

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

VALIANT MEN

TWO VICTORIA CROSS AWARDS

Two men born in the Matapedia Valley
are awarded the Victoria Cross for
heroism of the battlefield in World
War I.

KEN ANNETT

TWO VALIANT MEN-- VICTORIA CROSS AWARDSPREFACE

Few Gaspesians travelling the scenic route of the Matapedia Valley may be aware that along that way they will pass the birth-places of two men whose heroic deeds on the savage battlefields of the First World War (1914-1918) were honoured by the award of the Victoria Cross. Lest their names and deeds fade with the passing years, GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY wishes to recall the circumstances in which these sons of the Matapedia were honoured by the award of a decoration that is rare, unique and takes precedence over all other service medals and awards.

THE VICTORIA CROSS

The Victoria Cross came into being after the Crimean War when Queen Victoria decided that there should be a specific decoration for those who performed heroic deeds on the battlefield.

The decoration, presented traditionally by the Queen or King regnant, consists of a bronze cross having four nearly triangular arms with raised edges. The face of the cross has, in the centre, a lion 'passant, gardant' standing upon the Royal Crown, while below are the words 'FOR VALOUR' on a semicircular scroll. The reverse also has raised edges and the date of the act for which the Cross is awarded is engraved in a circle in the centre. The Cross is suspended by means of a plain link from a 'V' which is part of a clasp ornamented with laurel leaves through which the ribbon passes and on the back of the clasp is engraved the rank, name and unit of the recipient.

The ribbon, claret in colour, is uniform for recipients from all branches of the service.

Awarded for 'conspicuous bravery or devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy' the decoration is the highest military award and takes precedence over all others.



VICTORIA CROSS



JOSEPH KAEBLE

22nd Canadian Infantry Battalion

Joseph Kaeble was born in St Moïse, Quebec, on the 5th of May 1893. He was educated in the village school at Sayabec, Quebec, but left school at the age of seventeen to engage in lumbering operations. He enlisted on the 15th of March 1915, with the 189th Battalion from the Lower St Lawrence, later being posted to the 22nd Battalion with which he served nearly two years. The action described in the citation occurred on the night of the 8th/9th of June 1918, at Neuville-Vitasse, France. Kaeble had earlier won a Military Medal. Corporal Kaeble is buried in Wanquetin Communal Cemetery Extension, seven miles west of Arras, France.

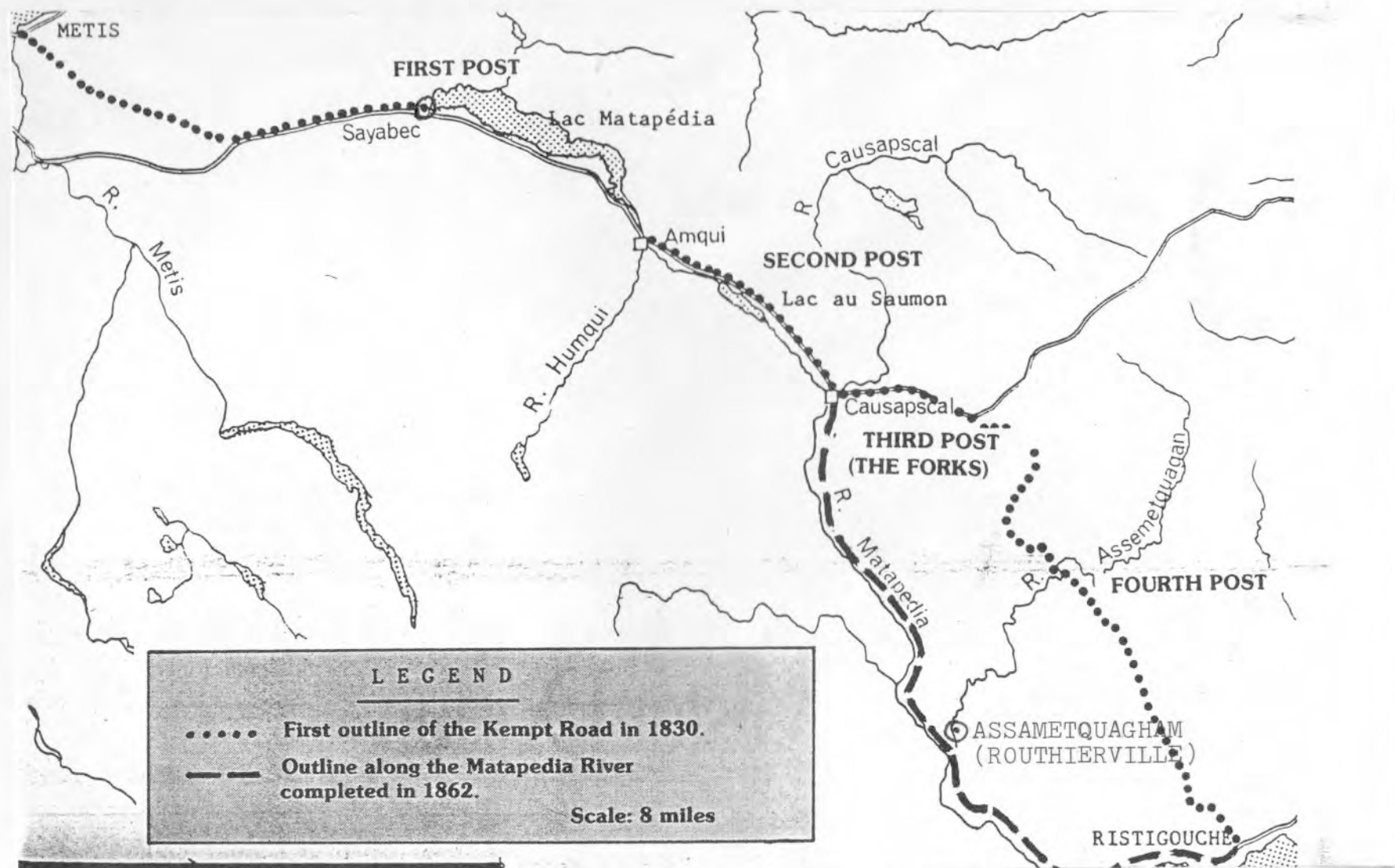
'For most conspicuous bravery and extraordinary devotion to duty when in charge of a Lewis gun section in the front line trenches, on which a strong enemy raid was attempted.

