

HILL 70

Signals Story

Signals at Hill 70

Canadian signals personnel successfully supported operations at Hill 70 in much the same way as had been done at Vimy Ridge. Multiple signal systems and techniques were prepared as part of the attack to ensure that accurate messages were passed in the case that any one method failed. During the assault, linemen followed close to the attacking infantry, establishing telephone links and repairing any breaks in the line. Operators worked tirelessly at their posts, relaying messages back to command. Despatch runners and riders courageously delivered messages under heavy enemy fire. During the battle, new techniques were explored which would cement the increasingly important role that wireless technology would play in warfare.

By July of 1917 wireless detachments had established communications links between the Canadian corps and its divisions. These detachments employed "Continuous Wave (CW) wireless sets which used vacuum tubes which were far more reliable and more powerful than the spark gap wireless sets previously utilized. For the actual attacks on August 15th, wireless sets were moved forward as the Canadian units advanced. They were particularly useful as telephone cables were frequently damaged.

Crucially, wireless was used by the Canadians to register heavy artillery fire at prearranged targets and to make corrections sent by forward observation officers (FOO).

After the Canadians took the top of Hill 70 they prepared for the inevitable German counter attack. On August 16 the Germans began the first of what would be 21 counter attacks on the Canadian positions. Wireless telegraphy played a key role in fending off the German attacks; wireless messages were sent by the artillery observers back to the batteries who brought a withering barrage down upon the attacking enemy troops.

Special sections were established to monitor German communications at Hill 70. Monitoring groups using Intercept telephone and wireless reception sets were employed to discover the location of German artillery batteries and anticipate counterattacks.



Canadian in captured trenches on Hill 70 August 1917
MIKAN 3395589

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Decorations for Valour

Signalman Thomas Wallace Aikins

Signalman Thomas Wallace Aikins was born in Toronto, Ontario on September 23rd, 1894. He worked as a hay manager at the Union Stock Yards before enlisting on May 8th, 1916 in Kingston, Ontario. He served with the 3rd Canadian Division when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Sig. Aikins was awarded the Military Medal for his devotion to duty while repairing the lines during the battle. Read his full citation below:

"For conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. In the attack on Aug: 15th 1917, Signaller Aikins acted as linesman. The lines from the old front line forward were broken time and time again, but in spite of the apparent hopelessness of the task, he worked at repairing the with entire disregard of danger, and dogged determination, under heavy shelling, machine gun and rifle fire. His admirable work assisted in establishing communication from time to time, and provided a means for sending messages of the utmost importance to Artillery control, thereby contributing towards the success of the operation on this part of the front. "

Signalman Harold Lancelot Abbott

Signalman Harold Lancelot Abbott was born in Brighton, England on May 28th, 1893. He worked as a rodman before enlisting on November 9th, 1914 in Victoria, British Columbia. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. He worked for 20 hours straight as Signal Superintendent and endured a great deal of mental strain. For this, Sig. Abbott was awarded the Military Medal. Read his full citation below;

"On August 15th, 1917, [Signalman] Abbott set a splendid example of endurance under great mental strain when he worked continuously for twenty hours as Signal Superintendent and Operator owing to the heavy pressure of work in the Brigade Signal Office, under heavy shelling and gas barrage."

Signalman George Allen

Signalman George Allen was born on November 8th, 1893 in Caronfore, India. He worked as a locomotive fireman before enlisting on September 21st, 1914 in Valcartier, Quebec. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Sig. Allen was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry while laying telephone wires through the enemy barrage. Read his full citation below:

"For conspicuous gallantry on Aug: 15th 1917. He laid telephone wires forward through the enemy barrage. During the next three days he continually repaired wires under heavy shelling, setting a splendid example and showing a total disregard for danger."

L/Corporal Harold William Bagg

Lance Corporal Harold William Bagg was born on December 19th, 1892 in Wymouth Dorest, England. He worked as a clerk before enlisting on July 10th, 1915 in Montreal, Quebec. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. L/Cpl Bagg was awarded the Military Medal for maintaining communication through a heavily shelled trench. Read his full citation below:

"L/Corporal was in charge of a relay station of 4 men from the 14th to 17th of August, 1917, keeping up a line through a bad section of trench, on which the enemy put a frequent barrage, and where there were many casualties, and although it was frequently broken, this Brigade was seldom out of communication for long with L.O., owing to L/Corporal Bagg's energy and devotion to duty."

