

Sidney Benjamin McCrea

Lance Corporal

Royal Hamilton Light Infantry



A-4083



Sidney Benjamin McCrea

Personal Information:

Sidney Benjamin McCrea, the youngest son of Thomas McCrea and Mary Anne Sanquin was born 19 February, 1919 in Stoughton, Saskatchewan, Canada and grew up on his father's farm, situated southeast of Stoughton.

So far as is known there were ten members of the McCrea family; after the young Sidney, there was George, the oldest, Janet, Mabel, Dorothy, Ethel, James and Kathleen. The McCreas were members of the United Church of Canada.

Sidney completed eight classes of the local rural primary school in Saskatchewan. After that he studied just one year in the High School but did not take any examinations; at that time he was not very enthusiastic about school and learning and left when he was 15 years old in order to help on the farm for the next four years.

At the age of 19, Sid and a few other young men took a freight train to Ontario to look for work. Apparently he was not someone who liked staying put.

On arriving in Toronto he quickly found employment as a truck driver with Imperial Oil but after four months, there was no more work. Subsequently Sidney had various jobs in Ontario.



Imperial tankstation in St. Catherines, Ontario approx. 1940



He worked for about five months in Otterville, about four months on the construction of an airport in Brantford, and around two years on a tobacco farm.

Tabacco plantation in Ontario, Canada.

He was said to be a well-built man with a good appearance and a relaxed, open and friendly manner.

When the Second World War broke out Sid joined the army. At this time he met Mildred D. E. Fraser and they married on 5 February, 1941. Two daughters were born to them; Donna Mirthe McCrea, born 28 August, 1941 and Carol Ann McCrea on 1 March, 1944.

Military Information:

Sidney enlisted on 29 May, 1940 in London, Ontario and was placed with the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR). Here he began his training at the Infantry Reserve Training Centre (IRTC) at Camp Borden. this lasted until 19 May, 1941



Basic training Camp Borden



A week later he was, as Gunner McCrea, transferred to the Coast Defence & Anti-Aircraft Artillery Training Centre (CD&AAATC) in Camp Debert , Nova Scotia, in the general service section.

Leftover barrack Camp Debert, today in use as a museum

two years later, he was promoted to Bombardier, (Corporal with the Artillery) on 1 July 1942.

On 1 July 1943, he was transferred to the Canadian Radio Detection Finder Training School (CRDFTS) at a military camp in Barriefield. Because of this change, the young family McCrea moved house to Stoughton, to the farm of Sid's father.



Camp Barriefield, Ontario, 1934

Mildred was expecting their second child in February 1944; in these circumstances a soldier was normally placed for training in the Centre nearest to home, Camp Barriefield, Ontario in this case instead of Camp Debert, Nova Scotia. But he was still some 2800 kilometres distance away from his wife and home in Stoughton.

After 24 August 1943 Sidney joined the Reinforcement Unit of the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA).

In November he was punished for the fact that after a leave of 16 days, he returned to barracks 16 hours late. He received a severe reprimand.

A few weeks later on 4 December he came back one hour too late and was more severely punished. On 9 January 1944 he was ordered to be confined to barracks in Camp Barriefield for seven days and reduced in rank to Gunner.

Around the same time Sidney's functioning was assessed further; he made a trustworthy impression on his superiors with all the signs of being a good soldier.

His superiors asked themselves why he had remained "general service" for so long, given the fact that Sidney himself seemed rather fed up with this situation. He had had no training for two years although he had already been quite a time in the army.

He wanted to continue in the Royal Canadian Artillery and seemed to have good prospects in the Field Artillery. It was thought advisable for him to go on with the basic training.



On 15 February, 1944 Sidney was transferred to the Canadian Army Training Centre (CATC) in Petawawa, Ontario in the Ottawa Valley. Three months later he was sent to the Training Centre Brigade Group in Camp Debert where he had been stationed in 1941.

Camp Petawawa 1943

Sidney was again interviewed on 2nd March 1944 and found suitable to be taken on as a marksman. He had a good chance of becoming an NCO and his progress was to be carefully watched. It was recommended that he train as marksman.

By 8 April Sidney had finished his Artillery training successfully and is suitable and available for deployment in Europe.

On 26 June 1944 as member of the 1st Canadian Reinforcement Unit (1CARU), he boarded ship for a nine day journey to England. After a short stay of less than three months, he then crossed the North Sea to Belgium on 17 October.

