



Vignettes of the Beach & East Toronto



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REMEMBERING WORLD WAR I

VIGNETTES OF THE BEACH AND EAST TORONTO

One hundred years ago in the summer of 1914, events in the small Balkan country of Serbia drew Europe, England and eventually Canada into one of the most terrible and bloody conflicts the world has ever faced.

In Canada more than 620,000 men and women were mobilized over the course of the four year struggle – 8408 from Toronto. Of these 250,000 were wounded and an astounding 67,000 were killed.

For the Beach and East Toronto, the war had a serious impact, both for those who went to war and those who stayed at the ‘homefront’. The community would have shared the pride in membership in the British Empire that was very much apart of the Toronto of those years. It would have shared the conviction that this war was a noble cause that would be settled victoriously in a few months. Many of the area’s young men (and quite a number of women) heeded the call to battle. Malvern Collegiate saw 122 staff and students enlist. The Balmy Beach Club provided nearly 100 volunteers. Members of local churches joined in the hundreds.

This is not a full record of all of the men, women and children of this community who endured the terrible years of 1914 to 1918. It couldn’t be. Many records from the period are not available anymore. Many of the men who died were too young to have

fathered children to keep their memories alive. So many stories are lost.

However, one Beach family is blessed to have a special record – a series of letters written home detailing life on the front.

EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTERS OF WILLIAM COMMINS

Two local young men who volunteered were William (Bill) and Chester Commins. They were the eldest sons in a family living at 90 Beech Avenue. Their family had moved to Toronto from Syracuse, New York in 1904. Father William was part of a team establishing a branch of the American Johns-Manville company in Canada. He and his wife Margaret had five children, four sons and a daughter.

Bill went to high school at Malvern, Chester at Riverdale but both had been members of the De-LaSalle cadets and band. They also were fine athletes and belonged to the Balmy Beach Club. Both Bill and Chester volunteered in 1915. Bill with the 75th Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment), Canadian Infantry and Chester with the 1st Battalion (Western Ontario Regiment), Canadian Infantry. Both achieved the rank of Captain and both were awarded the Military Cross, followed for Bill by a DSO (Distinguished Service Order) awarded posthumously, and both died within weeks of the end of the war. Bill was 26, Chester 24.

Captain William Commins, 75th Battalion, wrote letters home which his family kept, and which are a poignant record of his early idealistic enthusiasm for the great cause to both brothers’ experienced advice two years later to Maurice, the next youngest, to stay in school and out of the war or at least out of the army. They had not lost their belief in the need to fight the war, but did not want the younger brother to face the danger and the horrors.

Bill was a loving son, a strong Roman Catholic believer, a loyal Beacher and a vivid letter writer who left a picture of a very different world. His attachment to his neighborhood and his contacts with other Beachers including his effort to keep some of them together are a thread through the letters.

So are the many times he and Ches did manage to



WILLIAM (BILL) AND CHESTER COMMINS

keep in touch in England and across battlefields in that stalemated, stagnated war. His stories of their meetings and misses must surely have been of intense comfort to their family at home.

APRIL 1, 1916 FIRST DAY AT SEA ON BOARD SS EMPRESS OF BRITAIN

Above were millions of stars, below the turbulent sea, and I was uplifted with a great zeal for our cause, when I thought of the thousands of souls on these three great ships [three troop ships and naval escort HM Canarvan] all making the great sacrifice for the one cause, it was great to be here.

APRIL 7, 1916 SEVENTH DAY AT SEA – DAMN ROUGH

We are told that we reach the danger zone at daylight tomorrow, the ship's Officers are rather worried about a wireless we received from the St. Paul which passed us this afternoon. It purported to be from Col. Hughes wishing us a safe voyage. They claim that it gives our position to every German sub near the Irish coast. If it was from friend Sam, I'm afraid his judgment was rather rotten and he may get us into trouble. I wouldn't say anything about this outside the house.

[Col., eventually Lt. Gen. Sir, Sam Hughes was a difficult Minister of Militia who was fired by Prime Minister Borden in November 1916.]

Bill is sent to training camp and manages his first trip to London. Then as units are drafted for the front, men are shifted around to meet needs, and he refers to the 75th as "smashed."

FRIDAY EVENING JUNE 9, 1916 BRAMSHOTT CAMP

Well Howard Crabbe and Doug Towers just left my hut. Howard is wearing the crossed guns of a marksman, the envy of all others, no doubt. He is looking fine, brown, a little taller and mighty husky. Doug is a full corporal and is looking much sturdier. They are coming over again in a day or two with Rollie Taylor and Carl Fox. They have all been drafted to the Seventy-Fourth tonight and of course they are rather fed up.

[Crabbe and Towers, both members of the Balmy Beach Club were killed as was 17-year old Taylor.]

On June 10 Bill notes that brother Ches has arrived

in England. He hopes to get him moved into his unit, and on June 25 meets him in London.

JUNE 26 BRAMSHOTT CAMP

I never realized before how much I thought of Ches until he landed here . . . Everyone who I introduced the big boy to took a fancy to him and if he comes with us he will be very popular, I'm sure. I have not been able to get . . . the other Beach boys with me yet, however I have Trevor Clarke. I'm afraid I won't be able to get the others as their company commanders won't let them go.

Commings may have enlisted with the 75 Battalion because one of the recruiters was a minister in the Beach. Rev (Major) William Leonard Baynes-Reed



was one of eight Canadian chaplains to be awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) during World War I. He was later mentioned in dispatches.

He was 44 years old, rector of St John the Baptist Norway when he enlisted in August, 1915 in the Canadian Chaplain Service and was attached to the 75th Battalion.

His DSO citation reads, "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on 8th-9th August at the capture of the village of Lequesnel. He was constantly in the forward area, attending to the wounded and ministering to the dying under intense firing of all descriptions. His unselfish devotion to duty and his courage were splendid examples, and his services earned for him the respect and affection of all those among whom he worked."

A Toronto Star article said he was an "inspiration to the men in the trenches. He has conducted prayers for the men in their dug-outs, administered communion service and lived among the men through all their days of fighting."