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Decorations for Valour

Signalman Lionel Jack Ballard

Signalman Lionel Jack Ballard was born on February 18th, 1897 in Chatham, Kent, England. He worked as an electrician before enlisting on February 8th, 1915 in Ottawa, Ontario. He served with the 2nd Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Sig. Ballard was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry and devotion to duty after being wounded in the first day of the attack and refusing to leave his post. Read his full citation below:

"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on August 15th-22nd 1917. [Sig], Ballard was in charge of the Brigade Linesmen and was wounded by shrapnel during the first day of the attack. He insisted on remaining on duty, however, although his wound had to be dressed daily. On account of heavy casualties among the Brigade Linesmen he carried on his work with inexperienced men and maintaining the lines with great difficulty under heavy and almost incessant shell fire. On the last day of the tour he was evacuated to hospital, much against his will, as poisoning had set in in arm and shoulder as a result of the wound."

Signalman Lynden Albert Butler

Signalman Lynden Albert Butler was born on July 12th, 1895 in London, Ontario. He worked as painter before enlisting on September 23rd, 1914 in Valcartier, Quebec. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Sig. Butler was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry while repairing line during the attack. Read his full citation below:

" For conspicuous gallantry on Aug: 15th 1917. He maintained communication with a forward O.P. which was continually under intense enemy fire. The wires were at times totally destroyed but he immediately laid new ones. His pluck and determination was splendid. He was seriously wounded."

Signalman William Francis Campbell

Signalman William Francis Campbell was born on December 6th, 1891 in Kirkcaldy, Scotland. He worked as machinist before enlisting on September 29th, 1914 in Rimouski, Quebec. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Sig. Campbell was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry while maintaining communication between the Brigade and the Batteries. Read his full citation below:

"For most conspicuous gallantry on 17/18th August, 1917 when for over six hours, during an S.O.S. and under heavy bombardment of H.E. and "mustard" gas shell, [Signalman] Campbell and 2/Cpl Glaysher maintained the lines from Brigade to Batteries and so enabled the Brigade Commander to use his guns to the best advantage."

Signalman John Garden Elsey

Signalman John Garden Elsey was born on October 26th, 1893 in Carman, Manitoba. He was a law student when he enlisted on July 29th, 1915 at Portage La Prairie, Manitoba. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Sig. Elsey was awarded the Military Medal for devotion to duty while operating a telephone exchange for sixty out of seven-two hours. Read his full citation below:

"For consistent good work and devotion to duty. On August 15th to 18th 1917, during active operations he operated a telephone exchange for sixty hours out of 72 hours. His pluck and determination set a splendid example."

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Decorations for Valour

Corporal George Washington Gardiner

Corporal George Washington Gardiner was born on July 28th, 1896 in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. He was a student when he enlisted on September 23rd, 1914 at Valcartier, Que. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Cpl. Gardiner was awarded the Bar for the Military Medal for gallantry under trying conditions while severely injured. Read his full citation below:

"From the night of Aug:17/18th 1917, to the night AUG:20/21st 1917, this N.C.O. was in charge of PTO the right forward report centre. He was responsible for communications. On several occasions it was necessary for him to repair lines in exposed positions and under heavy gas-shell bombardment he continued to repair the lines and keep the Station working properly although suffering severely from gas poisoning; he continued to carry on until the Bde was relieved. His gallantry under trying conditions was of high order."

2/Cpl Charles Glaysher

2/Cpl Charles Glaysher was born on April 6th, 1888 in Farnham, Surrey, England under the name Harry Charles Wright. He worked as a brakesman before enlisting on September 24th, 1914 in Valcartier, Que. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Cpl Glaysher was awarded the Military Medal for maintaining the line during heavy bombardment. Read his full citation below:

"For most conspicuous gallantry on 17/18th August, 1917 when for over six hours, during an S.O.S. and under heavy bombardment of H.E. and "mustard" gas shell, 2/Cpl.Glaysher and [Signalman] Campbell maintained the lines from brigade to Batteries and so enabled the Brigade Commander to use his guns to the best advantage."

