

Seeing It Through
Manitoba's Soldiers
1914-1919

Ian Stewart

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Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 2021

Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum

Minto Armouries

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Have you heard of my boy Jack?

When do you think that he'll come back?

From the poem *My Boy Jack* by Rudyard Kipling

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Ian Stewart

Curator Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

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Introduction

With the use of letters, memoirs and recollections of Manitoba's soldiers, Manitoba newspaper articles, as well as the *Battalion War Diaries* of the 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles) 1st Canadian Division, 27th (City of Winnipeg) 2nd Canadian Division, 43rd (Cameron Highlanders of Canada) 3rd Canadian Division and the 44th (Manitoba) 4th Canadian Division infantry battalions, *Seeing It Through* explores the thoughts and experiences of young men who served "King and Empire" during the Great War.

*an extra chapter on the 78th (Winnipeg Grenadiers) Battalion has been added to the pdf so that the heroism of all Manitoba's five infantry battalions can be represented.

Full battalion histories are far beyond the scope of this work, it only hopes to cover significant events in each particular battalion's war as described in the available documents. As 44th Battalion Regimental Sergeant-Major James Barclay MM wrote in his memoir, "Trust you can make out my writing... Trust someone will have the patience to read this."

Although these battalions, and their respective divisions, entered the battlefields of France and Belgium over a 17-month period, by war's end they had collectively fought in every major battle of the First World War. From our sources, the reader will come to see what Manitoba's soldiers experienced from their time training in Canada and England, their first experiences in the trenches, the 1915 Battles

of Ypres and Festubert, the 1916 Battles of Mount Sorrel and the Somme, the famous victories at Vimy Ridge and Hill 70, the horror of Passchendaele and the greatest victories of all during the Last 100 Days Battles.

When Canadian infantry battalions left England for the battlefields, they were made it up of approximately 1000-1100 men and officers. However, because of the devastating losses our four battalions suffered in four years of war, some 22,000 men passed through their ranks. Over 6,000 were killed and 12,000 more were wounded: gassed, injured while prisoners of war, suffered shellshock and trauma, accident or trench warfare related diseases and accidents.

They, as *In Flanders Fields* reminds us, “lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, loved and were loved” and many now lie in hundreds of Commonwealth War Graves Cemeteries in France, Belgium, Great Britain, Canada and even in the Arctic wastes of Russia. This book’s purpose is simply to connect with these soldiers, to keep their memories alive. It does not attempt to make a judgement on the rightness or wrongness of the cause, the brilliance or stupidity of their generals or the cupidity of businessmen and politicians. Those historical judgements are left up to the reader.

If any reader knows a soldier, they know they are not saints. And, these men were not saints either. More than a few told their families matter-of-factly that they went out and got drunk, overstayed leave and got in fights. They despised useless army rules and any

incompetent officer that lorded over them. Some expressed their belief in divine protection, read their bibles and attended prayer meetings. Others, however, never mention God; they trusted blind fate and luck to get them a welcome flesh wound, a “Blighty”. During a long peaceful reprieve in a Canadian hospital where, as James Fargey, 43rd Cameron Highlanders wrote, “It is nice to be lying in a white bed and being fed the best of food.”

They faced their hardships and did their duty with resilience and determination. As Private Jimmy Bowes of the 44th (Manitoba) wrote from Vimy Ridge in 1917, after his two younger brothers had been killed, “We must not grumble about our part as we all willingly joined and are all willing to see it through...” John Hutchinson of the 8th Battalion wrote to his father, before he was killed, “remember the boy that did his duty and died with his face to the foe, and I was quite willing to give my life for my country as others done before and will do again.” The job was winning the war and getting home, as Markle Pecover of the 27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion wrote, “I do not bother or worry about all the hardships but keep as cheery as I can...We forget all about the present in looking forward into the future - to the time when we will be home again.”

The Royal Winnipeg Rifles perpetuates the 8th Canadian (90th Winnipeg Rifles), the 27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion and the 44th (Manitoba) Battalion. The regimental museum holds a quantity of their archival records and most of the stories of the perpetuated battalions are in the collection. Dr. Stephen Davis’s Canadian Letters

and Image Project (Department of History at Vancouver Island University) has been an invaluable resource on the 27th and 43rd Battalions.

Ian Stewart,

Curator, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum, 2021

Manitoba's War: The Beginning & The End



Winnipeg Tribune 5 August 1914

The Beginning

In his novel *Grain* (1926), a tale of early 20th-century farm life in Manitoba, Robert Stead captures the pressures and emotions his young hero feels in August 1914. War has just been declared and the local farmers and townsfolk of Plainville, Manitoba, have all gathered on the town's main street. The town is buzzing with a mingled sense of anxious anticipation and flag-waving patriotism.

Cresting a ridge, the cupolas of the wheat elevators at Plainville came into view, and down the long road between stretched a procession of buggies and automobiles. The whole countryside was crowding into Plainville... They found the streets of the little prairie town lined with buggies and motor cars; the livery stables full; every hitching post

occupied. They tied their team to an abandoned land-roller in a vacant lot and pressed through the crowds that had gathered around the telegraph office and the telephone exchange. Farm women and men, youths and girls, mingled on the street, but for once they were talking about something other than the weather and the crops. There was an air of excitement, of high spirits, of bantering, and of unconscious boastfulness. It was infectious; it swept through the crowd; it caught Jackson Stake and Gander and set them cheering boisterously when a number of youths paraded an effigy of the Kaiser down the street mounted on the most decrepit nag the community could produce, and with a disused copper kettle on its head for a helmet. They trailed the figure into the Roseland Emporium and demanded a sauerkraut cocktail—a flight of humor that was wafted from lip to lip through the appreciative throng.

The mood was the same in Winnipeg. The prairies' biggest city welcomed the war in August 1914, "Winnipeg Goes Wild with News," said the *Winnipeg Tribune*. The *Free Press* breathlessly described the mood of exhilaration in the city when war between the great European imperial powers was declared. In the downtown streets, "The floodgates of patriotism were wide open in Winnipeg last night and scenes of wild enthusiasm were enacted on the main thoroughfares when a *Free Press* "extra" announced shortly after 8 o'clock that war was declared between Britain and Germany...Winnipeg surely proved to the utmost her loyalty to the flag and her bitter opposition to the German aggression....All the

excitement was downtown, there being a funereal stillness markedly noticeable in North Winnipeg and other outlying sections. The ‘foreigners of North Winnipeg’”, the *Free Press* noted, “many of them who belong to nations now enemies of Great Britain showed good common sense in keeping well out of sight.”



Winnipeg Tribune 27 August 1915

In the days and weeks following the announcement of war, Canadian papers were full of reasons to join in the “Great Cause”. The papers and church pulpits preached that the survival of the British Empire was at stake and because of Canada’s unbreakable bond with the “Mother Land” it must join in the fight. If German militarism succeeded, the destruction of Christian civilization and democracy would surely follow. Furthermore, the principle of justice demanded the redress of the horrors German “kulture” had unleashed on millions of innocent European men, women and children. They asked, “How could any young man have a shred of self-respect when he knows he

is a coward for not signing-up? Family, friends and women would shun him as a cowardly slacker for not fighting for “King and Country!”

Many of the men who attested (enlisted) in the First Contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) came from existing militia units and a large percentage of those had served in the South African (Boer) War between 1899 and 1902. By November 1914, the Canadian government authorized the creation of a Second and Third Contingent to meet military commitments. They needed men and according to Jack Row, who served in the 27th (City of Winnipeg Battalion), “When the First World War broke out in August of 1914, I tried to enlist... I was a skinny eighteen-year-old, so they told me to go home and eat more porridge. By October they were beginning to take the war seriously and they were glad to take me.” They even took his 17-year-old brother, Sydney.

How did press exhortations and pulpit fulminations influence these volunteer citizen soldiers? By and large, young men aren't big thinkers; their letters, memoirs and recollections never mention attesting because of patriotism or fulfilling a duty to God, Country and Empire.



First World War Display, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum

They usually mention needing a job, to pay-off debts, getting away from the mundane, backbreaking toil of the farm or factory floor or a spur of the moment decision made with a friend. In his memoir James Barclay, 44th Manitoba Battalion, wrote, “My chum said to me that he was not going to work the next day. Why? He was going to the C.P.R. Station to see the 27th Battalion depart for overseas. I agreed to go along with him. What now I said, and he said we should join up.” Ed Russenholt, 44th Manitoba Battalion, announced his enlistment to his sister in a January 1915 letter, “Folks in these parts all nominate yours truly as foolish and I ‘spose you will too when I tell you your little brother is drilling for the third contingent... We get \$1.85 per day so that I will be able to get out of debt by spring.” In a letter to his sister, dated 25 September 1914, Frank Iriam, 8th Canadians (90th Winnipeg Rifles), wrote , “My work has been so unsteady and broken by slack seasons during the last two years that I am really glad of a spell and a change.”

*War God Claims
Winnipeg's Fairest*

Casualties 2nd Battle of Ypres, *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15 May 1915

663 WINNIPEG MEN IN WEEK'S CASUALTIES

“A staggering total of dead and wounded reported in the Last two weeks.” *Winnipeg Tribune*, 14 October 1916

The great bleeding on the Western Front came home to Manitobans in April 1915. Before the 2nd Battle of Ypres, casualty lists had been short; now papers printed hundreds of names of dead, missing and wounded fathers, sons and friends. For three and a half years, scanning the papers became a day-to-day dread. Almost 50% of casualties occurred from the drip, drip, drip of everyday “trench attrition.” Canadians fought in major battles and a host of smaller actions and these accounted for the other 50%:

1915-	April, 2 nd Battle of Ypres	6,000 casualties
	May, Battle of Festubert,	2,470 casualties
1916-	April, Battle of St. Eloi Craters	1,370 casualties
	June, Battle of Mount Sorrel,	8,430 casualties
	Sept.-Oct., The Somme	24,000 casualties
1917-	April, Battle Vimy Ridge	10,600 casualties
	Aug., Battle of Hill 70	10,000 casualties

Nov., Battle of Passchendaele 16,650 casualties
1918- Aug.-Nov. Last Hundred Days 46,000 casualties



The End

On 11 November 1918, enthused Winnipeggers went into their city's streets again. This time it wasn't to welcome war but to welcome the long awaited peace,

Shortly before 2 o'clock The Tribune issued its first extra and a few minutes later, the factory whistles started their joyous anthem... Then the celebration began. Thousands of homes were lit up suddenly as citizens were awakened by the whistles or by the shouts of the newsboys. Hundreds immediately donned their street attire and started downtown to be first in the celebrations. Nobody doubted it this time. It was PEACE at last, and the boys would be coming home soon.

The headline was inaccurate at best. Some 60,000 Canadian sons, fathers, brothers, and sisters would not come home. Of these, over 7,000 were Manitoban. They were left in the mud of Flanders and France, in English cemeteries, in the wastes of Russia and in the cold, dark Atlantic Ocean. Over 22,000 men, mostly from Winnipeg and

small town Manitoba, served in our four infantry battalions and most of Manitoba's war dead came from the infantry.

There was one more day of great celebration. With the 11 November 1918 Armistice, fighting ceased on the Western Front. However, the official end to the war was not until 28 June 1919 when the Treaty of Versailles was signed in Paris, France. To celebrate the day, King George V declared that Saturday, 19 July 1919 would be a public holiday across the British Empire.

On 9 July 1919, the Government of Canada confirmed that the holiday would also be held in Canada. Winnipeg's city councillors said that, although nothing had been finalized, Winnipeg would "stage a celebration equal to any in the country."

The city needed a holiday, it had just recovered from the flu epidemic, Winnipeg's war-weary battalions had returned home to middling public receptions, jobs were few and far between and labour strife continued. *Peace Day* was an opportunity for rejoicing, as Canada's Acting Prime Minister George Foster said, "to close the long and terrible chapter of the Great War."

On the holiday, parades and concerts were held across the country, but the West clearly outshone the East in celebrating the peace. The *Vancouver Sun* banner headline declared the giant party at Vancouver's Stanley Park the "Greatest Fete In City's History." The *Saskatoon Daily Star* proclaimed their *Peace Day* bash brought

out “The Biggest Crowd in the History of Saskatoon.” However, “Saturday Celebrated Quietly in Ontario,” wrote the *Manitoba Free Press*; “The peace celebrations in Halifax and across that province produced little enthusiasm,” said the *Ottawa Citizen* and “Montreal Did Not Celebrate,” declared the *Vancouver Sun*.

It was a holiday like no other. Page one of the Friday 18 July *Winnipeg Tribune* told Winnipeggers to “Cut Loose Folks, Joy unconfined and unrefined will reign in Winnipeg Streets on Saturday morning.” On a lovely summer day, thousands of jam-packed Winnipeggers joined the giant jazz parade that started at Market Square and snaked through the city streets “like a Bolsheviki convention that starts no place and ends no place.” For those not interested in a rowdy parade, events were planned for all ages: children’s activities, as well as cricket and baseball tournaments were held at the city parks or a family could get on a train and enjoy a day at Grand or Winnipeg Beach. For those looking for something more private, “motorists whizzed to their favorite resorts where the crowds and the din and the jazz can’t penetrate and after the lunch basket has been rifled a person can lie on the grass and fight the mosquitoes.”



“It is a hopeless task,” the *Winnipeg Tribune* proclaimed, “to attempt to describe the joy, the life, the happy crowds, the flying confetti, the street decorations, the gaily decked motors, the bands, the thronging parks—everything.” Winnipegers filled the parks: over 6000 enthusiastic fans watched Brautigan’s Quakers play Sheehan’s Maroons at River Park’s ball diamond, 25,000 people in 6000 cars crowded into Assiniboine Park for the band concerts and the evening fireworks, 12,000 visited Kildonan Park and over 4,000 crammed into Central Park for the day’s events. When it was all over, the usually staid *Manitoba Free Press* penned,

From dawn to dusk—24 hours of the greatest joy possible for human beings to experience—was the extent the population of Winnipeg indulged in the peace celebrations.

Gallantry awards won by Manitoba's soldiers during the Great War



Men of all ranks were awarded the Victoria Cross for “most conspicuous bravery.”



Senior officers were awarded the Distinguished Service Order for “meritorious or distinguished service.”



Lieutenants and Captains were awarded the Military Cross for “acts of exemplary gallantry.”



Privates and NCOs were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for “distinguished conduct in the field.”



Privates and NCOs were awarded the Military Medal for “bravery in the field.”

**8th Canadian
(90th Winnipeg Rifles)
1st Canadian Division**



A “Little Black Devil” going where he is told.

Sketch by QMS Stuart Stoddart DCM



Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

On the evening of 2 August 1914, newsboys hawked *Winnipeg Tribune* and *Winnipeg Free Press* extras announcing Europe was aflame with war. Within two days, Great Britain, its Empire and the German Empire were at war.

“No one who was present at the old drill hall on Broadway,” recounts an early history of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, known as the Little Black Devils, “will ever forget the fateful 4th of August when Colonel O’Grady entered and spoke to the members of the Regiment who were assembled awaiting news of impending developments. “Ninetieth Winnipeg Rifles,” he said, “I have offered the Regiment not only full strength but 1000 strong. Who goes? The reply was... a spontaneous outburst of patriotic enthusiasm...” By war’s end nearly 6,000 served

in the 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles) suffering 5,000 casualties with 1,600 dead.

Within days, the 90th was in camp at St. Charles. It was one of the First Canadian units to be under canvas and training for active service. The Regiment, designated the 8th Canadian Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles) in the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force, was soon on its way to the new military camp at Valcartier, Quebec.

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY MAN ON ATTESTATION.	
I, <u>Thomas Monahan</u> do make Oath, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs and Successors, and that I will as duty bound honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, in Person, Crown and Dignity, against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of all the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.	
<u>Sept 22</u> 1914.	<u>Thomas Monahan</u> (Signature of Recruit) <u>Howe</u> (Signature of Witness)

On 22 September 1914, Thomas Monahan #872, 8th Canadians, along with other volunteers, solemnly declared that “I am willing to fulfill the engagements by me now made, and I agree “to serve in the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force” and “make the oath that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth...” On 3 March 1915, 26 year old Thomas Monahan was the first Little Black Devil killed in action. He rests in Rue David Military Cemetery, Fleurbaix, France, alongside three other 8th Battalion men who died in March 1915.



“Memories of 1914,” **Royal Winnipeg Rifles History, 1883-1933**

On 25 September, the Little Black Devils boarded the *SS Franconia* bound for England. In his first letter to his sister, Kenora, Ontario’s, Frank Iriam wrote:

Dear Alma,

I guess you know by this time that I am off on a ramble to the old countries. We are aboard the Franconia of the Cunard Line. She is a fine boat, and our quarters are quite as good as could be expected on a troopship. We have a fine bunch of boys in our Battalion and, as they are under Canadian government control, they will get no intoxicating liquors at all, so you can see that helps some in the management of a large body of men.

There were 43 men came from Kenora with me. Some of them got turned down as physically unfit but the majority got past ok. I enjoyed

my month of training though it was very wet weather most of the time. My work has been so unsteady and broken by slack seasons during the last two years that I am really glad of a spell and a change.

Yesterday we were on the Bermudian, a little tramp steamer. She was too small to accommodate the Battalion, so everyone hollered, and the end result was transferred to this one and it is quite an improvement. Don't be shocked by the dirt on this sheet for it is honest dirt you know. Cheers and I want to get a jolly letter from you often.

Your brother

Doodle

On 20 October, the Battalion marched to billets on the Salisbury Plain to begin preparing for war. It was a long, dreary, wet winter in the south of England for the troops of the 1st Canadian Division. Water-soaked men underwent basic training, route marching, use of small arms, entrenching, company, battalion and brigade training.

Frank Iriam, who would have his memoirs published as *In the Trenches, 1914-1918*, wrote of the experience in England,

We were assigned to tents in a part of the plains called the West Downs and West Downs South, a few miles from Stonehenge of the old Druid Temple. Mud was here, rain was here, and the roadway was of chalk. The traffic had made its surface about ankle-deep with a sort of wet mortar that splashed up your shins and put your legs in

a plaster cast in jig time. Here in the wet we went to it, hammer and tongs, for the balance of the year. Drill all day rain or shine and no shine...

Putting troops in tents on the plains in the winter is not usual practice but, in our case, it was thought feasible as we “Colonials” were supposed to be a tough lot and physically able to survive it. Quite a few of us did live through it and quite a few did not. Spinal meningitis due to exposure and also wet pneumonia due to the same cause carried away quite the number.



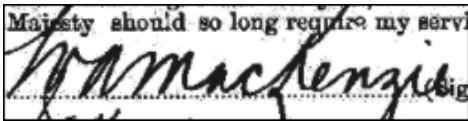
8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles) at Valcartier Camp 1914, Jim Parks, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives.



“Memories of 1914,” **Royal Winnipeg Rifles History, 1883-1933**



Lewis Gun Crew: Pte. Murray, Sgt. Hardaker, CSM Woods, Pte. Kendrick, Charles Campbell c.1917 England, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives.



Lieutenant Wallace MacKenzie took a few minutes one rainy day in December to write to a friend. McKenzie did not buy into the idea that the war would be a short victorious game that would be over by Christmas.

This is going to be a long-drawn-out war, I fear. The economic resources of both sides are tremendous and the war must go on. Naturally, we see only one end, and I am sure our German friends have exactly the same impression. Both sides must suffer tremendously, before the ultimate resolution is reached.

Surplus members and those deemed not fit for the infantry were soon “Taken Off Strength” and sent to other units. On 11 February 1915, the 1050 men of the 8th Canadians landed in France. The companies were paired with experienced British units and received practical individual and platoon training. As well, the officers learned the ins and outs of battalion administration. On 1 April, the Canadians were ordered to hold the left end of the British line near Ypres, Belgium.

In a letter dated 8 April 1915, Sergeant Alfred Houghton wrote of the 90th’s first weeks in the trenches:

We built and fitted 150,000 sandbags and other improvements have been carried out. We were in the trenches five weeks and we have had

five killed and 27 wounded in this battalion. I had a close shave myself. I was observing fire for Joe Austin through a small loophole in the sandbags when a bullet came through and broke my field glasses and missed me by barely an inch. To even things up I put a few shots through some of their sniper loopholes which were about 400 yards away.

I have great respect for the Hun snipers but there are only a few in each regiment. One day alone we fired over 14,000 rounds through our machine guns...We have been as near to their trenches as 100 yards and you can hear them talking quite distinctly. We have quite the time making ourselves understood in French and Flemish. Remember me to all the boys.



The first four Little Black Devils killed in action rest in Rue David Military Cemetery, Fleurbaix, France. Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum

Battle of 2nd Ypres

In a 13 April 1915 letter, Lt. Wallace MacKenzie again wrote to his friend, “We’re just about to start off to take over some new trenches. We have reports that the district is quite a warm one.” McKenzie was sadly correct. On 22 April, the Germans launched the first gas attack on French colonial troops to the left of the Canadians. The French line broke and the Canadian flank was exposed. On 24 April, the enemy launched a second gas attack on the Canadian line. The Canadian line held their bit of the trenches but the 8th suffered hundreds of casualties, including Wallace McKenzie whose body was never recovered. He is memorialized on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in Ieper, Belgium.

Soldiers recollections speak of the horrors of the gas attack. Lieutenant William Slater remembered that

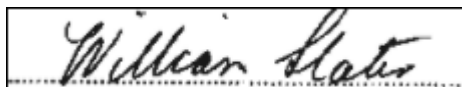
It was quite clear to everyone that something was brewing, and on the morning of the 24th we had just got back to Winnipeg Farm trench and were preparing to get under cover for the day when the air was filled with the cry of “Stand To”. We “Stood To” in some old trenches and were immediately enveloped in a cloud of gas which rolled towards us, while the bullets were hitting all around thick and fast. Being unprepared for gas warfare, this attack took a terrible toll, and right away we were all spitting and retching and vomiting and clawing at our mouths and throats in the throes of suffocation.

Major John Hay wrote that

The stuff burned my lungs as if it was boiling water and the whole trench was full of the green cloud so that I could not see five yards. The men had opened fire on the enemy, expecting an attack under cover of the cloud, but they now began to fall back from the parapet from the effect of the gas.

To Tom Drummond,

It seemed impossible to get air into the lungs; or, having got it there, to get it out. Strings of sticky saliva drooled from mouths... Men cast away equipment, rifles and clothing as they ran.... clutching at their throats, tearing at their shirts in a last struggle for air, and after awhile ceasing to struggle and lying still while a greenish foam formed over their mouths.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William Slater".

In this mayhem, Sergeant-Major Frederick Hall saved many wounded men trapped in no-man's-land and one attempt was recognized as an incredible act of bravery. The following account was written by Lieutenant William Slater who witnessed Hall's bravery while attempting to save Private Arthur Clarkson of Rose du Lac, Manitoba:

... Immediately on getting to the trenches we began to take charge of the situation, for the men in the trenches had suffered terribly, and it was up to us to "carry on." Many were killed and wounded in this last dash to the trench and one of the wounded men called for

assistance, so Private Rogerson went out to him, but was immediately wounded. On seeing this Lance Corporal Payne went to his assistance, but he was badly wounded, and then Sergeant Major Fred Hall went out also, and was lifting the wounded man to bring him in when he fell shot through the temples. It was for this act that I later recommended him for the Victoria Cross, which was granted.

For most men killed, there was a grieving parent, relative, or friend who desperately wanted to know how the man had died and where he was buried. In a letter to Mrs. Evans, dated 26 July 1915, L/Cpl. John Hutchinson explained to this grieving mother what he knew of her son Charles Evans' injury and the confusion that ensued after he was wounded. Charles Evans body was never recovered, and he is memorialized on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing.



19- year -old Charles Evans #666 c. 1914-1915 Canadian Virtual War Memorial

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John S. Hutchinson". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

July 26th, 1915

Dear Mrs. Evans

I received your most welcome letter of the 2nd and was disappointed when I read it as I was sure you would know the whereabouts of Charlie or what happened to him but as you don't, I am going to tell you just what happened that day as near as I can.

On the 24th of April just at dawn the Germans open up on us with rapid fire (this was at Y---). We got up in the trench and opened fire on them, a few minutes later word was passed to me that Charlie had been hit. We bandaged him up as best we could and put him in the dug-out. I then went back to my post.

As soon as the firing stopped, I went to him again. He was very weak from loss of blood but was able to talk to me a little. I went to him as often as I could about every hour, and he seemed to be getting stronger all the time. When we got the first aid men to take him out to the first aid station, he gave me some letters and his hat badge to keep for him and I talked to him for about 15 minutes then they took him out. He got to the first aid station alright, I am sure of that, but the Germans got through our lines that night. The staff at the first aid station had to get out and they left 8 or 10 wounded. Then the Germans shelled the place, and the wounded were all killed so I was told.[There are many documented reports that wounded men who could not walk were shot by the German instead of being taken prisoner]

I was going to go back the next night to see if he had been left but as I was wounded myself the next morning, I could not get there. That is

the last I heard of him....I fear the worst, but I hope to God that he is alright some place and will not give up hope. So, if you hear anything please let me know as soon as possible.

I remain

Yours Truly

J Hutchinson

John Hutchinson was killed during the 1916 Battle of Mount Sorrell. His body was never recovered, and he is memorialized along with his friend Charles Evans on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing.

Battle of Festubert

Only three weeks after the horror of the April gas attack at Ypres, the depleted Canadian division was moved to Festubert, France, about 45 miles from Ypres. Their orders were to attack enemy trenches to support the ongoing Allied offensive. The 8th Canadians went into the trenches on 20-21 May 1915. As soon as the Battalion arrived the war diarist predicted that this trip to the trenches was going to be “pretty hot.” The Battalion was heavily shelled, and casualties immediately began to mount. The Battalion’s worst day was 22 May when many officers and men were killed and wounded while assaulting German trenches. By the time relief came, the Battalion had suffered over 160 casualties. No significant gains were made during the battle but 2,868 Canadians were killed or wounded.

One of the lost was Thomas Corregan from Whitemouth, Manitoba, who led a bombing party into the German lines and, after clearing a trench, captured a machine gun.



His Major wrote,

I have seen, heard and read of many stories of brave men, but what those who returned told me of your son, is equal to any act for which men are decorated. He led the attack of the whole battalion, engaged, and really took the position we still hold...but it cost him his life. We old boys of his company all believe that Corregan's actions easily won the V.C.

However, because no officer had witnessed his heroism no medal could be awarded.

Another 8th Battalion hero of Festubert was the legendary George “Nobby” Clark #1220 DCM + Bar, Croix de Guerre. Frank Iriam wrote that “Nobby Clark feared neither God, man nor the devil and would fight at all times willingly with gusto. He was crazy as a bedbug in some ways but always cheerful.”

Chaplain Albert Woods described the act of “conspicuous courage” that won his friend a Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM):

It was growing dark as we took over; the front or firing trench, being a scant 150 yards from the enemy front line. Clark looked across to the enemy trenches, and noticed about midway across no man's land, a man's hand raised above a shell hole. He at once wormed his way to the shell hole and in the face of rifle and machine gun fire carried his man back to our trench. He then returned to the shell hole and brought back an abandoned enemy machine gun.

Battle of Mount Sorrel

The Canadians next great battle began on 2 June 1916. The Germans wanted to control all the high ground surrounding the Ypres salient and to do that they had to oust the Canadian divisions from their trenches on Tor Top, Sanctuary Wood, and Mount Sorrel. At 8:45, on the morning of 2 June 1916, the 8th Battalion War Diary commented that “The first sight of anything unusual was a crescendo bombardment by the enemy on trenches in and around Mt. Sorrel.” A few hours later the ground trembled for a few seconds similar to a mine explosion. It was soon reported that “troops on left were retiring from their front line. Germans coming through in force.”

Marvin Dunfield, an 8th Battalion man temporarily attached to a machine gun section, saw the battle from the beginning.

Fritz had attacked three times, but each time was driven back, retaining only his initial advantage of the previous day, which was

some fifteen hundred yds of our front line, forcing our troops back about several hundred yds. Fritz attempted another advance but was repulsed with heavy losses. We were not yet prepared to advance. Lines had to be consolidated, supports and reserves placed, units reorganized etc.

The infantry having no trenches to protect them were forced to take cover in shell holes, ditches and in fact any thing in the shape of a screen. Sanctuary Wood, the point to where the enemy had penetrated was alive with our own troops and here is where many a desperate hand to hand fight took place.

Two platoons or rather the meagre remains of what was left of two platoons had received orders that at three o'clock in the afternoon, when our artillery would cease their bombardment of the enemy, they were to charge. They made the attack and won the German trench. Unfortunately, their number was so depleted that it was impossible to withstand the massed counterattack by the enemy, but they held to the last man and over their dead bodies the Germans regained their former position but at a cost they will not soon forget.

Everything was quiet until about two o'clock when suddenly green and red signal lights shot high into the air from the enemy trench. No need to tell us what this meant. In the twinkling of an eye, we were crouched low in the bottom of the trench.

It seemed as if the sky had opened up and was raining shells. The din was terrific; the flashes blinding, the earth fairly rocked from the shock of hundreds of high explosives. The air was full of flying

metal. We were covered with sandbags and dirt. Our eyes burned and smarted from powder gases which hung in clouds over us. One would naturally think under the circumstances that a panic must result.

Every kind of projectile imaginable was used. Three-inch shells (18 pounders), commonly known as "Whizz Bangs" by Tommie, swept along our trench. Four-point nines, six inch and eight-inch shells containing the highest explosive chemicals rent the air and shook the ground all about us. Just to the rear of my part of the trench was the remains of an old farmhouse. If Fritz put one, he must have landed five hundred shells there. The air was full of flying brick, and a dense red cloud of dust hung constantly over the spot. Shrapnel shells burst high in the air, leaving great puffs of green, black and white gas. The stench from the gases was sickening. The eyes burned and watered from "tear" shell fumes. The fearful explosions just a few feet away displaced the air with such force that each concussion seemed like a blow on the brain. We could do nothing, sitting there hunched up our limbs cramped, our brains reeling with the never-ending shock upon shock, waiting, waiting, for the expected one that would release us from this hell.

Seemingly just skimming our heads could be heard the vindictive screaming of our own shells passing by the hundreds, landing with beautiful precision on the enemy's trench. I could see great clouds of earth simply lifted high into the air, sandbags, timber and all manner of material flying in every direction. About two in the afternoon a "coal box," a large calibre shell, exploded about three or four feet

from me, at the end of a traverse. A piece of shrapnel, quite a large chunk struck my leg, just to one side of the shin bone chipping away a generous piece of the flesh. I poured a small bottle of iodine into the raw open wound but my leg being numb from the shock I couldn't feel the strong antiseptic. I bandaged up the wound myself with my field dressing, lit a cigarette and waited for the next round.

Under cover of darkness the wounded were taken out, I hobbled out and made the dressing station from which point I was taken in an ambulance to the clearing station. There is one class of men to whom the greatest tribute and praise must be given. They are the stretcher bearers. Fearless, seemingly tireless, carrying the wounded from off the field of battle under heavy fire. If you ever get a chance to shake hands with one of these brave boys, you can say in all truth I have met a real hero. (canadianletters.ca)



8th Battalion wounded Mt. Sorrel H. E. Knobel, Library & Archives Canada

The 8th Battalion was thrown into the battle on 13 June. The Battalion moved forward to consolidate the hold on the trenches that had been retaken and to dig new ones. The War Diary reported that conditions were very bad on account of the heavy rain and the enemy's

bombardment of the roads and trails behind the trenches made them nearly impassable. The men faced 24 hours of constant shelling and, to add to their misery, no water or food could be brought up to the front lines. Then friendly fire began falling into the trenches. On the morning of the 15th the enemy shelling subsided sufficiently to allow relief units to make it to the frontlines, but it took the exhausted men over seven hours to make it back to camp. According to the War Diary,

The officers, NCOs and men of the Battalion were completely used up and totally incapable of further effort at the time. There was hardly an officer or man without slight wounds, and many had wounds which required dressing and for which they should have gone to the hospital. But the complete physical fatigue caused by the lack of three days sleep and the loss of 24 hours rations and great nervous strain was the most marked features on all hands. In spite of this 3 officers and 75 men volunteered to go back to Mt. Sorrel on the same evening to try to carry out the wounded.

Total casualties during the three-day tour were about 270 out of the 570 men who had gone into action.



Stretcher Bearer saving a life, Mount Sorrel 1916, H. E. Knobel, Library & Archives Canada

The Somme

On 12 August 1916, the Battalion prepared to leave for the long journey to the Somme battlefields. As they left, they met the 44th (Manitoba) Battalion entering the Ypres trenches for the first time and warned them, “Forget everything you learned in England.” The Battalion reached the battlefield on 16 September and quickly began a reconnaissance of the Courcellette trenches and prepared to go into battle when required.

On 25 September they reported to their jumping off positions with a trench strength of 644 men and 23 officers. At 12:35 pm, on 26 September, the men went over the top behind a barrage towards the heavily fortified defensive trench system known as Regina Trench.

Corporal James Barnett recalled that our officer came and said, “All right boys over the top and the best of luck.”

Few men were lucky that day, Barnett wrote that,

We got to their second line of defense where we were held up and here, I got a shrapnel wound in my right hand. At first glance it looked like it was in shreds, but it was not nearly as bad as it looked. In a few minutes I was on my way back to the nearest dressing station. A few who I met pressing forward loaded down with ammunition and other supplies that would be needed later on said, “Oh, you lucky devil!”

The attacks were partially successful and some men were able to fight their way into Regina Trench, but the supporting battalions were held up by enemy machine gun fire. When the Battalion was relieved on 28 September the War Diary reported it had taken 460 casualties.



8th Battalion Going Up to the Line (n.d.) Library & Archives Canada

On 9 October, the Battalion returned to the frontlines and all available men were assigned to deepen existing trenches and to dig new ones. The War Diary reported on 12 October:

During that day a number of Hun stretcher bearers came out of their trenches to save their wounded in NO MAN'S LAND, in some cases extending their services to our wounded too. We were thus able to recover several 1st Canadian Division men who were lying out in front. In our case, the Huns allowed our stretcher bearers to enter their own trenches to bring out men (Regina Trench).

On 15 October, the Battalion was told that offensive operations for the 1st Canadian Division were cancelled. On the 16th the men of the

44th (Manitoba) Battalion relieved the 8th Battalion who moved out of the Somme. The 44th would be bloodied attacking Regina Trench 10 days later.

Vimy Ridge



Eight man Lewis gun section, on Vimy Ridge, 1917. Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

The Canadian divisions moved to the area near Vimy Ridge following the blooding at the Somme. They spent a wet winter in their muddy trenches and in early spring began reorganizing to prepare for the great battle they knew would eventually come. From November 1916 through March 1917, the 8th Battalion War Diary reveals a normal period of trench routine: tours in the frontline with occasional raids on enemy trenches, time in support supplying working parties, reserve, and training. It can be fairly said that the men's training turned them into a professional army. They learned how to win

battles, but they would still die by the tens of thousands over the next two years.

The 8th Battalion had fought at 2nd Ypres, Festubert and Givenchy in 1915, at Mount Sorrel and the Somme in 1916 but were left out of the great Battle of Vimy Ridge. The Battalion's trench strength was 707 men and 21 officers when the battle began but they were in support and ready to go if called upon. From 9 April through 15 April the Battalion suffered 109 casualties with 19 killed; took no enemy prisoners and captured 3 machine guns, a trench mortar and a 5.9 gun.

However, on 28-29 April, they took part in the attack on the village of Arleux. The Canadians launched an attack on an extended front and captured the town after hand-to-hand fighting. The battalion took 300 casualties, making its April casualties equal to those suffered on the Somme in October 1916.

WINNIPEGGERS SHARE ARLEUX VICTORY



Frank Abbott

Frank Abbott, 8th Battalion Signals Section, T. Caunt Collection Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

Signalman Frank Abbott, from Souris, Manitoba, described his experience in the battle of Arleux in his diary:

Saturday 28 I get in shell-hole on right on village for 2 hours looking for signals. Heavy casualties of 8th. Big strafe starts at 8 pm and we go out on the line. Pretty hot, narrow escape from 8 inch. Fairly quiet at night.

Sunday 29 I get exactly 4 hours sleep, first since we came into line....Fritz came back with his artillery. Go out on line with Lampen, and shell bursts on us. Hits Lampen in back and rips chunks out of my tunic. I have three narrow escapes. We get relieved at 10 PM and arrived safely at tunnel at 1:30 am

Monday 30 Get a hot meal then off to a long sleep in dugout.”

Ernest Body describes the dangers he faced during the battle. In one day, he was buried alive by a shell, captured a German Maxim machine gun, which he used on the enemy, and later that day was wounded in the knee and elbow. He was declared medically unfit and discharged from service.

On April 28th, 1917, the 8th went back into this part of Vimy Ridge to take Arleux the next day. We took off at 5am and reached our objective about noon. The shell fire had now lessened and only an occasional coal box would come over from the enemy. The sun was shining, and Stubbs was on the gun, so I decided to take a nap. The coal box must have seen. A coal box shell can penetrate several feet of ground and then explode. This one charged the hole and jammed my face into the soft earth. Stubby saw what had happened and started

digging with the spade we had brought with us, found a leg, yanked on it, let in air and it was heaven to me.

I was not hurt but our gun was. I went over to the wood and went into several dugouts and found Maxim guns complete. Ossie picked a good gun and I loaded up with belts of ammunition. We took our plunder out and set-up in a renewed gun pit. We had been trained on Maxims....We had a good set of spy glasses and could see troops in the distance disappearing behind cover and expected that they would be planning a counterattack at dusk, we reserved our Maxim belts for them. Things quieted down and we heard that a Lewis gun crew had their gun knocked out and only one member active. I knew that gunner and we decided to find him and bring him and his gun to our hole or take our ammunition to his gun. I was talking to a fellow in a shell-hole when a shell burst over me and scattered shrapnel around. Ossie took care of the Lewis gunner and afterwards took care of me...

Hill 70

In July 1917, the Canadians were ordered to capture the city of Lens, France. General Sir Arthur Curry's plan was to first take a high point known as Hill 70, which would allow the allies to observe deep into the German lines, and a slag heap known as the Green Crassier. Curry also planned to then capture the Sallaumines Hill which would make the German position in the city untenable. With preparation for the assault completed in August, two divisions, including the 8th Battalion, attacked on 15 August. During their initial assault, the 8th

Battalion's forward companies advanced over 600 yards and, although facing heavy machine gun fire, managed to take their first objectives. However, they had taken too many casualties to advance further under the relentless machinegun fire. An allied artillery barrage and continued shooting by the Lewis machine gun crews eventually forced a German retreat. The attack was successful but 150 Little Black Devils were killed and another 250 wounded out of the 720 who went into battle. The dead included Major Alexander Bawden #1, the first man to attest in the 8th Canadians in 1914, who was buried in the Hersin Communal Cemetery.



Cpl. David Morgan was awarded the Military Medal “for carrying dispatches through an enemy bombardment of high explosives, shrapnel and gas shells on 18 August 1917” at the Battle of Hill 70.

Passchendaele Ridge

The Canadians did not have the opportunity to engage in the second half of their offensive. They were ordered to help in the faltering campaign at Passchendaele. In mid-October they left their lines in

France and headed back to the Ypres salient in Belgium. The 8th and the 2nd Brigade were not committed to battle in the early stages of the Canadian offensive. The village of Passchendaele fell to 2nd Division troops on 6 November, but the Canadian high command wanted to take the high ground of Passchendaele Ridge.

On 8-9 November, the Battalion was heavily shelled and “25 % of all ranks were buried in the viscous mud by shell fire during the 24 hours.” On 10 November, the battalions attacked under a driving rainstorm, over heavily cratered terrain. The front line strength of the 8th was less than 150 men when they were relieved, 138 men were killed and four times that number wounded or missing. The War Diary reported that the survivors were in such a weakened state that three men died of exhaustion at an aid station, two drowned trying to cross streams, and the conditions of the battlefield were so bad that the dead could not be carried out for burial.

On 9 January 1918, stretcher bearer Victor Smith wrote to his sister in St. James:

Well Maggie we are having quiet time since we were in the last battle. I tell you its coming to us as we lost a lot of the boys wounded and killed. It was about the worst we were ever in and I will never forget that awful November day when your Jack went away from us. He gave his life for the country and all the dear ones at home and died a hero-

tried and true- like so many of the boys that has gone before (their names will not never die).

100 Days Battles

The Canadians returned to their old lines in mid-November. After the 1917 battles, they needed to take on reinforcements, train and recover from the hardships they had suffered. From April 1917-December 1917, the 8th Battalion took approximately 2000 casualties of which 500 were killed. Luckily, the Canadians were not attacked in the March 1918 German spring offensive, so from January 1-August 9, 1918, the Battalion only had 58 killed with approximately 240 other casualties. The next great series of battles for the Canadian divisions would be in the Last 100 Days Battles that raged from the Battle of Amiens 8 August to the Armistice of 11 November 1918.

The 8th Battalion's attack during the Battle of Amiens was planned for 10:00 on 9 August. The Battalion's succinct *Narrative of Events* reported that "from the very onset fighting commenced." Artillery was able to take out a machine gun nest but as soon as it was captured another began firing. The attacking companies worked their way forward and because of "clever work on the part of officers, NCOs and stout determination of the men [Hatchet] Wood was surrounded and captured." The Battalion encountered continued opposition and by the time the objective was reached, it had suffered hundreds of casualties. The men fought on, and the final objective was reached at 6:00 p.m. A muster parade was called, and it was found that the

Battalion had taken 435 casualties. The officers and men that had been left out of the line joined the remaining men and the Battalion was ready for action the next day with a strength of 400.

Chaplain James Whillans' diary description of the battle was more dramatic:

The battle had started and proceeded successfully. The enemy was taken by surprise at 4:20 A.M. The men moved forward at the attack and went on after dispatching his first line of defence. The tanks did splendid work and moved forward effectively against all enemy opposition... I went south down the side of the valley, which was filled with cavalry. Shells were falling. Up one valley I saw horses and men hit as I passed and further up came on an aid post belonging to a cavalry unit. German planes had been over that morning and spotted them, so that they had been heavily shelled and had many casualties. Dead horses were lying around and men on stretchers were lying at the aid post. Tanks and batteries came from the west. In a few minutes, the latter were in action. Further up the valley at the north end of the wood things were very hot.

The East Rim of the valley and the wood was one front line and from there the boys began an attack at 1:00 PM... an odd shell whizzed close over my head and struck the ground...Meanwhile, the battle in front had proceeded. The O C Major Raddall went forward to see for himself what the situation was, walking right into an exposed position he was shot in the breast and died almost instantly.

The wood was shelled heavily, and we had many casualties. Our men advanced in the face of the fire and overwhelmed the opposition... There the enemy made a stand with M.Gs. It was here that one, if not both VCs earned by the battalion in the battle, was won. Corp. Coppins and Pte. Brereton were the recipients, and their acts were much alike. They attacked M. G. nests and cleaned them out, killing the gunners or making them prisoners...Hatchet Wood, as afterwards saw, was filled with German men, material, wagons huts, dumps etc. It had been a small camp. It lay right in the path of our advance and but for the spirit and dash of our men would have held us up...

In a letter dated 13 August 1918, 22-year-old Sergeant Fred Barnes wrote his sister saying

I don't feel right for writing just now. I have just come through another German hunt. Quite a few of my old pals are either wounded or other wise. And I feel as if my turn to follow some of them is pretty near.

Fred Barnes was killed by an enemy shell on the Arras front on 31 August 1918.

461342	Sergeant	BARNES M.M.	Frederick William	
1. UNIT OR SHIP	2. DATE OF CASUALTY	3. H.Q. FILE NO.	4. RELIGION	
8th Battalion	31-8-18	649-B-10685	Church of England	
5. CIRCUMSTANCES OF CASUALTY		6. NAME, RELATIONSHIP AND ADDRESS OF NEXT OF KIN		
<p>"Killed in Action"</p> <p>During the attack on the Arras front on August 31st, 1918, Sergeant Barnes was instantly killed by an enemy shell which burst close by, after the objective had been reached.</p>				

Stories of the 8th Canadians

(90th Winnipeg Rifles)

William Slater W.C. Dyer

Charles Dickson C.W. Barnhardt

Frank Stanley Dean

C. Hudson



H.L. Knobel Frank Abbott

Neil McDonald Charles Welch

Federick William Hall

John S. Hutchinson James Wheeler

Harry Lyle Majesty should so long require my serv
M. Mackenzie

Storace Le Bekin

Life in Reserve, Images of the 8th Battalion May-June 1916



Rest billets



Horse lines



Rations



Football match



A game of cards



Cooking behind the lines



Farewell Dinner for Col. Lipsett



Grenade section



Training in trenches



Training in trenches



Sniping instruction



Sniping instruction

H.E. Knobel images, Library & Archives Canada

Alexander Bawden Regimental No. #1

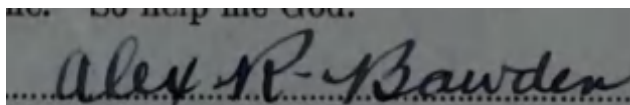


Photo by Lieutenant William Rider-Rider Library & Archives Canada
Chaplain James Whillans giving Alexander Bawden a drink of tea

**Letter to Lillian Bawden from Chaplain James Whillans 8th
Battn. Canadians B.E.F.**

Sept. 8th, 1917

Dear Mrs. Bawden

As you are aware, your husband Major Bawden was killed in action in the battle on August 15th. I knew him very well and, after a church parade before, we were riding along the road together. I had been speaking that morning of a man not going before his time was up. The Major said, "That is what I believe, the war had given me that belief."

He drew the location of the position of his company on a map and told me to come up after the attack, marking the way for me. He was shot by a sniper in the shoulder when well up on the ground that had been captured from the enemy early in the morning. From what one man told me he beckoned on his men after he had been hit.

I was at a camp kitchen when he was brought in by the stretcher bearers, after having been dressed at a dressing station a little way up. I spoke to him, but he had the appearance of being dead and did not move. A moment later a doctor pronounced him dead...

[He was] a friend of mine and I am sorry to have to write this letter. He did his duty in a highly skilled manner and played his part in this Great War for human freedom. May God bless you very abundantly in your loss.

In deepest sympathy,

Yours with every sincerity,

James Whillans

Captain Chaplain

Chaplain Whillans' letter found in the Canadian War
Museum

Horace “Carl” Beken and Gertrude Beken: From Joy to Sadness



Horace C. Beken

Horace “Carl” Beken was born at Salisbury, England, in 1888. Around 1910, while studying at the “Institute of Electrical Engineers” in Newcastle-on-Tyne, he met his true love Gertie (Gertrude) Bradley from Sunderland, England. Carl and Gertie talked of going to Canada together but decided to wait before marrying. In 1911, Carl went to Canada to improve his prospects and save money. Soon after arriving in Winnipeg, he started working as an engineer for the Grand Trunk Pacific Rail Company and may have purchased some property.

When war broke out, Carl attested with the 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles) on 23 September 1914. The Battalion arrived in England on 20 October 1914 and, on 28 November 1914, 32-year old

Carl and 30-year old Gertie married with Color-Sergeant Alexander Bawden acting as Carl's best man. Before proceeding to France, Carl amended his will to name Gertie as his heir and named his uncle, Company Sergeant Major Frederick Hall, to be the executor of his estate.



Sailing to England on the *SS Franconia* Carl Beken top right

The 8th Battalion went to the battlefields in February 1915 and its first month in the trenches was quiet. Carl's letters home mention life on the frontline but mostly deal with domestic issues and creature comforts. In a letter dated 7 March 1915, Carl wrote that they have been on the firing-line and asks Gertie to send him socks, candles and "almost anything eatable will not be out of place", as they get very little money and cannot buy very much. On 12 March, he wrote that in the last three days, "We had our first real taste of the trenches. Most of the time it was rather quiet only a few shots exchanged between us

now and then, but when they started shelling us then it got quite exciting but there was not much damage done.” He appreciatively adds that, “the socks also came in just right and after having my boots on for 3 days it's nice to be able to get a wash and a nice dry pair of socks on and that I should not have been able to do so if your pair had not come.”

In his letter dated 4 April, Carl writes that,

Your little box with flashlights and candles came safely yesterday and the handkerchiefs I was particularly glad of as I had a rather bad cold and have not had a chance to wash any out. Today I am sending you some socks and the socks you might wash and return to me later. The other things I do not want again. I don't have many things I could send home to be washed as when we go for a bath we are issued with fresh underwear and we turn in the dirty. This morning we went to the baths so now we all feel nice and clean and fresh.

In her last letter to Carl, dated 25 April 1915, she tells him she bought a new bed frame, mattress and spring. It was expensive, but when they moved to Canada they could take the mattress. She also tells him that she has had some problems with her pregnancy, but all appears to be fine now.

Carl and his battalion went into the trenches of the Ypres salient in mid-April 1915 and on 22 April the Germans launched the war's first gas attack on French colonial troops. On 24 April, they attacked the

Canadian lines using chlorine gas. Gertie received contradictory information on whether Carl had been killed, wounded or captured during the battle. She wrote desperate letters to the Canadian authorities hoping to get a definitive answer. In late May she received a letter from Carl's friend Nat Gray who described in horribly vivid detail how Carl had died:

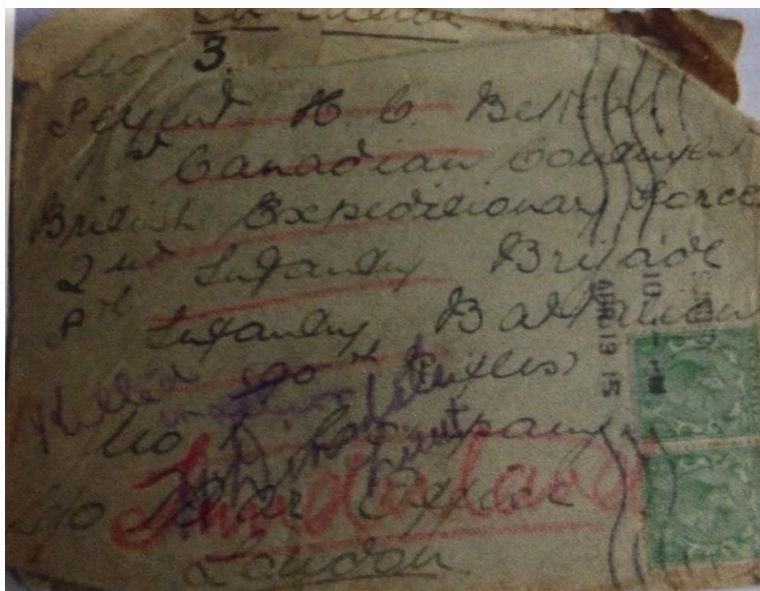
Gas was put over our trenches at daybreak on 24 April. Carl poor boy was affected at the very start and must have suffered tremendously. Last time I saw him he was sitting beside the dugout which we shared. Yellow in the face, frothing at the mouth and gasping for breath. This must have been sometime in the afternoon. As you know, we got all those wounded and suffering from gas to try and make their way to the dressing station. Well Carl and another chap started out, this chap just managed to go a little way with him when he collapsed, Carl going alone but he evidently did not get much further because I know at least 1/2 dozen men who are all positive they had saw him dead as they came out that evening and later in the day.

