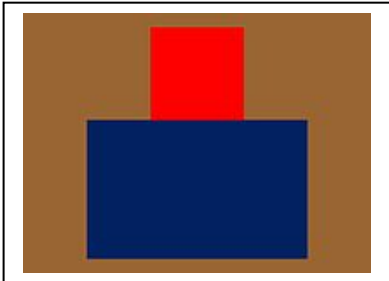


Private Thomas McCarthy (Number 715438) of the 26th Canadian Infantry Battalion (New Brunswick) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Menin Gate, Ypres (today Ieper): Panel reference 26-28.

(Right: The image of the shoulder flash of the 26th Battalion is from the Wikipedia web-site.)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a labourer, the young Thomas McCarthy has apparently left behind him no details of his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, except that he is documented as having been in the Cape Breton industrial city of Sydney during the months of November and December of 1915.

(continued)

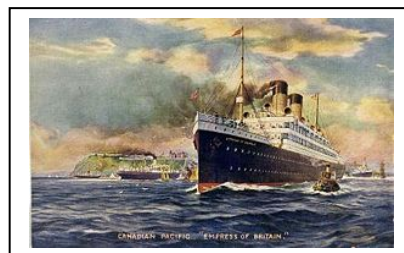
His pay records show that it was on November 20 of 1915 that Thomas McCarthy presented himself for enlistment as it was on this date that the Canadian Army began to remunerate him for his services; they also document that it was on this same day that he was *taken on strength* by the 106th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*). It, however, was not until December 4 that he was attested and, perhaps a little surprisingly, even later, on December 22, that he underwent medical examination, being pronounced... *fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force*.

Some ten weeks later, on March 8, the formalities of Private McCarthy's enlistment were brought to a conclusion by the major acting for the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Innes, of the 106th Battalion when he declared – on paper – that... *having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation*.

A further four months were to pass before Private McCarthy was despatched to overseas service. According to an account written by one of the Battalion's recruits, Private McCarthy and the other personnel who had enlisted in Cape Breton, had been transferred during the interim, ostensibly for training, southward to Truro where they were boarded in either local hotels or in the Y.M.C.A.

There was, however, apparently – this from the same source – to be little training undertaken: there were no barracks, no firing range and no parade ground. Apparently shovelling snow and marching comprised much of the exercise for the 106th Battalion's Truro detachment during the first six months of the unit's existence.

The 106th Battalion embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Empress of Britain* in the harbour at Halifax on July 15 of 1916. The unit was not to travel alone during its trans-Atlantic crossing; also taking passage on the vessel were the 93rd and 105th Battalions of Canadian Infantry, the 1st Draft of the 63rd Regiment (*Halifax Rifles*), and the 8th Draft of 'C' Battery of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery.



(Above right: *The image of the Empress of Britain is from the Wikipedia website.*)

The *Empress* sailed later on the same July 15, and docked some ten days later again in the English west-coast port of Liverpool on July 25, 1916. From there Private McCarthy's unit was transported by train to the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* which had by that time been established on the Dover Straits in close proximity to the town and harbour of Folkestone in the county of Kent.



(Right above: *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*)

(continued)

It was to be yet another ten weeks, on or about October 5, before Private McCarthy was to be sent overseas for a second time – and for *active service*.

On this occasion the journey was a matter of only hours on board ship to the Continent – likely from nearby Folkestone to Boulogne. He made the crossing as a soldier of the 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*), the unit to which he had been transferred on that same October 5, and of which the parent unit was already on *active service* at that time in France.

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

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

The records show that Private McCarthy, having spent a number of days at the Canadian Base Depot established in the vicinity of the French port-city of Le Havre, then reported to *duty* with his new battalion on October 15, 1917.

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



* * * * *

The 26th Infantry Battalion (*New Brunswick*) was an element of the 5th Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 2nd Canadian Division, and it had been serving in the *Kingdom of Belgium* since September of 1915.

After also having landed for the most part in Boulogne, from there to be transported north-eastward through France, the 2nd Canadian Division had immediately been posted to a sector in-between the by-then battered city of Ypres and the Franco-Belgian frontier. It would serve there for almost a year.

