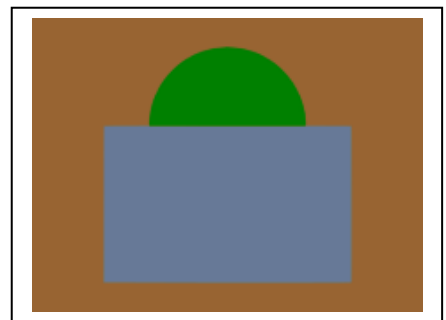




Private Gilbert Cram (elsewhere *Cramm*), Number 817412 of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (*PPCLI*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Lievin Communal Cemetery Extension: Grave reference III.B.19..

(Right: *The image of the PPCLI Battalion shoulder-flash is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)



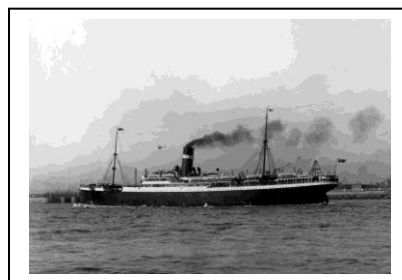
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *quarryman*, Gilbert Cram appears to have left behind him no history of his early years in Small Point, Broad Cove, or of his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to that of Canada. All that may be said with certainty is that he was present in the community of Sussex, New Brunswick, in December of 1915, for that is where and when he enlisted.

His first pay records show that it was on December 21 that Private Cram was first remunerated by the Canadian Army for his services to the 104th Overseas Battalion by which unit he was *taken on strength* on that same day. A week later, on the 28th, he presented himself for a medical examination – an exercise which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*...and for attestation, his oath thereupon witnessed by a local justice of the peace.

On that same December 28, the formalities of Private Cram's enlistment were brought to a conclusion by the officer commanding the 104th Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel George William Fowler, when he declared – on paper – that...*Gilbert Cram...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

Less than six weeks later, on February 6, 1916, Private Cram was transferred to another overseas unit, the 140th Battalion (*Saint John Tigers*). It was with this unit that he was to take passage to the United Kingdom at the end of September after a spring and summer of training in the area of Saint John, some of it likely at the newly-built *Barrack Green Armoury* located in city.

It was on September 25, 1916, that the 136th and 140th Battalions of Canadian Infantry embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Corsican* in the harbour at Halifax. Two days later the vessel weighed anchor and, after an uneventful voyage of some nine days, *Corsican* docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool.



(Right above: *The photograph of HMT Corsican is from the Maritime Quest web-site.*)

From Liverpool the 140th Battalion was transferred from dockside by train, apparently to the Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* established on the *Dover Straits* in the vicinity of the harbour and town of Folkestone.

Cæsar's Camp itself, to where the battalion was posted, stands on a hill north of the town, a site associated with camps and castles during much of its three-thousand year-old history, and the Canadian Army was to continue that tradition during the period of the *Great War*, *Cæsar's Camp* being a subsidiary facility of *Shorncliffe*.



(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*)

Not that the newly-arrived 140th battalion was to linger at *Cæsar's Camp* for very long: four weeks less a day after its arrival the unit was to be divided and ordered either to the newly-forming 13th Reserve Battalion (*New Brunswick*) at *Camp Bramshott* or to the RCR & PPCLI Depot at Seaford on the south coast of the country.



(Right: *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*)

It was to the latter that Private Cram was sent on November 2, 1916, there to be *taken on strength* by his new unit on the same day. Just over four weeks after his arrival there, on December 16, he was transferred once more, on this occasion across the English Channel to the parent unit of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry already serving on the Continent.

By the end of the following day, November 3 - likely having passed through the port of Southampton - he and sixty-three other re-enforcements from England had reported to the Canadian Base Depot of *Rouelles Camp* in the vicinity of the French industrial city of Le Havre, situated on the estuary of the *River Seine*.



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

Only a further twenty-four hours afterwards, Private Cram was on his way again, one of three-hundred twenty-nine men to be despatched to various units from the Base Depot on that December 18.

At the time, the PPCLI was operating in the area of the city of Arras, a distance of some two-hundred thirty kilometres to the north-east. Since Private Cram reported *to duty* on that same December 18, his draft undoubtedly had travelled by train to Arras itself before having completed the transfer – on foot?



(Right above: *The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'Place) in Arras which had already been steadily bombarded for two years by the end of the year 1916. – from Illustration*)

The four fighting companies of the PPCLI on that date were serving in the trenches of the *La Folie Sector*, not far distant from the city and mining-centre of Lens. Its base, transport and details were behind the lines in the reserve area in the vicinity of Neuville At-Vaast and while this is not confirmed by the Battalion War Diary, it was likely to have been there that Private Cram's draft was directed.