Baynes-Reed returned to St. John Norway after the war and stayed until his death at 67 in 1939. He had served at the church since 1898.

The enlistment from all of the churches in the Beach was high. About 350 parishioners from St. John went to war, among them, Captain Ole Olsen, another member of the 75th Battalion who was awarded a Military Cross. Baynes-Reed commissioned a stained glass window, topped by the badge of the 75th to honor the memory of the 1,082 officers and men of that Battalion who died in the war.

MONDAY JUNE 29, 1916

That last show out there on the Salient sure gave the Canadians a smash for a few hours. Over here no one knew whether anyone would be left to make up our Fourth Division, they've certainly postponed our leaving as a Division materially. Trevor Clarke, the chap who was a Fire Ranger on the Muskoka the year that we were up is one of my corporals now. I'm trying to arrange to get Howard Crabbe, Rollie Taylor, Carl Fox and Towers with me but the Seventy-Fourth are making a fearful howl about it and I cannot say whether I can get them or not.

JULY 3RD, 1916

We've had some excitement here for a change and I must say it has been a welcome relief. We spent all last week getting in shape for the review on Saturday before the King and Queen...We were able to turn out a full Battalion...and were formed up in a high square, and the march past was a corking fine sight. The King had a staff around him that would have made Sam Hughes look like a Mexican Army General.

Saturday we had the first anniversary of the authorization of the 75th OS CEF and it was a very enjoyable party. I add with some conceit that I was the first of three subalterns called on to speak.

We are all looking forward to a real push out there now (to France) and hoping that when we get out that they will have them on the run. A year from now I venture to say that the whole show will be over. I hope not before we get a chance to see a bit of it.

MONDAY MORNING AUGUST 7, 1916

I now have my kit ready for France. We wear a pack similar to the men but are permitted an extra 36 pounds on the transport, my sleeping bag, mattress and all weighs but eight pounds so I can get quite a bunch of stuff. I'm taking an extra pair of breeches, tunic, pair of slacks, one extra boots, trench boots, two suits of underwear, three shirts, three towels, trench coat (waterproof with a camel's hair detachable lining), extra pair of puttees and Toilet articles...

Well I'm sending my trunk to the Savoy Tailors, Strand, London as it should be rather handy there should I get back soon on leave.

Keep Maurice [younger brother] out of it, Ches and I regard him as a real man and too much of a hero to go now.

SEPTEMBER 24, 1916

Two weeks ago today I was asked to take charge of one of the biggest raids that has been directed against the Germans in many moons. I was to have three officers and seventy men. I picked Bill Poupore, Cec Snellgrove and Lou Neelon, and the men were all volunteers.

At just twelve-fifteen one gun went off, immediately every gun in the world seemed to start and the machine guns played a falsetto accompaniment which resembled a million type writers being pounded at once. Machine Guns alone fired twelve thousand rounds and most of this was put over in an intense barrage which lasted but three minutes, and just remember that all this stuff was hitting the German Front Line Trench just in front of our little party...I actually had my balaclava blown off and ... another piece of shrapnel struck the automobile horn which was strapped to my side and put a neat little dent in it.

Well after three minutes the barrage lifted and we rushed Fritz's trench and the next fifteen minutes were the busiest of my young life. We captured six Boshes [sic] and had to kill four who would not come with us. It was cold-blooded work but we had to work fast...Well I finally retired the whole party which had a perfect path back, as we had brought a white tape with us. O'Han[??] and I were the last in, we even brought the tape back with us.

They have recommended me for the DSO and the other officers have been recommended for the Military Cross – twenty of the men were also recommended. I'm afraid there are too many of us ... but still, one never knows. I have told the General that I was keeping the horn to send home, and he had quite a laugh.

BILLETS – LABELLE FRANCE

SUNDAY, SEPT. 24, 1916

I think I shall get my promotion soon ... absolutely everyone in the Corps is quite sure that ... five chaps are dead. I cannot understand why they reported them only missing. I suppose it's another case of mistaken kindness. ... I am still quite alright and trusting in God's goodness. I am confident that I shall have a safe return.

**REST CAMP – BILLETS-FRANCE
BEAUTIFUL RAINY AFTERNOON
SAT., OCTOBER 7, 1916**

My dear Maurice,

Your big brother has the distinction of being the first officer in the Fourth Division to be decorated, I can now write MC after my name ... I had to do something before meeting Ches out here or that gentleman with C on his shoulder would have me out cold. Now Maurice, down to the real serious feature of this letter. You ask me what your chums will do if you do not enlist. When they do, ask yourself how



WORLD WAR I PROPAGANDA POSTER

many of your chums have two brothers at the Front now, how many of them have two brothers shouldering the tremendous respon-

sibilities of a Commissioned officer. Tell them that you have one brother right down in the midst of the greatest battle in the greatest war that the world has ever known and that brother is with the First Battalion of Canadians. Tell them that your other brother is with the crack battalion of the Fourth Division and that he led the only really successful raid on the divisional frontage and that he led it with just the same spirit as he has many times led the old Beach Rugby teams and that he won the first Military Cross the first decoration given to an officer of the Fourth Division.

Now I ask you old chap, do you have to take your hat off to any man in Toronto? ... let me tell you old man that it takes real guts for a man to know where his duty lies and then follow it rather than his inclinations. Your duty is plain – you should stay at home. Our Father and Mother are making sacrifices now which they could easily have avoided by saying no.

**REST BILLETS – FRANCE
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1916**

I'm awfully glad that Mother has interested herself in Red Cross work for if the dear ladies only half-realized the good they do they would be well repaid

also it will help dear Mother to bear up under the strain and I'll bet she'll look younger when we get back next year.

Most of the schools and churches in the Beach were established by the time World War I started, and they were all engaged in war work. So were hundreds of individuals who volunteered with the Red Cross, with St. John Ambulance, the Y and their church groups. School children and adults alike raised funds, knitted, sewed, rolled bandages, learned first aid and home nursing.

A lively home grown group founded the Beach Boys' Benefit Club. The club held dances and gave shows for servicemen. Seventy years later, Gladys Naylor recalled a performance in the bandshell at the Scarboro Beach Amusement park when a gale force wind came up "and we were like little paper figures blowing in the wind".