(Right: *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*)

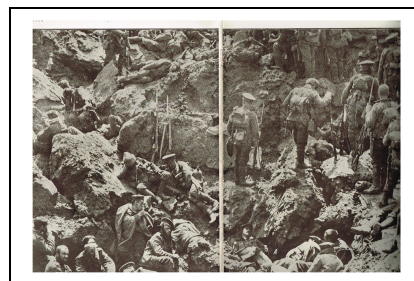


From March 27 up until and including April 17, 1916 – these the *official* dates - the unit had been involved in its first major confrontation, the dispute officially known as the *Action of the St-Éloi Craters*. The craters had been formed when, on that March 27, the British had detonated a series of underground galleries filled with explosives. The explosions had been immediately followed with an assault by British infantry units.

(continued)

(Right below: *The occupation of a crater in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – perhaps in the St-Éloi Sector – from Illustration*)

The Canadians were to take over from the British to occupy the *presumed* newly-won territory; however, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the putrid weather which turned the just-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, plus a resolute German defence, greeted the newcomers who took over from the by-then exhausted British on April 5-6.



This being the first major encounter with the enemy that the Canadian 2nd Division was to experience, the affair likely came as a shock to the new-comers. After some three weeks of fighting up to the knees – and at times the waist - in mud and water, at first the British – and then the Canadians who were to relieve them – had been held in check by the German defenders and all involved had incurred a heavy casualty list.

It appears from the Battalion War Diary, however, that the 26th Battalion itself had been only very *marginally* involved. During the period of the Canadian action, the unit was... *standing by*, was... *in camp*, or for five days in a row... *Battalion in trenches, large working parties working on trenches. Weather fine.* (26th Battalion War Diary)

Apart from casualties incurred due to his artillery, the Battalion appears to have had no contact with the enemy.

Some six weeks later, from June 2 to 14, was fought the battle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the areas of *Sanctuary Wood, Railway Dugouts, Maple Copse, Hooge* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps. The Canadians had been preparing an attack of their own on the enemy positions which dominated the Canadian trenches when the Germans delivered an offensive, overrunning the forward areas and, in fact, rupturing the Canadian lines, an opportunity which, fortunately, they never exploited.



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

For eleven days there had been some desperate fighting, at first involving mainly units of the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division*, but soon the critical situation had drawn in troops from other Canadian formations.



**Officially coming into service at midnight of December 31, 1915 and January 1 of 1916, the 3rd Canadian Division had trained for a period in the Ploegsteert Sector (southern Belgium) before, in March and April of 1916, becoming responsible for a south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

(Preceding page: *Maple Copse, the scene of heavy fighting in June of 1916, and its cemetery wherein lie numerous Canadians – photograph from 2014*)

The 26th Battalion had been engaged in relieving other battalions during the course of the encounter and it had been heavily shelled on occasion. However, it had not been in the forward area during much of the infantry activity and had been withdrawn altogether by the time of the final Canadian counter-attack.



(Right: *Railway Dugouts Burial Ground (Transport Farm) today contains twenty-four hundred fifty-nine burials and commemorations – photograph from 2014*)

By the time that the 26th Battalion moved up to the front again on June 14, the action at *Mount Sorrel* and its vicinity was all but over. During the night of June 12-13 the Canadians had once again attacked and, thanks to better organization and a good artillery barrage, had taken back almost all of the lost ground. Both sides were now back much where they had been just eleven days earlier.

(Right: *The Canadian memorial which stands atop Mount Sorrel just to the south-west of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) whose spires and towers may be perceived in the distance. – photograph from 1914*)



(Right below: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 and 1917 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hoge, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government – photograph from 2014*)



Thus, after having played its roll at *Mount Sorrel*, the 26th Battalion was relieved and withdrew to *Camp “D”* on June 20.

The second half of that following month of July was spent at first in *Alberta Camp* and then further back again, at Brigade Reserve in the *Vierstraat Sector*. However, in contrast to this likely monotonous but welcome period, the Battalion was then posted back into the trenches for twenty-two of the first twenty-four days of August.

