerated in the War Diary and the itineraries used, it would have been surprising had it been otherwise.

It was to be another eleven months before the 13th Battalion was involved in a further major altercation. Of course, local confrontations – in raids and during patrols - were fought from time to time, and artillery duels and the ever-increasing menace of snipers ensured a constant flow of casualties.

Lance Corporal Cowan during that time was granted leave twice: the first occasion was to be from October 8 until October 15; the second was from March 29 of 1916 until April 7. And while there appears to be no clues of where he spent that first week, he is recorded as having spent the subsequent period in England.



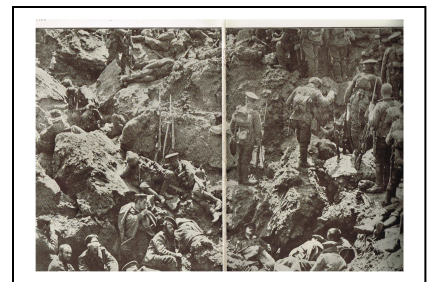
(Right above: *London – in fact the City of Westminster – in the area of Marble Arch, in or about the year 1913, just prior to the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

It was while he was on that nine-day period of leave in the United Kingdom that Lance Corporal Cowan received his second stripe, being appointed to the rank of corporal on March 30.

Meanwhile, about that time, the 2nd Canadian Division - having been on the Continent for some six months by then, and having been stationed in a sector southward down the line from the *Ypres Salient* - was to fight its first major action of the *Great War*. For the newcomers, the first weeks of April were not to be as tranquil as those being experienced during the same period by Corporal Cowan and his comrades-in-arms of the now-designated 1st Canadian Division.

The *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* officially took place from March 27 until April 17 of that spring of 1916. St-Éloi was a small village some five kilometres to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres and it was here that the British had excavated a number of galleries under the German lines, there to place a series of explosives which they detonated on that March 27. It was followed by an infantry assault.

After a brief initial success the attack soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were replacing the exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than their British comrades-in-arms, and by the 17th, when the battle was called off, both sides were back where they had been some three weeks previously – and the Canadians had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.



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

However, as previously noted, this confrontation was a 2nd Canadian Division affair and the personnel of the 13th Battalion during that period would likely have been disturbed by only the noise of the German artillery.

Meanwhile, at about the time of this engagement, the 1st Canadian Division was in the process of being transferred, from the *Ploegsteert Sector* to its new posting in the southern area of the *Ypres Salient*.

To the 1st Canadian Division's immediate right was now the 2nd Canadian Division, while to its immediate left was the most-recently arrived Canadian formation, the 3rd Division*, recently having been made responsible for the south-east sector of the *Ypres Salient*.

**The 3rd Canadian Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 30, 1915, and January 1 of 1916.*

Now from June 2 to 14 of 1916 was to be fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the area of *Sanctuary Wood, Railway Dugouts, the village of Hooge, Maple Copse and Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps. The Canadians of the 3rd Division had apparently been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans delivered their offensive, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity which fortunately they never exploited.



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

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

The British 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 horrific experience, many of the intended attacks never went in – those that did were sent 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.



The events of June 2 had interrupted a busy day for the 13th Battalion: route marches, bayonet exercises, gas-helmet drill and Company training had been followed by Battalion sports in the afternoon.

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At seven-thirty on that evening, after reports of a German break-through in the Canadian 3rd Division sector, orders had been given... *for the Battalion to 'stand to' and be ready to move at a moment notice... Soon after this the Battalion was ordered to proceed to the support of the Canadian 14th Battalion and made a forced march... to Zillebeke Etang...*

(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 13th Battalion was not involved in those disastrous counter-offensives made by Canadian troops on June 3 and were, in fact, engaged in only defensive activities. Corporal Cowan and the 2nd Company were sent to the area of Zillebeke Village behind the lines. Even so, the casualty count for June 2 and 3 numbered forty-four.

On June 4 there was no concerted action on the part of the Canadians; the 13th Battalion spent much of its time consolidating positions and sending out reconnaissance parties, all the time receiving the attention of the German artillery. Casualties for June 4 came to a total of forty-eight.

The War Diarist's entry for the 5th reports no infantry action undertaken by the Battalion. There were reported, nonetheless, thirty... *killed, wounded or missing in action.*

(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 summer of 1916. – from Illustration*)



On June 6 the War Diary once again reports little activity in the area of the 13th Battalion. Nor does he report – but, then, why should he? – the detonation, by the Germans, of mines under the Canadian positions at Hooge village. The Germans then managed to gain some territory in that area before their advance was contained. The 13th suffered half-a-dozen casualties on that day.

Late in the night of the 7th, following an uneventful day – by the standards of the time – and with no casualties due to enemy activity, the Battalion was withdrawn to the south-west of Ypres to arrive in their billets at four o'clock in the morning of the 8th. There the unit remained until June 11 when it began a march which was to bring the Battalion back to the area of Mount Sorrel. There it would serve in the imminent assault.



(Right above: *The school shown here as it was to be by the end of the conflict, had served during the earlier stages of the Great War to billet Commonwealth troops. So had the cellars seen in the foreground. – from a vintage post-card*)

By midnight of that June 12, some twenty-eight hours after beginning its return march, the 13th Battalion was in its allotted positions in the front and support trenches.