Williamson Road School, opened a month after the start of the war and its principal, Mr. Vallentyne promptly enlisted. A Miss Dalby joined St John Ambulance, probably in the VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment). Their women and Red Cross VADs took first aid and home nursing training and worked mostly in Canada as aides to the professional nurses. Kew Beach School, the oldest in the neighbourhood, had a cadet corps which drilled in the Beach Theatre, using bed slats for rifles. Their notable uniform featured red jackets, navy knickers and black hose and shoes.

At Malvern Collegiate the girls knitted and took first aid courses. On at least one Saturday afternoon



AN AFTERNOON SPENT KNITTING SOCKS FOR THE MEN ON THE FRONT.



MRS. EMPRINGHAM AND HER DAUGHTERS MAKE THEIR ROUNDS FOR A RED CROSS 'TAG DAY'

students held a sock shower at the home of Miss Barr at 42 Benlamond. The donations were sent to Malvern teacher Lt F.H. Wood for the men he was serving with overseas and were probably welcomed by the soldiers in that war's muddy terrain. In 1919 the Maids of Malvern adopted and for some years provided for a French war orphan, Roger Barrère.

**FRANCE FEBRUARY 19, 1917
(ON A TRAINING COURSE)**

I received work early last week that my captaincy



A RED CROSS FUNDRAISER AT 98 SCARBOROUGH ROAD

has gone through so I am now a three pip one. It was a cause for much rejoicing at the school and the chaps insisted that I go into a store on Saturday and get the three pips and that I had to take my tunic and overcoat off and put them up.

**IN THE FIELD –
EASTER SUNDAY**

Tomorrow I have the great honour of taking my beloved 'D' Co'y over the top in the first battle of the spring offensive . . . It is very hard for me to write this letter for so much may happen and I don't want you to take it too hard

should I be called upon to make the great sacrifice for it is far better to die now, if it is God's will, than to live through life and perhaps be of little use to the world in the end.

I received the Sacraments on Good Friday and I am, not afraid. It is only for the pain which my death now, would give you all that I care and I know that it will be a great consolation to you to know that my death will be a glorious one and that I have not died in vain.

This morning on my way up to the line I met Punk Ryan who is looking very fit and is now a Corporal, he wished to be remembered to you all. I also met Bum Thompson who Maurice and Frank [youngest brother] will remember, he is a sergeant.

[A note from a senior officer says Bill suffered a minor wound to an arm during the action.]

**FRANCE 30/8/17 AND FROM
MARCH 1 TO APRIL 9**

Sharp at 5:30 a.m. Easter Monday morning all hell broke loose on that portion of Germany located on Vimy Ridge ... About two minutes later I thought my arm had been knocked off and reaching over felt to see if my hand was there, the men were dropping all around me, my

runner had been hit in the foot when I got mine and I remember I thought that it was remarkable that neither of us seemed a bit excited.

My arm began to bother me and my big gauntlet got full of blood and finally I decided to drop out and get bandaged. We were then about one hundred yards from where we had to halt for the heavies to finish up. After we got into a big shell hole, I fainted and dropped into the water in the hole. The runners pulled me out of the water and when I came to one of them had been killed and Goodlife [?] and I decided to get back ... It was now almost nine o'clock... I managed the rest of the way in ... and landed in on Major Wilson about ten o'clock.

My wound was dressed and I was sent to Mont St Eloy by wagon... at 11 o'clock on the ninth we were started for Blighty... And were placed on the boat ... and landed at Reading at about ten o'clock on the evening of the eleventh. By that time with splints and bandages my arm was as large as a piano leg ...

After a hearty supper we were put to bed and the Vimy Ridge show was over for us.

FRANCE, MONDAY 20/11/17

[On the Somme] When going up to supper I got a bad shock, we were passing through that town which is most historic for our people in connection with the fighting of this war when I spotted a couple of wounded men from Ches' Brigade and found that his Battalion were doing a fight that morning.

Well I turned my company over to another officer and hurried over to the hospital train which I had seen on a siding. I found a number of men and one officer from Ches' lot. One man had seen him as he came back and said the boy was doing fine ... [about two days later] in walked the boy looking like a million dollars! I went down to his entraining point where I met his C.O. . . . [who] told me he would most assuredly get a decoration (however I should not mention it until it is confirmed).

I expect that I shall go on leave about the time we go in the line again, and Ches and I have arranged to go together, we're both due about the same time and both of us have pretty good drag with our respective C.O.'s.

FRANCE DEC. 27, 1917

The day itself was a perfect one for Christmas – clear and cold, ground covered with about one inch and a half of snow, and not a shot being fired or a

plane over. And better still, we had the old (Vimy) Ridge behind us instead of in front – I guess we're winning alright, aye what? The day before when I went back for provender and went through that once terrible wood on the side of the Ridge one would think that it was all a dream and it was High Park or Victoria Park on an early morning, although I make no claims of wandering through either of these parks in the early morning.

SATURDAY MARCH 10/18

The other personage strangely enough in this army of men is also a lady [the first lady he referred to was a horse] – but a very very young lady who has only recently joined us. Her name is "Chiclets" and she is a little fox terrier, three months old, who was given to me by the family at Charlie Chaplin [Cariblain Chatelain] where we had our mess. The people all cried when we left this time and insisted we take the dog with us to remember them by.

SATURDAY, MARCH 10, 1918

I just found out today that Ches is out of the line and is a very short distance from here and I am going to ride (horseback) over tonight and see the boy. If I can I shall arrange to stay all night – providing Ches has room.

Tomorrow afternoon we shall be moving.

However one thing more – about Ches' decoration. We out here never know what a man gets them for unless he is in our own lot. All I know is that Ches went over the top at the head of his bunch in a sector where the fighting was particularly hard owing to the weather. ... He led his men well, he kept his men and did his job . . . But I may say... that anyone who goes over once and looks death in the face that way can never be downed.

