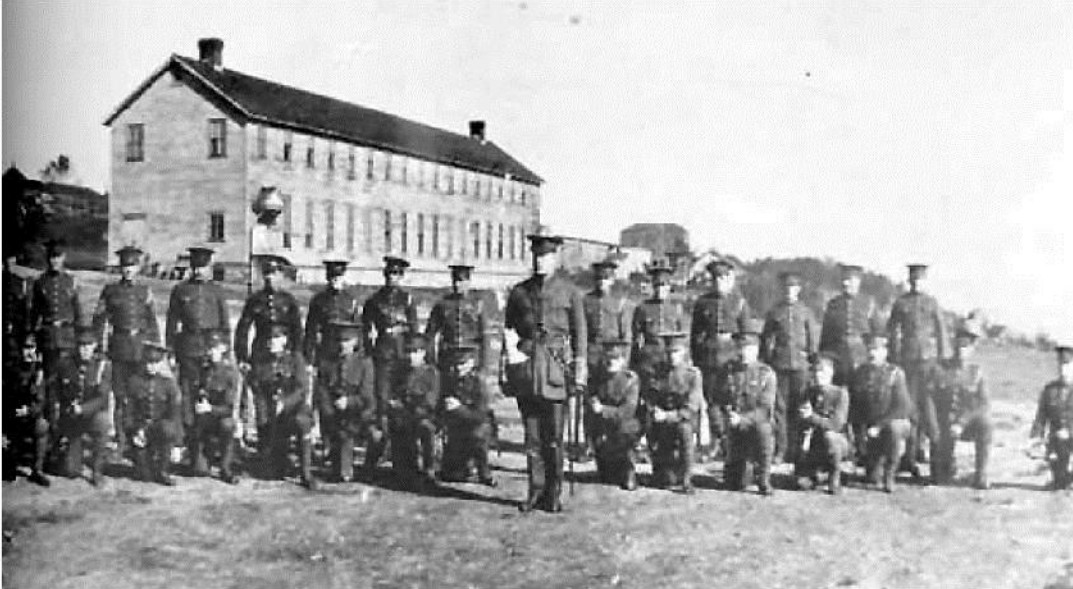


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Enlistment

I enlisted in the 4th Canadian Siege Battery on the 26th day of October, 1915. It was mobilized and stationed on Partridge Island, which as you know is in the outer part of Saint John Harbour. I was 17 years old at the time of my enlistment and therefore had to have the consent of my parents, which they reluctantly gave. On arrival in Partridge Island I had discovered that anyone under the age of 18 would not be accepted for overseas duty. Therefore when the time came for my enlistment in the 4th Overseas Siege Battery, I gave my age as 18 and had no trouble about it.



Members of 4th Siege Battery in front of Partridge Island barracks

Training in Saint John

While in Partridge Island, we did mostly foot and rifle drill, and a lot of physical training because boys from the city, just as today, were not in as good physical condition as the boys from the country and even we needed hardening up — which we got there. On at least two occasions — and I believe it was three — while we were in Partridge Island we got into the city as a unit.

The first time we came over in heavy marching order [full pack and weapons, approx. 70 lbs total] and took a route march from the city out to Rothesay. It was quite difficult as we moved in heavy marching order. There was a few inches of snow on the roads — there was no snow ploughing in those days. We all arrived in Rothesay okay and spent the night in the big school there, and the next morning marched back to the city and onboard boats and back to Partridge Island.

Another occasion we came over as a unit and marched around the city a bit and then formed up on King's Square — on the south side of King's Square actually — and had battery pictures taken.

Another occasion — I don't believe it was the full battery that came over that time — in answer to the invitation from the congregation of St. David's Church to a church supper and entertainment, and we certainly, those of us who got there, and I was one of them, enjoyed it very much. They put on a very fine supper and were a very nice friendly group of people.

Our quarters in Partridge Island were very, very good. They had been used in former years as hospitals for immigrants when they were placed in quarantine before being allowed on the mainland. We were stationed in Partridge Island until late in February or very early in March when we were moved to the immigration sheds in West Saint John and took over guard duty on the docks there.

Guard duty on the West Saint John docks

The guard duty on the docks on the West Side, which we did in the month of March in 1916, was rather strenuous on us all as we only had enough men in the battery to form two guards. So we did 24 hours on duty and 24 hours off duty, which meant 24 hours without any sleep, then 24 hours to rest. We were right in the city, with friends to see. My brother Walter and his wife lived in the city and I was a constant caller there when I had the opportunity. So we didn't avail ourselves of as much rest as we could have.

The Canadian Navy at that time consisted of two ships. One of them, the *Niobe*, was on the east coast and the *Rainbow* was on the west coast. One night, the *Niobe* was tied up to the outer end of the dock where I was on guard. It appeared that was its usual place to tie up when it was in port, and somewhere around one o'clock in the morning, the commanding officer came along returning to his ship. He stopped to speak to me, and inquired whether I was cold or not. It was an extremely cold night and I said yes, I was.

We were right opposite his ship when we met so he invited me on board to have a hot lunch. I hesitated a bit, but as the orderly officer of the day and the sergeant of the guard had been around on their inspection a short time ahead of that, I decided I'd take a chance and have a hot cup of tea and a lunch with him. I thanked him and went on board and had a most enjoyable lunch and chat and got an invitation to avail myself of this any night that I happened to be on duty and his ship was in and tied up at that dock. He gave the steward instructions that it didn't matter if he was there or not — I was to be looked after. I did not have the opportunity of a second visit on board the *Niobe*.

