

Private Thomas William Farewell (also found as *Farwell*) (Number 415418) of the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on the stone of the Menin Gate, Ypres (today *leper*): Panel reference 30-32.

(Right above: *The shoulder-flash of the 24th Battalion (Victoria Rifles) is from the Wikipedia web-site.*)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a *student*, Thomas William Farewell appears to have left behind him no details of his movement – perhaps in the company of his parent and siblings as their address in 1915 is cited as 43, Livingstone Street, Halifax - from the Dominion of Newfoundland to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. The only other evidence that he made the journey to Halifax appears to be the fact that he enlisted there.

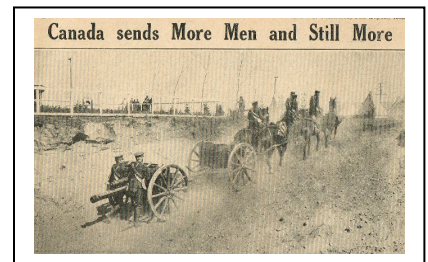
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It was in the capital city of Nova Scotia that Thomas William Farewell presented himself for enlistment and was *taken on strength* by the 40th Battalion (*Nova Scotia*) – both confirmed by his first pay records. The date was August 10, 1915, and it was on this same day that he underwent a medical examination - which found him...*fit for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force* - and then attestation.

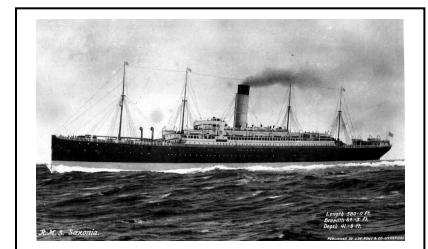
Six days later, on August 16, the Officer Commanding the 40th Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel A.G. Vincent, concluded the enlistment formalities when he declared – on paper – that...*Thomas W. Farewell...having finally been approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation**.

**The 40th Battalion had been mobilized on May 11 of 1915 at Camp Aldershot in Nova Scotia and had undergone its early training there but it had then been relocated to Camp Valcartier in Québec on June 21. Thus it may well be that Private Farewell travelled there, to Québec, during that six-day interim of August 10 to 16.*

(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 also 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*)*



Two drafts from the 40th Battalion had already sailed before the parent unit itself crossed the Atlantic, but these were seemingly used upon arrival in England as re-enforcements for other units already serving on the Continent. It was on October 18, 1915, that Private Farewell and the main body of the Battalion took ship in the port of Québec – in the company of the 41st Battalion of Canadian Infantry – embarking onto His Majesty’s Transport *Saxonia**.



**For some six months during the early days of the Great War, the vessel had served to accommodate German prisoners of war. In March of 1915 she then had reverted to service as a troop transport.*

(Right above: *The image of the Royal Mail Ship Saxonia is from the Old Ship Picture Galleries web-site.*)

The vessel sailed on the same date, to dock in the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport ten days later, on October 28. Private Farewell’s 40th Battalion was then transported by train to the fledgling Canadian military camp then being established in the vicinity of the villages of Liphook and Bramshott – to which latter community the camp owed its name - in the southern English county of Hampshire.



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The 40th Battalion was apparently the first Canadian unit to be stationed there.

(Preceding page: *The harbour of Plymouth-Devonport as it was almost a century after the Great War – a lot less busy nowadays - photograph from 2013*)

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



But for exactly how long the unit *remained* posted at *Camp Bramshott* is not clear: the 40th Battalion, originally destined to be a unit of 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade of the soon-to-be 3rd Canadian Division, apparently soon afterwards would become re-designated as a reserve battalion and was then to be transferred to the Kentish coast, to *East Sandling Camp**. When exactly this transfer came about is not clear, but it may well have been as early as February of 1916, as some individual medical reports show.

