



T-BARRY

Private
Thomas
Barry
(Number

715855) 26th Battalion (*New Brunswick*) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on *Vimy Ridge*.

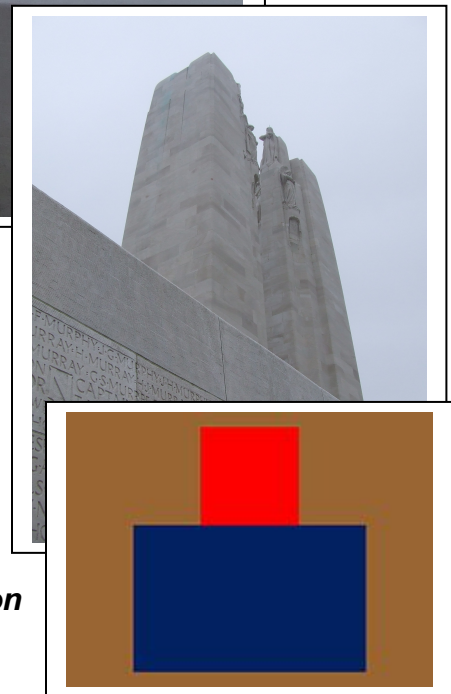
His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a fisherman, he was possibly the young man who arrived in North Sydney from Port aux Basques on board the vessel SS *Home* on September 27 of 1915.

(Right: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick) is from Wikipedia.*)

(continued)

Documented in one source as having been medically examined in Sydney, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, on January 21*, 1916, then also as having enlisted and attested in the same place and on that same day, a preponderance of his files cite him as medically examined and undergoing enlistment and attestation in the community of Truro, Nova Scotia, on February 10**.

**This file is likely to be incorrect as a medical report has him entering hospital on Willow Street to undergo six days of treatment for diphtheria on that date.*

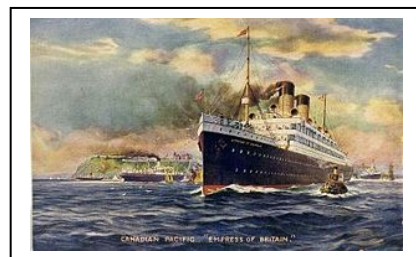


*****Even though by then in Canada, at the time he maintained his 'present address' to be Placentia Bay, Newfoundland. This might suggest that he had travelled from home solely for the purpose of enlistment.***

Whichever is correct, Private Barry is recorded as having been attached to the 106th Battalion (*Nova Scotia Rifles*) upon his enlistment, apparently to 'D' Company which was stationed in Truro. According to a paper signed by the Commanding Officer of this unit, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Innes, Private Barry was officially placed on strength on March 6. If one believes another source, the unit's... *training for the first six months consisted mostly of shovelling snow and marching**.

****From FOR KING AND EMPIRE, Canada's soldiers in the Great War web-site***

On July 8 of that same year, Private Barry made out a will in which he left his all to a friend, Mrs. Bridget Murphy of Red Island, Placentia Bay. One week later, on July 15, 1916, the 106th Battalion embarked in Halifax onto the requisitioned Canadian Pacific Steamship Company's *Empress of Britain*. Ten days later again, on the 25th, after a rough crossing, the vessel docked in the English west-coast port of Liverpool.



On board also taking passage to the United Kingdom were the 8th Draft of 'C' Battery, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery; the 1st Draft of the 63rd Regiment (*Halifax Rifles*); the 93rd and 105th Battalions of Canadian Infantry; and the 5th Draft of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, which, with Private Barry's 106th Battalion, surely totalled close to some four-thousand military personnel in all.

(Right above: The image of the Canadian Pacific's Empress of Britain is from the Wikipedia Web-Site.)

Upon arrival in the United Kingdom the Battalion entrained to the large Canadian military complex at Shorncliffe, adjacent to the English-Channel town of Folkestone in the county of Kent. There Private Barry continued training for a further two months – latterly at the subsidiary *Dibgate Camp* where he and his draft were transferred on September 26 and taken on strength by the 26th Infantry Battalion (*New Brunswick*) - before being sent to be posted to the Continent on the following day.