1-5-15	OC 822u	killed in action	CPUS	25-4-15	8-2/3	OFFICER 1/2 REG CANADIAN SECTION Q
		correct date of death -		24.4.15	(with list No 702)	

On 8 June, Gertie received a letter from Chaplain Woods confirming that officers had seen Carl dying in the trenches, as well Alexander Bawden wrote to Gertie's family, not Gertie directly, corroborating

that fact. In a 9 June letter Gertie finally accepted Carl's death, writing to her family:

I am afraid my poor boy is gone although I have been trying to think otherwise. I cannot realize yet that I may never see him again. This war is a cruel one and when one thinks of all the fine fellows that are gone, it makes one desperate. They have all died as Heroes and given their lives for their country. And although the loss is great, we feel proud that they have done something. No man can do more than give his life for his country.



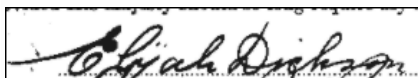
Gertie's last letter to Carl

Source: Pamela Edmondson, *On the Verge*

Elijah Dickson: “The Indian Canadian”



Elijah Dickson in *Saskatchewan & Its People Vol. II*, 1924



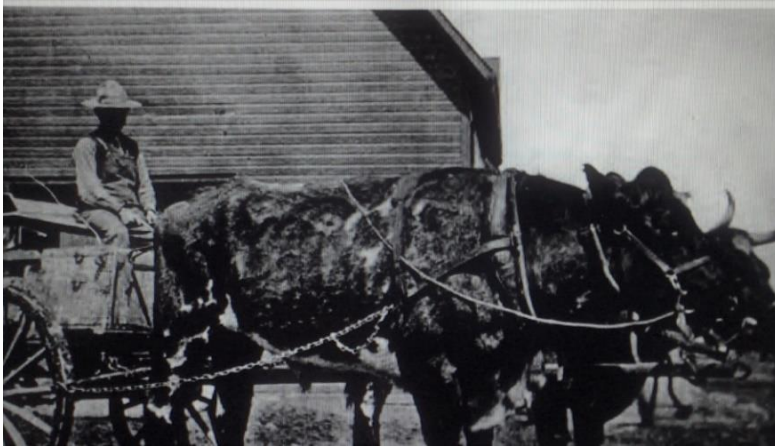
Elijah Dickson was born in 1890 at Oxford House, now Bunibonibee Cree Nation, on the Hayes River 950 kilometres north of Winnipeg. He was sent to the Methodist Church’s Brandon Indian Residential School, likely between ages seven to ten years of age. According to government census data, Elijah was enrolled in 1906 when he was 16 years old.



Brandon Indian School Garden Boys, Herbert Goodland Collection, SJ McKee Archives, Brandon University

By 1911, 20 year old Elijah was living in the town of Saltcoats, Saskatchewan, 250 kilometres west of Brandon and in 1914, Elijah married 19-year-old Christina/Christine Edith Bettern in a service at the Brandon Residential School. Christina was originally from York Factory located on the mouth of the Hayes River at Hudson Bay and, from 1911 census records, we know she had attended the school in Brandon as well.

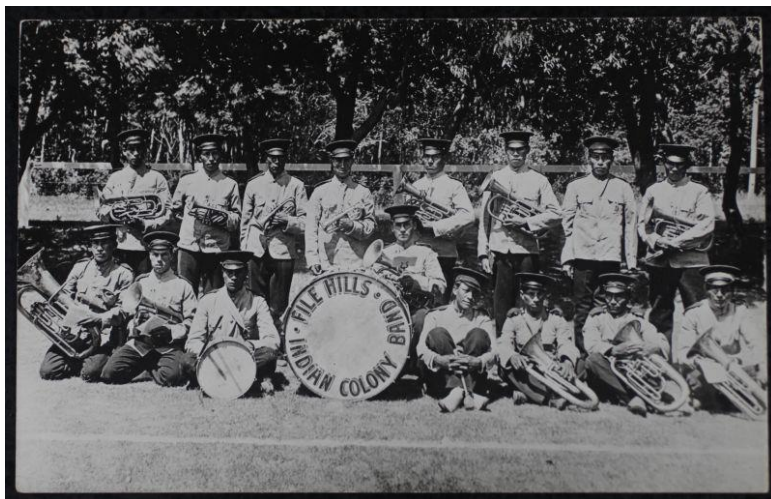
In 1914, the couple was living on the File Hills Colony, an experimental farm community on the Peepeepkesis Reserve near the town of Balcarres, Saskatchewan. In late 1915 or early 1916, Elijah and Christina's daughter Mildred was born.



Elijah Dickson with oxen on the File Hills Colony, 1914. *Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada*, 1915, Washington D.C.

James Dempsey tells us In his book *Warriors of the King: Prairie Indians in World War 1*, that the File Hills Agency was very active in fund raising and encouraging others to enlist in the Canadian Corps. Elijah was a member of the File Hills Indian Colony Band that played at Red Cross meetings and other patriotic gatherings in southern Saskatchewan.

At some point the entire band decided to enlist. All together 22 men from the Peepeepkesis Reserve attested and were accepted in the Canadian Corps. They went into many different battalions during the war: 12 became casualties (killed, wounded, gassed or invalided for illness) and two won Military Medals for “Bravery in the Field”.



Elijah Dickson top row 5th from right, File Hills Band, University of Regina.

Elijah attested at Winnipeg on 7 April 1916 with the new 203rd Battalion. The 203rd was mobilized by the Methodist Church from the three prairie provinces and approximately 40% of the men were Methodist.



“OVERSEAS 203 NO.1 HARD CANADA”

In keeping with Methodist temperance principals, the 203rd was a “Hard and Dry” battalion and their recruitment poster claimed it

would be “Dry from Winnipeg to Berlin.” Elijah’s attestation papers provide some basic information on the new soldier. He was a farmer, married and a Methodist. He was two inches shorter than the average enlistee in the CEF at only 5 foot 3 and $\frac{3}{4}$ inches tall and a slight 130 pounds. *The 203rd trained with other new battalions at Camp Hughes near the farming town of Carberry, Manitoba.*



203rd Souvenir Spoon, Camp Hughes 1916

Some of Elijah’s new comrades were Indigenous soldiers originally from northern Manitoba and some of them would be drafted into the 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles) in May 1917. These new soldiers included: Saint James Whiskey, a 20-year old trapper from Cross Lake, who was killed at Hill 70; Happy Jack Ross, a 20-year old trapper from Cross Lake, who was wounded at Passchendaele; Alexander Saunders, a 20-year old from Norway House, who was reported killed at Hill 70 but was found alive and survived the war; John Swanson, a 40-year old trapper originally from York Factory and living in Norway House. Swanson, who was wounded at Hill 70 and declared “medically unfit for further service”; and the Indigenous Olympic long-distance runner Joe Keeper, who attended Brandon Residential School with Elijah and also attested with the 203rd but served in the 107th (Timber Wolves) Pioneer Battalion in France.



View of Camp Sewell/Hughes' trenches, Manitoba Historical Society, 2015

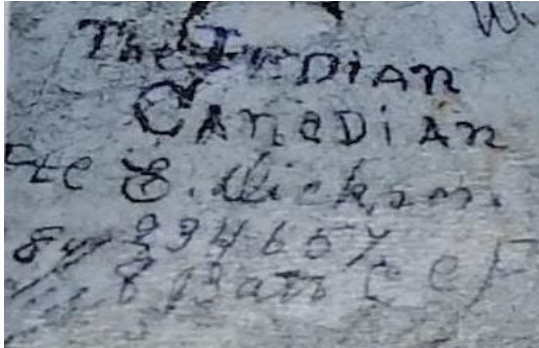
After its summer training, the Battalion sailed to England on the *SS Grampian* and disembarked on 5 November 1916. They continued training in England through the winter and in the spring were sent to different battalions in France. On 8 May 1917, a draft of 145 men including Elijah were “Taken on Strength” with the 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles), 2nd Brigade, and on 19 May another 58 came on strength. The 8th Battalion desperately needed new men as it had taken approximately 500 casualties, with 134 killed, during the April 1917 Battles of Vimy Ridge and Arleux.

It was an easy start for the new draft. In May, the 8th and the other 2nd Brigade's battalions were safely in a reserve area. However, in June and July, the Battalion went back into the regular trench routine and in the two months 30 men were killed.

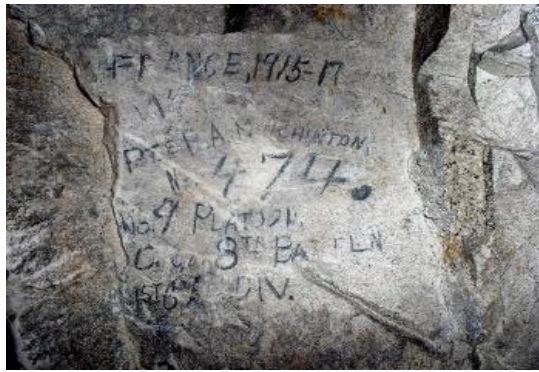
In early August they began preparations for the attack on the German stronghold of Hill 70 near the city of Lens. On 6 August, under very wet conditions and at times a driving rain, the Battalion moved up to the front line and took heavy enemy shelling. It was relieved on 8 August and the men marched to billets near the town of Hersin. At some point, Elijah and at least nine other 8th Battalion men took cover and comfort in the Loos cave system and wrote their name, unit and occasionally the date on the wall.

Scrawling their names wasn't a lucky talisman for the men of the 8th. Of these 10 random soldiers who jotted down their names on the cave wall, nine were soon casualties: John McBean and Michael Piontczak were killed on 15 August at Hill 70; Elijah Dickson and Reg Minchinton were killed on 10 November at Passchendaele, four were wounded by the end of 1917 and one in 1918. Although evocative, the 8th Battalion inscriptions in the Loos tunnels are not of equal quality.

These samples represent the fullest and most readable of the ten preserved:



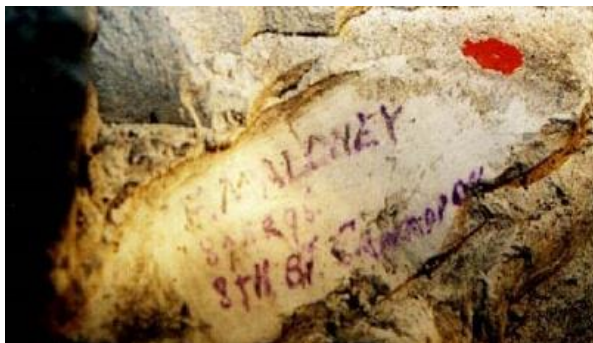
Elijah Dickson killed at Passhendaele



Reginald Minchinton killed at Passhendaele



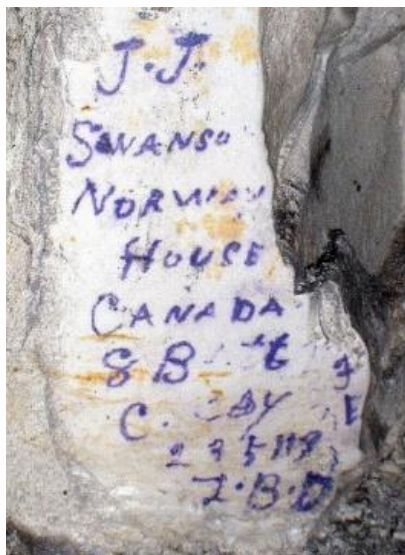
Thomas Huston wounded at Passchendaele



James Mahoney wounded at Hill 70



Fred Mackenzie wounded at Hill 70



J.J. (John) Swanson wounded at Hill 70

The cave seems a popular spot for men from other battalions of the 2nd Brigade to take cover, as there are also many names and dates inscribed from men of the 5th (Western Cavalry) and 10th Canadian Battalion.

The Battalion resumed its normal trench routines and duties for the remainder of August, September and October. In an undated letter likely written between September and October 1917 to the Commissioner of the File Hills Agency William Graham, Elijah expresses his desire to be back with his family, sadness that his friends have been killed or wounded but appears determined to continue the fight to the end:

“I am quite well and enjoying the French weather but wishing I was home instead of here. However, I hope to get that chance yet. Most of my Indian pals are either in Blighty or Killed. Two of us Indian boys are left, four of them have paid the price for this freedom we are fighting for...”

In late October 1917, the Canadian divisions were transferred to the Ypres sector to take part in the on going Battle of Passchendaele. On 10 November, the 2nd Brigade battalions attacked under a driving rainstorm over heavily-cratered terrain. The 8th Battalion was slaughtered. The War Diary reported 138 men killed. Elijah Dickson was one of the men killed that day. His *Circumstance of Death Card* reveals he was killed by a machine gun bullet and died “almost

instantly”. Elijah and 82 other men killed during the assault, have no known grave and are memorialized on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in Ieper (Ypres) Belgium.

After Elijah’s death, Christina moved to Winnipeg and, in 1922, married Albert Harrington who worked for the Municipality of West Kildonan. The family lived in West Kildonan and had two children and many grandchildren. Christina died at Winnipeg in 1960. Elijah’s daughter Mildred married Syd Chappell who also grew-up in West Kildonan. At some point, the family moved to Victoria, British Columbia. Mildred and Syd had three children who still live in the province. Mildred died at Victoria on 9 October 1995.

Royce Dyer and Adam Guilford: Little Black Devils in Russia and the Caucasus

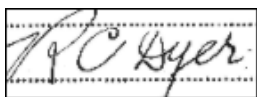
The 1917 Russian Revolution and peace treaty between Lenin's Bolshevik government and the German Empire was deeply troubling to the Allied governments. The German enemy was now potentially able to move millions of troops from the eastern front to the west, where the allies were fighting desperately for survival. Secondly, valuable natural resources were now within the enemy's grasp. Thirdly, they feared Bolshevik-style revolutions in their own politically and socially troubled nations.

The Allies did not have the capability to send large numbers of troops into Russia, so they sought ways to make alliances, to train and supply military expertise to local anti-Bolshevik forces. The Allies undertook three limited military operations in Russia. They sent troops to Vladivostok in eastern Siberia, to Murmansk in north-west Russia and into the oil-rich Caucasus. Two 8th Battalion officers volunteered to join these missions: Captain Royce Coleman Dyer D.C.M, M.M. went to North-west Russia and Captain Adam Harrison Gilmour M.C. + Bar M.I.D went south into the Caucasus.

Royce Dyer was born on 1 February 1889 in Sutton, Quebec, where his father was mayor. He attended school at the prestigious Stanstead Academy, but, prior to the war, he moved to Transcona, Manitoba and worked as a butcher.



Captain Royce Coleman Dyer D.C.M, M.M + Bar
Fairmount Cemetery, Sutton, Quebec



He attested with the 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles) at Valcartier, Quebec, on 21 September 1914. His attestation papers inform us that he was 25 years old, single, 5 feet-five inches tall, with grey eyes and black hair.

Dyer fought at the 2nd Battle of Ypres in April 1915 and was gassed during the Battle of Mount Sorrel in June 1916. In October 1916, during the Battle of the Somme, he was awarded the Military Medal (M.M.) for “Bravery in the Field” and was awarded a second M.M. in December 1916. In June 1917, he was invalided to England with broken ribs. While in England he volunteered to join a “Special Mission” for the British War Office and was promoted to sergeant. Dyer was attached to the Slavo-British Allied Legion (SBAL), which was part of the Northern Russian Expedition or Archangel Campaign (June 1918-October 1919). The 6000-man Northern Russian Expedition force was tasked with supporting anti-Communist forces

in northern Russia and the SBAL's mission was to train Russian, Finnish and Estonian volunteers to fight against the Bolshevik Army.

In a June 1918 letter home, Dyer wrote about his new assignment:

A few lines to say I am leaving for an unknown country. If I have an opportunity to write on my trip I shall do so. I will be away from civilization for the duration of the war, and perhaps one year later. I am in a position at present that I cannot explain. Our work will be very dangerous, as much, even more, than in France. I felt I must still fight for my flag and you at home. I could not stay on in England. I and 11 other sergeants volunteered for this Dangerous Mission. I am still brave enough though war torn after my 4 years of service, but never shall I give up.

In a 6 July 1918, letter Dyer felt able to provide more information on his whereabouts:

At last, we can write and say a few things. I am on the Kola Peninsula. My next place to march to will be Petrograd. When we landed here, I was taken ill with fever. My! but I was very sick; never before was I like it. However, it only lasted 5 days. Now I am back in best of health again.

The sun has been shining here 24 hours of the day. Next month winter starts. Christmas time we get only 2 hours of daylight. The winter lasts 10 months The people here are much the reverse of those in

France. Some are very dopy. I think they sleep and eat during the winter. Working during the summer months does not meet with their liking. Many Russians are joining us. We have not had any fighting as yet. Expect to later on. You must not have any fears for me. I am sure I shall get through O.K. At least I feel that way.

The trip across the North Sea was not bad. I was not sick at all. Two days out of the seven were very cold. The sailors told us at one point we were only nine hundred miles from the North Pole.... Tell anyone wishing to send me articles to send Illustrated magazines and paper. Don't send food stuff as the danger of its being sunk is too great and this means a waste of money.

Things look the same here as they did in the picture books I had when a boy. The Russians, dress, horses, harnesses, carts, houses are all the very same. The money is in rubles and a ruble is now worth 10 cents. In peacetime it is worth 52 cents. Some of the Russian people are rather dangerous, but I expect in time to have them all on our side.

A few months later, Dyer was in combat. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct medal (D.C.M.) for his bravery in an action at the town of Onega and received a battlefield commission in the Imperial Army and was quickly promoted to Captain. His unit's mission was to raise an anti-Bolshevik cadre, train the men to meet British military standards and then repeat the process until they had built an armed force capable of manning the frontlines. Dyer was put in charge of a battalion of ex-prisoners and he proved adept at

screening out common criminals, social malcontents and revolutionaries. According to available reports, the men responded favorably to Dyer's training and were on their way to becoming a cohesive military force. However, Dyer contracted pneumonia in December 1918 and died. He is buried in the Archangel Allied Cemetery (Plot E-6).

The officers that replaced Dyer were not as skilled in vetting troublemakers. In July 1919, a group of pro-Bolshevik soldiers mutinied and killed the Battalion's officers. Trouble spread and over 3000 troops mutinied and turned a city over to the Bolsheviks. Fierce fighting between Allied and Bolshevik forces began in August and in late September, the Allied forces began preparation to leave north Russia. They abandoned their last city on October 12 and left the Arctic wastes.



Royce Coleman Dyer is buried at Archangel Allied Cemetery E.6

Adam Harrison Gilmour, M.C. + Bar M.I.D., was born at Winnipeg to Thomas and Jane (Moore) Gilmour. His father was a successful

lawyer and real estate speculator. Gilmour gave his occupation as Grain Broker and that he was an active member of the militia. He was almost 29 years old, 5 foot 10 inches tall and weighed 150 pounds when he attested on 28 September 1914.

It was quickly determined that Gilmour was officer material and he was sent to cadet school and was Taken on Strength with the 8th Battalion on 21 June 1916. Exactly one month later, he was wounded and was awarded the Military Cross “for conspicuous gallantry in handling a Lewis gun party throughout a prolonged action. The gallantry coolness and excellent judgement displayed by this officer achieved very great results.” In November 1916 he was awarded a bar to his M.C. for conspicuous gallantry in action. He led carrying parties with water and bombs to the front line, over 1500 yards of captured ground, and although wounded guided reinforcements to the front line.

He was promoted to Captain and made General Arthur Currie’s Adjutant. In February 1918, he was seconded to the War Office for Special Duty and in March “proceeded on a Secret Mission” as a Staff Captain to the Headquarters Assyrian Contingent.

Gilmour had volunteered to be on a "hush-hush" mission to advance British strategic interests in the Middle East. It was so “hush hush” that the men were to be sequestered in the Tower of London before going on assignment in May 1918. The mission was commanded by Major-General Lionel Dunsterville, a schoolboy chum of Rudyard Kipling, and was soon known as the “Dunsterforce”. It was made-up

of 150 officers and 300 NCOs whose purpose was to organize, train and lead thousands of anti-Bolshevik native troops raised from the tribes of Asia Minor and the Caucasus “to protect the oilfields of Baku (Azerbaijan) and the Trans-Caucasian Railway.

Canada contributed 15 officers and 26 NCOs who were to be of “strong character, adventurous spirit, especially good stamina, capable of organizing, training, and eventually leading irregular troops.” Captain Gilmour was assigned to liaise with an anti-Bolshevik Colonel in the port city of Krasnovodsk on the Caspian Sea to help train troops to protect the Baku railway. However, nothing good happened. He later attempted to train troops in Turkestan but, as he wrote in his diary, “troops of this nature are not any more aggressive than their jobs require.” By July 1919, his strange adventure was over. He returned to England, demobilized and went home to Canada in October 1919.*

* Another story of a Manitoba Dunsterforce soldier was found in the Lawrence Family entry in the Stoney Mountain, Manitoba, local history, *The Story of Stoney Mountain and District*.

John Lawrence:

He joined the 90th Rifle battalion in 1915, and between that date and the time of his discharge November 1919, served around the world with the Canadian and British forces. He served with the 78th Battalion at Ypres, Passchendaele, and then volunteered with the Dunster Force for a secret mission, he went to India, Burma, China, Japan, and as far west as the Ural Mountains. He was billeted in the

house across the road from where the tzar was murdered. It was while at Ekaterinburg, that he met and married a Russian Red Cross Nurse and upon his discharge they moved to Stoney Mountain where he became an employee of the City of Winnipeg quarries.

Some, not all, of the fantastic stories stated in this entry can be confirmed by John Lawrence's service file and 1921 Canadian Census records. He was in the Dunster Force and did marry a Russian woman.

Sources for Royce Dyer:

British Forces Near Archangel in Great Peril: The Revolt of Dyer's Brigade, *Vancouver Daily Province*, July 26, 1919

Dyer's Battalion-The Untold Story of the Russian Revolution, Part 1, *Esprit de Corps*, September 2016

Dyer's Battalion-The Untold Story of the Russian Revolution, Part 2, *Esprit de Corps*, October 2016

"Original First" Hero Turns Up in Siberia, *Winnipeg Tribune*, November 15, 1918

War Veteran Dies While in Siberia, *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 25, 1919

Sources for Adam Gilmour:

Canadians in Other Campaigns, Veterans Affairs Canada

The Hush Hush Army-The Adventures of the Dunsterforce Parts 1 and 2, YouTube



Stanley Perrie

“We took Passchendaele Ridge,” 10 November 1917 diary entry of Pte. Stanley Perrie. Stanley was born and raised in Treherne, Manitoba, and worked on his father’s farm. He died from shrapnel wounds on 18 March 1918 aged 21.

Escaping Captivity

1,383 men from the 1st Canadian Division were taken prisoner during the April 1915 2nd Battle of Ypres. 163 were from the 8th Battalion and most of them had been wounded in the battle. Six of these men successfully escaped from German prisoner of war camps and were awarded the Military Medal. They were Privates Gerry Burk #1216, Arthur Johnston #58, Agie Nelson #882, Horace Robinson #1317, Thomas Shannon #13 and John Watts #1310. Albert Gendon was reported as missing on 15 May 1915 during the battle of Festubert and later as captured. He escaped to Italy after the war had ended but no medal was issued.

Arthur Johnston #58 donated his memoir to the Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum. He was originally from Kilbride, Lanarks, Scotland. He was 18-years-old, living at 608 Maryland Ave. in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as clerk when he attested on 23 September 1914. Johnston was wounded by shrapnel on 24 April 1915 during the 2nd Battle of Ypres. He was reported as being a prisoner of war on 16 July 1915 and interned in the Rennebohm Camp at Munster, Westphalia.

Arthur Johnston Memoir:

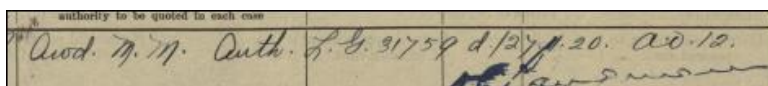
“We were taken North into Germany by box car and ended up in a large prison camp at Munster, Westphalia. I guess there must have been over 4,000 men in the camp: Canadians British, French,

Belgians, Russians and French Colonials from Africa. After a few weeks I was sent with a working party to a large coal mining complex at Dortmund where we worked at various jobs on the surface. On the coke ovens we had a 12 hour shift and every two weeks, in order to change shifts, we worked 24 hours with only mealtimes off.

In early April 1918, an English prisoner and myself planned an escape and acquired a map and a homemade compass. Carrying food which we had saved up to last a week, we climbed the fence surrounding the mine enclosure and headed west towards Holland. About seven days and 140 miles later, we were stopped by a Border guard with his police dog practically on the edge of Holland. We were returned to the mine and served a short sentence and then down the coal mine to work.

In October, after planning since our April attempt, we were all ready for another shot at escape. This time there were four of us. Corps, myself and two Belgians. Corps was my companion on the first try. His name is pronounced like "corpse" but he was her real-life Cockney from London. After work one day we jumped the fence again, carrying our meagre rations for a week's journey over the same trail as before. Travelling mostly at night and across open country, avoiding towns whenever possible, we finally reached our destination Holland.

After 12 days of quarantine, we went on to Rotterdam and Corps and I were given passage to England. Our Belgian friends stayed there until their country was free. I was four months in England before I got passage to Canada and landed home four years and seven months after I had left. I was awarded the Military Medal for Bravery in the Field.* (It says so on the metal bracket, who am I to argue.)”



Agie Nelson

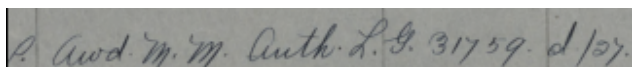


8th Battalion soldier Pte. Agie Nelson #882, born at Erinview, Manitoba, was a 24 year old carpenter when he attested in 1914. He was wounded during the 1915 2nd Battle of Ypres and taken prisoner. He was interred in a prisoner-of-war camp in Munster, Germany, and assigned to work in a stone quarry. After enduring two years and three months of captivity, he escaped along with two

others and reached the safety of the Netherlands eight days later and was soon repatriated to England.

In a newspaper article of 17 April 1917, he stated that he was keen to get back into action, “ I am going to the Canadian Depot tomorrow to get into Khaki again,” he declared.

However, Nelson never made it back into action as he was discharged from further military service. His medical report discloses that he suffered from “Neurasthenia” caused by “inhumane treatment in German prison camp”. Nelson was “restless at night, starts up at night at the slightest noise, has a tremor in his hands, is unable to walk fast, suffers from shortness of breath and is anemic (he lost 70 lbs. while imprisoned)”. The recommended course of treatment was “Rest.” According to his service file, Nelson was awarded a Military Medal for his successful escape and sent home to Canada. He died in 1951 at Rockwood, Manitoba.

A rectangular box containing handwritten text in cursive: "P. Award M.M. Auth. L.G. 31759. d/27."

* Edward Higley, *Guests of the Kaiser: Prisoners of War of the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1915-1918*.

See also 44th Manitoba Battalion: Clifford G. Robertson, Robert Jones & William Taylor: Prisoners of War

Frederick Hawkes: The Oldest of the 8th



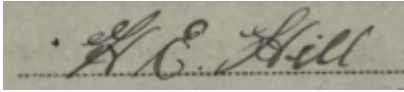
Frederick Hawkes

Frederick Hawkes (#2381262) was born in England on 15 April 1892 to unnamed parents. Frederick and his sister came to Canada in 1901 as British Home Children in Canada. He was sent to Portage la Prairie and lived with local farm families and seems to have lost contact with his sister. He was conscripted into the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1918. According to his service records, he was in France with the 8th Battalion in November 1918 and was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Following demobilization, he received a soldier's land grant and farmed near Portage la Prairie. He served in World War II, never married and enjoyed country music. He died, aged 106 years and 136 days, on 18 August 1998 at Portage la Prairie and was interred in Hillside Cemetery.

Private Frederick Hawkes was the longest-lived member of the 8th Battalion and one of the longest-lived Canadian combat infantryman of World War I

Letters of Howard Hill and family correspondence



Howard Edgar Hill's file contains the most comprehensive collection of an 8th Battalion soldier's papers in RWRM Archives. The collection contains one post card, nine personal letters, five Field Service cards, correspondence to and from Canadian military hospitals and grave registration, photos of Pte. Hill's grave in Abbeville, France, two obituaries, two letters of condolence, two letters from Department of Militia and Defence regarding payments and pensions, a photo of Abbeville Communal Cemetery taken in 1950, a card from a hotel in Abbeville and a framed color photo of a field of poppies.

Howard Hill was born in 1890 and lived in Winnipeg's north-end. He worked for the telephone system until he enlisted with the 106th Battalion in 1914. Howard was rejected at Valcartier, but he reenlisted with the Little Black Devils in 1915. He fought with the 8th Battalion in the trenches of Belgium from February 1916 until they marched to the Somme battlefields in August 1916. He was wounded on September 8th and died of wounds on September 14, 1916. He was buried in the Abbeville Communal Cemetery, Abbeville, France.

March 2nd, 1916 [from Belgium]

Dear Eva,

Just a line to let you know that I am still well and hoping you are the same. Well, I should have wrote before this but kept putting it

off, so thought I would do it tonight. Well, there is not much to say. I have been here some time now and it is same place for it has snowed all the time I have been here. Well, I wrote to them all before I came over here, Eva You could tell the rest where I am as it is pretty hard to write to them all now. I think I will stop for I cannot think of anything more to say, so will say good bye for now, so will close with love to all.

Your brother,
Howard

France May 29th, 1916.

Dear Eva

Just a few lines to let you know that I received your letters dated March 19 and April 19, and also your parcel and was glad to hear from you too, I should have wrote to you before this but kept putting it off, so I thought I had better do it today for I suppose you will be wondering what is the matter with me for not writing. Well, there is so little one can say that it is not worth while putting it in a letter for you could put it all on a postcard, that is why I have not wrote before, I could not think of enough to put in one. Well you were wanting to know how long I have been here. Well it is about 4 months now. I say, did you not get a letter dated about the end of February from here? If not, it could not have got through. Well, I see by your letter that you have got rid of your big car and got a tin can, but it will do the work just as well as the big one and not cost

as much to keep up. Well I think I had better stop. Hoping this finds you all well as it has me, so will say goodbye for now. With love to all.

Your brother Howard

June 25th, 1916

Dear Eva,

Just a few lines to let you know that I have received your letter some time ago and was glad to hear from you, so I sent you one of those rapid-fire post cards, as I did not have time to write you a letter, so I thought I would do it tonight as I am up ... I say there, we had a picture taken somewhere in France that is a picture of the battalion and one of a company and they are giving us all one of them, but I do not know if it is the battalion or the company, but they are going to send it to you. If it is the battalion you will find me standing just about on the right of the picture, if it is the company, I am just about the same place only sitting down. Well, I think I had better stop for now as it is time to hit the hay. Hoping it finds you all well as it finds me. So, will say good bye for now with love to all. Howard.

3rd Casualty Clearing Station

B.E.F. France

10-9-16

Dear Mrs. Restall,

Your brother Pte. H.E. Hill #475106 has asked me to write you. He is one of my patients and was admitted into hospital on the 8th severely wounded in the buttock. The wound is most extensive and severe and covers the whole buttocks.

So far, his condition has been good, but the Medical Officers cannot say exactly how he will get on for a few days yet

Your brother makes an excellent patient & is so grateful for anything done for him. We are all very fond of him and the Medical Officers very interested & kind.

Rest assured he is getting every attention from us all, both day & night & we hope in due time to restore him to health and strength once more. We will do our best; the issue is with God and we must hope and trust.

I shall write you again as I know how anxious you will feel so far away from your loved one. He sends fondest love and kisses and asks you not to worry.

With kindest regards and the best of luck to my patient.

I remain,

Yrs. Sincerely,

(Sister) M. Aitheu

No. 2 Stationary Hospital

B.E.F. France

Sept. 15th

Dear Mrs. Restall,

I am sorry to say that Pte. Hill, 8th Canadians died here this morning. He was brought in in a very critical condition suffering from dangerous wounds to the buttocks and only lived a few hours. Everything was done for him and he had every care and attention, but there seemed little hope for him from the first. He died peacefully and did not leave any messages. He was too ill to realize much. With sympathy to you in your trouble.

Yrs. Truly,

E. Whittall (Sister)

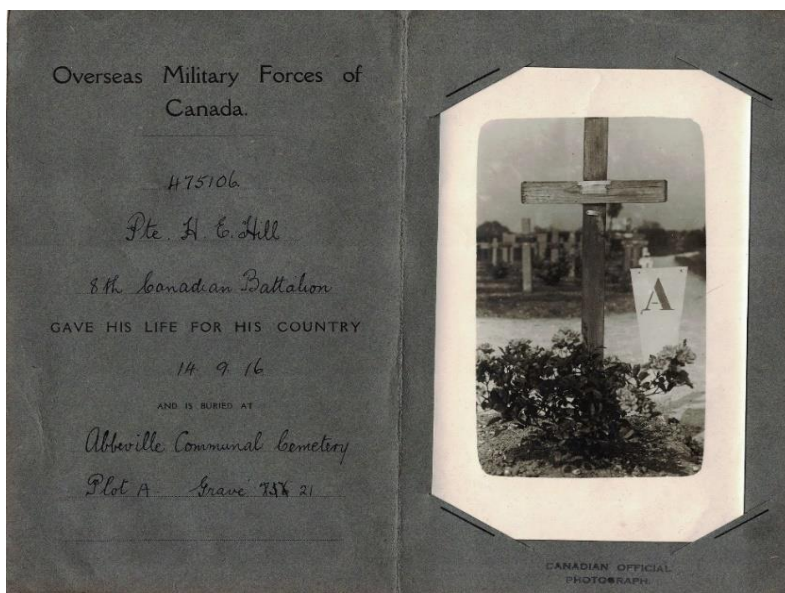
Springfield Man.

Sept 24th

My Dear Eva,


No doubt you will be surprized to hear from me, but I found your address in an old phonebook...We were so sorry to hear about Howard's death in the paper, and you girls have our heartfelt sympathy, poor boy, he gave his life for his country and died a hero, but is hard for the ones at home... I wonder if you have one

of his photos to spare, as I would love to have one... Six of the boys we went to see at Camp Hughes are all away overseas now... It hardly seems possible that we may never see them again... Hope you get this and that you will write. Close with Love from
Maude Egan



Photograph taken in 1919 of the grave of Howard Hill in the Abbeville Communal Cemetery, Abbeville France.

Cecil Hudson: A Heartbreaking Death



Lt. C. Hudson DCM MM Hudson family-- Leonard on left. Cecil on far right

On 3 October 1918, the *North Battleford News* sadly reported that **Lieut. Hudson is Accidentally Killed**. “He was a natural born soldier,” the article asserted, “and had a great future in the army had he lived...It is very hard for the many friends of the dead soldier to think that spending so long in the ranks from which he rose to a position of trust and prominence, death should claim him. But such are the fortunes of war and must be cheerfully accepted.” In Hudson’s hometown of Lloydminster, the town newspaper stated that “There was universal sadness throughout the city on Monday last when news was received of the death of Lieut. Cecil Hudson...How the deceased happened to be killed is unknown.” A memorial service for Cecil Arthur Henry Hudson was held on 13 October in North Battleford, Saskatchewan.

How did his tragic death come to be?

Cecil Arthur Henry Hudson # 81420 was born in London, England, on 18 July 1893. His parents, Arthur and Ellen Hudson, and family emigrated to Canada in 1905 and settled in Lloydminster. When he attested in December 1914, Cecil was single, living in North Battleford and working for the Canadian National Railway. He served throughout the war in the 8th Battalion's Signals Section along with his brother Leonard.



8th Battalion Signals Section, Cecil Hudson row 2 far left. Leonard Hudson bottom row centre.

T. Caunt Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

As the North Battleford paper noted, Hudson was a natural and brave soldier, who was promoted through the ranks. He was awarded a Military Medal (MM) for “Bravery in the Field” during the Battle of the Somme and a second MM for bravery during the Battle of Vimy Ridge. During the Battle of Passchendaele, he was wounded in the

head and in one eye. In February 1918, he was sent for Officer Training in England and while there received notice that he had been awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal for his “conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty during the November battle at Passchendaele. The medal citation reads:

He followed up the attacking companies, laying a line under fire. When the line was destroyed by shelling, he established a lamp station near the front line. He located a party of enemy snipers and killed three of them and made a most valuable reconnaissance report. Although wounded, he remained on duty with the greatest courage and determination until incapacitated by another wound.

He rejoined the 8th Battalion on 9 September 1918 as a newly minted Lieutenant. Two weeks later he took his own life. On 26 September 1918, Hudson was found dead in a wood near the 8th Canadian’s billets. His body was lying over a log with a service Lee-Enfield rifle, which had been stolen from a soldier, below the body. One rifle shell was found beside it. The Medical Officer Dr. Thomas Campbell stated at the Court of Inquiry that death was caused by a bullet fired at short range to the middle of the forehead. In the court’s judgement “the rifle was not fired by any person other than Lieutenant Hudson and no one else is in any way to blame.” Being unable to obtain any evidence to show that the rifle was accidentally or intentionally discharged, a verdict of “accidental death was rendered.”

The only clue to why Hudson might take his own life comes from his friend Lieutenant George Gibson. Gibson stated at the Court of Inquiry that on the night before his death Hudson had told him that “he was worried about his responsibilities as an officer and that since being wounded in the head and eyes at Passchendaele he was subject to lapses of memory and at times his mind was a blank.”

By revealing his worries, Hudson was clearly asking for help and guidance. Unfortunately, he asked too late. If only he would have sought out help while in England, talked to the Medical Officer, the Battalion Chaplain or if Lieutenant Gibson had recognized the seriousness of Hudson’s troubled state of mind, he might have taken him to see the Medical Officer that night.

Sadly, c’est la guerre.

Jonathon Hutchinson: Doing One's Duty

John G. Hutchinson



Jonathon Hutchinson was an “original” 8th Battalion volunteer. He was wounded on 28 April 1915 and later hospitalized with rheumatic fever. He returned to the battalion and was killed on 14 June 1916 during the Battle of Mount Sorrel. He has no known grave and is memorialized on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing. The 8th Battalion went into the frontline trenches in early March 1915. When Hutchinson wrote his letter, the Battalion had just completed its first front-line tour of the trenches and suffered its first two deaths in combat. The letter addressed to his father in Oswald, Manitoba, is found in Hutchinson’s Personnel File.

March 10th, 1915.

Dear Dad

I am writing this letter to you and will carry it in my pocket if I should get killed you will know what I would like doing with any thing I happen to have at the time My pay that I have coming I wish you to divide between yourself and Cassie as I owe Cassie some money and would like her to share even with you

That of me and Ethel Beverly I want Gets to have and my trunk and what it contains to George

I would like a dozen Photos of myself taken big one and one given to all of you in remembrance of the boy that did his duty and died with his face to the foe and I was quite willing to give my life for my country as others have done before and will do again And as we are going to make a big charge tomorrow or the next day I will say Good Bye and bless you all and I hope to meet you all in Heaven

Your affectionate

Son Jack

Send to
Mr. A. Hutchinson
Oswald Post Office
Manitoba
Canada.

NOTICE

In case of my death I wish the contents of this envelope which is my will to be forwarded to my father at the address below

J.G.Hutchinson
Mr. A. Hutchinson, Oswald Post Office Manitoba Canada

Letters of Frank Iriam



Frank Iriam (#57) was born in 1886 at Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. He was living and working as a locomotive engineer in Kenora, Ontario, when he attested on September 23rd, 1914. Iriam's role as chief of scouts for the 8th Battalion allowed him more independence than an ordinary infantryman. Although gassed in 1915, he remained at the front until 1918, when he was wounded and later demobilized.

Iriam's opinions on a variety of topics can be read in his memoir, *In the Trenches, 1914-1918*. Frank was also a prolific letter writer, and many of his letters were published in *the Kenora Miner*.

Dear Alma

[mid September 1914]

I guess you know by this time that I am off on a ramble to the old countries. I got a letter from you the other day and was glad to hear from my sister. We are aboard the

Franconia of the Cunard Line. She is a fine boat and our quarters are quite as good as could be expected in a troop ship...Yesterday we were on the Bermudian, a little tramp steamer. She was too small to accommodate the battalion, so everyone hollered, and result was transferred to this one and it is quite an improvement...

I left my home station at Kenora as a sergeant but there is a big surplus of such and the seniors take precedence. There were about 3 to everyone needed for this company when I was drafted into it. So, I sized it up the first day and applied to the C.O.'s for a place in the rank and file and am well pleased with it, too, as an N.C.O.'s job is no cinch at any time, and especially at a time like this. I have spoken for a job with the scouts and had a little practice at it before leaving camp.

Any letters you write will follow the contingent right across. Don't forget to write often whether you get replies or not, as it is not always possible to get writing on this job. But it is fine to get mail when the postman comes around. Don't be shocked by the dirt on the sheet for it is honest dirt, you know. Cheers and I want to get jolly letters from you often.

Your brother

Doodle



On Active Service

**WITH THE BRITISH
EXPEDITIONARY FORCE**

Address reply to:

1915

Name _____

No. _____

Section _____

Company _____

Battalion _____

Regt. _____

THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE,

% GENERAL POST OFFICE,

LONDON.

Belgium

Nov 15th

Dear Alma

Here we are again!

It has been quite a long time

*since I received that parcel
of cakes and wool socks.*

*Thanks very much for the
kind thought you had for
your old brother Alouette.*

*The socks are dandy and
just came at the right
time as we are having some
very wet cold weather here.*

Will write again soon.

Goodnight

Love and best wishes

Bro. Frank.

Iriam letter November 15, 1915

Belgium Dec.20, 1915

Dear sister Alma and cousin Fanny,

Received your nice letters today and it sure was cheery to get word from 2 nice girls at home. Things have been moving some in this locality in the last 2 days. In the wee small hours this morning, the Huns on our left got it into their heads to make an attack with poison gas and all the rest of the fancy frills.

Our advance patrol heard the gas hissing and roaring out of the pipes and hustled back to our lines and gave the alarm in time for everybody to get on their smoke helmets. They also had time to notify our artillery to cut loose. When the Huns did start to come over, they got the jolt of their lives as everyone on our side was wise to the game and ready. A number of them got started across, but I don't think any of them got back again, and then our guns got busy on their trench. They must have suffered very heavily from shellfire then, as their front lines would be packed with men ready for the attack.

*They have been pretty sore all day today and their big guns have been busy slinging all kinds of scrap iron and high explosives at us. You can smell the **Hate** in every shell as they boom and shriek and roar and snarl and howl in a way that would curdle the blood of honest folk back at home in the old U.S. and Canada. Today their long line spits fire and venom its seethes and writhes like a caged monster and the breadth of its **Hate** smells acid and hot in our faces here in this smelly old ditch...*

You wrote about Mr. Ford and his Peace Mission to end the war by Christmas. I would not like to express our feelings about him in this gang. He is German at heart and German his very sympathy. His only aim now is to save the Germans from the consequences of their awful array of fiendish crimes against humanity. He and his followers know in their hearts that the Huns have shot their bolt and have started on the down grade toward the day of retribution. If there was a hope left that the Huns could trample us underfoot do you suppose Ford's peace ship would have sailed. Oh! No! Never. In the first place he would have been scared of German submarines, and secondly, he would not have wanted to stop the war while Germany was winning...

It is now 2:20am and one of my scout patrols has just returned from reconnoitering on the right front of our battalion. They were spotted by an enemy sentry and had a rather thrilling half hour under machine gun fire in an open field. The moon came out suddenly when they were close to the German wire. They retired under cover from our own machine gun and got home all safe.

I was near forgetting to tell you that I got your scrumptious parcel, all O.K., and it was dandy too. We enjoyed every bit of it. Thanks very much for thinking of Doodle at Christmas time. Goodnight and two big XX's for each of you.

Yours Doodle

Dear Jenny and Alma.

Belgium Feb. 22, 1916

Here goes to write you few lines. We are in the reserve area today and at present in a wooden hut. It is quite like winter here now in Flanders. Everything is white with snow and the line of trenches shows up like a ragged grimy gash in a soiled blanket. Fritz shows some signs of activity these days. His aeroplanes have been busy, and also his scouts have been out quite a lot in the last few weeks.

The artillery is quite active on the whole of the Western Front, and you can hear a roar and smash and a rumble at almost any minute in the 24 hours.

They are threatening to equip us with high boots. My feet have been wet for so long now, I think I would get heart failure or something like that if I got into dry foot gear.

Am still on the scouting job for the battalion. I will enclose a clipping from the Kenora paper about 2 of my snipers who were recently killed by shell fire. Patty Riel was a fine big upstanding woodsman and one of nature's gentlemen. He was much liked by everybody in the battalion and the commanding officers were very fond of Patty. McDonald was also a good man and had a large score of Huns to his credit. I had a letter from uncle some time ago and I must answer it sometime. I don't think I will write very much today. I don't feel in the writing mood and have got other junk on my mind, so, I guess I will call it off for today and try to do better next time. Will say good night.

Love and best wishes Brother Frank.

* In his biography, Frank explains that he was the one who sent Sniper McDonald's Ross rifle to Lt. Col. Lipsett at battalion headquarters. The rifle is now on display in the Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum. Riel's rifle is thought to have been destroyed in a fire.

Dear Alma,

La Belle France, Nov. 20, 1916

Received your scrumptious letter a couple of days ago. We are having a short time in reserves and are living in some buildings that have been abandoned by civilians. Some of the old ruins give evidence of having seen days of considerable splendor. The Hun has certainly cut a wide swath in his career of destruction over this country...

The old war is still plugging along with little sign of early finish. We are doing as well as could be expected, though. It seems that we are practically saddled with the task of restoring civilization to the working basis again and cannot expect any help from the rest of the so called civilized countries who are quite willing and happy to see us bleed to death in accomplishing the task. I hope some of them may be in a position to need our support someday. The Huns seemed to have all the so-called neutrals scared stiff. They sink ships wholesale and send whole countries into slavery, and no one has guts enough to lodge a protest. There is

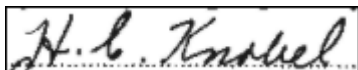
another Germany looming in sight after this one is licked but I don't just think it will fall to our lot to do the bleeding in that case....

I received the parcel OK and it was fine and dandy. Also got a couple from old B. Blake. If you run across any magazines such as Recreation, Field & Stream, Outdoor Life or any of them, I wish you would try and mail some to me. They make good reading in lieu of the real... Give my regards to all the folks. I will say goodbye for time

Love and best wishes from brother Frank.

X X OOO – hugs returned with interest.

Harry E. Knobel: Official Photographer of the CEF, 1916



Knobel's old crew, Scouts and Snipers 8th Battalion, June 1916 Library & Archives Canada

Harry Edward (H.E.) Knobel immigrated to Canada in 1899 when he was 28 years old. The 1901 Canadian census shows him living at Rat Portage, Ontario, working as a miner. By 1909, he was recognized across Canada as a “well known mining and civil engineer” entrusted with running mining operations in northern British Columbia, Pincher Creek, Alberta and, as a 1913 newspaper article commented, was “known in Port Arthur for 10 years as an explorer and prospector.”

Knobel attested at Valcartier, Quebec, on 27 August 1914 and was assigned to the 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles) with the regimental number #1258. According to information in his attestation papers, Knobel was born at Buxton-on-Trent, Derby, England, on 4 September 1871. He was single and gave his occupation as mining engineer. The physical description of the recruit was that he was 32 years old, 5 foot 11 inches, a greying complexion,

blue eyed and greying hair. The medical officer considered him a fit candidate for the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force.

He went over as a private but was quickly recognized as an exceptional soldier. Knobel was promoted to corporal and sergeant on 30 January 1915 and assigned to be the instructor of the Battalion's scout section. In his autobiography, *In the Trenches, 1914-1918*, Frank Iriam described Knobel's education, experience and abilities:

He was a mining engineer of good education and worldwide experience including being with Dr. Jameson on his famous raid on the Boers in South Africa [1895-1896], mining in the Yukon, Alaska, Northern Ontario, etc. and four years at school in Germany speaking German and French fluently. He was an expert surveyor, map man, artist and photographer etc. We now felt confident and look forward to seeing things when we progressed where we could try out our system of scout work and actual practice in the field.

Knobel's scout section was largely independent and took their direction directly from Lieutenant-Colonel Louis Lipsett and brigade headquarters. All of Knobel's skills came in handy when the 8th went into the trenches in March 1915. Lipsett wanted to know every foot of the Battalion's frontage and the scouts were kept busy mapping the trench lines and no-man's-land. Brigadier-General Currie also wanted detailed maps of the 2nd Brigade's frontage. Knobel, Iriam wrote, could go through a town and then draw a perfect map with the names

of streets, principal buildings and “a hundred and one other details”. The scout section also provided the battalion’s expert snipers, like Patrick Riel and Phillip MacDonald, and Knobel took them on their forays into no-man’s-land to set their observation posts. Knobel was Mentioned In Dispatches (MID) for bravery during the 2nd Battle of Ypres when he led his men safely out of the trenches.

In a letter dated 13 June 1915, printed in the Port Arthur Chronicle on 7 July 1915, Knobel described life in the Ypres salient:

We are seeing a lot of heavy fighting lately and we are looked upon as old veterans. The Germans call us the White Gurkhas ...The worst of the reputation that we have got is that whenever there is a particularly hot corner to be held, the Canadians are put into it. The result is that we are continually having casualty lists and as it is there only a few left of the original division.

This is a most murderous war; you have no conception of it until you have actually been through an engagement. The men are wonderful, but many are getting badly shaken with shell shock. You would hardly believe it possible that men whose grit has been proved over and over again could come out of heavy shell fire with their nerves so shattered that they absolutely break down. The worst of it is they never seem to recover their nerve.

On 15 May 1915 he was promoted to lieutenant and to captain on 17 July 1915. In November 1915 he was hospitalized with influenza and

was transferred to the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade headquarters as a staff officer. On 16 June 1916, he went to Canadian Army Corps headquarters to be the CEF's 1st official photographer. On 19 August 1916, Knobel was admitted to hospital in England and was diagnosed with neurasthenia (shell shock). The medical report on his case indicates that his condition originated in November 1915. The doctor wrote that symptoms appeared to begin after an attack of trench fever, a debilitating condition caused by lice bites. Knobel developed nausea, began vomiting, experienced chills and nervousness. These symptoms worsened about the time of the June 1916 Battle of Mount Sorrel. The doctor noted "there was a marked tremor of hands, very nervous, can't sit still but keeps shifting about". He was granted leave to Canada for four months. However, because of his illness, Knobel resigned his commission 16 June 1917.

After resigning, he took up his old occupation as a mining engineer in northern Ontario and lived on Loon Lake near Port Arthur. In 1926, he was awarded a life-saving medal for saving two canoeists from drowning in Loon Lake. He maintained his life-long interest in engineering, geology, anthropology and ornithology. He also played Chopin on his grand piano and was known to serenade people boating near his "camp". When he died in 1955, his obituary credited him with "developing the first crude gas mask...When the German army used gas in the second Battle of Ypres, Captain Knobel told his troops to cover their noses with a wet cloth." Given Knobel's lifetime of expertise with mines, gases and explosives, he may have known that

if the men did not panic, but covered their faces with a wet cloth, they would have some protection from the gas.