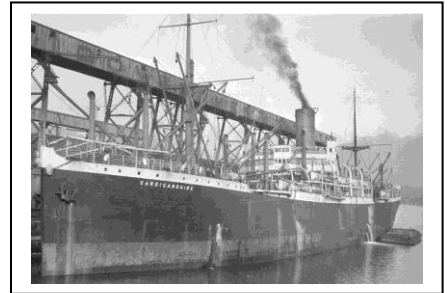
* * * * *

The PPCLI was not to serve with the other Canadian forces on the Continent until November of 1915 when it had become a battalion of the then-forming 3rd Canadian Division. Up until that time, its history as a unit on *active service* had been as part of a British infantry Brigade.

The Battalion* of the PPCLI Regiment had sailed from Canada on October 4, 1914, on the convoy carrying the first Canadian troops overseas. The unit had then spent the first weeks of its time in the United Kingdom at *Bustard Camp* on the Salisbury Plain, before then having been transferred to Winchester on November 16. There it had become attached to the British 80th Infantry Brigade of the 27th Division.

**The PPCLI was – and still is today – a regiment, a force which may comprise any number of battalions: today, in 2017, there are three. Some British regiments, for example, eventually sent twenty or more battalions to serve at the Front during the Great War. Only a single battalion - normally one-thousand strong but during the Great War oft-times comprising a lesser number - of the PPCLI Regiment ever served at the front.*

Only five days before that Christmas of 1914 the PPCLI Battalion had marched from Winchester to Southampton where it was to embark onto His Majesty's Transport *Cardiganshire* and to cross the English Channel to the French port-city of Le Havre. The vessel had docked there in the early afternoon, the Battalion personnel thereupon having spent the night in a nearby camp before having boarded a train on the following evening. The PPCLI Battalion War Diarist has described the event:



...The whole Battalion had to entrain in one train of 48 trucks. Officers 1, Men 24, Horses 10, VEHICLES 13. Very tight fit, some of the men being unable to sit down.

(Right above: *The image of HMT Cardiganshire is from The Library web-site. Having survived the Great War, she was sunk in 1940, during the Second World War.*)

The Battalion had then travelled northward, to complete its journey at Arques at half-past mid-night on December 23 before then having marched for a further two-and-a-half hours to its billets in, and in the vicinity of, the village of Blaringhem.

This community was to be its home for the following two weeks before a two-day march* into Belgium next found the PPCLI in the area of Dickebusch (today *Dikkebusch*), just to the south-west of the already-battered medieval city of Ypres.

**Some of the Canadian equipment in the early stages of the conflict left much to be desired – apparently both in quality and quantity. The War Diarist wrote of the march that... Lack of boots much felt, many men marching with no soles at all to their boots. British equipment was apparently soon adopted.*



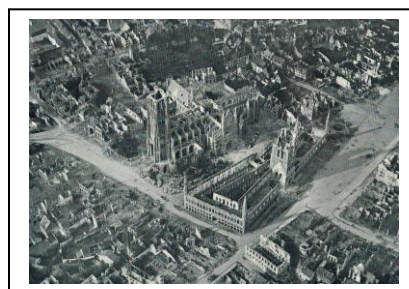
(continued)

(Preceding page: Troops – said to be British, but the Canadians wore British Uniforms – on the march in the north of France during the early period of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

The Battalion took its place in the line on the evening of that same day, January 6, 1915. Its personnel was soon to learn about the rigours, routines and perils of life – and death* - in the trenches.**

***The first to be killed in action, on January 8, 1915, according to the PPCLI War Diary, were Number 252, Corporal W. Fry and Number 1284, Lance Corporal H.O. Bellinger, likely victims of the heavy enemy shelling reported during the early morning – although Wikipedia names a Private Guy Dwyer from Hanover, New Brunswick, as having been the Battalion’s first combat casualty of the war on February 4, 1915.**

(Right: 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 Great War there was to be very little left standing. – from Illustration)

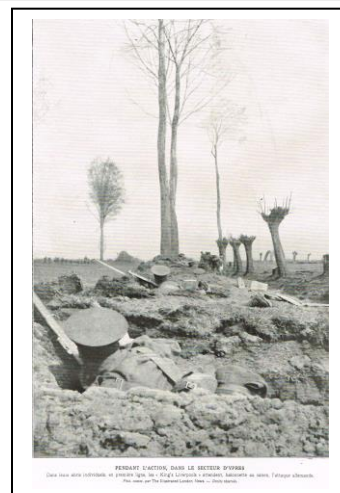


****During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was 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 being the 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 posting 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 – with which the PPCLI was already equipped in November of 1914 – from Illustration)



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

(continued)

The PPCLI remained stationed in the vicinity of Dickebusch while in the forward area, at Westoutre while in reserve, and near to the town of Poperinghe when withdrawn further back into Divisional Reserve. At the beginning of April it moved forward again so that by April 14 it was replacing troops of the Rifle Brigade on the eastern side of the *Ypres Salient*, in trenches in *Polygon Wood*.