Signalman Thomas Innes

Signalman Thomas Innes was born on March 2nd, 1892 in Easipave, England. He worked as a clerk before enlisting on August 9th, 1915 in Vernon, British Columbia. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Sig. Innes was awarded the Military Medal for courage under fire for repairing cut lines. Read his full citation below:

"On Aug: 15th, 16th and 17th 1917, [Signalman] Innes displayed exceptional courage in repeatedly repairing overland telephone cables cut by enemy shell fire. He was gassed on the night of Aug:17th/18th, while mending lines during a heavy enemy bombardment with gas shells."

Private Ivo Daniel McNaughton

Private Ivo Daniel McNaughton was born on May 31st, 1893 in Campbellford, Ontario. He worked as a baker before enlisting on September 23rd, 1914 at Valcartier, Que. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Pte. McNaughton was awarded the Military Medal for most conspicuous gallantry while establishing communication with an advance station. Read his full citation below:

"For most conspicuous gallantry on the 15th Aug: 1917. He went forward with the attack and established communication with an advanced station. He continued during consequent enemy counter attacks to repair telephone wires, which enabled valuable information to be sent through. His pluck, determination and total disregard to danger set a splendid example."

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Corporal Edgar Parsonage

Corporal Edgar Parsonage was born on March 28th March, 1890 in Liverpool, England. He worked as a constable before enlisting on November 26th, 1914 in Montreal, Que. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Cpl. Parsonage was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry and devotion to duty. Read his full citation below:

"For gallantry and devotion to duty. During the operations on 15th to 17th of August, 1917, Sergt. Parsonage was in charge of 1st Brigade, C.F.A. Signal Office and ran it with great skill, so that the service of particularly quick and efficient. He was on duty practically the whole time and on more than one occasion went out and mended lines under heavy shell fire and on one occasion under a particularly heavy gas barrage."

Signalman Thomas Cyril Selby

Signalman Thomas Cyril Selby was born on December 11th, 1893 in Toronto, Ontario. He worked as a clerk before enlisting on November 16th, 1915 in Toronto, Ontario. He served with the 3rd Division Signal Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Sig. Selby was awarded the Military Medal for distinguished and gallant conduct under heavy bombardment. Read his full citation below:

"For distinguished and gallant conduct. During the operations of the 15th, Aug: 1917, Spr. SELBY was employed as linesman. On the night previous to the attack he assisted to lay two different lines to this Battalion and keep communication all night and during the attack under very heavy shell-fire. During the operation the telephone which he carried was broken by a shell. He returned to Headquarters, procured a new phone and wire and laid a new one as the old one was badly broken and beyond repair. He was engaged on this task for twenty-four hours."

Signalman Reginald Sheard

Signalman Reginald Sheard was born on March 5th, 1897 in Cape Town, South Africa. He worked as a bank clerk when he enlisted on February 25th, 1915 in Ottawa, Ontario. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Sig. Sheard was awarded the Military Medal for courage and perseverance while laying line during the battle. Read his full citation below:

"On August 15th, 1917, A/L/Cpl Sheard set an example to the remainder of the linemen by his courage and perseverance in laying and repairing telephone lines to the attacking Battalions. This work was performed under very heavy shell fire."

Corporal Hugh Kennedy Wyman

Corporal Hugh Kennedy Wyman was born on October 5th, 1890 in Essex, Ontario. He worked as an electrical engineer before enlisting on March 16th, 1915 in Toronto, Ontario. He served with the Signals Service, Canadian Engineers when the Canadians were tasked with taking the high ground near the city of Lens, called Hill 70. Cpl. Wyman was awarded the Military Medal for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty while repairing broken line. Read his full citation below:

"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. This N.C.O. was in charge of the telephone communications, and although the line was continually being broken, this N.C.O., despite the exceptionally heavy shell-fire, immediately went out and repaired the breaks. During the day, it was necessary to lay four complete lines. When the fire became so intense that it was impossible to maintain the lines, this N.C.O. several time carried messages through the enemy barrages, and the great courage, coolness, and devotion to duty displayed by him, set an excellent example to the men under him."