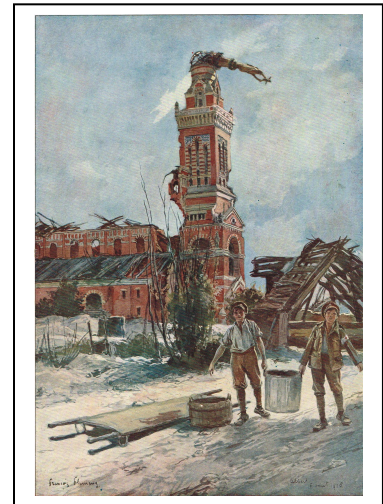
Having retired once more to *Alberta Camp* near the small community of *Reninghelst* on August 25, the 26th Battalion now prepared to leave Belgium. The Regimental War Diarist noted in his entry of that day: *All ranks in the best of spirits anticipating the move and eager to effect all details in the number of days training, SOMME OPERATIONS.*

(continued)

The training area for the 26th Battalion was to be in the vicinity of Tilques, back across the border in northern France and in the area of the larger centre of St-Omer. It had required three successive days of marching for the unit to reach its billets at Éperlecques by August 28 before then having commenced training on the morrow. One of the first items on the agenda of December 29 was the replacement of the Canadian-made Ross rifles by its British counterpart, the Short Lee-Enfield Mark III.

A week later the Battalion marched to the railway-station in Arcques to entrain for the journey south to Conteville in the rear area of the theatre of the ongoing battle. A day spent resting in billets was followed by five more on foot *not* resting, a march which terminated on September 11 at the *Brickfields (la Briqueterie)*, a large military camp in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert.

(Right: *Canadian soldiers at work in Albert, the already-damaged basilica in the background – from Illustration*)



The 1st *Battle of the Somme* had by that September been ongoing for some two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen-thousand dead.

On that first day all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the 1st Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment which was to lose so heavily on that July 1 at Beaumont-Hamel.

As the fighting had progressed, troops from the Empire (*Commonwealth*) were brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette.

(Right: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette. – photograph from 2015*)



The 26th Battalion had arrived in the area four days prior to the attack at Flers-Courcellette – other units had reported there on only the day before – thus those interim days were spent in preparation. For the attack of September 15, the 26th Battalion was in reserve at the outset and, as such, did not move forward until five o'clock in the afternoon, twelve hours after the initial assault, at which time it re-enforced the efforts of the 22nd and 24th Battalions.

(continued)

(Right: *Wounded troops being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the 1st Battle of the Somme – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)



(Right below: *The fields surrounding it once again farm-land, this is the reconstructed village of Courcelette one hundred years and several months after the Canadians attacked it in 1916. – photograph from 1917*)



On the following day, the 26th Battalion, according to its War Diary, was moved to the relative safety of a succession of shell holes, apparently staying there all day and... *where the most intense shelling was endured by the battalion throughout this entire day.*

(Right below: *Burying Canadian dead on the Somme, likely at a casualty clearing station or a field ambulance – from Illustration or Le Miroir*)



On the 17th the unit was moved once more and took up positions in a sunken road, to once again remain there all day. The only exception was that of 'B' Company which assisted in an attack delivered by the 24th Battalion before also it moved to the sunken road. The attack in question... *met with considerable opposition and rifle and machine gun fire was very heavy.*

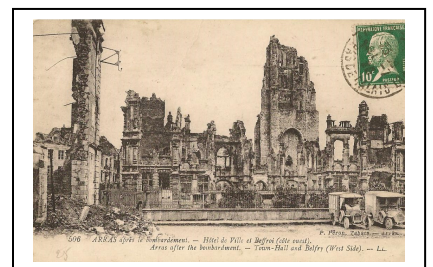
On September 27 the Battalion had been ordered forward once again, on this occasion to play a role in *the Battle of Thiepval Ridge*, more specifically on the right flank, in the area of *Regina Trench*. The operation had proved to be a further costly failure for the price of one-hundred eighty-two more casualties.



(Right: *Regina Trench Cemetery – this position was adjacent to Kenora Trench, another daunting German strong-point – and some of the ground on which the Canadian battalions fought in the autumn of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)

On October 10 the unit had been withdrawn from the *1st Battle of the Somme*.

The Battalion had retired towards the north-west before turning northwards to pass behind the battered city of Arras. By October 15 it was in the *Angres II Sector*, in the area of Lens, and moving forward, up into the front lines. On the next day, the 16th, the Battalion War Diarist entered simply:



Battalion in trenches Conditions quiet, weather wet.

(Preceding page: *The City Hall of Arras and its venerable bell-tower were later to look like this after nearly four years of bombardment by German artillery. – from a vintage post-card, the photograph taken just after the conflict*)

The conditions were not to be quiet for long: On the morrow the enemy had exploded a mine opposite a trench held by 'D' Company of the Battalion and the remainder of the day had been spent repairing damage and consolidating the defences.

There had been no casualties reported on that day but the incident may surely have reminded some of the troops that things could still be bad, even away from *the Somme*.