FRANCE – MONDAY 25/3/18

At present we are living in huts and having a fairly jake time of it for a few days having left our cellars a short time ago. Young Bill Smith was over to see me this afternoon. .. and is very keen to get back into the paddling game.

He told me that the [Balmy Beach] Club were again after that cup so I wrote him a letter to the effect that as he would have won it had he been there for the third year and as he was now in France taking part in this game, that I considered it more rightly his than if he had paddled over the course.



THE BALMY BEACH CLUB KEPT TRACK OF ITS MEMBERS WHO FELL IN BATTLE BY CLIPPING THE DEATH ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE PAPERS.

So I guess he will now hang on to it and he certainly has more right to it than anyone who may turn up later on. When I get back I'll put up another one.

The Balmy Beach Club was very active during the war, holding dances and fundraisers. But perhaps its greatest contribution was on January 14, 1916 when (according to an account kept by the club) the entire football team of the Balmy Beach Canoe Club, together with six spare men, enlisted.

“Eighteen of the players, who made an enviable reputation the City League, have donned the uniform of the 34th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery of Kingston and two others have joined the 118th Battalion at Berlin. The Balmy Beach Club has 98 men in khaki. Of the last season’s war canoe crew 13 of the 15 men have also enlisted while 11 of the 15 men who wore the orange and blue in 1914 are also in the King’s service. The Balmy Beachers have had a contribution in men for the new Sportsmen’s Battalion, which was authorized by the Militia Dept. last night.”

FRANCE TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 1918

Now as for Maurice [now 20 years old] I cannot understand the situation at all, surely he owes it to Ches and I to confide in us if he is going into the Army ... at all times he must bear in mind the one salient fact that his first duty is to his home and parents.

FRANCE APRIL 9, 1918

From Ches:

I have advised Maurice to get in the Forestry section or if not in that branch to try the train. I certainly would strongly disapprove of his joining the infantry – two from one family is quite sufficient.

FRANCE THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 1918

My dear Maurice –

Both Ches and I have heard of your intention with mingled feelings – we both realize what an added strain your entrance into this damned business is going to put on our beloved dear little Mother and dear old Dad.

However you have said you were thinking of the RFC [Royal Flying Corps]. Well if you have gone ahead with it or made up your mind I can only say this –the Flying Corps is a good bet – excellent pay, lots of leave, good mess and good quarters every night, contrary to general opinion, it is safer than the infantry – except when training. The great feature at the RFC is to get confidence in the air, but be careful, most good pilots crash because they have the former and forget the latter.

Bill's recommendation that Maurice go into the RFC is not surprising. A number of Malvern students ended up as flyers including Flight Sub-Lieutenant Gordon Ezra Duke (1896-1916) who signed up for pilot training at the Curtiss Flying School on Toronto Island in the late summer of 1915 in preparation for service with the Royal Naval Air Service. When the course was ended before completion in November, the navy agreed to pay his passage to



England to complete his course at their flight training centre in Eastbourne, Sussex. On Jan. 10, 1916, during his first training flight with instructor Warrant Officer 2nd Class Percival Fraser of Australia, a control cable broke loose and the plane crashed near Hampden Park, killing both men instantly.

Lieutenant Roy Wesley Kerr, (1895-1918) also did not complete his training before he died. Kerr joined the Royal Flying Corps in June 1917 and trained at Forth Worth, Texas, and Long Branch, Toronto. He arrived in England in April 1918 to continue his training as a pilot in what was now the Royal Air Force and was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant in July. When the new squadron he was assigned to was not formed as planned, he was sent to No. 2 Fighting School at Marske-in-Cleveland to practice gunnery. While flying a single-seater Sopwith Dolphin on Aug. 12, 1918, he went into a spin and crashed.

Three sons of Dr. Opie Sisley, Scarborough's medical officer of health, and Sarah 'Sadie' (McMillan) Sisley, also saw duty in the RFC.



Lieutenant Arthur Jackson Smith Sisley (1893-1917) or 'Bud' as he was known, first enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in January 1915 and served with the 14th Battery,



Canadian Field Artillery, for two years until he was wounded. While on leave, he volunteered for the Royal Flying Corps in January 1916 and received his commission in May. He returned to the front as a pilot in 1917 and joined 70 Squadron, based in Poperinghe, Belgium, in September, just as they received their new Sopwith Camel fighters.

On the afternoon of Sept. 10, Sisley was on patrol with 'B' flight over Langemarck, Belgium, when he was attacked by German ace Lt. Werner Voss and shot down. For a time, the family believed reports that he might be a prisoner, but eye-witnesses later confirmed he was seen going down in flames. His plane was never found.

Bud's youngest brother, 2nd Lieutenant Donovan Laurier Sisley (1898-1918) joined the Royal Flying Corps in Toronto as a cadet in March 1917 and received his commission in August. He joined 82 Squadron and was engaged in artillery spotting and photo-reconnaissance over the Western Front.

On March 6, 1918, while on a reconnaissance in their two-seater Armstrong Whitworth FK8 aircraft, somewhere between Itancourt and Séry-lès-Mézères, Sisley and his observer, Lt. Arthur Clair Gilmour, 11th Canadian Railway Troops, were attacked by five enemy Fokker aircraft. They were eventually shot down by Lt. Kurt Küppers of Jasta 48.

The third brother, Malcolm Millard 'Max' Sisley, AFC (1891-1957) also served with the air force. Max survived the war and went on to have a long career in the RCAF, serving as a Group Captain with the Provost Branch, RCAF, during the Second World War.

But the most famed of local flyers had to be Captain Roy Arthur Brown. Brown started flying lessons in 1915 with the Royal Naval Air Service, taking additional training in Chingford, England.

He was stationed with the 2009th Squadron in 1918

which had a major problem. Whenever the squadron took flight, the infamous Red Baron, Manfred Von Richthofen, and his Flying Circus would appear out of the mist and fog. On April 21, the Red Baron was on the trail of one of Brown's pilots and was ready to shoot him down. According to Brown's later statements he fired at the Baron from above, behind and to the left. Von Richthofen crashed and died. Although a number of other flyers took credit for the kill, Second Lieutenant Wilfred May, who was being chased by the Baron, saw Brown firing during the engagement.