I had a very enjoyable afternoon on one of the CPR passenger ships. I just happened to be "off beat" when a group of civilians came along to visit on board this ship. As they had to go through the dock and onto the ship, they had to be escorted. I was sent to escort them with orders to keep them in view at all times and bring them back when their visit was over. Their visit was long enough that I missed two "beats" as we called it, two tours on beat, two hours each, and had a very excellent supper and a nice visit with the purser who put himself out to keep me entertained all the time I was on board.

Departure Overseas

We remained at this duty guarding the docks until the 31st of March when we entrained in Saint John for the port of Halifax from which we were to sail for England. The date of our leaving was not kept secret at all therefore the families and friends of the boys in the battery were able to gather at the Union Station in Saint John to say goodbye. I was very happy to see my father and mother, my sister Mary and my oldest brother James there at the station to have a final goodbye with them before the train pulled out. My brother Walter and his wife Greta were also there.

We travelled by train to Halifax, arriving in good time on the morning of April the 1st and went immediately onboard the large passenger liner, the *Olympic* [a smaller sister-ship of the *Titanic*]. When the last of the troops were on board we moved out into the harbour and stayed at anchor there until the 5th. There were six or seven troopships leaving Halifax that week for England, and as our ship was the fastest one of the group, we were held until the last so that we would all reach the submarine danger zone at approximately the same time and one naval escort would take us through this zone.

Arrival in England — Liverpool, Portsmouth

We arrived in England on the 11th of April at Liverpool and were soon on the dockside, then to the train which was to take us to Portsmouth. We got away from Liverpool about 7:30 in the evening and arrived at Portsmouth very early the next morning.

Our quarters here were an old regular army barracks called Clarence Barracks and we were in Portsmouth for the rest of April. Then on the 5th of May, we left for the Siege training camp outside of Horsham.



Clarence Barracks, Portsmouth

Training at Horsham and Lydd

This was a newly-built wooden camp in a very nice location, about 4 miles from Horsham, which was a lovely country town. Here we got down to serious training. The men who were to train as the plotters and observers were selected there, the signallers and the men to man the guns, and the office personnel.

We trained under our own officers and I happened to be one of those selected to train as a plotter and observer and we got all of our training from our own commanding officer, Major L. W. Barker, who was a very excellent and efficient artillery officer.

Our training completed, we left for the artillery ranges at Lydd on the South coast on the 27th of June and there we passed through all our shooting tests very successfully. In fact, at the completion of them the camp commandant informed Major Barker that our battery had done the best shooting he had seen on those ranges since the war broke out in August of 1914.

Departure from England — Bristol, Folkestone

On the 20th of July we left Lydd and half of the battery went on leave and the other half proceeded to the city of Bristol where we loaded our guns on a ship at Avonmouth, which was the outer port of Bristol, also our lorries and all of our equipment.

When the boys on leave arrived back the remainder of the battery — in which I was included — left for a few days leave and returned to Bristol from where, on the 30th of July we took the train for Folkestone by way of London.

We arrived at Folkestone on the 31st and immediately after a short rest of 2 or 3 hours, we went on ship and landed in Boulogne the same day, the 31st of July.

Arrival in France — Boulogne

It was an extremely hot day and we had a hard march through the narrow streets of Boulogne and a completely uphill job until we reached St. Martin's Camp up on the plain back of Boulogne and there we were under canvas the short time we were in Boulogne.

That was just time enough to get our guns and equipment off the ship when it came in the next day, and get them loaded on the train. And on the 2nd day of August we left Boulogne for, as we called it, “up the line”.



Battery positions between Auchonvillers and Mailly-Maillet Wood

Mailly-Maillet, Englebelmer

We reached a railhead called Raincheval on the 3rd of August and immediately we got our guns and equipment unloaded. We proceeded to our first battery position in front of the remains of a village called Mailly-Maillet. It was in a mixed orchard of apples and pears and an Australian battery had been there just ahead of us and had been moved because of the constant and heavy shelling it had received in that position. As soon as we got into action a day or two later we received the same treatment, and the powers-that-be decided to move us to another position which was better concealed.

We moved to a valley near a place called Englebelmer, just to the right of a piece of woods called “Gadd” Woods. This valley had a local name of “Death Valley” and that was only one of many valleys that we encountered here and there in the different parts of the fighting front in France that was called Death Valley by the troops that happened to land in them.

There was no suitable place for quarters for us near where the guns were. We established living quarters in a chalk cliff a mile away from the guns, where we dug dugouts and they were nice and dry and we were quite comfortable there. But it made a long walk for the people on the gun crews, and for the plotters and observers and the signallers when they were serving at the battery commander’s post. When we took our turn at the observation post, why then our walks were very much longer and generally through very exposed positions — very exposed routes, I should say.



Artillery Observation Post

Courcelles-au-Bois, Doullens

We were in the Englebelmer position approximately two months then we shifted to a field just slightly in the rear of a ruined village called Courcelles-au-Bois. This field had a number of hay stacks or grain stacks scattered through it and we built imitation stacks over each of our guns and it made such perfect camouflage that we were never found during the period that we were there. Or if we were — we did get quite a lot of shelling near to us — no shells hit the guns. They were either between us and the village, or on the village, or else in a line of reserve trenches that were slightly in rear of our guns. We came off very lucky there and were in that position until close to the middle of December, when we were pulled out of there and went to the city of Doullens to get on board a train and proceed to another front.

