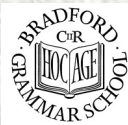


JOHN GILLIES MCTURK



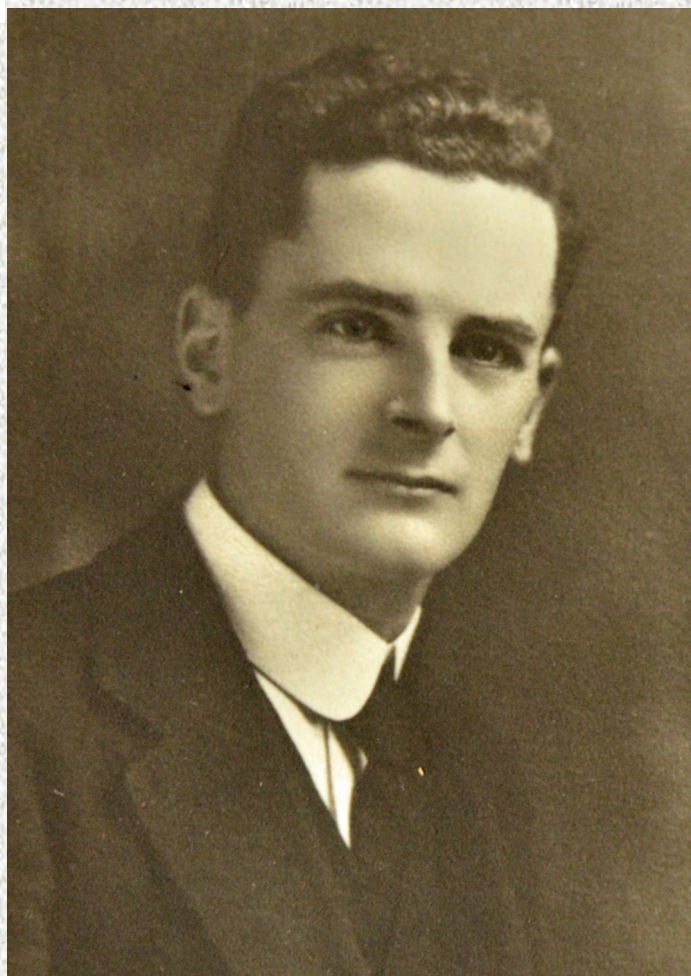
24th April 1915

1884-1915 Age 30

Private 25972 14th Battalion Canadian Infantry (Royal Montreal Regiment). John McTurk was born on 28th November 1884, the fourth of five children of Alexander and Agnes McTurk. His father was a Bradford cloth merchant originally from Scotland, while John's mother was a Bradford girl. By 1901, Agnes was widowed and John, who had already left Bradford Grammar School, was a clerk in a cloth warehouse. His elder brother James Alexander McTurk was a salesman in the same trade, apparently for Adolphus Mombert, a German-born wool merchant. John became a part-time "Saturday-night" soldier in the Territorial 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, where he would have renewed contact with the many Old Bradfordians in its ranks. However, in September 1909, he sailed from Liverpool on the *Megantic* bound for Montreal. He settled in the Lachine district of Montreal Island, Quebec, working as a travelling cloth salesman.

When war broke out, Canada offered Britain its support, although it would have to improvise an army at Valcartier Camp near Quebec. McTurk joined up on 21st September, stating that he had six year's service in the West Yorkshire Regiment and was a member of the Active Militia in Canada. He was unmarried and well-built for the time at 5'11" tall with a 36" chest. He had hazel eyes and dark brown hair. Less than a week later the 80,000-strong First Canadian Contingent sailed for Britain. They spent a miserable winter of rain, mud and boredom camped on Salisbury Plain. Many went absent without leave in London, until they were shipped to France in February 1915. For two months they learned the routine of trench warfare in a fairly quiet sector until in mid-April they took over part of the line from the French north of Ypres. This move placed the Canadian Division in the path of the first poison gas attack by the Germans on the Western Front.

The initial attack at 5 p.m. on 22nd April fell on men of French Algerian and Moroccan units who fled in terror of the choking green-yellow cloud.



The gas mainly missed the Canadians but created a four-mile gap in the line on their left and exposed the 13th battalion. The next day, McTurk's 14th Battalion reinforced them at the village of St. Julien. At 3.30 a.m. on the morning of Saturday 24th, their line came under very heavy and accurate bombardment with high explosive and shrapnel, and the two battalions "were literally blown out of the trenches". During the day they were forced by German pressure to retire four times until they were relieved around dusk by British troops. It was at some point during this onslaught that McTurk was killed and his body remained on the battlefield. His name is among those recorded on the Menin Gate who have no known grave. His widowed mother lived until 1930, at 31 Park View Rd, across Lister Park from modern-day BGS.