Knobel as Photographer: In 1915, Canadian soldiers were prohibited from using personal pocket cameras at the front. But, many soldiers disobeyed this rule, just as they disobeyed the injunction on keeping personal diaries. There was not an officially authorized CEF photographer to document the actions and lives of Canadian soldiers until Knobel was named official photographer of the CEF in May 1916. He was followed by Captain Ivor Castle, who was succeeded, in 1917, by Lieutenant William Rider-Rider. These three photographers shot more than 6,500 images of the war.

More than 480 of Knobel's photographs are available on-line through Library and Archives Canada. A number of these are identified as from Knobel's original battalion. There are the usual pictures of officers, and companies and sections; however, Knobel enlisted as a Private and worked his way up the ranks to become a commissioned officer, so it is natural that there should be many images of ordinary soldiers going about their daily tasks: tending to horses, getting and eating rations, peeling potatoes, playing football, playing cards, reading and writing letters or just relaxing.

In June 1916, the three Canadian divisions fought in the Battle of Mount Sorrel (Sanctuary Wood) three miles from Ypres. Knobel captured aspects of the horrors the men faced as they went over the top, explosions in trenches, brave stretcher bearers attending to the

wounded, bringing back the wounded and dead to the Casualty Clearing Stations behind the front-line and the sights of captured German trenches.

**Neil “Foghorn” MacDonald & Guilford Dudley M.C.,
M.M.: With the Transport Section**

Neil R. MacDonald



Neil “Foghorn” MacDonald June 1916, Library & Archives Canada

Neil Roderick MacDonald was born at Glengarry, Ontario, on 1 January 1870, to Archie and Mary MacDonald. He attended the Catholic Ottawa College; however, not having a priestly character, he decided on a career as a mining engineer. The 1901 United States census shows him living in Gatlin, Montana, working in his brother’s saloon. He surveyed in the nearby goldfields and was known as a skilled mining engineer. MacDonald got married and even ran for public office but the lure of riches took him to Mexico, the Yukon, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario. His contemporaries said that Foghorn was “among the first twenty men in every gold camp of consequence”. The story goes that he was mining near Bissett, Manitoba, when he heard that war had broken out. He jumped into his canoe and paddled to Winnipeg to join the First Contingent as a private.

At 6' 1", a voice like a megaphone and an over-sized personality, he was a force to be reckoned with. MacDonald was placed with the 8th Battalion and, as he was an expert with horses, was promoted to Farrier Sergeant. He went into the trenches in February 1915, commissioned in the field and became Battalion Transport Officer during the Battles of Festubert (1915) and Mount Sorrel (1916). By the fall of 1916, North American newspapers were acclaiming that MacDonald was the *BEST-KNOWN MAN IN THE CANADIAN ARMY*, *"FOGHORN" MOST POULAR MAN IN CANADIAN ARMY* and *WHO IS BETTER-"FOGHORN" MACDONALD OR THE KAISER*.

"Foghorn" never went over the top and won a Victoria Cross, nor did he ever plan a battle winning strategy. So, how did he win world wide fame? Simply by a gargantuan ability to drink copious amounts of alcohol and a backpack full of ribald tales of his adventures in the wild west and the great north country.

In 1916, he formed a boozy acquaintanceship with the famous Winston Churchill. Churchill had been sacked from the British Cabinet because of the disastrous 1915 Gallipoli Campaign. He was made Lieutenant-Colonel of the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers which were positioned alongside the 8th Battalion in the Ypres salient. Churchill had attended Sandhurst Military College with the 8th Battalion's Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis Lipsett. Lipsett, his officers, including "Foghorn," were frequent guests at Churchill's vaunted mess dinners. In his book, **With Winston Churchill at the Front**, Dewar Gibb wrote of "Foghorn":

I have never in all my life heard anything to rival his fluent impassive flowery profanity. And I recollect that his narratives were really interesting in themselves, and that never in all his life did Foghorn do any ordinary thing or take part in an ordinary adventure.

He treated with noisy scorn such of Winston's ideas as different from his...The CEO merely sat. We never saw the CEO take a second place in conversation to anyone save Foghorn and laughed at his sallies. The rest of us, who had not heard him, we're not left strength enough even to giggle; we had, however, become Foghorn worshippers.

Foghorn, who was too old to be a frontline officer, was transferred to England. He milked his acquaintance with Churchill, who was now back in parliament, and found his way into London society, where he called everyone by their first names. The British papers took great interest in this outlandish character who “came to epitomize the mythical natural virtues of the Canadian soldier.” In 1917, Foghorn’s popularity was enhanced as he went on a Canadian government bond tour in the United States. After the war he dabbled in Canadian politics but soon longed for the free life of a mining engineer and prospector. He died in 1923 of pneumonia contracted after a three day debauch with like-minded friends on the Montreal docks.

After his untimely death in 1923, obituaries eulogized him as one of the great war-time characters, as the *Winnipeg Tribune* wrote, *GREAT HEARTED CANADIAN GIVEN FINAL HOMAGE CANADA MOURNS AT BURIAL OF NEIL “FOGHORN” MACDONALD*, and

the Windsor Star put it “FOGHORN” seemed to step out of the page of a romance... a wanderer to remote corners of the world, he was a typical child of adventure come out of story books, a soldier of fortune—a citizen of the world.” He died at Montreal on 20 November 1923 and was buried in the family plot at the Glen Nevis Cemetery, Glen Nevis, Ontario.

Chaplain James Whillans gives us his impressions of Lieutenant Guildford Dudley, the 8th Battalion Transport Officer after the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Dudley was born in Dumfries, Scotland, in 1885, and had served two years in South Africa and three years in the Royal Scots. He attested at Valcartier in 1914 as a private. Dudley was awarded the Military Medal for bravery during the Battle of the Somme, commissioned in January 1917, awarded a Military Cross in November 1917 and was promoted to Captain in October 1918. Being an “old soldier,” Dudley was well-versed in the ways-and-means of getting what he wanted.

From the memoir of Chaplain James Whillans:

Stealing of horses and wagons was not uncommon at the front, and once, when a new division came out, the transport was left out without pickets with the result that in the morning one of the finest horses was missing along with several sets of new harnesses. One favourite method of getting a horse was to spy a good animal on some line during the daytime and at night some of the men would engage the picket in conversation and produce a flask of rum which was

generously passed around. Then the strangers would ask to see the chums of the pickets, with the result that they would all go into some billet where the rum circled again and things got merry. Meanwhile the noble steed that had aroused the cupidity of the rival transport was being spirited away by the confreres of those, who, in the billet nearby, were laughing and telling how they had swiped the rum from the quartermaster sergeant; the truth of course being that the rum had been furnished for this purpose for which it was being so successfully used.

Having secured the horse the next problem was to disguise it so that it could not be recognized by its owners. After the Vimy fight, saddle horses were scarce, and a fine animal appeared on a certain line one night after some scheme as the above head being worked. It was a bay with four white stockings which were speedily coloured, the tail and mane were trimmed, the animal was clipped underneath, and its teeth filed. It was a horse of metal and carriage, and it took its place on the line as the pride of the transport.

Wagons that were stolen had to be carefully painted and disguised and all telltale marks obliterated. On one such occasion some men in search of a lost wagon casually glanced at the vehicle they sought, which had been painted and changed and went on with a thorough examination of the other vehicles in the line.

It was a matter of common knowledge that these things went on, and, perhaps, few transport in the corps were not guilty in some way. It was an unwritten law that if a transport officer could recognize his property on any lines, he could have it, therefore it was the duty of the present owner to render unrecognizable anything he had not come by legitimately. In this art of camouflage, a high proficiency was obtained, which, as illustrated above, reached its perfection in the transformation of horses and mules. There was a heavy penalty for horse stealing, but the presence of a strange horse on the line could usually be explained, although it was as well not be caught with the goods.

The chief duty of the transport was to take the rations and other supplies forward when the men were in the line. During the daytime, the roads behind the lines lay long and empty across the scarred country, but when night came, they were feverish with activity. This was the case in the ordinary trench holding periods when no battle was in prospect, but before such battles as Vimy or Passchendaele the roads leading forward were crowded from earliest dusk to latest dawn. During the latter battle the roads leading into Ypres from Poperinghe were crowded night and day, like the Strand at noon.

But it was at night on the forward roads that one saw the traffic like a brimming river struggling to get onward, while here and there the stream was held up temporarily by the breakdown of some vehicle or the shelling of the road. Guns, huge tractors, tanks, horses and

mules drawing limbers and long lines of men move slowly on in the darkness. It was with difficulty that a transport could get into the endless stream of traffic on a main road, and the limbers frequently waited for hours before they could find a gap that would allow them one at a time to take their place in the slow-moving line.

It was always eerie on the roads at night. One seemed out of touch with everything away from the transport and not yet at the battalion. At either end you had the feeling that you were with one of those who belong to you; enroute on a dark night one had a lost feeling. Dead trees lay black and sinister at the side of the road, and jagged trunks shattered by shell fire stood up spectral in the night. On some nights, the horses and mules would go along with their ears back as though unconcerned; but there were nights when they were nervous, when their ears were forward, and their eyes bulged as though apprehensive of danger. Even in the dark they seem to be aware of the presence of a dead horse or men on the roadside, and often did not want to pass when the driver could see nothing.



Library & Archives Canada



Royal Winnipeg Rifles History 1883-1933

Shelling was never pleasant but there was something weird about it on the roads in the dark. It seemed worse there than in the line where one could hear a missile, but the rattle of the wheels on the cobbled road drowned out the sound of a coming shell. In the dark,

shells seem to be supernatural and seemed to be seeking one out. One had a horrible feeling, at times, when one imagined a shell bursting on the cobbles, it's splash being widely scattered and destructive on a crowded road. It was better to be on the ground than on horseback when the shelves were falling; one had a helpless feeling when mounted and exposed to every hurtling piece of shell that flew. At times, the roads would be drenched with gas, which was a particularly horrible thing at night, spreading itself so silently and insidious. There was something uncanny about the roads at night, to which even those who had been years in transport work never got used to, and this uncanniness was even on the quiet nights when no trouble was anticipated, the transport was frequently struck by shells, although when everything is considered one can only marvel that it was not wiped out many times. At Vimy there was a sunken road leading up to the Battalion, and the transport had just arrived one night when suddenly several salvos came over. One horse was halved by a shell, but the driver who was on its back at the time escaped with nothing more serious than a severe shaking. A limber was smashed, and the wounded horse took off with what was left of the vehicle. The transport officer's horse was also wounded and with the cry of terror - dashed madly away into the night. When going out later the transport officer saw the animal and it came to him when he called.



Hellfire Corner, Ypres salient, Library & Archives Canada

At Passchendaele there was but one road forward – The Plank Road – and it was shelled for miles, the ditches being filled with smashed limbers and dead mules. Where the planks ended the road became a slather of mud and water and bottomless shell holes, and through this wallow the transport struggled forward. Here the shellfire was intense, and the road strewn with dead men and bits of men. Every few minutes shells landed on the road spouting fountains of liquid earth into the air. Our particular transport was the only one to get through that night. It moved slowly up the road of death, the mules white with lather and steaming with sweat as they pulled the limbers out of one shell hole after another. Perhaps that was the worst experience that ever fell to the lot of the transport during all of its long history at the front. Shells fell all around during the last mile and it was nothing short of miraculous that the transport men came through unscathed.”

John Peter McBean and Mark Buyko: Letters

John Peter McBean Mark Buyko



John Peter McBean lied so he could go to war. When he attested on 16 January 1916, John claimed to have been born on 30 September 1897 and was 18 years and 3 months old. However, he was born on 30 September 1900, so he was barely 15 years of age. When killed on 15 August 1917, John was 16 years and 11 months old. There was

only one other 16 year old killed while on active service with the 8th Battalion. Pte. Evan Jones was born 3 March 1900 and killed on 26 September 1916. He was 16 years and 6 months old. *

Many of the letters in John's file are faded but there are several to his 12 year old brother Angus and his mother Violet. They are simple straightforward letters. While training at Camp Hughes in June 1916, he complains to Angus about the wind and dust that ruined his day of shooting, "We were out shooting last Wednesday done pretty good in the morning but in the afternoon about 3:00 o'clock the sand started blowing and my eyes got filled up so I couldn't see the target," adding to his humiliation was that "Captain Walters took my rifle and, of course, shot well." And, in February 1917 he was disgusted with the army and wrote from Seaford Camp on the south coast of England that, "They're sure drilling us these days but I can take all they can give me. I'm feeling Jake these days. Hope Bill is better by now. Tell him again not to join up as it is rotten in this army at present."

John was "Taken on Strength" with the 8th Battalion on 8 May 1917. Three letters to his mother from France are dated May 15, May 25 and 27 July. Something is different in this last letter; he has experienced real war. Friends have become casualties as , "We are having a time of it over here with the Huns... and expect to have a pretty hot time when we go in again." Three weeks later, on 15 August 1917, he was killed in the Battalion's assault on Hill 70.

May 15, 1917

Dear Mom

I received your letter of late and was glad to hear from you and hope that the kids are better by now. How is Papa getting along with the crop? I suppose Angus will be busy helping him. Are the kids going to Cary school and who have they teaching there?

John

May 25, 1917

Dear Mama

Just a line to let you know I received your letter OK. Also, the parcel which I was very glad to get. The Old Chum came in very good also the cookies... I suppose the crop will be pretty near all in by now. Are you having lots of rain? Are the kids going to school now? Tell Alex not to study too hard. Have not seen Andrew (Stewart) lately but expect to see him on Sunday. How is everyone around the Ridge getting on? Johnny Ward got a wound in the face. He is in the 44th Battalion. Well as there is no news will have to close right soon.

From John

July 27, 1917

Dear Mama

Just a line to let you know I'm getting along fine and hope this finds you all the same. We are out of the line again for a few days but expect to have a pretty hot time when we go in again.

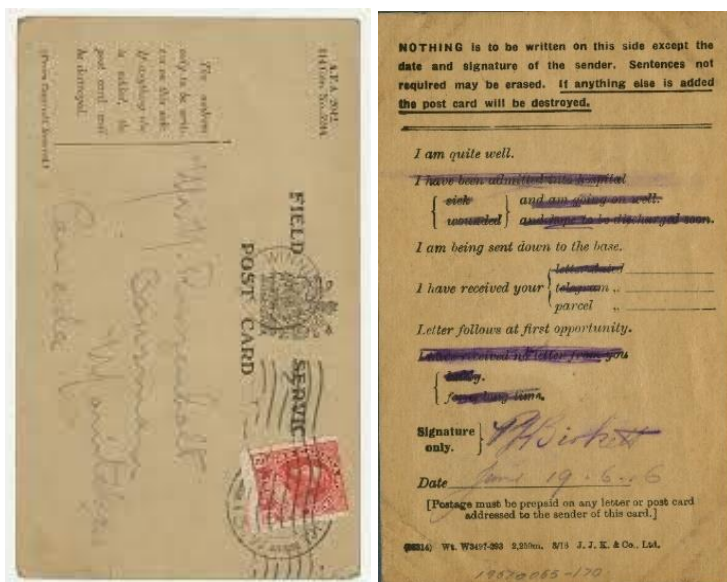
I am glad to hear that the crops are so good, hope they don't get hurt with the rust like last year though. Have not seen Andrew for a couple of weeks but he is still alive. J. Ward got a wound in the foot which did not leave any mark on it. He is back in the 44th Battalion again. Haven't had any letters from Ida for a long time so I guess she has forgotten me. It is too bad about the McClennan boys. I knew them quite well, one of them used to play in our battalion baseball team. Well, I saw the results of the Saskatchewan election in the paper last night and was pleased to see how things turned out although I am not as interested in following as I used to be.

That cake you sent became in fine as we had just moved about that time and so had something to eat on the road. Was also pleased with the Old Chum. We are having at time of it over here with the Huns. Won't be a bit sorry when this thing is over. Well as news is scarce, I will close. Remember me to everybody and write soon.

From John

There is one other letter in Peter's file. On 7 March 1918, 20 year old Mark Buyko of Gilbert Plains, Manitoba, wrote what was likely the hardest letter he would ever write. According to Manitoba 1916 census records, Mark's family had come to Canada from Austria when he was two years old and neither his mother or father could read or write English. He likely had very few years schooling and, as the letter shows, he struggled with writing and putting his thoughts on paper. The majority of CEF soldiers had less than a grade six education and writing would have been a struggle for many. Hence,

one of the reasons for the Field Service Postcard or “Whiz Bang” which required little writing.



Mark and John were both raw recruits; they had both been “Taken on Strength” with the 8th Battalion on 8 May 1917, along with 150 other new soldiers. Their first three months in the trenches had been quiet, so they had no battle experience. In early August, the Battalion began preparing for an upcoming Canadian attack on German trenches. On the morning of 15 August 1917, the Battalion went over the top at Hill 70. By the end of the day, it had taken 400 casualties with 115 dead. One of these was John McBean and Mark thought it important to let Mrs. McBean know that he was with her son when he was killed.

March 7, 1918

Dear Mrs Mc Baem

Jest a few line to let you know above your Boy I saw him kill on The hill 70 on morning August 15-17 And I dont know where he is buried But I know him well when I see him I look at his no 830473 so I was sure that was him he was with me in same platoon well that all I can tell above him

Yours Sincisely

pte M Buyko 235056

C Company 12 plat 8 Can Batt BEF France

Mark survived the war with only a gun shot wound to a finger.

On Active Service



WITH THE BRITISH
EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

~~March 7. 1918~~
March 7. 1918

Dear Mrs McBaem
Just a few lines to let you
know about your
Boy I saw him kill on
The hill 70 on morning
August 15-17 And I dont
know where he is buried
But I know him well
when I see him I look at
his no 830 473 so I was
sure that was him he
was with me in same
Platton Well that all
I can tell about him
pte M. Buyko 235056
yours C Company 12 Pl
8 Can Batt
Sincerely B E & Fran

TO ECONOMISE PAPER, PLEASE WRITE
ON THE OTHER SIDE, IF REQUIRED.

John McBean file, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

***Pte. Evan Arthur Jones**



Pte. Evan Arthur Jones, born 3 March 1900 at Port Stanley, Ontario, to Henry and Elizabeth Jones and lived at 1033 Garfield Ave. in Winnipeg. Jones joined the unit in June 1916 and was reported killed on 26 September 1916. He was the youngest Little Black Devil to be killed while on active service with the 8th Battalion. He was 16 years and 6 months old and has no known grave and is memorialized on the Canadian National Vimy Monument.



John (Jack) Smellie: My Experience During the Battle of Mount Sorrel, June 1916



O.P.H Ward

4th General Hospital

Denmark Hill, London S.E.

June 22nd, 1916

Dear Mother

As you will see by the address, I am in a hospital in London. I am suffering more from shell shock than anything else and hope to be alright again in a few weeks. I suppose I might as well start at the beginning and tell you all about it.

On Saturday, June 10th, they came around asking for volunteers. Nobody knew what it was for, but they never called for volunteers unless there is some job to be done which they don't like to pick out men for. Tommy Swindell, one of the boys in our section, and myself were among the volunteers. The battalion was out at rest at the time but they marched us right up near the frontline again. When we got there they explained the situation to us.

The 3rd Division had lost some trenches on a commanding ridge called Mount Sorrel a little way from Ypres and they had to be taken back. We were to form a consolidating party in the attack, that is we were to go over with the attacking party carrying sandbags and

shovels as well as our rifles and tried to fix up the trenches which they captured so that they might be in a condition to hold.

The night before the attack we went up to the front lines as soon as it was dark and dug ourselves in just behind the actual firing line. We just dug holes big enough to crawl into and protect us from flying pieces. Tommy Swindell and I dug ours together. All the time the rain was coming down in a steady drizzle and the mud was getting deeper all the time. Everything was fairly quiet except for an occasional machine gun. Exactly at 12:30, things started. I happened to be watching at the time. In an instant the German frontline seemed to burst into a mass of flame and the air simply shook with the crash. Our artillery had started work and after that I kept my head down.

Fritz knew right away that we were planning an attack and he knew that we would have men massed in our frontline and supports. His artillery got busy and soon shells were bursting all among us. You could hear nothing but the whistle of shells, the crash of their explosion and the awful whine of the flying pieces. At 2:00 o'clock, just as daylight was breaking, the artillery slackened and the order came to advance. We pulled ourselves out of our holes and started over, what were left of us. You could hardly call it a charge. The shells had loosened up the earth and the rain had changed it into one big sea of mud, lots of places knee deep, however, there was very little opposition and we got over that awful stretch of ground all right.

What few Germans were left were only too glad to surrender. Most of them were boys between 16 and 20 with one or two old men among them. There was nothing left of the old trenches and we set to work in a hurry to try and dig new ones. The ground was full of old sandbags, dead bodies and discarded equipment, which made the task anything but an easy one. The first hour or two wasn't too bad but then the German artillery seemed to learn how things were standing and they let us have it. I was digging away for all I was worth when the whole of Belgium seemed to fall on top of me. When I came too, my face and right arm were trapped and I couldn't move. I didn't know how many hours I lay there, but it must have been a good many, as it was well

on in the afternoon when a 3rd battalion fellow managed to dig me out.

I was pretty useless and lying there with the shells bursting all around had simply destroyed my nerves. The shells were simply driving me crazy so I started for the rear at once. There was only one communication trench back to the supports.

Fritz knew this and was shelling it very heavily to prevent reinforcements being brought up. Twice the side of the trench was blown in on top of me and both times I managed to scramble out. In one place it was blocked altogether and I had to go over the open. That field was an inferno of flying shells, my rifle was broken in my hands, my haversack was torn off my back, and any clothes were simply torn to ribbons by flying pieces, while I was only slightly scratched. One big splinter tore the side out of my greatcoat, went through my tunic and dropped down only giving me a small gash in the side. I've got that piece yet. How I came through it alive will always be a mystery to me.

With love to all from

Jack

Snipers of the 8th Canadians: Ballendine, MacDonald, Riel & Smith



Snipers Riel & MacDonald, courtesy of R. Harpelle & K. Saxby, Lackhead University.

Three of the most prolific snipers of the First World War were Indian soldiers from the 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles) with a combined total of 138 confirmed kills:

John Ballendine of Battleford, Saskatchewan, with 58 confirmed kills was declared medically unfit due to a knee injury and returned to Canada.

Philip MacDonald of Akwesasne, Quebec, with 42 kills was killed on 3 Jan 1916 when hit by a shell fragment. MacDonald is buried in Berks Cemetery Extension plot III.B.40

Patrick Riel of Manawauke, Quebec, with 38 kills was killed on 14 Jan 1916 when hit by a shell fragment. Riel is buried in plot Ill.B.39 at Berks Extension cemetery beside his friend Philip MacDonald.

*Frederick Smith the fourth sniper mentioned in the attached article was originally from England and living in Roblin, Manitoba, when he attested. Smith was reported missing 18 August 1917 during an 8th Battalion's action during the Battle of Hill 70. He is memorialized on the Canadian Vimy National Memorial.

Excerpt from: *Snipers' Month* by Max Aiken, **Canada In Flanders**, 1916

July was a snipers' month. True, every month is a snipers' month; the great game of sniping never wanes, but the inactivity in other methods of fighting left the field entirely opened for the sharpshooter in July.

It was during the fighting at Givenchy in June 1915, that four snipers of the 8th Canadian Battalion (Winnipeg Rifles) agreed to record their professional accomplishments from that time forward on the wood of their rifles.

Private Ballendine, one of the four, is from Battleford. He is tall and loosely built. In his swarthy cheeks, black eyes, and straight black hair, he shows his right to claim Canadian citizenship by many generations of black haired, sniping ancestors. He learned to handle rifle with some degree of skill at the age of ten years, and he has been shooting ever since. At the present time he carries thirty-six notches on the butt of his rifle. Each notch stands for a dead German to the

best of Ballentine's belief. One notch, cut longer and deeper into the brown wood than others, means an officer.

To date, Private Smith, of Roblin, Manitoba, has scratched the wood of his rifle only fourteen times; but he is a good shot, has faith in his weapon, and looks hopefully to the future.

Private McDonald, of Port Arthur, displays no unseemly elation over his score of twenty-six.

Private Patrick Riel makes a strong appeal to the imagination, although his tally is less than McDonald's by two or three. He is a descendant of the late Louis Riel, and when he enlisted in the 90th Winnipeg Rifles at the outbreak of the war and was told by one of his officers that his regiment had done battle against his cousin Louie at Fish Creek and Batoche, he showed only a mild interest in this trick of time. Riel, like McDonald comes from Port Arthur way. Before the war he earned his daily bacon and tobacco as a foreman of lumberjacks on the Kaminisiqua River. The weapons used by these four snipers are Ross rifles, remodeled to suit their peculiar at particular needs. Each is mounted with a telescopic sight, and from beneath the barrel of each much of the wood of the casing has been cut away. The men do their work by day, as the telescopic sight is not good for shooting in the poor light. They are excused all fatigues while in the trenches and go about their grim tasks without hint or hindrance from their superiors. They choose their own positions from which to observe the enemy and to fire upon him- sometimes in leafy covers behind our frontline trench, sometimes behind our parapet.

Very little of their work is done in the “No Mans Land between the hostile lines, for their danger from the enemy is augmented by the chance of a shot from some zealous but mistaken comrade. The mention of No Mans Land reminds me that, on the Canadian front, this desolate and perilous strip of land is now called “Canada.” The idea is that our patrols have the upper hand here, night and day we govern the region, though we have not stationed any governor or resident magistrate there as yet...

Three Victoria Crosses: Alexander Brereton, Frederick Coppins and William Frederik Hall



Alex Brereton
3 Bde's. 10th

8th Bn. Awarded the Victoria Cross. Field.

Only one other battalion in the CEF won two Victoria Crosses in one day. Alexander Brereton and Frederick Coppins won theirs on 9 August 1918.

Alfred Somers, of Strathclair, Manitoba described what he saw in the battle of Amiens, how his section came under fire and how Alexander Brereton, of Oak Lake, Manitoba, saved his life. During the advance, Somers took cover under a tree root and saw that all the men in his section were either killed or wounded. Every time he tried to look-up; bullets struck the tree just above his head. All of a sudden, the firing stopped, and he heard shouting. As he glanced upward, Somers saw Alexander Brereton jumping into the German lines. For his action Alexander Brereton was awarded the Victoria Cross for “most conspicuous bravery”. After the war Brereton married Somers’s sister and moved to Alberta.

London Gazette

For most conspicuous bravery during an attack, when a line of hostile machine guns opened fire suddenly on his platoon, which was in an exposed position, and no cover available. This gallant N.C.O. at once appreciated the critical situation and realised that unless something was done at once the platoon would be annihilated. On his own initiative, without a moment's delay, and alone, he sprang forward and reached one of the hostile machine-gun posts, where he shot the man operating the machine gun and bayoneted the next one who attempted to operate it, whereupon nine others surrendered to him.

Cpl. Brereton's action was a splendid example of resource and bravery, and not only undoubtedly saved many of his comrades' lives, but also inspired his platoon to charge and capture the five remaining posts."



Fred J. Brereton

18-10-18 8th Bn Awarded the Victoria Cross

Fred George Coppins
Aug 8 1915

To Eighth Batt Association

Please accept this medal to
go with other trophies, I have
no immediate family and
I feel this is the proper
place for it
Thank you

Fred G Coppins

Coppins letter donating his Victoria Cross to the 8th Battalion Association

Corporal James Barnett, who was wounded on 25 September 1916 when the 8th Battalion attacked Regina Trench, reflected on Fred Coppins, who was known to be a good man in a fight. He met Coppins before the battle of the Somme:

I became a member of a light machine gun crew... Six men was a crew and our number one was the lad by the name of Fred Coppins, not a big man, fairly well built and a very cheery disposition he was known as Copsy. I was to know him less than two months and he was a real man when the going got tough. In a few days we were to go up to the line and we did a few days in there and despite a lot of shelling we didn't take a lot of casualties. One night they attacked our lines twice, but they didn't get into our lines and I know that Copsy and the Lewis gun accounted for a good many in front of us.

London Gazette

For conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty when, during an attack (August 1918), his platoon came unexpectedly under fire of numerous machine guns. It was not possible to advance or to retire, and no cover was available. It became apparent that the platoon would be annihilated unless the enemy machine guns were silenced immediately. Cpl. Coppins, without hesitation, and on his own initiative, called on four men to follow him and leapt forward in the face of intense machine-gun fire. With his comrades he rushed straight for the machine guns. The four men with him were killed and Cpl. Coppins wounded. Despite his wounds he reached the hostile machine guns alone, killed the operator of the first gun and three of the crew, and made prisoners of four others, who surrendered.

Cpl. Coppins, by this act of outstanding valour, was the means of saving many lives of the men of his platoon and enabled the advance to be continued. Despite his wounds, this gallant N.C.O. continued with his platoon to the final objective, and only left the line when it had been made secure and when ordered to do so.”



(ANSWERS)
Frederick William Hall

Granted Victoria Cross

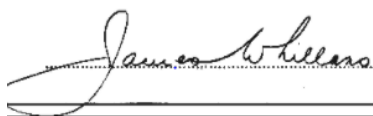
On the night of 24 April 1915, Frederick Hall overheard Private Arthur Clarkson, crying out for help as he lay dying fifteen metres from the safety of the trench. Though venturing into no-man's land under heavy enemy gunfire was often deadly, Hall didn't hesitate to act. That same day he had already ran out twice to save two injured men from certain death and he had been successful both times.

London Gazette

Colour-Sergeant Frederick William Hall, 8th Canadian Battalion. On 24 April 1915, in the neighbourhood of Ypres, when a wounded man who was lying some 15 yards from the trench called for help, Company Sergeant-Major Hall endeavoured to reach him in the face of a very heavy enfilade fire which was being poured in by the enemy. The first attempt failed, and a Non-commissioned Officer

and private soldier who were attempting to give assistance were both wounded. Company Sergeant-Major Hall then made a second most gallant attempt and was in the act of lifting up the wounded man to bring him in when he fell mortally wounded in the head.

Chaplain James Whillans: "The Bodies Would Have Been Scattered"

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "James Whillans". The signature is written in black ink on a white background. Below the signature, there are two horizontal lines, one solid and one dashed, which appear to be part of a signature line or a decorative element.

James Whillans was the 8th Battalion's Presbyterian chaplain. He was born in Scotland, came to Canada in 1904, graduated from Manitoba College and served as a minister in Winnipeg, rural Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Whillans was devoted to the men and, according to family lore, often had to be urged by his batman to speed up the interment service as shells landed closer and closer. Whillans donated his padre's flag which covered the bodies of over 800 Canadian dead, as they were interred in the battlefields, to the 1st Presbyterian Church in Winnipeg.

The 1584 Little Black Devils who were killed, died of wounds or died as a consequence of the Great War rest in 225 Commonwealth War Graves Cemeteries scattered across Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Russia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States or are memorialized on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing or the Canadian National Vimy Memorial. 65 of these men, all killed on 9 August 1918, rest in the hallowed ground of Manitoba Cemetery, more than in any other war grave cemetery.

Following the 8-12 August 1918 Battle of Amiens, Chaplain Whillans took on the task of building a cemetery. He was worried, as he wrote in his 1918 diary, “If I had not done this, the bodies might have been widely scattered, many unidentified and buried in shallow graves.” Whillans restated his concern in a 1932 letter to Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Raddall’s son. He wrote that “I was determined that our men would lie in a proper cemetery with a name to their graves...” He recalled, echoing *In Flanders’ Fields*, that larks were singing above the “utter peace” of the field as he began performing the burial service. Fourteen years after the war’s end, the shell-shattered ground and the rough burial plots were transformed:

It is well kept, with a dwarf stone wall around. There is a large cross, the headstones are in order with the names and a maple leaf. Maple trees have been planted, and the old time English garden plants, thyme, lavender, and pansies rambling, and other kinds of roses are there. The grass is trimmed, and we thought Manitoba one of the nicest kept cemeteries... The cemetery is rather out of the way and will not be visited much, but it is typical of the way the men made their sacrifice-- not in the glare of publicity and they sleep in quiet places.

The fortunes of war took the 8th Battalion back to the old 1916 Somme battlefields in August 1918. Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig and the Allied General Staff had determined that the time was ripe for a great “push” to end the war’s stalemate. On 8 August 1918 Canadian and Australian forces spearheaded the Allied attack near Amiens. For the

first time in the war, Lieutenant-Colonel Raddall and Major Saunders rode their horses into combat. The Battalion saw little action on the 8th but that changed the next day. At 1:00 P.M. on 9 August, 600 Little Black Devils leapt from their jumping off point and attacked across open ground towards the German positions in Hatchet Wood. The enemy had reinforced their position with men and ammunition the night before and made a determined stand with machine guns. At day's end the Battalion had taken over 400 casualties.

In his memoir, *In the Trenches 1914-1918*, Frank Iriam described what he saw before suffering his own life-threatening wounds:

The enemy was in a thick wood on the far side of an open and very level and smooth field that dipped very slightly or concave like a saucer... I heard later that there was a nest of 50 enemy machine guns sweeping that bit of ground... Machine guns were enfilading this road with their bullets, tearing its surface, bouncing a continuous shower of earth and dust some four feet high as hail-stones throw up water on the surface of a lake... I was there to see one of the waves of our boys coming ahead in their attack...

[Iriam is wounded and begins to make his way back to the jump-off point] I didn't see where I could do much good by lingering where I was and started back towards the rear... I began to pass the killed and wounded that had been caught in that hail of machine-gun fire. I remember one lad in particular that gave me a queer turn. He was a fine big strapping fellow about 23 years of age, and he had come to us in the last draft of refills from the base. He was lying on his face and I could see he had been badly shot across the hips by a machine

gun. I spoke to him and he turned his face up to me and grinned as cheery as could be with a bright face of good colour and his eyes ditto. I looked beyond and glimpsed his legs. They were literally shot to ribbons and twisted around and around inside his trousers and puttees like two pieces of rope. He was flat on his stomach and unable to turn. He must have been paralyzed or numb from the waist downward, probably from a spinal shot and as yet felt no pain. If he was to move, or be moved, starting the blood to circulate he would snuff out like a candle. It was a gruesome feeling to look at his bright face and cheery smile and then to see the condition of the rest of him. (23-year-old George Christie, at 5'10," was the only new draft who could possibly be described as strapping.) He was only one of many, many that I saw in various stages of mutilation and various stages of pain and agony in the mile of ground I crossed on my way around the north end of that wood. Then I went down farther to search of some place of rest and in search of some assistance that I must soon obtain if I wanted to continue for a while on this side of Jordan. (Iriam 263-268)

The *Circumstance of Death Cards* of Privates Allan Booth, a 21-year-old from Hill View, Saskatchewan, and Willey Kirkpatrick, a 25-year-old bookkeeper originally from Little Lever, England, tell how most of the 8th Battalion men died on the sunny 9 August afternoon, the "battalion advanced in the face of stout opposition from the enemy who placed a heavy barrage at the 'jumping off' place and from hidden nests poured machine gun fire into the ranks of our men

who pushed forward.” If not for the bravery of Victoria Cross winners Frederick Coppins and Alexander Brereton many more men would certainly have been killed. Coppins called for volunteers to help him take-out German machine gun nests. Four unknown men answered his call, Coppins won the Victoria Cross, and these brave anonymous soldiers rest in Manitoba Cemetery

According to Frank Iriam, the men of the 8th who fought at Amiens were a mix of “old seasoned battle-scarred, shell wracked, gas poisoned, men of 1914-15 and new draft men sent out to fill in some of the gaps in the sadly thinned lines...” Although there were veterans in the Battalion, there were few 1914-1915 men. Only five of the men buried in Manitoba Cemetery were original 8th Battalion men who had lived through 2nd Ypres, the Somme, Vimy, Hill 70, and Passchendaele: Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Raddall was a 24-year professional soldier who had been gassed, wounded, Mentioned in Dispatches and awarded a Distinguished Service Order; Lieutenant Francis Newland # 406 was wounded in September 1916, attached to the 31st (Alberta) Batt., awarded the Military Cross, was wounded in May 1917 and invalided to England and taken on strength with his original battalion; Lieutenant Leonard Little #702 had been gassed and won a battlefield commission; Corporal William Stretton #936 had been wounded and awarded a Military Medal and Private Stanley Thornley #303 had gone over with his twin brother and had been wounded twice. The men who attested in Winnipeg during the winter of 1915-1916 were taken on strength in the winter of 1917-

1918. Men conscripted under the Military Services Act (1917) were taken on strength in May 1918.

Who were these men who lost their lives so suddenly on 9 August? Their Attestation Papers and Service Records reveal some basic facts. Twenty-two (22) were Canadian born, forty-two (42) were born in Great Britain, two (2), in the United States and one (1) in Iceland. The low percentage (32%) Canadian born is understandable as western Canadian battalions generally had more British immigrants than eastern battalions, whose Canadian immigrant split was 50/50. The men generally attested in Winnipeg or small-town Manitoba, but some were from Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia.

56 (84%) were single, employed in a wide range of urban jobs; however, labourer, farmer or farm hand are common. Most were between 5'4"-5'6"- the tallest being 6' 2" and the shortest 5'1". Almost all were very slight with a normal chest girth of 33-35" or an extra-small to small man's size. The greatest chest girth was 41" or men's medium-large.

At the time of their deaths three were under 20, 42 were in their 20s, 15 were in their 30s and four were over 40 years-of-age. Records show that 6 had been treated for VD and many others for a variety of ailments including influenza, mumps, measles, diphtheria, trench fever and accidents. None had major disciplinary charges on their records, but a few had been punished for minor offenses such as a lack of discipline, respect for authority and overstaying leave.

42% of the men (27 of 64) had been shot, wounded by shrapnel, concussed by shells or poisoned by gas. This, arguably, is a relatively low number as infantry battalions had an 80-90% casualty rate. It is likely this low because the Canadian Corps was not engaged in major actions from December 1917 to August 1918. During this time, many soldiers were taken on as replacements to supplant the thousands killed or wounded in the great battles of 1917. Statistics from the 8th Battalion War Diaries show that from April 1917-December 1917, the 8th Battalion took approximately 2000 casualties of which 500 were killed. From January 1-August 9, 1918, there were approximately 240 casualties of which 58 were killed. In the Last 100 Days Battles the Battalion suffered some 1200 casualties with 300 dead.

Manitoba Cemetery, where our gallant men were laid side by side to sleep their last long sleep in the VALLEY OF THE SOMME. (8th Battalion War Diary)



1. Private Charles Acton #234981 was born in Shropshire, England, and gave his current address as Bender Hamlet, Manitoba, where he worked as a farmer. He attested at Winnipeg in May 1916. He joined the Battalion in May 1917 and was wounded in July 1917. Private Acton was 24 years old when he was killed.

2. Company Sergeant Major Robert Adam #150017 attested at Brandon in July 1915. He was born at Banffshire, Scotland, and gave his occupation as motorman. Taken on strength in March 1916, he

was wounded in the chest in March 1917 and in the knee in September 1917. Company Sergeant Major Adam was 27 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **UNTIL THE DAY DAWN AND THE SHADOWS FLEE AWAY**

3. Private Herbert Armer #2378656 was conscripted under the Military Service Act (1917) in January 1918. He was born in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as freight receiver. He was taken on strength in May 1918. Private Armer was 22 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **WE THINK OF YOU AND WILL TO THE END**

4. Lieutenant Edward Baty attested at London, Ontario, in February 1917. He was born at Newcastle, England, was living in London, Ontario, and gave his occupation as jeweler. He was originally in the Divisional Cycling Corps and was taken on strength in April 1918. Lieutenant Baty was 30 years old when he was killed.

5. Private Allan Booth #865359 attested at Brandon, Manitoba, in March 1916. He was born at Hillview, Saskatchewan, living in Brandon and gave his occupation as bookkeeper. He was taken on strength on March 1918 and awarded a Good Conduct Badge in May 1918. Private Booth was 21 years old when he was killed.

6. Private Charles Brindley #2128853 attested at Winnipeg in August 1917. He was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, but had been living in the United States and served in the U.S. Navy for four years. He gave his present occupation as boilermaker. He was taken on

strength in April 1918. Private Brindley was 25 years old when he was killed.

7. Private Arnold Brookes #892455 attested at Winnipeg in September 1916. He was born at Manchester, England, and lived in Myrtle, Manitoba, and gave his occupation as farm laborer. Taken on strength in June 1918, Private Brookes was 28 years old when he was killed.

8. Private James Cairns #892592 attested at Winnipeg in July 1916. He was born in Prince Edward Island and was living in Elgin, Manitoba, working as a farmer. He was taken on strength in July 1917. Private Cairns was 21 years old when he was killed.

9. Private Richard Cherrie #784038 attested in his hometown of Dundas, Ontario, in January 1916 and gave his occupation as clerk. He accidentally shot some soldiers in the stomach in April 1916, while they were absent without leave and fooling around with guns. He was taken on strength in May 1918. Private Cherrie was 19 years old when he was killed.

10. Private George Christy #2378702 was conscripted under the Military Service Act (1917) in January 1918 and gave his occupation as clerk. Originally from Port Rush, Ireland, he was living on Hargrave St. in Winnipeg. He was taken on strength in May 1918. Private Christy was 22 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **BORN MARCH 15, 1896, PORT RUSH, IRELAND**

11. Private Francis Cragg #892270 attested at Winnipeg in April 1917. Originally from Nottinghamshire, England, he gave his address as Kerrobert, Saskatchewan, and occupation as steam engineer. He was taken on strength in June 1917 and was admitted to hospital with diphtheria in July 1917, he was poisoned by gas in September 1917 and hospitalized for two months. Private Cragg was 27 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his gravestone reads: **FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH**

12. Lieutenant Arthur Crockett attested April 1916 at Prince Edward Island. He lived in Pleasant Grove, P.E.I., was married and gave his occupation as farmer. He arrived in England in July 1916 and remained there until taken on strength with the 8th Battalion in May 1918. Lieutenant Crocker was 37 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR OTHERS**

13. Lieutenant Thomas Crozier #15064 attested at Valcartier in September 1914. He was born in Ireland and gave his occupation as draftsman. He was originally in a cavalry unit and when commissioned, in February 1918, was transferred to the 8th Battalion. Lieutenant Crozier was 26 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **THE PURE IN HEART WILL SEE GOD**

14. Lieutenant Ernest Dawson #30326 attested at Valcartier in September 1914. He was born at Hythe, England, and lived in Toronto working as a painter. He was originally in the Army Service

Corps but was promoted and transferred to the 8th Battalion in April 1918. Lieutenant Dawson was 26 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **REST IN PEACE**

15. Private Stanley Dawson #2273307 attested at Winnipeg February 1917. Originally from Orangeville, Ontario, he lived in St. James with his wife and gave his occupation as meter reader. He was taken on strength in January 1918, however chronic bronchitis kept him out of the line until July 1918. Private Dawson was 30 years old when he was killed.

16. Corporal Austin Deakin #187554 attested August 1915 at Winnipeg. He was from Birmingham, England, and gave his occupation as linesman. He was taken on strength in September 1916. Corporal Deakin was 27 years old when he was killed.

17. Private Charles Ferguson #820541 attested April 1916 at Fort Frances, Ontario. Originally from Duncannon, Ontario, he lived in LaVallee, Ontario, and gave his occupation as farmer. Taken on Strength in September 1917, he was wounded in the arm at Passchendaele in November 1917. Private Ferguson was 27 years old when he was killed.

18. Lieutenant Robert Foster attested January 1915 at Winnipeg. Originally from London, England, he had served 2.5 years with the 90th Winnipeg Rifles and gave his occupation as a bank clerk. Discovered to have defective vision, he was posted as a clerk at divisional headquarters. He was promoted through the ranks and

commissioned in April 1917. Foster was taken on strength in April 1918. Lieutenant Foster was 27 years old when he was killed.

19. Private Robert Geelan #291551 attested at Winnipeg in December 1915. He was from Belfast, Ireland, lived in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as clerk. He was taken on strength in mid-April 1917 and wounded in June 1917. Private Geelan was 22 years old when he was killed. He does not have a marked grave but has a *Special Memorial* indicating that he is believed to be buried somewhere in the cemetery. The family inscription on his headstone reads: **THEIR GLORY SHALL NOT BE BLOTTED OUT**

20. L/Corporal Frederick Goslin #828864 attested at Baldur, Manitoba, in January 1916. He was born in London, England, and was living in Baldur working as a farm labourer. He was taken on strength in January 1918. L/Corporal Goslin was 23 years old when he was killed.

21. Private George Gosling #1084077 attested at Winnipeg in October 1916. Originally from London, England, he lived in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as painter. He was taken on strength in January 1918. Private Gosling was 30 years old when he was killed.

22. Private James Grant #693353 attested at Winnipeg in March 1917. Originally from Morayshire, Scotland, he gave his address as Winnipeg and listed his occupation as farm labourer. He was taken on strength in May 1918. Private Grant was 21 years old when he

was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **BLESSED ARE THE PURE OF HEART SO THEY SHALL SEE GOD**

23. Private Charles Greig #874540 attested at Morden, Manitoba, in February 1916. Originally from Huntly, Scotland, he gave his occupation as surveyor. He was taken on strength in December 1916 and in July 1917 had a suspected appendicitis attack and in August was wounded in the arm. In July 1918 he went up on charges for “conduct prejudicial to good order” in that he used obscene language on parade and was insolent to a superior officer. He was sentenced to 42 days Field Punishment #1, which was reduced to 28 days. Private Greig was 31 years old when he was killed.

24. Private Thomas Hadfield #865716 attested at Camp Hughes in August 1916. Originally from Stockport, England, he was married and living in Brandon. He gave his occupation as labourer. He was taken on strength in October 1917 and was concussed by a shell explosion in November 1917. Private Hadfield was 40 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **REST IN THY SAVIOUR’S JOY**

25. Private Gordon Hall #2128876 attested in October 1917 at Winnipeg. Born in Bisset, Ontario, he lived in Algoma, Ontario, and gave his occupation as sawmill worker. He was taken on strength in May 1918. Private Hall was 20 years old when he was killed. The family inscription on his headstone reads: **SLEEP ON DEAR DEAD, SLEEP IN PEACE, WE SHALL KEEP FAITH**

26. Corporal Frederick Harmer #234424 attested at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, in March 1916. Born in Sussex, England, he lived in Prince Albert and gave his occupation as clerk. He suffered from mumps and influenza prior to being taken on strength in February 1918. He was awarded a Good Conduct Badge. Corporal Harmer was 28 years old when he was killed.

27. Private Herbert Hawke #892416 attested at Winnipeg in August 1916. Originally from Workington, England, he had been living in Chicago, Illinois, and he gave his occupation as assistant chemist. He was taken on strength in August 1917 and was wounded in November. Hawke contracted trench fever in November 1917 and was hospitalized. He returned to the Battalion in May 1918. Private Hawke was 19 years old when he was killed.

28. Private Horace Hood #1084296 attested at Winnipeg in December 1916. He was living in Winnipeg but was born in Newtown, Pennsylvania. He gave his occupation as fair wage officer. He was taken on strength in November 1917 and contracted influenza in April 1918 and was out of the line until May 1918. Private Hood 28 years old when he was killed.

29. Private James Hutson #424948 attested at Dauphin, Manitoba, in September 1915. Originally from London, England, he lived in Dauphin and gave his occupation as labourer. He was taken on strength in June 1916. Private Hutson was 21 years old when he was killed.

30. Corporal Alex Kerr #552739 attested at Calgary in August 1915. Originally from Swainlinbar, Ireland, he gave his occupation as North-West Mounted Policeman. He was taken on strength in March 1916 and, in February 1917, was accidentally shot during a training exercise. Corporal Kerr was 28 years old when he was killed.

31. Private Willey Kirkpatrick #2128878 attested in October 1917 at Winnipeg. Originally from Little Lever, England, he lived in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as bookkeeper. He was taken on strength in May 1918. Private Kirkpatrick was 25 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **A NOBLE BOY IN HEART AND MIND AND A BEAUTIFUL MEMORY LEFT BEHIND**

32. Private Alfred Kreuter #1084305 attested at Winnipeg in December 1916. Originally from Rostock, Ontario, he lived in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as apiarist. He was taken on strength in March 1918. Private Kreuter was 27 years old when he was killed.

33. Lieutenant Leonard Little #702* attested at Valcartier in September 1914 and was an “original” 8th Battalion member. He was originally from London, England, and gave his occupation as surveyor. He was wounded in May 1915 and was promoted to sergeant, CSM and quartermaster. In 1917, he went to England for officer’s training and returned to the Battalion in October 1917. Lieutenant Little was 23 years old when he was killed.

* A service number below 1000 indicates the soldier was an “Original 8th Battalion”

34. Private Einar Long #234090 attested at Winnipeg in February 1916. Originally from Nordfjord, Iceland, he gave his occupation as student. He was taken on strength in November 1917 and was awarded a Good Conduct Badge. Private Long was 26 years old when he was killed.

35. Private Walter Lovell #874594 attested at Winnipeg in December 1915. He was from McKenzie, Manitoba, and gave his occupation as farmer. He was taken on strength in December 1916 and was on Vimy Ridge in April 1917. He returned to his unit in July 1917. Private Lowell was 20 years old when he was killed.

36. Corporal Murdo MacLeod #440419 attested at Camp Sewell in May 1915. Originally from Lake Megantic, Quebec, he lived in Saskatchewan and gave his occupation as grinder. He was taken on strength in November 1915 was shell shocked in 1916, suffered from pleurisy and was wounded. Private MacLeod was 25 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **REST IN PEACE**

37. Private Findlay McLeod #830185 attested at Winnipeg in in January 1916. Originally from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, he lived in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as labourer. Taken on strength in September 1917, he was concussed and buried alive in November 1917, gassed in February 1918 and was in hospital for two months. Private McLeod was 20 years old when he was killed.

38. Private Samuel Marsh #874862 attested at Winnipeg in March 1916. He was born in Winnipeg, lived in Transcona and gave his occupation as farm hand. He was taken on strength in December 1916. In February 1918, he was hospitalized and treated for secondary syphilis. He had 27 days pay deducted but received a Good Conduct Badge in May 1918. Private Marsh was 19 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **OUR DARLING BROTHER AT REST**

39. Private John Marshall # 2273323 attested at Selkirk, Manitoba, in March 1917. Born in Selkirk he gave his occupation as labourer. He was taken on strength in February 1918. Private Marshall was 33 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN TO GIVE HIS LIFE FOR OTHERS**

40. Private Ernest Meyer #830185 attested at Winnipeg in December 1915. Originally from Wicklow, Ireland, he lived in Winnipeg, was married, had been in the 90th Winnipeg Rifles for four years and gave his occupation as credit manager. He was posted in England until he was taken on strength in January 1918. Private Meyer was 33 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **HE THAT IS FAITHFUL IN THAT WHICH IS LEAST IS FAITHFUL ALSO IN MUCH LUKE 16.10**

41. Private Arthur Miller #291334 attested at Winnipeg in January 1916. Originally from Yorkshire, England and living in Winnipeg, he gave his occupation as streetcar conductor. He was taken on

strength in January 1917 and was wounded in August 1917. Private Miller was 37 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **NEARER MY GOD TO THEE**

42. Private Claude Moyse #2378846 was drafted under the Military Service Act. He was sworn in in January 1918. Born at Winnipeg, he gave his occupation as tinsmith. He was taken on strength in May 1918. Private Moyse was 21 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **NEARER MY GOD TO THEE**

42 Lieutenant Francis Newland MC # 406 attested at Valcartier in September 1914. Originally from Dublin, Ireland, he gave his occupation as bank clerk. He was wounded in September 1916, attached to the 31st (Alberta) Batt. and awarded the Military Cross in January 1917. He was wounded again in May 1917, invalided to England and reposted to the Alberta Depot Battalion. In February 1918, he was reposted to the Manitoba Depot Battalion and then taken on strength with his original battalion. Lieutenant Newland was 27 years old when he was killed.