(Preceding page: 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)

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



His draft almost certainly made the crossing from Folkestone to the French port of Boulogne, two hours' sailing-time away on the coast opposite. Having disembarked in France, Private Barry's contingent was transported to the Canadian Base Depot established at Le Havre, for final days of training and organization before being forwarded to a rendezvous with the parent unit.

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



Private Barry is documented as having reported *to duty* with the 26th Battalion in the field on October 10, 1916, at Longuevillette, to the south-west of the town of Doullens and well behind the lines. He was one of a draft of one-hundred sixty(?) -four reinforcements to arrive on that day.

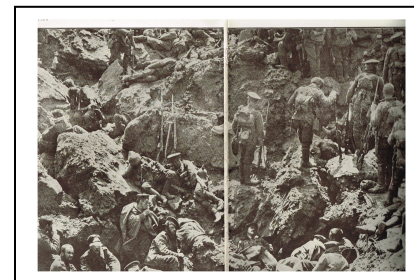
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The 26th Infantry Battalion (*New Brunswick*) was an element of the 5th Infantry Brigade, itself a component of the 2nd Canadian Division, and had been serving in the *Kingdom of Belgium* since September of 1915. After landing in and being transported from France, the unit – and the Division - had immediately been posted to a sector in-between the by-then battered city of Ypres and the Franco Belgian frontier.



(Right above: *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 during 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 Canadians were to take over from the British to occupy the *presumed* newly-won territory. This, however, was not to be, and the Canadian troops fared no better than the exhausted British whom they began to replace after a week of fighting.



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(Preceding page: *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*)

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

It appears from the Battalion War Diary, however, that the 26th Battalion was 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.* Apart from casualties incurred due to his artillery, the Battalion appears to have had no contact with the enemy.

On June 2 it had then been the turn of the Germans to attack. This had occurred in the south-east area of the Ypres Salient, the confrontation becoming known as the *Battle of Mount Sorrel*. The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, overran the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans were unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences.

For eleven days there was some desperate fighting, at first involving mainly units of the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division*, but soon drawing 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 before, in March and April of 1916, becoming responsible for a south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

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.

By the time that the 26th Battalion moved up to the front again on March 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 above: *Maple Copse, the scene of heavy fighting in June of 1916, and its cemetery wherein lie numerous Canadians – photograph from 2014*)

(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: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of 1916 in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooze, 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*)



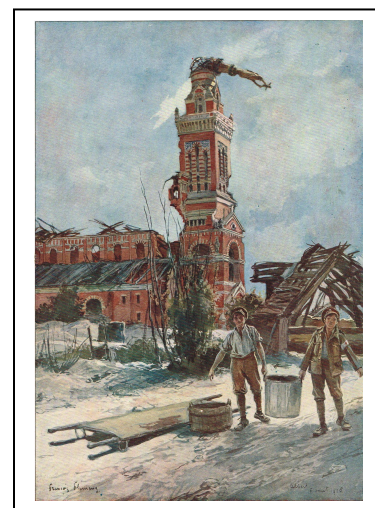
Thus, after having played its roll at *Mount Sorrel*, the 26th Battalion was relieved and withdrew to Camp “D” on June 20.

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, on the other hand, the Battalion was then posted back into the trenches for twenty-two of the first twenty-four days of August.

Having retired to Alberta Camp near Reninghelst on August 25, the 26th Battalion 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.*

The training area for the 26th Battalion was at Tilques, back over the border in northern France and in the vicinity 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 commencing training on the morrow. One of the first items on the agenda of the 29th 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. 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 above: *Canadian soldiers at work in Albert, the already-damaged basilica in the background – from Illustration*)

The 1st *Battle of the Somme* had by that time 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 Battle had progressed, troops from the Empire (*Commonwealth*) were brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), 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 Courcelette.

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

The 26th Battalion had arrived in the area only four days prior to the attack at Flers-Courcelette – 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.



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

(Right above: *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.