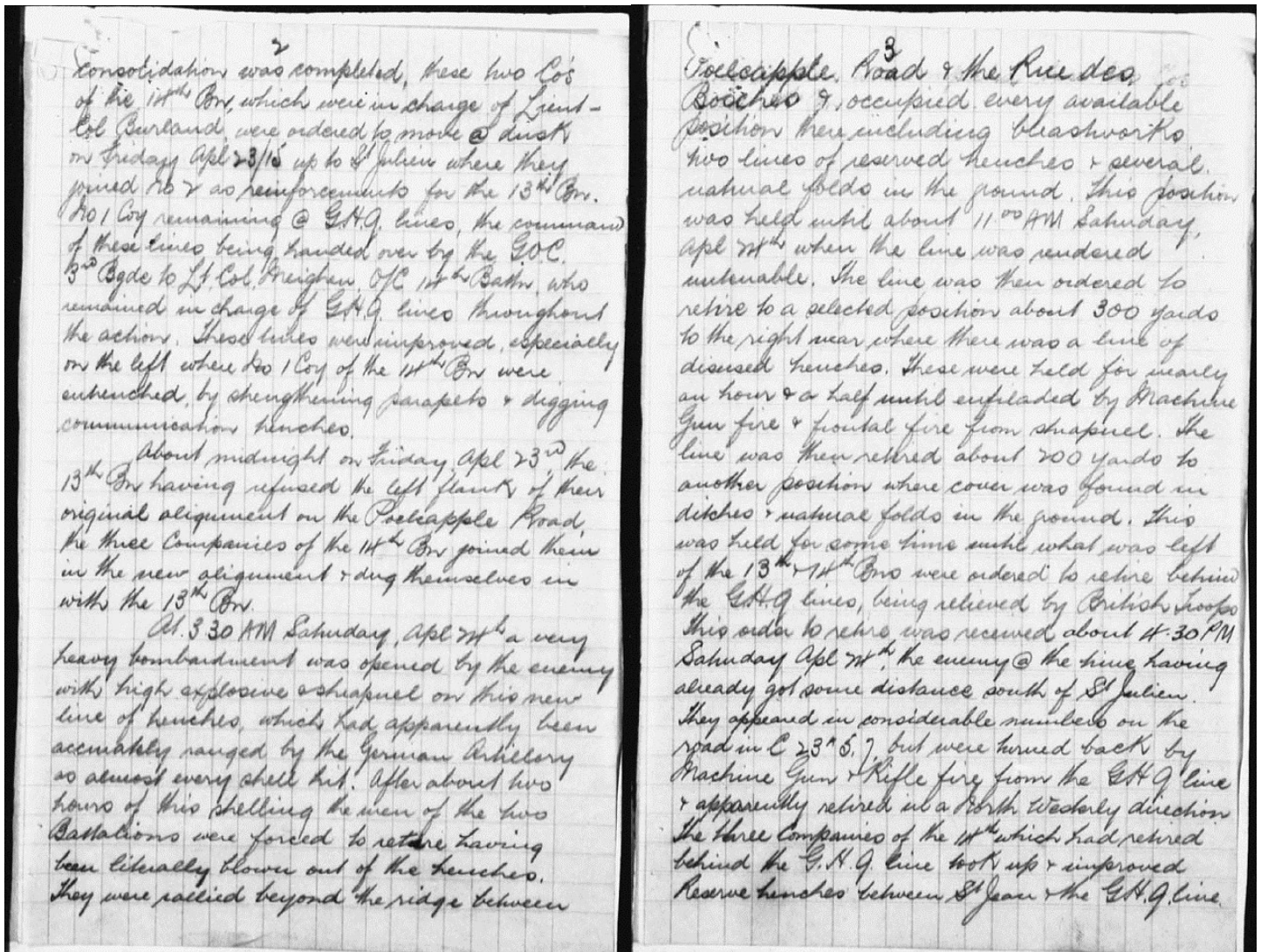
The Canadian Memorial at St. Julien

Old Bradfordians—'We will remember them'



Acknowledgements:

McTurk's photo is in the O.B.A. Roll of Honour. The Bradfordian records his death. Census and probate records were accessed through Ancestry.com. McTurk's attestation was found through the IWM Lives of the First World War at <https://search.livesofthefirstworldwar.org/record?id=gbm%2fcan-att%2f136607>. The names of the men who formed the 14th Battalion was consulted through <https://doingourbit.wordpress.com/2014/01/04/nominal-rolls-for-the-canadian-expeditionary-force/>. An account of the organisation of the First Canadian Contingent up to the 2nd Battle of Ypres in April 1915 is at www.niagarahistorical.museum/media/03.C.E.F.-ABriefHistorycopy.pdf. The War Diary of the 14th Battalion is available at <http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/warDiaryLac/wdLacP08.asp>. The photo of the Canadian Memorial at St. Julien was taken by the author. James Rishworth O.B. participated in an attack on 23rd April to support the Canadian front at St. Julien. He was killed in action a few days later.
Researched and compiled by Nicholas Hooper (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com) April 2015.



The 14th Battalion War Diary for 22-24th April 1915.