

Private William (known as *Will*) Charles Hood (at times *Hoods* in parish records) (Number 110247) of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles, Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the stone of the Menin Gate, Ypres (today *Ieper*): Panel reference 30-32.

(Right above: The image of a cap badge of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles, is from the Wikipedia Web-site.)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a surveyor, William Charles Hood appears to have left behind him no details of his movement from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Québec. The only evidence that he made the journey to Montreal appears to be the fact that he enlisted there in early 1915.

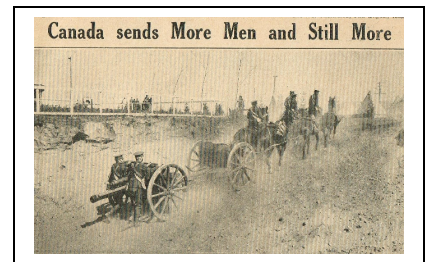
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His first pay-records are a bit ambiguous\*: on one hand they document that Will Hood was *taken on strength* by the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Canadian Mounted Rifles, on February 6, the day on which he underwent a medical examination and attestation. It was also on that day that Lieutenant Colonel Baker, Officer Commanding the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, CMR, declared of Private Hood – on paper – that... *having been final approved and inspected by me...I am satisfied with the correctness of this attestation.*

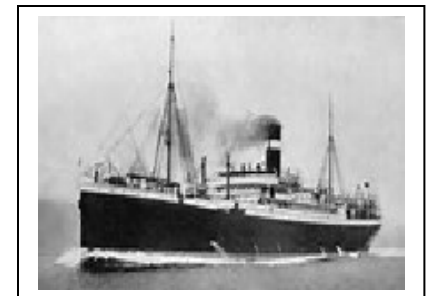
*\*The ambiguity arises where the pay-records appear to cite that the first day on which Private Hood was remunerated for his services by the Canadian Army was February 8.*

Although Will Hood was recruited in Montreal, the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, CMR, was principally organized in the Eastern Townships of Québec which was where the first training of at least a part of the unit was undertaken. It was there, in Sherbrooke, on May 1, 1915, that Private Hood received a first promotion, to the rank of corporal. Later it appears that further training took place at the large military complex at Valcartier, since it was there that he was appointed provisional (*acting*) sergeant, putting up a third stripe on September 20 or 21 (two sources differ).

(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 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*)*



On July 17 or 18 – once again the sources differ – the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Canadian Mounted Rifles embarked onto His Majesty's Transport *Hesperian* in the port of Québec. The vessel sailed on the evening of that latter day, the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment, CMR, being on board as well as Sergeant Hood's Battalion for the trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom. Eleven days following, on July 29, *Hesperian* docked in the English south-coast naval harbour of Plymouth-Devonport.



(Right above: *The photograph of the Allan Line vessel Hesperian is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site. Not long after transporting Sergeant Hood across the seas, she was torpedoed off Ireland – on September 4, 1915 – to sink two days later. Thirty-two lives were lost.*)

From there the two Mounted Regiments were transported by train across country to the county of Kent, to the fledgling Canadian Military establishment of *Shorncliffe*, down the Dover Straits and to the close vicinity of the town and harbour of Folkestone. There the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Canadian Mounted Rifles, was to remain for the following twelve weeks, until October 2, at *Dibgate Camp* and from then at *Cæsar's Camp*\*, until its departure to France.

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***\*Shorncliffe was the name given to the entire complex which comprised a number of subsidiary camps, Dibgate and Cæsar's being only two of them.***

**It was on October 24 at half-past five in the afternoon that the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, CMR, having marched from Cæsar's Camp, arrived at the pier in Folkestone and boarded the transport ship which was to take it to the Continent.**

**And it was on this same day that Sergeant Hood's provisional promotion to that rank in September 20-21, in Valcartier was confirmed.**

**(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*)**

**(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 where the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, CMR, landed, at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)**

**The ship docked later that same evening although it was to be...*heavy rain and gales of wind blowing*...rather than flag-waving crowds which greeted its arrival. Upon its disembarkation the Regiment marched – it is not often that one hears of any horses – to the nearby St. Martin's Camp. There it was to spend the next day, and it was not until the early morning of October 26 that Sergeant Hood and his comrades-in-arms again marched, on this occasion to the nearby railway station.**

**By the end of the following day again the unit was settling down in the vicinity of the northern French town of Meteren, at least some of the horses having made their appearance by then. On November 2 both horses and men moved from Meteren to Aldershot Camp near Neuve-Église.**

**In doing so, the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, CMR, had crossed the frontier and was now in the *Kingdom of Belgium*.**

**(Right above: *While the caption reads that these troops moving up are 'English', this could mean any unit in British uniform – including Empire (Commonwealth) units. This is early in the war as there is no sign of a steel helmet. – from a vintage post-card*)**

**The 5<sup>th</sup> CMR was now stationed in Belgium at the southern end of the front there, just before the trenches crossed over the frontier into France. Messines in the forward area and Locre to the rear are two place names which often appear in the Battalion War Diary.**



Some four months later, during the month of March, the unit would be ordered into the *Ypres Salient*, just to the south-east of the city of Ypres (today *Ieper*) itself. It was in these two sectors that the 5<sup>th</sup> CMR Battalion personnel was to learn about the rigours, the routines and the 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 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 usually being 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: 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)*



The exercises that the personnel of the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, CMR, was now to undergo were for the most part pertaining to infantry training. The unit was also introduced into the trenches where there was obviously little enough room for a man, and of course none whatsoever for a horse. Thus the CMR mounts remained for the moment to the rear, although their well-being was for the time-being still a part of the troopers' daily duties.