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(Preceding page: *Regina Trench Cemetery – Regina Trench was adjacent to Kenora Trench – and some of the ground on which the Canadian battalions fought in the autumn of 1916 – photograph from 2014*)

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

* * * * *

By the time that Private Barry reported to Longuevillette, the 26th Battalion had already been withdrawn from the front at *the Somme* for a week and was making its way north. By the 15th it was in the *Angres II Sector*, area of Lens, moving up into the front lines. On the 16th, the Battalion War Diarist entered simply: *Battalion in trenches Conditions quiet, weather wet.*

It was not to be quiet for long: On the morrow the enemy exploded a mine opposite a trench held by 'D' Company of the Battalion. The day was spent repairing damage and consolidating the defences. There were no casualties reported on that day, but Private Barry – now in his second day in the trenches – must surely have gleaned some idea of what it was all about.

What it was all about for the next five months or so must have seemed 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 – although, of course, it never worked out exactly that way. And sometimes there was even a bath and a bed.

In reserve one could count on a variety of inspections from those higher up the military ladder – and every now and then from a politician or a member of a royal family – plus 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.



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.



(Preceding page: *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*)

Most casualties were due to the ever-present enemy artillery fire, but snipers were also a constant danger



and disease and living conditions – particularly the ubiquitous lice and rats – were to take an additional toll.

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

In the trenches the 14th Battalion had once more settled into the rigours and the routines – and tedium - of trench warfare – perhaps, however, a welcome respite for those who had experienced *the Somme*; infantry action for the most part was on a local scale – patrolling and raids – with occasionally the latter being delivered at battalion strength. Casualties for the most part were due to enemy artillery with snipers also taking their toll.

Then it was spring and the time for the campaigning season to begin. On March 24 the 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 attack in the area of Arras. The Canadian Corps was to advance in a sector near 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*.

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.



The British campaign proved an overall disappointment - the French offensive a disaster.

(Above right: *The Canadian National Memorial on Vimy Ridge – photograph from 2010*)

(Right: *Canadian troops of the 4th or 3rd Division, equipped 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*)



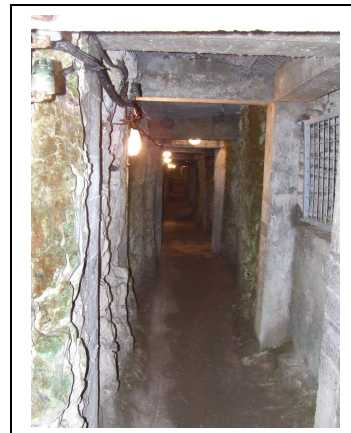
On that April 9, in driving snow, the four Canadian Divisions, on this occasion acting as a single, autonomous entity, stormed the slope of *Vimy Ridge*, by the end of the next day having cleared it almost entirely of its German occupants.

Several kilometres of tunnel 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, however, notes that the objectives of the 26th Battalion were not on the Ridge itself, this being the job handed to 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 Private Barry's unit were in the *Thelus Sector*. Thélus was – and is – a small village further down the slope and to the right-hand – south-east - side 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 advance of guns and 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*)

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 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 Private Barry's unit 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*)

The months of May and June were for the most part spent withdrawn from the line, partially to be used for re-enforcement 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 Diary 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 Le Miroir*)

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

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 Battalion and other Canadian 1st and 2nd 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.



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

(Preceding page: *The monument to commemorate the capture of Hill 70 by the Canadians stands some hundred metres or*



so from its apex, this point just to the left from where the roads intersect. – photograph from 2014)

The son of Thomas Barry, (former fisherman, deceased May 30, 1900?) and Selina Barry (née *Viscount*, deceased September 25, 1899) of Red Island, Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, he was also the brother of at least Anastatia (sic), of Patrick – whom he named as his next-of-kin – of Elizabeth and of Peter.

Private Barry was reported as having been *killed in action* on that August 15, 1917, at *Hill 70* in northern France, on the day after his birthday.



(Right above: *Canadians operating in the front line and in No-Man's-Land under artillery fire during the summer of 1917. – from Le Miroir*)

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

The date of Thomas Barry's birth in some sources, including his attestation documents, is cited as August 14, 1894. The Placentia Bay Roman Catholic Parish Records and a memorial in Red Island Cemetery apparently record 1895 as the year of his birth.



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

Private Thomas Barry 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.