During an intense bombardment Corp. Kaebler remained at the parapet with his Lewis gun shouldered ready for action, the field of fire being very short. As soon as the barrage lifted from the front line, about fifty of the enemy advanced towards his post. By this time the whole of his section except one had become casualties. Corp. Kaebler jumped over the parapet, and holding his Lewis gun at the hip, emptied one magazine after another into the advancing enemy, and although wounded several times by fragments

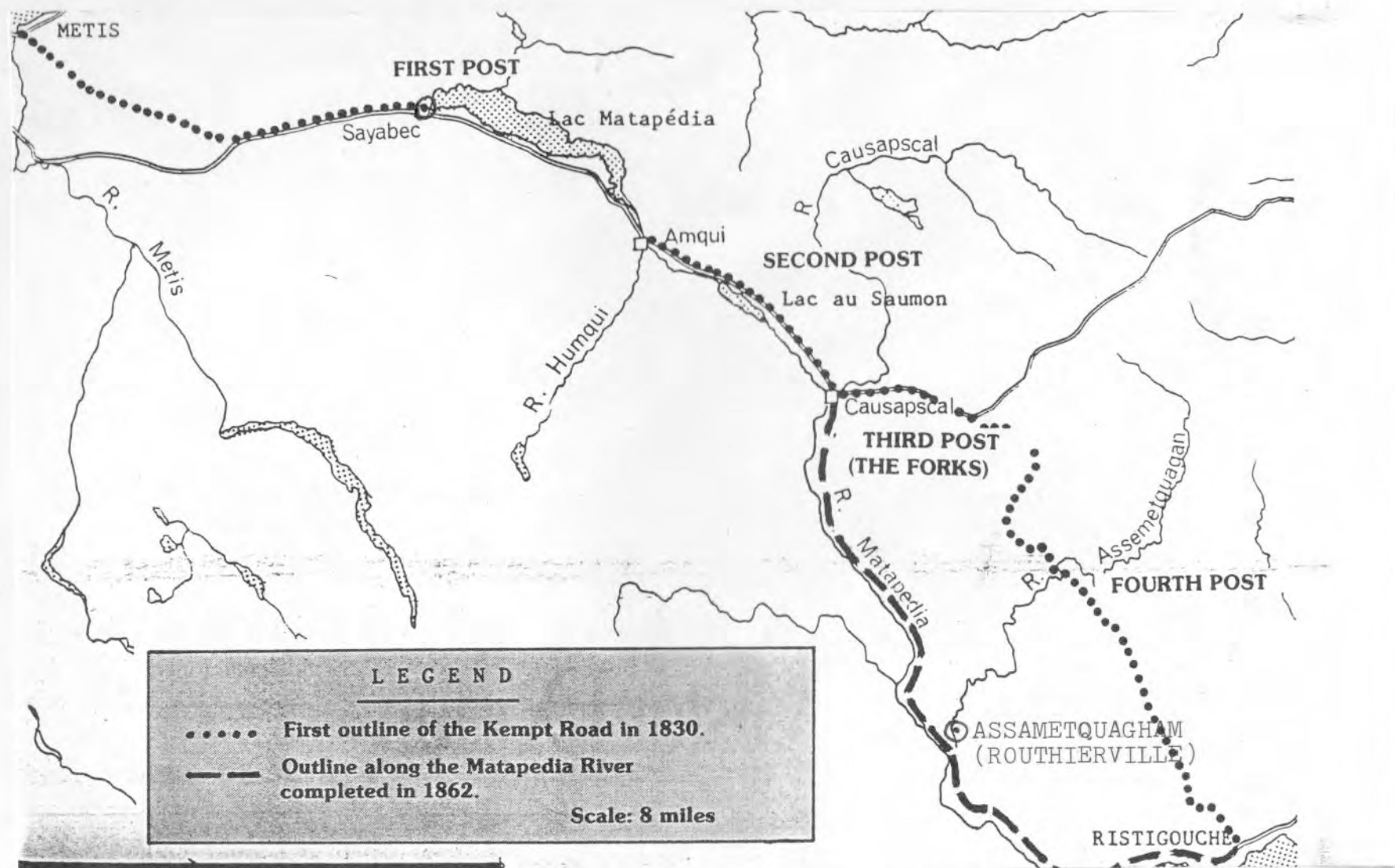
of shells and bombs, he continued to fire, and entirely blocked the enemy by his determined stand. Finally, firing all the time, he fell backwards into the trench, mortally wounded. While lying on his back in the trench he fired his last cartridges over the parapet after the retreating Germans, and before losing consciousness, he shouted to the wounded about him: "Keep it up, boys, do not let them get through! We must stop them!" The complete repulse of the enemy attack at this point was due to the remarkable personal bravery and self-sacrifice of this gallant non-commissioned officer, who died of his wounds shortly afterwards.'

