

John McPherson - WW1(KIA)



(AI enhanced photograph)

Personal Profile

- Full Name: John (Jack) McPherson (MacPherson... pp. 1, 21).
- Date & Place of Birth: April 13, 1894, in Morar, Antigonish County, Nova Scotia, Canada (MacPherson... pp. 1, 5).
- Trade or Calling: Farmer (MacPherson... p. 1).
- Marital Status: Single (MacPherson... p. 1).
- Next-of-Kin: Dan McPherson (Father), residing in Morar, Antigonish County, Nova Scotia (MacPherson... pp. 1, 7).
- Regimental Number: 104422 (MacPherson... p. 1).

Units Served In

- 68th Overseas Battalion: Enlisted in this unit on August 10, 1915, at Regina, Saskatchewan (MacPherson... p. 1). He sailed from Halifax aboard the S.S. *Olympic* on April 28, 1916, arriving in England in early May (MacPherson... pp. 5, 33).
- 32nd Reserve Battalion: Taken on strength in England on July 7, 1916, for transitional holding and training (MacPherson... p. 33).
- 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Saskatchewan Regiment): Transferred and deployed overseas to France on August 24, 1916 (MacPherson... p. 33). He joined the unit in the field on September 6, 1916, to serve as a frontline infantry reinforcement (MacPherson... pp. 25, 33).

The 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion, CEF—popularly known as the "Tuxford's Dandy 5th" or the "Western Cavalry"—was one of the original, elite frontline infantry battalions of the Canadian Corps during the First World War.

Battles Fought In

- The Battle of the Somme (Battle of Flers-Courcelette): Private McPherson's brief front line deployment placed him directly into the bloodiest phases of the Somme campaign (MacPherson... pp. 29, 33). He was actively engaged in shock-troop advances south of the devastated village of Courcelette, France (MacPherson... p. 29).

The Battle of the Somme (fought from July 1 to November 18, 1916) was one of the largest, bloodiest, and most heavily contested strategic campaigns of the First World War (MacPherson... pp. 11-12). Fought along the banks of the Somme River in northern France, it pitted the joint British and French armies against the German Empire, becoming the defining symbol of industrial trench attrition.

The Battle of Flers-Courcelette (September 15–22, 1916) was a major Anglo-French offensive launched within the broader Battle of the Somme. It is celebrated as a massive tactical victory for the Canadian Corps and is immortalized in world history as the very first battle to feature armored tanks.

Injuries & Medical History

Private McPherson suffered a severe pre-combat illness followed by highly catastrophic battle wounds:

1. Pre-Combat Illness (England)

- Pleurisy with Effusion: Hospitalized at Moore Barracks Canadian Hospital from June 10 to July 19, 1916, complaining of severe chest pain upon breathing (MacPherson... p. 39).
- Doctors noted an area of consolidation and performed an aspiration procedure on June 22 to clear out fluid from his pleural cavity (MacPherson... p. 39). He completed his recovery at the Woodcote Park Convalescent Hospital in Epsom and was discharged fit for duty on August 8, 1916 (MacPherson... pp. 12, 33).

2. Fatal Combat Wounds (Courcelette)

- The Wounding (September 26, 1916): While advancing in the field at Courcelette, he was struck by exploding high-explosive shell fragments (MacPherson... pp. 29, 31). He sustained multiple Gunshot Wounds (GSW/Shrapnel) to his left forearm and his back (MacPherson... pp. 29, 31).

On September 26, 1916, the 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Western Cavalry) was thrown into intense, direct frontline action during the Battle of Thiepval Ridge, which launched on that exact morning as a continuation of the bloody Somme campaign.

According to the records and the 5th Battalion War Diary, here is the tactical breakdown of what the unit experienced on that day:

Zero Hour: The Morning Assault

- *The Mission: Operating under the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade of the 1st Canadian Division, the 5th Battalion was tasked with a major assault on the right flank of the Allied push. Their strategic objective was to capture heavily fortified German trench systems sprawling across the heights between the ruins of Thiepval and Courcelette.*

- *The Jumping Off: At exactly 12:35 PM (Noon), following an intense, earth-shattering Allied creeping artillery barrage, the men of the 5th Battalion climbed out of their assembly trenches and charged into No Man's Land.*

Vicious Trench Fighting & Objectives Won

- *Taking the First Targets: Navigating through deep mud, overlapping shell craters, and tangles of uncut wire, the battalion attacked with immense aggression. They successfully rushed, overwhelmed, and captured their initial frontline objective, a major system known as Zollern Trench.*
- *Hand-to-Hand Combat: The German defenders resisted fiercely. The fighting quickly devolved into chaotic, close-quarters combat inside the labyrinth of captured trenches, featuring heavy use of Lewis machine guns, rifles, and Mills bomb grenades.*

Pressing Forward: After consolidating Zollern Trench, elements of the 5th Battalion pushed further up the slope later in the afternoon to assist in capturing parts of the Hessian Trench system, successfully helping to lock down the strategic high ground of the ridge.

Bracing Under the Counter-Barrage

- *The German Fury: Furious at losing the crest of the ridge, German artillery batteries immediately retaliated. For the remainder of September 26, the newly won trenches held by the 5th Battalion were subjected to an apocalyptic, unrelenting German counter-bombardment.*
- *Holding the Line: Despite the intense shelling, choking smoke, and mounting casualties, the men stubbornly dug in using entrenching tools and held onto their hard-won positions through the night.*

The Physical Toll

This day of severe breakthrough fighting came at a massive cost. The 5th Battalion sustained heavy casualties on September 26, with dozens of men killed, wounded, or missing in action. It was precisely during this volatile final week of September—marked by this devastating high-intensity shellfire—that reinforcements like Private John McPherson suffered their fatal wounds before being evacuated to the rear.

- **Paralysis & Complications:** The blast fragments caused severe spinal damage. Upon admission to No. 10 General Hospital in Rouen, doctors noted complete paralysis of both legs, a total loss of tactile sensation below the knees, and a complete retention of urine and feces (MacPherson... pp. 29, 31).

- Evacuation & Death: He was evacuated to England on October 9 and admitted to the 1st Southern General Hospital (Stourbridge Section) in Birmingham (MacPherson... pp. 11, 25). His clinical logs detail an agonizing decline marked by an offensive bladder infection, severe headaches, a rapidly weakening pulse, blindness, and delirium (MacPherson... p. 30).
- Private McPherson succumbed to his wounds and passed away on October 27, 1916, at 5:50 PM at the age of 22 (MacPherson... pp. 11, 21, 37).

He is laid to rest in plot C331 at the Stourbridge Cemetery in Worcestershire alongside 47 other Commonwealth soldiers. His name is officially recorded on the Veterans Affairs Canada Virtual War Memorial.