The next five months or so must have started to seem rather monotonous – and uncomfortable – for a great deal of the time, with a few instances of terror thrown in every now and then. For the most part the 26th Battalion was in that same *Angres II Sector*, in theory spending one week in the front line, a second week in the support lines, and a third week in reserve. And sometimes there was even a bath and a bed.

In reserve one could count on everything from a variety of inspections from those higher up the military ladder – and every now and then from a leading politician or a member of a royal family – to being seconded into working-parties. While in support there were more working-parties, route marches, training on new equipment, inspections from lesser lights on that military ladder, more inspections for trench-foot and other medical problems, and carrying ammunition and the like from the rear to the front.



The front-line was the sharp end of the proverbial stick and there was rarely anything positive to say about it.

And of course, things were never as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves posted 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 – from Illustration*)

During this period of the winter of 1916-1917 there was little in the way of concerted infantry action by either side. There were at least two large raids conducted locally by the 26th Battalion, and patrols and wiring parties were an everyday part of life, but this seems to have been the extent of offensive operations in all that time.



(Right above: *A carrying-party loading up – one of the duties of troops when not serving in the front lines: The head-strap was an idea adapted from the aboriginal peoples of North America. – from Le Miroir*)

(continued)

Most casualties were due to the ever-present enemy artillery fire, but snipers were also a constant danger and disease and living conditions – perhaps particularly the ubiquitous lice – were to take an additional toll.

(Right: *A detachment of Canadian troops going forward during the winter of 1916-1917 – from Illustration*)



Then it was spring and the time for the campaigning season to begin. On March 24 the 26th Battalion left Bois des Alleux where it had been spending five days in Brigade Support. It thereupon marched to Grand Servins... *Poor billets...* recorded the War Diarist.

The reason for the move was to undergo special – and in some cases novel – training for an upcoming British-ordered attack in the area of Arras. The Canadian Corps was to advance in a sector close to where the 26th Battalion had recently been operating, in an area where the ground sloped upwards to the top of a German-occupied rise which dominated the entire Douai Plain.



The crest of the rise was known as *la Crête de Vimy – Vimy Ridge*.

(Right above: *The Douai Plain seen through the haze from the northern parapet of the Vimy Memorial: A grieving Canada overlooks the once-upon-a-time battlefield and beyond, towards others.* – photograph from 2015)

On April 9 the British Army launched an offensive in the area to the north of the Somme battlefields; this was the so-called *Battle of Arras* intended to support a French effort elsewhere. In terms of the daily count of casualties, some four thousand per day, it was to be the most expensive operation of the War for the British, one of the few positive episodes being the Canadian assault of *Vimy Ridge* on the opening day of the battle, Easter Monday.



While the British campaign proved to be an overall disappointment, the French offensive of *Le Chemin des Dames* was a disaster.

(Above right: *The Canadian National Memorial which, since 1936, has stood on Vimy Ridge* – photograph from 2010)

(Right: *Troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, equipped – or burdened - with all the paraphernalia of war, on the advance across No-Man's-Land during the attack at Vimy*)



Ridge on either April 9 or 10 of 1917 - from Illustration)

On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, on this occasion acting as a single, autonomous entity, stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

Several kilometres of tunnel had been hewn out of the chalk under the approaches to the front lines of *Vimy Ridge*, underground accesses which afforded physical safety and also the element of surprise during the hours – and in some cases, days – leading up to the attack.

The Battalion War Diary notes that the objectives of the 26th Battalion were not on the Ridge itself, the prising of which from the grasp of the Germans had been made the responsibility of the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions.

The War Diary also notes that, as was the case with many other units, the advance of the 26th Battalion to the... *Jumping Off Trenches...* was made over-ground, not through any of those well-known tunnels.

(Right: *One of the few remaining galleries – Grange Tunnel - still open to the public at Vimy one hundred years later – photograph from 2008(?)*)

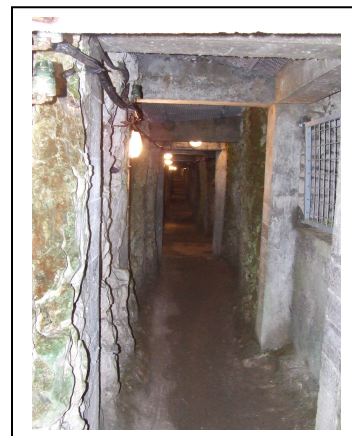
**This was the first occasion on which the Canadian Divisions were to act in concert as a Canadian Army Corps rather than being individually attached to a British force. In fact, British forces were now placed under its command.*

The objectives of the 26th Battalion – indeed, of the 2nd Canadian Division - were in the *Thelus Sector*. Thélus was – and is – a small village further down the slope and to the right-hand side – south in the direction of Arras - of the attack.