44. Private Henry Painter #425593 attested at Camp Hughes in October 1915. He was originally from Cornwall, England, and had served with the 99th Manitoba Rangers. He was taken on strength in June 1916 and was once fined 14 days pay for drunkenness. Private Painter was 29 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **IN CHRIST ALL SHALL BE MADE ALIVE**

45. Private Lewis Penhall #2136436 attested at Winnipeg in September 1917. Originally from Cornwall, England, he had been living in Ironwood, Michigan, and gave his occupation as miner. He was taken on strength in February 1918 and once forfeited pay for loss of his blanket due to neglect. Private Penhall was 32 years old when he was killed.

46. Corporal Cecil Phillips #892394 attested at Winnipeg in June 1915. Originally from Woodstock, Ontario, he was living in Alexander, Manitoba, and gave his occupation as student. He was taken on strength in August 1917. Corporal Phillips was 20 years old when he was killed.

47. Sergeant George Pigott # 234201 attested at Winnipeg in March 1916. Originally from Kildare, Ireland, he had been living in North Dakota, was married and gave his occupation as farmer. He had served in South Africa with the British Army and was taken on strength in December 1917. Sergeant Pigott was 37 years old when he was killed.

48. Private John Pratt #2173435 attested in Winnipeg in July 1917. Originally from Kent, England, he had been living in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was married and gave his occupation as car conductor. He was taken on strength in March 1918. Private Pratt was 31 years old when he was killed.

49. Private Albert Prince #422664 attested at Winnipeg, in December 1914. Originally from Lincoln, England, he was living in Winnipeg, was married and gave his occupation as blacksmith. He was taken on

strength in July 1915 and was wounded in June 1916. Private Prince was 29 years old when he was killed.

50. Sergeant George Prosser #829620 attested in Winnipeg in December 1915. Originally from Hereford, England he was living in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as electrician. He was taken on strength in December 1917. Sergeant Prosser was 21 years old when he was killed.

51. Private Douglas Purchas #892506 attested at Winnipeg in October 1916. Born in London, England, he was living in Stonewall, Manitoba, and gave his occupation as farmer. He was diagnosed with gonorrhoea on enlistment. He was taken on strength in December 1917 and was sent to hospital in February 1918. He rejoined the battalion in April 1918. Private Purchas was 22 years old when he was killed.

52. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Raddall was a professional soldier and attested at Valcartier in September 1914. Originally from Farmboro, England, he lived in Halifax with his wife. He was wounded at 2nd Ypres 1915 and again in 1916, Mentioned in Dispatches in March 1918 and awarded the Distinguished Service Order in May 1918. Lieutenant Colonel Raddall was 40 years old when he was killed. The family epitaph on his headstone reads: **GOD BE WITH YOU UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN**

53. Private William Rodger #477275 attested at Edmonton, Alberta, in September 1915. Originally from Barrhead, Scotland, he gave his occupation as contractor. Taken on strength in June 1916, he was

wounded in February 1917 and returned to the unit in June 1918. Private Rodger was 31 years old when he was killed.

54. Private Lewis Rogers #2173397 attested at Winnipeg in July 1917. Originally from Mission Junction, British Columbia, he had been living at Arlington, Washington, and gave his occupation as chauffeur. He was taken on strength in March 1918. Private Rogers was 21 years old when he was killed.

55. Private Frank Smith #829330 attested at Winnipeg in November 1915. Originally from London, England, he was living in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as labourer. He broke his right arm while in still in England and was taken on strength in March 1917 and was wounded in July 1917. He returned to his unit in November 1917. Private Smith was 26 years old when he was killed.

56. Private Andre Soucy #892617 attested at Winnipeg in October 1916. Originally from Pembroke, Ontario, he was living in Clan William, Manitoba, and gave his occupation as brakeman. He was taken on strength in November 1917 and was wounded in the head in March 1918. Private Soucy was 29 years old when he was killed.

57. Private Nathan Soule #892593 attested at Winnipeg in November 1916. Born in Fairfax, Vermont, he had been living in Edmonton. He had served three years in the Vermont National Guard and was taken on strength in March in December 1917. Private Soule was 32 years old when he was killed.

58. Private Harry Speed #460847 attested at Winnipeg in June 1915. Originally from Manchester, England, he gave his occupation as night watchman. He had served six years in a British unit and was taken on strength in June 1916. In September 1916 he was buried alive during the Battle of the Somme and reported killed in action. Being buried put pressure on troublesome hemorrhoids which had to be removed. He returned to the battalion in July 1917. Private Speed was 29 years old when he was killed.

59. Corporal William Stretton MM #936 attested at Valcartier in September 1914. Originally from London, England, he was living in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan and gave his occupation as engineer. He was taken on strength in April 1915 and suffered a shrapnel wound to the neck in October 1915. He was charged and convicted of drunkenness and being AWOL in November 1917. He also lost seven days pay for ill-treating a horse. In April 1918 he was awarded a Military Medal "For devotion to duty and personal disregard of danger". Corporal Stretton was 31 years old when he was killed.

60. Private Thomas Surridge #892297 attested at Winnipeg in June 1916. Originally from Northamptonshire, England, he was living in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as farmer. He had three years military experience in the Northamptonshire Volunteers. He was taken on strength in August 1917. In June 1918 he was tried and convicted of disobeying a lawful order while on parade i.e., would not stop talking when ordered too. Private Surridge was 32 years old when he was killed.

61. Private Stanley Thornley #303 attested at Valcartier in September 1914. Originally from Stratford, England, he was living in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as electrician. An original 8th Battalion, he was wounded at 2nd Ypres, invalided to England and returned to his unit in July 1915. Private Thornley was 23 years old when he was killed. The family inscription on his headstone reads: **FOREVER WITH THE LORD**

62. Private George Walker # 2115069 attested in Winnipeg in March 1917. Originally from Sheffield, England, he was married, living in Birtle, Manitoba, and gave his occupation as farmer. He was taken on strength in January 1918. Private Walker was 45 years old when he was killed.

63. Private Lloyd Warren #820028 attested Fort Frances, Ontario, in January 1917. Originally from Callender, Ontario, he was living in Fort Frances, Ontario, and gave his occupation as mill machinist. He was taken on strength in July 1917. Private Warren was 28 years old when he was killed.

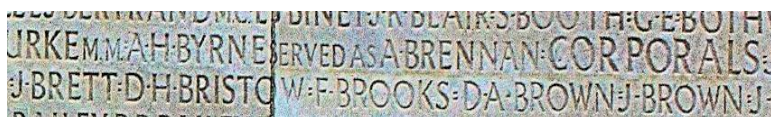
64. Private Glen White #830239 attested in Fort Frances, Ontario, in December 1916. Originally from Zalma, Nebraska, he was living in Buriss, Ontario, and gave his occupation as farmer. He contracted influenza and was hospitalized while in England. He was taken on strength in December 1917. Private White was 25 years old when he was killed.

65. L/Corporal John Whyte #830288 attested in Winnipeg in December 1915. Originally from Galashiels, Scotland, he was living

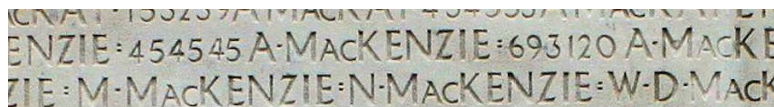
in Winnipeg and gave his occupation as bank clerk. He was taken on strength in February 1918. L/Corporal Whyte was 32 years old when he was killed.

Two men who died on 9 August 1918 have no known grave and are commemorated on the Canadian National Vimy Memorial. As Manitoba Cemetery has seven unknown graves, perhaps the two missing 8th Battalion men rest with their comrades:

L/Corporal Dalton Bristow #625175 attested at Vermillion, Alberta, in March 1916. Originally from Collingwood, Ontario, he was living in Frog Lake, Alberta, and gave his occupation as farmer. Taken on strength in February 1917, he was wounded in August 1917, hospitalized and returned to the Battalion in March 1918. L/Corporal Dalton Bristow was 24 years old when he was killed.



Private Murdo MacKenzie #2173515 attested at Winnipeg in September 1917. Originally from Stornoway, Scotland, gave his current address as St. Cloud, Minnesota, and occupation as laborour. Taken on strength in December 1918. Private MacKenzie was 29 years old when he was killed.



In total 113 men rest in Manitoba Cemetery. They come from the 1st Battalion (Canadian Machine Gun Corps), 5th Battalion (Western Cavalry), 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles), 14th Battalion (Royal Montreal Regiment), Tank Corps (British), 17th Lancers (Duke of Cambridge's Own). The 8th Battalion's eight officers who were killed on 9 August 1918 are buried in Section A. A Special Memorial located at back is for Private Robert Geelan, 8th Battalion, who is known to be buried in Manitoba Cemetery.



Manitoba Cemetery, CWGC

Some of the 8th Battalion men buried in Manitoba Cemetery



Robert Adam



Herbert Armer



Arthur Crockett



Crozier



Ernest Dawson



Thomas

Charles Ferguson



Einer Long



Walter Lovell



Willey Kirkpatrick



Arthur Miller



Cecil Phillips



George Pigott



George Prosser



Graham Purchas



Thomas Raddall



Stanley Thornley

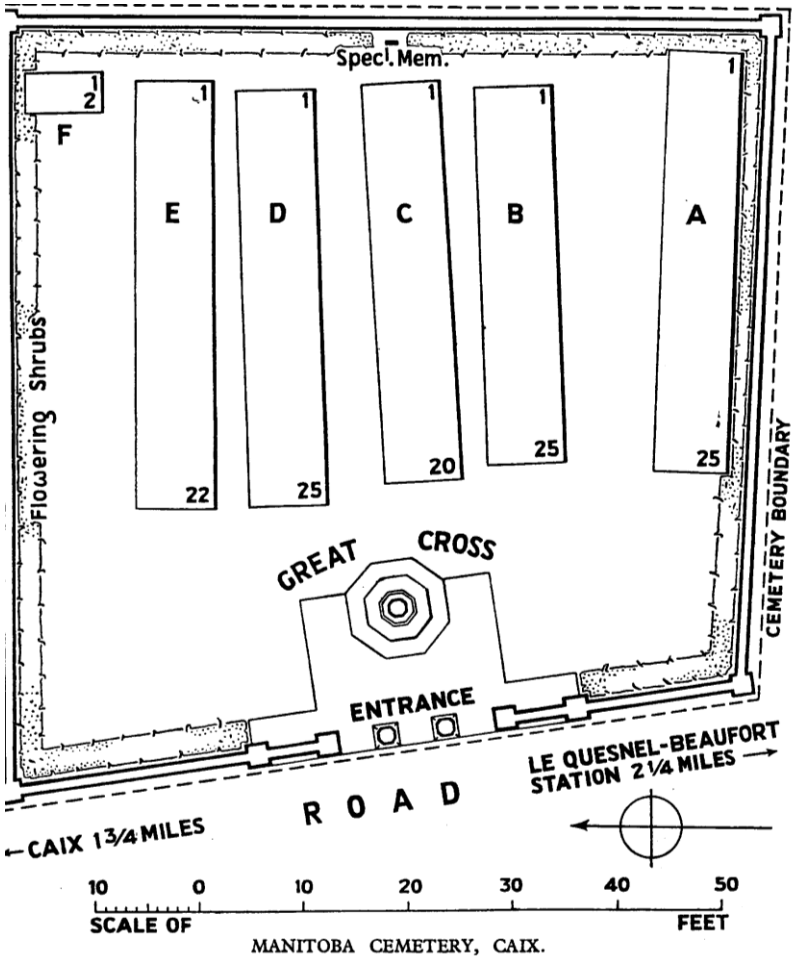


George Walker



Lloyd Warren

Sketch Map of Manitoba Cemetery:



Section A: Officers of the 8th Battalion

Spec.Mem: Pte. Robert Geelan, 8th Battalion

Charles Henry Tyler: In Memorium

4 March 1889 - 11 April 2001

Passed at Winnipeg

Aged 102 years



Charles Henry (Harry) Tyler is believed to be the last known survivor of the 5,939 men who served with the 8th Canadians (90th Winnipeg Rifles) during the First World War.

He was born in Essex, England, and was living in Winnipeg's North End working as a clerk in 1916. Harry wanted to be a soldier, so he lied about his age, and was only 16 years of age when he attested in February 1916. He trained at Camp Hughes and in England before being "Taken on Strength" with the 8th Battalion in France on 28 September 1918. Harry was with the 8th for the Battle of the Canal du Nord and the final victories of the Last 100 Days Battles. After the war, he returned to Winnipeg and lived a good long life.

Death of Sargent William White

Letter of March 16, 1915, from the 8th Battalion Chaplain W.A. Woods to Mrs. Grace White sending condolences on death of her husband Sargent William.



France, 16th March.

Mrs Grace White
103 Stevens Rd
East Ham
Essex

Dear Mrs White.

You will no doubt have heard before this reaches you of your husband's death. Sgt White was killed instantly by a shell on Sunday afternoon. ~~The~~ poor fellow suffered no pain. He was a favorite with his comrades and will be very much missed. It is very hard for me to write you, knowing that you will now be the sufferer but you have this consolation that he has died in his country's service which is the grandest inscription that can be placed on any one's grave - He is buried in a quiet little spot beside those of his comrades & the grave properly marked. I shall be pleased to do anything for you that lies in my power.

Yours faithfully
W.A. Woods
Chaplain

France

16 March 1915

Mrs Grace White

103 Stevens Rd.

East Ham, Essex

Dear Mrs. White

You will have no doubt heard before this reaches you of your husband's death. Sergeant White was killed instantly by a shell on Sunday afternoon. The poor fellow suffered no pain. He was a favorite with his comrades and will be very much missed. Knowing that you will now be the sufferer but you have this consolation but he has died for his country's service which is the finest inscription that can be placed on anyone's grave. He is buried in a quiet little spot beside three of his comrades and the grave is properly covered. I shall be pleased to do anything for you that is in my power.

Yours faithfully

Chaplin A.W. Woods

**“We Only Knew One Shell Hole and One
Trench at a Time”**

**27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion
2nd Canadian Division**



The 27th Battalion mobilized in October 1914, and, in December, the men went to billets at the Old Agricultural College Dairy and Machray Buildings at Tuxedo Park. 18-year-old Jack Row recalled his training days, “Until December we lived at home and just walked about a mile over to the university grounds to drill, but in December we went into barracks at what had been the agricultural college. It had been taken over by the army and named Fort Osborne Barracks. We used to go on route marches along Academy Road which was then just a trail with bush on each side. British born John Thwaites, a young farm hand living in Moline, Manitoba, remembered it was “a dirty place, horses had been in it and there were still traces of them.” The Battalion trained there over the winter and one memoirist recalled their primitive training, “Trenches of snow were built with protection of binder twine to act as barbed wire. These were used for instructional purposes and later for attack purposes.”

Before the Battalion departed for England, it was adopted by Winnipeg. It would not be just another one of the no-name numbered battalions; it would be Winnipeg’s own 27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion. The men were presented with their made in Winnipeg “City of Winnipeg” Battalion hat badges in a ceremony in front of city hall. “The design was simple and effective, wrote a local paper, “being the city coat of arms mounted on a maple leaf and containing the inscription XXVII BATTN.”

The Battalion was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel I. Snider, a 59-year-old veteran of the 1885 North-West Rebellion and the Queen’s

South African War. He was supported by six majors, seven captains and 21 lieutenants. The officers were mostly members of Winnipeg's professional class: businessmen, merchants, real-estate agents, accountants, bankers, engineers, or lawyers who had militia experience. The average age of the 27th officers was 31; the oldest was 51-year-old Major Kitson and the youngest was 21-year-old Lieutenant Garton.



27th Battalion camp, Charles Baranger Collection, Univ. Manitoba Archives



On the morning of 13 May 1915, the last “Fall In” sounded for the 27th Battalion at Tuxedo Barracks. Parading in full marching order, the unit moved off to the band’s rendition of the Battalion march past, “Come, Come, Come, Come Archibald.”

The *Winnipeg Free Press* enthused:

Again, this morning the streets of Winnipeg echoed back the tramp of marching men, as 1133 men, the officers and enlisted men of the 27th “City of Winnipeg” Battalion, marched out from the quarters at the Old Agricultural College shortly after daybreak, through the streets of the city and down to the C.P.R. loading yards where they are to entrain on two special trains. The effect of six months military training was plainly seen as the men marched away today. Probably not anywhere in the world has there ever been raised as fine a body of men as the citizen soldiery which left today. The undesirables had been weeded out months ago, and the men who left for the front this morning were as nearly perfect, physically and mentally, as anybody of men wearing the uniform of the British King.”

At Portage and Maryland, the 27th joined up with the 43rd (Cameron Highlanders of Canada) Battalion and its pipe band. It was reported that thousands of people had gathered down Portage Avenue and Main Street to wish their soldiers goodbye. A few minutes later the first train of 16 cars backed in and as two companies of men entrained, the cars were decorated with flags and pennants, and on one car was

a 10 foot long sign reading WINNIPEG TO BERLIN AND RETURN. A second train pulled in and the rest of the men boarded. Colonel Snider was asked what his farewell message to the people of Winnipeg was, and he answered, "I'd rather show than tell them what the Winnipeg Battalion can do-- goodbye."

On 16 May 1915, the men boarded the *SS Carpathia* and after an uneventful journey arrived in England. On May 30 the Battalion and Brigade was officially taken on strength of the 2nd Canadian Division. On June 1st, with the rumble of the artillery in France as a continual reminder of the seriousness of the work at hand, the men began training: physical exercises, inspections, parades, close order drill, instruction, signaling, entrenching, route marches, advances and retreats. Officers and NCOs were picked to go on special courses on musketry, machine gunning and bombing. By mid-September, after four months of training, the Battalion entrained for Southampton. While waiting to board the transport ships readying to take them to the battlefields of France and Belgium, the men sang *Pack Up Your Troubles* and their favorite *Goodbye-ee*.

Goodbye-ee

Goodbye-ee, goodbye-ee,

Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye-ee.

Tho' it's hard to part I know,

I'll be tickled to death to go,

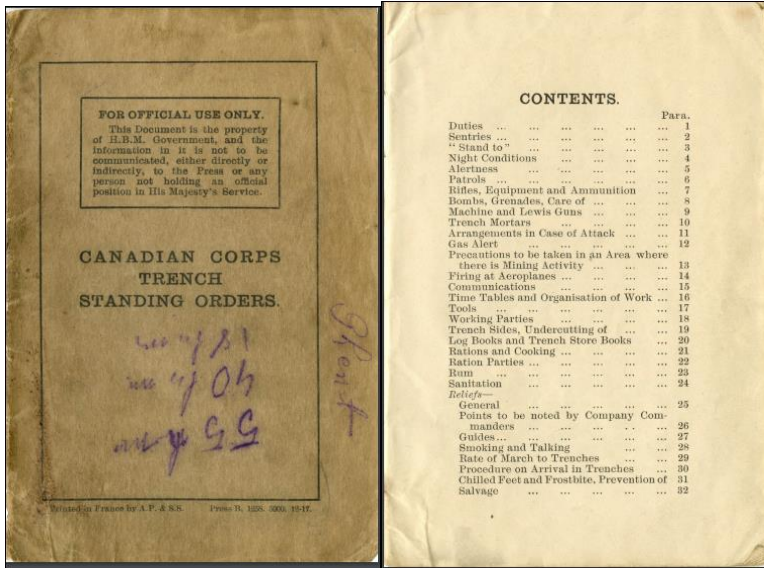
Don't cry-ee, don't sigh-ee.

*There's a silver lining in the sky-ee,
Bonsoir, old thing, cheer-i-o, chin, chin,
Nah-poo, too-dle-oo, Goodbye-ee.*

*Goodbye-ee, goodbye-ee,
Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye-ee.
Tho' it's hard to part I know,
I'll be tickled to death to go,
Don't cry-ee, don't sigh-ee.*

*There's a silver lining in the sky-ee,
Bonsoir, old thing, cheer-i-o, chin, chin,
Nah-poo, too-dle-oo, Goodbye-ee.*

The “Winnipegs” took up positions in the trenches near Ypres, Belgium, on 1 October 1915. Three days later, Sergeant William Atton was killed while watching a “dogfight” in the sky above. “He held his head too high and was sniped”, wrote Winnipeg banker Lieutenant Ralph Jones in his diary, “just a couple moments after our Colonel [Snider] warned him to take care and keep down lower.” Six-foot-tall Jones pondered the fact that “being a short man has its advantages in the trenches.” On 7 October, the 27th was relieved and returned to the relative safety of their billets, four miles behind the front line. Jones commented in a letter, “What amazes me now is how easily we get used to it all.”



The Winnipeggers learned the ins and outs of trench warfare during their first trips to the Ypres salient. The men settled into the dreary and dangerous routine of trench warfare on the Western Front. In a 12 November 1915 diary entry, Ralph Jones described a rather typical day:

On duty 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and slept from 12:30 a.m., mighty comfortably in spite of heavy rain and strong winds... Was awakened at about 2 a.m. by sudden shock of a fallen sandbag, which rain had shrunk and fallen from back wall, on my legs. Thought at first whole dugout was caving in.

Meanwhile 29th advancing from rear several hundred yards back suffered five casualties, the enemy's fire seemingly being directed

over our parapets purposefully. Just after "stand to" in evening, while waiting to be relieved by 29th Battalion, the enemy opened on our extreme right with machine gun and rapid rifle fire. I threw up a number of flares on our company front and neither sentries nor no man could see any signs of enemy.

Our artillery sent in several salvos and silenced the enemy eventually but not before several bursts of the rapid fire had been indulged in. The enemy artillery sent over a very few shrapnel shells which unfortunately for us were well-placed as one of them found two men in C Company. Our Co. went out avoiding communication trenches and we were amazed to get through so exposed, in the open, with having to drop several times to avoid strafes. The enemy did not continue the M. G. and rifle fire after we started and very few shots were fired at all while we were within hearing. It was an interesting and rather thrilling evening and to see the flashes from our batteries as they burst and occasionally to shut the enemy up made one realize the tremendous power the guns' carry.

Coming to Locre the men plodded say 3 and 1/2 to 4 miles without a stop and we were caught in a fearful downpour of rain, about the worst I have ever seen lasting probably 15 minutes. I was surprised to find my men so capable of enduring a hard march over cobblestones on a black night with rain and much wind to battle against the whole way. They were all made cheerful by an issue of rum and soup. I was tired on marching to billets and slept like a log almost as soon as my head struck the pillow.

After six months in the trenches the 27th faced their first major action during the Battle of the St. Eloi Craters. In a letter dated 2 April 1916, to his brother Roy, an artillery officer stationed near the 27th, Ralph wrote, “Just a line to say I am well and leave for the trenches in a very few minutes. We shall be close to the recent show and may have a look-in when the Boche come back at us as he does nightly....Guns around here about awfully noisy recently. Big stuff going over in plenty.”

Ralph Jones was killed on 6 April and his body was never recovered. In a 14 April letter, Roy wrote to family in England and described how Ralph had died, as told to him by 27th Battalion officers and men who saw him fall:

Ralph and Captain Young were in charge of A Co., they having gone into the trenches on the 2nd. During the week they were under incessant shellfire of every description but on the morning in question from our O.P. some distance down the line to the right, it was reported to be without precedent.

In the midst of this, Ralph received an order to connect up with the Battalion on the left (31st Battalion). As soon as he received the order, he gathered the remnants of his men and led off. Of course, all this time they were under heavy shell and machine gun fire and as they proceeded, they found the trenches absolutely leveled by the murderous fire, but an occasional traverse would give them a little

cover, and here they stopped a couple of times by his order for a breath.

After the second time, Ralph started to lead off and in doing so stepped up to go along the level trenches when a shrapnel shell or H.E. shell exploded nearby, several pieces hitting him, one in the forehead and the other in the left side. He fell at once and was gone without a word. His corporal, who was close to him at the time, gave me the details and said his death was instantaneous. From what I can gather, they were attempting to cross a perfect Hell's cauldron at the time and of course had orders to do so... His Co. had about 60 casualties out of 150 men, so you can grasp what hell it was.

As a Battalion memoirist wrote,

The story of St. Eloi will fill a page in history and the full story cannot be given here. The bare facts are that the Battalion, with others of the 2nd Division hurried up the line to relieve British troops.... Indeed, the battle was still in progress when our men took over, though there was a lull during the 3rd of April. The next day, however, the Germans began a bombardment, which for intensity has probably never been equalled. The effect was literally to wipe out the whole trench system of that sector. During three days of great stress and amid terrific confusion, our men hung onto their line and the result of the fight was the reestablishment of the old line. Among those who made the supreme sacrifice was Lt. R.E. Jones.

The Canadian made Ross rifle had failed the Canadian soldier by jamming in the muddy trenches during the 1915 Battle of 2nd Ypres and it did so a year later at St. Eloi. According to 27th Battalion soldier Cpl. George Children, who was severely wounded in both knees during the battle,

The trenches were in a very bad shape –full of mud, water and dead Germans. ... We spent the first night trying to get our rifles in shape to use, but it was almost a hopeless task for they were covered with mud and full of water. It does not take a big spot of mud to put a Ross rifle out of action

Children convalesced and was assigned to other duties in England until 1918. He was promoted to lieutenant and returned to his Battalion and fought in the war's final battles.



Winnipeg Evening Tribune 15 April 1916

The bravery and dedication of the officers and men was smeared when the Battalion's Commanding Officer Lieutenant-Colonel Snider was relieved of command, as a cover for the higher-ranking officers who had ordered the impossible mission. Snider was given sick leave and sent home to Canada. "They said it was shell shock," he wrote in his memoir, "but it was hell-shock from the way I was treated." As well, to the disgust of the Battalion's officers, command was given to Major Daley and a captain from the 31st (Alberta) Battalion.

The Battalion regained its stolen glory during the Battle of the Somme. Following British tanks, which one farm boy from the 27th described as looking like "threshing separators." The Battalion attacked and captured the fortified village of Courcelette on 15 September 1916 but took almost 400 casualties, with 138 dead. In two letters to his mother, dated 18-19 September 1916, Private Jack Row describes his experience during the attack on Courcelette:

Our brigade made an advance on the 15th and when we were digging in a sniper got me through the flesh on my hip. I bandaged it up and the sergeant major took my name and told me to go back with one of the runners. When we got about 300 yards back another sniper got the runner through the thigh. When I caught up with the runner the same sniper got me through the left forearm, smashing it up some. We both flopped into a shell hole, but I could do nothing for the runner, and he could do nothing for me so we both crawled back to a trench

which was occupied by another battalion where I got bandaged up with some field dressings and had splints tied with my puttees. Fritz started to shell the trench pretty heavy so one of the boys told me I'd better take another chance on getting out as that trench was getting knocked to pieces. I crawled out and beat it as fast as I could go. I had to stop once or twice but at last got back to our old front line and managed to walk out although I was pretty groggy.

Syd [Jack's brother also in the 27th] is back with the battalion or at least the remains as it was practically wiped out as were most of the Canadians. In fact, every battalion that goes over the top generally loses about $\frac{3}{4}$ of its men, fortunately 85% are Blightys, the men being able to get out. I was lucky to get only a couple of clean bullet wounds. My arm is still on the splint, but I am able to move my fingers and the bone is knitting fine. It's the pieces of shell that make the bad wounds.

We have got the drop on Fritz now though and the prisoners we took were a happy bunch except of course the ones that we stuck with our bayonets for moral effect when they were too slow. One bunch of about twenty put up a fight with grenades but our fellows put about three grenades among them and the ones that were left were glad to come out and carry some of our wounded in. I was with the company machine gunners, so I had a good view as we were reserve company and did not go over until last. It was partly my fault that I got hit the first time as I was walking around as if I owned the place, however I got a nice one.

I hear that Bob Stanley has gone west [slang for killed] and Maurice Duquette was in this same hospital. There are about a dozen of the 27th around here. One fellow by the name of Walley whose folks live on Sherburn has both hands smashed and has to be fed like a baby as he is absolutely helpless.

On 26 September, the Battalion took another 90 casualties attacking Sugar Trench and later supported attacks on the infamous Regina Trench. In late October and early November 1916, the Canadian divisions moved to take up positions facing Vimy Ridge and prepared for their memorable attack of 9 April 1917.

The 27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion was the only one of our four Manitoba battalions to directly attack on the opening day of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. It was led into battle by Bandsman Patrick “Paddy” Smith, who was killed while playing the regimental march on a piccolo. Lieutenant Alfred Lawson’s account of the attack on Vimy Ridge vividly describes the battalion’s actions. Many accounts describe the famous creeping barrage that protected the Canadians until they stormed the enemy trenches. However, few describe what the soldiers experienced as they faced enemy mortar and shell barrage over the 5000 yards of muddy, shell-pocked no-man’s-land they had to cross before reaching their objective.

On a sunny 8 April afternoon, Lawson writes, the band played for the men, and everyone was in a good humour. In the evening, the Battalion marched to its jumping-off-point and, as the first Canadian attackers were to go off at 5:30, they only had a few hours’ interrupted

sleep because of the artillery's continuous pounding of the enemy lines. When the 27th advanced, they had to go nearly 5000 yards to reach their objective. Lawson writes that, *by the time we leaped our trenches Fritz had put up his barrage which started not more than 50 yards from our starting point. It consisted of heavy coal boxes, shrapnel, whiz-bangs, gas shells and every other thing he had from 18 pounds up to his heavy shells. It was not a pleasant curtain to go through especially for a depth of 2,000 yards.*

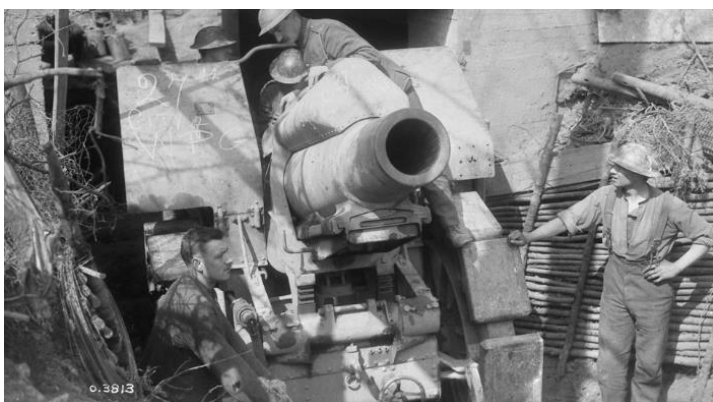
After going 2000 yards the enemy barrage thankfully stopped, giving the exhausted men a rest. They formed an "attacking formation" and went forward under a creeping barrage that destroyed the two 10-yard-thick belts of wire in front of the enemy trenches. At the signal, the men charged into the trenches and with fixed bayonets overcame the defenders and took many prisoners. "That fifteen minutes", writes Lawson, "was the most exciting I have ever had. I felt just like a schoolboy. It must get into everyone's blood in a charge; besides, it was the relaxing of our feelings after having had to endure the strain all the way up".

Canadian soldiers were noted for being dedicated souvenir hunters. The 27th's Markle Pecover wrote home about the collection he acquired after the battle of Vimy Ridge, "I went through some German dugouts and got quite a collection of souvenirs - belt, saw-bayonet, rifle, and a German haversack full of odds and ends - leather tobacco pouch, old Dutch pipe, nail brush in leather case, silver plated safety razor, officer's cap, and a few other little things."

Unfortunately, he had to abandon his booty as an attack was called and he never recovered his stash. However, he continued,

In one dugout I found a pack with a suit of beautiful clean underwear, shirts, socks, and nice tan boots. It didn't take me long to make an exchange, I can tell you. That clean, soft underwear and dry socks and shoes felt pretty good, and the last I saw of the clothes I took off; they were starting to walk across the floor. You know why!

As spring moved into summer, the Battalion saw fierce fighting during the Battle of Fresnoy. On 3 May 1917, 80 men were killed, including Lieutenant Robert Combe who was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for the “most conspicuous bravery and example.” Combe’s body was never recovered, and he is memorialized on the Canadian National Vimy Memorial.



The Battalion captured 10 German guns and took 300 prisoners, but, luckily, its casualties were relatively low. Note 27th City of Wpg. marked on captured gun (Yeh Baby!!). Library & Archives Canada

In August 1917, the Canadian divisions moved into position to attack the German held city of Lens. The Battle of Hill 70 began on 15 August and the 27th entered the fight on 21 August. They took a German trench system and, although inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy, they could not hold the trench and suffered 51 dead.

The Canadians moved from France to Belgium's Ypres salient in October 1917 to take part in the Battle of Passchendaele. On 6 November, the 27th successfully attacked Passchendaele village. According to the Battalion War Diary, all the wounded were evacuated from the battlefield but because of "the terribly very heavy going it was impossible to carry out the dead other than the officers." The Battalion lost 70 men, including Private James Robertson, who won the Battalion's second Victoria Cross for "his most conspicuous bravery and outstanding devotion to duty." Private Robertson rests at Tyne Cot Military Cemetery, Belgium, along with 45,000 soldiers who are buried and memorialized at the largest Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery.



On 6 November 1917, 22-year-old Fred Watts from Mafeking, Manitoba, was wounded in the thigh during the 27th Battalion's attack during the Battle of Passchendaele. Here he shares a cigarette with an unidentified wounded German soldier. Library & Archives Canada

During the last 100 Days Battles of 1918, the 27th saw action at Amiens, Arras, Cambrai and Mons. After the November 11, 1918, armistice, they became part of the occupation force along Germany's Rhine River. In April 1919, they left Germany and began the long trip back through France, to England and home to Winnipeg.

On 26 May 1919, the 27th "City of Winnipeg" Battalion came home from the war. The names of the returning soldiers had been published in the local papers, so, families and friends knew who was arriving on the special Canadian Pacific train. The train arrived in mid-afternoon and a large crowd had gathered at the Higgins Avenue station to greet the returning soldiers. Winnipeg had wanted an over-the-top welcome

for its famous battalion, but “the turmoil caused by the general strike prevented any formal events.”

Some 5000 men served in the 27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion during the Great War. Over 800 did not return home. They were buried in the mud of Belgium and France. Thousands of others were ruined in body, mind, or spirit: wounded, gassed, shell-shocked or invalided home from illness. To our city’s shame, there is no memorial dedicated to the men of Winnipeg’s own 27th Battalion.

Stories from the 27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion

Elmer Ameyias Crossman

Wm. T. Cover

DECLARATION TO BE MADE
Robert Gervason Combe.

Res. James



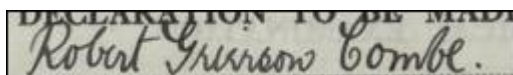
Alfred Lawson

William Alfred Cramp

James Peter Robertson (Signature)

John Row (Signature)

Lieutenant Robert Combe VC



Lt. Robert Combe VC, Vimy Foundation

Robert Combe was born at Aberdeen, Scotland, on 5 August 1880. He emigrated to Canada around 1906 and after studying pharmacy worked at a drug store in Moosomin, Saskatchewan, and later opened his own pharmacy in Melville, Saskatchewan. On 1 April 1915, when he was 35 years of age, he attested in the CEF. Combe requested to be placed in an infantry battalion and he was taken on strength as a lieutenant with the 27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion on 4 April 1916.

During the 3 May 1917 Battle of Fresnoy, the 27th Battalion was ordered to take and occupy German trenches. Before they reached their objective, the enemy began shelling the Battalion which resulted in many deaths and casualties. Combe rallied the few remaining men and, in a fierce hand-to-hand fight, took the trench and captured over 80 Germans prisoner. Tragically, Combe was killed by a sniper. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

The citation reads:

For most conspicuous bravery and example. He steadied his Company under intense fire, and led them through the enemy barrage, reaching the objective with only five men. With great coolness and courage Lt. Combe proceeded to bomb the enemy and inflicted heavy casualties. He collected small groups of men and succeeded in capturing the Company objective, together with eighty prisoners. He repeatedly charged the enemy, driving them before him, and, whilst personally leading his bombers, was killed by an enemy sniper. His conduct inspired all ranks, and it was entirely due to his magnificent courage that the position was carried, secured and held.

Although buried by his men, Combe's grave was lost in subsequent fighting, and he is commemorated on the Canadian National Vimy Memorial.



Memorial Stone laid for Lieutenant Robert Grierson Combe, Aberdeen, Scotland

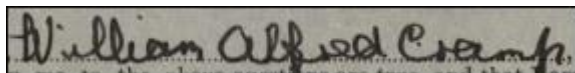
Sources:

Robert Grierson Combe, Personnel Records of the First World War, Library & Archives Canada

Memorial Stone laid for Lieutenant Robert Grierson Combe, Aberdeen City Council, news.aberdeencity.gov.uk/

Vimy and More: Part 6 of 18, legionmagazine.com

Sergeant William Cramp and a Dog Named Vimy

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William Alfred Cramp".

Sergeant William Cramp was Bandmaster of the 27th Battalion Band. When he took over the band in April 1918, he met Vimy the band's mascot. "This is an extraordinary dog story," Crump wrote, "but can be vouched for by hundreds who were there. Vimy was a strange dog in many ways, his mother was a famous rat catcher in the trenches where he was born, but he wouldn't hurt anything, he would even be friendly with rats, and used to roll over on his back if another dog looked like starting a fight. He knew all the band and wouldn't have anything to do with anyone else in the Battalion."



Trench dog and a friendly monkey, 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles) Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives.

During a concert in June 1918, Vimy began to act strangely. Everyone who knew him took it as a sign that a shell was coming over, as he seemed to know when one was coming. As soon as the band started to play, Vimy began biting my puttees and trying to drag me away, and when he found I wouldn't come, he started digging a hole

*in the lawn to hide in. Colonel Riley said that 'I think you had better take Vimy's tip and go away; a shell here would kill a lot of people, so you had better dismiss the band.' The band didn't waste any time in going, as did all the rest of the people. I only got about a hundred yards up the road when I heard a terrific explosion in the direction of the Chateau, and one of the officers came up and overtook me and told me that a shell had fallen on the middle of the lawn where we had been playing and had blown the lawn away.**

After the Armistice, the 27th was sent to Germany and the bandmen took Vimy along with them. When the Battalion left Germany in April 1919, Crump wrote, "When we were on our way to Le Havre, to return to Canada. Vimy accompanied us in the train, and every time the train stopped, he would get off with the rest of us and run around. When we got near L' Havre, we stopped for the last time and when the train started, he ran away to a field and sat looking at us; as none of us could believe he didn't intend to come, and as the train slowly moved off, we called to him to come, but that was the last any of us ever saw of him, though great efforts were made to get him back.

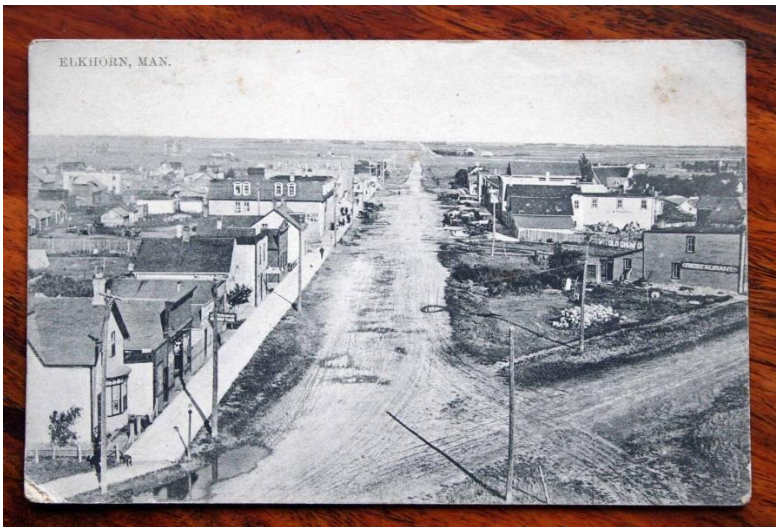
*Crump's story of a battalion mascot saving soldiers' lives is not unique. During the 1915 battle of Festubert, Saskatchewan's 5th Battalion (Western Cavalry) mascot "Billy" the goat was credited with saving the lives of three soldiers. He head-butted them into a trench just as a shell was about to land where they were standing.

Elmer A. Crossman: “Up the Line”



Elmer Ameyias Crossman

Elmer Crossman diary and photo courtesy of Murray Kissick, 27th Battalion Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives



Elkhorn, Manitoba, prairie-towns.com

Many Canadian soldiers tried to keep a diary but let their entries slide after a month or two. Few were as conscientious as Elmer Crossman. Generally, he writes sparingly, giving only the barest of information,

but occasionally makes observations on the towns they march through or the people he meets.

Twenty year old Elmer enlisted in Elkhorn, Manitoba, on 12 February 1917 and began his training in early March. On 9 April he was on the train heading east. After a short stay in Nova Scotia camps his draft embarked for England on 3 May and arrived in Liverpool 10 days later. Training had barely begun when, on 25 May, he got his first taste of war when “about 14 enemy machines flew over camp and dropped bombs, destroying the armory hut, struck two of our huts killing 10 and wounding 19 of our men, they flew over Folkstone and did a lot of damage, 76 being killed and 172 wounded mostly women and children.”



London, England, c.1917

Elmer was given a five day leave in early June 1917 and went to see the historical sites of London. Imagine the wonder a small-town prairie boy experienced seeing the marvels of the mighty British Empire’s capital. Elmer lists them in his diary, including: Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, the Tower of London, St. Paul’s Cathedral, which he thought “a

magnificent building with wonderful architecture,” the Albert Memorial, “which is a magnificent structure and said to be the best outdoor monument in the world” and finally the Dog Cemetery where the “society people bury their pets.” He returned to camp on 9 June and on the 21st left Folkstone for Boulogne.

On the front, as soldiers are want to do, he complained about the weather, food, billets, the hard work and every two weeks he cheerfully noted, “Got paid today.” On 11 July, he left for the front and was billeted eight miles from the trenches but could hear the artillery. He was assigned to a railroad work party. His only respite from back breaking labour came when Germans shelled the area. “Doing nothing,” he wrote, “Fritz dropping shells.” Luckily for Elmer, Old Fritz was a poor shot, Elmer and remarked that, “He dropped quite a few shells today, hitting our WC and blew it all to pieces.” On 23 October the Canadian divisions left France and moved up into the Ypres salient. As the Battalion marched towards the Passchendaele battlefield, he wrote on November 2, 1917, “We’re moving up to Ypres now. The town has been all blown to pieces and is in an awful state of ruins, but it has been a beautiful place.”

His comments on the horrors he saw and experienced during the Battle of Passchendaele are spare: “November 8, We are back out of the line again. We went over the top and took Passchendaele village on the sixth. Everything was in terrible condition, if you stepped off the duck walk you went up to your knees in mud. We had a hard time, especially getting the wounded out, nevertheless we succeeded in taking and holding the ridge.” On 9 November the battalion left Belgium and went back to France. He has very little to report for the next two months except that he had a touch of trench fever around Christmas.

Early 1918 was generally quiet for the Canadian battalions. On 5 March, Elmer was given a 14 day leave for London, “March 6, Go to

London tonight and am starting in for a good time.” Like on his first leave he visited many historical sites and attended the theatre. On 23 March he was back in France and returned to the regular routine. From May onward he writes that activity on the front has increased:

May 10 In the front line again, spent six days in support. Two raids pulled off last night one on each side of us, plenty of shell ducking for a while.

June 6 Went in front line of St. Marc, the trip before the last and had bad time of it. Five hours gas bombardment when we were in Brigade support and a lot of shelling when in the front line.

June 17 In front line in front of Neuville Vitasse, plenty of fish tails and whizz bangs coming over.

June 22 Pulled off raid on Neuville Vitasse last night. I was on the party, got some prisoners, machine guns etc. 25th raid by division since they came back here.

July 24 Drilling every day now.

In early August, he noted that the Battalion took the train back to the Somme battlefields and got off near Amiens, “going to pull something off on this front,” he predicted. Then on 8 August the Allied armies attacked in the first of a series of battles known as the Last 100 Days. “Drive started this morning, we were in reserve to division at start, but in the afternoon moved up toward the front. Advanced about 15,000 yards.” From then on, the Canadian battalions were on the move, fighting almost continuously until the Armistice:

November 11 Moved again today, civilians were nearly wild all along the road, shouting and dancing. Stopped for night in a convent in front of Mons, most of the nuns can speak good English so we are hearing some of their stories now. Armistice signed at 11 o'clock today. Fighting has ceased.

The Battalion was assigned to be part of the occupying army in Germany. However, in early January 1919, Elmer came down with Spanish Flu and was evacuated to England. He remained in hospital until late March, after which he was given leave and then it was the wait to get home:

May 1 We came to Liverpool today and got in the ship, the Royal George.

May 4 We started today.

May 8 This ship is very slow, they seem to be having a lot of engine trouble.

May 10 It is pretty rough today. I have not been seasick.

May 11 It is still rough.

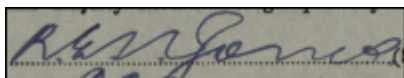
May 12 We landed in Halifax today and on the train 2 hours afterward.

May 18 Landed in Winnipeg last night, was discharged shortly after landing and got home at 2 a.m.



Embroidered 27th Battalion Crest made by Herbert Clark when in hospital in 1918, City of Winnipeg Archives

Ralph Jones: A Banker in the Trenches



Lieutenant Ralph Egerton Norris Jones graduated from Upper Canada College in Toronto and was a branch manager for the Bank of Commerce in Winnipeg. He was a dedicated diarist whose long-detailed entries fully depict life in the Ypres salient trenches during October 1915 thru February 1916. Jones wrote very few diary entries in March 1916; however, he did write to his brother in England. Ralph Jones's diary and letters are found at the Canadian War Museum. Jones also wrote of his experiences for the Canadian Bank of Commerce employee publication *Letters From the Front*.



Mock-up trench system, Courtesy of the Manitoba WW1 Museum

Selections from Ralph Jones' diary:

18th October 1915 Monday

A misty morning and colder than usual. Many flares during night, one observer states 140 at least were sent up by enemy on our Battalion frontage and only a few of us.

At 4 a.m. "stand to" found some men slow in getting out of dugouts. They will be smarter tomorrow. Pierce, 2nd command B Co. at A Co. H.Q. company headquarters, just as we finished breakfast and to our surprise he had been drinking. He was full of fight and wants more movement along the Allies line instead of apparent fruitless activity.

We all agree with him naturally, and we're rather amused at his determination to fight and fight vindictively. Pierce was wounded in fleshy part of leg above knee by a rifle bullet. What seems to me to have been carelessness just after the artillery commenced in the morning, little sniping in evening. [Pierce was once Court Martialled for drunkenness and eventually discharged from the army for generally being a pain in the ass. He went home to Fort Frances and worked for Canada Customs.]

Gray who was hit yesterday in S.P. # 7 has died and is the third of our company to die in action.

D. Pollock one of my men hit by stray spent bullet which just barely cut into him after passing through equipment and clothes. It would have undoubtedly entered his abdomen but for the web equipment. Took him to the dressing station at Kemmel and sent him home by passing transport. Pollock hit just where road to Chateau passes engineers' workshop. Got home and saw to men getting tea about 10:30. Pollock found bullet in breeches when he reported to our M.O. Went to M.O. and got some medicine. Met Major McCarron way back. he is the Q.M. of the 28th and was very much under the influence of booze I thought. Poker and bridge game in Co. HQ and my digs. I did not play and after some scotch and medicine went to bed about 10:30.

27th October 1915 Wednesday

Morning unusually quiet and weather foggy and fairly cool. A rum ration issued to men by Young and self at "stand to" at 4:30 a.m. and

mighty well appreciated. At 8 a.m. Battalion sent 50 men down to Locre to be reviewed by the King, Prince of Wales, Generals Plumber, Alderson, Turner et.al. Mud enroute and around billets, awful and in one of three falls I had my knee bruised and uncomfortable. C Co. lost four or five men on way out tonight. One being killed and three wounded by rifle grenade as they entered communication trench. Another shot in neck by stray bullet near headquarters after leaving communication trench to take road. C Co. certainly having bad luck. Rum ration to men every morning now. A 28th officer tells me that, when the usual morning fog lifted the other day, one of his men, was out in front, found himself a few yards from a German, who said, "You had better go back or I will have to shoot you". One of our brigades, in this neighborhood, it is said, during a very bad spell this past week, was not molested while at work on parapets, and returned the compliment, allowing the enemy to work undisturbed and in full view. Is it not absolutely absurd? One would think there was no war some days, about breakfast or dinner time, as not a shot is fired by either side for sometimes an hour or so.

11th November 1915 Thursday

Sitting in my partially rebuilt dugout, the rain coming down rather heavily having driven me to cover temporarily, as I have been out in it for hours without a break of more than a moment while reporting conditions. Sniping by enemy constant and evidently old troops in front of us. While sleeping towards say 11:30 a.m., Jessamine, Major McLeod's batman, was looking for wood about 500/ 600 yards in a

rear and in the open he was shot in the right lung. My batman, McDonald, and one of my men, Arnott, while trying to assist stretcher bearers in removing Jessamine were both shot. The former in the back and apparently through the spine and the latter, Arnott, through the shoulder. McDonald, poor boy, shouted and screamed terribly and could be heard distinctly where we were in the front line. He was removed before I got up, so I missed seeing him.

Had he not gone out but followed my instructions to have hot water for my washing and shaving at 11:30 a.m. he would have been safe. This recorded simply to record a coincidence that was a feature in the misfortune. I lost a good servant as he is not likely to live, his legs being paralyzed from hips down.

On duty 7:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. and rain falling started parapets and parados sliding in creating several gaps. Artillery duel today most firing as usual from our side. Trench mortars used on left of our Brigade made havoc apparently in enemy trenches.

Regarding the three casualties above, Jessamine's brother who is a S.B. [stretcher bearer] had to crawl out and drag his brother from the road, his assistant remaining in a ditch out of sight of snipers. It was immediately afterwards that McDonald and Arnott were hit. One bullet which first splintered the handle of the stretcher and nicked the finger of an assistant S.B. struck McDonald. An experienced and A-1 sniper evidently with telescopic sight or sights.

13 November 1915 Saturday

Coming to Locre the men plodded say 3 and 1/2 to 4 miles without a stop and we were caught in a fearful downpour of rain, about the worst I have ever seen lasting probably 15 minutes. I was surprised to find my men so capable of enduring a hard march over cobblestones on a black night with rain and much wind to battle against the whole way. They were all made cheerful by an issue of rum.

7th December 1915 Tuesday

Rather uneventful day, until about 3:45 p.m. when our artillery opened on the enemy with H.E. and shrapnel and continued the bombardment for about an hour. Went out again from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. to superintend work of wiring party. Last night I was unfortunate enough to fall onto a very much flattened out dead British soldier when dodging a flare light; also, I was made quite uncomfortable a little later by placing my hand on a much-decayed human face, when I sat down to give men orders while they were trip wiring, and the head wobbled. Walked back to trenches quickly, washed and put-on gloves to avoid being too conscious of the sense of touch for rest of evening. Not enough material to keep wiring party busy whole evening, although they were over an hour late in arriving owing to darkness. Not troubled by snipers very much but rain uncomfortable.