At the same time, French troops in the adjacent sectors counter-clockwise – to the north-east of the city - were being replaced by the Canadian Division. Some Canadian units were still in the process of establishing themselves in their new positions when the Germans attacked on April 22, for the first time using chlorine gas to precede their infantry onslaught.

(Right below: *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*)

Close though the positions held by the PPCLI were to the ruptured Canadian and French lines, the Battalion War Diary notes little activity on the part of the unit; at the end of the month, by which time the situation had been partially stabilized, the PPCLI Battalion had still been lodged in and about *Polygon Wood*. From April 22 to 30 (inclusive), in contrast to casualties in the Canadian sectors, those of the PPCLI Battalion had been light: sixty *killed, wounded and missing* all told.



However, eight days later, the unit was to be called upon to resist a major German attack: In an action designated among its battle honours as *Frezenberg*, on May 8 the PPCLI Battalion had held the new, hastily-prepared positions of the *Bellewarde Ridge* all day until its relief at mid-night by the King's Royal Rifles. By then the unit had incurred, dependent upon the source, some four-hundred casualties of which one-quarter had been reported as *killed in action*.



(Right above: *A former non-commissioned officer of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry stands in front of the monument to the PPCLI Battalion, to be found in the area of the Bellewarde Ridge. The stone commemorates the action of May 8, 1915. – photograph from 2013(?)*)

The following months, during which the Battalion underwent re-organization and re-enforcement, were to be spent at first in the area just outside the *Lille Gate* – the southern entrance to the city of Ypres – then later, south again and across the Franco-Belgian frontier, in the vicinity of the town of Armentières.



(continued)

Subsequently, after a lengthy period in the area of Hazebrouck, and withdrawn well away from the forward positions, at the end of September of 1915 the unit had been ordered returned to the front in the vicinity of the northern French coal-mining city of Lens, there to spend the two following months. The PPCLI would later come back to the same area as a unit of the Canadian 3rd Division and the Canadian Corps.

(Preceding page: *The mining village of Loos-en-Gohelle just to the north of Lens as it was already in 1915 – from Le Miroir*)

These later months of the autumn of 1915 had seen little concerted action by either side, confrontations being rather of a local nature. There had been, of course, a constant stream of casualties, mostly due to the enemy's artillery and also to his snipers. The British and Empire (*Commonwealth*) contribution to the war effort had now been growing, with British Territorial Army units and the battalions of Kitchener's New Army starting to make their way to the Continent; and further units from the Dominions had now also been arriving from around the globe to serve in the various theatres of the conflict.

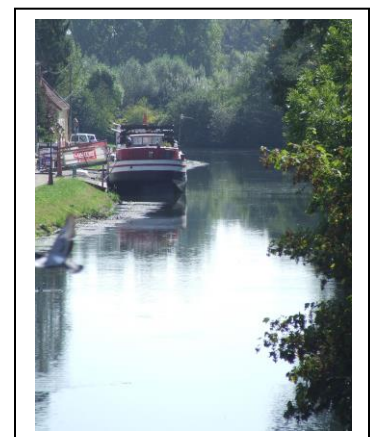
In September of 1915 the 2nd Canadian Division, after months of training in the United Kingdom, was to land in France to take responsibility in Belgium for sectors where, only months before, the PPCLI had been serving. And then units of the soon-to-be 3rd Canadian Division were to begin to make their way across the English Channel, some to serve at the front on an ad hoc basis, until the new parent unit would officially come into being.

In November, 1915, the British 27th Division had received orders to prepare for transfer to the new theatre of war being established in Macedonia, there to fight against the forces of Bulgaria, that country having recently declared for the Central Powers. The first units of this division has thus begun embarking for the enterprise on November 17.

The PPCLI Battalion, however, was not to contribute to this venture in Salonica. On November 8 there had been a farewell parade at which time the Commanding Officer of the 80th Brigade, as spokesman for all of the Canadian unit's now-former comrades-in-arms, had paid his compliments and had offered his best wishes to the Canadian unit in all its future endeavours.