Brown lived on Wrenson Road after the war and even ran for political office in the Beach.

JULY 3/18

Scarboro [Golf Club] must be quite wonderful this year with its cinder paths, its bridges, lights and all other improvements. I'm sorry about the club dances and I do wish that our old crowd were back

to look after things, however, one never knows how soon, and we may all be back sooner than we know.

Unfortunately owing to the distance I didn't get over to the Corps Sports, and later found that Ches was there, and of course was awfully disappointed.

My big mare has been laid up and somehow I can't get any pleasure from riding the others, so I decided not to go and now I'm sorry. However, I shall manage to see him in a few days I trust and have a good chat.

JULY 7 1918

Tonight we had a photo of the "originals" taken minus one Whittle (leave) and one Baynes-Reed (not to be found). [See below left]

FRANCE – JULY 13/18

Here we are in the line again and I've had my usual luck in just missing Ches. . . Well just as we were pulling out a couple of my men came along and said they had just met Ches and he would expect me to dinner at his place – about a quarter of a mile down the road – and of course I had to come in again without seeing the boy.

The sensation of going in again has been rather hard to define this time after our two months of rest, when the warning order came everyone took it quite philosophically... For my own part I was rather glad of the move because each day was making it harder to think of getting back into harness.

All tales to the contrary, we are not asking for trouble nor are we champing at the bit to get into a fight- we simply know how good we are and how well we can acquit ourselves in a fight – but we are at the same time satisfied to take the easy end of it should it come our way – we know that we are sure to get our share before it's over. The cheap newspaper stuff about "Canadians keen to be in the fight" and "Canadians hoping that the Hun will attack so that they can get their own back" is the damndest kind of rot.



ORIGINAL OFFICERS, TAKEN AT CAMBLAIN-CHATELAIN, JULY, 1918.
 MAJOR J. H. HULL, D.S.O. (K-4-A), MAJOR A. G. POUPORE, D.S.O., CAPTAIN
 M. A. NEELON, M.C. (K-4-A), CAPTAIN A. B. DUNCAN, M.C. (K-4-A),
 CAPTAIN "BILL" COMMIN, M.C. (K-4-A), CAPTAIN T. S.
 CRESWICKE and CAPTAIN A. W. BOBBY.

FRANCE AUGUST 16, 1918

I cannot fully express my sorrow when I inform you that your son Bill was instantly killed by a shell in the great attack on the ninth. The Battalion was detailed to capture a good sized village and a system of trenches beyond it. We had just taken the village and were pushing on to the line of trenches and Bill was coming to Battalion headquarters to report. His company had done fine work in the attack. He was instantly killed by a shell a few yards from Battalion headquarters. The attack was a great success but the whole battalion is sad owing to the deaths of your son and Major Bull. They were very dear to all of us. We brought the remains back and Bill is buried beside Major Bull. The Brigade Chaplain, Father Fallon said the funeral

service.

I cannot express my sorrow, Bill and I had been fast friends ever since the Battalion was organized. He was a true Christian and a man you were proud to own as a friend. He attended confession on the evening of the seventh before we went forward into the attack. You must be consoled by the fact that he died a true soldier doing his part nobly to the end.

Sincerely

(Major) Albert G. Poupore

Bill was buried at Beaucourt British Cemetery (B) in Somme, France. His brother Chester died on October 1, just three months after Bill and is buried at Sancourt British Cemetery (I C 8), Nord, France.



While Bill Commins' letters give us additional insight into his life and character, we know something about other Beachers who lived through the war.

Military, census and municipal records can be very detailed. Area resident Richard Gerrard undertook to see what he could learn about his Great Grandfather Percy Giles and this is the result.

GILES, PERCY THOMAS: BIOGRAPHIC DETAILS

- Born in Banbury, Oxfordshire, England on 12 February 1886. Trains as a butcher. Immigrated to Canada about 1909 (not listed in 1909 Toronto City Directory) after the death of his parents.
- Joins the Toronto Police by 1911.
- Marries Sadie [maiden name?]. Has four daughters: Annie (age 5 at enlistment), Lillian (age 3),

Edith (age 1½, dies later in infancy, buried in St. John's Norway Cemetery) and Sally (born after the war).

- Addresses: 7 Foxley Street; 407 Dundas Street East; 94 Ivy Avenue; 296 Kingswood Road.
- Attested on 30 December 1915 (age 29 years 10 months) to the 124th Overseas Battalion (Governor General's Body Guard), Canadian Expeditionary Force.
- Rank at Attestation: Sergeant Cook
- Previous service: Private with the '2nd Oxfordshire' (2nd Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry?) for two years.
- Transferred to Military District No. 2 Reserve Unit, Canadian Army Service Corps (CASC), Shorncliffe Army Camp, Kent, England (August 1916) as a Butcher
- On 19 October 1916 reverts to Permanent Grade (Private)
- Transferred on to No. 3 Company, 5th Divisional Train, CASC. Stationed at Bramshott Military Camp, Hampshire, England (September – October, 1916), then Witley Military Camp, Hampshire, England (November 1916 – May 1918), then 1st Division Train in Belgium, France and Germany (June 1918 - April 1919).
- Discharged to Canada 30 April 1919, Dispersal Area "I", Dispersal Station Toronto.
- Returns to the Toronto Police, 55 Division, rises to rank of sergeant.
- Enlisted in 3rd Battalion Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, Canadian Army, 2 July 1942. Discharged as unfit 31 December 1944.
- Dies 30 December 1961 Toronto, Canada and is buried at Highland Cemetery, Toronto.

Documents: First World War (Service number 769345)

- Certificate of Military Qualification for Non-commissioned Officers, certifying that Sergeant Percy Giles, 124th Overseas Battalion, CEF, attended the Infantry School of Instruction at Toronto until 12 March 1916, stamped and dated 14 June 1916,

signed Lt-Col Labatt and Capt. Trump, Military District 2.