The creeping barrage having come down at 5.30 am, the first wave of the assault jumped off... *at Zero plus 32 minutes the light signal (3 white Very lights (flares)) was fired showing that Bn. had reached and occupied their objective. The casualties in the attack were slight and during the rest of the days the Coys. spent the day in clearing the trench and making shelter for the men.* (Excerpt from Battalion War Diary entry of April 9, 1917)

Little further progress was made after the successes of that first day, the terrain proving too difficult for the rapid advance of guns and of the necessary equipment – and, as usual, the Germans were quick to recover, although no serious attempt was made by them to retake *Vimy Ridge*. The Battalion remained in the forward area consolidating its position until relieved on April 15.

(Right above: *Canadian sappers, having just laid a narrow-gauge railway line across the battle-field, use it immediately to evacuate the wounded of both sides. This photograph taken on the field at or in the vicinity of Vimy. – from Illustration)*



(continued)

Towards the end of April the 26th Battalion was employed in digging new trench positions so as to be in a position to support Canadian attacks going in at the once-communities of Arleux-en-Gohelle and later at Fresnoy.

These costly operations went ahead – the first a relative success, the second a lot less so - but apparently the 26th Battalion was not heavily involved. Once again, most of its casualties were to be due to enemy artillery action.

(Right: *German prisoners being escorted to the rear by Canadian troops during the attack on Vimy Ridge – from Illustration*)



After the five-week Battle of Arras had stuttered to its conclusion – officially on May 15 - the remainder of the month of May and most of June were spent by many Canadian units, including the 26th Battalion, withdrawn from the line, the time partially to be used for reinforcement and for further re-organization.

On July 1, Dominion Day, however, the 26th Battalion was on its way to the forward area and by the following day was in Brigade Reserve, once again in the *Angres Sector* in the vicinity of the mining centre of Lens. On the 6th the unit was once more in – or in the area of - the front lines and by the 20th the Battalion War Diarist was recording preparations being made for... *the coming show*.

The British High Command had by this time decided to undertake a summer offensive in the *Ypres Salient*, Belgium. Thus, in order to divert German attention – and also his reserves - from this area, it had also ordered operations to take place at the sector of the front running north-south from Béthune to Lens.



The Canadians were to be a major contributor to this effort.

(Right above: *An example of the conditions under which the troops were ordered to fight in the area of Lens during the summer of 1917 – from Miroir*)

For the 26th Battalion, the end of July and the beginning of August of 1917 were to be a succession of days of training. The Canadian Corps, since *Vimy Ridge*, was from now on always to fight as an autonomous entity; its now-apparent military capability was also to be exploited to a much greater extent than had been the case in earlier days.



(Right above: Canadian troops, during the summer of 1917, under artillery fire while operating in No-Man's-Land somewhere in the area of Lens – from Le Miroir)

One of the primary objectives was to be the so-named *Hill 70* in the outskirts of the mining centre of Lens. On August 14, the 26th Battalion and other 1st and 2nd Canadian Division units moved to assembly areas. On the 15th the attack went in.

Those expecting *Hill 70* to be a precipitous and ominous elevation are to be surprised. It is hardly prominent in a countryside that is already flat, the highest points being the summits of slag heaps which date from the mining era of yesteryear.

Yet it was high enough to be considered - by the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie – to be the key feature in the area, its capture more important than that of Lens itself.

(Right: The monument to commemorate the capture of Hill 70 by the Canadians of the 15th Battalion stands some hundred metres or so from its apex, this point just to the left from where the roads intersect. – photograph from 2014)



Objectives were limited and had for the most part been achieved by the end of August 15. Due to the seeming dominance of *Hill 70* over the entire area, it was expected that the Germans would endeavour to retrieve it and so it proved; on the 16th several strong counter-attacks were launched against the Canadian positions, positions that by this time had been transformed into defensive strong-points.

These defences held and the Canadian artillery, which was employing newly-developed procedures, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. *Hill 70* remained in Canadian hands.