The PPCLI Battalion was to remain at Flixecourt, where it had been posted for the farewell ceremonies and courtesies, until the 25th day of the month when it was to march – accompanied by a fife and drum band - to Pont-Rémy, some fifteen kilometres distant. From there it had entrained for the northern French community of Cæstre. It had there been greeted by Lieutenant-General Alderson, Commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, and by the welcoming Band of the 1st Canadian Division, before having marched to its billets some two kilometres away.

(Right: *The 'pont' at Pont-Rémy, a stone's throw from the railway station, here traverses the River Somme, another name in both Canadian and Newfoundland history. – photograph from 2010*)



(continued)

On the morrow morn, that of November 26, the weather gods would welcome the newcomers in their own fashion: with a heavy snow-storm.

It was now to be a further seven weeks before the PPCLI battalion would be posted to the forward area once more. In the meanwhile it had remained in the rear areas of Flêtre and La Clytte. In both encampments the unit was to undergo training, had paraded, had attended courses, had been inspected, had gone to church, was to practice musketry, had taken infrequent baths, had marched, had been photographed, was to play football, would welcome re-enforcements, had furnished working-parties, had three men wounded by long-range artillery... in fact, had undertaken just about everything except having fired a rifle in anger.

(Right below: *La Clytte (today Klijte) Military Cemetery in which are buried one-thousand twenty-eight dead of the Great War. Two-hundred thirty-eight of them are unidentified. – photograph from 2017)*

The 3rd Canadian Division was officially to come into being at mid-night on the night of December 31 of 1915 and January 1 of the New Year, 1916. The PPCLI Battalion was henceforth to be a unit of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, to serve in the company of the 42nd and 49th Battalions as well as with the Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment*. Its first tour in the trenches as a Canadian unit under Canadian command was to commence on the evening of January 12.



**The Royal Canadian Regiment, the senior infantry formation of the Canadian Army, also fielded a single fighting battalion during the Great War. This unit was nonetheless usually referred to as the RCR, rather than as a battalion.*

The month of February - all twenty-nine days of it in that 1916 – and the first three weeks of March had continued in the same routine manner, deemed as *normal* on perhaps the majority of his entries by the Battalion War Diarist. The weather, cited from the same source, had usually been... *poor*.

The 3rd Canadian Division up until the middle of March had been working much in tandem with the 1st Canadian Division, learning the ropes in the *Ploegsteert Sector* just to the north of the border with France. On March 21, it had been ordered into the area of the *Ypres Salient* and to the south-east of the city.

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



The PPCLI Battalion was to relieve the 3rd Battalion of the (British) Rifle Brigade at the *Railway Dugouts* there in the south-east area of the *Ypres Salient*, not very far removed from where the unit had distinguished itself in May of the previous year.

(continued)

The German artillery was more active – as always – in this sector than had been previously experienced, at least by units other than the PPCLI, but there appears to have been little infantry activity other than the incessant patrolling and the occasional raid by both sides.

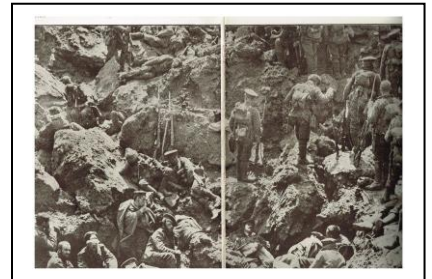
(Right: *Railway Dugouts Burial Ground (Transport Farm) today contains twenty-four hundred fifty-nine burials and commemorations.* – photograph from 2014)



This may have been due to the confrontation ongoing at the time in the *St. Eloi Sector*, it now in the throes of becoming the responsibility of the 2nd Canadian Division. However, the personnel of the PPCLI would likely have been aware of an occurrence in that area only because of the noise of the guns; it was not to be directly involved.

That *Action at the St. Eloi Craters* officially was to take 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 had been here that the British had excavated series of galleries under the German lines, there to place a series of explosives which they had detonated on that March 27 and were to follow up with an infantry assault.

After a brief initial success the attack had soon bogged down and by April 4 the Canadians were to be replacing the by-then exhausted British troops. They were to have no more success than had had the British, and by the 17th of the month, when the battle had officially come to an end, both sides were to be 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, possibly at St-Éloi* – from *Illustration*)

The whole affair had come to a conclusion – unsatisfactory from a Canadian point of view – before there had been the need for any units other than those of the 2nd Canadian Division to become involved.

But then, almost seven weeks later, at the beginning of June, it was then to be the turn of the 3rd Canadian Division to undergo its *own* baptism of fire.

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Salient* remaining under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This had been just to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, in the areas of the village of *Hooge* and other places of English-sounding names such as *Maple Copse*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Hill 60* and the afore-mentioned *Railway Dugouts*.