(Excerpts from the Battalion War Diary entry for June 12-13) At 1. 30 a.m. immediately our artillery lifted to the old British trenches, our men, the first and second line under Major K.M. Perry, the third and fourth under Major G.E. McCuaig sprang up on the parapet and set off at a steady pace, over very rough ground and through a heavy barrage and succeeded in gaining the first objective...

As soon as the bombardment of the old British lines lifted at 1.50 a.m. the party again advanced at this stage the going was very heavy...

The attack proceeded briskly, bombing the enemy down the trenches, and directly the final objective was reached, Major McCuaig sent up a red flare...

The affair was over by mid-morning, the remainder of the day being spent in consolidation, taking care of the wounded of both sides, of prisoners... and in the burial of the dead. The 13th Battalion retired later that night.

The engagements of the previous eleven days – from June 2 until that June 13 – had thus culminated with this second – and more successful - counter-attack by the Canadians on that morning, a final offensive which left both sides in approximately the same positions that they had been occupying on June 2 when the affair had started.

The documentation in his files records the date of Corporal Cowan's death as being June 27, fourteen days after that final engagement at Mount Sorrel.

Excerpt from the 13th Battalion War Diary entry of June 27, 1916: *Halifax Trench - Weather dull and very wet, raining practically the whole night. At 4 a.m. the enemy opened an intense bombardment, with guns of all calibres, and with heavy trench mortars, the latter especially causing great damage to our front and support lines.*

When the curtain of fire lifted about 5 a.m. three parties of Germans attempted to enter Vancouver Trench. One party estimated at about 20 men, endeavoured to enter trench 53, another of about 30 made an attempt to enter trench 57; and a third party consisting of 13 to 15 Germans attempted to effect an entry near Vigo Street.

The 1st two attempts were repulsed by our Bombers and M-Gunners, a M-G firing from the 14th Battalion lines also assisted. The third party was dispersed by rifle fire from our post at Vancouver trench, near Vigo Street, and by a post of the 49th Battalion.

Some dead were left, but none nearer than 40 yards from our trench, two prisoners were taken however, near Davidson Street, both of whom were wounded.



(Right above: Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 in the area of Mount Sorrel, Hooge, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: it is maintained in its original state, as much as Mother Nature will allow, by the Belgian Government. – photograph from 2014)

The main German body, who were seen consealed (sic), in front of their trenches, made no further attempt to advance.

The bombardment commenced at 4 a.m. and ceased at 5.20 a.m.

Our retaliation was neither quick or intence (sic) enough in reply to our S.O.S. signals.

At 8.30 a.m. a report was received by the Intelligence Officer to the effect that signalling by a white flag had been observed on Mount Sorrell. A man was immediately sent to investigate but nothing could be discovered.

Our observation post in Crab Crawl was destroyed in the morning, making observation exceedingly difficult.

The War Diarist included in his report a list of the sixty-three casualties of the day, one of whom was... *No. 24583 Cpl G.T. Cowan – Killed.*

Casualty report: *“Killed in Action” – Was in a dugout, when an enemy shell burst outside, some of the pieces entered the opening, instantly killing him.*

The son of John Cowan, Auditor & Estate Agent of Cowan & Co*, and of Eliza Julia Cowan (née Earle, deceased December 9, 1915) of 37, Queen’s Road, St. John’s, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Peter H., to Lilian, to Edgar – later of 100, Edgecombe Avenue, New York City - and perhaps to John.

**Elsewhere also Manufacturer’s Agent & Commission Merchants of 256-258, Water Street, St. John’s*

George Tremaine Cowan had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-four years and three months: date of birth in St. John’s, Newfoundland, June 30, 1890.

Corporal George Tremaine Cowan 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).

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War Office,
23rd August, 1916

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to award the Military Medal for *bravery in the field* to the undermentioned Non-commissioned Officers and Men:-

24582 Cpl. G.T. Cowan, late Can. Inf.

13th Battalion (*Royal Highlanders of Canada*) War Diary (Excerpts from entry of 1916, July 26)



Honours and Awards. The General Officer Commanding in Chief, under the authority granted by His Majesty The King, has awarded the following decoration:-

The Military Medal – No. 24582 Cpl G.T. Cowan

The following is from the Canada, Military Honours and Awards Citation Card in reference to Number 25582, Corporal G.T. Cowan of the 13th Infantry Battalion – Military Medal:

At the attack on Sanctuary Wood this N.C.O. displayed great coolness and resource. His C.S.M. was hit also his Company Commander, whom he placed in a place of safety, and then collected the men of his platoon and reorganized digging parties consolidating. He has been through the Battles of Ypres and Festubert, 1915, when he displayed marked resourcefulness, and ability.

In trench work at Messines he did excellent patrol work. His character is an exemplary one, and his services deserve recognition.



Issued on July 22, 1916

Gazetted (London Gazette) on August 23, 1916

(Right above: *Remnants of Canadian trenches dating from 1915-1916 at Sanctuary Wood – 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 25, 2023.