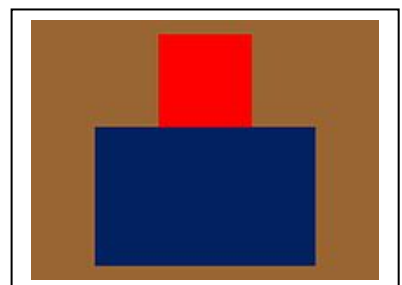




Lance Corporal Hubert Michael Meehan, Number 69607 of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, lies buried in La Laiterie Military Cemetery, Belgium: Grave reference II.B.29.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder flash of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (New Brunswick) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

(continued)



His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a clerk, Hubert Michael Meehan has left little behind him to tell of his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of New Brunswick. It is true that two H. Meehans – or perhaps a single one on two occasions - are recorded as having crossed the Cabot Strait during the year of 1913 prior to the Great War, but both were on their way to the industrial city of Sydney, Cape Breton. The records are certainly not conclusive enough to suggest that either one of them might be the subject of this dossier.

Be that as it may, it is certain that by the penultimate month of 1914, Hubert Michael Meehan had found his way to St. John, New Brunswick, for it was both then and there that he enlisted.

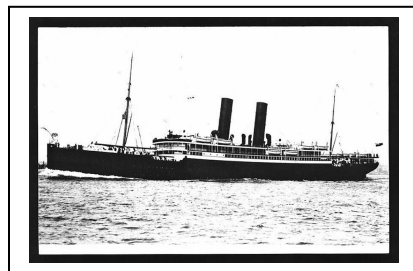
To be precise, it was on November 9 of 1914 that he presented himself for enlistment in St. John and was attested on the same day. Exactly into which military formation he enlisted is not altogether clear with some sources recording that it was immediately the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*). However, Private Meehan himself declared in his papers that he had spent three months as a soldier of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Regiment (*St. John Fusiliers*) of the Canadian Militia – a unit from which recruits were despatched to the 26<sup>th</sup>\*.

*\*Canadian Militia units were forbidden by law to operate outside the borders of the country. However, there was nothing to preclude these already-established units from recruiting on behalf of a newly-forming Overseas Battalion.*

On the day following his enlistment and attestation, Private Meehan underwent a medical examination which found him... *fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force*. And on this same November 10, an officer acting on behalf of Lieutenant Colonel McAvity, commanding officer of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 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.*

One final document shows that Private Meehan was officially *taken on strength* by the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (*New Brunswick*) on January 6 of 1915. Four weeks later, on February 3, he was up on charges of having been *Absent Without Leave*. It may not have been too serious: there appear to be no further details, not is there any mention of any penalty.

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been authorized on November 7, only days prior to Private Meehan's enlistment. It had begun training immediately in St. John – at the Barrack Green Armouries - and continued to do so – with a week off during the Christmas period – until the time arrived for its embarkation for passage overseas. The ship that Private Meehan and his Battalion were to board was the requisitioned *Anchor Line* passenger vessel and now troop transport, *Caledonia*.



(Right above: *The photograph of the Anchor Line vessel Caledonia – to be torpedoed and sunk in December of 1916 - is from the Old Ship Photo Galleries web-site.*)

(continued)



A number of sources cite June 15 of 1915 as the date of Private Meehan's embarkation but this was apparently not so: the ship is documented as having sailed from Montreal on June 9 with "A" Squadron of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Remount Depot on board. Her next stop was St. John, New Brunswick, on June 13, where she welcomed not only Private Meehan's 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion, but also Section 1 and the Headquarters Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Ammunition Column, plus a part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Cyclists Company.

*Caledonia* sailed from St. John on the same day to next put into Halifax on the 15<sup>th</sup> for the 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the 40<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the No. 2 Heavy Battery of the Canadian Garrison Artillery. She then immediately set out to cross the Atlantic to drop anchor in the English south-coast naval harbour of Portsmouth-Devonport nine days later again, on June 24.

From there it was a train ride to the coastal area of the county of Kent – in the vicinity of the Channel ports of Dover and Folkestone – where the Canadians were busy establishing *Shorncliffe*, a large military complex.