They are still referred to by the local people as such today.

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

The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, had overrun the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans had been unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were to patch up their defences. However, the precipitate and hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, delivered piece-meal – if at all - and poorly co-ordinated, was to be a horrendous experience for the Canadians.



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

Ten days later the Canadians had again counter-attacked, on this occasion better informed, better prepared and better supported. The lost ground for the most part was to be recovered, both sides were back whence they had started eleven days before – and the cemeteries fuller and more numerous.

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

(Right below: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooge, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: On the opening day of the Battle of the Messines Ridge, a British mine detonated under its summit removed any resemblance to a hill. It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government. – photograph from 2014*)



June 2nd, 1916 - At 8.30 a.m. the enemy began shelling our front line and supports. This gradually increased to an intense bombardment from H.E. shells and trench mortars. The bombardment lasted for five hours when it was lifted and an infantry attack followed. The enemy succeeded in capturing the front line of our right company No.1. The garrison having been almost annihilated. Our left Company No. 2 succeeded in holding their trench and stopped an enemy bombing attack... Our casualties were heavy. (Excerpt from the PPCLI War Diary entry for June 2, 1916.)



The PPCLI Battalion had been relieved on June 4 after having been submitted to almost constant artillery fire during the intervening period. The War Diarist on June 4, however, was to report that, on that day at least... *our casualties were not severe. At daybreak the 43rd Bn came up on our right and the 60th on our left but as it was too light the relief was postponed until evening... The Battalion...marched to the Asylum via the Lille Gate and were conveyed to “C” Camp by motor lorry...*

The PPCLI was to play no further role at *Mount Sorrel*. It would retire well to the rear westward through Poperinghe and into France where it was to rest and re-enforce. During this period the Battalion War Diary has recorded the unit as having welcomed over five-hundred fifty newcomers, officers and men, thus allowing the reader an idea of the heavy casualties incurred during this episode*.

**It was also during this period, on June 14, that daylight-saving time was introduced into use by the Canadians, British and other Commonwealth Forces.*

The PPCLI Battalion was to remain in the rear area until June 26 when it had been ordered moved forward to take over responsibility from the Royal Canadian Regiment Battalion for the trenches in the area of *Sanctuary Wood*, the scene of heavy fighting only a few days before. This had still been an active area at the time, mostly artillery duels but at least one serious enemy attack – repulsed - to the sector just to the right of the PPCLI's 7th Brigade.

The level of intensity of those few days had soon begun, however, to diminish, and thus was to begin in that early summer – once again - a period of the everyday grinding pattern of life in – and out of – the trenches.

In mid-August, units of the 1st Canadian Division were to begin to withdraw into France for some two weeks of training at the British Second Army facilities; in turn, two weeks afterwards, the 1st Division formations were to be followed by the battalions and other units of the 2nd Canadian Division.

During that summer, in contrast to the sectors in Belgium, relatively quiet during that period, it had been much less so elsewhere: the British, other Commonwealth troops and the French had undertaken an offensive in France, at *the Somme*. It had not been an overwhelming success, and the ensuing high casualty rate had necessitated the call to the Canadian Corps to supply re-enforcements to continue the venture.

On the night of August 21-22 there was to come the turn of the PPCLI which, as was the case with many of the retiring Canadian troops, had been relieved by battle-weary British and Irish units withdrawn from that ongoing confrontation to the south, *the Somme*. The PPCLI personnel had subsequently been transported from Ypres to the west by train and by the next day had been in the town of Poperinghe, indulging in the luxury of a bath.

The luxury was to be short-lived: the training area for the 3rd Canadian Division had been arranged for the area of Cassel, some twenty kilometres west again of Poperinghe. It would be to there that the entire 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade had marched on August 24 and it had been there and also in proximity to the neighbouring community of Steenvoorde that the Brigade was to undergo drills and exercises until September 7.

At the railway station at Esquebec at five-thirty in the afternoon of that September 7, the PPCLI Battalion was to board a train destined for the community of Conteville, at a distance of about one-hundred kilometres to the south. There the train had arrived at four o'clock on the following morning, some twenty-three hours later.

(continued)

On September 13, six days later again, the PPCLI Battalion, having marched in stages from Conteville the sixty kilometres or so south-eastward to the provincial town of Albert, had reported to the nearby *Brickfields Camp* where it was to bivouac for that night and for some of the next.

Then on the morning of September 15, having been ordered to *stand to* at six in the morning, the unit had marched towards the front, readying itself for the Battalion's attack planned for six o'clock that evening.

The *First Battle of the Somme* had by that time been ongoing for exactly eleven weeks. 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.

