

Bavin, TG

[Read an extract from Trpr Bavin's war diary](#)

Thomas George was the youngest son of Thomas and Eleanor Annie Bavin. The family lived in Jersey Place, Cheltenham, where Thomas was born in about 1894. His siblings were Eleanor G (1886), born in Upton, Essex and Ernest William (1888), born in Cheltenham.

In 1891, The father was a manager of a firm of wine merchants. He died at the age of 35, being buried on 3 November 1894 in Cheltenham when Thomas was a small baby. At the 1901 Census, the family had moved away, but Eleanor, and Thomas, now aged 7, were to be found as visitors at Sydenham Grove, Cheltenham at the home of friends, a bookseller, William G Cockett and his wife Lorina. Ernest was at school as a boarder at St Oswald's School, Ellesmere, Shropshire.

By 1911, the Bavin family was resident at 8 St Alban's Avenue, Chiswick, with the exception of Ernest, who by then, at 23, had emigrated to Canada. Thomas, 17, had a listed occupation of "Bank Student". In 1912, the family of three travelled on S.S. Corinthian to Quebec, the two Eleanors as tourists; Thomas intended to take up permanent residence, joining his brother. Initially he worked as a commercial traveller in Canada, though he eventually joined the North West Mounted Police. Mrs. Bavin and her daughter returned to St Alban's Avenue and there are several entries in the St Michael's Parish magazine concerning her volunteer activity in the church, assisting at Jumble Sales, in aid of the St Michael's Mission. She organised a stall for children's clothing, and also helped with church flowers.

When the War came, Thomas Bavin joined Lord Strathcona's Horse as a Trooper. This regiment, which had close links with the NWMP, (later the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, ("The

Mounties") was placed on active service at the start of the Great War on 6 August 1914. It mobilized as Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), CEF, which embarked for England on 3 October 1914. It first disembarked in France on 5 May 1915, where it fought dismounted in an infantry role with "Seeley's Detachment" (really the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, part of the 2nd Indian Cavalry Division), 1st Canadian Division. On 27 January 1916, the regiment remounted and resumed its cavalry role as part of the 1st Canadian Cavalry Brigade, 5th Cavalry Division with whom it continued to fight in France and Flanders until the end of the war. Thomas Bavin's name does not appear on the Regiment's Nominal Roll dated 1915, although he volunteered later in that year, and formally attested on 7 January 1916. Among the regimental honours in France and Flanders 1916-18, were The Battle of the Somme 1916 and Cambrai, 1917.

Thomas Bavin arrived back in England on 31 January 1916 and he first embarked for France on 21 May being formally taken on the strength of the regiment on 31 May, in preparation for the huge Offensive that began on 1 July. It was a frustrating time for the Cavalry – the Infantry assault was ineffective in most parts of the Somme front, so that Cavalry activity consisted mainly of small and infrequent raids on enemy trenches. Much of the rest of the year and the Winter was spent in the rear, in the training grounds near the coast, mainly at Bethencourt sur Mer.

In 1917, once again, the Canadian Cavalry Brigade remained under-utilised. Much of the Summer was occupied at the rear, exercising and feeding the horses and it was really Autumn before they began to scent some action. But it was only in November that they briefly came into their own, in the allied Offensive that culminated in the Battles of Cambrai. All the regiments in the Brigade took part, The Royal Canadian Dragoons, the Fort Garry Horse and the Lord Strathcona's.

Trooper Bavin would have participated in both of the battles.

The high point for the Lord Strathcona's was at the conclusion of the First Battle, on 21 November, when the Brigade supported the Infantry and Armoured squadrons that succeeded in establishing a bridgehead at Masnieres. A tank had attempted to cross the canal and collapsed the bridge, and the LSH were ordered to reinforce the Engineers re-establishing the crossing against continuing German counterattacks. They patrolled the town dismounted and cleared out pockets of resistance. In the meantime, squadrons from Fort Garry Horse penetrated forward as far as Rumilly but had to retire for lack of support. A strong counterattack late in the day heavy shelling killed 5 and injured 6 horses. There was no further opportunity to press on to the planned objective of Rumilly. The LSH were retired to the rear, with the intention of wintering at Montecourt.