- Canadian Pay Book for Use on Active Service, Army Book 54, dated entries for 1 August 1916 to 1 April 1919.
- Pay Book, Canadian Expeditionary Force, dated 14 April 1919. Listing his civilian allowances on demobilization; ink annotations in back of home remedies.
- Form of Will (P.85), Percy Giles (769347) with 5th Division Train bequeaths to Sadie Giles of 94 Ivy Avenue, Toronto. Printed document with ink entries signed and dated 28 March 1917.



- Black and white photographic postcard, depicting Sergeant Percy Giles in uniform of 124th Overseas Battalion, dated 1 March 1916. Wearing a seven button tunic complete with 124th Battalion cap and collar badges and rank chevrons. Pencil annotations verso.
- Black and white photograph postcard, depicting Private Percy Giles with a group of CEF soldiers (Giles is centre back row indicated with an "X" above). All are wearing the seven button tunic, leather ammunition bandoliers, curved "CANADA" shoulder titles, and general service cap and collar badges. Two on far left are wearing cap and collar badges for 150th Infantry Battalion (150th Carabiniers Mont Royal).
- Canadian Expeditionary Force Discharge Certificate, signed and dated 23 April 1919, No. 2 District Depot, Toronto. States he served with 124th Battalion, 1st Division Train, CASC in Belgium, France and Germany.
- Memorial Card for Lieutenant Arthur Bernard Jarvis, Royal Field Artillery, killed in action in France on 3 August 1917.

Documents: Second World War (Service number B.65782)

- Department of National Defence (Army) Identity Card, Corporal Percy Giles, dated 31 December 1944
- Canadian Army (Active) Discharge Certificate, Corporal Giles, 3rd Battalion Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, dated 31 December 1944, as "unable to meet the required military physical standards."

Documents: Civilian (incl. Toronto Police)

- Black and white photograph, depicting Percy Giles in Toronto Police uniform with helmet, Badge number 119 on collar, bi-metal police helmet plate, stamped signed “Adamson / 377 Yonge St. / Toronto” on matt, about 1911.
- Black and white photograph, depicting Percy Giles in Toronto Police uniform with peaked hat, about 1935(?). Ink annotation verso.
- Newspaper clipping from Banbury, England about retired Toronto policeman Percy Giles returning to his hometown while touring England with members of the Canadian legion, about 1956.
- Newspaper clipping, Toronto Globe and Mail, Percy Giles obituary, 30 December 1961.

Artefacts

- Clock. Carved mahogany 'trench art' clock, made two parts (winged clock surround and base) from a propeller blade with inset Royal Flying Corps cap badge and .303 shell casings.

MEMORIALS

Some of the artifacts that keep the name of those who served alive are the many memorial plaques put up in schools and churches. In addition to a plaque St. John Norway there are three stained glass windows in commemoration of the war.

St Aidan’s Anglican Church, like other Beach churches, had about 300 parishioners who had enlisted, including T. Hudson Stewart, who became an army chaplain in 1916.

In an unusual gesture, on their long honor role, they separated four women who had volunteered as Nursing Sisters: Annie Bennett, Gertrude E. Service, Gertrude L. Spanner, and Annie Whitaker.

About 3,000 Canadian nurses served overseas, though more had volunteered. Canadian VADs were invited by the British as early as 1916 to work in British military hospitals as aides for the nurses. Canada put a number of them to work



at home to

provide support for nursing staff, especially toward the end of the war as more invalid soldiers needed rehabilitation care.

One of the best known memorials is at Malvern Collegiate. One hundred and twenty-two Malvern students enlisted and, of those, 25 of were killed. Because so many of the men were buried in France, the community wanted a place to memorialize their sacrifice.

After the war, graduates, students and staff raised \$3,400 for a statue. The statue was created by a famous Canadian sculptor, Emanuel Hahn, the preeminent designer of war memorials of the 1920s. It was unveiled in 1922 at a ceremony which Rev Baynes-Reed officiated.

On it are inscribed the names of the 25 men who died in World War 1, and thanks to the research efforts by the Malvern Red and Black Society we know something about the war-time service of each of them.

ROLL OF HONOUR 1914-1918

Lance Corporal Cecil Pugh Annis (1894-1918)
RR#1 Highland Creek

Son of Levi and Sarah Annis of Highland Creek, Annis was among the first Malvern students to volunteer for the Canadian Expeditionary Force, signing up in April 1915. He served with the 3rd Battalion and was wounded in action twice, first in June 1916 at Mount Sorrel, Ypres, during the Battle of the Somme. After returning to the front lines, he was again wounded in October 1916 and spent many months convalescing before returning to Toronto to be discharged, no longer fit for service having lost an eye and suffered head wounds.

Although he hoped to return to Malvern and finish his studies, his health deteriorated and he died on Sept. 20, 1918, just weeks before the armistice. He is buried in the cemetery at Washington United Church, Scarborough.

Capt. William Kennedy Commins, MC, DSO
(1892-1918)
90 Beech Ave.

2nd Lieutenant Gordon Parsons Davidson (1892-1917)
2162 Gerrard St. E.

Son of George and Martha Davidson, he joined the CEF in October 1915, serving with the 95th Battalion. He went overseas with a draft of Canadian Offi-



cers Training Corps candidates for Imperial commissions in March 1916 and, after training at Oxford, was appointed to the Royal Scots Fusiliers in November and joined the 1st Battalion in France in December 1916. He was with his regiment near Monchy-le-Preux during the Battle of Arras, when he went missing in the disastrous attack of May 3, 1917, and was later reported killed on that day. He is remembered on the Arras Memorial in the Faubourg-d'Amiens Cemetery.

Private John Patrick Davidson (1897-1917)
44 Wineva Ave.

Son of John Patrick and Jessie Russell Davidson, he joined the CEF in November 1915, and arrived in England with the 95th Battalion before joining the 60th Battalion (Victoria Rifles) in September 1916. In January, his regiment went into the line near Thelus, France, and he was killed when a trench mortar exploded near him on Jan. 24, 1917. He is buried in Ecoivres Military Cemetery, Mont St. Eloi, Pas de Calais.

Flight Sub-Lieutenant Gordon Ezra Duke (1896-1916)
255 Glebeholme Blvd.