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



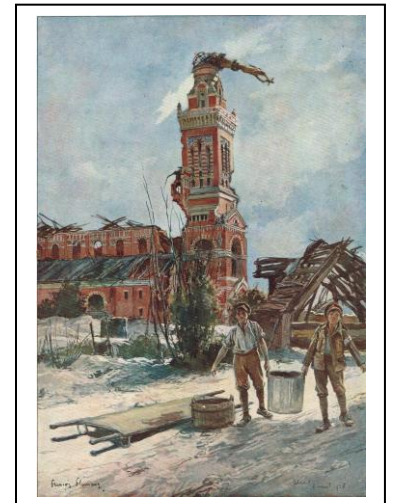
On that first day all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions having been the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was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

As the British offensive had progressed, troops from the Empire (*Commonwealth*) were to be 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 was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcelette.

Meanwhile, having moved towards the forward area on that morning of September 15, at two in the afternoon the Battalion was to receive its final orders in preparation for the attack at six that evening. The unit had apparently arrived in the area of the jumping-off trench – which could not be found – *at exactly that hour and thus... marched in file through the Barrage & immediately launched the attack & reached its first objective the sunken road running south of Courcelette...* (Excerpt from the PPCLI Battalion War Diary entry of September 15, 1916)

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



(continued)

(Right: *The fields surrounding it once again farm-land, this – seen from the north - is the reconstructed village of Courcelette one hundred years and several months after the Canadians attacked it in 1916. – photograph from 1917*)



(Right below: *Wounded troops being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the First Battle of the Somme – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)



Its first objective consolidated, the Battalion had pushed on and had finally attained its second objective by four o'clock on the afternoon of the next day. There the unit was to remain until having been relieved just before daybreak of the following day again, September 17. By that time the Battalion War Diarist was able to report... *All wounded were evacuated and all dead, as far as were known, buried... Total casualties just under 300.*

Withdrawn behind the lines for the next number of days, the PPCLI provided working-parties and received a draft of one-hundred forty re-enforcements before setting out on a six-day circuitous march, likely to allow the thus evacuated billets in and near Albert to be occupied by newly-arriving troops who were to be employed in imminent operations. The Battalion marched back into *Brickfields* on September 28.

Another assault had gone ahead on September 26 and by its end, there was a goodly – and depressing - number of billets once again available in Albert and elsewhere.

Then PPCLI had occupied some of those vacancies in Albert and also furnished working-parties until October 2 when it had marched forward into the support lines in the area of *Maricourt Wood*. There, two companies were to be posted to positions known as *Centre Way*, and the two others to *Piccadilly Circus*.



The PPCLI Battalion War Diary entries for October 3 and 4, 1916, read as follows:

3/10/16 The supports as described under 2/10/16. Intermittent heavy shelling. Very wet.

4/10/16 As for 2 and 3/10/16. The Battalion was relieved by the 8th Bn South Lancashire regiment at 4 pm and marched to bivouacs on TARA HILL.

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

The reprieve was short-lived: by the late afternoon of October 5, the PPCLI Battalion had marched back up to the forward area to the west of the remnants of Courcelette and had once more been serving in support positions.

On October 8 a further offensive venture – less ambitious than that of the general attack of September 15 – had been ordered undertaken, on this occasion by both the 7th and 9th Canadian Infantry Brigades.

In the area of the villages of Le Sars and Courcelette, and onward towards Thiepval, the Germans had created a strong defensive system known as *Regina Trench*: the approaches to this position as well as the position itself would be the objectives of the assault; the attackers from the 7th Brigade were to be the RCR Battalion and the 49th Battalion with the PPCLI Battalion acting in support.

Excerpts from PPCLI Battalion War Diary entry for October 8, 1916: *...The Patricias were in support... The first news was that the attack had been successful... Later news came that the wire had not been destroyed and that only parts of the objective had been entered... Then news came that the 9th Brigade had failed on our right... About 11, R.C.R.s were forced to abandon their hold on Regina Trench and retired to the jumping off trench... No's 1, 2 & 3 Coy's retired...*



There were apparently to be no further German counter-attacks, but while small Canadian parties had made further limited advances, the main German positions would remain in the enemy's possession. The cost to the PPCLI Battalion, since it had been operating only in support, was not to be as great as that which had been incurred by the attacking RCR and 49th Battalions, yet it still had suffered *twelve killed in action, seventy-six wounded and two missing in action.*

(Right above: *Regina Trench Cemetery and some of the area surrounding it which was finally wrested from the Germans by Canadian troops on the night of November 10-11, 1916 – photograph from 2014*)

The PPCLI Battalion had been relieved later that evening and on the following afternoon, at four o'clock, had...*marched out of line to TARA HILL and bivouacked.*

On the next day again the unit would begin to march away from *the Somme.*

It was to be a long march: westward before turning north to pass behind the city of Arras. The trek had then continued for a further ten kilometres to the area of Écoivres before having turned directly eastward.