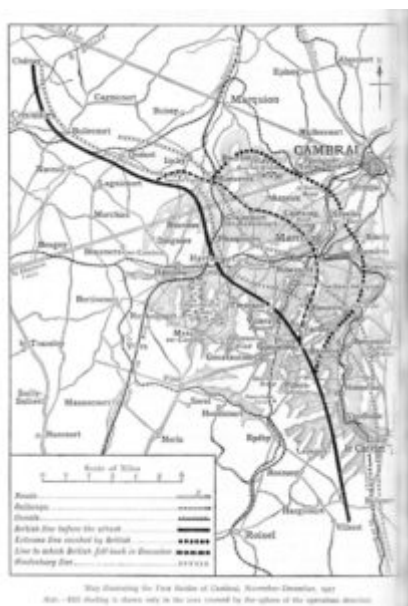
However, 1 December saw the Germans' big Counter Offensive which effectively re-took the ground gained by the British 10 days before. The Lord Strathcona's were ordered forward again to stiffen the resistance at Gauche Wood south of Gouzeaucourt, behind the original British front line on 21 November. The regiment fought doggedly and succeeded in maintaining the line. The War diary (see below) describes the various squadrons' actions.

We do not know in which squadron Thomas Bavin served, but he was killed during the fierce fighting of the day. His body was never recovered. He is commemorated at the great monument at Vimy. The Parish Magazine in January 1918 noted:

"During the past month, [Dunckley](#), Bavin, [Taylor](#) and Tolson have been reported as killed – Bavin came all the way from Canada, although his mother is resident among us, and a Church worker."

Eleanor Bavin will have received her son's British War and Victory medals. Ernest Bavin also served, and survived the War.

EXTRACT FROM TRPR BAVIN'S WAR DIARY
WAR DIARY. LORD STRATHCONA'S HORSE



1917 BATTLES OF CAMBRAI

The First Battle, 21-22 November 1917

FINS 20.11.17 Z Day. The regiment in common with the Brigade concentrated S of DESSART WOOD, NE of FINS. Word was received to advance on MASNIERES at noon. The Regiment came under shell fire in Xroads LES RUES DES VIGNES, S of Masnieres. Regtl. HQ was established at a farm at this place with the horses. Bivouaced in open behind screened road running W towards MARCOING.

Contact was obtained with the 88th Inf Bde (29th Div) and Major Goodday's Sqdn was dispatched at 5.45 pm to assist in defence of Bridgehead across canal at MASNIERES in case of hostile counter attack from direction of CAMBRAI. (They rejoined at 8.45 am 21.11.17).

At 10.15 pm orders were given for LSH to encircle RUMILLY from E and N, it being intended that other troops should attack RUMILLY from the W. This order was later cancelled in favour of one to return to FINS which was in turn cancelled. The night was a continuation of orders and counter orders. The line held by the infantry during the night's approximately G27.c.5.8 – G27.a.8.8 – G21.a.1.1 – about L of centre.

21.11.17 MASNIERES

The regiment was in readiness at daybreak to break through and make for their original objectives as R Flank Guard to the Bde. Two troops of Major Clarke's Sqdn. were detailed in re-bridging the canal during the early morning.

At 11 am just as the Brigade was preparing to move forward a strong counter-attack developed against our Infantry line and the GoC 88th Inf. Bde. countermanded the move. The regiment received orders to be prepared to reinforce the infantry if required, but was not called on to do so. One troop of Mjr. Goodday's Squadron under Lieut. TROTTER MC got in touch with the R Inniskillin Fusiliers on our Left prepared to render help if necessary. Lieut. HARVEY VC moved with a patrol through MASNIERES to the Infantry Front Line and when owing to shortage of ammunition this part of the line had to give way temporarily – this patrol rendered valuable assistance and rescued at least one wounded officer. During there whole day the Regiment kept in touch with the Infantry line on the look out for a favourable opportunity to break through, but without success. At about 5 pm a request was received to reinforce Bridgehead, Lieut. AD MORGAN'S troop with three Hotchkiss Guns proceeded to carry out this order. The horses were heavily shelled at about 3.45 pm and were moved back near the SUNKEN ROAD. Whilst giving orders for this move Lt.Col. DOCHERTY DSO was wounded in the arm but continued on duty. News was received that 2nd. Cavalry Division was moving back to VILLERS-FAUCON. The Regiment remained for the night ready to help the infantry in case of attack.

22.11.17 CAPPY

At 8.30 am the Regiment moved back to EQUANCOURT, thence to CAPPY on the day following. Casualties during the 20-22 November : Lt Col. DOCHERTY DSO wounded, at duty, 5 Ors wounded and evacuated, 2 remained at duty. 5 Horses killed , 6 wounded.

27.11.17 MONTECOURT

Regiment moved via MARICOURT-DOINGT to camp at MONTECOURT for the winter. Rained all day during the march.