20th November 1915 Saturday Time has been so much at a premium; I have not had a chance to write anyone or even write this up for four days. Should record, in case overlooked. Today we moved to shelters

at Kemmel to act this brigade reserve battalion for at least 4 days. Work out on parapets last night and this morning, well done and well ahead. Soup for fatigue parties at 12:30 a.m. and fatigue parties 12:30 a.m. to 3 a.m. not required to "stand to" with rest of Co. at usual hour. Early this morning on B Co. frontage a Gerboy was out in the open throwing bombs at them. When Paige shot at him, he threw a bomb towards each flash. Paige moving every time he shot. The Gerboy's cries when hit were awful and could be heard hundreds of yards away.

31st December 1915 Friday (New Year's Eve.)

Our front quiet again today. Bombardment due south heard off and on. Weather continues remarkably fine these days. I took wiring party to frontline and while cutting spools before carrying them out stopped by Compline and told not to go out tonight as our artillery going to fire at 9:15 p.m.

Went to Hayman's dugout after sending men back and telling their Corporal to treat them to one of my bottles of scotch whiskey and had a few drinks with the officers of the Co. leaving for Regent Street dugouts about 10:30 p.m. Found three of our company Sergeants waiting in my dugout for me. They had received a ration of rum poured out by a tin which coal oil had been, so they came to beg a bottle of Scotch which I gave them willingly. At 12 midnight one of our guns threw one shell at the enemy's lines.

16th January 1916 Friday

Fearful catastrophe occurred before my eyes at about 1:30 p.m. Our trench mortar prepared to shoot and while Major McLeod and I stood near his dugout, say 40 yards from the gun, the huge bomb exploded at the muzzle. As I saw the Corporal pull the string, I felt something was going to happen and when the awful grey black smoke and debris had cleared away men were down crying and struggling on the ground. I ran over shouting for stretcher-bearers. The Corporal of the gun crew died before us in a couple of minutes and one of his men a moment or two later. There were 10 men hit and all the gun crew of four badly. There were two killed and two signallers badly hit, AJ McCrae of my platoon hid behind some protection while he was in his dugout in the doorway of which was unhurt although immediately behind the gun. Corporal who was killed, Pollock, received a tiny piece in his left arm. The utter helplessness that one feels under such conditions, I felt a great hopeless cry within me-- Why am I not an M.O. or even an undergrad in medicine or surgery. Here were men with life's blood gushing out and I could do nothing but stand and look on while stretcher bearers worked so slowly, oh so slowly! Until today our company had no casualties for the week. We moved out this evening relieved by the 29th Battalion about 5 p.m. Bosch through 8 minenwerfers into the trenches on our left and our trench mortar there with the artillery gave back much H.E. We had no casualties during the exchange, I believe. There were three men of my platoon hit and one seriously by premature bomb explosion. After dinner tonight went over to Hospice/ 6th Field Ambulance to men of my platoon who were hurt

today. McRae had gone but the rest seemed in good fettle according to the orderly. It was too late to see them.

Sources:

Ralph Jones, Personnel Records of the First World War, Library & Archives Canada

27th Canadian Battalion Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

Canadian Bank of Commerce, *Letters From the Front*, Internet Archive

Ralph Jones, *Diary*, Canadian War Museum

John Newton's Diary and Split Ear the Horse



The infamous *Hellfire Corner*, Imperial War Museum

Private John Newton was a 19 year old farmer from Wellwood, Manitoba, when he attested in October 1914. He served continuously on the front until summer 1917, when he was declared medically unfit for service and was sent home to Canada. Along with Colonel Snider and other men who had been invalided home, Newton met the train carrying the Battalion when it arrived in Winnipeg on 26 May 1919.

Newton knew how to handle horses and was assigned to the Battalion's transport section. He had the dangerous job of packing rations, ammunition and water up to the front line by wagon or packhorse. German artillery targeted the roads and horse trails and shelled them constantly. One of the most dangerous was called

“Hellfire Corner” on the Menin Road leading out of Ypres into the salient.

Included here is Newton’s description of his experience during the battle of Vimy Ridge. He also tells a story about a frightening experience he had with his horse named *Split Ear*.

Diary Entries:

7 April 1917

One of Fritz's planes came over and set fire to one of our balloons both observers escaped in parachutes and he was driven away by our planes before any more damage was done, they are taking up the tanks tonight we are still braking [hauling by wagon] ammunition et cetera up the lines.

9 April 1917

Our attack succeeded, hundreds of prisoners coming down now into a specially constructed barbed wire enclosure, one of our balloons broke away with the strong wind, both observers escaped by parachute, it's impossible to get limbers up the lines at all, ammunition has to be packed up on pack horses, but they are laying narrow gauge railway as soon as possible, I had some narrow shaves, got blown up on horse, several mules hit.

10 April 1917

Day after Vimy advance we are still packing water, ammunitions from old frontline to our new lines which Fritz was forced back from, the

old lines in a terrible condition, dead dying and wounded lying all over in trenches on both ours and Germans, more close shaves, some horses killed, from now on it's quiet for a few days and then packed up supplies and ammunition for new front lines, close shaves and tough time packing Vimy Ridge.



Horses packing supplies on Vimy Ridge, 1917. Library & Archives Canada

Story of Split Ear by John Newton

The transport section played an important part in our battalions. At night it was our job to get the rations and ammunition water etc. up the lines by limber or packhorse. Some nights we could get through with very little trouble but other nights we were showered with shells. The reason for this was the roads or trails which we had to follow were lined up by the German guns. Every so often the Germans opened fire on these roads in the hope of catching us. If we got

through at the right time it was okay, but if not, we sure got a shower of shells.

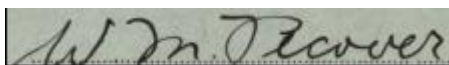
The roads, trails or duck walks were so poor you could not swerve very much, so you just had to take your chance with a pack horse. Where the mud was bad, we simply had to lead our horses on specially constructed boardwalks commonly called duck walks. Even if you were shelled you did not dare take your horse off the walks or they would be bogged down but I can say this for the mud, it's saved my life more than once as the big shells went right down in the mud, sometimes right beside you and exploded in the mire and we were probably thrown off the duck walks and showered in mud, whereas, if it had been dry and hard ground we would have been blown to pieces, of course there were lots of my poor comrades who did not get off so lucky as just a mud bath.

One interesting experience was after the Vimy Ridge advance. That morning we were "standing to" with our horses packed with orders to follow as close as possible behind the troops. We got our supplies etc. up to the new front line and coming back over the old lines as best as we could in day light, with the shells dropping all around us, my horse was scared by a shell and fell into an enormous shell hole right on his back, the pack saddle holding him down in the mud. We were supposed to shoot any horse when they were in that predicament, but I thought too much of my horse, which I called Split Ear, to leave him there. So, I took a chance by climbing down on his stomach and

undoing the pack straps. If he had ever started kicking, he would have sure smashed me up, but he never moved a muscle until I got the strap loose and climbed to the edge of the hole and then kept pulling the lead and after a struggle, I finally got him out. Probably was foolish to stay there with the shells bursting around but I never regretted it as that horse was almost human....

Another time coming over the old trenches I was leading him, and I came to our old frontline trench, I made a jump to cross it, and slipped and fell to the bottom leaning against the opposite side of the trench. The horse being trained to lead, jumped after me but as he jumped, he spread his two front feet out over each side of me and stopped with his front legs on one side of the trench and his hind legs on the other. If he had finished his jump, his hind legs would have crushed me. This horse, when I left the regiment in November 1917, was a bundle of nerves, as I was myself, and I heard after he bolted and was never seen again.

Markle Pecover: Rules and Jumped-Up Officers

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "W. M. Pecover". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured background.

Markle Pecover and father 1916, ianbell.com

William Markle Pecover was born at Lucknow, Ontario, on 14 October 1894 to Rev. Frederick Charles and Adda Pecover. Markel attended Queen's University, a Presbyterian-funded institution, attained a Normal School Certificate and since 1913 had taught in the small farming town of Whitewater, Manitoba.

After the war, Markle taught in rural schools in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and eventually became a school principal in Calgary. During World War 2 he served in the Canadian Army. Markle retired in 1960 and died aged 92 on 5 May 1986 at Calgary.

When he attested on 25 April 1915, he was 21-years of age, a slightly built 5' 11" and Dr. J.S. Wright considered him fit for the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force. Markle was wounded in the arm on 4 May 1917 and was declared medically unfit for service and sent back to Canada.

In November 1916 Markle was sent to France and promised his mother that he would try to write every week or at least send a "whizz-bang" (Field Service Postcard). In a number of his letters home and to friends he apologetically "grouses" about the cost and quantity of the food in the estaminet, the slowness of the mail and asks for socks, candles, candy and cigarettes. Generally, he tries to be cheerful and to quell his parents anxieties, writing, "Do not worry about me. None of us worry about ourselves but go along & make the best of it. Put your trust in God, and He will answer your prayers".

In a 2 December 1916 letter home, he writes dramatically about the French countryside the Battalion has marched through. The scenery is what he always imagined:

so quaint, and old and picturesque. The roads wind around through the hills with great beautiful trees covered with green ivy everywhere. Every mile or so the road runs through quaint old villages, of stone or sod huts, all with thatched roofs, and which look as if they had been standing there when Caesar conquered Gaul. The poorly clad peasants in their wooden clogs, selling apples, two for a penny, to the Canadian boys marching by. In the fields we see the old men & women working with ancient wooden plows, and here & there old,

old women trudging along with great bundles of faggots on their backs, beside which our heavy packs seem light in comparison.

However, he knows that the recruits are marching off to face the real war. The four Canadian divisions have left the Somme battlefields and are taking up winter positions at the foot of Vimy Ridge. Their training has been arduous and now

We are beginning to realize what a stern & deadly thing the war really is... We have learned how to wear our gas helmets & have gone through the deadly gas with them on. Each day we are learning how to best take care of ourselves, and at the same time to kill the most Huns. It seems like a revival of the spirit of the Middle Ages augmented by the deadly science & skill of the 20th century.

December on Vimy Ridge was cold and rainy, and when it wasn't raining it was snowing. As well, the enemy was not taking kindly to the Canadians squatting on the turf they had taken in 1914 and fought over in 1915 during the 2nd Battle of Artois. In his 23 December letter home, Markle wrote:

Do you remember the cellar at Whitewater last spring? That is the only place that I can liken it to. A low, dark wet, black hole down under the ground - a dug-out in the trenches. I am sitting in a corner trying to write, and Argyle is lying on some wet bags beside me. We can hear the water - drip - drip - drip from above for it is raining, always raining, outside. The guns are firing continually above - Fritz sending over his little souvenirs and our boys replying with rifle and artillery fire.

We were up nearly all-night last night. Mac and I are on a working party, carrying rations. We have to carry food to the men in all parts of the trenches. Twice thro' the night and three times through the day the rations go up, so there is little time for sleep. Yesterday Fritz knocked our trenches in, in several places, and we had to dig them out thro' the night; dig out several feet of thick sticky mud.

The trenches are in a pretty bad state – mud, mud, mud, and in places water knee deep. I tell you it was no fun groping alone thro' them in the dark with rifle and ammunition and a load of rations.

Even though conditions are terrible he continues:

Our clothes & hands & faces are covered with mud and wet - but nobody cares. What is the use! We just have to go along and make the best of it. We do not feel afraid - not even down-hearted.

I feel O.K. No cold or any thing else. I do not bother or worry about all the hardships but keep as cheery as I can...We forget all about the present in looking forward into the future - to the time when we will be home again.

The 27th Battalion War Diary entry for 25 December 1916 merely stated that:

At 9:25 p.m. bombing started on our left. Artillery and trench mortar fired heavily on our front and on to our left for an hour. Our artillery replies vigorously. Weather fine and clear in the forenoon growing dull with some rain in afternoon day quiet. Our casualties two men slightly wounded.

However, in his 1 January 1917 letter home, Markle had a much different version of what transpired on Christmas Day in the frontline trenches. Any parent reading it would be terrified for their young son:

Jan 1 /17

My Dear Ones at Home

I know that you will be worrying because you have not heard from me for a few days. But where we are now it is almost impossible to write. I am lying on a wet blanket in a dug-out. It is wet, wet, wet & cold, cold, cold. Water is dripping on me & all around me - drip, drip, drip. It is impossible to keep dry - outside or in, & so I have just made up my mind to keep wet - to grin & bear it.

Since coming into the trenches, we have had to work all the time - day & night - hard wet, dirty work in the mud and wet. Up at six o'clock in the morning & work till twelve at night. We have had no fighting. Except for artillery duels & a little machine gun & rifle fire it is very quiet. I have never fired a shot....

At night we were called out to carry wire to the front line, or rather out into No-Man's land for wire entanglements. I felt pretty tough but had to let go. Every man had to carry a bale of barbed wire for about two miles thro' the muddy trenches.

I had just scrambled over the parapet with my wire when Fritz started to fire - 'whizz bangs' - 'sausages' 'fishtails', shrapnel, machine gun & rifle & bombs. The men crawled back into the trench, & for two hours we crouched there in the water, not daring to move. Great shells

exploded all around us & blew clouds of mud over us. Shrapnel exploded above & we could hear it striking the ground around us & all the time the rifle & machine guns' fire whistled above our heads. The noise was terrific, and the ground shook like an earthquake whenever a big shell exploded. The whole field was lit up like day, by the great flares that were sent up continually. Our artillery was not long in opening up, and for two hours the fight continued & then died down as suddenly as it commenced.

I crouched down as low as I could get & hugged the side of the trench. Argyle was a few yards in front of me. I did not feel afraid. I looked up into the sky and could see the Christmas Star shining calm & peaceful. Then I knew who was watching me and was not afraid.

It was a strange 'Xmas day - and night and one that I will never forget. After the scrap was over, we had to work the rest of the night repairing trenches that had been blown in. On 'Xmas eve I had carried sandbags from 6 P.M. till 3 A.M. & so was naturally pretty tired by the end of 'Xmas night.

I have not had a wash nor a shave now for over a week, & my clothes are covered with mud, & wet. Altho' it rains continually, water for washing or drinking is very scarce. They will be calling us for some new fatigue work in a few minutes, so I must close. I will try to write again at least once a week.

Do not worry about me. None of us worry about ourselves but go along & make the best of it. Put your trust in God, and He will answer your prayers.

Your loving boy

Markle



After Markel's Christmas letter describing his being shelled for hours in the trenches, imagine how his parents felt a week later receiving an official telegram informing them that Markel had been wounded and was in hospital. Markel's letter dated 6 January describing how he was wounded was even more dreadful than his Christmas letter. The letter details how close he came to death, as the men he was with died and were buried alive by it shell exploding in a dugout.

6 January 1917

My Dear Ones at Home -

This letter finds me in quite a different place from the last one, for I am a 'casualty' and am having a few days in the hospital. I guess I have the distinction of being the first 184th man 'wounded' in action. I

am not really wounded though, but a little shaken up with shell shock. I'll tell you the story as briefly as possible.

I was sleeping in a dug-out for the day after being on outpost duty all night. About 12:30 (noon) the Huns started shelling the front line where we were. We were quite safe in our deep dug-out, but the poor chap who was on sentry duty at the entrance was blown to pieces. Our officer called for a man to carry a message down the trench about half a mile, to headquarters dug out, to report the casualty, and I offered to go. In two places our trench was blown in and I had to crawl out and double overland - Fritz's snipers took a few cracks at me that whizzed by unpleasantly close, but you bet I lost no time. I went faster I think than I ever did in a 100 yds. dash and got into the trench O.K. I delivered my message to Major A. - & just turned to go back, when we heard a shell coming. I just had time to crouch down when I heard the terrific explosion - it seemed right at my side. It landed in the next 'traverse' to me, about 20 feet away, but being around the corner I was not hurt.

I was nearly covered up with a shower of stones and mud and almost stunned by the shock. I turned and crawled back down into headquarters dug-out. A lieutenant was lying on the floor unconscious, and the Major was covered with black mud and bleeding at the nose & mouth. Two other men were lying on the floor unconscious with shock. The dug out was full of dust & shell gas, so I got a bag and two or three of us that were all right started to put out the gas. Then a second and a third shell hit the dug-out. The second one knocked in one end and completely buried one poor chap, who

we never saw again. Two men started out to get Red Cross men. Then a third shell hit, and I knew no more till a Red-Cross sergeant brought me around some time later. We could not leave the dug-out till after dark as the trenches were all blown in. I lay there for the rest of the afternoon feeling more dead than alive, with my head going 'round in a whirl and ringing like a bell. After dark we walked between three & four miles, thro' the trenches to where an ambulance was waiting. There were seven of us from the one dug out, and we were nearly all in by the time we got to the ambulance. It did not take us long to get down to the hospital where we got warmed up & were soon comfortable for the night. Today I feel a little shaky but will be ready to go back to the battalion in a few days. One of the boys in the dug-out was Billy Sharp from Arden and it was his chum who was buried.

Do not worry for me. Even in the moments of greatest danger I feel safe & secure and am not afraid for I know who it is that cares for me. 'Yea tho' I walk thro' the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil', for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy Staff they comfort me. What a wonderful comfort there is in these words.

I read the psalms over & over; they are so wonderful & full of comfort

Your loving boy

Markle

Occasionally he is irked by military regulations and this got him into trouble at least once. In a letter dated 6 April 1917, Markle writes his parents that he is in the “guard room” and under punishment for the

next 28 days because he was charged with “Conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline ‘Did write a letter using a code therein disclosing battalion location’”. Knowing that his parents were interested in knowing where he was, he had given them hints of the battalion’s whereabouts in a previous letter. He is unrepentant, writing

I am not a criminal I have done nothing that I am ashamed of, but you know about how much I enjoy being under such a system as is involved in military life. It goes pretty tough being the under-dog all the time, and made an automaton, and slave to the 'orders' of the few who enjoy a temporary advantage over us. The consolation however lies in the fact that the advantage is only a temporary one.

All letters were read by battalion or brigade headquarters before they were sent to the recipient and it is common to see sections scribbled over with pencil. Sometimes, the soldier would try to include a reference so that the reader could guess where the writer was. Markle had tried to give his parents the Battalion’s location previously and the censor had scribbled over them. Possibly, because Markle had used a “code” or the officer was annoyed at the persistent breaking of rules or Markle was known to have a bit of an attitude, he was charged. However, he writes, “I am not worrying in the least. The guard room is quite comfortable, and the hard labour means no longer hours or harder work than usual.”

Markel’s infraction did not keep him out of the attack during the battle of Vimy Ridge, but he was sent back to confinement after the battle.

The letter he mentions in the following letter is missing but he fills in the details for his parents.

April 26, 1917

My Dearest Ones at Home

I have a little time again this morning and so will write you again. In my last letter I told you about our Easter Monday. You have probably read all about the things that the Canadians did that day, and I feel proud to know that I went through that fight, and very, very thankful that I came through without a scratch. From reading the accounts in the paper you will know about where we are in France. I tried to tell in a letter but failed in that. My 'time' will be up next Friday. All it has meant is a few extra fatigues, and the missing of a couple of pay days. Most of the days has been spent in the line with the rest of the platoon and it makes no difference there.

Ever since the day of the attack we have been on working parties and have had only a couple of days rest. The weather still keeps cold, altho' for the past 3 or 4 days it has actually been dry. The air is always cold however, and we have never had a real warm day this spring. Today, although it is not raining there is a raw cold wind blowing which makes it very disagreeable, and makes woolen gloves, balaclava, and sweater a necessity.

Thanks to my ever-increasing supply of big, soft, home-knit socks, I have never known sore feet. I carry several pairs with me all the time, and wear two pair, which I change every night.

The dug out which we are in today is quite comfortable, altho' there is a little water dripping from the ceiling. It is a German dug out and is in their [words crossed out] line that we drove them from. The Germans certainly built their dug outs for comfort as well as safety. Some of the officers dug outs are furnished quite elaborately, with stoves, furniture, electric lights etc.

At our objective, we captured several big guns in cement emplacements, and I was through the dugouts connected with these and got quite a collection of souvenirs - belt, saw-bayonet, rifle, and a German haversack full of odds and ends - leather tobacco pouch old Dutch pipe, nail brush in leather case, silver plated safety razor, officer's cap, and a few other little things. In the afternoon however we were called to make an attack on the snipers along the track where Argyle was hit. I had to leave my souvenirs in the woods as they were too much to carry, and altho' the attack was cancelled at the last moment, I did not have an opportunity to go and collect my souvenirs, as the place where I left them was under fire. However, I had the razor in my pocket, and after all the best souvenir is a 'whole hide' to go back with.

In one dugout I found a pack with a suit of beautiful clean, underwear, shirts, socks, and nice tan boots. It didn't take me long to make an exchange, I can tell you. That clean, soft underwear and dry socks and shoes felt pretty good, and the last I saw of the clothes I took off; they were starting to walk across the floor. You know why!

Goodnight now, my dear ones.

As spring moved into summer, the Battalion saw fierce fighting during the 3-8 May Battle of Fresnoy; it was during this battle that Markle's war ended:

FRANCE

MAY 6 '17

MY DEAR MOTHER

IN AN ATTACK WE MADE ON MAY 4, I GOT A BULLET THRO' MUSCLE OF RIGHT ARM, ABOVE ELBOW. I AM HAPPY AND COMFORTABLE IN HOSPT. AT BASE AND EXPECT TO LEAVE FOR ENGLAND IN A FEW DAYS. I FEEL O.K AN DO NOT SUFFER MUCH.

LOVINGLY

MARKLE

This is Markle's last letter from the battlefield. His injury was serious enough to have him sent back to Canada and discharged as medically unfit for service.

FRANCES
L (MAY 6 '17)
MY DEAR MOTHER
IN AN ATTACK WE
MADE ON MAY 4 I
GOT A BULLET THRO
MUSCLE OF RIGHT
ARM, ABOVE ELBOW
I AM HAPPY AND
COMFORTABLE IN
HOSPITAL. PAUSE AND

EXPECT TO LEAVE
FOR ENGLAND IN A
FEW DAYS. I FEEL
O.K. AND DO NOT
SUFFER MUCH.
ADDRESS MAIL
POST OFFICE
MARKLE
LOVINGLY
MARKLE
COOKER

Sources:

Markle Pecover, Personnel Files of the First World War, Library & Archives Canada

Markle Pecover, canadianletters.ca

Jack Row: Four Fighting Rows

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in cursive that reads "John Row". To the right of the signature, the letters "(Sr)" are printed in a small font.

Whitewood, Saskatchewan, whitewood.ca

John Row (Sr.) was born in London, England in 1871 and emigrated to Canada. He served in the Royal North-West Mounted Police and later operated a pharmacy in Moosomin and Whitewood, Saskatchewan. He enlisted in the CEF in 1915 and served in the Canadian Army Medical Corps in England, Belgium, and France. John and Emma (Biggins) Row had five children, all of whom were born in Whitewood. Two sons, John (Jr.) aka Jack and Sydney attested in 1914 when they turned 18 years old. A third son, Francis, attested when he turned 18 in 1915. All three boys served in the 27th Battalion. Jack was wounded twice and Sydney once. Sydney and Francis were awarded Military Medals in 1918. All four family members survived the war.

18-year-old Jack was the most prolific letter writer in the family. He kept his mother well-informed about his, the brothers' and dad's activities in his playful letters throughout the war. In his May 1915 letters home from England, he enthuses over the landscape, the fields and the towns. London, however, was a different story, "We went through the outskirts of London and stopped after about seven stations. It was sure smoky. I felt like I'd been fighting a prairie fire only the smoke didn't taste as nice". He jokes about the steep hills they march up:

This is the darnedest country for hills you ever saw. Our camp is on a sort of plateau so no matter which way we come home we have a long weary climb. Nobody ever gets home drunk here because he heaves everything about halfway up, so you see it is quite conducive to the discipline of the camp...I can easily see why some people live for 60 or 70 years and never go 3 miles off their own farm. A ten-mile route march is equal to about 25 at home.

He also mentions that Lord Kitchener came to inspect the troops and that

Kitchener is a wonderful man for his age. His moustache is long and shaggy and tawny with a little grey. I was on the right flank nearest them, so I had a good look at them. You would not be able to pick out Kitchener of Khartoum by his pictures. They say that he never smiles but that's all rot as he was smiling nearly all the time. We gave three cheers and a tiger after the inspection was over, then they galloped off to inspect the other men in the other fields near us.

Training, he tells his mother, is hard, mostly involving trench digging, shooting and bayonet fighting. They have to get up early and march six miles to the ranges wearing all their equipment and seven-pound boots. Bayonet fighting “beats the physical exercise all hollow” and he is one of the best shots in the platoon, even though “the targets here are a lot harder to hit as they are not white. They are made to look like a man's head showing over an earthworks.”

His first letter from France is dated 19 Sept 1915 and he tells that he met up with brother Syd and Dad. All is well. His next series of letters are short, as it is “the same day after day so there is nothing to talk about. The time seems to go so quick. We have been in France ten weeks”. John, like many soldiers, loves his tobacco, so he advises his mother on what and how to send this most valuable commodity:

The two things that are scarce are grub and tobacco, so you want to send some McDonald's chewing tobacco in the socks. It takes 1/3 of my money to keep me in tobacco. The best part of chewing tobacco is that if you don't want all of it you can always trade it for smoking tobacco at a gain, in fact you can get 15 or 20 cents worth of smoking tobacco for 10 cents worth of chewing tobacco, so you might as well send chewing tobacco but disguise it to look like socks or tooth powder, then the mail carriers won't swipe it. So, if anyone is crazy to send anything tell them to ship a pair of socks with lots of chewing tobacco in 'em, never mark tobacco on the outside.



Jack Row writes quite a lot about smoking in his letters. WW1 Cigarette case and WW1 Woodbine cigarettes. Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum

John is initially assigned to a wood-cutting detail and is spared the dangers of the trenches. When he visited Syd, he learned that there were very few of the old platoon left, “Five months in France makes a big difference. Strange faces everywhere. Some have been promoted, some killed, some on detail jobs like myself.” John returned to the Battalion on 4 May 1916 and over the next few months wrote that overall things were pretty quiet. In a 9 September letter he tells his mother how Syd was wounded by a mortar on 7 August and sent to hospital in Boulogne. In an 18 September letter, written from hospital in England, he describes how he was wounded during the battalion’s 15 September 1916 attack on the town of Courcellette.

He tries to keep it light-hearted, but one can imagine his mother’s fears having two wounded sons in hospital, a husband still in the

trenches and a third son training to go into battle. His next letter of 10 October 1916 explains more of the battle but it is still glib.

Sept 18th 16

Dear Mother:-

As you will see by the above address, I have made Blighty all right. I landed at Dover this morning and sent to this hospital. I am now quite well, thanks, for some time.

Our brigade made an advance on the 15th and when we were digging in a sniper got me through the flesh on my hip. I bandaged it up and the sergeant major took my name and told me to go back with one of the runners. When we got about 300 yards back another sniper got the runner through the thigh. When I caught up with the runner the same sniper got me through the left forearm, smashing it up some. We both flopped into a shell hole, but I could do nothing for the runner, and he could do nothing for me so we both crawled back to a trench which was occupied by another battalion where I got bandaged up with some field dressings and had splints tied with my puttees. Fritz started to shell the trench pretty heavy so one of the boys told me I'd better take another chance on getting out as that trench was getting knocked to pieces. I crawled out and beat it as fast as I could go. I had to stop once or twice but at last got back to our old front line and managed to walk out although I was pretty groggy.

I got back to the horse ambulances who handed me over to the motors who took me to the dressing station where I got my arm fixed up

properly and my hip dressed. I was put on the motor ambulances again and was taken to the casualty clearing station where I stayed a day. I was put on a train late at night and woke up at Boulogne where we'd landed exactly a year before. Stayed at a hospital near Boulogne and was put on the boat at night.

I woke up at Dover this morning and had a very pleasant journey via Canterbury, Chatham and Hendon. Among some of the sights seen I might mention the famous flying ground at Hendon and some women porters in long pants with whom we had a brisk conversation.

Well, I've just had to stop for supper. Everything looks pretty good to me. This is a swell place. I shall have to write and let Dad and Syd know I am O.K. Syd wasn't back yet when I left, so I guess he will be O.K.

Well dear, you will have to excuse this writing as I cannot hold the paper still. You'd better pass this letter on as it will save me writing any more long worded letters. Tell the kids to drop us a line. Give my love to all and grab off a little yourself.

Jack

Oct 10th 1916

Dear Mother:

...Syd is back with the battalion or at least the remains as it was practically wiped out as were most of the Canadians. In fact, every

battalion that goes over the top generally loses about ¾ of its men, fortunately 85% are Blightys, the men being able to get out. I was lucky to get only a couple of clean bullet wounds. My arm is still on the splint, but I am able to move my fingers and the bone is knitting fine. It's the pieces of shell that make the bad wounds.

We have got the drop on Fritz now though, and the prisoners we took were a happy bunch except of course the ones that we stuck with our bayonets for moral effect when they were too slow. One bunch of about twenty put up a fight with grenades but our fellows put about three grenades among them and the ones that were left were glad to come out and carry some of our wounded in. I was with the company machine gunners, so I had a good view as we were reserve company and did not go over until last. It was partly my fault that I got hit the first time as I was walking around as if I owned the place, however I got a nice one....

Well, I'll have to hurry up and go and get my arm dressed by the nursing sister. We have a lady doctor in this hospital and she's a tartar. She dresses the same as a male officer and wears a Sam Browne belt without the shoulder strap. She is an Australian and claims she has had two arms, one leg and a collar bone broken riding horses. I hate to think what happens to the horses. I wonder if she cuts 'em up with a lancet and then rubs iodine on the cuts.

Well love to all.

Jack

Jack remained in hospital and convalesced in England for 18 months. He generally described himself as “fit as a fiddle and knocking around doing nothing, as usual”. He didn’t expect to go back into the line again, but one never knew because “they are not so particular about a man these days. My left arm is not as strong as my right and a little awkward, but I can handle a machine gun just as good as ever”.

On 5 June 1918 he was back in the trenches with the old battalion. On 29 June 1918 he wrote home with the news that

I was wounded again. I got hit on a raid the morning after I wrote you that last letter. I should have written you before, but I thought I should leave it till I got to Blighty. I got wounded in the foot, leg & arm by a German grenade, all flesh wounds & clean but enough to keep me away for a while. I guess my luck still holds.

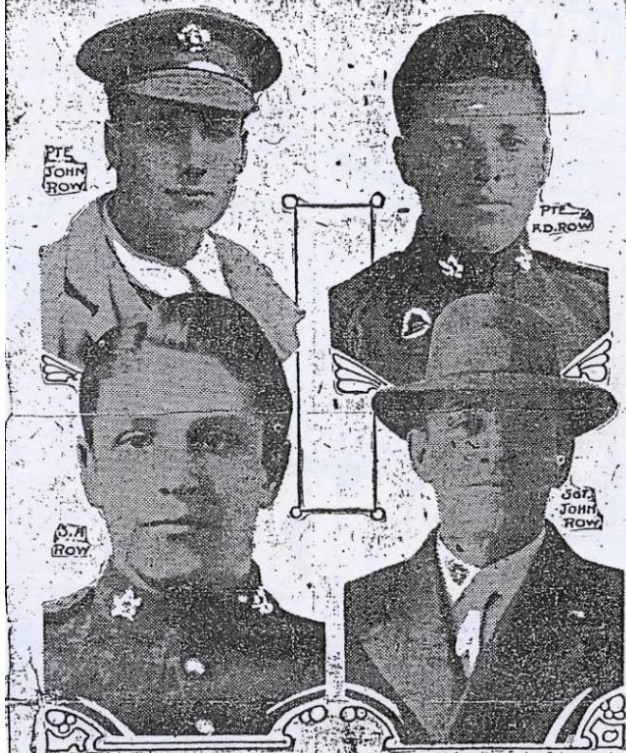
Then in a 13 August letter he expanded on the story of how he was wounded,

When I went over on this raid, I had a hunch that I was going to get a Blighty and it was just at the last minute that I got picked for the storming party where you get the best Blightys but less chance of getting away with them. If I have kids of my own, I'll let them take all the risks they like. They might as well do it while they are young as growing into a bunch of 'cold foots'.

Jack

Jack convalesced in England and was demobilized in May 1919 when the 27th returned to Winnipeg.

FATHER AND THREE SONS WHO ARE UPHOLDING THE HONOR OF WINNIPEG



Here is another case of a loyal Winnipeg family. Sergt. John Row, who has been two years in France with a Winnipeg unit, has two of his sons wounded and a third doing duty on the western front. One of the sons, Pte. John Row, has been wounded in the left arm and is now in England. A second member of the family, Pte. Sidney A. Row, has been twice wounded and won the Military Medal for conspicuous gallantry at Vimy Ridge. Another son, Pte. F. D. Row, went overseas with Lieut. Col. Sharpe's unit and is now with a communication section of a well known Winnipeg battalion.

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FOND MEMORIES OF MY WAR, John Row – Part 1

The following memoirs were sent to the Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum in March 2021 by John Row's son-in-law Russell Stewart.

When the First World War broke out in August of 1914, I tried to enlist but they weren't really geared up for recruiting yet and I was a skinny eighteen-year-old, so they told me to go home and eat more porridge. By October they were beginning to take the war seriously and they were glad to take me; in fact, they took my brother Sydney who was a year younger than I was.

We joined the 90th Winnipeg Rifles which later on helped form the 27th City of Winnipeg Battalion. Until December we lived at home and just walked about a mile over to the university grounds to drill, but in December we went into barracks at what had been the agricultural college. It had been taken over by the army and named Fort Osborne Barracks. We used to go on route marches along Academy Road which was then just a trail with bush on each side.

When we were getting our recruit training the colonel's orderly used to try to bully us. He was older than the rest of us and considered himself a tough guy. One day he tried bullying me in the barracks, so I hit him and knocked him down. I was in my bare feet, but I kicked him in the ribs anyway and broke some of them. The next morning, I

was up in front of the colonel. He had trouble keeping a straight face because he didn't like the guy either and was trying to get rid of him so nothing serious happened to me. I was the most popular guy in camp after that and we never saw the bully again.

Later on, I had my appendix taken out at Cochrane, Ontario. When I came back to my unit, I was put on light duty as a barracks room orderly. The old sergeant came in to inspect before the orderly officer made his rounds. He said to me "You haven't taken the urine pail downstairs. I said "Sergeant, I am not supposed to lift heavy things." The sergeant said, "I order you to take that pail down." I said, "Very good, Sergeant." I waited until he walked downstairs to the second landing, then I grabbed the pail and followed him. Halfway down I pretended to fall. He got the whole five gallons over him. The orderly officer came up to the landing and asked what the matter was. There stood Old Sarge on the landing covered with cigarette butts and urine. I sat on the steps moaning "Oh, my side." The sergeant stood at the foot of the stairs swearing at me. "You son of a biscuit box, I could kill you!" The orderly officer stood by the window and said "What's the trouble? Don't come near me, Sergeant." Then he called the corporal from the next floor and told him to take me to the medical officer. The corporal took me, and the medical sergeant made me lie down on a cot. I never had any more trouble with that old sergeant.

The next summer we were shipped to England on the Cunard liner "Carpathia." It had gone to the rescue of the Titanic survivors in 1912 and was torpedoed just before the end of the war. We finished our training on the Salisbury Plain and then went to France. Our younger

brother Frank joined later, and we were all overseas with the 27th. Heinie didn't manage to kill any of us, but it's a wonder our own officers and sergeants didn't shoot the lot of us for the trouble we caused them.

In 1916 I was at the third battle of Ypres and at Posiers and Courcelette and then was wounded at the Somme. I took part in several minor scraps in May and June 1918 and then was wounded in a raid at Niewall Vitasse near Arras. At various times I was in hospitals in England at St. Albans, Haplow, Uxbridge, Hastings, Stowmarket, Bury St. Edmonds, and Epsom.

Once I was in a ward where I was the only one who was mobile. I was an arm case and most of the rest were legs, so I had to help them to the bathroom and so forth. One day I went down the hall to the bathroom and through the skylight I could see a zeppelin flying past. I watched it for a while and then it was shot down. That was the last zeppelin attack on England. They were too slow and too easy a target. When I got back to the ward, I told the other guys about it and of course they were all mad at me for not coming and getting them. They didn't care for my explanation that if I'd tried to help them all down there none of us might have seen it.

Syd saw all the 1916 action until he was wounded at St. Eloi. In 1917 he was at Vimy Ridge and Fresnoy and then was wounded and awarded the Military Medal at Passchendaele. Frank served from the Somme to Vimy in 1917 and also at Fresnoy and Hill 70, and like Syd was awarded the Military Medal at Passchendaele. Frank was at

several minor scraps in 1918, ending in the final march to the Rhine. He spent the winter of 1918-19 at Bonn near Cologne. Our father was a medical sergeant with the Third Canadian Casualty Assembly Centre. He went overseas in 1915 and was with the 3rd Pioneers and other special troops at Mons the last day of the war. He spent that winter in recovered Belgian territory and didn't get home until the summer of 1919, by which time he was nearly fifty-three years old.

At the end of the war, I was at the holding camp at Seaford on the south coast of England. We were not allowed to go to the villages. There was a big barn in a field that served as a mortuary for the villages and the camps. I was on guard there twice. I was in a hut, and they cut the guard down to twelve men from twenty-four. We had to keep all the windows on the lee side of the hut open and we were allowed only one tub of coal for twenty-four hours.

The guys got into all kinds of trouble. They climbed down to a wrecked freighter below the Seven Sisters cliff and hauled up wine in the fire buckets from the hut. Then they all got sick because the wine was contaminated. I was away on a burial party, so I missed that party and when I got back the corporal put me on guard duty because I was the only one who wasn't sick. I hadn't had my tea, but I had to stand there in full battle order yelling "Halt" and pointing my rifle at whichever door opened. The corporal and the orderly were running around looking for a doctor or a stretcher bearer. Everything was disorganized. I was glad when they told me and two other guys to report to number 8 hut at 6 o'clock the next morning.

When we got over there, we found we had to have a medical checkup and go to a special row of huts. Then they handed out gas masks and new tin hats and gave us slips marked "Siberian Detail." At that time, the allies were sending troops to Russia to try to put down the Bolshevik revolution and we were to be part of it. We were kept there for ten days, virtual prisoners, but I went absent without leave for two days to meet my brothers who were on special leave up at Croydon. I just got back in time for my medical examination and then we moved off in full battle order to another row of huts for readiness to sail from Southampton. Two days later we were on the way to Halifax on the White Star liner "Olympic" and eating big red apples, the first we'd seen since we left Canada four years before. We'd each been given five dollars to buy comforts, so we lined up every day to buy a Red Cross apple for ten cents. We were supposed to cross Canada by train and then go by ship to Vladivostok, but as it turned out we never did get to Russia because the whole thing was cancelled, and we were discharged. I kept the new rifle they gave me because nobody recorded the serial number on it.

FOND MEMORIES OF MY WAR, John Row – Part 2

They came to be known as the Somme battles, but we only knew one shell hole and one trench at a time and had no clear idea of the larger picture. I was in charge of the Lewis gun section, no. 8 platoon, B company, 27th Battalion, normally eight men. The platoon sergeant said to me "You stay in this shell hole until I or Sgt. Reid comes for you. Don't let anybody move until I or the other sergeant comes." I had N.D. Matson for no. 2, Charlie Dowd no. 3, a Greek waiter no.

4. *I think his name was Pico. The others were new men, supernumeraries as they called them.*

From midnight on bombs and shells had been falling. Flares lit up everything except Heinie, as we called them. We never said German, just Heinie. Big shells were falling behind us off and on but mostly it was machine gun and rifle fire. An odd field gun shell lit from both sides, but we were all in holes and fairly safe.

Daylight started to come. The stretcher bearer crawled over and bandaged up those who were near. One guy was yelling all night, but the stretcher bearer couldn't find him. The morning barrage started about six o'clock. Matson kept wiping off the gun. Dowd and one of the new men kept on digging. The sun came up and I tested the gun twice on a bunch of Heinies on our left front who were shooting at us. They were in line with the sugar factory, and I couldn't get a clear view of them on account of smoke.

The first line went over. Matson says to me "Shouldn't we go?" I said "Sgt. Parsons said to stay here till he or the other sergeant comes. I'm in command now." Pico was crying in the hole but still digging furiously. He collapsed with shell shock and Matson was wiping his head with a sandbag. There were grenade fights going on all along our front. I couldn't shoot because I couldn't see who it was. Matson kept on lifting the cover and I tested the gun whenever I saw a Heinie helmet on our left front. I saw there was a three-foot trench connecting shell holes. The trench had been dug by men on our right flank.

I had to stay on my knees so I could use the gun and Matson would lift the cover and wipe it so the sight would be clear. Matson says, "Where's that secret weapon, those tanks they were talking about?" We'd trained for tank warfare a bit using wagons but up to then we'd never actually seen a tank. I looked around and could see something that looked like threshing separators coming along about 200 yards apart. Those were the first tanks and that was the first-time tanks were used. Just then Matson, who was looking rear all the time, says "Duck" and we all flattened. Umpteen planes came over. They looked to be about a hundred yards over our heads. Nobody could hear but the sun disappeared in the smoke and then cleared away and we could see row on row of men still going. Matson said, "What about it?" I said "No-no sergeant gave me the order. We have a good place here."

All of a sudden, the prisoners started to come. No tunics and no braces. Some had caps and some didn't. One guy had a red and white striped shirt and he grinned at me and said, "Good morning." I said, "Nice day for a walk." He had his hands in his pockets holding up his pants. They'd had their belts and braces cut so if they used their hands, they lost their pants. All of a sudden there was our sergeant walking beside them. He said "Hi, Row." I said "Hi, sarge." He said, "All set and ready?" I said, "All except Pico." He said, "You've got lots of men." Pico just crouched in the hole crying and didn't even have his helmet on. Anyhow I had five men each with eight pans of ammunition.

We started going from one hole to another. There were stiffs all over the place. One poor bugger had a kilt, and you could see his little

football pants. He just looked as if he had tripped. I had to step over him. One tank was on its nose in a big hole and Heinie was shelling the hell out of it. The other two were stopped but still firing their light cannons and machine guns. We went up hill for about six hundred yards. Here and there bunches of stiffes were piled up, and also a few dead horses. Machine guns and field guns were firing all around us from big shell holes that looked like caved-in wells. When we got to the top of the ridge the Sugar Refinery was on our left rear and we could see clumps of Heinies and Canadians throwing grenades of all descriptions. There was a bunch of Heinies in a big shell hole. A little guy crawled around behind them and then must have thrown a hairbrush, which was two slabs of gun cotton tied onto a board. That silenced them.

The sergeant stopped by our hole. He said "Mount your gun up front facing the sun. All you other guys use that hole to sort yourselves out." I said "O.K." I dropped the two legs of the gun and Matson started to polish again. The smoke and sun blinded me, and I went out front to clear the broken posts away so I could traverse the gun left and right. I got some wooden posts out and piled the broken wire on them for cover. In front were a lot of spiral tethering pins as I called them. I was screwing one out when slam bang, I got hit just at the belt. My whole left leg went numb. I turned to Matson and said, "Take over." He said, "Crawl into that hole." There was a new stretcher bearer in there. I went toward the hole and another bullet just snapped the skin above the belt. I just lay flat on my back and enjoyed the rest. I could see Matson and Dowd testing the gun and it was all right.

The stretcher bearer put a strip around my waist, did my belt up again, tied a label to my tunic and told me to beat it. I started to walk to a group of officers and runners to our right rear. They waved me off, so I headed for the ruined tank. It was the only thing sticking up clear in the sun and smoke. I saw a runner with a message in his hand and with a haversack hanging. He waved to me, and I kept about twenty feet behind him. A big shell lit between us, and the ruined tank and he got a piece in him. He started to run and disappeared in a small hole. I went by the hole and was looking for him in the blue smoke.

All of a sudden "snap" just like a firecracker and my left arm dropped. I felt my right-hand pocket and my shell dressing was still underneath it in the lining. I couldn't use my jack-knife as it was swinging from the lanyard and plastered with mud. I thought "No use, just hang onto the arm." It hurt and was hanging loose. I just hung onto it and the sleeve acted as a sling. I thought "Well, I've got clean underwear and shirt, so I won't get blood poisoning. Just hang onto it."

I saw some men to my left just going into a travel trench. I went over to them and saw the stretcher bearer finishing bandaging one of them around the leg. He looked up and I saw they were Van Doos, the 22nd Battalion. He said, "What's your trouble?" I showed him and he said, "For God's sake, haven't I got enough without you plugging in?" He went on and finished the guy's leg and another one's shoulder. Then he said, "Pull out your bayonet." I did and we squatted in the travel trench. Men were stepping around us. He said, "Undo your right puttee." I did. He bandaged the arm using the bayonet for a splint and

the puttee for a sling. Then he said, "Now bugger off and don't bother me anymore." I said goodbye and started walking. The air cleared and there were two wounded officers holding each other up. One had no helmet on. A whiz-bang came and plastered them so I swung to the right and after a while I could see a kind of hump, we'd passed the night before. I knew it was the same hump because there were still three stiffs stretched out with bags over their heads. I circled and got into the hole and followed the tracks from one old trench to another going downhill. I followed another bunch but didn't join them. It was cloudy and smoky, so visibility was low. I stumbled along toward the row of French 75-millimeter field guns I'd seen the night before and there were the teams and ambulances in a gully.

I found Burchill, our old stretcher bearer. He got me a stretcher and told me to lie down and brought me a nice tin of hot tea. He just said, "You're O.K." and went and got a blanket and told me to watch the casualties get into the horse ambulances. Everything was dull and smoky as it was a shelled out old road. I saw Maurice Duquette walking along with his arm in a sling. I said, "What luck?" He said "I got one for Blighty, I hope. What've you got?" I said "Same." "One for Blighty" meant a wound serious enough to get you back to England for treatment but hopefully not serious enough to do permanent harm. Another stretcher bearer brought me some more tea and congratulated me on having someone to talk to. That was the last time I saw Maurice. He died later in the west building of the same hospital I was in. I was in the central building. His brother Albert died about the same time in a London hospital.

I got put in an ambulance just at dusk. There were four stretchers and four walking cases. The horses balked and reared but the straps over our chests and the four walking cases kept us from being thrown out. They unloaded us at the railway station in Albert and I got bandaged up and put in a motor ambulance.

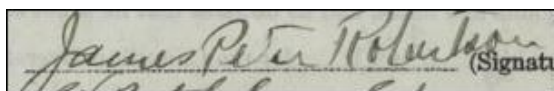
I was unloaded in about two hours and found myself in a big marquee on the right side of the door with Germans on each side of me. I sat up and said, "What's up?" An orderly gave me a mug and some hot tea from a big pail. He went all around the tent. I sat up again after a while and said, "How come all the Heinies?" I looked and the other side of the door was all Canadians, so I looked at myself. My white shirt with blue and red stripes I had put on the day before was the same as the Heinies' shirts. One of the police at the door came over and said, "Do you speak English?" I said "Sure, do you?" He said "I heard you speak. You didn't sound like a German." They picked me up and put me on the other side of the tent. In the morning I was on the train to Wimeroux, seven miles from the sea and thirty miles from the front.

Sources:

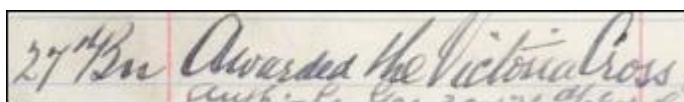
John Row, canadianletters.ca

John Row Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

James Peter Robertson VC



James Peter Robertson VC Gravestone, Tyne Cot Cemetery



Born at Pictou County, Nova Scotia, he was living in Medicine Hat, Alberta, working as an engineer when he attested in the CEF on 16 June 1915. He was taken on strength as a private with the 27th Battalion on 27 September 1916. Nothing in Robertson's service records indicate that he would become a hero but that changed on 6 November 1917. During the Battle of Passchendaele, Robertson's platoon was held-up by uncut wire and machine gun fire. Robertson rushed the enemy position, killed several men, and captured the machine gun and lead the men to their objective. Later while carrying wounded comrades out of no-man's land he was killed.

His Victoria Cross citation reads:

For most conspicuous bravery and outstanding devotion to duty in attack. When his platoon was held up by uncut wire and a machine gun causing many casualties, Pte. Robertson dashed to an opening on the flank, rushed the machine gun and, after a desperate struggle with the crew, killed four and then turned the gun on the remainder, who, overcome by the fierceness of his onslaught, were running towards their own lines. His gallant work enabled the platoon to advance. He inflicted many more casualties among the enemy, and then carrying the captured machine gun, he led his platoon to the final objective. He there selected an excellent position and got the gun into action, firing on the retreating enemy who by this time were quite demoralized by the fire brought to bear on them. During the consolidation Pte. Robertson's most determined use of the machine gun kept down the fire of the enemy snipers; his courage and his coolness cheered his comrades and inspired them to the finest efforts. Later, when two of our snipers were badly wounded in front of our trench, he went out and carried one of them in under very severe fire. He was killed just as he returned with the second man.

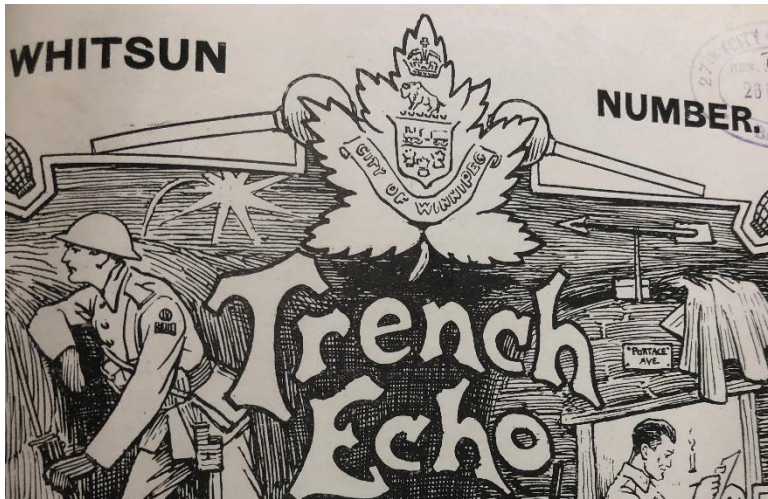
James Peter Robertson is Buried in Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium, along with 45,000 soldiers who are buried and memorialized at the largest Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery.

Sources:

James Peter Robertson, Personnel Records of the First World War, Library & Archives Canada

War Diaries of the 27th (City of Winnipeg) Infantry Battalion, Royal
Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

The Trench Echo: Its Mostly About the Rum



The "Trench Echo" hopes to be what its name implies, echoes from the trenches. What we lack in quantity we hope we make up in quality, and what we lack in quality we trust is made up in enthusiasm. So read the "Trench Echo " and send a copy home to Mother or Wife or " the Girl." -Ye Editor

One of the few ways the men of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) had to keep up their morale was through their trench newspapers. These papers, commented the editor of the 27th Battalion's trench newspaper the *Trench Echo*, "Whether they make us swear or smile, they help more than anything else to relieve the monotony and keep one's intelligence from corrosion or dry rot, and they constitute one of the few real comforts of trench life." Although

many battalions published a trench newspaper, generally issues were sporadic, and most were only produced once or twice during the war.

