

Our Brick Wall – Battle of Vimy Ridge or Battle of Arras

The story of Brian Allan Cassidy

Brian Cassidy – www.cassidys.ca

This article is based on research by Brian Cassidy and Paul Cassidy. Note that there is some question as to the spelling of Brian Allan Cassidy's middle name. In the military documents, Brian consistently signed his name Brian Alan but in official military records, it is spelled Brian Allan. Throughout this document we have chosen to use the spelling Brian Allan to be consistent with his military records. An official birth certificate could not be located.

We've all been there – your research is going great and suddenly you can't proceed further due to missing information. To make matters worse, there is no obvious way forward. Such was the problem I encountered while researching a branch of my family: *The Cassidys of Cassidy Lake*¹.

In the early 1890s several Cassidy families relocated from St. Martins, New Brunswick to the west coast. We speculate that the move was necessitated with the demise of the ship building industry in New Brunswick in the late 1800s. By this time the railroad was now completed from coast to coast in Canada making such migrations much easier than in the past. The first passenger trains arrived in British Columbia in 1886.

The family of particular interest to this story is that of Edwin and Ella (Laskey) Cassidy who were married October 1890 in Saint John. We believe that very soon after marriage they departed St Martins for the west but details beyond that are skimpy. The Family Search website shows Edwin and Ella had a daughter Vara Grace born October 1891 in Coupeville, Washington. There was another reference to this family in the 1911 Canadian Census showing the family living in Vancouver with daughter Vara and son Brian, born January 1895 in B.C. Having the same first name as mine, I was inspired to find out more about him which turned out to be a very difficult and most interesting task that took me on an unexpected journey.

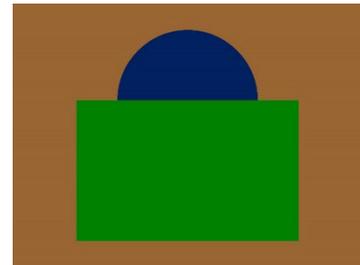
Since the 1911 census showed Brian as being born in B.C., we can assume that the family moved from U.S. to Canada between 1892 and 1894. We do not know Edwin's type of employment in Washington State or the reason for moving to Canada. The 1911 census shows Edwin's trade as grocer and the family address was 677 Harris, Vancouver. The family could not be found in the 1901 census but we assume that they were living in or near Vancouver at that time since Brian was born in B.C. in 1895. Other family members including Edwin's brother Herbert, who like Edwin relocated from St Martins, were in both the 1901 and 1911 census for Vancouver. Some of the 1901 census records were lost according to Library and Archives Canada and that may explain why Edwin's family cannot be found in that census.



Ella Laskey
1868-1966
Photo c1890

No other reference to Brian could be found in any census or vital records beyond that provided by Family Search. The search for more information about Brian was looking like a dead-end story until I decided to try and locate him on the Find a Grave website and a promising lead immediately popped up. The entry “Pvt Brian Allan Cassidy” had the correct birth date of January 20, 1895 so this lead was very promising. The place of burial was Lapugnoy Military Cemetery in France. The date of death was shown as April 14, 1917. Since this was obviously a soldier in the Canadian Military, I located his WW1 service record at Library and Archives Canada. Such records are a gold mine of information for genealogists as you will find vital statistics in addition to the complete military service history including health and pay records and other service details. Brian’s military record also included a will (Appendix 1) in his own handwriting in which he left all his worldly possessions to his mother Ella.

Brian Allan Cassidy signed up for the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force by way of the 72nd Battalion Canadian Infantry² on October 7, 1915 in Vancouver. He was just 20 years old. He was rather short in stature at 5 ft. 5-1/2 inches and weighed 141 pounds, in good health and with a scar on his left hand. His occupation was bank clerk. The 72nd Battalion set sail from Halifax for England in April 1916. Brian’s service record indicates that the Battalion proceeded for *service overseas* Aug 12, 1916 and disembarked at Havre, France the next day (Appendix 4). The next entry in his service log was quite a few months later and noted that he was treated for influenza on March 23, 1917 and returned to duty on April 4th. Only 6 days later on April 10 we have the ominous entry *Dangerously Wounded*. The log further notes that he was treated at the No. 23 Casualty Clearing Station. Brian *died of wounds received in action* 4 days later on April 14.



72nd Battalion Patch²

Since the Lapugnoy Military Cemetery is close to Vimy and Brian was wounded on April 10, 1917, I immediately assumed that he took part in the Battle of Vimy Ridge. However, after reading more about the history of this cemetery, I learned that the majority of soldiers who were treated at the No. 23 Casualty Clearing Station and buried at Lapugnoy had taken part in the Battle of Arras. Since the Battle of Arras (April 9 – May 16) and the Battle of Vimy Ridge (April 9-12) had occurred at the same time, there was now serious doubt as to the battle in which Brian had participated. Since he was treated at the No. 23 Casualty Clearing Station, I thought it most likely that he had been wounded in the Battle of Arras but that was just a guess. I saw no way to resolve this question at the time.