(Right: A Canadian 220 mm siege gun, under camouflage nets in the Lens Sector, being prepared for action – from Le Miroir)



As far as the actions of the 26 Battalion at *Hill 70* are concerned, excerpts from Appendix Number 5 of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary give a general idea: *At 4.25 a.m. on Wednesday, 15th August the Artillery opened up and the 25th Battalion on the Right and the 22nd Battalion on the Left advanced to the attack, closely followed by the 24th and 26th Battalions respectively. The objective...was the BLUE Line. ...the 24th and 26th Battalions, which were to pass through the 24th and 26th Battalions...would also advance at Zero hour until clear of the German Front Line so as to avoid the enemy barrage. This proved most successful and the casualties...were very light.*

The Blue Line was captured on scheduled time, namely, at 4.51 a.m.

At 5.24 a.m. the 24th and 26th Battalions passed through...and advanced on the GREEN Line which they captured at 5.42 with the exception of the Left Company of the 24th Battalion which was held up...by Machine Gun fire and Bombers. ...this Company, however, captured their objective by 7.15 a.m. The whole of the GREEN objective was now in our hands...

At this point the enemy counter-attacked the positions held by the 24th Battalion but were driven off.

The remainder of the day was spent in consolidating the positions gained and in clearing the battle-field. The consolidation was carried out...and Machine Guns were placed in Strong Points. (War Diary)

Having repulsed several further German attempts to re-gain the lost ground, attacks accompanied by heavy bombardments and hostile aeroplane activity on both August 16 and 17, the 26th Battalion was relieved and retired into the area of the former British front line.



(Right: Canadian soldiers in the captured rear area of Hill 70 during the days after the battle – from Le Miroir)

This Canadian-led campaign had apparently been scheduled to continue into September and even longer, but the ongoing British summer offensive in Belgium was proceeding less well than expected and the High Command was looking for reinforcements to make good its by-then exorbitant losses. The Australians and New Zealanders – further to the south than the Canadians - and then the Canadians themselves, all were ordered to prepare to move north; thus the Canadian Corps was obliged to abandon its plans.

There were, therefore, to be no further major Canadian-inspired actions in the Lens-Béthune sectors and the troops yet again were to settle back into that monotonous but at times precarious existence of life in – and behind – the forward area. On most days, according to the Battalion War Diary, it was the artillery which fought it out – but, of course, the infantry was usually the target.

Even though it was known that the Canadians were to be transferred north into Belgium, for the 26th Battalion there was to be a more-than-nine-week interlude between the action at *Hill 70* and the transfer to its next theatre of operations. During this time the daily grind of life in the trenches was still the rule - with several exceptions when the unit was retired to areas behind the lines, particularly for training - although the War Diary shows that sports were being considered more and more to be a morale booster among the troops.



(Right above: Canadian soldiers, while off-duty, perusing the program of an upcoming concert 'somewhere on the Continent' – from Le Miroir)

It was not until the 24th day of that October of 1917 that the 26th Battalion entrained in or near the community of Tinqués to begin the transfer north into Belgium and once more to the *Ypres Salient* from where the unit had departed some thirteen months before.

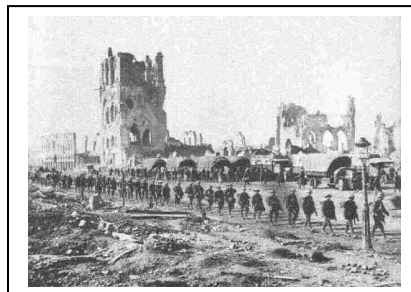
It was, of course, during this period of awaiting further orders to transfer northwards that Private McCarthy reported *to duty* to his new unit. The date on his documents is October

15, at a time when the 26th Battalion was recorded to have been at Neuville St-Vaast and in the not-distant trenches.

(continued)

* * * * *

Officially designated as the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the campaign – ongoing since the last day of that July – was to come to be known to history as *Passchendaele*, taking that name from a small village on a ridge that was – at least was latterly ostensibly *claimed* to have been - one of the British Army's main objectives.



(Right: *Troops file through the rubble of the medieval city of Ypres on their way to the front in the late summer of 1917. – from Illustration*)

(Right below: *Somewhere, possibly anywhere or almost everywhere, on the battlefield of Passchendaele during the autumn of 1917. – from Illustration*)

From the time that the Canadians entered the fray, it was they who shouldered a great deal of the burden. For the week of October 26 until November 3 it was to be the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which spearheaded the assault, with the 1st and 2nd Divisions in reserve. From November 5 until the official end of the affair – November 10 - the reverse was true with troops of the 2nd Division (see below) finally entering the remnants of Passchendaele itself.