(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)



The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was encamped at *East Sandling*, one of the subsidiary camps at *Shorncliffe*, just down the coast from Folkestone.

It was to be a relatively short wait for Private Meehan and his comrades-in-arms before they were called to *active service* on the Continent. Towards the end of that wait, on September 9, he received promotion to the rank of lance corporal (*signalling*). Six days afterwards, he and his unit were on the move.

On and about September 15 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division took ship to France, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion making the crossing as one of the components of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade. Lance Corporal Meehan and his unit - following an inspection by the King on September 2 - sailed on that September 15 from Folkestone to the French port-town of Boulogne on the coast opposite, some two hours' sailing-time away.



(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)

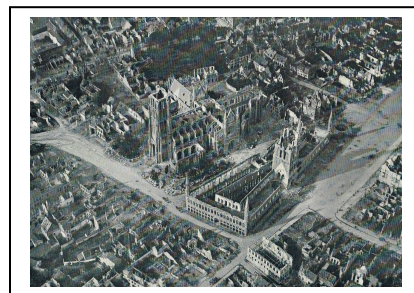
(Right: *The French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War* – from a vintage post-card)



(continued)

On the afternoon of the next day the Battalion boarded a train which, after some six hours, was to find its way some fifty kilometres eastward to the community of Wizernes. The War Diary then recounts that the men were obliged to march... *all night to Bivouac about three miles from Arque* (War Diary). By the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup> the unit had marched to the larger centre of Hazebrouck and, a week later again, it finally reached permanent billets near Scherpenberg, a small rise – there are no *big* ones - in Belgian West Flanders.

Thus the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion arrived in Belgium, to the south of the already-shattered medieval city of Ypres, a sector which it would come to know well as it was to remain there for the best part of a year. It was there that Lance Corporal Meehan was to become familiar with life in the trenches\*.



(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*)

*\*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, a year later, having by that time been equipped with those steel helmets and, less visible, British Short Lee-Enfield Mark III Rifles – from *Illustration*)

The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary entry for November 18 of 1915 comprises but a single line: *Batt'n was relieved by the 22<sup>nd</sup> and moved to Scherpenberg Barracks*. It had been serving a tour in the line and on the day before... *L 2 trench shelled by Germans. Four signallers killed and 5 others wounded...*

**Casualty report: Killed in action in trenches south east of Vierstraat**

The son of Charles Edward Meehan, deceased April 20, 1920, former clerk of the municipal council then of the Bank of Montreal – and to whom he had allotted a monthly twenty-five dollars from his pay - and of Mary Ellen Meehan (née *Kelly*) of 5, Monkstown Road (and earlier of 17 Garrison Hill), St. John's, Newfoundland, he was also brother to William-Patrick, Charles-Leo, John(?), Ellen (also *Helen*)-Mary, to Augustine-Joseph\* and to Charles-Kelly\*\*.



***\*Private Augustine Joseph Meehan, Number A36070 of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Central Ontario), is buried in Bois Carré British Cemetery: Grave reference I.C.24. He was reported as having been killed in action at Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917.***

***(Right: The grave of Private A.J. Meehan in Bois Carré British Cemetery – photograph from 2014)***

***\*\*Sapper Charles Kelly Meehan, Number 3259665, also served during the Great War in the 1<sup>st</sup> Depot Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> New Brunswick Regiment: called up, May 31, 1918; sailed to England June 29, 1918; returned to Canada having served only in United Kingdom.***

Lance Corporal Hubert Michael Meehan was reported as having been *killed in action* while serving with the Canadian 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion (New Brunswick) in Belgium on November 18, 1915. There is a *burial* report also dated November 18.

Hubert Michael Meehan had enlisted at the apparent age of twenty-two years and nine months: date of birth at St. John's, Newfoundland, February 12, 1892.

***(Right above: On this fallen memorial to Charles and Mary Meehan in Belvedere Roman Catholic Cemetery in St. John's are also commemorated their two sons, Hubert Michael and Augustine Joseph, both of whom laid down their lives during the course of the Great War. – photograph from 2015)***

Lance Corporal Hubert Michael Meehan 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).



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](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 26, 2023.

