

Private Thomas James Hannabury (elsewhere *Hennebury*) (Number 438614) of the 52nd Battalion (*New Ontario*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Menin Gate, Ypres (today *Ieper*): Panel reference, 24-26-28-30.

(Right above: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 52nd Battalion (New Ontario) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force is from the Wikipedia Web-site.*)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, Thomas James Hannabury appears to have left no details behind him of his emigration from the Dominion of Newfoundland to that of Canada. It is documented only that he was in Port Arthur*, Ontario, during the month of April, 1915.

**In 1970, Port Arthur became a constituent of the new city of Thunder Bay.*

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It was on April 22 of 1915 that he presented himself for medical examination and enlistment, this confirmed by his pay records as being the first day on which he was remunerated for his services by the Canadian Army. It was also the day on which he was *taken on strength* by the 52nd Battalion (*New Ontario*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, the soon-to-be Commanding Officer of that unit, Lieutenant Colonel Hay, declaring – on paper - that Thomas Hannabury had been... *finally approved and inspected by me...and that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation**.

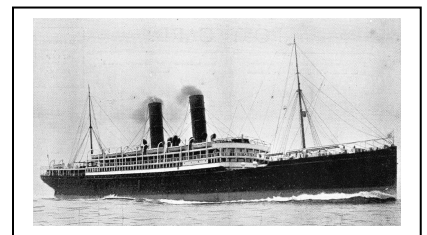
**The fact that it appears to have been two days afterwards, on April 24, before a magistrate certified the attestation in question, appears not to have been an impediment to the proceedings.*

Private Hannabury was to train for the succeeding months in the vicinity of one of the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William, the activities of these two separate groups of recruits being co-ordinated by the Commanding Officer of the Battalion who was based in the Armouries at Port Arthur. At the beginning there were no barrack facilities available and so the fledgling soldiers were billeted with the local populations.

The summer was to be spent in camp – but first of all it had to be built. It was apparently done quite economically as it was the Battalion personnel who provided the labour. The camp itself was established in an area known as *Gresley Park* at a distance of some five kilometres from the city of Port Arthur. It was taken over by the parent unit on June 15, the day after the First Draft of the 52nd Battalion had left for overseas service.

On November 3rd, 1915, camp was struck and the entire unit moved into the Armoury at Port Arthur, where it remained all day, and that night, in the midst of a snow storm, the 52nd Battalion of Port Arthur and Fort William, marched aboard two trains, and left its depot town to answer the call of the Colors. (The above information and excerpt from the Port Arthur News Chronicle, it in turn from the Thunder Bay Public Library web-site)

November 4 to 8 of 1915 saw the 52nd Battalion (*New Ontario*) transferred from Port Arthur by train – via Ottawa - to St. John, New Brunswick, there on November 23 to take ship on board the *SS California* for the trans-Atlantic voyage. The vessel was to sail for the United Kingdom later on that same day, before docking in the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport some ten days later again, on December 3.



Private Hannabury and his Battalion were not alone in taking passage on *California*. On board were three other military units: the 9th Regiment of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, the 34th Battalion of Canadian Infantry, and a contingent of the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps Reserve.

(Right above: The photograph of the Anchor Line ship SS California is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries Web-site.)

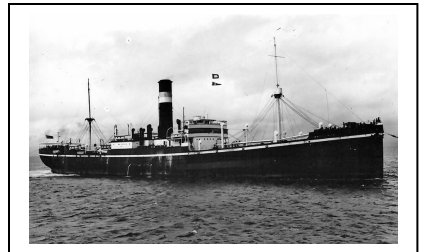
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From Plymouth, Private Hannabury's Battalion entrained for *Witley Camp* in the county of Surrey. There the Canadians were to spend almost eight weeks training under the guidance of British instructors before the unit was ordered to the Canadian military complex established in the vicinity of the villages of Bramshott and Liphook in the county of Hampshire. There the Battalion reported on January 25: it was to remain there for a bare three weeks.



(Right above: *Royal Canadian Legion flags amongst others adorn the interior of St. Mary's Church in the English village of Bramshott. – photograph from 2016*)

It was on board three ships, the *SS Matheran* – to be later sunk by a mine in 1917 – the *Queen Alexandra* and the *King Edward* that the 52nd Battalion took passage from the English port-city of Southampton en route for the Continent on February 20, 1916. On which ship Private Hannabury was to travel is not recorded.



