

Vincent McEachern - WW1(KIA)



(Photo enhanced using AI technology)

1. Personal Profile & Enlistment

- Name: Vincent McEachern (p. 1)
- Regimental Number: 3181365 (p. 1)
- Rank: Private (p. 5)
- Civilian Trade: Brakesman (p. 1)
- Next-of-Kin: John D. McEachern (Father) and Mrs. Jannett (Jennie) McEachern (Mother) of Cape George, Antigonish County, Nova Scotia (pp. 1, 11, 15).
- Enlistment: Drafted under the Military Service Act on March 29, 1918, at Halifax, Nova Scotia into the 1st Depot Battalion, Nova Scotia Regiment (p. 1).

The 1st Depot Battalion was established on September 25, 1917 to accommodate the expected flood of soldiers drafted under the Military Service Act. The Halifax explosion (December 6, 1917) disrupted its organization. Many of the unit's personnel assisted in retrieving dead and wounded civilians from the ruins, and also cleared debris from the city's devastated neighbourhoods. Following completion of its "disaster relief" work, 1st Depot Battalion moved to Aldershot, where Vincent was "taken on strength" on March 29, 1918. A regular battalion usually contained approximately 1,000 men, but at times No. 1 Depot reached 5,000 before drafts departed for overseas.

2. Overseas Deployment & Training Timeline

- April 17, 1918: Formally embarked from Halifax aboard the S/S *Melita* to deploy overseas (pp. 7, 25).
- April 28, 1918: Disembarked at Liverpool, England, and was taken on strength by the 17th Canadian Reserve Battalion at Bramshott to begin combat training (pp. 23, 25).
- Hospital Stay (Mumps): Directly upon arrival in Liverpool on April 28, he was admitted to the 1st Western General Hospital (Sparrow Hall) suffering from the mumps (pp. 17, 19-20). He spent 20 days recovering before being discharged back to active training on May 17, 1918 (pp. 19-20).
- September 11, 1918: Having completed reinforcement training, he officially proceeded overseas to France (pp. 24-25).

3. Frontline Service & Battles

Private McEachern arrived at the Canadian Base Depot in France on September 13, 1918 (p. 24). On September 21, 1918, he officially arrived at the front lines and joined his combat unit: the 85th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders) (pp. 5, 24).

The 85th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders), CEF, was one of Canada's most famous and highly decorated infantry units of the First World War. Known affectionately as the "Never Fails" battalion, the unit was raised entirely from Nova Scotia and built a legendary reputation for tactical reliability and sheer grit on the Western Front.

He served in the field during the momentous Canada's Hundred Days offensive.

Canada's Hundred Days is the historical term given to the final three months of the First World War (August 8 to November 11, 1918). During this intensive period, the four divisions of the Canadian Corps were used as the primary elite "shock troops" or "spearhead" of the British Army, breaking through the most heavily fortified lines on the Western Front.

Though the log lists his presence simply as "Field" (pp. 24-25), the 85th Battalion was heavily engaged in breaking the German lines during this specific autumn window, prominently fighting through:

- The Second Battle of Cambrai (late September to early October 1918).

When discussing the Battle of Cambrai, it is important to note that two major battles were fought over this strategic French railway hub.

***The First Battle of Cambrai** (1917) is world-famous for changing the face of modern warfare through the first mass deployment of tanks.*

***The Second Battle of Cambrai** (1918) was the brutal, decisive follow-up where the Canadian Corps successfully smashed the Hindenburg Line and liberated the city.*

- The pursuit to the Selle and the liberation of Valenciennes (late October to early November 1918).

Following the capture of Cambrai, the Allied armies relentlessly pursued the retreating German forces across northern France, culminating in the fierce battles along the Selle River and the strategic liberation of Valenciennes.

During the operations around Valenciennes, the 85th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders) played an active, exhausting role. They were continuously moved forward to support the flanks, clear out bypassed enemy machine-gun posts, and secure the lines of communication amidst heavy enemy retaliatory shelling.

Just four days after the city fell, the 85th Battalion crossed the border into Belgium, where Private Vincent McEachern was tragically killed during the final push toward Mons.

4. Death: Where and How He Was Killed

- Date of Death: November 6, 1918 (pp. 5, 9, 17).
- How He Was Killed: He is officially recorded as "Killed in Action" (K. in A.) (pp. 5, 9, 17). This means he was killed directly by enemy fire (artillery shelling, machine-gun fire, or small arms) during combat operations.

- Where He Was Killed: We are not sure which company within the 85th Battalion Pvt. McEachern belonged to but accounts from that day are chilling.

At 5:30 a.m. November 6, the 85th's "A" Company dispatched two Platoons to the left and two platoons to the right, completely enveloping "The Fosse." "D" Company on the left headed toward Quievrechain, where it established contact with the 78th Battalion. Meanwhile, "B" Company received orders to send patrols across the Belgian border (the Annelle River). The soldiers pushed into Belgium as far as the Honnelle River, where they made contact with "D" Company.

The 85th Battalion then received orders to hold its positions until relieved by the 22nd Battalion. Before relief commenced, however, the unit received instructions to retreat across the Annelle River. A significant rise in its water levels during the day forced some soldiers to swim to the other side. The withdrawal signified the end of major combat for the 85th Battalion, as the 2nd Division's 5th Brigade assumed the 12th Brigade's positions and continued the advance toward Mons, Belgium.

The day's fighting resulted in the deaths of 18 of the 85th's soldiers, while another 53 were wounded. Private Vincent M. MacEachern was killed during the advance on Quievrechain, and was laid to rest in Valenciennes (St. Roch) Communal Cemetery Extension, France.

- On November 6, 1918 - just five days before the Armistice - Pvt. McEachern was killed.

The WW1 Armistice was signed in the early morning hours of November 11, 1918. It went into effect at exactly 11:00 AM that same day—historically remembered as the "eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month."

5. Post-War Legacy & Family Compensation

Because Private McEachern was killed in active combat, his family received the following commemorative items and financial fulfillments from the state:

- The Memorial Cross, Medals, and Scroll: Issued directly to his mother, Jannett, and father, John, back home at Cape George (p. 15).
- Wills & Pay Fulfillments: Vincent had executed a military will on March 29, 1918, leaving his entire estate and personal effects to his mother (p. 21). His ledger cards show a balance of \$49.78 remaining in his account, which was sent to his family via the Separation Allowance branch (pp. 28, 31).