**Before the end of the Great War, Canada was to have despatched overseas two-hundred fifty battalions – although it is true that a number of these units, particularly as the conflict progressed, were below full strength. At the outset, these Overseas Battalions all had aspirations of seeing active service in a theatre of war.*

However, as it transpired, only some fifty of these formations were ever to be sent across the English Channel to the Western Front. By far the majority remained in the United Kingdom to be used as re-enforcement pools and they were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by units that had by then been designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.



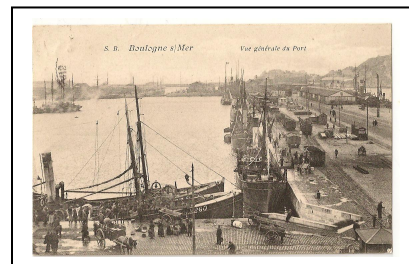
East Sandling was a subsidiary of the large Canadian military complex of *Shorncliffe* which had seen the arrival and departure through its gates of the 2nd Canadian Division on its way to the Continent in September of 1915. It was also to witness the transfer of units of the 3rd Canadian Division during the autumn of 1915 and the winter which followed, as they left England through the nearby harbour and town of nearby Folkestone, to disembark some two hours later in Boulogne on the French coast opposite.

(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*)

Private Farewell, *struck off strength* by the 40th Battalion, was now to follow in the footsteps of those other units, sailing for France during the night of March 15-16, 1916. On that latter date he reported to the Canadian Base Depot established by that time in the vicinity of the French industrial city of Le Havre, situated on the estuary of the River Seine. He was there *taken on strength* by the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*).



(Preceding page: 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)

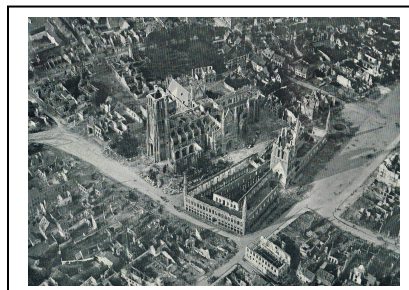
Two days afterwards he was despatched from there to join his new unit in the field...and two days later again, on March 20, his personal dossier records him as having *done so* – although the Battalion War Diary does not. It was on a day on which the 24th Battalion was being relieved to fall back into Brigade Reserve in the area of *Royal Engineers Farm*, to the south of the Belgian city of Ypres.



(Right: *R.E. Farm Cemetery with its one-hundred sixty-nine dead, is only one of the many burial-sites to be found in the fields of Flanders* – photograph from 2015)

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A component of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the Canadian 2nd Division, the 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) was a Montreal-based unit with a history which dated back to 1862. After mobilization it had sailed to Great Britain from Canada in May of 1915, and had been transferred with the 2nd Division to France, then to the *Kingdom of Belgium*, in September of the same year. There it was to serve with the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade to the south of the *Ypres Salient* in a sector between the already battered city of Ypres and the Franco-Belgian border.



(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*)

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It was to be six months after the arrival of the 24th Battalion parent unit on the Continent that Private Farewell was ordered to report to it as a re-enforcement. Those six months had been for the most part a relatively placid period for all the Canadian soldiery stationed at the time in the *Kingdom of Belgium*. After Private Farewell's arrival, that calm was to last but another two weeks.

It was to be in early April of 1916, more than six months following its arrival on the Continent, that the 2nd Canadian Division was now to undergo its baptism of fire in a major infantry operation.

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The place was in the area of the village of St-Éloi where, on the 27th day of March, the British had detonated a series of mines under the German lines and then had followed up with an infantry attack. The foreseen role of the newly-arrived Canadian formation was to then capitalize on the presumed British successes, to hold and to consolidate the newly-won territory.

However, the damage done to the terrain by the explosions, the often putrid weather which was to turn the newly-created craters into ponds and the earth into a quagmire, and then a resolute German defence, had greeted the Canadian newcomers who were to begin to take over from the by-then exhausted British on April 3-4.

Two weeks later the Germans had won back the lost territory and had inflicted severe losses on the Canadians.