Excerpts and cartoons from the April 1916 *Trench Echo* :

MY LITTLE WET HOME IN THE TRENCH.

I've a little wet home in a trench,
Where the rainstorms continually drench.
There's a dead cow close by
With her hoofs towards the sky,
And she gives off a beautiful stench.
Underneath, in the place of a floor.
There's a mass of wet mud, and some straw,
And the Jack Johnsons tear
Thro' the rain -sodden air
O'er my little wet home in the trench.

There are snipers who keep on the go,
So, you must keep your " napper " down low
And their star- shells at night
Make the deuce of a light,
Which causes the language to flow.
Then bully and biscuits we chew,
For its days since we tasted a stew
But with shells dropping there,

There's no place to compare
With my little wet home in the trench.

A Night with the Battalion Scouts in "No Man's Land."

"Patrol of two men required at once!" raps out the Scout Officer. "Report immediately to O. C. 'D' Company." The night is dark, and a drizzly rain is falling as we leave our comfortable dugout, after having received our instructions. Buttoning up our jacket collars and pulling our balaclavas well down over our faces, we clamber on to the firing -step and await an opportune moment to get over the parapet. The time comes! The star shells have ceased their vigilant search for a moment, and the enemy's snipers are holding their fire. Over we go. A low curse from Scout "A." He has forgotten to transfer a few precious francs from these d ---. d front trouser pockets to a more secure spot, and in sliding down the parapet the coins jingle merrily to mother earth and are lost forever in the mud. Crouching low we make a beeline for a small opening in our entanglements used purposely by patrols. On clearing our wire, we take a small but powerful bomb from our pockets and cocking our revolvers we commence our journey across "No Man's Land" to the German trenches.

Zip ! Up goes a flare illuminating the land for a radius of several hundred yards. We crouch low, hugging the ground as a lover hugs his -nuff said! From experience we know that both sides will pour in a heavy fusillade immediately the star shell dies out; also, that the

enemy's sentries are anxiously straining their eyes in order to detect signs of Johnny Canuck (they call us " The Madmen ") Patrols, so it behooves us to exercise considerable caution.

Taking advantage of the noise caused by rifle fire, we crawl forward for a short distance, our eyes and ears very much on the alert, for we know not the moment we may collide with a hostile patrol. Down ! We are at centre field and can plainly see a figure a few yards in front. Crack! A faint rustle of grass and our fingers tighten on the triggers; our eyes are strained to the utmost, and we fear that the thumping of our hearts may give our position away. We lie perfectly still for about fifteen minutes; but, except the occasional thud of a bullet close by, and the scream of a few ricochets, everything in our near vicinity is quiet.

We move forward by inches to investigate our apparent opponent, only to find the dead and fast -decaying body of an unfortunate soldier who has fallen gloriously in a " charge " some time back. The rustling was caused by one of the many monster rats which frequent the trenches and the ground between the lines. We are now within fifteen yards of the German parapet but cannot advance further on account of a sniper being suspicious of our presence. Ping! A bullet digs its nose into the earth a few feet to our left. Hiss! Another clips the grass above our heads, and we start thinking of Home, Sweet Home, and - our past sins!

We are compelled to make our stay at this point somewhat longer than consistent with comfort, but at last we make a break, and backpedal, by inches of course, until a convenient shell -hole is found. There a

few twists are made, which would make an eel turn green with envy,
and we are on our return trip. As before we await a lull in the firing,
then scramble over the parapet to " safety." We hand in our report,
and stride back to our little dug -out in the West, wet through with
slime and water, but happy in the thought of a dry bed and -a snort of
RUM, yum! yum ! !

J. M. M.

RUM

The parapets have all caved in and dug -outs tumbled down,
You're up to the knees in Belgium mud of thick and sticky brown,
You're slipping here, you're falling there, in a hole you'll sometimes
get,
Oh ! it's nice to be on sentry -go when the weather's cold and wet.
And you carry on until it's time for you to quit,
When your relief will come along to do his little bit,
Then you roll up in a blanket and away to rest 'you creep,
Where the rats will keep you company whilst you lie fast asleep,
But ere dawn breaks along the trench an order's coming through,
The word is passed quite rapidly the boys must all " Stand to! "
They climb on to the fire -step and get a trifle mixed,
But soon you'll see them at their posts with all their bayonets fixed,
Then suddenly along the trench there comes: ghostly form.

The boys all stand there ready their duty to perform.
It creeps along quite cautiously,

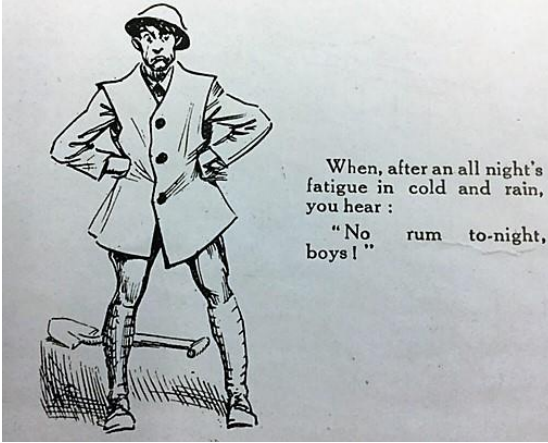
" My God" we hear ; " they're come!"

" Who have?" They ask : " The Huns?" " No chance," hoarse voices shout,

" IT'S THE RUM ! "



THE WOES OF THE WORKING PARTY



When after an all night's fatigue in cold and rain, you hear:
"No rum to-night, boys!"



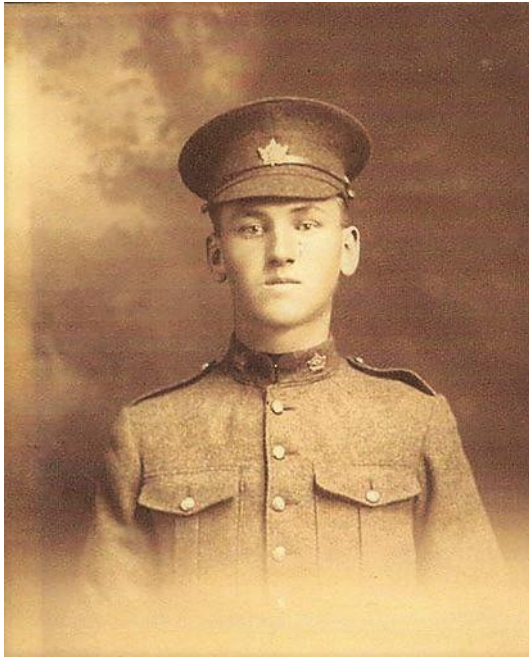
"If the Sergeant Steals Your Rum Never Mind"

"Ere, I've been waitin' 'ere for 'arf-an-hour.
"Bout time you chaps shifted. Ye don't take me for Charlie Chaplin, does
yer?"

“The Kilts Swept All Before Them”

43rd (Cameron Highlanders of Canada)

3rd Canadian Division



James Fargey, Belmont, Manitoba

James H. Fargey

Everyone knew war was coming soon. On 3 August 1914, orders were issued by the 79th Cameron Highlanders of Canada that every Cameron was to parade that night to determine who was willing to go to the front. The next day, the British Empire declared that it was in a state of war with the German Empire. Canada, as part of the British Empire, was automatically at war and when Ottawa ordered mobilization, men from the 90th Winnipeg Rifles and the 79th Cameron Highlanders were called away from their jobs to begin training. Only a few weeks later, thousands of troops started leaving the city enroute to Camp Valcartier, Quebec. Part of that first group were 250 men and officers from the 79th Cameron Highlanders of Canada who were destined to be part of the new 16th Battalion (Canadian Scottish).



79th Cameron Highlanders, Military Parade 1914 Winnipeg, Martin Berman Postcard Collection, Winnipeg Public Library

Twelve hundred more men were called for active service on 3 November 1914. On 15 December 1914, the 79th was ordered to mobilize and a call for recruits was issued. Three days later it was announced six new battalions would be formed and the 79th would be one of them. On 9 January 1915, the official announcement was made that the 79th would go to the front as a unit designated as the 43rd Battalion (Cameron Highlanders of Canada). An article appearing in many local Manitoba papers noted that for those willing to enlist with the 43rd, *A preference is given for Scottish recruits, particularly Highlanders, but of course this regiment is willing to enlist good men of other nationalities.*



43rd
Battalion Off To War Winnipeg, May 29th, 1915, Library & Archives Canada

On 29 May 1915, the Battalion's 39 officers and 1020 other ranks entrained in Winnipeg bound for Montreal. They then boarded the Canadian Pacific Steamship *SS Grampian* for the week-long voyage to England. The Battalion would be assigned to the 9th Infantry Brigade, 3rd Canadian Division, and would fight the war along side the 52nd

(Northern Ontario) Battalion, 58th (Central Ontario) Battalion, 60th (Victoria Rifles, Montreal) Battalion and the 116th (Ontario Country Infantry) Battalion.

After months of cold, wet training in the south of England, Private James Fargey, a 19-year-old from Belmont, Manitoba, wrote to his brother Frank, “I don’t think we will be here very long because all these Canadian camps are being cleared out and sent over to France...” James was a proud young soldier who believed his battalion was ready to meet the challenge of the trenches:

When we left Wpg. we carried a pack from the barracks to the station and thought we were being killed but now we go out for a route march all day with full pack on and it never bothers us... To tell you the truth the forty third is one of the best battalions that ever-left Manitoba. You may think this is B.S. but it isn't... This is the straight goods I'm giving you and us fellows are not ashamed of the battalion we are in.

On 17 February 1916 he wrote, “We are going across to France tomorrow night. We have everything packed now and are carrying everything in our pack and on our back...” His next sentence is uncertain in its meaning. Is James being cocksure or is he apprehensive about going into the trenches when he writes, “You talk about putting one’s head up over the parapets. I have been warned several times about that in the past from fellows from the front and will certainly keep mine down.”



“We got used to the rain and mud.” Pte. James Fargey, England, Winter 1916, photo from the Tom Caunt Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum

James was one of the over 6000 men who served in the 43rd Battalion, 4000 of these men coming from the 79th Cameron Highlanders. From March 1916 to November 1918, the 43rd fought in all of Canada’s battles and won over 250 valour medals, including a Victoria Cross. But, with these honours came suffering and death. The Battalion took over 3400 casualties and the Cameron Wall of Honour lists the names of over 1000 men who were killed, died of wounds, illness or in captivity.

The 3rd Canadian Division, including the 43rd (Cameron Highlanders of Canada) went into the battlefields in early 1916. The 43rd went into the trenches of the Ypres salient in late February 1916 and saw limited activity. On 31 March, during its second tour of the Ypres trenches, the

Battalion tasted the horror of war when it came under heavy machine gun fire and artillery shelling. Four men, Privates Richard Bellhouse, Joseph Birss, Donald Ellis and James Hunter were killed, with many more wounded. In April, the Battalion suffered more losses from accident, enemy sniping and artillery. The month of May saw an increase in enemy shelling, as well as aeroplane reconnaissance. The Battalion suffered casualties on an almost daily basis. *Death*, wrote Chaplain Charles Gordon in May 1916, *is walking at our side by day and by night.*

The first major engagement for the 43rd, along with other battalions of the 3rd Canadian Division, took place during the 2-13 June 1916 Battle of Mount Sorrel (Sanctuary Wood). At the beginning of June 1916, the enemy overran strategically important trenches only three kilometers from the city of Ypres. Before 2 June 1916, the Ypres front was relatively quiet, leading Winnipeg soldier Marvin Dunfield, who had seen action in 1915, to write home that, *the very shadow of death seemed as remote from the scenes of murder and carnage as a country place on the Assiniboine.*

The Canadian divisions marched toward Mount Sorrel to regain the lost muddy ditches and, Dunfield continued:

over the rough cobblestone roads, we trudged along. We could hear the pipes of our kiltie battalions, and occasionally we caught glimpses of them passing a crossroad, swinging along, heads up, everyone keeping step to the pipes. Kilts swaying in perfect rhythm, marching cheerfully

and fearlessly into battle. Before twenty-four hours had passed, hundreds of these brave lads will have passed to the great silent army and hundreds more will come out, but wrecks of a sturdy manhood that went in.

Another Manitoba soldier described what he experienced in the battle, *We lay on the bottom of muddy ditches in the cold rain for three days and we were lucky that we caught a few bites to eat. The shell fire was probably the fiercest and most concentrated that has been seen in this part of the country and never let up.*

The 43rd was involved in the heavy fighting, faced gas attacks and artillery barrages several times over the next ten days. During the battle, 43rd Battalion Company Sargent-Major Robert “Bobbie” Shankland won the DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal) for braving heavy shell fire and attempting to rescue wounded and buried men trapped in No Man’s Land. By the end of the battle no new ground was taken, but the lost ground was recaptured, so it counted as a victory. The disgrace of losing a trench was avoided but at the cost of 8,700 Canadian casualties, half of which were from the 3rd Division.

The 43rd was proud of its achievements in its successful counterattacks on the German held areas. In a reassuring letter home, dated 17 June 1916, Jimmy Fargey downplayed the danger he had faced:

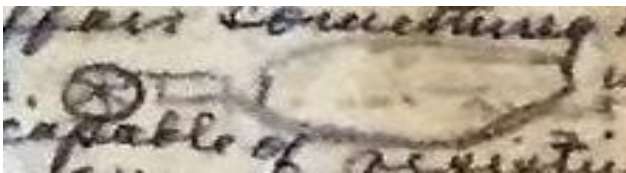
I guess you have been very anxious about me since we have been having quite a time these last two weeks, but I came thro it safe. The Germans took some trenches off the Canadians alright and held them for ten days

and then the Canadians took them back. It has been raining the last week we were in the trenches and they were in frightful conditions, but we are back in camp now having a rest and we certainly needed it.

In the summer of 1916, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions marched toward the Somme battlefields where British, Newfoundland, South African and Anzac troops had been fighting since 1 July 1916. The Canadians entered the fray during the 15 September 1916 Battle of Courcellette, where tanks were used for the first time in battle. On 14 September 1916, Chaplain Albert Woods, who had been Chaplain to the 8th Battalion in 1915 during the Battle of 2nd Ypres but promoted to Senior Chaplain of the 3rd Division, wrote in his diary about the remarkable mechanical, steel war-machine he had just seen. It was the new secret weapon Field-Marshal Douglas Haig and the High Command hoped would eventually turn the tide of war. Although the few machines that were used on the Somme were ineffective, thousands would be added to the Allied arsenal and be ready for the decisive battles of 1918:

Everyone knows what a caterpillar is. It is a crawling sort of an animal. But few have heard of or seen a caterpillar fighting machine. We have several. It is a huge affair, something the shape of the following sketch---made of steel plate capable of resisting shell [and] rifle fire. Carries (the male for there is a male and female) two 6 pounders and three Hotchkiss guns, while the female carries five machines [guns]. They can cross ditch 14 feet wide, climb over brick wall five feet high, and if a tree gets in the way they simply push it

*over. The Bosch has not seen it yet, but he will tomorrow, and it will be surprising if he is not amazed. It will simply run over his trenches and barb wire like its namesake the animal would. We are entering today on another step in our offensive. The bombardment started at 6:30 pm. I could attempt to describe it, it was beyond description, at present moment it is not so intense... Tomorrow at dawn the 2nd and 3rd Divs. attack to the west and north of Thiepval. **It is our day.**"*



Chaplain Wood's sketch of the "caterpillar fighting machine" from his 1916 diary, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives.

On 15 September 1916, Canadian infantry battalions took Fleurs-Courcelette and, as Woods writes, "After the capture of Fleurs, the Caterpillar paraded the town followed by a crowd of tommies singing and shouting..." Woods felt no moral qualms about using advanced weaponry to defeat the enemy. The Germans had used gas against Canadians at Ypres in April 1915 and flamethrowers in July 1915. It was a war of bloody attrition. He wrote on 18 September:

It is interesting to note the expressions of opinion by the Germans as to the nature of the struggle - "It is not war," said one officer, "it is murder, no one can live under such shell fire as your artillery puts over." "It is butchery," said another - Did they think and speak like that a year and five months ago? Was it butchery when they used this gas on

22-28 April 1915...and what about their liquid fire? ...They speak about our “tanks” as unfair. It would be fair enough if they had them instead of us.



43rd Battalion in France (nd.). The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, *Twenty Fifth Anniversary Souvenir*

The 43rd Battalion's first turn during the Somme battles was in September 1916 when its men made a partially successful assault on the Zollern Redoubt. The Battalion suffered over 100 casualties and were forced to retire to their jumping off point when they came under a German counterattack. In early October they prepared for their attack on Regina Trench. An October 1916 article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* told readers what the Canadians faced at Regina Trench:

The German defenses had indeed been so organized that almost an air of mystery and of sinister hidden danger had come to be attached...[they] were known to be strongly built, with many deep dugouts and to be protected by heavy wire entanglements...The Germans appeared to spring from a concealed position immediately behind the line...Three times the Canadians had attacked this position near Courcelette. Each time they had successfully broken into the trenches and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, but each time the strong hostile counterattacks had driven them out again.

On 8 October, the 43rd, along with other battalions of the 9th Brigade assaulted Regina Trench. The assault failed as the artillery bombardment had not destroyed the thick coils of barbed wire protecting the trenches. The German defenders came out of their hidden bunkers and cut down the advancing Canadians. A few managed to fight their way into the trench but could not withstand the German counterattack which forced the survivors to retreat to their own lines. Major Charles Gordon, the chaplain of the 43rd, wrote in the *Cameron Highlanders of Canada 1909-1919*:

Regarding the details of the attack, as far as the 43rd Battalion, and indeed the 3rd Canadian Division...These catastrophes are no doubt inevitable in war; the Enemy's wire was on a reverse slope, observation was extremely difficult, and it was definitely reported to have been cut; but all this is poor consolation to the survivors of a battalion, who mourn their comrades, lying on the battlefield.

The 9th Brigade took almost 1000 casualties and the 43rd Battalion suffered over 360, only six of its officers and 67 other ranks were present at roll call the next morning. Among the dead were young Lance Corporal James Fargey and the Commanding Officer, Lieut. Col. R. M. Thomson, who was wounded and then hit by an artillery shell on the way to an aid station. The 43rd returned to the front line on 25 October to 30 October but, as the war diarist wrote, “ the situation was generally quiet”.



Both Lt.-Col R. M. Thomson and L/C James Fargey of Belmont, MB. died of wounds suffered on 8 October 1916.

The bloodied and depleted Canadian 1st, 2nd and 3rd Divisions left the Somme battlefield at the end of October, leaving the 4th Division to finally take Regina Trench. By the time the last Canadians left the Somme the divisions had suffered 24,000 casualties with 8,000 dead.

The Canadians took up positions near Vimy Ridge and prepared for their next great battle. December 1916 through March 1917 were relatively quiet for the 43rd Battalion and casualties were limited. The men trained, trained, and trained for the fight they knew was coming in

the spring. They practiced fighting in the new battle platoon formations that would become a mainstay in the Canadian Expeditionary Force; they raided enemy trenches to instil a fighting spirit; they worked on defending against enemy raids and they trained to attack in brigade formation “over the tapes,” which were exact models of the enemy trenches they planned to attack.

On 5 April, the Battalion launched a major trench raid to obtain information on enemy units, take prisoners and to destroy dugouts, trenches and supplies. After a sustained artillery barrage, three separate parties, supported by covering fire from Lewis guns and snipers, attacked different sections of enemy trenches. An unknown number of enemy were killed, and prisoners were taken to Battalion headquarters in the Grange Tunnel. The raiders suffered 26 casualties including 21-year-old Lieutenant Jack Eaton who was in charge of a covering party. Eaton left the safety of a shell hole to recover a Lewis gun and as he directed its fire, as the war diarist wrote, “The gallant boy exposed himself unnecessarily and was sniped through the head.” The 43rd Battalion was relieved on 8 April following its trench raid



Lieutenant John Eaton , Canadian Virtual War Memorial

The Battle of Vimy Ridge began on 9 April and continued until 12 April. The Battalion was prepared for immediate offensive operations if called upon. The battalions of the 9th Brigade soon relieved the 7th Brigade on the Ridge. Heavily laden with equipment, in horrible weather and over shell-torn ground, the 43rd took on the hard graft of consolidating captured ground and advancing divisional boundaries. They soon met organized German resistance and throughout April faced-off with enemy raiding parties. At the end of June, as part of larger operations, they sent fighting patrols forward and successfully took the enemy frontline and support trenches to establish a new line for the Battalion. The regular pattern of trench warfare was followed throughout the summer and in late August to September the 43rd took over trenches in the Lens front, after which it returned to the rear to prepare for the awaited attack on Sallaumines which was intended to drive the enemy from Lens.

However, in October 1917, before this attack could take place, Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie was forced to move his four Canadian divisions back to their old battleground in the Ypres salient where the 3rd Battle of Ypres was raging. After months of fighting, the exhausted Imperial and Dominion troops were stymied in the bloodstained mud of the Flanders' battlefield. The fall fighting season was coming to an end and the Canadians were tasked with winning a pyrrhic victory for Field Marshall Haig by taking Passchendaele Ridge. Sir Arthur Currie's plan involved sending his four division's battalions in several tightly scheduled leapfrogging attacks to take and hold strategic points before sending in his men for the final assault.

The 43rd and its sister battalions were tasked with taking a position called the Bellevue Spur. When the Battalion went into battle on 26 October, it had a trench strength of 21 officers and 511 other ranks. The 43rd gained and held its objective, all the while facing terrible weather conditions, relentless enemy counter attacks and the loss of half of its men and officers. They were close to losing the position when a wounded Lieutenant Robert Shankland, who had won a DCM for bravery in 1916, made his way back to headquarters to organize reinforcements and then went back to the line to support his men. For his "conspicuous bravery" he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

The officer who led the reinforcements, Captain Christopher O'Kelly, was originally from the 8th Canadians (90th Winnipeg Rifles) but now assigned to the 52nd Battalion, was also awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery and resourcefulness. Many other 43rd men were awarded

gallantry medals, including 33-year-old Military Medal (MM) winner William Dinnell from Moosejaw, Saskatchewan, who “rushed a pill box...which was inflicting heavy casualties amongst his comrades.” Neil McRae of Clandeboye, Manitoba, won a Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) for “exceptional coolness and resourcefulness while under fire.” The Battalion was relieved but returned to the Bellevue Spur area for a tour of duty in mid-November. By late November, when the Canadian divisions returned to their lines near the slopes of Vimy Ridge, the Battalion had suffered over 300 casualties.



Lt. R. Shankland VC DCM Neil McCrae DCM

After their last ditch March 1918 offensive to break the British lines failed, the German army lost a series of battles in spring and early summer of 1918. The British and French Commanders determined the time had come for their armies to launch a series of attacks to destroy the German army. The almost continuous battles, known as the Last 100 Days, began on 8 August and raged until the Armistice on 11 November. The four Canadian Divisions' battalions were battle-hardened, up to full strength, buttressed by conscripts, well-rested and trained to be the shock troops of the advance. They would be leaving

the relative safety of the trenches for open warfare which utilized combined arms fighting with coordinated artillery, air and tank support. The first of these attacks was planned to take place at Amiens, France, on 8 August 1918.

On the night of 7 August 1918, the 43rd moved off to its assembly area to attack Dodo Wood (also known as Rifle Wood) in the morning. According to the war diarist, “the whole attack was an operation which none but the most seasoned troops, particularly trained and skilled in manoeuvre could hope to undertake with any success, but in spite of the fog and smoke which occurred during the assault, the operation was successfully carried out.” The attack, the diarist continued, “was a splendid exhibition of Highland fury in assault and the kilts swept all before them”. The morale of the German High Command was badly shaken, and in its commander’s words, August 8 was the "black day of the German Army."

The attacking companies advanced in a thick fog and met stiff resistance from entrenched German machine guns and mortars but moved forward towards the objective while engaging in hand to hand fighting. At one point, one of the tanks assigned to the 43rd mistook “our men for the enemy and it opened up a hot fire on them and Lieutenant Hanson rushed up to the tank and by beating at the front persuaded its occupants that their fight was not with us but with the Hun.” There were many other acts of courage and initiative, including those of DCM winners Private Charles Gibson, and NCOs Thomas Kerr and Roland Merritt who organized and maneuvered their men forward in the dense fog

while under enemy machine gun and friendly fire. The Germans were firing their machine guns rapidly and a battery of 5.9 howitzers began firing at the attackers; however, the officers of A & D Company maneuvered their men into position to enfilade the battery with Lewis gun fire and captured it undamaged. The 43rd carried its objective on scheduled time, capturing four 5.9 guns, one 4.1-gun, 16 trench mortars, 35 machine guns, 3 bomb throwers and over 400 prisoners. The Battalion's losses were 195 casualties.



German 5.9 gun similar to that captured on 8 August 1918



Thomas Newman



Thomas Prichard



Harry Kaye



Donald MacLeay



Henry Taylor



William Menzies

Six from the 43rd killed 8 August 1918. They rest in Hourges Orchard Cemetery, Domart-Sur-La-Luce, along with 32 other 43rd Camerons killed that day, Canadian Virtual War Memorial

The Canadians left Amiens at the end of August to prepare for their next battles. They were tasked with breaking the German's heavily fortified Hindenburg Line which was made up of multiple daunting trench systems. In early September, the defensive line known as the Drocourt- Queant Line (D-Q-) was taken.

On 27 September, the 9th Brigade was given its task in the offensive. They were to cross the Canal du Nord to open the way to the city of Cambrai which was a vital German transportation link. In what would be its final offensive push of the war, the 43rd was assigned to take a set of villages, cut through the defensive Macroing Line and hold a two-mile front. The 43rd went into battle with a trench strength of 23 officers and 634 other ranks. To reach its jumping off point it had to cross 6000 yards of unknown territory.

They faced little resistance in taking the villages, "The Germans it seemed," wrote the war diarist, "were bent on getting away and our men

could not keep up to them.” They continued their advance until the companies came across uncut wire and faced devastating machine-gun fire from the Macroing Line. The War Diary’s narrative of the battle stated that there were too many new recruits who, “exhibited courage in action but with their officers wounded, they lacked the individual initiative which allowed companies to remain cohesive in battle.” The troops held their ground and reorganized with the supporting battalions, but little progress was made as machine-gun fire was too strong. By the time the battalion was relieved on the night of 1 October, it had suffered 382 casualties. After the Allied armies crossed the Canal du Nord, the city of Cambrai was taken on 9 October and the German army was in full retreat.

Throughout October, the 43rd continued to pursue the remnants of the German army through towns where “they received a hearty reception from the inhabitants.” These operations were not without danger, on the night of 23 October the acting Commanding Officer Major W. Taylor was killed during a patrol and two others were wounded. On 11 November the 43rd was in the French city of Mons for the Armistice.



43rd Battalion march past saluting Lieut.-General Sir Arthur Curry and an early incarnation of my cute dog *Karmie*. Mons following the Armistice of 11 November 1918. Library & Archives Canada

The 43rd (Cameron Highlanders of Canada) arrived back in Winnipeg on Monday 22 March 1919. They had sailed across the Atlantic on the White Star Liner *Baltic*, landed at Halifax on 19 March and quickly entrained for Winnipeg. On 21 March, the *Winnipeg Tribune* published the names of the returning men, so families knew if a loved one was on the train speeding toward home.

The 43rd was the first Winnipeg battalion to return from the battlefields and the city had prepared a joyous celebration for their arrival. Mayor Gray had asked all businesses to close for a half- holiday on Monday and all civic and government offices were shuttered. The city was decorated with flags, bunting and banners from Higgins Avenue down Main Street and from Portage Avenue to Sherbrooke Street. The cold weather and steady rain did little to dampen the city's spirit. Thousands

of citizens crowded the sidewalks and a parade of 4000 veterans of the South African War, along with returned injured soldiers, were ready to march with the Battalion. The *Winnipeg Tribune* reported:

Whistles shrieked, bells jangled, and thousands cheered when Winnipeg's troops came home. With buttons and insignia glistening, clad in tartan kilts, and wearing full trench equipment, including steel grey helmets and the rifles they used at the front, the 43rd Cameron Highlanders swung down Main Street behind their picturesque pipe band with all Winnipeg pushing and crowding for points of vantage along the sidewalks, waved flags and shouted, "Welcome home!"

However, in the words of one Cameron wag who joked, but clearly looked towards his civilian life with some anxiety, "What are we going to do when we get into trousers? It won't feel right to not have bare knees." It is known that some members of highland regiments burned their kilts when they returned to Canada but there are no reports of this happening in the 43rd (Cameron Highlanders of Canada).



Homecoming 43rd Battalion, Rob Mc Inness Post Card Collection, Winnipeg Public Library



Battle flags with regimental Battle Honours, Cameron Chapel, 1st Presbyterian Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba. (Martha Mcleod 2021)

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Correspondence of Charles W. Gordon, University of Manitoba Archives

The Great War, The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada

Letters and images of James Henderson Fargey, canadianletters.ca

Past Forward-Winnipeg's Digital Public Digital History, Winnipeg Public Library

Selected articles, *Winnipeg Free Press*, 1914-1919

Selected articles, *Winnipeg Tribune*, 1914-1919

Stories from the 43rd Battalion
(Cameron Highlanders of Canada)



43rd Battalion kit

Courtesy Manitoba WW1 Museum

Jim Cameron, A Persistent Postman



First World War mailbox with letters, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

It took 22 years for delivery of a letter addressed to 43rd Battalion machine gunner Duncan McKenzie, postmarked October 1917. McKenzie received his letter in November 1939, after it had been carried for that long lapse of years by Jim Cameron, a comrade at Passchendaele.

Machine gunner Jim Cameron was handed the letter on 25 October 1917 and told to give it to McKenzie. It was from his sister Bella McKenzie who lived in Callander, Scotland. However, Mackenzie had gone up the line and Cameron decided to give him the letter the next day.

At 5:30 a.m. on 26 October the 43rd Battalion went over the top at Passchendaele and Cameron was wounded without having delivered the letter. When he woke up in hospital some days later, he still had the letter. Unable to contact Mackenzie, he carried the letter with him when he was shipped back to Canada in 1917. Through the ensuing years Jim tried from time to time to locate McKenzie, but he was not able to do so until a month after another war had started.

Jim, who was a school principal in Grandview, Manitoba, wrote to a Duncan McKenzie in Rorketon, Manitoba, and asked if he was the man who should have received the letter that morning before the Passchendaele engagement. Receiving an affirmative reply, Jim Cameron mailed the precious letter enclosed in a registered envelope to make sure of its final delivery.

Source:

Jim Cameron, Rutherford History, Agnes and Andrew Rutherford and Their Descendants, 1880 to 1982, by Agnes L. Floren

Jim Fargey: “I Promise Mom, No Smokin’ No Drinkin’

The Fargey family came to Canada in the wake of the 1840s Irish potato famine. Mr. Fargey had died in Ireland and his widowed wife immigrated to Canada with eight of her 10 children and lived with relatives in southern Ontario. In the 1870s, the mother and four sons moved to Manitoba to take up farming in the south-west corner of the new province. In 1890, two sons, Samuel and William, established a lumberyard in the newly incorporated town of Belmont and Samuel married Jemima Sparks, the daughter of the Belmont hardware store owner. Samuel and Jemima’s family prospered, and they had four children: Frank, James, Aileen and Cecil. James was born in 1897, attended school in Belmont and in 1914 attained his Grade 10 Certificate.



Fargey family c 1914-1915, left to right: Frank, Jemima, Aileen, Samuel, James, Cecil (in front) Nd. Canadian Letters

James attested with the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force on 22 July 1915 in Winnipeg, gave his trade as farmer and stated that he was an active member of the 79th Cameron Highlanders of Canada. The medical examiner stated that James appeared to be 18 yrs. and 4 months old , was 6 ft. in height, green eyed, brown haired and fit for military service.

Having a Grade 10 Certificate meant he had more education than most members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force and James was a dedicated letter writer. In his two years service in the army, he sent nearly 100 cards and letters home. Being a farm boy, he asked his father and brother questions on how the crops were growing on the family farm, took a great interest in grain and animal prices and of course the weather. He often commented on the French and Belgium farms, the tools the farmers used and the differences he noticed in weather and climate.

James and his family were staunch Presbyterians and supporters of the temperance movement. James likely signed a “temperance pledge” as there is a note from the “Royal Templers for Temperance” in the Fargey collection asking him to remain firm in his commitment to temperance. He thanked his mother for the bible chapters she sent, telling her that he read his bible nightly, attended church services willingly, praised the character and sermons of the Battalion’s chaplains and never had a bad word to say about anyone. However, if he thought the men in his battalion were being treated poorly by their officers or that army regulations were unjust, he would voice his opinion and stand up for the men.

In his first letters home, dated August 1915, while training in Winnipeg, he thanked his little sister for the box of cookies, complained about the “rank” food they were being fed and that their officers were not likely to do anything about the men’s complaints. However, not all young soldiers shared this opinion. Duncan Munro, a Saskatchewan farm boy, commented in a letter home that, “There certainly is some class grub here. The menu tonight was macaroni, bread and butter and a few buns and an occasional dish-o-jam, of course a person can go to the canteen and pretty near buy anything you want.”

By mid-September, the 79th had over 500 recruits with more coming. Along with some of his Belmont friends, James was picked for an active service draft which left Winnipeg in early October. On October 8, they boarded ship to cross the Atlantic. He wrote that almost all the boys had been a bit seasick but over all it was not a bad trip. In a 15 October Thanksgiving Day letter to his mother, a home sick James wrote, “ I thought a lot on home on Sunday and Monday and I guess you thought a lot of me, and we certainly need all your prayers now and when we get to camp.”

On 22 October they arrived at Bramshott Camp, “a large camp with room for lots more soldiers”. The weather was rainy, but the camp was adequately fixed up and James didn’t notice the rain and mud too much and, soon, got used to it. However, as a hungry young man and a cash-poor soldier, he regularly complained about the cost of food and that soldiers were charged more than locals,

When we came over to England, I thought things would be cheaper but meals which we get downtown are dearer than they were at Winnipeg....At Folkestone last week I went into a restaurant to have supper. I had eggs on toast, bread, butter and tea. When I was thro it cost me a shilling and I never had half enough to eat.



Winnipeg Tribune 25 August 1915



James Fargey c. 1915

On their first leave in November, James and his mates had their first opportunity to wear their new kilts. In a letter to his brother Frank, James reflected on the pluses and minuses of wearing a kilt,

I have just been home a week from my leave. We certainly had a fine time in Leeds. The kilts are the dress for getting the Janes to look at you on the street. They weren't very cold with a pair of underpants on; but the worst trouble is that you have to wash your knees too often. I had my picture taken in Leeds, but they are a little dark and don't show up the knees very well.

In January 1916, the word began to spread that the battalion would soon be going to France and James, a proud young soldier, thought that they were ready. James and his mates didn't go into the trenches until mid-March 1916. His letters had reported that they were only three to four miles from the firing line and "the big guns are booming very plentiful." He doesn't mention that the first 43rd's soldiers were killed by machine gun fire on March 31st. The Battalion had been billeted in barns and tents and although it had been raining a lot, they were quite comfortable. Naturally, he complains about the price of eatables which are "very dear in France here and about all you can get are eggs and chops." However, most other Canadian soldiers were happy to get along with some "vin rouge" or "vin blanc".

James stirred up a hornet's nest in March, when he informed his mother that he had taken up smoking a pipe. Canadian soldiers smoked for many reasons: to mask the horrid smell of the trenches, to keep away flies, to calm nerves or simply to pass the time. James, knowing that temperance persons abhorred tobacco almost as much as liquor, nervously wrote to his mother:

Well Mother, I have some news to tell you. You mightn't be pleased at first, but I think you will consider it. I have started to smoke. Not smoking steady but take a pipeful of tobacco occasionally. It gets so lonesome sometimes in the tent that it helps to pass the time away. I don't smoke very much but I considered it before I started, and I thought that you wouldn't mind it considering the circumstances. Well Mother, I thought I would tell you because I didn't want to keep anything back.

To placate her, he ends the letter by telling her that he and a Winnipeg chum read a chapter from their Bibles every night by candlelight. The issue is resolved when he writes in a 13 April letter that, after reading her last letter:

I feel very sorry that I had started smoking when I got your letter tonight. I really hadn't thought it seriously enough when I started or else I should never have started. I do not smoke very much, and it will not be a very hard job for me to quit and from now on I am going to quit. I feel very sorry that I caused my loved ones at home so much worry, but I didn't think when I started.

He answers his mother's questions on his well-being. No, he doesn't need more pairs of drawers as the weather is warming up; he doesn't need underwear as they have "a bath and a change of underwear about every two weeks and I really couldn't carry any more in my pack"; he doesn't need kneecap warmers as they don't wear kilts in the trenches (James tells a little lie here as Highland regiments do wear their kilts in the trenches. Would he have been embarrassed to get "knee warmers"?); don't send a blanket as they are too cumbersome and heavy, but a piece of soap would be nice, candles, writing paper and pencils are always in short supply. Later, James reconsiders the underwear issue, as other soldiers need pairs and he would give his extras to them. Food parcels are welcome as

When in the trenches we get dry tea and sugar and sometimes now bacon, so we have to do our own cooking. All we do is make tea, bread,

and sometimes cold meat...but we make up for it when the parcels come around and when we come back to camp.

Things changed for James when spring turned into summer as the 3rd Canadian Division and the 43rd Battalion faced its first major action during the Battle of Mount Sorrel (Sanctuary Wood) 2-13 June where the 43rd took over 190 casualties. In a 17 June letter he wrote:

My Dear Mother,

I guess you have been very anxious about me since we've have been having quite a time these last two weeks, but I came thro it safe. You have been hearing all accounts of it. The Germans took some trenches off the Canadians alright and held them for ten days and then the Canadians took them back. Our battalion was not in the charge but were in the supports and so never had quite so many casualties as the other battalions had. It has been raining the last week we were in the trenches and they were in frightful conditions, but we are back in camp now having a rest and we certainly needed it. Now Mother don't worry too much about me, I had quite a few narrow escapes and I am in fine health and a good rest for a few days will fix us up fine. With lots of love to all.

Jim

He kept up his regular correspondence through July and August and appraised the family on life in the Ypres salient trenches, "With all the rain the trenches", he wrote, "we're half full of water and mud and large working parties are struggling to drain them." Over 450 men were

assigned to nightly working parties and there was always danger from enemy snipers. However, on a positive note , he writes,

I feel good myself. I never had better health. We have been out here nearly five months now and I never have gone sick a day. It's been just a year since I enlisted and have five months on active service. I can answer you that I am trying to do my share and praying to God that the war will be over soon and that we may all be together soon.

He heard that his friend Jim Porter was wounded, writing that,“ I was talking to him about two days before and the battalion he was in was nearly wiped out, but they held the line.” And, it was too bad that Jack Wigham had been killed and that Jeremy McDeeks had seen the grave in Ypres. But he has seen his friends Mac Wood, Leslie Smith, Arnold Cole, Jack Nicholson and Jack Lovett. They were all doing fine.

The war dragged on in August with no great news to report, excepting that the British had been making headway on the Somme and he hoped victory there would shorten the war. Because of censorship, he wasn't able to mention in his letters that three Canadian divisions were moving from the Ypres salient to the Somme battlefields and would enter the fight on 15 September 1916. The 43rd went into action in late September attacking and partially taking a German trench but were forced to return to their jumping off point after an enemy counterattack. On 8 October, the 43rd Battalion took their turn attacking a heavily fortified and defended German trench system known as Regina Trench. The attack failed and the Battalion suffered over 400 casualties, including Jim Fargey. On 13 October, he wrote from the Canadian Military Hospital

in Etaples, France, “I am under the best of treatment and there is no danger at all... It is nice to be lying in a white bed and being fed the best of food.”

His medical card revealed James’s true condition. He had a gun shot wound to the thigh and was severely ill. James Fargey died on 15 October 1916 and the family received the official telegram on 18 October 1916. A hospital chaplain sent a letter to Mrs. Fargey saying:

He talked so much about home, and how you have brought him up in the love of Christ and of which was proper and good. He said it was that what had kept him fine and strong & safe from the many temptations of army life. Before I left, he asked me to read him a passage of Scripture & on my taking out my own testament he begged me to read it from the Bible his mother had given him which he said he never failed to read day by day.

James Fargey was not the only young Belmont man to give up his life fighting in Canada’s battalions. Each of the families would have received a telegraph from the Canadian Government, eventually their son’s personal effects would arrive home, a letter thanking the family for their son’s service and sometimes a picture of the grave site from Graves Registration. Later, in 1921-1922, the mother or wife received a Memorial Cross with a purple ribbon and a scroll and the medals he had earned were sent to the family.

Belmont World War 1 Roll of Honour

John Wigham died at Mount Sorrel on 6 June 1916.

Albert Chambers died at Regina Trench (The Somme) on 8 October 1916.

James Fargey died at Regina Trench (The Somme) on 8 October 1916.

Robert Owen died at Vimy Ridge on 9 April 1917.

Charles Martin died at Vimy Ridge on 9 April 1917.

David Mathews died at Passchendaele on 16 October 1917.

John Whatmore died 7 November 1917 from wounds received at Passchendaele on 16 October 1917.

Ernest Maloney died at Amiens on 8 August 1918.

Grover Vrooman died at Amiens on 15 August 1918.

Bert Smillie died during the attack on the Drocourt Queant Line/
Canal Du Nord on 29 September 1918.

Earl Cline and Roy Kerr died of illness while in Canada.

Director of Graves Registration & Enquiries.

Begs to forward as requested a Photograph of
the Grave of:—

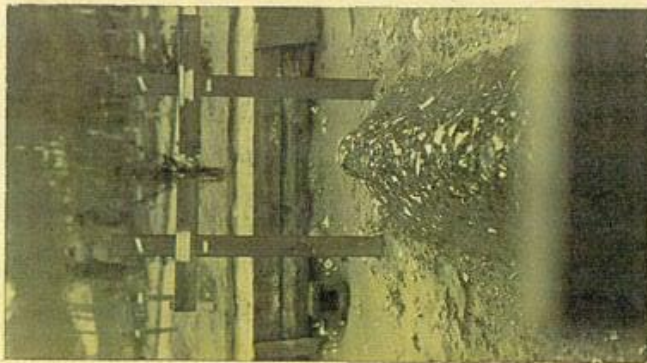
Name *Fargey*

Rank and Initials *PLI J*

Regiment *43/Canadian Infantry*

Position of Grave *Etaples Military Cemetery*

Nearest Railway Station *Etaples*



All communications respecting this Photograph should quote
the number (*22/424*) and be addressed to:—

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Grave registration card sent to Mr. and Mrs. S. Fargey

Sources:

Belmont News, 1916

James Fargey, Canadian Letters, World War 1 Collection,
www.canadianletters.ca

James Fargey, Personnel Files of the First World War, Library &
Archives Canada

The Path of the Pioneers, Belmont and District, Belmont Historical
Society, 1989

THANKSGIVING SERVICE



*This was given to
us at the service when
we came out of the line*

CANADIAN CORPS



VIMY RIDGE

(APRIL 9th 1917)



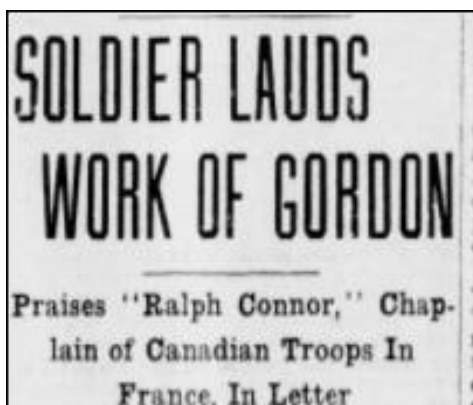
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“This was given to us at the service when we came out of the line”. *Service given by Canon Frederick Scott. Pte Thomas Caunt Collection.*

Chaplin Charles W. Gordon: “Death is Walking At Our Side By Day And By Night”



Charles W. Gordon



“Soldier Lauds Work of Gordon,” *Winnipeg Free Press* 4 October 1916

A letter written to Reverend D. McIver of Knox Church, Souris, Manitoba, from Corporal J.T. Parie of Souris.

I wish to tell you that I had quite a chat with your friend Doctor Gordon a few Sundays ago, and I desire to say that Major Gordon is the soldiers friend and a hero. Sick, wounded and even dying have nothing but the highest praise of him. His name should live as long as the name of Canada lives. That God may spare him to carry on his hazardous duty he is now performing is the soldiers earnest wish.

Reverend Charles W. Gordon was a minister at Winnipeg's St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church and wrote popular novels under the name of Ralph Conner. He volunteered to be Chaplain of the 43rd Battalion which was commanded by his close friend Lieut.-Col. R.M. Thomson.

Chaplain Gordon believed it was his duty to be with the soldiers and experience their suffering. Gordon's belief that the chaplain should be in the trenches and minister to the ordinary soldier was common in the Chaplains' Service. Gordon's superior, Major Arthur Woods, Senior Chaplain of the 3rd Division, wrote that his problem was not getting his chaplain's into the trenches but was keeping them out of dangerous situations. In a 1974 letter to the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, one 8th Battalion soldier recalled meeting Chaplain Frederick Scott, Senior Chaplain of the 1st Canadian Division, in the trenches near Lens. He told the Chaplain to be careful because of the heavy shelling, Scott replied, "I'm no dug-out man. I must be with my boys." Frank Iriam also wrote of seeing Scott during the battle of Passchendaele,

It was up there that I saw Canon Scott at his work. You could see his long spare figure moving about heedless of the sweep of bullets or shrapnel. When he found one of our boys wounded and dying in a shell hole, he would read to him from his Bible and then hold his poor clammy cold wet hands trying to ease and help him in his last agony, as he passed on down into the shadows. Scott even tried to cover up the poor shattered remains of what had yesterday been youth, strength and fire, endeavoring to leave a mark for the poor grave.

In his letter dated 8 May 1916, Chaplin Gordon is writing to Mrs. Margaret McWilliams, an influential leader in Winnipeg's women's political scene and wife of lawyer R.F. McWilliams. In it he describes a soldier's life in the trenches. At the time of the writing, a major battle has just been fought in the St. Eloi Craters (3-6 April 1916) where many Winnipeg men were killed. The enemy is becoming more aggressive and Gordon's Battalion is under artillery shelling and machine gun strafing day and night. Adding to the danger, active enemy snipers are on the lookout for unwary or careless soldiers.

Belgium Somewhere

8-May-1916

My Dear Mrs. McWilliams

...I don't want you to say anything to anybody about what I write you, for I would not like my dear, dear wife to know. She does not imagine that I am right in the midst of the thick of it--in the front trenches everyday with our men...If I am called to the final halt, if it is to come

here in the mud, that she should bear the agony and fear before the event...

The choice came to me when we first moved up into the front line. It is quite the proper thing for the chaplain to remain at the dressing station and do the necessary and splendid work of tending the wounded and burying the dead, but somehow when I saw our boys go up into the front trench and the young officers, Young and Creighton, and the other kids in the ranks. I could not see it my duty to stay back. The brigadier took me up for it- but I think I showed him my viewpoint- while the dying and the dead are the chaplain's, surely, he has more to do with the living. Anyway, it has been to me a satisfaction to have received the welcome and thanks from the officers and men and stand beside them when the big H.E. shells are hurling death all around. And it is quite touching to see their care of me, "Stoop down there sir, there's a sniper that has that marked", and soon enough he had, for he got one of them a few minutes after. And it is worthwhile to hear the officers rail at me for coming up, "What the devil are you doing here", but they smile when they say it and that smile makes it worthwhile to get the dust knocked up into your face by a whiz-bang as I have more than once.

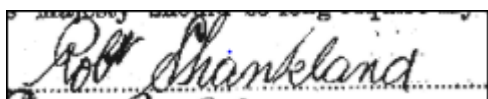
Now why have I got on this strain with you? I feel almost as if I am blowing a bit, but I am not. I am leaving humble testimony to the splendid heart and courage and cheer of our men and a very humble testimony to the wonderful goodness of God to me... I remember the first time I saw a wounded man- his head pierced with a bullet and his face and neck covered with blood and a great bloody mass on his chest. I

helped to carry him down the trench. I was really surprised for I was afraid the blood was going to be too much for me--now that is due solely to the goodness of God our Father. Night before last a shell blew the roof off my billet and filled the room with smoke and debris. Death is walking at our side by day and by night, but He keeps me in his peace. Not long ago I had to bury these men. It was of course at night in a little cemetery behind the trenches, exposed to the sweep of machine gun fire and of course to shell and sniper. In the middle of my prayer the machine gun was turned on us. The boys hugged the dirt and one of them reaching up dragging me down. When a man feels he is at his work doing his duty he sometimes doesn't think so much of the shells. But don't you imagine I don't duck or take to cover or eat dirt when I hear the shell whine. You ought to see me. The work is satisfying--a great privilege I think it-- and the boys are grateful.

Charles W. Gordon, Correspondence, University of Manitoba Archives

“Soldier Lauds Work of Gordon,” *Winnipeg Free Press* 4 October 1916

Robert Shankland DCM VC



Robert “Bobby” Shankland was born on 10 October 1887 at Ayr, Scotland, to William and Jane (McCricrick) Shankland. Robert did well in school and won several academic awards. He was a member of the Ayr Battalion of the Boy’s Brigade which, like the Boy Scouts, emphasized military training and Christian values. After finishing school, he worked as a clerk in a number of Ayr businesses. In 1911, he emigrated to Canada and was employed with the Crescent Creamery Company in Winnipeg’s west end .



R. Shankland’s home at 6 Gordon Terrace and the Russell Street School, ayr, Scotland c. 1905

Shankland attested on 18 December 1914. He was 27 years old, was 5’ 4½” tall and described as having a sallow complexion, grey eyes and

dark hair. He gave his address as 68 Church St., was single, employed as a clerk and identified that he had militia service with the 79th Cameron Highlanders of Canada. On 21 December 1914, the Medical Officer declared him fit for overseas service.

The 43rd Battalion (Cameron Highlanders of Canada) arrived in England in late May 1915 and, on 15 October 1915, Shankland was promoted to Company Sergeant Major. The Battalion went into the trenches in February 1916 and saw only minor action in March, April and May. The Battalion's first major action was during the Battle of Mount Sorrel (Sanctuary Wood) in June 1916. During the battle, Robert Shankland won the DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal) for braving heavy shell fire and attempting to rescue wounded and buried men trapped in No Man's Land. His DCM citation reads:

For conspicuous gallantry in volunteering to lead a party of stretcher bearers under heavy shell fire and bring back some wounded and partially buried men. His courage and devotion were most marked.

On 31 December 1916, Shankland was promoted to Lieutenant. He fought with his battalion through the Battles of the Somme and Vimy Ridge. In October 1917, the Canadian divisions were sent back to the Ypres salient to fight in the Battle of Passchendaele. On 26 October, the battalion was ordered to attack a position known as the Bellevue Spur. It gained and held its objective while facing terrible weather conditions, relentless enemy counter attacks and the loss of half of its men and officers. They were close to losing the position when Shankland,

although wounded, made his way back to headquarters to organize reinforcements and then went back to the line to support his men. After an interview with Major General Sir Arthur Curry, he was awarded the Victoria Cross for the “most conspicuous bravery and resource in action under critical and adverse conditions.”