Battle of the Somme, 1916

The Battle of the Somme of 1916 started before we got there, it started about the first of July and it kept up continuously until we arrived, and until shortly before we left the Somme in the middle of December. It was during September that the Canadians moved down to the front just alongside of where we were, and it was there that I first met my brother George and some friends that were in the same unit that he was who had been in France from September 1915. I also saw another friend, Merton Crawford from Goshen, and had a pleasant chat with him one Sunday when I was off duty. I did not get a chance to see him again as he was killed the next week in the attack on Regina Trench, which was one of the sharp engagements during the Battle of the Somme.

Sugar Refinery, Thiepval Wood, Thiepval, Regina Trench, Hébuterne

We had a very busy time in the Somme because it was all just one battle after another, which was all called the Battle of the Somme, 1916. But at the time we called them the attack on the Sugar Refinery, another one on Thiepval Wood, and then a larger one when Thiepval itself was captured, and the Regina Trench battle, and then the final one that we were in was the Battle of Hébuterne.

Shortly after that battle is when we pulled out.



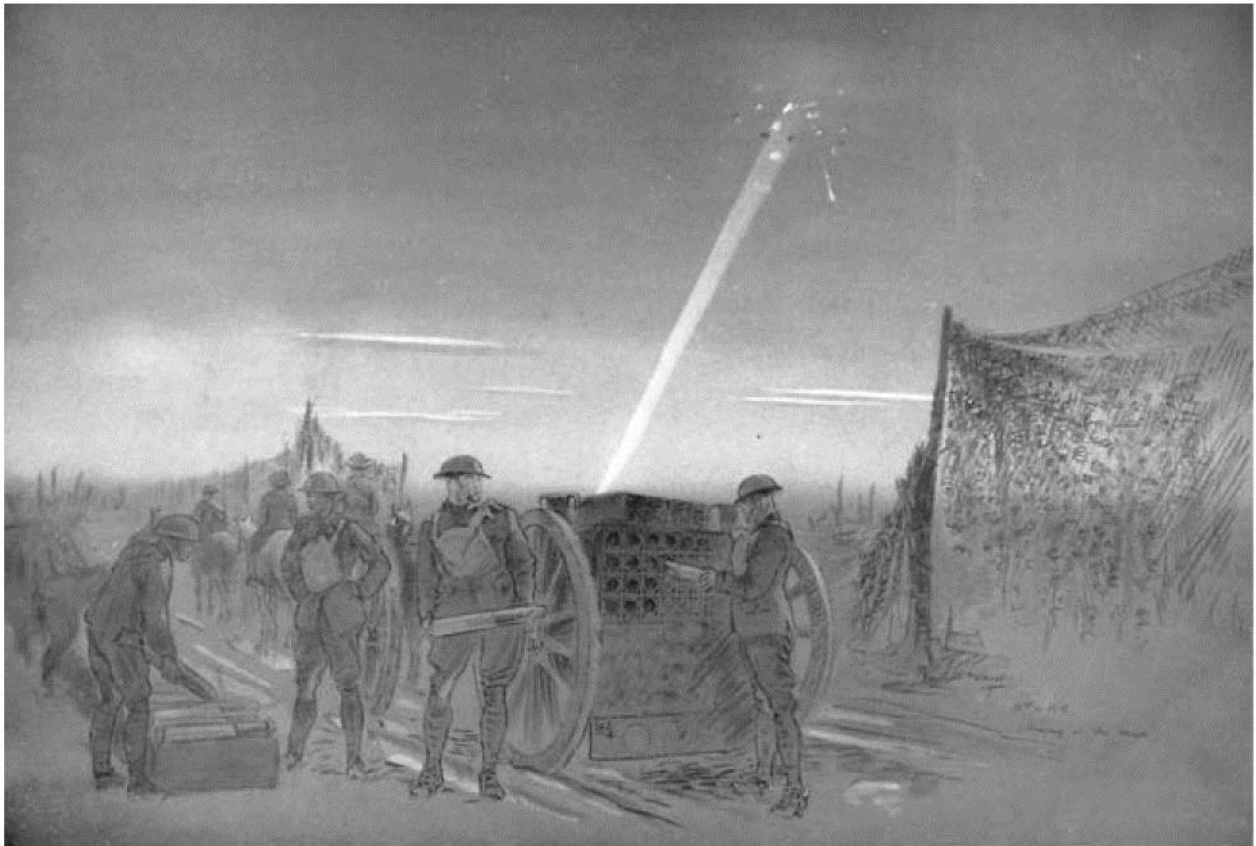
Thiepval Wood

Bully, Bully-Grenay

We detrained at a place called Bully. Our guns had been in constant action from the time we had reached the front on the fourth of August and were in bad need of overhauling. So we had a few days rest in the city of Bully while the guns were in the workshops getting overhauled.

When they came back to us we moved from there to our gun positions in a village called Bully-Grenay and finally we had the pleasure of joining our own Canadian corps. Up until this time we had served with the British Army from the time we trained in England and came to France. When we went into action at Bully-Grenay, then we were with our own Canadian troops.

A few days after we reached Bully-Grenay, my transfer to my brother's unit came through and I joined him at a place called Barlin. [Harold now joined the 2nd Divisional Ammunition Column].