Now he is a member of the Canadian Infantry Corps (CIC), a section of the 4th Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit (4CIRU). A day later he was assigned to his new unit, the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI).

This Regiment was created in Hamilton, Ontario back in December 1862 as the 13th Battalion Volunteer Militia (Infantry); it became the Royal Hamilton Regiment on 1 May 1920 and consisted of four battalions. The name changed on 15 March 1927 to the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry.



The Regiment was mobilized 1 September 1939 as part of the Canadian Active Service Force and boarded ship for England 22 July 1940.



The RHLI took part in the catastrophic attack on Dieppe, 19 August 1942, on the northern coast of France. Of the 582 soldiers who landed in the morning, only 102 came back after the attack. 197 soldiers were killed and 174 were taken prisoner; 194 soldiers were wounded, including prisoners.

an abandoned Dingo scout car, left after the attack 19 August 1942 on the Dieppe shingle beach

The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry returned to France 5 July 1944 as part of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division and stayed until the end of the fighting in northwest Europe. (The overseas batallion was dissolved 31 December 1945.) The RCLI now fought its way across France and Belgium in the direction of the Netherlands.



Majoor J.M. Figott and members of his company of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry kneeling at the graves of comrades killed at Dieppe, September 1, 1942



A gun-tractor skidded off the road on the flooded island of Beveland, October 28th, 1944

They took part in the battle of the Falaise Pocket in August, that of the Scheldt in October / November and then Woensdrecht / South Beveland until they reached the Rhineland in February/March, 1945. After heavy fighting in Operations Veritable and Blockbuster, the RHLI moved north in the direction of Groningen in order to help free the rest of the Netherlands from Nazi occupation.

Medical Information:

Sidney McCrea was a good looking young man, 1.70 m tall with green eyes and brown hair.

On 23 September 1941 he was a patient in the military hospital in Halifax, Canada during his stay in Camp Debert and was released one week later.

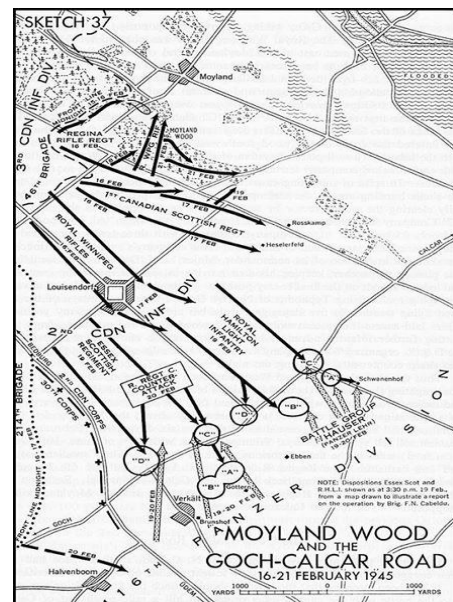
On 25 August 1943 he was a patient in the Barriefield Camp hospital during his stay in the camp there and was released 7 September. Again, 18 January 1944, he spent a week in the same hospital.

It is not known for what reason he needed to go into hospital.

The Last Days:

Eleven days after the start of Operation Veritable, 19 February 1945, Sidney with the RHLI took part in heavy fighting southeast of Kleve in Germany. They met with stubborn enemy resistance in Moyland Wald, a small wood halfway between Kleve and Kalkar.

On 21 February the Regiment was visited by the Brigade commander who found an extremely keen and motivated group of soldiers, fanatic about the number of tanks they had destroyed. Following this battle, the enemy lost control of the roads which were of crucial importance and the Regiment could go forward in the direction of Xanten further south. with the objective of crossing the Rhein.



Operation Blockbuster began 22 February 1945. Exactly where the RHLI was when Sidney lost his life on 23 February is not known at the time of writing.

Sidney MaCrea was buried in a temporary grave in the military cemetery of the Canadian 3rd Division in Bedburg Hau, Germany.



He was reburied 6 December 1946 in the Canadian Military War Cemetery, Groesbeek in the Netherlands.

He was reburied in plot XI – rij A – graf 13



Ontvangen Onderscheidingen:



1.

1. 1939 – 1945 Star
3. 1939 – 1945 War Medal



2.