The Battalion's final destination was to be the *Neuville St-Vaast Sector*, directly to the north of Arras, some kilometres behind the forward area and from where a slope today still gently rises to dominate the entire area: la crête de Vimy – *Vimy Ridge.*

(Right above: *From the summit of Hill 145 on Vimy Ridge, on which point stands the Canadian National Memorial, a grieving Canada overlooks the Douai Plain. – photograph from 1915*)

By October 24-25 the unit had been posted to the trenches. There it was once more to return to the way of life of the *Western Front* – perhaps, after *the Somme*, the average soldier felt this not to be such a bad thing.

During the period from that October of 1916 until February 11 of the following year, 1917, the PPCLI, when in the forward area, was to serve in the *La Folie Sector* and, when in the rear area, was to operate in the vicinity of Mont St-Éloi* or a little closer to the Front, at Neuville St-Vaast.



**Not to be confused with the Belgian village of St-Éloi where the 2nd Canadian Division, as seen on a previous page, had fought during the spring of 1916.*

(Right above and right: *The village of Mont St-Éloi, near to which the 4th CMR Battalion was posted on occasion, at an early period of the Great War and again a century later - The ruins of the Abbey St-Éloi – destroyed in 1783 – are visible in both images. – from Le Miroir and (colour) from 2016*)



It had also been, as has been recorded on a previous page, at this time that Private Cram, on or about December 18, 1916, was to report *to duty* with his new unit, the PPCLI Battalion, in the Neuville St-Vaast Sector.

* * * * *

For the personnel of the PPCLI Battalion, the late autumn and then winter of 1916-1917 was to be, once more, one of the every-day grind of life in and out of the trenches. There was 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.

Casualties were, overall, light; even while posted in the forward areas the War Diarists were often able to record...*Casualties – nil*. During this entire period the medical services were much more occupied with cases of sickness and the need for dental work than they were with the victims of military activity.

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

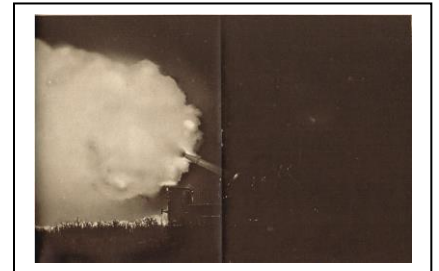


When the PPCLI Battalion was ordered to be transferred in near-to-mid-February, it was to the area of the community of Bruay, some thirty kilometres to the north of Neuville St-Vaast and to a designated *Corps Rest Area*. To judge from the Battalion War Diary entries of that period, however, there appears to have been only a very minimum of rest involved.

Parades, inspections, training – bayonet-fighting, bombing, musketry – sports (particularly football), lectures, route marches, medal presentations – with the occasional bath and concert added to the mix: this was the syllabus offered to the Battalion until March 20.

To these preparations were, as of that moment, to be added some novel developments: use of enemy weapons; the familiarization of each unit and of each man with his role during the upcoming battle; the construction of ground layouts built, thanks to aerial reconnaissance, to show the terrain and positions to be attacked; the introduction of the machine-gun barrage; and the excavation of kilometres of approach tunnels – at Vimy Ridge and elsewhere - not only for the safety of the attacking troops but also to ensure the element of surprise.

On March 21 the PPCLI Battalion moved southwards to Villers-au-Bois, thence back into the trenches where the Battalion Headquarters were established in *Grange Tunnel* (see further below). By this time it was evident that the Canadian artillery was preparing the ground for an attack, each day the barrage intensifying: by the last day of the month the War Diarist was reporting... *Another barrage – 10. A.M. A better one**.



**It was apparently not until April 2 that the full fury of the Canadian and British Barrage was unleashed. It should be said that a great deal of the artillery used in the assault on Vimy Ridge was British and that a British Division also participated in the attack. Almost fifty per cent of the personnel who had been employed for that day were British, not to mention those whose contribution – such as those who dug the tunnels - allowed for the operation to happen as it did.*

(Right above: *A heavy British artillery piece spews its flame into the middle of the night. – from Illustration*)

The ground troops were now also being involved in numerous raids to harvest last-minute information a propos the enemy opposite, and messages were received from not only the Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Corps, Sir Julian Byng, but also from Princess Patricia herself.

