

MEMORIES OF THE GREAT WAR

In 1916 17-year-old George Murray Walker of Perth enlisted with the 130th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), and shipped out for the battlefields of France. Transferred to the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) he was among the men who heard the last shot fired at Mons, Belgium, on November 11, 1918. Sixty years later he recalled those years in a short memoir published by the Perth Courier.



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Memories of Perth, the Great War and Coming Back Again

By Murray Walkerⁱ
Bloomington, Indiana

It was in April. The snow was melting. The crows had come out of the woods and school was boring. The year was 1916. Over in Europe a nasty war was going on and in the counties of Lanark and Renfrew the 130th Battalion was being recruited.ⁱⁱ



*Lieutenant-Colonel John
Edward de Hertel*

Colonel de Hertel was the commander. I never knew how he got this honor because his previous military service was minimal and the minute the battalion reached England he was returned to Canada.ⁱⁱⁱ Nevertheless, he strutted around in his brand-new uniform with the proper insignia on his lapels and talked about the honor of doing service for your country.

We were young and very innocent. The band^{iv} played stirring music and the uniformed boys were getting all the girls. They looked so smart in their uniforms, but years later, looking at an old photo of me, I couldn't believe how once we thought we looked so smart.

Well, on the morning of the 17th, Pat Wilson^v and I went to the enlistment office. They knew we were under age, but they took us and immediately outfitted us in an ill-fitting uniform^{vi}. So off we went home. Needless to say, our parents were flabbergasted. Pat's mother was playing bridge and she fainted when Pat came into the room. My mother shuddered but said nothing.

They put us in the band. Neither of us had ever played an instrument but Mr. Keyes^{vii}, the local bandmaster, offered to give us lessons. Pat, who was large, was given a bass horn. I had an alto. Every morning we paraded the enlisted men to the old fair grounds for drill. Pat and I carried our horns, our cheeks puffed out, but no sound. Then back to our lesson. Marching the troops back at noon there would be a short stop at the pump on the corner of North and Wilson streets, using a tin cup attached to a chain. That is when all mothers told their children not to use the cup any more.

In May, all the enlistees were brought into Perth for mobilization prior to going to camp. We were billeted in the buildings of the fair grounds. I was in the chicken house, and it wasn't long before we began scratching, and not as a chicken, but as defence against lice.

Colonel de Hertel had his proud moments and we had ours. He strutted in front of his battalion and we had money in our pockets - \$1.10 a day! He was important in the community and we were in our glory; a uniform, no school, girls, travel to a far away country. How dumb we were. With no idea of what war was like, what the hardships we would encounter and what death and destruction we would see.

We were marshalled at the station for the troop train to take us to Barriefield.^{viii} We were in good spirits, kidding and waving goodbye to our parents and friends. But arriving in camp things changed. There was discipline like we had never known before. Hard drill in the mud. After a month or so we were moved to Valcartier^{ix}. Then things got tougher. We were being put in shape for overseas.



Farewell at the Railway Station, Private Murray Walker, right rear.

The bass and alto horns became our daily obsession and we had managed to learn the fundamentals, but we were never to be musicians, or last long as a member of the band. Soon it was our turn for leave, so back to Perth for 14 days. It was July and two weeks was all too short, so stayed longer, being AWOL. But good old Doc Consitt^x fixed that up with a sick excuse. Back in Valcartier drill and discipline had intensified and we began to realize that the fun was over – we had more serious business to tend to.



130th Battalion Band 1916

Word seeped through that we would soon go overseas, and our parents came to Quebec City for a farewell meeting. Then at the end of September we left for Halifax and boarded a troop ship^{xi} for England. It was a large convoy and, as we were the first to embark, *[we remained]* anchored in the harbor for several days, while other ships loaded. Our speed across the ocean was as fast as our slowest ship.

Arriving at Liverpool we were loaded onto a train for an all-day ride south. Everything was new to us and we were thrilled at being in England and riding a train. Our destination was West Sandling^{xii}, near Folkestone, and we were put in the 12th Reserve *[Battalion]* for redistribution to other units.^{xiii} Pat Wilson and I were separated, he was sent to Shoreham^{xiv}, and I went to the 125th Battalion at Witley Camp^{xv}, in Surrey. It was part of the new 5th Canadian Division, readying for France. Witley was 40 miles from London, eight miles from Guildford.

Then we got leave to the big city. I teamed up with Jim McVeety^{xvi} from Perth and if you can imagine two seventeen-year-olds, strolling down Piccadilly with a giddy feeling and a few pounds in our pockets, well that was us. The winding streets, the double decker busses, the crowds, soldiers from Australia, New Zealand, Africa – we were entranced. The YMCA was our headquarters where we got a bed for a sixpence. Drury Lane was our favorite theatre and the Thames was a great disappointment. After being used to the St. Lawrence, the Thames was just a creek.