(Right: *The photograph of the SS Matheran is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries Web-site.*)

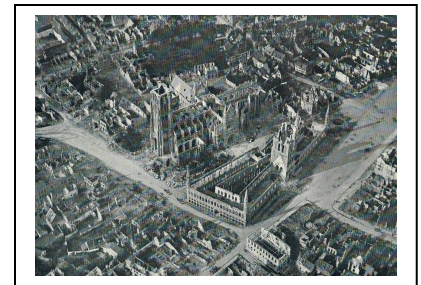
Disembarking in the French port of Le Havre on the following morning, the unit proceeded to the nearby Canadian Infantry Base Depot where it was to spend the night under canvas – in a snowstorm – before being despatched by train north to Belgium on the next day again.



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

Travelling via the northern French town of Hazebrouck, the 52nd Battalion – just over one thousand strong all ranks - arrived in the Belgian community of Poperinghe at about three o'clock in the afternoon of February 23, the unit's companies thereupon marching to their various billets.

The 52nd Battalion (*New Ontario*) was one of the units of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself a component, since January of 1916, of the 3rd Canadian Division. The 3rd Division was itself only newly formed – *officially* coming into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915 and January 1 of 1916 - and most of its personnel were only now adjusting to the life of a soldier. The Canadian 3rd Division's first posting – temporary as it transpired – was to a sector to the south-west of Ypres.



During the third and fourth weeks of March, 1915, the 3rd Division was transferred into the *Ypres Salient*, an area which was to prove to be one of the most lethal theatres of the entire *Western Front*.

(Previous page: An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration)

It was also during that month of March, on the 21st, that Private Hannabury ran afoul of the Battalion authorities. For being... *Out of bounds without a pass...* he was awarded three days of Field Punishment Number 1.

For the two weeks after its arrival in Belgium, the 52nd Battalion had undergone training in trench warfare. From March 10, the date of its first posting to the front, until early June of 1916, the newcomers were to experience, at first hand, the daily routines, rigours and perils of life in – and out of – the trenches*.

****During the Great War, British and Empire (later Commonwealth) battalions had their time more or less 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 behind the front; the unit was then withdrawn into reserve – either Brigade, Divisional or Corps Reserve, the former nearer to the forward area, the latter the furthest away.***



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

(Right above: *Some months later, Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916 – by that time equipped with steel helmets and the less-visible Lee-Enfield rifles (see below) - from Illustration*)



(Right above: *Remnants of Canadian trenches dating from 1915-1916 at Sanctuary Wood – photograph from 2010*)

The War Diarist of the 52nd Battalion (*New Ontario*) for the month of May, 1916, has, more often than not, identified the unit's casualties in the entry of each day. Such, however, is not the case for May 26 and 27, likely the days on one of which Private Hannabury was wounded.

On May 26, five *other ranks* were wounded but the circumstances not documented.

On May 27, three *other ranks* were reported *wounded*, likely from a bombing-party which had been sent out overnight – but since they had then been able to return, those wounds were likely slight. Then... *Hostile shelling severe...precautions to have men take cover in trench. One shell made direct hit killing 5 wounding 7 O.R. Shelling of front and support line becoming more constant.*

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Private Hannabury was taken from... *trenches in the vicinity of Maple Copse* (Casualty Report)... to the Advanced Dressing Station at *Maple Copse*, at the time being run by 'B' Section of the 10th Canadian Field Ambulance*.

(Right: *Maple Copse Cemetery, adjacent to Hill 60, in which lie many Canadians killed during the days of the confrontation in June, 1916, at Mount Sorrel* – photograph from 2014)



**On June 2, during the opening German bombardments of the so-named Battle of Mount Sorrel, the ADS at Maple Copse was destroyed by shell-fire and abandoned.*

The son of George McFarlane Hannabury and Eliza (elsewhere *Elizabeth*, also elsewhere *Eliza Jane*) Hannabury (née *Garrett*) of 59, Colonial Street, St. John's, Newfoundland, he was also brother to at least Susan-Bowden and to Ewen-Stanley.

Private Hannabury was reported as having *died of wounds* in the same ADS of the 10th Canadian Field Ambulance on May 27, 1916. He was buried by Battalion personnel in *Maple Copse Cemetery* but his grave was to be destroyed in subsequent fighting, his remains never to be identified.

Thomas James Hannabury had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-six years: date of birth in St. John's, Newfoundland, June 26, 1889. However, in a copy of St. Thomas' Anglican Church records, the given date is October 14, 1886.

Private Thomas James Hannabury was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 26, 2023.