But that *time-being* was fast running out\*.

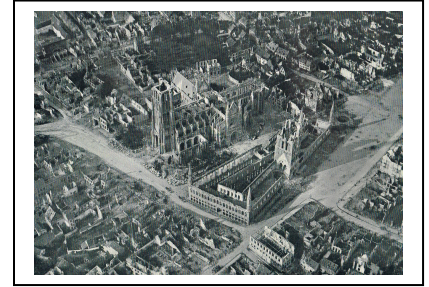
*\*In the month of December of 1915 it was decided to dismount the Mounted Regiments. Cavalry was finding less and less a role to play in the conflict – despite the biases of the High Command – thus the CMR units lost their horses and became regular infantry.*

*However, the strength of a CMR regiment was little over fifty per cent of a bona fide infantry unit and so the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> CMR Regiments were chosen to remain intact and to become the four infantry battalions of the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division's\* 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. The remaining CMR formations were then used as re-enforcements to bring the four fore-mentioned CMR regiments up to battalion strength. Thus the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> CMR Regiments became the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> CMR Battalions.*

*\*The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, in which the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, CMR, was now to serve, itself officially came into being at midnight on the night of December 31, 1915 – January 1, 1916.*

As cited above, during the month of March the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, CMR, transferred from a relatively quiet area into one that had already proved to be one of the most lethal of the entire *Great War*.

This new area of responsibility in the *Ypres Salient* was to comprise places in the south-east sector which the English-speaking troops had by that time variously designated as *Maple Copse*, *Hill 60*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Railway Dugouts* and *Mount Sorrel*, as well as the once-village of *Hooge*.



There it was that the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division would be involved its first major infantry action.

(Right above: *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 conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration)*

Some two months later, from June 2 to 13 of 1916, the struggle for *Mount Sorrel* and for the afore-mentioned area of *Sanctuary Wood*, *Maple Copse*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Hooge* and *Hill 60* between the German Army and the Canadian Corps was to be played out.

The Canadians had apparently 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 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, they never exploited.



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

(Right below: *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)*

On that June 2, the 5<sup>th</sup> CMR was in Brigade Support at *Maple Copse*, having been there since the night of May 31-June 1.



The following are excerpts taken from the War Diary of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Mounted Rifle Battalion entry of June 2, 1916: *A red letter day in the history of the Battalion, ever to be remembered by those who lived through it. In the early morning, enemy sprung a mine in part of line held by 4<sup>th</sup> CMR Battalion and began a bombardment of the Brigade area... and all the ground in MAPLE COPSE and vicinity. The men were kept under cover as much as possible...*



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

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**...Several attempts were made to get in touch with the front line but without success. Runners sent out by us... were killed or returned wounded, with news that the communications trenches had been blown in, and that it was impossible to get through enemy barrage fire...**

**(Right: Troops – in this instance British – in hastily-dug trenches in the Ypres Salient: These are still the early days of the year as witnessed by the lack of steel helmets which came into use only in the summer of 1916. – from Illustration)**



**On the following day, June 3, the War Diarist restricted himself to simply report: *Fighting continues and the enemy has continued to take a heavy toll from the 5<sup>th</sup> both in Officers and men.***

***The enemy is being well held and counter attacks are beginning to push him back. This evening the remnants of the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade are to be relieved by the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade and go back to rest camp.***



**What exactly the role was that Sergeant Hood played on those days of June 2-3, 1916, - or even in which Company he was serving - does not appear to have been documented – but he did not return to rest camp.**

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



**(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: Still nursing the scars of almost a hundred years ago, it is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government – photograph from 2014)***

**The son of Charles Hood, fisherman, and of Caroline Hood (née Parsons) of Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, he was also brother to at least John, Sarah-Ann (Annie – named as his next of kin and to whom on October 9, 1915, he had willed his all), Emma, Isaac and to Henry.**



**Sergeant Hood was at first reported as *wounded and missing* on June 2 of 1916 while fighting in the... *Trenches near Maple Copse.***



**(continued)**

On September 9 of the same year, this report was amended so as to read: *Presumed to have died on or since 3/6/16.*

William Charles Hood had enlisted at the apparent age of thirty years and six months: date of birth at Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, August 3, 1884 (from both attestation papers and parish records).

(Preceding page bottom left: *The photograph of Corporal Hood is from the Ancestry.ca web-site.*)

(Preceding page bottom right: *The sacrifice of William Charles Hood is honoured on the War Memorial in the community of Bay Roberts. – photograph from 2010*)

Sergeant William Charles Hood 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 25, 2023.