

[Page 21 - Cape Bretoners in World War One](#)ISSUE : [Issue 33](#)

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Fr. Leo Sears: We got orders to return to Vimy, to the Ridge, to prepare for the Germans' last effort, which was very nearly successful. On the way out, we spent our Christmas--oh Lord, I've forgotten the name of the place--but we were billeted in a hay mow with chickens over our head, on the side of a canal. But our Christmas parcels had all come through, and we had a marvellous Christmas dinner, with lots of refreshments. (Would you have clergy with you?) No, we went to the church in the French village, half-ruined church, with daylight showing through the rafters. One of the Christmases I'll always remember. It was an old French priest, not a young one, who had the midnight Mass. Only old people there. And girls, and children. Christmas Day, in the evening, we were on the side of a canal--some way or other, some of the lads found bicycles in the village, and very happy, they started riding up and down the canal. (Religion had not left you?) It was very important. While we were waiting to get ready to go into our final position for the attack on Passchendaele, it was brought to our attention that there would be a Catholic chaplain at Ypres on a certain day. We got permission to go into Ypres this day, to get to confession. And we went there in the morning. We stayed there all day. There were crowds of Canadian soldiers, Canadian Catholics, waiting their turn to go to confession. And late that evening, the chaplain came out, and he said, "I'm sorry. I've been hearing all day, and I can hardly hear any longer. I'm dead beat." He gave us general absolution, which was a comfort, going into the line. You've often heard that expression that there are no atheists in a shellhole. It's perfectly true. It makes a difference. Anybody who had ever had any faith, experienced a revival of faith. (I would think of war as such a hardener.) It hardened. and it softened. It hardened to the experience of violence. It softened you to the extent of wondering how God could allow this violence to occur, and that the reason must be rebellion of man against God-- that God would leave mankind to find his way out of the situation for which he was responsible himself. And of course, the sense of camaraderie and loyalty to one's friends was out of this world. Especially in an outfit that was small enough where everybody knew everybody else. I was lucky in that respect. You see, the infantry, where casualties were so frequent, where replacements were so numerous, you were never sure of how long you would be with your friends. Although, after Vimy, the McGill outfit got reinforcements. They were all lumberjacks from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. And I remember, when we heard who were coming, I remember saying, "Are we going to have two camps in this outfit Serving Industrial Cape Breton and North Victoria Real Estate & Insurance • If you're thinking of selling your home, give us a call. Gerald Brennan, Mgr. Residence: 794-4564 "And remember: No sale, no charge." 794-3119 Hyland Restaurant Fully licensed and Motel Bake Shop Open year round to Cape Bretoners and their friends, offering good home cooking and seafood at its best. Inverness 258-3440 HOBBY HUT The Knitting & Craft Shop 204 Commercial St., North Sydney, N. S. Tel. 794-7774 •



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