The Second Battle, 1 December 1917

1.12.17 CHAPEL CROSSING

In the morning patrols from Major Goddard's squadron did as follows:

One patrol followed the Tanks to GAUCHE WOOD and remained in observation, keeping the regiment informed of the progress of the attack and the new positions occupied by the troops on our left.

One patrol under L/Cpl. EWING AB and 5 men worked their way behind an enemy post of 6 men and one LMG who, when rushed, surrendered. They were able to effect this surprise because the intermittent fire of a Hodgkiss Rifle directed on the enemy post prevented them from observing the approach of our patrol. A patrol under L/Cpl RUSSELL and 4 men surprised another enemy post and captured a Heavy MG and 4 prisoners.

At 3 pm the following orders were issued:-

A & B Squadrons (less one troop) starting from W.12. b were to seize the road running E from GAUCHE WOOD to VILLERS-GUISLAIN. Lieut. MAY's Troop "B" Squadron to seize the railway cutting N of CHAPEL CROSSING – "C: Squadron assembled in the SUNKEN ROAD W18 be to be used as the situation might require.

At 3.15 pm the following actions took place:-

"A" and "B" Squadrons under Major JC CLARKE and Major C GOODDAY respectively moved by MORRIS BANKS and GUN LANE to X.2.c.1.1. They were under heavy MG and Artillery fire. Major CLARKE was wounded and Lieut. R YOUNG was killed with about 20 Ors killed and wounded.

Lieut. NICOL took charge of "A" Squadron and with Major GOODDAY went forward to the E end of GAUCHE WOOD to reconnoitre the objective. The enemy were found strongly entrenched and also to have occupied three abandoned tanks near the objective.. Moreover, as the attack from the S did not seem to be developing, Major GOODDAY therefore decided to occupy a line of shell holes in GAUCHE WOOD immediately behind the 2nd Grenadier Guards and reported to them and Regimental HQ.

Lieut. MAY's Troop accompanied by 1 MG attacked Southward from MORRIS BANK. They met with no resistance until they came to rifle pits shown X.7.c.4.1. Here the enemy attempted to put up a fight, but fire having been brought to bear on them and some of their own bombs thrown at them, they abandoned their position. 4 surrendered, the remainder were caught with rifle & MG fire at close range and it is thought that nearly all became casualties. Lieut. May then took up a position covering a trench about X.7.c from the North and reported his position to HQ.

At 3 pm one troop "C" Squadron and one MG attached occupied the Railway Embankment just S of CHAPEL CROSSING and opened fire on the trench at X.7.c. Regimental HQ then moved up to that Troop and Col. DOCHERTY made a personal reconnaissance of the situation and sent for another Troop from "C" Squadron and one MG. While showing the troop sergeant of this troop and pointing out how he wanted the troop to attack this trench, Col. DOCHERTY was killed. Major DJ MACDONALD MC assumed command of the regiment and brought up the remaining two troops of "C" squadron and two more machines guns. A heavy Hodgkiss MG and rifle fire was then concentrated on this trench X.7.c and when two men,, Sgt. PARKINSON DCM and Pte RUTHERFORD rushed for it and threw German bombs into it, between 70 and 100 Germans rushed out and attempted to retire, they came under concentrated fire of Lieut. MAY's troop and one MG from the North and 2 troops "C" squadron , 4 HK Rifles

and 3 Megs on the embankment at the range of about 300 yards they offered an excellent target especially as they were confused and bunched up. . The remainder of Sergt. PARKINSON's troop having by this time occupied the trench, Sgt.T BELL took his troop forward and occupied some dead ground in X.7.d. It was the intention of Major MACDONALD to pursue with the troops at hand, but a message was received from Lieut. MAY that at least 200 Germans were advancing to attack his troop. Thereupon Lieut. HARVEY VC and his troop with one MG was sent from the embankment to reinforce him. This attack was beaten off and suffered heavily.

4.30 pm No supports having arrived, Major MACDONALD decided to hold the Railway Line, keeping a garrison in the captured trench. Sgt. BELL's troop was brought back under cover of rapid fire of two troops and MGs. They withdrew without any further casualties, bringing in the wounded. Two troops of the RCDs having arrived as reinforcements were sent to Railway Cutting about X.7.c.1.8. Col. PATTERSON DSO commanding FGH having arrived with his Regiment took over the Embankment, detailing Major MIDDLEMASS FGH with his squadron to reinforce STRATHCONA in consolidating the railway cutting to MORRIS BANK. "A" and "B" Squadrons were then withdrawn from GAUCHE WOOD and filled a gap of about 400 yards between out left and the right of the Guards Division, which line was shortly afterwards handed over to the 17th Lancers, LUCKNOW Brigade, 4th Cavalry Division.

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