Divisional ammunition column loading up at dump

The ammunition dumps in France and Flanders were carefully chosen, with special regard to accessibility and protection from enemy observation. On a demand for ammunition being received from a battery, the Divisional Ammunition Column wagons, which were always full, proceeded to deliver the ammunition to the battery concerned, returning to the dump to refill, and proceeding then again to the guns or to the Divisional Ammunition Column. The work was usually done at night, especially in Flanders, where the absence of hills rendered observation possible at considerable distances. The work was at all times hazardous, and especially so when a "strafe" was in progress, as the ammunition had to be delivered at the guns at all costs.

- see endnote 7

Christmas, 1916 — Barlin, Callonne-Ricouart

We had Christmas in Barlin. The billets for the men at Barlin were among the best that we had all the time I was in France and the accommodations for the horses were undercover. Tin, we called it, but it was actually galvanized steel roofing was over them. Though there were no sides to the stable, it made protection from any of the rain or storms that came.

From there we moved out to a rest area called Callonne-Ricouart and both the billets for the men and the accommodations for the horses were very, very poor. In fact, the horses were out in the open during the coldest period I ever experienced in France and the hills around where we were had snow on them. In the flat field, where the horses were tied up, the ground was frozen and considerable ice was around.

This was very hard on them as when we were in Barlin, orders came down from the powers-that-be to clip all horses, and here they were all clipped. True, they had one blanket but with their bodies and legs clipped and standing out there on the frozen ground, they started to go down in condition and it was something that didn't get stopped.

Because when we left there and moved up to a place called Cambigneul to start preparations for Vimy Ridge they were very, very hard-worked — the men too — and they had pretty muddy standings there. The horses had no opportunity to “get back on their feet”, as we would say, and their condition continued to go down rapidly right up to and during the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Cambigneul, Gauchin-Légal, Mont St Eloi & la Targette

We left the small village in Cambigneul and moved to a place called Gauchin-Légal where we spent a short time and then moved to a field alongside of a wood called Bois des Alleux. It was in the Mont St. Eloi vicinity and here again, the horses were in mud, and quite deep. Then we moved from there in about 2 weeks time, as I recall, to a field in front of the village of Mont St. Eloi and just short of a place called la Targette.



Abbey at Mont St Eloi (period postcard)

Vimy Ridge

I've already named the main battles that we took part in in 1916, then in 1917 the Vimy Ridge was the first big battle and it continued. It opened on the 9th of April and when the main ridge itself was captured there were still other places in connection with that German position that had to be captured also.

Leigh Northrup, Charlie Boyd, Cyrus Gaskin and Vernon McLaskey killed

There was continuous fighting right on through the rest of April and May, 1917 and it was on the 23rd of May that my nephew, Leigh Northrup, was killed. We went over in the same battery, also another chap from home, Charlie Boyd and two of our friends, Cyrus Gaskin from Moncton and Vernon McLaskey from near Woodstock. The four were all killed with the same shell.

I got word — at least my brother, George, got word of it — through a friend of ours from home here, William West. He was in charge of the signallers in brigade headquarters, a brigade our old battery was in, and sent word to George. [George later recalled hearing that the explosion had buried Leigh, and his chums quickly dug him out. When they uncovered his head and shoulders they were initially elated, because they thought he was unharmed. Unfortunately that wasn't the case. Source: William ES Gamblin].

We went to the place where the boys were being buried, called the Cabaret Rouge near the Arras-Béthune road, right along side of it, in the Souchez Valley. We got there to be present when the boys were buried. My horse got hit in the rump on the way going to the cemetery, and neither George nor I, nor George's horse seemed to collect any trouble ... [tape changes sides] ... the horse was okay.

Four enlisted together, one remains

There were four of us who had enlisted in the 4th Siege Battery at the same time from this area. There was Freeman Lewis, and Charlie Boyd, Leigh Northrup and myself. With Charlie and Leigh killed, I was the only one of the four left in France.

Freeman Lewis had been gassed and then slightly wounded on his way to the dressing station and was away from the front to hospital at this time. He did not completely recover, but he reached Canada and died in the Soldiers Hospital at Ste. Anne de Bellevue before I arrived home at the end of the war.

Battle of Hill 70 (Lens), Passchendaele

The summer of 1917 saw the Canadians engaged in a very severe battle we called the Battle of Hill 70 [North of Lens]. It, like the Vimy Ridge, carried on for quite awhile. It finally ended up in victory and the position well-consolidated.

And then it was rather just the ordinary trouble from then on until the Canadians were moved to the Ypres country and the really tough — one of the worst battles that we had to contend with or had to fight — was the Battle of Passchendaele. The mud was so terrible there it was very, very difficult to carry on. But it finally ended in victory for the British and the colonial troops.

The Australians and the New Zealanders were up in that front at the same time. They had had a rough time at a battle just before Passchendaele opened up, the Battle of Wijtschate Ridge we called it. But anyway, Passchendaele ended up in victory in December.

We moved away from there after having been there from late in October. I missed the march to Passchendaele as I had left for leave to England about two days before the unit moved to Passchendaele. It must have been a little longer than that before they left because I had my 10 days leave and was back with the unit at Passchendaele the day after they arrived there.

Dad Turner killed

By the way, I was just in time to bury the man — one we thought a lot of, he was a lot older than the most of us. We called him “Dad”, Dad Turner. He had gone from the unit down to the railhead with me when I went on leave, to bring my horse back to the unit.