A shy and modest man, Shankland did not tell his parents that he had won the DCM when he went on leave in January 1917. They only learned of that award and his Victoria Cross when told by a newspaper reporter. Shankland returned to Winnipeg after the war and moved to Vancouver in 1937. He died at Vancouver on 20 January 1968.

Sources:

Government of Canada

Robert Shankland, Personnel Records of the First World War

War Diaries of the 43rd Canadian Infantry Battalion

Other

First World War VC Winner Dies, *Vancouver Sun*, 22 January 1968

Robert Shankland, Scotland’s War, www.scotlandswar.co.uk

“Shankland 3rd Winnipeg Man to Win Victoria Cross,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, 21 December 1917

“Tartan Clad Warriors Have Great Record of Service in France,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, 22 March 1919.

Guy Smith: “My Silly Old Heart Ticking All Wrong”



Guy Edmund Smith was born at Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, England, and emigrated to Canada in 1908. He was 22 years old, living in St. James, Manitoba, and working as a painter when he attested on 13 July 1915. Smith was sent to Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Epsom, England, and was diagnosed with “shell shock” (neurasthenia) originating when he was “blown up” at Vimy 21 May 1917. He was invalided to Canada 26 June 1918 and received a medical discharge. In Smith’s service record there is a reference to DAH which means *Disorderly Action of the Heart*, sometimes called “effort syndrome” or “soldier’s heart”. Often the result of stress or fatigue, it “does not imply there was any organic disease.” Thousands of Canadian soldiers were diagnosed with DAH. The afflicted were either declared medically unfit or put on less stressful duties.

June 1st 1917

Dear Old Dick

I guess by this time you have no doubt given me up as hopeless, like the bad coin, here we are again. So, let this show that I do not forget you, although I am so often too confounded lately to write. Now I have confessed, please accept my most humble apologies. Well, you see Fritz has not managed to get me yet, though he came so close to doing so a little while back as to kind of upset my apple cart and set my silly old heart ticking all wrong. One of his big crumps did it. My position was too near where the blessed thing fell. With my usual good fortune, I

escaped with a severe shaking up, though I am sorry to say three of our poor fellows were killed, two of my gun crew, and one from another who was talking to us at the time. It happened on the Ridge. I seemed to quickly recover from the shock and was able to finish that trip, a matter of eight days, and another trip after that before this heart trouble got me down. I suppose it is a sort of after effect. The moral I learned from this experience is to dodge them with a bigger margin next time. Well, to get on with my tale of woe, I was sent down the line and finally ended in this convalescent hospital at Boulogne, that was a fortnight ago. I believe I am feeling a little better... There is a lot of fellows have heart cases. The M.O. a specialist in that line hopes to set us right again...

I suppose you will have heard that Rod Ballantyne was killed on the Ridge... Guess you've seen by the papers what we have been doing. All I will say is that we had a hot time. But I would not have missed it for anything. It was terribly grand, the sight of a lifetime. That is not to say that I am anxious to participate in anymore, but, if necessary, I am still willing... Well old pal, guess I must quit, the tea call has gone, and I am hungry.

*The best of good wishes to you, from Your old Chum,
Guy*

Source: Guy Smith, 43rd Infantry Battalion,
<https://militaryandfamilyhistory.blog>

**Remembering the 44th (Manitoba) Battalion
4th Canadian Division**



Ed Russenholt, Sanford, Manitoba

Ed Russenholt

Within three months of the start of the Great War, the Canadian Government approved the creation of two new contingents to supplement troops already training in England. The 44th Manitoba Battalion was raised as part of the Third Contingent on 7 November 1914. The new Battalion took men from the 90th Battalion Winnipeg Rifles, the 100th Battalion Winnipeg Grenadiers and the 106th Battalion Winnipeg Light Infantry

The 44th (Manitoba), a part of the 4th Canadian Division, faced its first major combat on 25 October 1916 when they attacked Regina Trench during the Battle of the Somme. However, many other operations seared the hearts and minds of the men who served in the 44th, most notably, the attacks on La Coulotte and “The Triangle” in May-June 1917, and the disastrous, ill-conceived attack on the Green Crassier during the Battle of Hill 70 (Lens) in August 1917.

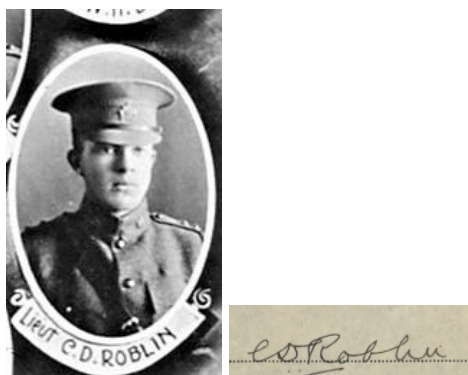
It was not all defeats. Celebrated victories secured the 44th's place in the annals of Canadian military history. On 10 April 1917, together with other battalions of the 10th Brigade, 4th Canadian Division, the 44th took Hill 145 where the Canadian National Vimy Memorial stands today, and on 12 April 1917, the depleted Battalion, fought along side the 46th (South Saskatchewan) and 50th (Calgary) Battalions, to conquer the allegedly unassailable “Pimple” and brought the Battle of Vimy Ridge to an end.

The 44th joined the other Canadian battalions during the horrors of Passchendaele in October 1917. In August 1918, they headed to Amiens and during the Last 100 Days battles helped break the

Hindenburg Line at Droquet-Queant, the Canal du Nord and Cambrai before going on to Valenciennes. They took crushing casualties but fought on until victory was assured.

In 1914, the new Battalion was given the nickname *The Athletic 44th* by Winnipeg newspapers, as it sought out men from Winnipeg's hockey, lacrosse and football teams and tennis and rowing clubs. The athletic "pals" were promised that if they joined up with teammates they would be kept in the same company. Some of the city's prominent young sportsmen, including Charles Belcher, Francis Caldwell, Lesley Moffatt, Harold "Corky" Fowler, Raymond Fowler and Charles "Chuck" Stewart attested and became some of the Battalion's first officers, who, as the war went on, earned promotions, were awarded gallantry medals, were wounded, and some were killed.

The Battalion's first officers, like those who had joined Winnipeg's other battalions in 1914, were well-educated members of Winnipeg's professional class: businessmen, merchants, real-estate agents, accountants, bankers, engineers or lawyers and had militia experience. One 44th officer, 22-year-old Lieutenant Charles Dufferin Roblin, was the son of Manitoba's Premier Sir Rodmon Roblin. Young Roblin was severely wounded at Passchendaele and sent home as medically unfit.



Officers of the 44th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, Winnipeg 1915 (Detail), 44th Battalion Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

Early in the war, Manitoba men were eager to enlist, and the Battalion quickly reached its 1200 man complement. There were many reasons why a man might choose to enlist: he believed in the Empire and the rightness of its cause, he wanted to get away from the tedium of the farm or escape the drudgery of the factory floor, he may have been unemployed, social pressures or it was done on a whim.

On 15 June 1915, the 44th set off for Camp Sewell to begin training. Camp Sewell was near the farming town of Carberry, Manitoba. From 1909 to 1914, militia units from Manitoba, Saskatchewan and North-Western Ontario had carried out their summer training on the 420 hectares of grassland. Indeed, Manitoba militia units were doing their summer training at Camp Sewell when war was declared on 4 August 1914. During the war, Camp Sewell's population of 38,000 made it the third largest population centre in the prairie provinces. The camp

was renamed Camp Hughes in 1915 to honour Canada's Minister of Militia and Defense, Major-General Sir Sam Hughes.



Training at Camp Sewell, 44th Battalion Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

Today, Camp Hughes looks much like it would have in 1915: barren rolling prairie, spindly poplars and a few cows grazing on the tough grass growing in the sandy soil. In the Battalion history, *6000 Canadian Men*, Edgar (Ed) Russenholt gave his first impression of Camp Hughes. “Crowding off the trains the men look over a tumble of sand-hills clothed with sparse brown grass and ground cedar. Bluffs of discouraged poplars dot the rolling plains; while here and there scrub oaks and evergreens struggle up to the crest of the sand ridges.” Camp Hughes was a windy, dusty place, and soldiers complained that the sand seeped into their eyes, food and beds and, so it was claimed, that the average man ate a “pound of dirt a day”.

Others complained about the summer's scorching heat and the mosquitoes. Prairie thunderstorms often came through the Carberry Plains and soldiers' letters and photographs reveal that storms roared through the camp causing flooding and general mayhem in the summer of 1916.

The 44th began five months of training and, according to Regimental Sergeant-Major James Barclay, "it was a great adventure sleeping in tents with all my pals." The 15 July 1915 *Winnipeg Free Press* reported that over 8000 men were needed in Saskatchewan to get the bumper grain crop off the land before fall frosts destroyed it. Young soldiers, whether farmers' sons or Winnipeg boys like James Barclay, were given time off from training to help during harvest season.

The men worked and trained hard, gained weight and soon pale, scrawny recruits became hard and healthy soldiers. Every morning there was a mile run, a run which soon became a two-mile run. There were also long marches to increase stamina and discipline, both of which, as the men would learn, were vital on the front. Bandsman Duncan Munro wrote that the band played for the Battalion's 15-mile route marches in the blistering heat of the prairie summer. During the day, the men practiced bayonet fighting, rifle firing on the ranges and how to maneuver in platoon, company and battalion formations.

In a June 1915 letter to his sister, Ed Russenholt described one Saturday's inspection by the camp commandant. This letter from

Camp Sewell portrays youthful innocence, enthusiasm and exuberance at playing war:

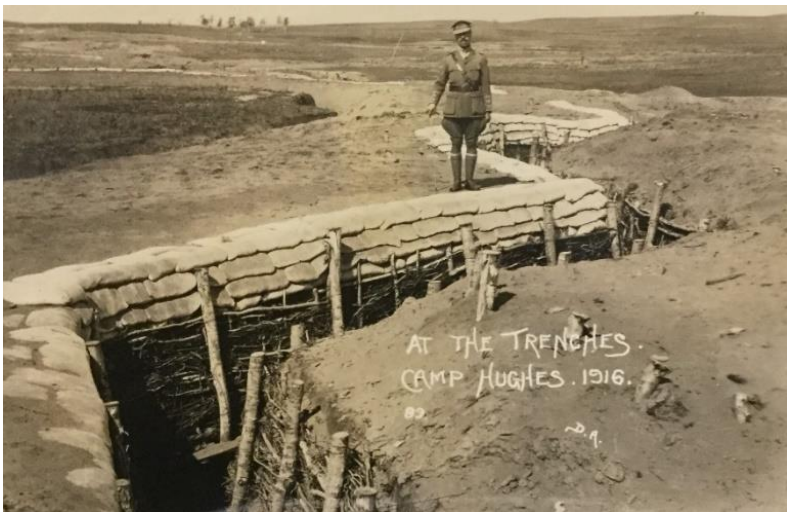
I wish you could have been here to see all the different battalions and squadrons marching in and out of their lines, each to the blare of brass bands, each to the screech of bagpipes, call of bugles and roll of drums over the hills to a level plain north of the railway. The cavalry and the artillery were there before us and when it started to rain, and we turned for home the batteries came hammering past one after another at the gallop. No wonder men lose their nerves and often their minds in the roar of battle. When you see over 8000 boys here on the move you can form some idea of what a battle between millions must be...

A further realization of what a battle really is and how men conduct themselves resulted from our two days' sham battles... [Our companies] attacked a position where [Companies] C & D were strongly entrenched on the hills. Today the attack was carried out under a driving rain.... But we forgot it was raining when we were able to creep up to within 25 yards of the defenders' trenches & blaze away some of our blank shells. We were all gloriously well & good when we reached home about 7 p.m.

Sincerely Edgar

Camp Sewell had a 10 kilometer trench system modeled on trenches found on the Western Front in 1915: fire (front-line) trench, support (second-line) trench and communication trenches. The recruits moved forward, up the communications trenches to the support and

fire trench and trained in the daily routine of trench warfare: establishing listening posts, setting sentries, eating meals, cleaning equipment and practicing frontal assaults across no man's land into the enemy trenches. Because the area's sandy soil caused the "trenches to cave in at the slightest provocation", repairing the trenches was a regular job, wrote Boissevain's Private James Bowes to his mother in June 1916.



At The Trenches, Camp Hughes, 1916. Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives



View of Camp Sewell/Hughes' trenches, Manitoba Historical Society, 2015



44th Battalion at Camp Sewell 1915, 44th Battalion Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

As the winter of 1915 approached, leaves were cancelled and on 18 October 1915 the 37 officers and 1097 other ranks boarded trains and headed east to Winnipeg. Russenholt wrote that “on reaching

Winnipeg, hometown to nine-tenths of the men...Crowds throng the station. In that sea of faces are friends, families, wives, mothers; spectators cheer, soldiers thunderingly reply, a mad rush of greeting—then stillness. Amid the surging crowd and the confused roar of casual greeting and badinage, loved ones say goodbye.” In his memoir, James Barclay remembered that there was great excitement in Winnipeg that day and he was lucky enough to see his parents. It was the last chance for many as over 1300 of the 6000 men who passed through the ranks of the 44th Battalion were killed in action or died of wounds.

The long train ride to Halifax was uneventful. The Battalion boarded the transport ship *Laplant* and, other than some cases of seasickness, the Battalion made the 10 day Atlantic crossing safely. The 44th was stationed in Bramshott, one of the three training camps for Canadian troops in England. The Battalion’s British NCOs shocked the 44th’s men by declaring, “Forget everything you were ever told in Canada.” The changing realities of trench warfare demanded new training methods, weapons and tactics for specific situations. The recruits were instructed in bombing [throwing grenades], digging trenches, range-finding, signaling, machine gunnery, rapid fire shooting, scouting, sniping and bayonet fighting.

When a new battalion arrived in England, there was a chance it would be broken up to supply replacement troops for the Canadian battalions already fighting on the Western Front. This almost happened to the 44th when hundreds of men were taken as replacement troops and sent to join fighting battalions. Fortunately, the Battalion absorbed

hundreds of men from the 61st (Winnipeg) Battalion. The 44th would spend the war fighting alongside the 46th (South Saskatchewan), 47th (British Columbia) and the 50th (Calgary) Battalions in the 10th (Western Canadian) Infantry Brigade.

The men's training became more systematic and intensive as they were soon to be sent to the battlefields. Men were tasked to specialist schools to learn how to command a 36 man platoon or an eight man squad, to use and maintain wireless radios, or to operate the heavy Vickers machine gun, the light Lewis machine gun, and trench mortars.



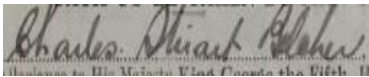
Training with the Lewis machine gun, Library & Archives Canada

After a final inspection by Major General Sir Sam Hughes, the Battalion marched out of Bramshott Camp to board H.M. Transport *Viper* at Plymouth. On 12 August 1916, the ship docked at the French port of Le Havre. During their overnight train ride from Le Havre towards the frontline, the men of the 44th heard the rumble of the big guns.

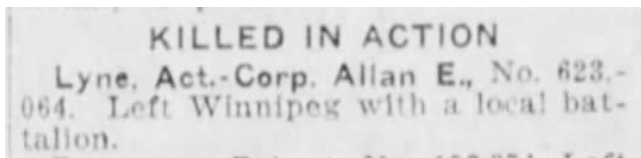
The men were issued British Lee-Enfield rifles, steel helmets, primitive gas hoods and they began their march towards the Ypres salient in Belgium. Captain Charles Belcher, one of Winnipeg's famous athletes, told his company,

I feel that I am going into the biggest game I've ever played. I feel, too, that I am going in with the biggest and best team I ever played with.

When the Battalion encountered the 8th Canadians (90th Winnipeg Rifles), who were heading to the Somme, the Little Black Devils yelled, "Forget everything you learned in England."



The "biggest game" turned deadly on the Battalion's second night in the trenches. On 21 August 1916, Corporal Allen Lyne was shot and killed by a German sniper. He is buried in Ridgewood Cemetery, Belgium, with five comrades who died during the first weeks the Battalion was in the Ypres salient.



Winnipeg Tribune 6 September 1916

After their first few weeks in the trenches, the men tramped back to their rest billets. The Battalion's second tour up the line was much the

same as the first, and the oppressive, grinding daily routine began to weigh on the men's spirit. As Russenholt wrote in September,

If it wasn't for the rain and mud & alarms & biscuits & bully beef & Hienie's rum jars & sausages & the noise & lugging a cart-load of household goods on your spine... & the rats & the wee companions & having clothes on for a week or so at a stretch and one or two small items, this would be the ideal life. The life humanity has been searching for ever since the dawn of time...



Winnipeg Tribune, 16 August 1916

After their second tour, the Battalion was again ordered to rest billets. On 20 September 1916, the 44th marched off the Ypres salient towards St. Omer, France. The men all carried a full pack containing all of

their clothes, a great coat, rubber sheet, blanket, haversack, emergency rations, a full water bottle, 170 rounds of .303 ammunition for their Lee-Enfield rifle, bayonet, entrenching tool and gas respirator. The weather was fine, the roads were dry, and the men moved steadily along to the tunes of the Battalion's band. After an 18-mile march, they rested and slept for the night.

Two days later, they reached St. Omer to begin training in new battle techniques. The men were taught how to advance in waves behind an imaginary artillery barrage. They were told that they must almost "lean up against it"; the "curtain of fire" thrown up by the artillery would be so intense that the enemy's guns could not shoot through it." As the Battalion War Diary reported on 29 September 1916: "Battalion carried on Brigade scheme. Co-operation with aircraft, and an advance under a creeping barrage -- which was successfully carried out."

On 3 October, the 44th Battalion and the 4th Division headed towards the Somme battlefields where the three other Canadian divisions were fighting alongside Imperial and Dominion forces. The Battle of the Somme had begun 1 July 1916, and the Canadians had joined the fight in mid-September. On 8 October, the 44th reached their billets and met up with friends from the 43rd Battalion (Cameron Highlanders of Canada). The "kilties" had just returned from a battle at "Regina Trench" where they had taken heavy casualties when the Allied artillery barrage failed to cut the German barbed wire and reconnaissance scouts did not see the entrenched enemy machine guns.

In late October 1916, the 44th was ready to go into the front lines. In Ypres, the weather had been clear and calm, and the shelling limited. But on the Somme, the fall weather was hellish, the shelling incessant, and, after three months of fighting, the battlefield reeked of death. Jack Quelch, a 19-year-old farm-boy from the little town of Beulah, Manitoba, wrote home: “You could smell the place half a mile away. They were mostly Heinies but were some of our own chaps among them. If I see this through, I shall not forget that place.”

The 44th's War Diary entries of October 19 and 20, 1916, described the conditions the men faced and reported that men were being killed every day: “Showery clearing towards evening. Battalion was to have been relieved tonight by 47th Bn. but were later ordered to evacuate immediately it became dark. 2 O.R. were killed and 3 wounded in 24 hours, 19th-20th. Sickness is very prevalent owing to state of trenches.”

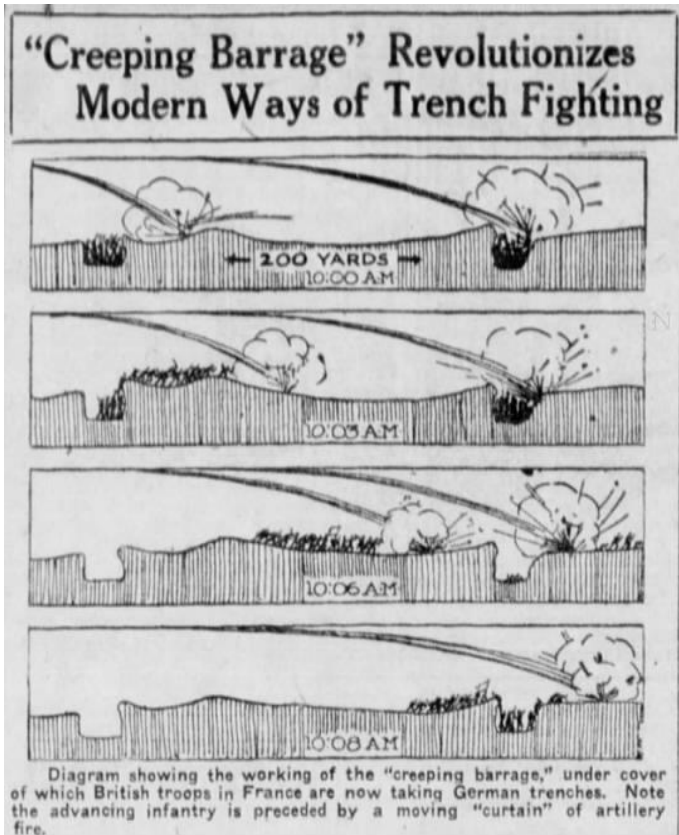


Diagram of Creeping Barrage. *Winnipeg Tribune* 17 May 1917

On 23 October, the Battalion moved forward to take their turn attacking Regina Trench. Russenholt writes that the heavily loaded men carried 4 Mills bombs, 220 rounds of ammunition, rations for 48 hours, a water bottle, five empty sandbags and a pick or shovel. They trudged for hours through sludge and reached the front line and waited for the order to attack; however, the weather delayed the attack for 24 hours. The men remained overnight in the water-logged ditches with

no protection from “the hammering of rain and the bursting shells, enfilading enemy machine gun and shell fire.”

The 44th went over the top on 25 October 1916; however, the artillery barrage again failed to cut the German wire and keep enemy machine gunners in their dugouts. Death came quickly as the Germans opened up with machine guns, forcing the men to try to crawl back to their trenches or to take cover in shell holes. In early evening, the Battalion stretcher bearers attempted to carry the wounded out to safety. However, as Victor Wheeler wrote in *The 50th Battalion in No Man’s Land*, “volunteers from the 50th Battalion went over the top to help rescue many of the 44th men whose lives were ticking away in No Man’s Land. Not all stretcher bearers and their bloodied comrades, however, reached the field dressing station. They were tempting sweetmeats for hungry Heinie snipers.”

The Battalion War Diary’s entry of 25-26 October 1916 stated:

Battalion attempted to capture portion of REGINA TRENCH under Operation Order No.9. The operation failed owing to insufficiency of Artillery Barrage. The Battalion suffered heavily. Three officers were killed, seven wounded and one removed for shell shock; thirty-seven other ranks killed, one hundred twenty-five wounded, thirteen missing and presumed dead.

26 October 1916: The Battalion rested today. The condition of their clothes and equipment was deplorable and shows the hardships they had to endure during the tour, many of the men suffering from exposure and exhaustion.

On the 27th, the Battalion made its way back to Albert to recuperate and take on replacements. Six days later, they returned to the front; Regina Trench still needed to be taken. The horrible weather continued, and working parties had to carry all supplies miles up to the front. As Russenholt wrote in the Battalion history:

Rations must be carried up front from far back in the line. Bread, in sandbags, is water soaked and mixed with mud; water is brought up in tins tied in pairs with strips of sandbags—these tins have previously held three gallons of gasoline each, and a goodly portion of it apparently, remains in the solution with the water. Finally, for three days no rations can get through the sustained shellfire with which the enemy rakes the roads, trenches and paths. Men subsist on biscuits and cheese.

On 11 November 1916, Regina Trench was finally taken by battalions of the 4th Division. The summer “fighting season” ended, and Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig called for an end to Allied offensive operations in mid-November. On 28 November 1916, the 44th left the Somme battlefield. They rested, recuperated and took on replacement troops until mid-December. On 25 December 1916, the Battalion took up its position on the Canadian line near Vimy Ridge.



Burial service on the Somme in 1916, where 8000 Canadians died. Library and Archives Canada

On Christmas Day, the 44th was ordered to take its turn on the front-line. The winter of 1916-1917 was one of the wettest in many years, and the men suffered. Russenholt remarked in a Christmas letter to his family that “water and mud is over the knees.” The War Diary reported on 30 December 1916 that

Wet weather has made trenches in an awful state. Both Front-Line, Support and Communication trenches have caved in, in many places. There is also a great deal of water in them in places. Large parties working on them.

In early 1917, under the command of British Lieutenant-General Sir Julian Byng, aided by Canadian Major-General Arthur Currie, the four Canadian infantry divisions on Vimy Ridge went through a

major reorganization. The commanders urgently wanted to solve the “riddle of the trenches”. What lessons could they draw from the 1915-1916 Battles of Ypres, the Somme and Verdun? They determined that, to take the “Ridge”, the Canadian Corps had to be transformed from an amateur civilian army into a professional army.

In a 1960 CBC radio interview, Russenholt described the men’s training which led to their becoming a professional army:

I think that's the basis of the whole show. This is a job and before you can turn out skilled workmen, they've got to do a lot of training... Training, we appreciated that, and he [Battalion commander Colonel R.D. Davis] drummed it into us all the time. Training, training, training, training. Now, not right turn, left turn, shining buttons and so on, although he was death on that too, but training, training, master that [machine] gun, master that gun. And I remember every time that we were out from the line, as I was gun sergeant, I had classes going all the time on those guns, even with a bunch of old-timers. We used to say that our gunners got so good, you know, that if they could disassemble a gun, put it in a scoop shovel and throw it in the air, it'd come down assembled and shoot.

Each of the Battalion’s four companies was reorganized into four infantry Battle Platoons, and to create a balanced battle unit, each platoon consisted of four sections that worked in “cooperation”: a rifle section, a bombing [Mills’ grenade] section, a rifle grenade section and a Lewis gun section. The men were trained to use all the weapons of the infantry soldier: riflemen shoot at the enemy, bombers

and rifle grenade men blow-up machine-gun nests and strong points, Lewis gunners provide cover fire during the attack and consolidate the captured ground to repel counter-attacks. Each battle platoon was supported by stretcher bearers and with runners who could keep the battle platoons in contact with the platoons on its flanks and with headquarters.

Byng and Curry understood that in a battle a platoon was the only body that could be directly commanded by an officer or NCO. They believed that, when men were well trained, the platoon became a flexible unit that could make decisions on conducting and changing battlefield operations “on the fly”. The battle platoon became the main battle formation of the Canadian infantry, and its success at Vimy and subsequent combat proved its worth.

To train for the upcoming battle, the men had to “go over the tapes”. An exact outline plan of the German trench system: front line, support, communication and mine craters was laid out with white tape. The men went through the phases of the attack over and over until they knew their task perfectly. The men complained about the repetition, writes Russenholt, but “at heart [they] are impressed with the thoroughness of the preparation—here is such a contrast to the affair of Regina Trench.”

Practice on the tapes trained the men in the new battlefield tactics but lacked the realism of combat. Consequently, the battalions at Vimy turned to the long-time Canadian speciality of trench raiding to hone the men’s skills and foment an essential fighting spirit. A small group

of men would stealthily cross No Man's Land to capture enemy prisoners, destroy dugouts and create fear in the German front line. Trench raids weren't without risk, and, in the month of March 1917, the Canadians took over 1400 casualties.

The 44th took their turn at trench raiding on 13 February under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Davies and Captain Charles Belcher. The front had been carefully reconnoitred and the men thoroughly trained. At zero hour, a barrage began shelling the enemy trenches and the raiders went "over the bags". The raid inflicted 30 German casualties, took 14 prisoners and captured two machine guns. This may seem inconsequential, but it was the Battalion's first successful attack on an enemy trench and morale skyrocketed.

As March of 1917 began, the Battalion continued its training and prepared for the upcoming attack. On 20 March, the Canadian artillery barrage began. In two weeks of shelling, nearly 90% of the German guns and most of the wire was destroyed. On 9 April, the Canadian battalions came out of their trenches and the tunnels they had dug into the soft Vimy chalk. The 44th was not due to go into battle until 11 April, but, on the morning of the 9th, the men of the 44th climbed out of their tunnels to wait for "Zero Hour". Russenholt wrote that suddenly they saw:

Away west of us flame leaped up like prairie fire. The sky split as the lightning of gun fire flashed upward and southward as far as the eye could see! And the tremendous booms of the big guns thundered. Overhead an avalanche of shells whistled and roared!! In that instant,

exploding shells ripped the blackness east of us with the sound and fury of the opening barrage!!

No one spoke. We knew that even as we stood, thousands of Canadian men... our comrades were advancing across No-Man's Land into the deadly fire of surviving German machine guns, whose deadly chatter reached us from here and there along the German defences.

The 44th was rushed into action on 10 April. The 4th Division battalions that had been ordered to take Hill 145 had run into heavy machine gun fire and were not able to capture the strong point. The men moved forward into unfamiliar terrain, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Davies, who would end the war as one of the CEF's most decorated officers, winning the Distinguished Service Cross three times in 1917-1918, as well as being Mentioned In Dispatches five times.

They pressed on under heavy fire and although many of their officers were killed or wounded the Battalion, in a testament to its training and morale, moved forward to capture their objective, consolidate a trench line, and connect with the battalions on the flanks.

As Wesley Runions, a young soldier from Dugald, Manitoba, stepped into No Man's Land, a piece of shrapnel hit him in the stomach and shoulder, and he went down. But, as he recalled,

I heard the men cheer, as they took the Ridge.

Canadians now looked beyond the mud and the blood into the broad Douai Plain. The operation cost the Battalion 100 casualties. Their job wasn't done; they still had to complete their original objective.

On the evening of 11 April, the Battalion moved forward to attack a German strongpoint known as “The Pimple.” As Lieutenant D. Marshall remembered,

It was early in the morning, pitch-dark and this was our home territory, that was our area that we had been in and out of all winter. We had trained on the tapes, but when we got up there, there was nothing, it was just a quagmire that was turned into just muck overall. Anyway, we started out, and it started to snow like the Dickens too, a regular Manitoba blizzard some said, just when we were going, and you couldn't keep it online, I mean we had to skirt these craters too... it was a matter of single file and everyone reaching back and pulling someone out of the mud to keep with the crowd and we really got stuck in the mud there. The mud was so bad that you couldn't stand in any place, you'd have to move, or you would sink practically. And they were shelling us then heavily, and the shells were bouncing around and they did no damage at all-- they went into the mud and they blew up in the air. So, nobody got hurt much.

With the 12 April taking of “The Pimple”, the Battle of Vimy Ridge came to an end and, as Ed Russenholt wrote to his sister, on 15 April 1917,

the old 44th has cleaned up accounts with Hienie for what happened at the Somme.



Brewery at La Coulette, 1917, 44th Battalion Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

The operations the 44th faced in May and June 1917 are not found in standard Canadian First World War texts, but this series of engagements was seared into the hearts and minds of the 44th 's trench warriors. The Battalion suffered over 600 casualties in the most sustained fighting of the war. The Battalion historian queried his readers as he told the story of these hard months:

Does the reader weary of the endless repetition – ‘up the line’ and ‘out’, march and working party, casualty, and reinforcement in this chronicle? Let him judge then of the unutterable monotony that weighs on the souls of men whose lives are bound in the narrow routine of war. ‘Up the line’ -- days and cramped trenches are

punctuated by shells, bullets, bombs, the issue of rations, comrades killed and wounded, the nights are hours of ceaseless work and tense watching. 'Out on rest' -- a succession of working, carrying, training. And always all over rats, vermin, gas, the irk of discipline, the haze of uncertainty, the sense of utter futility, the knowledge that each moment of life is enslaved to other men in some remote headquarters.

After these operations, the Battalion rested and took on much-needed replacements. In July, the Canadian divisions prepared for their next major operation, the Battle of Hill 70, 15-25 August 1917. The 4th Division was held in reserve in the opening days of the battle, and the 44th Battalion was assigned to take a slag heap in Lens known as the Green Crassier.

Today, the Green Crassier is a pleasant, forested park in the center of Lens, France, but, in 1917, it was a huge slag heap of mine tailings and abandoned rusting machinery. Taking the Green Crassier would be, as described in Col. G.W.L. Nicolson's, *The Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919*, "a costly and unprofitable task". The ill-fated plan to take the Green Crassier on a narrow front with only one battalion and without clearing the entrenched enemy positions, spelled doom for the 44th. They took their objective on the night of 23 August, but, by mid-afternoon the next day, 247 Canadian men on the slag heap had been killed, wounded or captured. No further attempts were made to retake the objective, and it remained in German hands until the end of the war.

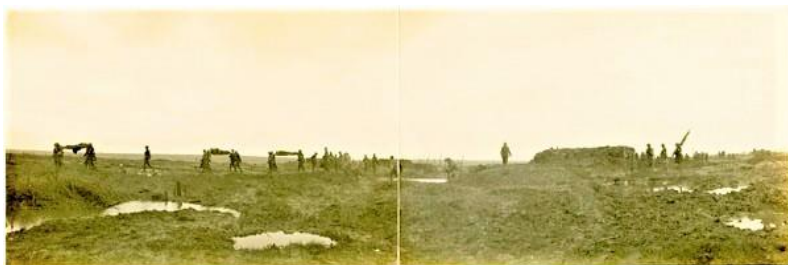


The Green Crassier, 1917, Library and Archives Canada

In October 1917, the Battalion marched to Belgium to join the Empire and Dominion troops in the great horror known as the Battle of Passchendaele. They entered the battle in late October, along with the other battalions of the 4th Division. Their task was to take Decline Copse (Woods) near the village of Passchendaele. On 27 October, they prepared for their attack. The battalion history describes the scene that night:

During the hours of darkness, the scene on the battlefield up in front is awful beyond description. Stretcher parties work doggedly at the almost hopeless task of caring for the countless wounded who mingle with the dead in the advanced positions. Parties of men lose direction in the darkness and wander to and fro in the mud, trying to find their units. The toll of killed and wounded mounts steadily under the everlasting pounding of enemy guns. Overhead, great enemy bombing planes roar back and forth. The glare of burning ammunition dumps add to the grim terror of the scene. All night long, section-by-section,

step-by-step, the men fight their way forward. Companies strive to keep intact, scarce knowing what is ahead, behind, or on either flank". In the early hours of October 27th, the Battalion worked its way forward while facing unchecked machine-gun fire and gas shelling. Finally, the whole of Decline Copse was taken, and the Battalion was able to repel counter attacks.



Passchendaele, 1917, Library & Archives Canada

In his poem *Memorial Tablet*, British poet Siegfried Sassoon wrote, “I died in hell. They called it Passchendaele.” Jack Quelch wrote home on 29 October 1917, echoing Sassoon’s sentiments:

I have seen a few hundred dead too, but this is the worst, it’s an ungodly hole. From the front lines to three miles back there is hell, I think I will leave it at that. They are lying all over; shell holes fill up with water and corpses. Hienie’s shell fire is the worst I have ever seen.

The Canadians returned to their lines near Vimy Ridge after the Passchendaele battle. They rested, were restored to a full-strength of 1000 men and trained to peak efficiency. After the failed German

Spring Offensive of 1918, the Allied High Command decided the time had come to attack. In the almost continuous bloody battles of the Last 100 Days (8 August to 11 November 1918), the Canadian Expeditionary Force suffered over 45,000 casualties with 11,000 dead, a number virtually equal to losses during the battles of the Somme and Vimy Ridge.

On 8 August 1918, the Canadian and Australian divisions spearheaded the attack at Amiens and dealt a crushing, but not yet deadly blow to the German army. The 44th was always at the front of the battle and played its part in the deadly fighting at Amiens. At 10:15 a.m. on 10 August the 44th took its turn attacking during the battle. They advanced in four waves moving steadily until they entered the old German trench system and uncut wire. Col. Davies observed that “the operation had all the difficulties of a trench-to-trench attack with an open warfare objective.” As the attack continued “no quarter was given owing to our heavy casualties from machine gun fire... and there was increasing readiness to use the bayonet.” When the Battalion was relieved on the night of 12 August it had taken a substantial number of machine guns and prisoners at the cost of 275 casualties.

In late August, the Canadian forces attacked the enemy in the Battle of Arras and in early September broke the enemy’s defenses at the Droquert-Queant Line. In late September, during the battle of the Canal du Nord, tragedy was averted when officers and NCOs of the 44th rushed into the allied creeping artillery barrage to stop over-

anxious soldiers who had advanced too quickly and were caught by deadly “friendly fire”. Then, finally, the 44th helped break the Hindenburg Line at Cambrai and fought in the last major battle at Valenciennes.

The Battalion had had a trench-strength of 1000 men before the Battle of Amiens, but, at the end of the war, they were down to less than 200 trench warriors, even after taking on hundreds of replacement soldiers in September and October. Because of the shortage of replacement troops from Manitoba and as many draftees were coming from the eastern provinces, the 44th Manitoba was designated as the 44th New Brunswick in August 1918.

Although the war ended on 11 November 1918, Canada’s soldiers were forced to wait for up to six months in make-shift camps in England and Wales before their turn came to return home. The 44th Battalion’s turn finally came in May 1919. On 2 June 1919, at St. John, New Brunswick, the men of the 44th Battalion stood in front of Colonel Davies who dismissed them for the last time. Six days later, on 8 June 1919, a train carrying 50 members of the Battalion drew into the Winnipeg train station where the men signed and completed their discharge.



44th embarks for Canada, May 1919, 44th Battalion Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

The hero's welcome they deserved was not readily forthcoming. There was confusion over what time the train would arrive, and so few family members or friends were at the station to meet the returning soldiers. Although they had survived the "war to end all wars" all was not well on the home front. They returned to a city still shaken by the deadly Spanish Flu of 1918. The soldiers returned home hoping to find well-paying jobs waiting for them, but instead found a city racked by widespread labour unrest. From mid-May thru June 1919 the city was shut down by the Winnipeg General Strike and the men sometimes found themselves pitted against old comrades in a titanic political struggle.

In Vimy's Deadly Shadow
44th (Manitoba) Battalion,
4th Canadian Division



C.S. Russenhalt William Taylor

Albert H. Sumner Charles Stuart Baker

C. Robert C. Robertson

James Barclay

James (Jimmy) Barclay: “Rum! Where is My Shot?”

In 1985, when James Barclay was over 90 years old, he sent his two-part hand-written memoirs to the Royal Winnipeg Rifles Association. Barclay planned a third part to his narrative; however, it is not found in the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 44th Battalion archival collection.

James Barclay was born in Scotland and came to Canada in 1913. He tells the story of his enlistment, something which appears to have occurred on a whim. He tells of having good times at Camp Sewell and harvesting the 1915 wheat crop. He enjoyed his training at Bramshott Camp, in England, and he describes how he engineered a meeting in Scotland with an old girlfriend, who eventually became his bride. He writes about his time on the Somme and how the Battalion's attack on Regina Trench on 25 October 1916 introduced him to the horrors of war. He also fought on Vimy Ridge but missed the great battle because he was wounded on 8 April 1917 and evacuated to England.

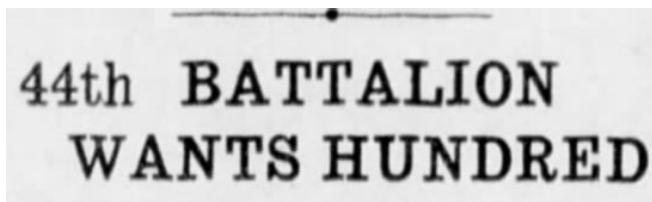
As much as possible, to maintain authenticity, Barclay's original spelling and punctuation have been retained

Part 1. (undated)

The following what I am going to write is from memory...I James Barclay came out to Winnipeg in the summer of 1913. I was 18 years old in January 1915. I was working with the Winnipeg Oil Company. My chum Bill Stewart, who was working with the C.N.R., said to me one evening, when we were out together, that he was not going to

work the next day. Why? He was going to the C.P.R. Station to see the 27th Battalion depart for overseas. This was the month of May 1915. I agreed to go along with him. What now I said, and he said we should join up. We made for south Main Street and tried the 90th and 100th Grenadiers. They were not recruiting so we went to Minto Street Barracks and were told to come back at 2 P.M.

Went to my house for lunch and of course the usual questions were asked. What were we going to do? Told them that we had to be at the Minto Barracks at 2 P.M.



Winnipeg Tribune 15 October 1915

Twenty-five were lined up for our medical, four of us at the end of the line had to go up against the wall and be measured. Just made the height they said. [Barclay's height listed on his attestation papers indicates that he was 5 ft. 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches].

Passed the other tests and filled up all our papers and were told to report to the Barracks at 6 A.M. the following morning and bring a knife, fork and spoon as we were leaving for Sewell Camp the next A.M.

We were issued with our full dress and equipment. I was assigned to #11 Platoon with my chum. So, it was time to settle down to regular

training that I took in my stride. Then we got time to take in the *Canvas City*. I rather liked sleeping and living in a tent and the companionship was great.

It was a very heavy harvest that summer and the soldiers were allowed a month's harvest leave. Three of us went to Brandon, just west of the camp. We were hired by Mr. Taylor and we were treated to the very best of food and all-in-all I sure enjoyed stooking [grain]... We got good weather all that month. Then it was back to camp and down to regular training.

After the harvest leave, I was promoted to Lance Corporal, so that is why I did not go with the first draft for overseas. Then we got the order that we were going overseas, getting ready for that will never be forgotten. Our arrival in Winnipeg caused great excitement. I was appointed to look after one of the carriage doors, but a soldier told me that it was his duty and that I should go to find my people and right away I met up with my father and mother. I was really lucky, some of the boys never met their people.

The trip across the Atlantic had its ups and downs. Yes, sea-sickness, but we soon got over that. Our arrival at Bramshott and the Wooden Huts was our next stop. The weather was wet and cold and that took some getting used to. There it was down to soldiers' training, rifle ranges and long route marches with full marching order. I kept in good health and took all this training in my stride.

Then a big draft was sent to France and we got back to full strength by getting reinforced by the 61st Battalion from Winnipeg. Col.

Wayland took us overseas. I finished being a Sargent then a Sargent-Major and the Regimental Sargent Major when I was 22 years old. I was also recommended for a direct commission in the field and was wounded on Vimy Ridge but that is another story.

If this should be to your liking, I will have another story of our training at Bramshott and our arrival in France and at Ypres in 1916.

Part 2: Dated March 23rd, 1985

After the troop train left Winnipeg, we all got settled down for the train trip to Halifax. Quite a number of the boys were disappointed that they did not meet up with their people. The crowd was great for our send off. Yes, I met my mother and father.

The boat trip was the next great experience and a novelty and getting settled in our berths for the trip across the Atlantic. Once settled the trip was enjoyed by most of the boys, of course seasickness was to be expected but they soon got over that. Arrival in England at Plymouth and take the train to Bramshott Camp. Getting settled in the huts which were very comfortable for we were not sure how long we would be there. Settled and right away started training. We were introduced to the Lee-Enfield rifle for the first time. Then to the rifle range to try out the new rifles.

Of course, our first leave was looked forward to. I made arrangements to go to the town where I went to school. My pal Ed Russenholt wanted to go to Ireland, but that was out of bounds, so I talked him into going north with me, which he did. Going to London for the first

time was quite a novelty but we soon knew our way around. Got the train north out of London, arriving in Aberdeen after enjoying the scenery for the trip. Got the local train out of Aberdeen in the early evening. Our stay in town was most wonderful for us. We were well looked after with the best of food.... One evening I met the girl I was looking for, for now she was back in town after doing government work in Dundee. Kept in touch with her during the war and she came out to Winnipeg in 1919 after I got back. Yes, we were married on 21 May 1920 and that will be 65 years married in March 1986.



60th Anniversary photo of James and Mary Barclay, *Winnipeg Free Press*
21 May 1980

Then it was back to camp. First a large draft was called for and my chum Bill Stewart was on that. Yes, he returned after the war and was with the fire department. Then it was orders to go across the Channel. Yes, I guess we all had our own feelings about that.

We were introduced to the trenches at Ypres, the M and N trenches. Our part of the section was all sandbagged, parapet and parado with

trench wooden mats to walk on. So many days in the line and so many days out and that meant working parties.

Soon we were on the move again to the Somme Front. Also, we hit a rain spell, so the trenches were water and mud. We arrived at the Brickfields; no grass there just lay on the bare ground. That was just outside of Albert. We soon found out that the “Dumbbells” were playing in a large marque near where we were and that first evening, we attended the show. After that show we were invited to get our blankets and spend the night on the benches which we all gladly accepted.

Then it was a move to the Chalk Pits on the other side of Albert where we were introduced to the trenches there—mud and water. After a few trips into the line and going out on raiding parties, we got a fair idea of the layout of the land and I got my two stripes.

On this trip we got orders that we were going over the top the next morning [October 24th]. We did not reach our front-line, and everyone sat down and wanted to go to sleep. Yes, the bags of rations were laying out in the open, everything was pretty wet.

We got orders that we were going over the next morning [October 25th] and we started out in good faith.... I was in the second wave. After going some distance, we realized something was wrong. We had no artillery support and when I think back now, I never saw an officer from the time we left the Chalk Pits. The Lance Corporal and myself were in charge of the platoon.

We lay out most of the day. When the first shell landed on my right, I realized that the Germans threw three shells - one to the right, one to the left and one in the centre and I was in the centre. I put my hands on the centre of my neck and I could hear it coming. It landed at my feet and a chunk of something came down my thigh. After a spell, when I came too, I'll admit I was really weak, but I could not feel any blood, so I must be alright I thought.



The Paths Of Glory-- On The Somme, Ed Russenholt, *6000 Canadian Men*

After awhile I gathered my things. Yes, my pipe was one of the things. Matches were wet. Then I could see this fellow of the leading wave coming crawling in and when he passed me. I wished him all the luck in the world. He made it in and so I got ready to follow and yes, I made it back to the starting point, got my coat and said to the boys that I was going to make it back to the front-line and for them not to follow to quickly. I made for the trench leading to the front-line, I did not jump into the trench there or I would have landed on top of "Goldie" laying at the bottom of the trench. So, I made it to the front line and the first I ran into was my pal, Ed Russenholt. He wanted to

know if many of the boys were coming in, yes it was quite a few. Found out afterwards that the boys in the waves behind us were hit the most, for they were really out in the open and we were first over the crest of the mounds.

Understand that we did not have enough men to carry the wounded out.

After that I was on working detail and thought-- If only I could change my socks. We were near headquarters at the time, so yes, I changed my socks, and my feet went up like balloons that I couldn't get my boots on, so I got permission to go out to the dressing station. So, I started out overland until I hit the Albert-Bapaume road. I was carrying my boots over my shoulder with my greatcoat on and leather jerkin for by this time it was really pouring rain with thunder and lightening.

That was really some experience walking that road with the flashes of the Big Guns going on both sides and the flashes of the lightening. That was when I saw the first tank laying in the ditch by the side of the road.

I made it to the Sunken Road and the Sugar Refinery and, yes, the Medical Officer looked after me with the others that were wounded, and I was on my way to Boulogne.

I was two weeks in the No.1 Canadian General Hospital in Boulogne with what they call Trench Feet.

Got back to my battalion and they were at Vimy Ridge. I was given my third stripe on my return to my unit.

I forgot to mention that we got reinforced by the 61st from Winnipeg. They spent the winter in Winnipeg and joined us at Bramshott. Yes, we missed them that went into the big draft, but our reinforcements were a Great Bunch of Boys.

We held and looked after the Ridge until the Big Push came. But I had to miss that because making a tour of the line around mid-night when I stopped to talk with a fellow by the name of Lockhart, I heard the burst of the shell and Lockhart put his hands to his face, so I pulled him down the line and sat him down and looked all over his face and could see nothing. “You wait here,” I said, “and I will get the stretcher bearer.”

I slid into the dugout and called for the stretcher bearers and they wanted to know if I had seen the guy with the hot tea. “Never mind the tea you go up. You go up to the first bend in the trenches and you will find Lockhart, he has been wounded.” Away they went in a rush.

I sat down in the corner of the dugout and there I could feel my left arm go funny as though something had hit the muscle.

The boys saw that the way I was acting, and they asked if I had been hit also. “There is a hole in your leather jerkin.” And, sure enough there was something under the shoulder blade. So, they, one of the boys, walked with me to the bottom of the Ridge and next saw an

officer carrying a tin in his hand and I knew what it was, Yes, Rum!
So, I said, “ Where is my shot?”

“What are you also wounded Jimmy?” he asked. Yes, I got my shot
and got all fixed up and the two of us went on our way.

Yes, I landed in No. 1 Canadian Medical hospital in Boulogne. I was
operated on there and when I came too, I found a shrapnel ball tied to
my wrist. I was waiting on a stretcher waiting to be carried out to go
to England when they brought in the first of the wounded right from
the Ridge.

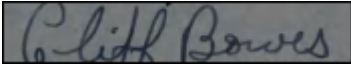
Made Blighty alright and landed in Colchester Hospital. My next
chapter will be of my stay in England and the recovery I made. Trust
you can make out my writing... Trust someone will have the patience
to read this.

James rejoined the 44th in November 1917 following the Battle of
Passchendaele. He was made Company Sergeant-Major in November
1918 and Regimental Sergeant-Major in 1919.



15.7.19 44th BN AWARDED MILITARY MEDAL

Clifford, James and Frederick Bowes: Buried in the Shell-Swept Fields of France”

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Clifford Bowes".

The local history of Boissevain, *Ours Is a Goodly Heritage, Morton-Boissevain, 1881-1983*, records that the Bowes family settled in the Boissevain area in 1890. The eldest son, Clifford, enlisted with the 222nd Overseas Battalion (Boissevain Platoon) in the summer of 1915 when he was 23 years old. By the fall, he had been sent to England and was training at the Canadian base at Bramshott.



J. G. Bowes family: Elma seated in chair, Elliott, Clifford James standing, Fred on arm of chair.

Ours Is a Goodly Heritage, Morton-Boissevain, 1881-1983

Cliff Bowes was a dutiful letter writer, and he kept his mother and father informed about life as a soldier. They worked hard, he wrote, and were up at 6:00 a.m. doing physical exercise, gun drill, bayonet fighting, and route marches. The young men were always hungry, and he likely missed homecooked meals. Cliff commented that the grub was “three squares a day, lots of it, but quality at times only fair.”

He was not too impressed with London. The British Museum, Westminster Abby, the zoo and Tower of London were interesting, but “its all right for a visit but would not live here if they gave me the whole works.” He also assured his mother that he was not getting into trouble as he was on the “water wagon” having “seen the effects of booze too much here to have any desire for it.”

He was a proud soldier and happy about joining up. In a 1 January 1916 letter, he wrote that “it certainly will be a happy day for me when I am actually in the front—and you can rest assured that I will do my duty no matter how hard or at what cost.” He had no truck or trade for the “cold footed or the damn lazy” and, like most men of the Canadian Corps, he believed Canada should introduce conscription.

When Cliff heard that younger brothers, James and Fred, had enlisted in the fall of 1916, he sent Fred a letter saying,

I am indeed very glad to hear of your and Jim's enlistment. Accept my heartfelt congratulations, Fred, for believe me boy, all told you sure must have the guts and spirit to leave home and friends. However, do your work with a will and you will never be sorry for your actions.

Cliff's two younger brothers, 20-year-old Fred and 22-year-old Jim, had also enlisted in the 222nd, trained at Camp Hughes in the summer and arrived in England in December 1916. They were posted to Shoreham Camp and didn't have an opportunity to see Cliff.