Back in Camp, our training intensified. We were to go to France as a complete division, and we had overnight camping, target practice and 20-mile hikes with complete pack. Then the high command decided Canada could not support five divisions as casualties had depleted the other four, so we were broken up.

One morning, 40 of us were assembled on the parade ground and marched to the station. It was a short run to Dover where we boarded a cross channel ship to Boulogne. It was a 20-mile uphill walk to Etaples where the distribution center was, and it was a long, gruelling day. Arriving we lost all our past identity, except for name and number, and were assigned to our fighting unit. I was sent to the PPCLI^{xvii} along with Jim McVeety. We were given the general direction as to where the battalion was and told to go find them.



James McVeety (1898-1918)

Prowling around France, bumming rides on lorries, eating at any mess we passed, we eventually found the Princess Pats and were assigned to No. 1 Company, No. 3 Platoon. Without going into details, the rude awakening we received at our first battle, the sound of the shells, the 'over the top' signal and the dead mules and men, and the blown-up equipment we endured and fortunately, I received no wounds, except mental. But at Arras^{xviii}, Jim McVeety was killed while lying in a shallow shell hole.

On November 11, 1918, we marched into Mons [*Belgium*] to receive the Mons medal and the kisses, flowers and the hearty enthusiasm of a liberated populace.

While the 130th Battalion had long been disbanded, the men scatted over many battalions did valiant service for Lanark County and Canada. Our outfit returned home in March 1919 to a Sparks Street parade of ticker tape and cheers in Ottawa and an immediate discharge.

I don't often get to Perth, but last summer I was there and my niece, Fern Walker, persuaded me to visit the Canadian Legion Headquarters. I was greatly impressed with her enthusiasm, the building itself and the use it was given. While sitting in her office she casually passed me an application blank which I found in my pocket when I arrived home. At my age and after an absence from Canada of 57 years, why would I want to join another organization so remote from where I was living. Then I thought, after so many years, maybe I should belong to something Canadian, so I filled out the application and mailed it to Fern. I may never use the club, but Perth and vicinity did play an important role in my life during my teen years and I feel comradeship in knowing these connections are there.



Notes

ⁱ George Murray Walker (1898-1981), born at Kingston, Ontario, the son of Walter William Walker (1879-1942) and Mary Eleanor Weston (1870-1952), grew up at Perth where his father was publisher of the *Perth Courier*. The Walker family owned the *Courier* from 1863 until 1995. When he enlisted with the 130th Battalion Walker was a student at Perth Collegiate Institute, but also had three years militia service in the Lanark & Renfrew 42nd Regiment. Shortly after returning from war service Walker moved to Potsdam, New York, where he took-over operation of 'Weston's Bookstore' from his brother-in-law, John R. Weston. In 1921 at Potsdam, Walker conceived the idea of forming a hockey team composed of Clarkson College students and founded the Clarkson Golden Knights hockey program, one of the most successful college athletic programs in the United States. He persuaded Gordon Croskery, an instructor in the mechanical engineering department, to be the coach, while he set the schedules, secured the equipment, arranged for a place to play home games and otherwise financed the program until the sport became a recognized part of the athletic program in 1935. Games were played outdoors (on a public rink or on the Raquette River) until 1939 when the first game was played in an arena built on Clarkson Avenue, although ice-making equipment was not installed until 1952. In 1975 the facility was named the 'G. Murray Walker Hockey Arena' in his honor and games were played there until 1991, when it was replaced by a new facility (Cheel Arena). Since 1972 more than two dozen Clarkson Golden Knights alumni have played in the National Hockey League. Walker was also co-founder of the local ice carnival. In 1963 Walker made a gift of 'Weston's Bookstore' to Clarkson College where it still serves as the College Bookstore. George Murray Walker died at Bloomington, Indiana, USA, but was buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Perth, Ontario.



ⁱⁱ The 130th Battalion was created by the Canadian Militia Department on November 15, 1915 and received its colours at Perth on June 2, 1916.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lieutenant Colonel John Edward de Hertel (1863-1945) was born at Perth, the only child of Jean-Eduard de Hertel (1831-1868) and Jane Douglas (1838-1916), his family dating back to Jacque and Marie Marguerie Hertel, who arrived in Canada from France in the mid-1600s. De Hertel left Perth at 16 to work for the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) and while in charge of an HBC post at Lonely Lake, NWT (Saskatchewan). He was later employed by the Canadian Foreign Trade Service in the West Indies and