And I just got back in time to bury him. Things like that happened so often.

Christmas 1917 – Bouvigny-Boyeffles

We had Christmas after our return from Passchendaele in fairly comfortable quarters. Previous to going there for Christmas, we spent a few days on the slopes in front of Mont St Eloi and there's where we did our voting in the so-called “Conscription Election” in Dec. of 1917.

Then we moved out to a place called Bouvigny-Boyeffles, where we had Christmas, mostly on rest there. It was there I met a friend from home who was in the Second Division, one of the trench mortar brigades, Rupert Perry [or Parry or Berry]. He was a Lieutenant with them and that was the second time I had seen him since he had arrived in France.

In 1918 I transferred from my brother's unit to the 16th Canadian Field Battery, whose hometown was Guelph, Ontario. In the early spring of 1918 I was promoted to Sergeant and shortly after that was recommended for officers training, and to be commissioned in the artillery.



Field artillery – 18-pounder gun crew in action

Arras

From January 1918 until the big German attack and breakthrough late in March of 1918, there was just the usual desultory fighting here and there — no one particular battle that I could name. But we sure had a busy time of it during that German attack, as the Canadians were used as emergency troops in several places.

We were just preparing to move up to a position on the left of Arras, which was near the front line, when the German attack came on and all our plans were changed. We finally arrived on the east of Arras on what we called the Mametz Front, to back up and relieve a Guards Division — that's our Second Canadian Division — of which our unit was a part. Our division had a rough time for the next three months as we did 93 days straight-ahead in the line without relief, or without being out on rest at all and with constant action all that period. But at the end of that time, things had settled down and the Germans had been halted in good shape, and our line firmly established again.

We got out on rest for a couple of weeks and then we pulled out for a night march all the way to the Somme, where we had been in 1916. The reason for the marching at night with the mounted troops was so the Germans wouldn't know we were on the move. The infantry and all dismounted troops were moved, either by train or by bus, the buses moving by night, too.

Last Battle of the Somme, Aug 1918

We just reached our part of the front in time to get our guns in position and our ammunition up when the last battle in the Somme opened on the 8th of August. It was one wonderful feeling because it went so good on the Canadian and Australian front right from the start, and on the British front.

It was such a wonderful feeling to have the Germans out of their trenches and on the retreat in front of us, and out we were in open action and going ahead in grand shape. It was such a change from the static trench warfare, as we had termed it up till then. It was one wonderful feeling.

Last Battle of Arras, Aug 1918

Eventually, of course, the battle was over and we left that front and went right back to near east of Arras where we had left a short time before that, just in time to get our guns in position and our ammunition up and enter into the so-called last Battle of Arras — though it covered a much wider area than that, especially to the east of Arras.

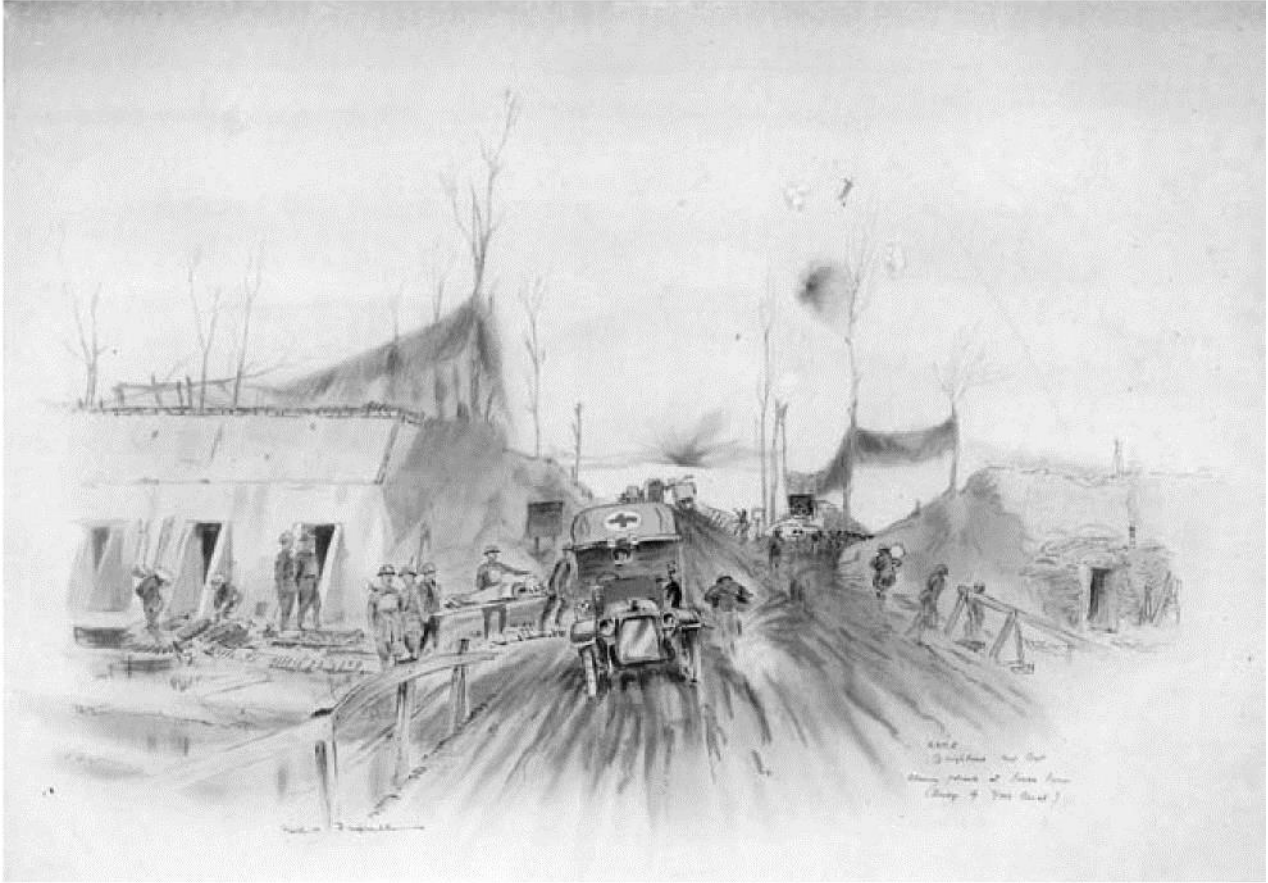
The battle of the 8th of August opened up in the Somme and it was continuous fighting from then to the end of the war. It really marked the beginning of the end for the Germans. The pressure kept up on them — just one battle after another.

