



Lance Corporal Thomas Eustace (Number 110150) of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles (*Quebec Regiment*), Canadian Expeditionary Corps, is buried in Berks Cemetery Extension, Hainault: Grave reference III.A.56.

(Right: *The image of the Cap Badge of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles, is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as being that of a student, Thomas Eustace had already received his Bachelor of Arts Degree from Bishop's University in Lennoxville and was now studying for the Church of England Ministry. He apparently also was – or had been - a member of the *Church Lads Brigade*, although whether at Lennoxville or at home in Newfoundland, or both, is not clear.

Thomas Eustace forsook his studies on March 8 of 1915\* when he enlisted on that date into the Canadian Army in Sherbrooke, Quebec. He also underwent a medical examination and his attestation on that same day, as well as being attached to the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Canadian Mounted Rifles.

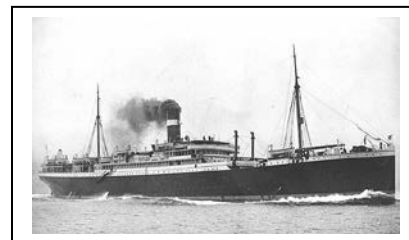
*\*His pay records show that this was the first day on which Trooper Eustace was remunerated for his services to the Canadian Army and, more precisely, to the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Canadian Mounted Rifles.*

The 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Canadian Mounted Rifles, was a unit raised in the Sherbrooke area, with at least some of its training taking place in the newly-established military camp at Valcartier, to the north of the city of Québec.

*(Right: Canadian artillery being put through its paces at the Camp at Valcartier. In 1914, the main Army Camp in Canada was at Petawawa. However, its location in Ontario – but also at some distance from the Great Lakes – made it impractical for the despatch of troops overseas. Valcartier was apparently built within weeks after the Declaration of War. – photograph (from a later date in the war) from *The War Illustrated*)*



It was at Quebec that on July 29, 1915, the 5<sup>th</sup> CMR Regiment embarked onto the Allan Line ship *Hesperian*\* for passage to the United Kingdom. Also travelling on *Hesperian* were the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the CMR, a draft for the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the CMR, and a number of veterinary officers.



The vessel sailed on the same day.

*(Right above: The image of the Allan Lines vessel Hesperian is from the Old Ship Photo Galleries web-site.)*

*\*Less than a month later, on September 4, having sailed the day before from Liverpool en route to Quebec, the vessel was torpedoed by the same U-Boat which had sunk Lusitania earlier that year. She sank on September 6, thirty-two people dying when a life-boat overturned during launching.*

On July 29 the vessel docked in the English south-coast port of Plymouth. By the end of the day the Battalion War Diarist was recording that by then all five-hundred ninety-four military personnel\* had arrived by train via London at *Dibgate Camp*, a subsidiary of the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* being established on the Dover Straits in the county of Kent and in the vicinity of the harbour and town of Folkestone.

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It was to remain there until the beginning of October when it was transferred the short distance to *Cæsar's Camp*.

(Right: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 2016*)



*\*The strength of a regiment of the Canadian Mounted Rifles was about half that of a regular infantry battalion. When the CMR lost their horses at the end of 1915 and became regular infantry – officially on January 1, 1916 - several regiments were disbanded to provide troops for the new battalions.*

*The designation of 'Regiment' was also to be changed on January 1, 1916, to 'Battalion', although it appears to have already transpired – either officially or otherwise – by that time.*

During the period at *Dibgate*, Trooper Eustace received promotion to the rank of lance corporal; the date in most documents is recorded as September 22 but another single file suggests that, although recorded on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the appointment was retroactive to September 1.

Also in September, on the 29<sup>th</sup>, Lance-Corporal Eustace was imposed upon to write a will; this he did, bequeathing his everything to his parents. If not before, at that moment he and his comrades-in-arms must surely have become aware that a transfer to *active service* on the Continent was imminent.

On October 24, 1915, the full complement of officers and other ranks embarked in the nearby coastal town and harbour of Folkestone. Later that same evening the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the CMR, disembarked on French soil in Boulogne and marched through the town to St. Martin's Camp. Whether they were met by large crowds on this occasion, as other arriving troops had been, is not recorded: it may have been unlikely as high winds and heavy rain appear to have been awaiting them upon landing.



(Right above: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)

(Right: *The French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)



Two days later the Regiment – and some horses – left by train in the morning for the northern French town of Bailleul where, upon de-training, both the personnel and the mounts were billeted for the night in several local farms. On the morrow the unit was ordered across the frontier and into the *Kingdom of Belgium*.

Lance Corporal Eustace's 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment became attached to the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Mounted Rifle Brigade upon its arrival on the Continent, the Brigade being stationed in Belgium at the southern end of the front, between the Franco-Belgian frontier and the city of Ypres.

Ploegsteert and Messines in the forward area, and Meteren to the rear are place names which often appear in the Battalion War Diary. It was in this sector that the 5<sup>th</sup> CMR Battalion personnel were to first learn about the rigours and the routines of life in – and out of – the trenches\*.

(Right: *Some of the farmland in the area of Messines, a mine crater from the time of the 1917 British offensive in the foreground – photograph from 2014*)



*\*During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less equally divided into three postings: in theory a week was to be spent in the front lines, at times little more than a few metres separating them from the enemy forward positions; a second week was then served in support positions, perhaps a hundred metres or so behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearest to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.*



*Of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.*

(Right above: *A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from Illustration*)

On November 28 the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, was stationed at *Hill 63*, some eleven kilometres to the south of the already partially-destroyed city of Ypres (today *Ieper*) and to the north-west of Ploegsteert. According to the Regimental War Diary entry of the day, there appears to have been little that was exceptional about that day except that it was the date on which the Battalion incurred its first fatal casualty.

(Right: *An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915 – just after the battle of 2<sup>nd</sup> Ypres - which shows the shell of the medieval city, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the war little was left standing. – from Illustration*)



Excerpt from the Battalion War Diary entry of November 28, 1915: *Enemy quiet during night, except for snipers, who were eventually stopped by our machine gun fire.*

*First death reported No 110150 Lance-Corporal Eustace "B" Squadron Killed in action...*

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The son of George Eustace, fisherman, and of Caroline Eustace (née *Weir* from Petty Harbour) of Torbay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to - at least - a twin (died at birth), to Mary-Ann (born and died 1889), to Elizabeth-Maria, to James, and possibly George.

Lance Corporal Eustace was reported as having been *killed in action* on November 28, 1915, while serving in the trenches near Ploegsteert in Belgium.

Thomas Eustace had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-seven years and one month: date of birth, February 1, 1888, in Torbay Newfoundland.

He was at first apparently interred in Rosenberg Military Cemetery from where his remains were later transferred to where they rest today.

The following correspondence was sent to the Bishop's University faculty (received by Doctor and Mrs. Parrock) after Lance Corporal Eustace's death:

*Dear Friends,*

*Your gift of tobacco addressed to Corpl. Eustace was handed to the corporals in his platoon, as we were his immediate friends up to the time of his death. You have no doubt by this time all the details of this sad occurrence, and we wish to add that he was a good soldier and a true friend at all times, which is the highest praise one soldier can give another.*

*Corpl. A.B. Walton, Corpl. C. Boulhillier, L/Corpl. B.E. Lewmark*

Lance-Corporal Eustace was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



(Right: *The War Memorial in Trinity honours the sacrifice Private Thomas J. Eustace of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Mounted Rifles who died on November 28, 1915. However, there appears to be no apparent association between him and the community of Trinity, all his references being to Torbay. - photograph from 2012*)



