

October 26, 1916: Private Angus MacDonald



Date of Birth: October 28, 1885* at Havre Boucher, Antigonish County, NS

Parents: Duncan D. & Elizabeth MacDonald

Siblings: Brothers James, Donald (Daniel) & Vincent; sisters Mary E., Catherine J., Elizabeth M., Teresa, Annie & Emma

Marital Status: Single

Occupation: Trackman

Enlistment: April 15, 1916 at Pictou, NS

Units: 106th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles); 26th Battalion (New Brunswick)

Service #: 716173

Rank: Private

Next of Kin: Duncan MacDonald, Mulgrave, Guysborough County, NS (father)

Date of Death: October 26, 1916 at Bully-les-Mines, France

Final Resting Place: Bully Grenay Communal Cemetery, British Extension, Pas de Calais, France

*Date of birth obtained from 1901 census. The 1911 census gives the date as September 1887, while Angus's attestation papers record the date as October 28, 1888.

Angus MacDonald was the fifth of 10 children born to Duncan and Elizabeth MacDonald of Havre Boucher, Antigonish County. Sometime between 1901 and 1911, the family relocated to Mulgrave, Guysborough County, where Angus found employment as a trackman on the Intercolonial Railway.

Angus enlisted for military service with the 106th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) at Pictou, NS on April 15, 1916. Three months later, the 106th's recruits sailed for England aboard SS Empress of Britain and made their way to camp at Lower Dilgate, Shorncliffe after a ten-day voyage.

Before year's end, the 106th was dissolved in order to provide reinforcements for existing units. Angus was among a party of soldiers transferred to the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick) on September 21. He crossed the English Channel to the continent on October 6 and joined his new unit at Bouzincourt, near Albert, France, two days later.

The 26th Battalion had recently arrived in the Somme area of France, where it incurred 271 casualties at Courcellette in mid-September and an additional 182 in fighting at Kenora Trench early the following month. Angus was one of 87 much-needed reinforcements who replenished its ranks following these devastating losses.

On October 15, the new arrivals entered the trenches for their first "tour." The only incident of note occurred two days later, when German forces detonated a large mine opposite a section occupied by one of the 26th's Companies. Its soldiers quickly occupied the resulting crater and consolidated their position. Upon retiring to Brigade Reserve on October 21, the unit's personnel

commenced training at a nearby firing range, in addition to receiving bombing and Lewis Gun instruction.

Soldiers in the forward area routinely used live ammunition while training. The hazards of such a practice became tragically apparent in an incident described on Angus's "circumstances of casualty" card:

"Whilst in the Bombing Pit at Bully Grenay, during a course of instruction in bombing [Pte. Angus MacDonald] was accidentally wounded about the head when a bomb which he had thrown exploded prematurely about five feet from his hand. This accident occurred at about 1.30 P. M. on October 25, 1916, and he succumbed to his injuries the following day [October 26] at No. 5 Canadian Field Ambulance. Court of Enquiry convened to investigate the circumstances of his death is of the opinion that the premature explosion was due to a faulty fuse and that all customary precautions regarding safety were strictly adhered to."

Private Angus MacDonald was laid to rest in nearby Bully Grenay Cemetery, British Extension, three and a half miles southeast of Noeux-les-Mines, France.