These next ones I didn't see, when the Canal du Nord was crossed and the Hindenburg Line was broken, and so on, because I was resting out of harm's reach in hospital when the Canal du Nord was fought and the Hindenburg Line busted and from then on. From then on I was only a very interested bystander, as it were.

Wounded near Arras

I was awaiting word to leave for England to take my officers training when, in the battle near Arras, which was previous to the Canadians reaching the Canal du Nord, I was wounded and left for hospital.

I had been very lucky from the time I landed in France. I had been hit and knocked down the very day I was visiting Merton Crawford. We had been out in an orchard on the edge of Bouzincourt, the village where they were billeted just previous to going into the trenches before the next push. We got out there by ourselves to have a little talk when the Germans started shelling pretty heavy. We hustled out of the orchard and started going through a hole in a brick wall for to get shelter behind it, when another one broke handier. I got knocked down but not seriously hurt. Anyway, I didn't have wound enough to go to hospital, which I was very thankful for. I did not even have to go to the field dressing station.



Field Dressing Station and ambulance

It was a different story on the 26 of August, 1918 as there was no question I was wounded badly enough I had to be taken to the advanced aid post. Then to the field dressing station where, after some bandaging and 'dope shot into me' I got an ambulance trip down to a railhead in a place called Aubigny. From there I got on a hospital train and landed at the base in France in a British hospital where I had some operations. When deemed able, I was shipped across to England to a hospital in London and remained there until I was ready for convalescent hospital.

Then I was sent to the Canadian convalescent hospital just outside of Epsom. I reached there the first week of November, as near as I can remember. I was only there a very short time when the Armistice was declared on the 11th of November.

Joining the Army of Occupation

A number of us got away from the convalescent hospital a lot sooner than we should have as we were told that anybody that could get by the doctor, if their unit was going to go into Germany in the Army of Occupation, they could go — that the unit had sent word for their former members to rejoin them if they were able to. So of course a number of us whose units were going in the Army of Occupation, we talked nice to the doctor and he let us out.

When we arrived down at the reinforcement depot at Whitley, we found out it was just another one of these stories that no one knew who started them or where they came from. So it was about 25 of us in the unit who were very disappointed and not in very good humour.

To Wales instead

But anyway, I went to the artillery reinforcement unit and from there to a camp up at Rhyll in Wales where the Canadian troops were gathered together to proceed home. They were mostly all, like myself, battle casualties, although there was one unit of forestry and quite a large number of conscripts who had arrived from Canada and they were there awaiting going back.

Home again

We finally got away from Rhyll late in February and sailed from Liverpool for Halifax [*SS Carmania*]. It was an uneventful trip back. I got to Halifax and from there entrained and went right through to Fredericton where I eventually got my discharge on the 4th day of March, 1919.

I immediately returned to my home, and visited family and friends around the home area: my brother and his wife in Saint John, brother Walter. Then my youngest brother, Bill, went with me to a place called Moore's Mills in Honeydale in Charlotte County to see my sister Rose and her husband and two children.

I left with my father for a trip to the U.S.A. to visit my two half sisters, Soretta and her family in Hartford, Connecticut and Rachel and her husband in South Deerfield, Massachusetts. Then we returned home. A few days later, I had a job and went to work.

[The next sections are collected from various parts of the tape]

Saint John hospitality

The fact that almost half of our battery was from the city of Saint John, or right around it, seemed to work out awfully good for our whole battery because the city of Saint John used us in a wonderful way all the time we were stationed in Partridge Island and over on the West side.

In fact, the city of Saint John gave us a grant of money before we left which the commanding officer was to have at his disposal to buy things, from time to time, if they were available, for our comfort or convenience — whichever you're a mind to call it.

We didn't have to spend all of it, we still had some of it when we returned to Canada and put it in a special bank account. It has since financed flowers for different ones, each one of the battery who has passed on since then. It also helped out the odd fellow who ran into hard times financially since the war.

We finally closed it out last year, and turned the balance of it over to the Ladies Auxiliary of the Saint John branch of the Royal Canadian Legion who've been host to the remaining members of our battery who were able to get to our last three reunions. The Ladies Auxiliary has served the supper.