Private Martin James Flood (1894-1916)
14 Swanwick Ave.

Son of Martin and Margaret Flood, he joined the CEF in June 1915 at Camp Niagara. He arrived in France in December with reinforcements for the 2nd Battalion (Eastern Ontario Regiment). After nine months at the front, he was wounded by shrapnel during the Battle of the Somme on Sept. 24, 1916,



and was taken to No. 3 Casualty Clearing Station northeast of Amiens, where he died of his injuries. He is buried in Puchvillers British Cemetery.

Lieutenant Cecil John French, MC (1893-1918)
Ridgetown, Ont.

Son of Frederick and Mauanna Lydia (Taylor) French, he was a medical student at the University of Chicago when he enlisted at Minnedosa, Mani-

toba, in October 1915 and joined the Canadian Machine Gun Corps. He rose quickly through the ranks and was promoted to sergeant with the 16th Machine Gun Company by September 1916. French transferred to cadet school in February 1917 and received his commission as a lieutenant in April 1917, again with the 16th Company. He was awarded the Military Cross for conspicuous bravery in reorganizing his crews after an attack and saving the guns during the Battle of Passchendaele in October 1917. In December, he was injured when struck by a car and spent time in hospital. After spending time at field gunnery school, he returned to the front with the 4th Canadian Machine Gun Battalion and was killed on Sept. 28, 1918, near the Douai-Cambrai Road in the battle for Bourlon Wood. He is buried in Anneux British Cemetery, Nord, France.

Gunner Arthur Patrick Gorman (1889-1917)
West Hill

Son of Patrick and Ellen Gorman, he signed up with the CEF in June 1916 at Belleville and served in the artillery, eventually joining the 6th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, in France in April 1917. He was wounded in the face in December when the brigade was at Mericourt and was diagnosed with tuberculosis during his stay in No. 16 Canadian Hospital, Orpington, England. He was invalided back to Canada in May 1918 and discharged in September. Gorman died from his illness on March 29, 1920, and is buried in Highland Creek (St. Joseph's) Cemetery.

Private William Albert Heal (1891-1918)
23 Kimberly Ave.

Son of John and Amelia Heal of Scarborough Junction, he volunteered for duty in November 1915 and sailed for England in May 1916. After training, he embarked for France in May 1917 and joined the 20th Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment). At Third Ypres in the Battle of Passchendaele, while taking part in an attack on enemy positions northwest of Guémappe in the early morning of Aug. 26, 1918, he was killed instantly by shell fire shortly after leaving the 'jumping off' trench at about 3am. Heal is buried in Tilloy British Cemetery, Tilloy-les-Mofflaine, near Arras.

Gunner William John Hird (1897-1921)
34 Edgewood Ave.

Son of James and Annie Hird, he served with the Queen's Own Rifles militia while a student at Malvern, volunteered for the CEF in December 1915

and embarked for England in September 1916. He served with the 13th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, until August 1917 when he joined the 53rd Brigade. During the spring of 1917, Hird spent many months being treated for a persistent cold which was eventually diagnosed as tuberculosis. He was sent back to Canada in February 1918 and discharged in August. He was sent to the Soldiers Civil Re-establishment Sanatorium in what is now Baker's Park, Calgary, Alberta, where he died on Feb. 23, 1921. Hird is buried in the nearby Calgary Union Cemetery.

Gunner Walter Thomas Hutchinson (1893-1916)
58 Lyall Ave.

Son of Thomas and Mary Hutchinson, he joined the CEF in November 1916 and became a member of the Canadian Field Artillery, arriving in England in April 1917. In June he was sent to France to reinforce the 4th Division, Canadian Divisional Ammunition Column and by November, he was helping feed the guns at Passchendaele during the Third Battle of Ypres and was one of a party detailed to deliver ammunition to the 19th Battery. While carrying out his duties on Nov. 9, 1917, Hutchinson was killed near Vlamertinghe, Belgium, in a bombing raid by hostile aircraft. He is buried in Vlamertinghe New Military Cemetery, West Flanders.

Private Wilfred John Jones (1896-1917)
20 Sprucehill Rd.

Son of Walter and Mary Jones, he served for a year with the 4th Company, Canadian Officers Training Corps, at the University of Toronto and joined the CEF in October 1915. He arrived in France in June 1916 and was transferred to the 3rd Brigade, Canadian Machine Gun Corps. After serving for almost a year at the front, Jones was evacuated to hospital in May 1917, but returned to the front near Vimy in June. He was killed by a shell just past midnight on July 1 and is buried in Orchard Dump Cemetery, Arleux-en-Gohelle, Arras, France.



Lieutenant Roy Wesley Kerr (1895-1918)
18 Cedar Ave.

Lieutenant Charles Simpson Lennox (1898-1917)
35 Patricia Dr.

Son of Charles and Sarah (Simpson) Lennox and a cousin to Col. Sam Sharpe, MP, commander of the 116th Battalion, CEF, he joined that regiment in No-



ember 1915 and embarked for England in July 1916. By November he had risen through the ranks and was promoted to Lieutenant, sailing for France in February 1917. During the Battle of Lens, Lennox and several men of 'B' Company were defending an outpost near Avion that was overrun in a counterattack on July 23 and he was reported missing. It was later learned that he died of a head wound on July 24, 1917, while a prisoner at Hénin-Liétard (now Hénin-Beaumont). He is buried in Cabaret-Rouge Cemetery, Souchez, Pas-de-Calais.

The family donated the central stained glass window in St. John the Baptist Norway Anglican Church and dedicated it to their son and the 54 members of the parish who were killed in 1914-1918 .

Private Charles William Mabbot (1899-1918)
288 Main St.

The son of William and Martha Mabbot, he joined the CEF in March 1916 while a student at Malvern, just 12 days after turning 18. He embarked for England in April 1917, and was assigned to the Eaton Motor Machine Gun Battery, which became part of the 2nd Canadian Machine Gun Brigade. He was wounded on Oct. 18, 1918, after the Battle of Cambrai, and sent to the military hospital in Napsbury, St. Albans, England, where he died from an infection on Oct. 23. He is buried in the Hatfield Road Cemetery in St. Albans, Hertfordshire.