Some time later, I related this story to my cousin Paul Cassidy who is also an avid family historian especially when it comes to persons in the military. Paul is the creator of Camp Cassidy which is a Wellness Centre and Outdoor Recreational Facility for Canada’s Military and First Responder Families in the Atlantic Provinces. Camp Cassidy (campcassidy.ca) is located in a scenic rural New Brunswick area adjacent to Cassidy Lake near Sussex, N.B. It has several hiking trails and in June of this year two bridges were dedicated in memory of two Canadian war heroes, one of whom fought in both World Wars.

I wanted to be sure that Paul was aware of Brian Allan Cassidy’s participation in WW1 and my apparent brick wall. The most recent common ancestor (MRCA) that connects the three of us is William Cassidy (1797-1886) who emigrated from Ireland to New Brunswick in 1819. Paul immediately dove into researching this story and eventually found the War Diary for the 72nd Battalion (Appendix 2). I was aware that records of war activities were kept but was not aware that WW1 war diaries were searchable online at Library and Archives Canada.

The War Diary for the 72nd Battalion notes that it was engaged in the Vimy Ridge conflict for the duration of that battle (April 9-12) and did not advance to the Lens/Arras area until April 13. Since Brian's wounds were suffered on April 10, it had to be in the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Private Brian Allan Cassidy is not listed among the 3598 casualties in the Government of Canada Vimy Casualty List and we believe that is because he did not die until two days after the conflict. As for the accuracy of this diary, we think it is safe to say that the Vimy battle was of such importance to the Battalion (the first time they fought under unified command with the other Canadian divisions) that the diary writers would have been very careful to be accurate about those events and the Battalion's movements; thus we are confident in declaring that Vimy Ridge was the battle in which Brian participated – brick wall gone! In the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the 72nd Battalion fought as part of the 12th Infantry Brigade in the 4th Canadian Division. In the map in Appendix 3, you can find the specific area where the 72nd Battalion was located.

As with any genealogical research there are almost always new questions that arise from the discovery of new material. Most nagging is the missing 1901 census data for the family of Edwin Cassidy. Is it just lost records or did the family migrate to some other place outside Canada? Another mystery is the lack of British Columbia vital records for this family. While I have always been interested in history and war conflicts such as the two World Wars and the American Civil War, the discovery of an ancestor that died in WW1 at Vimy brought a renewed interest in that conflict in particular.

I also wonder what motivated young Canadian men to enlist for the Overseas Expeditionary Force. From the outset of the war in July 1914 until September 1917 when the Canadian Government started conscription by passing the Military Services Act, military service was optional; so Brian Allan Cassidy was under no obligation to serve his country in The Great War conflict. Why did he join? Was it a sense of duty? Was he seeking adventure? Was it for better pay? He was employed as a bank clerk which should have been sufficient income for a young and single person. We will never know the answer to those questions but it does seem right that we study such conflicts and pause annually to remember those Canadian heroes who gave their lives so that we might have a better future.

Appendix 1 – Private Brian Allan Cassidy – Military Will

- 20 -

Perforated sheet for Will from Pay Book of Reg.
No. 129937
Name Brian Alan Cassidy
Unit 72nd Battalion (Canadian)

Military Will.

In the event of my death,
I give the whole of my
property and personal effects
to my mother, Mrs. Ella
E. Cassidy, 827 Sutherland
Ave., North Vancouver, B.C.,
Canada.

Signature Brian Alan Cassidy
Rank and Regt. Private # 129937,
Date 72nd Battalion (Canadian) 22/1/1946 A.D.