then by H. Shorey & Co. of Montreal, a clothing manufacturing and wholesale firm, before returning to Perth in 1900 where he married Susan Rothwell Balderson (1875-1935) in 1911. At the time of his appointment to raise and command the 130th Battalion he was Manager of the John A. McLaren Distillery at Perth and a Director of the Ottawa Wine Vault Co. and Cecil Investment Company, both of Ottawa. He had served in the Militia with the 3rd Victoria Rifles of Montreal (7 years) and the Lanark & Renfrew 42nd Regiment (26 years) and in 1915 was ranked a Major in 42nd Regiment. At the outbreak of WWI, he was named Chief Recruiting Officer for Lanark and Renfrew Counties and in late 1915 was appointed to raise the 130th Battalion from Perth. De Hertel went to England with the 130th but when it was broken up and its men redistributed through the 12th Reserve Battalion, he was sent to France in March 1917 on a 10-day *“tour of inspection”*, attached to the 18th Battalion Canadian Infantry, before being sent back to Canada to become the Compulsory Service Exemption Officer at Kingston. Following the war, he returned to Perth, where he worked as manager of the Balderson Theatre, owned by James Morris Balderson (1862-1943), Lieutenant Colonel of the 42nd Regiment 1908-1920, and served one term as mayor in 1925-1926. He died at Perth in December 1945.

^{iv} The 130th Battalion had two bands, a 30-piece brass band and a 10-piece bugle band. Colonel J. E. de Hertel, who was a long-standing member of the Perth Citizens band, personally composed the battalion’s marching song, *‘130th March Past’*. He also designed the Battalion’s cap badge.

^v Pat Wilson has not been identified. ‘Pat’ may be a nick-name or Walker may have mis-remembered the man he enlisted with. The name ‘Pat Wilson’ does not appear on the 1916 muster roll of the 130th Battalion and none of the six men surnamed Wilson who joined the 130th Battalion did so on the same date as Walker; Lieutenant Herbert John Wilson, Private Alvin Smith Wilson, Private George Arthur Wilson, Private James Clyde Wilson, Private Roy John Wilson and Corporal Roy Reginald Wilson. Six other men from Perth with the surname Wilson, but none named Pat, also served in WW1; A. A. Wilson, E. Wilson, E. H. Wilson, C. Wilson, T. B. Wilson, and E. D. Wilson.

^{vi} Colonel de Hertel was well known for accepting underage volunteers, as well as for enlisting men that his own Medical Officer, Captain E.C. Consitt, had ruled unfit, by taking them to *“outlying points and got them through there by civilian practitioners who were not familiar with the work”*. By such methods, in November 1915 the *Perth Courier* could report that *“Lieutenant Colonel de Hertel ranks the highest in the Dominion in point of securing recruits”*.

^{vii} Alfred Henry Keays (1871-1947), Bandmaster of the 42nd Lanark & Renfrew Regimental Band in 1916, and Bandmaster of the Perth Citizens Band 1903-1946, was born at Perth, the son of John Keays (1835-1909) and Margaret Livingston. His father was Perth Police Chief in the 1890s. The 130th Battalion Bandmaster was Lieutenant William Barrow Finlayson (b.1874) of Smiths Falls.

^{viii} Barriefield Military Camp, Kingston, Ontario, north of Fort Henry.

^{ix} Valcartier Training Camp, 13 kilometers north of Quebec City, Quebec.



Captain Dr. Edward Consitt

^x Perth physician Dr. Edward Christopher Vincent Consitt (1881-1929), Captain and Medical Officer of the 103th Battalion. A review of MO Consitt's service record shows that in July 1916 he was available at Perth to provide Wilson and Walker with sick notes because he himself was on medical leave, suffering from rheumatism. A few months later, in November 1916, a medical board found Consitt unfit for military service and discharged him from the army.

^{xi} *SS Lapland* embarked the 130th Battalion and sailed on September 26, 1916.

^{xii} West Sandling Training Camp, Saltwood, Kent, was built in October 1914 with wooden huts to house eight battalions of the CEF, as an extension of nearby Shorncliffe Camp. Due to the proximity to France troops there could be training one day and be in the trenches at the front by lunchtime the next.

^{xiii} "The 130th Band only played once together when it reached England, for most members were dispatched into active service" – *Sound the Trumpet, the Story of the Bands of Perth (1852-2002)*, by Daphne Overhill (2002).

^{xiv} Shoreham Training Camp was located near the small south-coast West Sussex fishing town of Shoreham-by-Sea because of a nearby seaport and railhead.

^{xv} Witley Training Camp, built on Witley Common in Surrey, was located about 65 kilometers southwest of London.

^{xvi} Jim Frederick McVeety (1898-1918), born at Port Elmsley, was the son of James and Anna J. McVeety of Perth. Before joining the 130th Battalion on January 10, 1916 and transferring to the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry on March 27, 1918, McVeety had two years militia service with the 42 Lanark & Renfrew Regiment.

^{xvii} Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI).

^{xviii} Jim McVeety (1898-1918) was killed in action on August 26, 1918 at the Second Battle of Arras, and buried Dury Crucifix Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France.