Private Harvey George Mansfield (1895-1916)
195 Seaton St.

Son of Margaret and the late Charles Mansfield of Scarborough, he enlisted in August 1915 and embarked for England in May 1916, arriving in France a month later. He joined the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles and by October his regiment went into the line on the Somme to take part in the Battle of Ancre Heights. During the first attack on Regina Trench on Oct. 1, 1916, he was killed in action. He is buried in Stump Road Cemetery, Grandcourt, France.

His brother, Fred (3rd Battalion, CEF), was killed on Aug. 30, 1918.

Private Charles Percy May (1895-1918)
2189 Gerrard St.

Son of Joseph and Margaret May, he enlisted in March 1916 and left for overseas in April 1917. Dur-

ing training in England, he was promoted to the acting ranks of lance corporal and sergeant, but reverted to private when he sailed for France in March 1918 to join the 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles Battalion. On the night of July 5, 1918, while in the front line south of Mercatel near Arras, he was killed instantly by a high-explosive shell which burst on the wall of the trench immediately behind his post. He is buried in Wailly Orchard Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais.

Private Robert Fountain McLuckie (1895-1916)
50 Harvard Ave.

Son of Bathia McLuckie and the late Peter McLuckie, he enlisted in July 1915 as a member of the 3rd Company, Canadian Officers Training Corps, and arrived in England in September 1915. He was assigned to the 3rd Company, Canadian Machine Gun Corps, in February and joined his unit in France the following month. Just eight weeks later, while his unit was billeted near Ypres in the town of Dickebush, their barracks were shelled by the enemy on the night of May 21 and he was reported killed the following day. Pvt. McLuckie is buried in Railway Dugouts Burial Ground, in Ypres, West Flanders.

2nd Lieutenant Arthur Jackson Smith Sisley
(1893-1917)

2 Main St.

2nd Lieutenant Donovan Laurier Sisley (1898-1918)

2 Main St.

Lance Corporal Harold Wilson Spence MM
(1895-1917)

West Hill

Son of George and Lillian Spence, he joined the CEF in July 1915 and left for England in March 1916. On arrival, he contracted scarlet fever and was hospitalized for many months to convalesce. He finally joined the 44th Battalion in France in December 1916 and served at the front, winning the Military Medal for bravery in the field in July 1917. In September, Spence was promoted to Lance Corporal and given 10 days leave in Paris. He returned to the front and was killed at Passchendaele six weeks later, on Oct. 28, 1917, in the Battle for Decline Copse. He is remembered on the Menin Gate, Ypres.

Private Joseph Rollit Taylor (1897-1917)
70 Balsam Ave.

Son of Joseph and Katie Taylor, he left Malvern in November 1915 to join the 3rd Divisional Cyclist Company and arrived in England in January 1916. Because of the static nature of trench warfare, the cyclists were broken up to reinforce infantry battalions and Spence was transferred to the 44th Battalion (New Brunswick Regiment), CEF, in July 1916. He arrived in France in August and served in the field through many battles until he was killed on Jan. 31, 1917, near Carency, just west of Vimy. He is buried in Villers Station Cemetery, Villers-au-Bois, Pas-de-Calais.

Lieutenant Aalsey Joseph Trebilcock (1889-1917)
24 Lyall Ave.

Son of Joseph and Esther Trebilcock, he joined the CEF in January 1916 and immediately received a commission due to his service in the militia with the 120th (City of Hamilton) Overseas Battalion (13th Royal Regiment of Hamilton). He arrived in England in August 1916 and began training for service in the Canadian Machine Gun Corps. By September, he was in France and on his way to join the 1st Company, CMGC. On Nov. 6, he was leading his gun crews to their forward positions on the highest ground of the Bellevue-Meetcheele Spur, when he was wounded in the left leg and died later that day at No. 3 Canadian Field Ambulance. Trebilcock is buried in Vlamertinghe New Military Cemetery, West Flanders. His brother, Joseph Archibald Trebilcock, was also killed in the war (see below).

Major John Archibald Trebilcock, MC (1893-1918)
24 Lyall Ave.

Trebilcock entered the CEF shortly after the war began, enlisting in the Canadian Field Artillery in December 1914. He sailed for England in May 1915 and trained until September, when he was discharged to take a commission with the Royal Field Artillery, first with the 79th Brigade and then the 81st. During this time he was promoted to Lieutenant, Captain and Major, serving on the Armentières front and at the Somme. During 1917 he fought at Vimy, Messines and Passchendaele. He was awarded the Military

Cross for his actions at Passchendaele in September, when he kept his guns working under heavy enemy fire, and put out, at great personal risk, blazing ammunition that had caught fire in one of the gunpits. He served in Italy during the winter of 1917-1918 and returned to the Western Front in April. After only a few weeks, he was wounded near Arras on May 21, 1918, when ammunition in one of his gun pits caught fire during enemy shelling and exploded while he was trying to help his men. He died at 91 Field Ambulance Station and is buried in Bac-du-Sud British Cemetery, Bailleulval, Pas-de-Calais.

Private Thomas Murray Watson (1897-1917)
82 Dixon Rd.

Son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Watson, he enlisted in the CEF in March 1916 and sailed for England in July. By November he was in France and joined the 20th Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment) near Le Havre. After spending the winter months at the front and taking part in preparations for the Canadian assault on Vimy Ridge, he was killed by an exploding shell on April 8, the day before the battle while a member of a carrying party assisting the 4th Trench Mortar Battalion. He is remembered on the Vimy Memorial, but regimental records show he may have been buried in La Targette British Cemetery at Aux Reitz.

This book is only a small sampling of the many sacrifices this community made to help win “the war to end all wars.” One hundred years later, the Beach still continues to make contributions that make Canada a better place to live.

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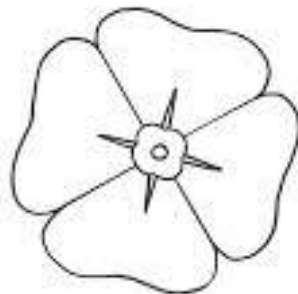


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