

## Cpl. Thomas Calvert, Military Medal (1881-1918)

Thomas Calvert was like many of the early volunteers, but his subsequent military career was unlike any others. He was, as were many of the first to volunteer, British born and with previous military experience. His birthplace was Lancaster in the north of England, 30 November 1881 and in his twenties he spent three years serving with the South African Constabulary. They were at this time a militia style force tasked with policing a country that had just been wracked by a brutal war. This war had seen the first time that Canada had sent a contingent of troops overseas to fight in an Imperial War. That contingent of troops had been a regiment of 500 men raised and funded by Lord Strathcona, the Strathcona Horse, and they were commanded by a noted Canadian policeman and soldier, Samuel "Sam" Benfield Steele.

After the Strathcona Horse had been disbanded Sam Steele took on the task of creating the South African Constabulary along the lines of the R.C.M.P. which is where Thomas Calvert must have known him, ca. 1902-1905.

In 1906, Thomas emigrated to Canada, and the 1911 census finds him residing just outside of Nanaimo, B.C., on Vancouver Island. He is 30 years old, single and a "coal engineer."

We next find Thomas employed at the Nickel Plate mine in Hedley in 1915. After his leaving party at the Nickel Plate Mine that April, Thomas Calvert goes to Winnipeg. This is where Sam Steele is living and for the evening of 21 April 1915 there is an entry in Sam Steele's diary where "Bagnall called with Calvert..." and it is arranged for his training. The next day he signs his attestation papers and is assigned the Service Number 13 and posted to Headquarters Staff. In his letters to the *Hedley Gazette* he writes of his General Steele and how he is still in England but hopes they will be sent overseas. General Steele never went to France and stayed in command of all Canadian troops in England until March 1918 and then retired from the army in July 1918. On 6 July, Thomas Calvert is re-assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Canadian Engineers, "D" Company, and serves them with distinction, being awarded the Military Medal and promoted to Corporal.

On the night of 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1918, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion are given the difficult job of building a bridge for assaulting troops and tanks to cross at the French town of Valenciennes. Under intense machine gun and shellfire they complete their task and the attack is a success. It is the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's last action of the war. Unfortunately Thomas Calvert is badly wounded during the battle and is transferred to the big base hospital at Etaples where, 12 days after the Armistice is signed and a week before his 37<sup>th</sup> birthday, Thomas Calvert died of his wounds – a shrapnel head wound and broncho pneumonia – on 23 November 1918. He was the last of the Hedley Boys to give their all in World War I.