2. France & Germany Star

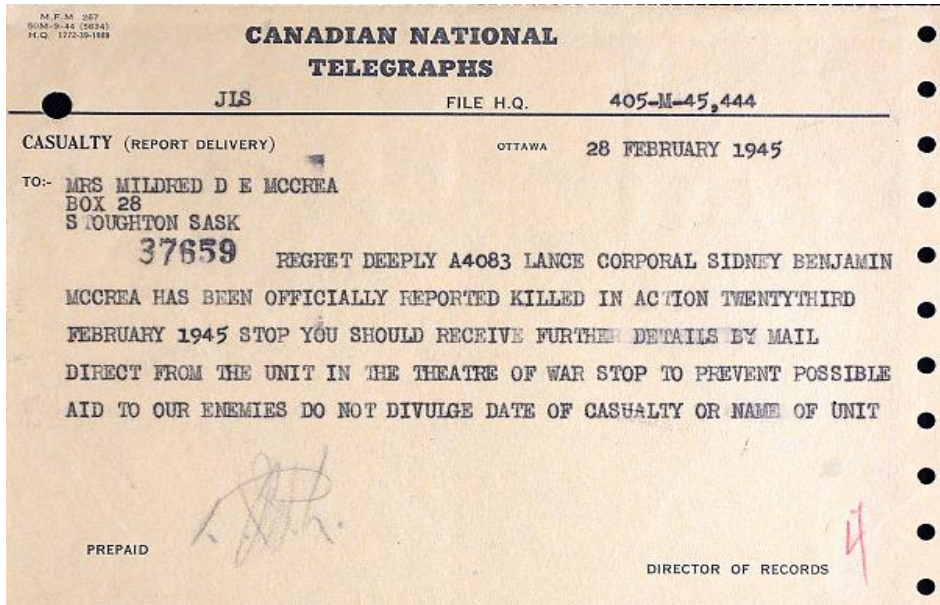


3.

4. Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp



4.

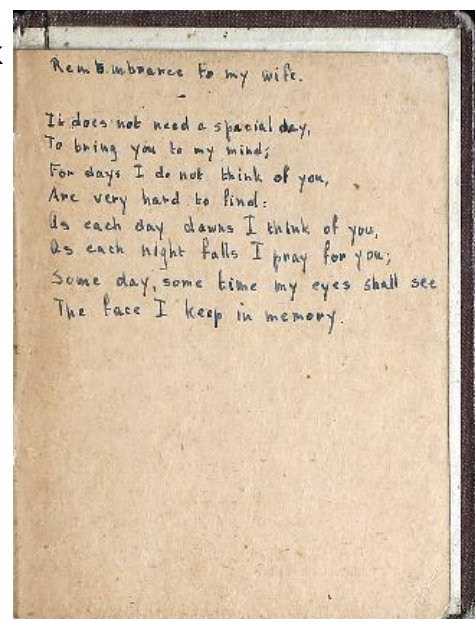


Spouse Mildred recieved telex of Sidney's death.

A page out of Sidney's Soldiers Service Book with a poem he wrote to his wife Mildred:

"Remembrance to my wife"

"It does not need a special day,
To bring you to my mind,
For days I do not think of you,
Are very hard to find,
As each day dawns I think of you,
As each night falls I pray for you,
Some day, some time my eyes shall see,
The face I keep in memory."



McCrea Island in Reindeer Lake, Saskatchewan is named after Lance Corporal Sidney Benjamin McCrea, who with the greatest sacrifice, gave his life defending the freedom of our country.

Sidney's father



Sidney's mother



James Thomas McCrea grew up in the Shannon area of New Brunswick and as a young man worked on ships in St. John.

In 1898 he journeyed west to Douglas, Manitoba and then moved on to Stoughton, Saskatchewan. Tom (nickname) took up a homestead west of Stoughton where he met and married Mary Anne Sanguins in 1905.

Tom and Mary raised a family of eight children. Mary died in 1962, Tom died on 03 November 1967.



Sidney Benjamin McCrea

Lest We Forget

Militaire documenten: Library and Archives Canada

Internet Sites:

<http://www.cwgc.org/>

<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>

<https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk>

<https://www.findagrave.com>

<http://search.ancestry.com/search/category.aspx?cat=39>

<http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/ol-lo/vol-tom-3/par2/rhli-eng.asp>

<http://www.rhli.ca/museum>

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<http://imharchive.ca>

Library and Archives Canada

War Diaries Royal Hamilton Light Infantry.

Wikipedia

Printrest



FACES TO GRAVES

Stichting Faces to Canadian
War Graves Groesbeek

Levens verhaal samengesteld: Hennie Koster, Research Team