Appendix 2 – War Diary – 72nd Battalion – April 1917 – Image and Transcription

WAR DIARY		ORIGINAL		Army Form C. 2118.
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY		(Erase heading not required.)		Vol 22
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
Fisc 88	1-4-17		Batteries registering hostile artillery quiet. Nothing to report	PMS
-	2-4-17		Orders received that Canadian Corps will attack Vimy ridge on 7 day. Batteries started preliminary bombardment according to orders from 1 st Canadian D.A. firing on an average 1000 Rds in 24 hours	PMS
-	3-4-17		Bombardment continues now including daily bombardment of THÉLUS.	PMS
-	4-4-17		Orders received that the German wire is not properly cut. A.R.C. turned on to wire cutting	
-	5-4-17		results good as only 5 hours were allowed.	
-	6-4-17		Bombardment continues. 7 day fixed for 8 th 4-17.	
-	7-4-17		7 day postponed 24 hours. Batteries (16/pts) continue wire cutting and bombardment.	PMS
-	8-4-17		Bombardment (and wire cutting up to 12 noon) continued.	
-	9-4-17		Zero hour having been fixed for 5:30 am, all firing was stopped at 3 am for the Brigade. At Zero all Batteries opened a creeping barrage starting on the enemy front line covering 3 rd Canadian J Bde. First two objectives were taken according to programme. All batteries turned onto standing barrages. The whole attack was successful and all objectives of 3 rd C.R. Bde were taken also all important high ground on Canadian Corps front. Two N.C.O. in the bde were wounded. Infantry casualties light. THÉLUS Village was taken without opposition. D72 was kept very busy all day first with neutralizing hostile batteries then on standing barrages.	PMS
-	10-4-17		Brigade did not move forward on 9 th still in position road forward very bad.	PMS
-	11-4-17		Col JW Stirling CMG now Brig Gen gone to command 59 th DA.	
A 10 D	12-4-17		Bde move forward to Lens-ARRAS Rd Lt Col Richey RGA arrives to Command wounded.	PMS
-	13-4-17		All in action. Enemy out of range.	
-	14-4-17		C72 & D72 move forward near THÉLUS	PMS
-	15-4-17		Nothing to report	

Transcription by Brian Cassidy

72nd Battalion Canadian Infantry War Diary – April 1917 – Vimy, France

9-4-17 Zero hour having been fixed for 5:30 am all firing was stopped at 3 am for the Brigade. At Zero all 4 Batteries opened a creeping barrage starting onto enemy front line covering 3rd Canadian J Bde. First two objectives were taken according to programme. All batteries turned onto standing barrages. The whole attack was successful and all objectives of 3rd C R Bde were taken also all important high ground on Canadian Corps front. Two N.C.O. in the bde were wounded. Infantry casualties light. Thélus Village was taken without opposition. D72 was kept very busy all day first with neutralizing hostile batteries then on standing barrages.

10-4-17 Brigade did not move forward on 9th. Still in position road forward very bad

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12-4-17 Ditto. Col JW Stirling CMG now Brig Gen gone to command 59th DA

13-4-17 Bde move forward to LENS-ARRAS Rd Lt Col Richey RGA arrives to Command / ACO wounded.

14-4-17 All in action. Enemy out of range.

15-4-17 C72 & D72 move forward near Thélus.

Appendix 4 – Private Brian Allan Cassidy – Overseas Military Service

R-122

Rank Name **CASSIDY, Brian Allan.** Reg'l No. **129937**

Unit **72nd. Bn.** If in perm. Corps, }
What Unit? } Married or Single **Single.**

Place and Date of Enlistment **Oct. 7th. 1915.** Place of Birth **Vancouver, B.C.**

Name and Address, Next-of-Kin **Edwin V. Cassidy.**

827, Sutherland, North Vancouver, B.C. Can. Relationship **Father.**

Assigned Pay Monthly \$ Payable to Relationship **M**

Separation Allowance \$ Payable to Relationship

Discharge, Date and Place Reason Character

N/E. R.B. No. **2962**

File R.L. **2562819/15/17.**

Category **D.W.**

Report.		Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place.	Date.	REMARKS. Taken from Official Documents.
Date.	From whom received.				
		<i>Arrived in England</i>		<i>7 MAY 1916</i>	A.F.B. 103 CHECKED <i>22 AUG 1916</i> <i>Empress of Britain</i>
#11 8-16	72nd.	Embarked For France	Pramshott	12-8-16	Part 2 D. O. 215
<i>11.4.17</i>	"	<i>Adm 12th Can Hd Amb.</i>	<i>Field</i>	<i>23.3.17</i>	<i>CHA 176. Influenza</i>
<i>23-4-17</i>	"	<i>Returned to duty</i>	"	<i>4-4-17</i>	<i>C.Z.A. 186</i>
<i>13.4.17</i>	"	<i>Dangerously Wounded. No 23 Cas Cly Sta</i>	"	<i>10.4.17</i>	<i>CHA 178. Wounded O. m 1683</i>
<i>20.4.17</i>	"	<i>Prev reptd Dangerously Wounded. now reptd. Died of Wounds</i>	"	<i>14.4.17</i>	<i>CHA 184. Not Stated m 2283</i>
<i>17.4.17</i>	"	<i>Died of Wounds recd. in Action</i>	"	<i>14.4.17</i>	<i>Part II O 38.</i>

¹ The Cassidys of Cassidy Lake, *Generations* – Spring 2017, page 3

² 72nd Battalion Patch by Kprtqr06 at English Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=33902721>