The London Gazette, 16th September 1918





SAYABEC, BIRTHPLACE OF JOSEPH KAEBLE, AT THE NORTH END OF LAKE MATAPEDIA, AND ASSAMETQUAGHAM, NEAR THE JUNCTION OF THE MATAPEDIA AND ASSAMETQUAGHAM RIVERS, BIRTHPLACE OF LIEUTENANT JEAN BRILLANT, SHOWN IN RELATION TO THE ORIGINAL KEMPT ROAD OF THE MATAPEDIA VALLEY.



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JEAN BRILLANT

22nd Canadian Infantry Battalion

Jean Brillant was born in Assametquaghan, Matapedia County, Quebec, on the 15th of March 1890. He was educated at the Classical College of Rimouski and at St Joseph University, New Brunswick. On leaving school he joined the Militia and served with the St Lawrence Fusiliers. In 1915 he enlisted for overseas service with the 189th Battalion, which later merged with the 22nd Battalion in France. The action described in the citation occurred on the 8th and 9th of August 1918, east of Meharicourt during the Battle of Amiens. Lieutenant Brillant died of wounds on the 10th of August. In Montreal and Rimouski, Quebec, his memory is honoured in Jean Brillant Avenue and in the Jean Brillant Branch (Quebec No. 27) of the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League. He is buried in Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery, Fouilloy, France.

CITATION

'For most conspicuous bravery and outstanding devotion to duty when in charge of a company which he led in attack during two days with absolute fearlessness and extraordinary ability and initiative, the extent of the advance being twelve miles.

On the first day of operations shortly after the attack had begun, his company left flank was held up by an enemy machine-gun. Lt. Brillant rushed and captured the machine-gun, personally killing two of the enemy crew. Whilst doing this, he was wounded, but refused to leave his command.

Later on the same day, his company was held up by heavy machine-gun fire. He reconnoitred the ground personally, organised a party of two platoons and rushed straight for the machine-gun nest. Here 150 enemy and

fifteen machine-guns were captured, Lt. Brillant personally killing five of the enemy, and being wounded a second time. He had this wound dressed immediately and again refused to leave his Company.

Subsequently this gallant officer detected a field gun firing on his men over open sights. He immediately organised and led a "rushing" party towards the gun. After progressing about 600 yards, he was again seriously wounded. In spite of this third wound, he continued to advance for some 200 yards more, when he fell unconscious from exhaustion and loss of blood.

Lt. Brillant's wonderful example throughout the day inspired his men with an enthusiasm and dash which largely contributed towards the success of the operations.'

The London Gazette, 27th September 1918



THE MATAPEDIA VALLEY