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Measuring the Cost

Lance Corporal Alexander Cochrane

L/Cpl Alexander Cochrane was born on April 6th, 1885 in Dundee Forfarshire Scotland to Alexander and Isabella Cochrane. He worked as a teamster in Alberta before enlisting on November 12th, 1915. He served with the Canadian Headquarters Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking Hill 70 in August of 1917. L/Cpl Cochrane was killed in the line of duty on August 18th, 1917. He was 32 years old.

Private James Coffey

Pte. James Coffey was born on July 25th, 1878 in Stafford on Avon, England. He worked as a labourer in Alberta before enlisting on January 5th, 1916. He served with the Canadian Headquarters Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking Hill 70 in August of 1917. Pte. Coffey was killed in the line of duty on August 18th, 1917. He was 39 years old.

Sapper Hubert Samuel Dowson

Spr. Hubert Samuel Dowson was born on December 13th, 1891 in Perth, Ontario to Samuel and Margaret Dowson. He attended Victoria University and achieved academic honours before enlisting with the Canadian Engineers on May 23rd, 1916. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking Hill 70 in the summer of 1917. Spr. Dowson was killed by a shell while laying line on July 31st, 1917 in the lead up to the assault on the hill. He was 26 years old.

Sapper John Hamer Grendin

Spr. John Hamer Grendin was born on November 28th, 1890 in Bolton, Lancashire, England. He was married to Alice Ann Grendin and they had two children, Ruth and Thomas. The couple were separated at the time of his enlistment. He worked as a kitchen porter and before enlisting on September 16th, 1915 in Toronto. Spr. Grendin served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking Hill 70 in the summer of 1917. He was killed when a shell hit his outpost on August 17th, 1917 during the assault on the hill. He was 27 years old.

Sapper Harry John Hammond

Spr. Harry John Hammond was born on April 1st, 1894 in Donald, British Columbia. He worked as an electrical mechanic before enlisting on October 13th, 1915 in London, Ontario. Previously Spr. Hammond has served in the 1st Field Troop Canadian Engineers. He served in the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking Hill 70 in the summer of 1917. Spr. Hammond was killed in action on July 29th, 1917 in the lead up to the assault on the hill. He was 23 years old.

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Measuring the Cost

Sergeant Everard Willard McLellan

Sgt. Everard Willard McLellan was born on April 18th, 1896 in Louris, Prince Edward Island. He was a student and a member of a local militia when he enlisted on April 17th, 1916 in Charlottetown, PEI. He served with the 8th Seige Battery when the Canadians were tasked with taking Hill 70 in the summer of 1917. He died of his wounds after sustaining a gunshot wound to the head on July 27th, 1917 in the lead up to the assault on the hill. He was 21 years old.

Signalman Hubert Stamp

Signalman Hubert Stamp was born on August 26th, 1890 in Manotick, Ontario to John and Susannah Stamp. He worked as a liveryman until he enlisted on July 17th, 1915 in Calgary, Alberta. He served with the CHQ Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking Hill 70 in the summer of 1917. Sig. Stamp was killed in action on July 25th, 1917 in the lead up to the assault on the hill. He was 27 years old.

Signalman Austin Douglas Watterson

Signalman Austin Douglas Watterson was born on March 10th, 1891 to John and Jennie Watterson of Montreal, Quebec. He worked as a clerk and served three months in the 21st Battery before enlisting on February 12th, 1915 in Montreal. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking Hill 70 in the summer of 1917. Sig. Watterson was killed in action on July 31st, 1917 in the lead up to the assault on the hill. He was 26 years old.

Signalman Harold Worthington

Signalman Harold Worthington was born on September 27th, 1895 to Thomas and Elizabeth Worthington of Toronto. He worked as a bank clerk when he enlisted on March 20th, 1916 in Toronto, Ontario. He served with the 1st Division Signals Company when the Canadians were tasked with taking Hill 70 in the summer of 1917. Sig. Worthington was killed in action on July 31st, 1917 in the lead up to the assault on the hill. He was 22 years old.