On April 6, two of the Battalion’s four companies moved into *Grange Tunnel*, apparently to remain there until the day of the attack, a date of which they may not have been aware until April 8, for it was only then that the War Diarist recorded: *Orders received to attack & capture a portion of VIMY RIDGE...**

**Apparently at the Battalion level, the orders were relayed verbally to all company commanders, likely to ensure no interception by the Germans.*

(Right below: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, has stood on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)



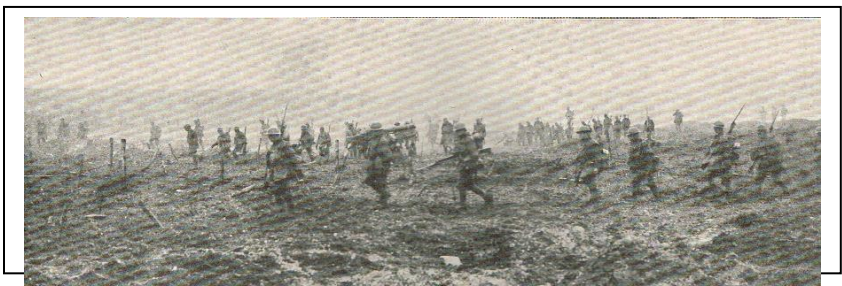
(continued)

On April 9 in that spring of 1917, the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of *the Somme* battlefields; this was to be the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the *Great War* for the British, one of the few positive episodes having been the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.

While the British effort at Arras would prove an overall disappointment, the French offensive of *Le Chemin des Dames* was to be yet a further disaster.

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, for the first time acting as a single, autonomous entity – there was even a British brigade (as seen above) serving under 2nd Canadian Division command - stormed the slopes of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

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



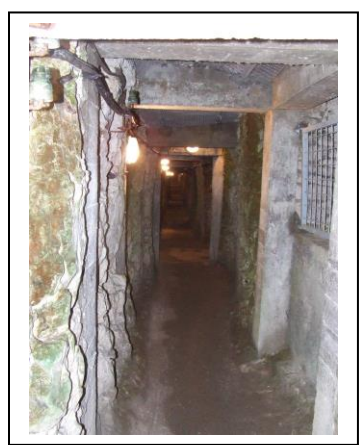
Excerpts from Operational Order No. 8:

The Battalion will attack from the OBSERVATION LINE on a two Company frontage: Nos.1 and 3 Coys capturing the Intermediate Objective (the junction of Blue Trench and Beggar Trench); Nos.2 and 4 Coys passing through and capturing the Final Objective (Britt Trench to Junction with Staubwasser Weg).

After reaching Final Objective, Nos.2 and 4 Coys will push patrols forward towards BOIS DU CHAMP POURRI...to ascertain whether these defences are occupied. Protective barrage will be lifted to enable this to be done...

...BATTALION H.Q...Will be in GRANGE SUBWAY...

(Right: *One of the few remaining galleries – Grange Tunnel - still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years later – photograph from 2008(?)*)



Excerpts from Appendix C from the PPCLI Battalion War Diary for the month of April, 1917

9th April, 1917

5.30 a.m. Artillery opened and leading wave commenced to climb up our lip of craters.

7.10 a.m. Message...received from...C.O. No.1 Co., stating had reached FAMINE TRENCH with few casualties...

8.30 a.m. Message...received from...O.C. No.4 Co., stating his Coy reached final objective at 7.40 a.m. with few casualties...

9.30 a.m. Message...received from...O.C. No.2 Co., stating his Coy in final objective...4 German Officers and 14 O.R. Taken prisoners. Casualties pretty strong. Enemy resistance weak...Patrol sent out...

10.20 a.m. Message...advising German snipers very active on left...



(Right above: German prisoners being escorted to the rear by Canadian troops during the attack on Vimy Ridge – from Illustration)

Casualty Report:- On the morning of April 9, 1917, after the final objective had been reached, he was killed by a bullet from the rifle of a sniper.

The son of George Cramm, fisherman, and of Susannah Cramm (née Peach) – to whom as of October 1, 1916, he had allotted a monthly ten dollars from his pay – of Small Point, Broad Cove, Conception Bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Arthur, John-Charles, Mary, George, Eliza-Ann and to John-Joseph.

Private Cram (Cramm) was reported as having been killed in action on April 9, 1917, during the Canadian attack on Vimy Ridge.

James-Gilbert Cram (Cramm) had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-eight years: date of birth (from attestation papers) at Broad Cove, Newfoundland, April 1, 1887. However, Methodist Parish Records cite his birth date as August 28, 1881 – and his full name as James Gilbert Cramm.

Private Gilbert Cram 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 23, 2023.