We only had four members able to be there at our reunion last September [late 1970s]. There were four or five others that we knew of who either had illness or illness in the family or, for some other reason, weren't able to get there. We four decided that we would have a dinner together each autumn or maybe a little earlier in the summer as long as we were able to get together. Dodge Rankine, Bill Wright, Frank Wilson, and myself were the four who gathered last September.

Meeting George and Jean Gamblin in England

My brother George's wife, Jean, was in England months before I arrived there. When George came over for leave in the spring of 1916, he came to the camp at Horsham. Major Barker gave me a few days leave so I could have some time with him while he was on leave from the front. We had a very pleasant few days together in London and down at Folkestone where Jean was living at that time. Of course, I saw her again when I came over on leave from France in October of 1917.

Then in 1918, when I was in hospital in London, she visited me, but before I got out of hospital Jean had returned to Canada. When I had my leave on coming out of hospital, when I arrived at the place she had been living, she had left a week or 10 days previously to go home.

Anna Pearl Gamblin, RN

When I was on leave with George, I also met my cousin Anna Gamblin from Sussex, who was a nurse with the Canadians. She was then in a Canadian hospital, I think they called it "Ross Merrick's Hospital". I remember the first words she spoke to me when George introduced me to her down at Folkestone.

She just looked at me. I suppose I looked rather young, and she said, "You ought to be spanked!" Of course, I didn't agree with her.

I met her again when I came over in the fall of 1917 on leave. She was in a Canadian hospital in another part of England. The name of the hospital, for the moment, I can't recall. [Harold may be referring to Basingstoke, where Anna also served. After initially joining the Harvard Unit and treating casualties in France, in 1916 Anna became a Nursing Sister in the Canadian Army. She served in Salonika/Thessaloniki and England].

Murray and Seymour Gamblin

Our cousin Murray I met when I came out of hospital and was on my way home. Murray was at the 13th Infantry Reserve at Camp Whitley and I looked him up and made his acquaintance. His home also was in Sussex.

He was a brother to Anna that I just referred to, and their brother Seymour was killed in the Battle of the Somme in 1918. He was a machine-gunner with one of our Western battalions — the 44th, I think it was. [CWGC listing for Seymour is as follows: Service Number 883286, Died 10/08/1918, Aged 33, 50th Bn. Canadian Infantry, Son of Duncan C. and Margaret Gamblin, of Sussex, New Brunswick]

In the opening battle on the 8th of August, they put a number of our infantry machine-gunners in the tanks which were being used for the first time on a large scale. The tank that Seymour was in happened to get a direct hit from a German shell and put out of action and burned, and the crew and the machine-gunners that had been added to it were all killed.

The Casualty

There are many memories that one could record, some of them are very, very sad and some are a bit funny. I remember one rather humorous thing — though things were deadly serious at the time.

It was after the German breakthrough in March 1918 and we were in a rather hot place, but things had cooled down some and we were taking shelter and expecting to get some sleep in this old shed affair that had been rigged up for troops at one time. It had some bunks with chicken wire for a mattress and we just got settled down nicely when the Germans started shelling.

One of the shells hit this shed. It wounded several of us — I was one of the lucky ones that didn't get hit. One chap started calling out for help, for help. He was hurt bad, and bad. We eventually reached him to tie him up and then we had a real good laugh.

We had the other boys all looked after, he was the final one to be checked and here he wasn't hurt at all, although his face looked very much as if it was all covered with blood. We discovered what had happened. There was a can of jam on a little shelf at the foot of his bunk. Quite a piece of shell had hit that can of jam and splattered it, and a big part of it had landed right fair in his face. It was plum jam — anyway it was red, looked like blood and he stuck his hand up to his face after something hit it and saw his hand and decided he was wounded. We all had quite a laugh at him right there.

It was one of those laughs when you're under heavy tension that just isn't a laugh — but still it's a noise. He was quite happy when he discovered that things weren't what he thought they were.

Captain Shore

A day or two after that our Padre, Captain Shore, who looked old enough that he shouldn't have been there in the first place, he got quite severely wounded and we were very sorry to see him go because he was well-liked throughout the unit.

England – Hospitality and strange ideas about Canada

After we arrived in England, we really didn't have very much contact with civilians until we reached the Siege training camp just outside the town of Horsham. There we did meet many of them and we were invited, small groups of us, to different parties — lawn parties and so on — and we were most hospitably received and used. It was wonderful the way the so-called "reserved" English people could be so hospitable and friendly to such utter strangers, as we were.

Most of them had a very, very sketchy idea about Canada and about Canadians. We got some quite weird questions asked us at different entertainments or parties we were at. I remember one middle-aged lady, certainly a well-educated one, and one of the questions that she asked me, in all seriousness — or apparently so — was "What clothing, if any, do you Canadians wear in the winter time?"

She had asked me several questions before that were quite in order, but this one surprised me to such an extent that I gave her an answer that certainly wasn't anyways near the truth. I told her that when we could get them, we used animal skins to cover us in the winter and keep us warm — that they did a pretty good job. She wanted to know about summer and I told her that well, in the summer time we didn't wear very much of anything. In fact, the first suit I ever owned was after I joined the army.

So, you see, I didn't always stick to the truth. I got what I considered to be a rather silly question and thought that maybe she was trying to pull my leg.