(Right below: *An attack in the aftermath of the exploding of a mine under enemy lines – from Illustration*)

The *Action of the St. Eloi Craters* had not been a happy experience for the novice Canadians. The 24th Battalion, however, according to its War Diary, had not been heavily involved and the majority of its casualties at the time had been due to artillery fire. Apart from repelling a German bombing party on April 15, the unit had been engaged in very little of the infantry action.



Six weeks following the episode at St-Éloi there had then been the confrontation at *Mount Sorrel*. This had involved principally the newly-arrived Canadian 3rd Division* but a number of other units from the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions, since the situation at times was to become critical, had also subsequently played a role.

**The Canadian 3rd Division officially came into being at mid-night of December 31, 1915, and January 1 of 1916. However, unlike its two predecessors, it was formed on the Continent, some of its units having already been on active service there for months. Others did not arrive until the early weeks of 1916, thus it was not until March of that year that the Division was capable of assuming responsibility for any sector. When it eventually did, it was thrust into the south-eastern area of the Ypres Salient.*

On June 2 the Germans had attacked the only high ground in the *Ypres Salient* which remained under Canadian (and thus also British) control. This was in a sector to the south-east of the city of Ypres itself, the area including the village of *Hooge*, *Sanctuary Wood*, *Railway Dugouts*, *Hill 60*, *Maple Copse* and also the promontory which since that time has lent its name – in English, at least - to the action, *Mount Sorrel*.



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

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The enemy, preceded by an intense barrage, had overrun the forward Canadian positions and for a while had breached the Canadian lines. However, the Germans had been unable to exploit their success and the Canadians were able to patch up their defences.



Sir Julien Byng's* hurriedly-contrived counter-strike of the following day, however, delivered piece-meal, poorly supported by artillery and badly co-ordinated, had proved a costly disaster for the Canadians.

**The British-appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Corps.*

(Right above: *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*)

The 24th Battalion was not to play a leading part in the action at *Mount Sorrel*. Uninvolved during the early days, the unit moved forward into the front-line trenches in the area of *Maple Copse* on June 7, there to remain until relieved on the 11th. Thus neither did it participate in the closing stages of October 12-13.

The Battalion was not to escape without casualties however. Once again these were caused mostly by German gun-fire, particularly at the time when it was moving forward towards *Maple Copse* on June 7, one platoon incurring twenty-three casualties in a single extremely heavy bombardment and thus almost ceasing to exist.

The 24th Battalion (*Victoria Rifles*) War Diary entry for June 11, 1916, reads as follows: *ZILLEBEKE FRONT - Intense and intermittent bombardment of our trenches all day with quick & effective retaliation by our guns. Relieved at 12 MN by 2nd Cdn. Bn. Our patrols captured one German prisoner of 121st Reg't. Wurtenburgers.*



There is no mention of casualties. However, there appears to have been at least one...

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

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



Casualty report: *"Killed in Action" – During a bombardment by the enemy of the trenches in the vicinity of Maple Copse, he was struck by a piece of enemy 5.9 shell and instantly killed.*

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(Right: A century later, reminders of a violent past at the site of Hill 60 to the south-east of Ypres, the area today protected by the Belgian Government against everything except the whims of nature – photograph from 2014)



According to the records, Private Farewell was buried and...*original grave marked with a wooden cross*. The grave was then likely destroyed in subsequent fighting or its whereabouts forgotten.

The son of Joseph Farewell, fisherman, and of Susannah Farewell (née *Lockyer*) of Path End, Burin – later of Livingstone Street then Robie Street of Halifax, Nova Scotia, he was also brother to at least James-Lockyer and Annie.

Private Farewell was reported as having been *killed in action* during the fighting at *Mount Sorrel* on June 11, 1916.

Thomas William Farewell had enlisted at the *apparent* age of eighteen years: date of birth at Burin, Newfoundland, August 25, 1898 (from attestation papers).

Private Thomas William Farewell 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 25, 2023.