Young Fred was not as serious as Cliff, and he obviously liked to have a good time. However, because he was worried how his mother would take any news about his misdeeds, he decided to tell her first.

As Fred wrote on 16 December 1916,

Two boys we got from Melita [Manitoba.] started chewing about who could drink the most booze of the bunch and the result is that on Saturday we went down, and I'll say we were a happy bunch coming home.

Anyway, we got home fine and went to bed but the next morning, well, we all felt rotten all day. In the evening, Hanley and I went down with the intention of having a beer to clear the stuff out of us and the result was that we both came home a damn sight worse than we were the first night. But never again. That's enough for me, so don't worry on that score. I am only telling you this because I thought likely you would hear of it anyway and have a wrong impression of it all together. Anyway, we've all sworn off and didn't wait for New Year's either.

Because of illness, Cliff couldn't join the 44th in the summer of 1916, and so he missed the Battalion's October bloody baptism of fire at Regina Trench during the Battle of the Somme. He had developed a

severe case of sciatica and spent months in the base hospital undergoing a long rehabilitation. But he was declared fit in the fall and joined his battalion at Vimy Ridge on 12 December 1917.

The Battalion's first trip up the line was from Christmas Day 1916 to New Year's Day 1917, and in a letter home, Cliff didn't mention how horrible the weather was or the deplorable conditions of the trenches, nor did he mention the six deaths the Battalion suffered.

He wrote that "I have been through the big ordeal of my first trip into the line. It was not so bad on the nerves as I thought it would be but just the same there is lots of excitement at times.... We got our measly 15 francs (\$3.00 in 1918) yesterday and spent the whole in about half an hour sampling French wine and champagne. Now don't run away with the idea that we all got tanked for such is not the case."

Also, on Christmas Day, Jim learned that he and Fred had been posted to the 44th. He wrote that "the boys would be together again by New Year's, but Cliff doesn't know yet, so it will be a surprise." Fred and Jim arrived in France on 1 January 1917, and Jimmy wrote, "Well here I am, only I don't know where I am." The brothers reached the frontline on 6 January 1917 and, in a February letter home, Jim wrote that they had been up the line and were getting used to the gunfire:

I was out last Tuesday, and we certainly got a decent baptism for a starter. Old Hymie was decidedly peevish in the morning but none of us got hurt...Say mother in case anything happens to Fred or me, we

both left a will with the paymaster...I don't expect that you will have occasion to use them but then you can never tell.

Perforated sheet for Will from Pay Book of Reg.
No. 291816
Name James L. Bowes
Unit 222nd Batt. 6.87.

Military Will

I, James Lawrence
Bowes, leave all my
property both real and
personal wheresoever
situate to my mother
Margaret D. Bowes
Boisbervain. May. Can.

Signature James L. Bowes
Rank and Reg. Capt. 222nd Batt.
Date Dec 27th / 1916

Military Will of James Bowes, 1916, Service Records of James Bowes, Library and Archives Canada

Finally, on 9 February 1917, the brothers got together, and they saw each other regularly, even though they were in different companies. They fought together, as Fred wrote on February 20, “in the biggest raid ever pulled off in this part of the line.”

On February 27, 1917, in its usual terse prose, the Battalion War Diary noted: “Situation was normal... Casualties during day 4 O.R. [Other Ranks] wounded. Weather Fine.” The four casualties

mentioned occurred near the end of the day when a German rifle grenade dropped into a forward listening post manned by four men, including two of the Bowes brothers. Had one of them lit a cigarette, stood up or made a noise that attracted the German's attention and revealed the men's location? We'll never know.

Eddy O'Neil, from Boissevain, Manitoba, was lucky and survived his wounds; James McTaggart, from Melita, Manitoba, died of wounds. Jim Bowes and Fred Bowes did not survive. Their deaths are but one of many tragic stories in the history of the 44th Battalion; however, the story of the three Bowes brothers is particularly sad.

March saw a flurry of letters to Boissevain. On 1 March 1917, Cliff wrote that, when word came down the line that Fred had been wounded and Jim had died, he went to find the field ambulance, but it had already taken Fred to a Casualty Clearing Station.

Oh mother, I am nearly heart-broken and crazy. Jim passed away very quietly, thinking of us all and not of himself. Mother let one thing alone comfort you in the hour of your trouble and that your dead boy was one of the greatest heroes that passed away in this terrible strife. Although wounded far the worst and suffering intensely, he would not let them take him out until they had taken Fred first.... His funeral is to be held tomorrow and I still have that task to do. That is to see my brother buried near the shell-swept fields of France.

In a subsequent June letter to his mother, Cliff recalled Jim's funeral. "I saw Jimmy at the cemetery and, Mother, he did look natural with

his bonnie smile. They tell me he passed away quite contentedly. His only worry was for Fred and you.”

Initially, the medical staff at the Casualty Clearing Station thought that Fred might pull through, but that likely a leg would have to be amputated. A nursing sister wrote they were doing their best, but that Fred’s condition was serious. The Battalion padre wrote that, although Fred’s progress was slow, his chances were good, and even Cliff was optimistic about Fred’s recovery.

However, Fred died on 8 March 1917. The nursing sister, G.N. Raine, wrote Mrs. Bowes and told her that Fred had been unconscious most of the time and “so was spared pain”. The padre also wrote to tell the family that Fred had succumbed to his wounds and that he had just performed the funeral service for him.

Cliff was not able to attend the service but did visit his brothers’ graves later, and, in June, he wrote to his father that “the boys’ graves are both beautiful. I am sure glad that when they had to go that it was not in the drive, as they at least had a decent burial undisturbed from the turmoil of shells.”

The “drive” Cliff mentioned was the April 9 thru 12 Canadian assault on Vimy Ridge. He knew that many of the 3500 men killed would have been obliterated by shell or mortar fire or buried so deep in the mud that their bodies would never be recovered.

Cliff did not take part in neither the 44th’s attack on Hill 145, where the Vimy Memorial stands today, nor “The Pimple.” On March 3rd,

he had been re-assigned to a tunneling unit and worked on Vimy's underground lighting system. In late May, he was re-assigned to the 44th's transport unit away from the frontline and believed he would be out of the fighting from now on.



Grange Tunnel, Vimy Ridge, Ian Stewart, 2016

In a late June letter, Cliff expressed that, though he had supported Fred and James' decision to enlist, he was not as keen on his brother Elliot joining up or being conscripted. The family had suffered enough he wrote, and "I know if I was in his place, I would fight to the last ditch for his place is at home and I would sure rather see him at home than here...But we must not grumble about our part as we all willingly joined and are all willing to see it through..."

In his July letters, Cliff writes that he is very pleased to be getting so many letters from home, and he talks about meeting up with the boys from Boissevain. He's still thinking about his brothers and recalls the first night Jim and Fred "hit the line," on 12 February 1917. What a

reception they had, “But they didn’t seem to mind at all. They sure were men.”

In September 1917, Cliff was given 10 days leave; he thought he would be allowed to go to Scotland, but his leave was granted for Nice, France. He returned on September 24 and rejoined his battalion just as the Canadian Corps was readying to march to Passchendaele.

His last short letter home was dated 23 October. On 28 October 1917, Cliff was killed during the Battalion’s attack near Decline Copse on the outskirts of Passchendaele. The Battalion Chaplain, George Farquhar, wrote to the family in Boissevain:

Dear Mrs. Bowes,

My heart is heavy, so I feel called upon to write you with sad and even sadder news.... As I write you now, I feel there is no help anywhere else for you except in God when you read the sad news that the third of your three boys has passed beyond.

Ever since his two brothers fell, I have tried to keep in touch with him. He was always the same boy he was when he left home. ...You will have seen some account of the hard fighting in the press. The conditions this time were worse than I have ever seen. The wide, almost level plain sloping gradually to the ridge, the deep mud and worst, the absence of any shelter, the open fighting, and the intensive fire of the enemy. Yet our boys did magnificently, fulfilling all expectations and taking all the ground they were sent for. Your son

D.C. Bowes, 622720, was with the men in the charge. In the first line, he was hit by a shell and death was instant.

...Your son was a splendid type of what any mother might be proud, liked by all and a capable and efficient soldier. You have given so much in this war, that I can say nothing more, only that our sympathies are with you, and we pray God to give you help.

Cliff Bowes had done the duty he had pledged to do. His body was never recovered. He is memorialized on the Menin Gate Memorial along with the names of the 6940 Canadians who fell in the Ypres salient, “But to whom the fortune of war denied the knowledge and honoured burial given to their comrades in death.”

In 1927, still grieving for her sons, Margaret Bowes unveiled the rebuilt 44th Battalion Monument that once stood on Vimy Ridge and now stands in Vimy Park in Winnipeg.



Fred and Jimmy Bowes names, along with names of all those who fell on Vimy Ridge, at La Coulette and The Triangle, are on the 44th Battalion Monument at Vimy Park, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Ian Stewart, 2017

Arthur Galbraith: Vimy Ridge Diary 9-10 April 1917

Arthur Galbraith



Sunday, April 8th, 1917

Went under Saturday
we left at 7:30 pm. and went
straight onto the Souchez line
where we arrived at 1:30 am.

Monday, April 9th, 1917

Arrived in Souchez trench at 8:30 am
where we stayed until night pm.
I went up at 11:30 to take down the
line from the middle line but when I
came back I found we had to move
to the music Hill trench over in the
Choulet Brigade area. Today was
Sunday the 11th of the brigade went over
the forward did not take their position
so we have to do it tomorrow. Three
mines were blown on our front.
They were quite a few prisoners in

music Hill trench when we got
there at midnight

Tuesday, April 10th, 1917

Up at ten - we had no sleep for we were
all out and cold and wet. We
had to go over the top at noon. We jumped
forward and advanced in attacking
formation to our new front line and
waited for the barrage. Our companies
go over to attack. It is a success. We passed
quite a lot of dead which were over
top a part. In our trench they were over
top. There was a report that all the
officers of B Coy were gone. So the Cpt. sent
Capt. Caldwell & myself down. We found
nothing. We were in the middle line & dug out
had to go to the West. We were in the
Anchors and company was wounded also.
We marched back to the middle line
about 1:30 am. (Wednesday) I pulled down
the floor of the trench. About ten we were
sent to quarters. The music Hill just east
of Cassel. It rained all the time & there
was no daylight. The officers of the
1st Coy were in the first line. I
went down. We left the trench & parked
at the music Hill. We had a very
good night of observation. Our last
night it rained about 11 1/2 hrs.

Lieutenant Arthur Galbraith, 44th Battalion Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum and Archives

Arthur Galbraith lived at 202 Oak Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba. He enlisted in January 1916 and lost an eye when he was shot through the head, during the 1918 Battle of Cambrai. In this diary entry, he describes the 44th Battalion's 10 April 1917 attack on Hill 145.

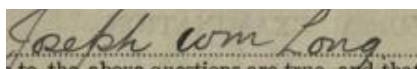
Monday April 9th, 1917

Arrived in Souchez Tunnel at 4:30 a.m. where we stayed until 8 p.m. I went up at 3:00 p.m. to take over the line from the Middlesex but when I came back, I found we had to move to the Music Hall Tunnel, over in the 11th Brigade area. Today was Z day. The 11th and 12th Brigades went over the top. The former did not take their objective, so we have to do it tomorrow. Three mines were blown on our front. There were quite a few prisoners inside Music Hall Trench when we got there at midnight.

Tuesday April 10th, 1917

Up at 10. We had no sleep for we were all wet and cold and we were told we had to go over the top at noon. We jumped off at noon and advanced in artillery formation to our new frontline and waited for the barrage. C & D companies to go over to attack, A & B in reserve. We passed quite a few dead which were being buried by a party. In one grave there were over 20. There was a report that all the officers of B company were killed so the Col. sent Captain Caldwell and myself down. We found Neall and Meiklejohn there and Urquhart had been wounded.

Joseph Long: A Manitoba Soldier “Known Unto God”



Joseph Long
to the above questions are true and the



44th Battalion Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

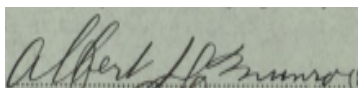


H-LONG-J-W-LONG-E-LOWE-E-G-LUFF-F-LY-C

JW LONG is memorialized on the Canadian National Vimy Memorial and the 44th Battalion Monument in Winnipeg.

Joseph Long and his family came to Canada from England in 1912. They settled near Scotland Farm Post Office in Manitoba’s Interlake Region. He was barely 18 when he attested in Winnipeg on 25 August 1915. He fought with the Battalion at Vimy Ridge and was killed during “The Triangle” operations in mid-May 1917. He has no known grave.

Duncan Munro: Bandsman



Duncan Munro attested in 1916 and joined the 44th in 1917. He was an 18-year-old farm boy from Tugaske, Saskatchewan. Life, he learned, was going to be very different in the CEF (Canadian Expeditionary Force) from small-town life. Duncan wrote many letters home and, like many soldiers, did not worry his parents over the danger and hardships he faced at the front.

Duncan was in the 44th's band, and one of his duties would have been to act as a stretcher bearer during and after battles. Duncan certainly saw his share of suffering and death.

Duncan was awarded a Good Conduct Badge in 1918; however, he managed to get himself into the occasional bit of trouble.

In his first letter home, he expressed his hopes, his wonder at the food served at the barrack's mess and the complexity of the army kit he had to pack:

Winnipeg, May 5, 1916

Dear Mother and Father,

I am getting into the band alright if I play the coronet. I will have to play second coronet, but I don't like that idea....

There certainly is some class grub here. The menu tonight was macaroni, bread and butter and a few buns and an occasional dish-o-jam, of course a person can go to the canteen and pretty near buy anything you want.

.... I got so many things belonging to my uniform that I had a hard time to find a place to put them. I had to shine my buttons for the first time today. I haven't had to shine my boots yet but expect to in the morning. The boots they give us are not as clumsy as I thought they would be, but the underwear would cover a horse. I think I will keep my own.

They give us two heavy pairs of boots like what you have seen and a light pair of canvas shoes, two pairs of heavy socks, one pair of pants then a lighter pair which they call fatigue pants, then a pair of puttees, then two suits of underwear, then three shirts, one of which is a service shirt and two others of flannel. Then a sweater coat, then a short coat and an overcoat and a Glengarry cap.

Then I forgot the kit, a toothbrush, a hair brush and clothes brush and razor, another thing which they call a housewife which is composed of some yarn and safety pins and a few more little things, and two towels and a sack. I guess they call it a kit bag where you carry everything.

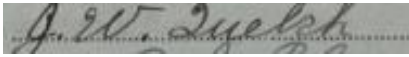
Mine is stuffed full. I guess that is about all they give us, we have to buy the rest ourselves. But don't send me anything except the socks because we have to put everything in this bag..."

This letter is taken from Jerry Carline, *Duncan's War*, 2008, pp.16-17.



44th Battalion Band Bramshott 1916, 44th Battalion Collection Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

Jack Quelch: “I Shall Not Forget That Place...”



In a letter of 17 October 1916, Jack Quelch, a 19-year-old sniper in the 44th, wrote to his parents in Beulah, Manitoba, about the Battalion’s recent doings. At times he is lighthearted, but the letter is tinged with irony and fatalistic resolve.

There’s no rest for the ordinary soldier, and Jack’s letter is a fine articulation of a soldier’s life in the CEF. Jack writes that it has taken a few days to write the letter because, as he says, “I am out of luck with this letter writing. We have to go out and build dugouts.” Then, of course, when the Battalion gets back from the trenches, there’s washing, shaving, bathing and trying to “rid one’s self of some company, but this job is mostly a waste of time as you have just as many in a day or two.”

Jack had just read an article in the *Free Press* reporting on Manitoba’s autumn scenery, and he wishes he could be there to see it. The scenery on the Somme reminds him of the illustration from the “Graphic” that hangs in the dining room, except that there are fewer trees; in fact, there are no trees, only “stumps”, and the area is covered with tents, as far as one could see.

Soldiers' letters are sent unsealed and are censored by battalion officers. Jack, like all good soldiers, tries to bend the rules and plays a little guessing game with his parents,

I expect you will know well where we are by the papers. But I think I can cu-you now without any harm. There was a picture of a certain church in France, in one of the illustrated papers, with a statue of the Holy Virgin on the steeple, which has been hit by a shell & not blown off, but just bent over at right angles & the day was when it should fall that the war would end. Well, our camp is within a mile and a half of this church. It is a regular landmark.

He describes a village [possibly Courcelette], which the British had been fighting over but was now only "a heap of debris". He couldn't explore too much because Hiney was making things a *little too warm just then...* *There were some gruesome sights there, which showed what must have taken place. You could smell the place half a mile away. They were mostly Hineys, but there were some of our own chaps among them. If I see this through, I shall not forget that place...*

The Somme is very different from the Ypres salient. The salient was quiet, but here Hiney puts over "*COAL BOXES*", "*WHIZ-BANGS & SHRAPNEL IN PLENTY*. And not just for an hour or so, but all the time both day and night."

He thanks his mother for the parcel and the cake but notes that, unfortunately, the cake was moldy, and so he suggests it might be more practical to send candles, writing paper and envelopes and chocolate. But he does add that the sardines and oxo she sent made for a “jake” snack when mixed together.



Ed Russenholt, *6000 Canadian Men*

After the great Canadian victory in August 1917 at Hill 70 and the 44th's tragedy at the Green Crassier, the CEF continued to occupy the trenches in the Vimy sector and trained to attack the city of Lens. However, Field Marshall Haig ordered the Canadian Corps back to the Ypres salient to take part in the Third Battle of Ypres, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele. Jack Quelch writes home after the 44th Battalion has captured Decline Copse.

October 29th, 1917

Dearest Mother:

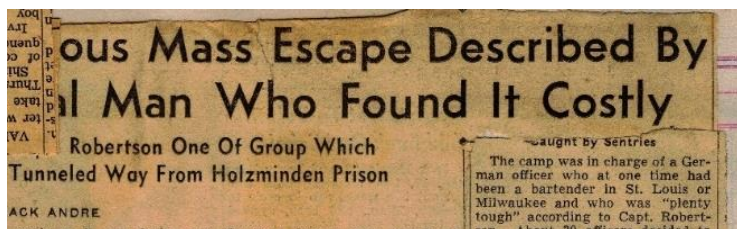
We have just completed a few days ago one of the worst trips in the lines since I have been in France. I have been in some dirty holes in this country, but this was the worst. The acts seen and done by the troops can live up the imagination of any man. I thought I had seen a few thousand guns while I have been in France but have never seen this mass of guns there are in this place and the incessant bombardment. The country is a big jelly pot of mud and water shaking or rather quivering under the force of the guns. There are planes in thousands and give Hienie's planes their due, they come over in bunches of a dozen or so and drop bombs and use their machine guns on both the troops in the trench and in the billets in the rear, if you could call them billets at all. I have seen a few hundreds dead too, but this is the worst, it's an ungodly hole. From the front lines to three miles back there is hell, I think I will leave it at that. They are lying all over; shell holes fill up with water and corpses. Hienie's shell fire is the worst I have ever seen.

We lost the best officer in the battalion in this trip, he was our section officer last winter... The poor fellow got his head blown off by a five nine shell. I am afraid I might have overstepped the margins a bit in this letter and may have it censored but I am sending it in a green envelope. (The letter was opened by a censor and three lines crossed out.) We are in a fair billet now warm and

*comfortable...Well I think this is about all this time. So, we'll say
goodnight, give my love to all.*

Jack's war ended in August 1918 when he was shot in the hand,
thigh and penis and evacuated to England. He returned to Canada,
married, raised a family and worked as a customs officer in
Windsor, Ontario. He died aged 72 years of age at Windsor.

**Clifford G. Robertson, Robert Jones & William Taylor :
Prisoners of War**

A rectangular piece of aged paper with the name "C. Robertson" written in cursive ink.

Winnipeg Tribune Nd, 44th Battalion Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives

Clifford “Tigger” Robertson was 31 years of age, married and living in Fort William, Ontario, when he attested in February 1916. He was “Taken on Strength” as a lieutenant with the 44th Battalion on 21 September 1916 and promoted to Captain in 1918.

Robertson was captured while leading his platoon during the action on “The Pimple” 12 April 1917, during the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Robertson was sent to Holzminden Prisoner of War Camp in Germany where troublemakers and those who had attempted to escape were imprisoned. Robertson told the paper that he was part of a large group of British, Australian and Canadian officers who hatched a plot to tunnel their way out of the prison camp. After months of secret tunnelling, 29 officers escaped. In World War I’s

“great escape”, 10 officers managed to make their way to neutral Netherlands and to England. However, Robertson was recaptured and returned to the camp.

In an undated interview with the *Winnipeg Tribune*, Robertson relates that he was tried and convicted by a German military tribunal for his escape and was fined 30,000 marks. The British authorities paid his fine; however, they deducted the money from his salary that was being deposited into his bank account. Robertson said that this action by the British authorities was *a bit much* as he was only following the King’s Regulations in trying to escape. After the war Robertson spent eight years working as a mining engineer in Guatemala. He returned to Winnipeg and died in 1955 at age 70

In the newspaper article, Robertson claims to have been awarded a DSO and an MC but no record of these medals being awarded exist in his Service File nor found in the *London Gazette*. Recent scholarship proves, however, that Robertson was part of the plot and that he was likely one of its organizers, given that he was among the first men to escape through the tunnel.

33987

LIST No	HOSPITAL	DATE OF ADMISSION	REMARKS
651 (1)	Reported from General Headquarters	9/12-17	Missing
684 (1)	Previously reported	12-4-17	correct date (as per 684 (2))
694 (1)	Previously reported	P.O. at Karlsruhe, Baden	now reported at Freiburg (list dated 9-6-17)
744 (1)	Prev. rep. P.O. at Odenfeld	now rep. P.O. at Schermstett	(P.L. dated Aug 11 1917) 8-9-17
106 (2)	Prev. rep. P.O. at Schermstett	now rep. P.O. at Holzgonden	(P.L. dated Oct 7 1917) 5-11-17
1185	Prev. rep. P.O. in Holzgonden	now rep. at Schell	Rep. and arrived

C.G. Robertson Service File: listing POW camps where he was imprisoned.
Library & Archives Canada

ROB

Robertson Clifford

lieut. 44th Canadian

Ref. 231, Oydun Rd. Post Williams, Canada.

P.A. 10147, 1.5.17, R. Clifford.
lieut. 44th Canadian Inf. Pt.
Born 24.11.85, Clifford, taken
12-4-17, being carried from
Dona at 0742, ref. Lager, Narsartok
taken. Communiqué feuille 11.1.17

(24.10.57) 29.5.17 R. Clifford
lieut. 44 Post. born

ROB

Robertson Clifford
Lieut.

44 Canadian I. R.

P.A. 10147
P.A. 10557
- 17036

C.G. Robertson's International Red Cross World War 1 prisoner of war index card. International Red Cross World War 1 Prisoner Files

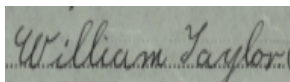
Private William Taylor and the Story of Robert Jones

William Taylor was a 20-year-old farmer from Sturgeon Valley, Saskatchewan. He attested in April 1916 and was taken prisoner in June 1917, one month after joining the 44th in the field. Taylor was repatriated in December 1918.

The 44th Battalion Collection contains two postcards that William Taylor sent to his mother, as well as the story he had written about his friend Robert (Bob) Jones. These items were sent to Minto Armoury, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, when Taylor was 86-years- old.

The Story of Robert Jones, P.O.W. 1917- 1918

By William Taylor

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William Taylor". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Bob Jones and I met when we were prisoners of war and were sent in a party of twenty men to work in a bush camp at a place called Mark Friedland in Western Poland.

At Mark Friedland we were put to work cutting timber for the mines. We worked in pairs and our quota was to be thirty trees per day, felled and cut up, a quota which was never filled. The guards, two very young men, one seventeen and jovial, the other eighteen, nervous and officious, was in charge. He carried an old-type Mauser rifle, which

was much too heavy for him, and it was not very long before he and our Bob Jones were barking at each other. That was not helped at all when Bob tried to drop a tree on him, and it would have hit him but for a warning shout from one of our gang.

Then came the climax. We were in dire straits there. Our ration was a small loaf of rye bread each week, with some potatoes. There were no washing facilities except a small hand bowl, and we were dirty, lousy, unshaven, and terribly hungry after two months of privation. Then parcels came from the Red Cross, and just in time as some of us were exhausted from malnutrition. I had collapsed and was not able to take my own parcel into the billet.

Bob had received a parcel with a bar of soap in it, and one Sunday morning he had found a pail and somehow managed to warm some water. He was washing what remained of his underwear when the two guards came in. They were looking for a man to do a job and there was Bob right in front of them! The elder guard told Bob to go with them, but he refused as he was going to do his washing, and he did not work on a Sunday. The guard tried to pull him away. Bob's Welsh temper was rather short fused and his response to what he took to be a challenge, was to draw the sudsy underwear from the pail and hit the guard with it! With dirty suds all over him, the guard stepped back and waveringly pointed that ancient cannon at Jones, who went into action immediately, picking up an axe that had been brought in for sharpening, and making for the guard. We intervened by pulling Jones

down from both sides and disarming him, while that young guard was shakily holding the rifle and it might have gone off at any moment.

The guards left but later came back with others and put our hero under arrest. We did not know where he was taken to, nor did we see him again till after the war was over. We heard later that Bob Jones had been given two years in a prison but what kind of institution it was. We never knew but that was not the last we saw him.

When the war ended Germany was terribly disorganized and it was very difficult for the prisoners to get to their main camps and assemble for repatriation. We managed it and finally the day came, and as we were ready to march to the railway Bob Jones was escorted to the parade ground and released but when we began to move off Bob collapsed. Whether through weakness or the flu we never knew. He was taken to the camp hospital, a terrible death house at that time, we never heard from him again.

That little Welsh fighting man has remained a very vivid memory for me all through the years and will always do so.



.,WilliamTaylor on right.



The card captions read “Quite Well Willie”. 44th Battalion Collection, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum & Archives.

Ed Russenholt's Last Letter from the Front, 3 May 1917

On 10 April the 44th and its sister battalions had successfully taken Hill 145 and two days later captured "The Pimple" to end the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

In April 1915, a jubilant Ed Russenholt wrote to his sister Drusilla,

...Big doings these days, eh? Last five days the old 44th has cleaned up accounts with Hienie for what happened at the Somme — and then some...

But soon the fortunes of war turned against the Battalion. After the battle, the battalion recuperated, re-equipped, and took on replacements. "Boys keep coming and going and now-a-days, I don't know one quarter of the boys — used to know them all" wrote a newly promoted Lt. Russenholt.

In May and June, these unseasoned soldiers were thrown into battle against a fresh, well-equipped and highly trained enemy. The 44th Battalion's optimism from Vimy would falter as it suffered over 600 casualties over the next two months. Their brigade's first assignment was to carry out operations in a section of captured German trenches known as "The Triangle". The men were not expected to take more German trenches in a "bite and hold" operation, but to merely hold their precarious position and kill as many counterattacking Germans as they could. The Canadians were surrounded on three sides, the

enemy sniped constantly and were close enough to throw bombs into the trenches.

As April moved into May, the Battalion suffered an alarming number of casualties in "seemingly fruitless operations." On 8 May the Germans attacked but were held off by an artillery bombardment. Soon, they counterattacked from all sides using a new terror weapon called the "flammenwerfer" (flame-thrower). They were about to overrun the battalion but Maj. Charles Belcher, according to an entry in the *War Diary*, "displayed magnificent leadership, rallying the scattered men and leading them over the top in face of Flammenwerfer... and later led an attack carried out in broad daylight without artillery protection." Sadly, Major Belcher was killed by a sniper just after his heroic action and leadership. By the time the troops were relieved on 12 May, the Battalion's 280 casualties were the highest since the catastrophe at Regina Trench.

In their next front-line tour, the depleted battalion was ordered to capture the heavily defended town of La Coulette near "The Triangle". The advancing companies were caught in German artillery and machine-gun fire and took 262 more casualties. The battalion had gone from victory at Vimy to disaster. The men were disheartened but not angry at their Battalion officers. It was, according to Russenholt, in the battalion history, the higher-ups at brigade and division levels who betrayed them and sacrificed lives for no purpose.

Writing to his sister, Russenholt bared his soul and penned a moving reflection of the life, feelings and fears of a Canadian infantryman.

Nearly every friend and comrade he had trained and fought with in the past two years had been killed, wounded or captured. He is one of the few left physically whole but his optimism is shattered.

3 May 17

Dear Sister Mine:

Don't think that because I don't write that I've forgotten you or all the kind things you have done for me. The memory of these things is one of the things I will carry to my grave, whether it is an old man's resting place or a grave in a shell-hole as befits a soldier, as it were.... Often I have sat in the bottom of a trench when our friend has been putting a barrage on over our lines when our own shells whistled overhead — and Hienie's crumped and crashed and whined in front, behind and overhead — and the air full of mud & flying shrapnel and the smoke and the stink of the high explosive — when chaos reigned — when all that holds a man is the habits that have been drilled into him in his training — combined with the knowledge that the other fellows are sticking — and sitting there the thing that has got him through [in] my mind has been the Twenty-third Psalm... And surely through it all He has been with me through the valley of the shadow of death — and cared for me on a certain day last October, on the Somme, when our battalion walked into Hienie's machine gun fire and our boys were left out in "no-man's land" wounded or killed — He Brought me out safely. Miss Murray in a letter at Xmas said, "Every man is immortal until his work is done." And if in God's good time any of us is called surely it is for the best and because our work here has been completed...

Sincerely,

Edgar

That was his last letter from the front. Russenholt was gassed by a shell on 9 May. His war was over and he was sent home and, although suffering from the effects of the gas, he lived to the age of 100.

“The Pimple” Monument



Photo by Harry Palmer, A Portrait of Canada



Photo by Ian Stewart 2016

About a mile away from the majestic Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France — between a farmer’s pasture and a wheat field — sits a little-known tribute to those who lost their lives in these First World War battlefields. In late 1917, only a couple of months after the bloody hellfire that defined a young nation’s military might, the men of the 44th Manitoba Battalion built a small memorial to honour comrades who had fallen during the winter, spring and summer battles of that year.

That original memorial, after surviving the rest of the war, was taken apart and sections were brought to Winnipeg to build a new monument. It was placed in Winnipeg’s St. James Park (now Vimy Park) in 1926, where it still stands today. The memorial’s remaining shell in France was knocked down in 1990, only to be replaced in 2007 by a modest new one built by local French citizens to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the 44th ‘s capture of “The Pimple.” on 12 April 1917.

NO.	DATE	E.	FOLLOWS
22-2 6100	9-4-18	April 6 th 1918 shot by sentence of Court Martial. ✓	

Entry in the Service File of Charles Welch “April 6th 1918 shot by Sentence of Court Martial.”

The stories of Privates Stephen Fowles, 44th Battalion, and Charles Welch, 8th Battalion, are remarkably similar. Both men were tried, convicted and sentenced three times in their military service for *When on Active Service Deserting His Majesty's Service*. If found guilty the officers of the courts martial were allowed only one possible sentence: “TO SUFFER DEATH.” Yet, these two men cheated the firing squad four times. How was this possible?

In 1915, the British Parliament passed the *Suspension of Sentences Act* (1915), which Winston Churchill called “the most humane measure that has ever been passed in the history of the British Army.” The act stated that a “convicted soldier’s death sentence could be commuted to a prison term and, if he behaved in prison, the sentence might be suspended.” Furthermore, the act made allowances for soldiers suffering from exhaustion or temporary loss of nerve. Although the Courts Martial had to issue a death sentence they could plead for the soldier’s life, then the sentence could be commuted by the British General commanding the British Army in which the Canadian Corps was attached, or ultimately by Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. Consequently, only 23 of the more than 200 Canadian soldiers sentenced to death for desertion were executed.

It is difficult to determine why these men were finally executed because the record of their Courts Martials were not placed in the National Archives but were destroyed by someone in the Canadian government. However, some of the records of Fowles' and Welch's previous Courts Martials exist so that we can see how the process played out in 1916-1917.

Stephen McDermott Fowles was born in Winnipeg on 13 June 1897 and the family lived in Austin, Manitoba. He attested with the 107th Overseas Battalion in Winnipeg on 6 February 1916 and trained with Manitoba soldiers at Camp Hughes. He was posted to the 44th in early 1917 when the Canadian Corps was training to assault Vimy Ridge.

Only the proceedings of Fowles' second court-martial of 12 December 1917 are available. Fowles deserted during the Battle of Passchendaele. The 44th Battalion had been in the forward area near Passchendaele since 21 October preparing for its planned 27 October attack on Decline Copse. On 23 October Fowles was reported missing. He was arrested 45 kilometers from Ypres on 26 October. He stated in his defense that "I left my unit in the forward area to try and get to Paris as I wanted to get married..."

During his trial Fowles' Conduct Sheet was entered into evidence. It showed that he had been absent without leave in 1916 and had received three days field punishment. In September 1917, he received 27 days field punishment for the same offence.

The court found him guilty and sentenced him to death as required. Lieut.-Col. Davies did not recommend mercy. Davies predicted Fowles would desert again:

To maintain good discipline, suspension of the sentence in the case of this type of man only leads to a repetition of the offence. The character of this man has not been good and from a fighting point of view he is of no value, as he shows a lack of courage while in the line. There is no doubt in my mind that this crime was deliberately committed, and I recommend, most strongly, that the sentence of Death, as passed on Pte. Fowles, be carried out.

The Brigadier-General commanding the 10th Brigade and Major-General Sir David Watson commander of the 4th Division also recommended death. However, General Sir Henry Horne commuted the sentence “to ten (10) years P.S. [penal servitude] and if Stephen Fowles behaves himself in prison, his sentence to be put before the Commander-in-Chief at the conclusion of three months.” Fowles’ sentence was duly suspended, and he returned to his unit. As Lieutenant Colonel Davies predicted, Fowles deserted a third time and was court-martialed, convicted and sentenced to death. There was no “third time lucky.” Sir Henry Horne confirmed the sentence, as did Field Marshall Haig. Fowles was executed on 19 June 1918.



Stephen McDermott Fowles at Camp Hughes. Stephen Fowles rests in Villiers Station II Cemetery, plot X111. B.1 near Villers-au-Bois, France

Charles Welsh was 26-years-old when he attested on February 10th, 1915. He was born in England, had done military service in Manchester and was a serving militiaman. Welsh was taken on strength with the 8th Battalion in late 1916. His service record was unexceptional, except for an instance of being absent from fatigues in December 1915. On 21 February 1916 he was charged with desertion in the field. In his defense he stated that he had gotten drunk as he “was not used to wine” and slept in. The courts heard good reports from his officers and reduced the charge to being Absent Without Leave. He was sentenced to six months hard labour, but the charge was reduced to Field Punishment #1.

Welsh was tried for desertion again in August 1916. On 13 June 1916, according to evidence given in court, Welsh had claimed to be sick while on fatigue duty, and the sergeant, noting that Welsh appeared to be “shaking and in a weak condition, gave him permission to return to

headquarters. He was not seen again until 24 July when he was brought back under arrest. He was found in the reserve area without his equipment and the badges had been ripped from his jacket. Witnesses stated that he was “wandering around aimlessly” and “looked in a bad condition.” Welsh told them that he would go back to his unit if he was given something to eat.

In his defense, Welsh stated that on 9 June he had returned from leave. He was upset as his mother had died and his seven brothers and sisters had no one to look after them. He did not remember falling out of duty, but he did remember being away from his unit. “It was my intention to return,” he said, “but put it off because of fear of punishment and was very weak from want of food.” Defense witnesses testified that Welsh was a good soldier but he “worried a great deal.”

The Court found him guilty of desertion and sentenced him to death, but believing that there may have been mitigating circumstances, the Court requested mercy. His sentence was reduced by British General Sir Hubert Gough to five years penal servitude, but the sentence was remitted, and Welsh returned to the trenches. Welsh went missing again during the Battle of Passchendaele and was arrested eight weeks later. He was convicted of desertion and executed on 6 March 1918.

Canadian soldier Deward Barnes described his role in a soldier’s execution:

We took our positions, five kneeling and five standing behind, the sergeant on one side and the officer on the other to give the orders. If we did not kill him the officer would have to. As soon as the curtain dropped (the prisoner was tied to a chair five paces away from us, a black cap over his head and a big round disk over his heart) and we got the order to fire. One blank and nine live rounds. It went off as one. I did not have the blank... We had the rest of the day off. It was a job I never wanted.

During and after the war, the Canadian government hid the story of executions from the families and the public. The families were not informed, and the court martial records of the 23 soldiers were destroyed. Because of the government's practice of suppressing the truth about the executions, the parents of those executed were told they died in battle: "We were just told that he was killed in battle. It was only much later that my parents learned that he was executed," said Stephen Fowles 93-year-old sister Ruth Duncan, in a 1995 interview with the *Brandon Sun*.

The world moved on and for 80 years the soldiers executed for desertion in World War I lay virtually forgotten in their French and Belgian graves. However, in 1989, Julian Putkowski's book *Shot at Dawn: Executions in World War One by Authority of the British Army Act* revived the public's attention. Putkowski argued that the soldiers were unjustly executed. The victim was chosen arbitrarily for execution, did not have proper representation during their rushed

trials, defense witnesses were not called, medical evidence was ignored or suppressed, and many were underage. Putkowski and the Shot at Dawn Committee lobbied the British government demanding pardon for the executed soldiers.

The British Shot at Dawn Committee contacted Stephen Fowles' sister, who was the last surviving direct relative of an executed Canadian soldier. She, in-turn, gained the support of Ron Duhamel, then Member of Parliament for Provencher and Canada's Minister of Veteran's Affairs (2000-2002).

The minister was sympathetic to her request that something should be done to bring justice to the men and closure to the families. On 11 December 2001, with consent of all political parties, Duhamel expressed regret on behalf of the Canadian government, stating in parliament:

Those who went to war at the request of their nation could not know the fate that lay in store for them. This was a war of such overwhelming sound, fury and unrelenting horror that few combatants could remain unaffected...

Today I want to talk about 23 of our fallen...They were lawfully executed for military offences such as desertion and, in one case, cowardice...

We can revisit the past, but we cannot recreate it... We can, however, do something in the present, in a solemn way, aware now, better than before that people may lose control of their emotions, have a breakdown for reasons over which they have little control. For some it would have been known today perhaps as post traumatic stress disorder. To give these 23 soldiers a dignity that is their due, and to provide closure to their families, as the minister of veterans' affairs and the government of Canada, I wish to express my deep sorrow for their loss of life.

I am announcing in the Chamber that the names of the 23 volunteers will be entered into the First World War Book of Remembrance along with those of their colleagues. Adding the names of these citizen soldiers to the pages of this sacred book, which lies in the Memorial Chamber not far from here, will be a fair and just testament to their service, their sacrifice and our gratitude forevermore.

The announcement was not universally praised. The well-known veteran's advocate and former Royal Winnipeg Rifle Cliff Chadderton, along with the eminent military historian Jack Granatstein, opposed what they saw as unwarranted historical revisionism. However, the world was moving away from Chadderton's and Granatstein's way of thinking and saw the death penalty and the executions in a different light. In the 1990s, the death penalty was abolished for military crimes in Canada, Britain and New Zealand. In 2000, the New Zealand government pardoned their five

soldiers who had been executed. In 2006, the British government pardoned the 306 men executed under their authority in World War I, including the 23 from Canada.



Charles Welsh rests in the Mazingarbe Communal Cemetery Extension plot 11 B. 12, Mazingarbe, France,

78th Battalion (Winnipeg Grenadiers) Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1920



Library & Archives Canada

The 78th Battalion (Winnipeg Grenadiers), Canadian Expeditionary Force was authorized on 10 July 1915 and fought as part of the 12th Brigade, 4th Canadian Division, until disbanded in 1920. Major James Kirkaldy, who had served in Manitoba Militia units before the war and with the 8th Canadian (90th Winnipeg Rifles) during the 2nd Battle of Ypres in 1915, was to lead the new battalion. The *Winnipeg Tribune* reported that Major Kirkaldy's appointment "should stimulate recruiting for he was in the thick of the fighting at Langemarck, St. Julian and Ypres and was invalided home on account of wounds."

It was announced that the 78th Battalion would not be broken-up in England and its men dispersed to different battalions but would go to the battlefields of Europe as a unit. It reached its 1200 man compliment in only 21 days, setting a new record for recruiting in Western Canada, and entrained for Camp Sewell (later renamed



78th Overseas Battalion Winnipeg Grenadiers, 1916



78th Overseas Battalion Winnipeg Grenadiers, 1916



78th Battalion in Big Military parade , Winnipeg, Nov. 1915, Rob McInnes Postcard Collection, Past Forward, Winnipeg Public Library

Camp Sewell, as many soldiers complained, was a windy dusty place in the summer. Recruit Roy Armstrong, wrote home that, “it is as they said rather sandy & your eats, your eyes etc. are full. The average man is supposed to eat 1 pound of sand a day. But for all of that it is healthy. I sleep in the sand with 1 blanket underneath & 2 on top, get up at 5:30 & go to bed at 10 after roll call. Another recruit wrote that “it takes a lot of time washing clean.” Camp Sewell was only suitable for summer training, so, in the fall, the troops returned to Winnipeg for the winter.

On 20 May 1916, the 78th Battalion (Winnipeg Grenadiers) embarked from Halifax on the *Empress of Britain* and arrived in Liverpool, England on 29 May 1916. Winnipeg lawyer Major Gordon Thornton wrote home that the “ ship used to be a passenger

boat but has been pulled to pieces and rough tables made for the men and hooks to hold hammocks put in. They are very crowded but fairly comfortable. All outside light is cut off all the windows & port holes being covered with black paper & nailed shut. The hull has been painted a dull grey like all the British Battle ships so that at a mile it is almost impossible to see them.” (Thornton, *Canadian Letters*)

In late August 1916, the Battalion, along with the 4th Canadian Division, went to the battlefields of Belgium and into the trenches of the Ypres salient. The Battalion suffered its first battlefield death on 13 September 1916 when Cpl. Jack Pounds of Transcona was killed while working in the trenches; however, as Major Thornton wrote home, “We have been extremely fortunate through it all having had only about four actual deaths and about 10 wounded in the Battalion.”



Cpl Jack Pound was the first 78th Battalion death in combat. Canadian Virtual War Memorial

In October 1916, the 4th Canadian Division was ordered to join the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions fighting in the Somme battlefields in France. On 13 October, during their first foray into the Somme trenches, a work party of 750 men from the Battalion were ordered to assist engineers in trench repairs. Unfortunately, due to miscommunication between the engineers and guides, the work parties became lost in the unfamiliar trenches and took dozens of casualties with 8 killed. At the end of October, the battalion took its first tour of the front-line trenches and sent out patrols to obtain information on enemy activities. In mid- November, as the five (5) months long bloody Battle of the Somme was coming to its end, the 78th Battalion and other fresh troops from the 4th Division attacked and successfully captured the infamous Regina Trench, where thousands of Canadians had lost their lives in fierce fighting in October. Although the Battalion took heavy casualties, it fared better than other Winnipeg battalions.

The 4th Division joined the other Canadian Divisions on the slopes of Vimy Ridge in November 1916. The Battalion moved into the front line trenches on 29 December 1916 and its normally staid *War Diary* noted on 31 December 1916:

We ushered in the New Year by putting over a shot in the Hun's rear area directly opposite our front, sharp on the stroke of 12 midnight.

The Canadian battalions hunkered down in the wet, cold winter mud of Vimy Ridge waiting for the spring and the coming great offensive. They trained and practiced trench raiding to sharpen

fighting skills, harass the enemy and gain information. On 19 February 1917, the 78th conducted a major raid on enemy trenches. In a 2 March 1917 letter to Winnipeg, Major Thornton described the raid, “We raided his trenches and blew up a mine, bombed his dugouts and killed quite a bunch of them and while we had a few casualties it showed us what we could do and how much more fun it was fighting than sitting still and taking his guff.”



Stormont Green MacKenzie MC 78th Battalion in winter wear (c.1916)
Kenora Great War Project

Although the 78th Battalion had been in combat on the Somme, its true “baptism of fire” was during the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Early in the morning of 9 April 1917, the battle began and 800 men from the 78th Battalion leapt out of their trenches to attack Hill 145, the Ridge’s highest point. However, the supporting battalions failed in their assigned tasks and the Winnipeggers came under heavy machine gun fire from both flanks and from counter-attacking

enemy troops. “We had the ”pimple” of the ridge to take,” wrote Sgt. Chris Collis, who was buried alive during the battle and later declared unfit for further service, “when we went over the top it was like a ploughed field. The mud was really hell, but we plugged on and on. I saw several of our officers fall and as they fell they urged their men to still go forward. A braver bunch never went into battle.” One of the officers was Lt. James Tait who won a Military Cross for “Conspicuous Gallantry”. Lt. Tait’s citation reads:

Early in an assault he was wounded, and all the other officers killed or wounded, but he led his company with great fearlessness and determination through intense fire to the objective, and although unable to walk, supervised its consolidation, finally crawling back alone to leave for others the four (stretcher) bearers.

Normally about 15% of a battalion’s strength is left out of battle to preserve the unit’s integrity in case of catastrophic loss. However, according to the *War Diary*, by the end of the day Lt.-Col Kirkcaldy had ordered the entire battalion to the front line. All but one of its officers were killed or wounded (only six of the battalion’s original officers survived the war) and although it had taken the objective, it suffered 600 casualties.

In the course of the battle, three men from Basswood, Manitoba, Robert Richardson, Daniel Matheson and Tom Cassidy were killed. The story of their enlistments and deaths are dramatically retold by George Hambley in his local history, *The Golden Thread or The Last of the Pioneers: A Story of Basswood and Minnedosa*,



Form 1, 96-3-17-S, P.

MILITARY CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL 1981
TORONTO

SECTION A.

Date *Dec 25/14*

Name *Christian C.* Age *35* Married or Single

Home Address *671 Main St.* Enlisted on *Dec 8/15*

Town or City *Winnipeg* Province at *Selkirk, Man.*

Unit *482.* Rank and No. *Pte 721010.* Previous Conduct

Diagnosis and Recommendations of previous Boards. *Amp Both Legs & Both Arms.*

On 9 April 1917, Ethelbert “Curley” Christian of the 78th Battalion was injured by a enemy shell and buried two days before being rescued. He is believed to be the only survivor of a quadruple amputation in the First World War.

Through the summer of 1917, the 78th Battalion maintained trenches in the Canadian front lines and was not ordered to participate in the August Battle of Hill 70. In October 1917, the Battalion, along with the other battalions of the CEF, returned to the Ypres salient to fight in the Battle of Passchendaele.

The Battalion took up its battle positions on the night of 28 October and remained in the front-lines until 3 November. It took all its objectives and was the first Canadian battalion to enter Passchendaele village. The 78th took 400 casualties, many of which the *War Diary* reported came from a gas attack on the night of 28 October. In the course of the battle, Lt.-Col. Kirkcaldy was seriously wounded by an enemy sniper while he was on patrol in the front lines. In a 3 November 1917 letter home, Pte. Henry Trudel of Mariapolis, Manitoba, wrote of an ordinary soldier's experience in the horrible battle:

Dear Parents,

I believe that you have learned that I was wounded by a blast of shell fire, on my left knee and also to my head.... These are not serious injuries.....we marched 3 miles to get to the Red Cross under a storm of shells....Here, it rains every day. We are in the mud up to our butt...The cold in Canada is better than the weather here... Will this terrible nightmare ever end?

From your son who thinks of you always in his prayers. Kisses to the whole family,

Henry (Henry Trudel, *Local World War 1 Stories*, Man. Hist. Society)



78th Battalion men leaving YMCA Sept. 1917, William Ridder-Ridder, Library & Archives Canada

The Canadian divisions rested and took on replacements in the winter and spring of 1918. However, they were given weeks of training in open warfare techniques which would serve them well in the summer of 1918. The next great series of battles the Canadian divisions' faced were the Last 100 Days Battles which raged from 8 August to 11 November 1918 and the 78th Battalion (Winnipeg Grenadiers) played their part in Canada's greatest victories.

The first of the battles took place at Amiens, France, between 8-12 August 1918. The 78th entered the battle on 8 August and fought till relieved on 11 August. During its advance, the 78th's advance was stalled by heavy enemy machinegun fire and artillery bombardment. While under this heavy machine gunfire, Lieutenant

Edward (nicknamed *Madman*) Tate, who had won a Military Cross during the battle of Vimy Ridge, won the Battalion's first Victoria Cross. Tait single-handedly knocked out an enemy machine gun post and inspired his men to advance on the enemy. His Victoria Cross citation reads: He "displayed outstanding courage and leadership and although he was wounded he continued to direct his men until he died on August 11th 1918." The battalion suffered 350 casualties.

Over 20,000 Canadian soldiers killed in the First World War have no known grave. They are memorialized on the Canadian Vimy National Memorial, if killed in France, or the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in Ieper (Ypres), Belgium, if killed in the Ypres salient. During the Battle of Amiens, the 78th Battalion had 46 fatalities with 35 "missing. In 2005-2006, eight (8) of the 78th Battalion missing were discovered and five (5) identified through DNA analysis : Lt. Clifford Neeland, Pte. Sidney Halliday Lance-Sgt. John Lindell, Pte. Lachlan Peters and Pte. William Simms. In 2015, the eight (8) were buried with full military honours at the Caix Military Cemetery in Caix, France. (Discovery At Hallu, National Defence & Canadian Forces)



Lt. James Edward Tait



Lt. Samuel Lewis Honey

In September, the Battalion took on replacements and trained for the next battle. In its last major battle of the war, the 78th moved up to its position near Bourslon Wood during the Battle of the Canal du Nord (27 September-11 October). On 29 September, when the Battalion came under heavy machinegun fire and with most officers wounded, Lieutenant Samuel Lewis Honey DCM,MM led his men in clearing enemy strongpoints which, as his Victoria Cross citation stated, led to the capture of Bourslon Wood. Honey died of wounds received during the battle and was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

In the final month of the war, the Battalion continued sending out patrols but saw little action. The *War Diary* noted on October 19, 1918 that when the Battalion left its billets in Auberchicourt, France:

The liberated civilians lined the streets and welcomed us. They said never were they more happy and their smiling countenances confirmed that. White flags were waving on windmills and church towers, which the civilians had pasted up, signifying that the Hun was out of the town. The French flag was hanging from most of the windows, bouquets of flowers were handed to the Major, also to the Adjutant riding at the head of the column, and also to some of the Company Commanders. One old lady, who lived in the Chateau, rushed out and stopped Major Semmens riding in front and asked piteously if he would bring back her son whom the Germans took with them the previous day.

On 5-6 November the 78th faced the enemy for the final time. Advancing behind a rolling barrage it captured almost 100 prisoners, 20 machineguns and moved into Belgian territory for the 11 November Armistice. The Battalion's men were kept busy with training and sports for the next months. On 28 April 1919, the 78th entrained for Le Havre and were notified that they would leave France and sail to England on 3 May. On 9 June 1919, 26 officers and 591 men returned to Canada on the steamship *Adriatic* and arrived at Winnipeg's Union Station on 12 June.

**Seventy-Eighth and Field Ambulance
Boys Given a Warm Welcome Home**

Winnipeg Free Press, p. 18, 13 June 1919



Presentation of 78th Battalion Colours, April 1919. Library & Archives Canada

Sources:

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