Civilians in France

In France, we did not get much contact at all with the civilian people. It was only on the occasional move from one front to the other that we were far enough behind the line that we would be meeting civilians at all, and then it would only be where we would happen to be camping for the night.

Horses

The first horse I had after joining my brother was called Bunt. He was a very good-dispositioned horse, nice to ride — although he had a very rough trot — and a very fine-looking horse. After the Battle of Vimy Ridge, I got a new one in the remounts that I named Darkie. He was coal-black all over, and was a little hard to handle until I got acquainted with him and eventually he became almost a pet, even though he was very "high-lifed" and had a mind of his own.

Made me think of a horse I had later in civil life that I called Victor. He was okay as long as you used him, as I used to say, man-to-man. That was the same way with Darkie that I had in France. He was a wonderful horse. You couldn't tire him out — or at least I never had him get tired — and I put him through some pretty long hours and rough times.

I still had Darkie when I transferred from my brother's unit in 1918 to the 16th Canadian Field Battery, whose hometown was Guelph, Ontario. During the period I was with the 16th Battery, I was continuously at the guns and so never had any one particular saddle horse allotted to me. When we moved, I was given a horse and when we got into our next position, I was with the guns and didn't need him. So I never even had a chance to get acquainted with any other army horse after I left Darkie behind me when I transferred to the 16th Battery.



Watering Canadian Artillery horses at the Front

My brother, George, had a very good riding mare called Dolly. She was Arabian with a colour we would call strawberry roan with a black mane and tail. She was a beautiful mare and very easy-gaited and wonderfully smooth to ride. She was deathly scared of any kind of shellfire, or even rifle or machine gun fire. In places where that was happening, you couldn't trust her as to what she would do. She was capable of some very wicked bucking and could dislodge most anybody, but I never knew of her trying to buck George off.

He loaned her to an officer going out one night on an ammunition detail and they came under heavy shellfire and Dolly lost her head and she bucked this chap off right by a brick wall. She broke enough of his bones that he went to hospital and I don't know whether he ever got back to France again or not.

She was stolen from him in 1916 and about a year later she was found, and he got her back. It was something he was very, very happy about. He had taken her to France in September 1915, and he still had her after he came out of Germany after being on the Army of Occupation. They were leaving all the horses behind in Belgium before they came back to England and on home.

I was happy to learn that Darkie had survived and was still with his unit, although I didn't think much of him having to end up his days in the hands of the Belgians. What I saw of both the Belgians and the French, their treatment of horses – especially of their work horses – left a lot to be expected.

Editor's notes

1. The foregoing is a transcription of an audiocassette Harold made for his daughter Myrtle in the late 1970s, edited by Evan Gamblin in Nov 2001 and 2018.
2. This material is copyright ©2001 Evan Gamblin & Myrtle Bannister. Unauthorized reproduction in any form without prior permission is prohibited.
3. The transcript was edited mainly to rearrange it in chronological order, with section headings added.
4. The place names Harold mentions were readily identifiable from the Michelin maps # 4059 – *Nord* and #4062 – *Pas de Calais*.
5. Explanatory notes are included within square brackets.
6. For some insight into what Harold meant when he said “some memories are very, very sad”, see:

“*Undertones of War*” - Edmund Blunden

http://fargo.itp.tsoa.nyu.edu/~klein/somme/texts/blunden_1928.html [note that the document name is “blunden_1928.html”]

During the Battle of the Somme, Blunden served in, and describes many of the towns and villages Harold names. Blunden also mentions seeing a heavy howitzer in action near Maily-Maillet.

7. The drawings are the work of Fred A. Farrell, a war artist with the Scottish 51st Highland Div. His work can be found at: http://raven.cc.ukans.edu/~kansite/ww_one/docs/51st/51st1.htm
8. No. 4 Siege Battery, Canadian Garrison Artillery, Canadian Expeditionary Force was formed at Saint John, NB, primarily from personnel of the 1st and 3rd Regiments on 10 October 1915. Most of the personnel joined during the period 18 October 1915 to 17 November 1915. The battery embarked from Halifax, NS on the SS *Olympic* on 1 April 1916. It was redesignated as the 131st (Cdn) Siege Battery on 7 May 1916 at Horsham, England. It went to France on 30 July 1916, armed with four 8-in Howitzers and joined the 1st Heavy Artillery Group (HAG) on 3 August 1916. It transferred to the 16th HAG on 15 August 1916; to the 63rd HAG on 2 December 1916; and to the 53rd HAG on 26 January 1917.

On 29 Jan 1917 it was redesignated as the 4th Canadian Siege Battery. The battery transferred to the 41st HAG on 13 February 1917 and to the “Nieppe” Group in IX Corps Heavy Artillery on 14 February 1917. The Right Section of the Battery transferred to the Canadian Corps Heavy Artillery on 24 February 1917 and to the 30th HAG on 19 March 1917. The Left Section of the Battery transferred to the 84th HAG on 24 February 1917 and to the 30th HAG on 30 March 1917. The complete battery joined the 2nd Canadian HAG on 14 May 1917 and then transferred to the 42nd HAG on 28 October 1917; to the 89th HAG on 7 November 1917; and to the 16th HAG on 13 December 1917. On 20 December 1917 it transferred to the 2nd Canadian HAG where it remained for the rest of the war. On 2 February 1918 the battery was made up to six 8-in Howitzers. It was demobilized at Saint John, NB in May 1919. [Source: Richard Flory].