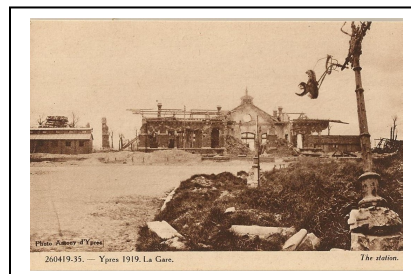


(Right: *The monument to the sacrifice of the Canadians which stands in the outskirts of the re-constructed village of Passchendaele (today Passendale) – photograph from 2010*)

The unit arrived in the vicinity of the northern French commune of Cæstre on the evening of that October 24. Although the camp had been designated as a rest area, the War Diary entries record numerous activities, lectures and training exercises undergone in preparation for the unit's subsequent move to the *Passchendaele Front*.



The 26th Battalion was on its way again from Cæstre on November 3, boarding a train which crossed the Franco-Belgian Frontier to transport its charges to the ruins of what once had been the railway station at Ypres. The station being just outside the southern ramparts of the city, the Battalion then traversed the remnants of Ypres in a north-easterly direction to arrive in the vicinity of Potijze.



(Right above: *The remnants of the railway station just outside the ramparts of Ypres where the Battalion detrained – the image is from 1919 – from a vintage post-card*)

(continued)

On November 4, the 26th Battalion was to move closer to the forward area. Before the unit moved forward, it had drawn supplies and ammunition to carry up to the front line. On the following day it moved forward again, by eleven o'clock in the evening having reached the assembly areas.

Excerpts from Operational Order, Number 180 – issued 2nd Nov. 1917:

1) *The 2nd Canadian Division has been ordered to attack and capture PASSCHENDAELE on “Za” day.*

2) *The attack will be carried out by the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the Right and the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the Left: the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade will be in Divisional Reserve...*

...5) *The 26th Battalion will assault on a 2 Company front with one Company in Support and one Company in Reserve.*

...9) *Consolidation...a) The forward slope should be held by posts in shell holes or short lengths of trench; these posts must be well scattered...in order that the enemy may have no good target for his artillery...*

b) *A main line will be dug just behind the crest of the ridge and so sited as to escape direct observation while denying the crest to the enemy should he succeed in breaking through our advanced posts.*

This main line will also serve as the jumping off line for counter attacks.

Excerpts from Appendix 3 of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary for November, 1918:

6) *On this occasion...At 6 a.m on the 6th of November the barrage opened and the 26th Battalion advanced to the attack...*

The whole of the 5th Brigade objectives were gained on schedule time, namely, by 6.58 a.m., and consolidation commenced.

By 10 a.m. the ground won by the Brigade had been well consolidated...

(Right: *Just a few hundred metres to the south-west of Passchendaele – and looking in the opposite direction from the site of the Passchendaele monument – this is the ground up which the Canadians fought during those weeks of October and November of 1917. – photograph from 2010*)



(Right: *Canadian troops – not having proper bathing facilities - performing their ablutions in the water collecting in a shell hole at some time during the last month of Passchendaele – from Le Miroir*)

Casualties during the operation incurred by the 26th Battalion had been forty-two *killed in action* and two-hundred seven *wounded*, all ranks.

The son of Richard McCarthy (fisherman) and of Elizabeth (known as *Lizzie*) McCarthy (perhaps *née Farrell*) – to whom he had willed his all on January 14, 1917 - of Marystown (at the time also *Mortier Bay*) in the District of Burin, Newfoundland, he was likely brother to at least Susan and Annie.



**As seen, some of the above requires confirmation. In 1921 it appears that the family was in the area then known as Creston North.*

(Right above: *The photograph of Private Adams is from a website entitled – A Short History and Photographic record of 106th Overseas Battalion C.E.F.*)



Private McCarthy was reported as having been *killed in action* on November 6 of 1917, during the fighting of that day during the *Third Battle of Ypres: Passchendaele*.

(Right: *The sacrifice of Private Thomas McCarthy is honoured on the Marystown War Memorial. – Photograph from 2015*)

Thomas McCarthy had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-one years and six months: date of birth in Marystown, Newfoundland, May 3, 1895 (from *Attestation papers*).

Private Thomas McCarthy 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.