

Edmund Fenning Parke.

Lance Corporal. No. 654, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (Eastern Ontario Regiment.)



Thirty miles from its source, the River Seven passes the village of Aberhafesp, near to the town of Newtown in the Montgomeryshire (Powys) countryside. It was here on the 20 June 1892 that **Edmund Fenning Parke** was born. His father, Edward, worked as an Architect and Surveyor and originated from Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire. His mother Harriette Elizabeth (nee Dolbey) was born in Newtown. The couple had ten children all born within the surrounding area of their mother's home town. Edmund was the younger of their two sons. The family were living at The Pentre in Aberhafesp when Edmund was baptised on the 24th July of the year of his birth.

Within a few years the family moved to Brookside in Mochdreⁱ again, only a short distance from Newtown. Edmund attended Newtown High School and indications are that after leaving there he worked as a clerkⁱⁱ. He also spent some of his free time as a member of the 1/7th Battalion, The Royal Welsh Fusiliers, a territorial unit based in the townⁱⁱⁱ.

On the September 4th 1910 however, Edmund set sail on the RMS Empress of Britain from Liverpool bound for a new life in Canada. The incoming passenger manifest records that he was entering Canada seeking work as a Bank Clerk.

In the summer of 1914, many in Canada saw the German threat of war, in Europe, as inevitable. In July of that year a wealthy Montreal businessman, Andrew Hamilton Gault was determined that Canada should provide a force to come to the aid of 'the Empire' if needed. He personally funded the formation of a new regiment. The plans were formalised, together with Lt. Col. Francis Farquhar, the military secretary to the Governor General and the Regiment was to be named after his daughter, Queen Victoria's granddaughter. By 10th August the Regimental Charter had been signed and recruiting began the next day.

**R E C R U I T S
W A N T E D !**
FOR
PRINCESS PATRICIA'S
CANADIAN LIGHT INFANTRY
RAISED BY A. HAMILTON GAULT, ESQ.
COMMANDED BY LT. COL. F. FARQUHAR, DSO
(Coldstream Guards)

This unit will be equipped as soon as possible, and placed at the disposal of the Imperial Authorities.
Preference will be given to ex-regulars of the Canadian or Imperial Forces, or men who saw Service in South Africa.

QUALIFICATIONS: (1) Physically fit (2) Age limit 40 (3) "Good" Certificates of discharge For ex-soldiers.

CONDITIONS: Enlistments for one year or the war. Pay Canadian Rate

APPLY TO RECRUITING OFFICE WITHIN

Edmund lived in Ottawa where he did in fact work as a Bank Clerk^{iv}. He had no hesitation however in responding to the recruiting posters that appeared in the late summer of 1914 and on the 20th August attested to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He was to be paid C\$1 per day plus 10 cents per day Field Allowance of which he arranged for C\$5 each month to be assigned to his mother. He gave his father, Edward Parke of Wellesbourne, England as his next of kin. To the question of previous military experience put to him in the Attestation document, Edmund recorded his two years service with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers Territorial Battalion. As the

Recruiting Poster for Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry

Territorial Force didn't come into existence until April 1908 with a minimum age limit of 17, indications are that he would have been underage when he joined this unit.

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry received its colours on the 23rd August. Edmund was one of 1098 men chosen from 3000 applicants of which 86% were of British birth, mostly with previous military experience. The fact that the 'Patricias' was the first Canadian Battalion to enter the war they were to become known as 'The Originals'.

The Battalion sailed on the 3rd October 1914 and arrived in England on 18th. Following training on Salisbury Plain and Winchester it departed on 21st December from Southampton on board the S.S Cardiganshire for Le Havre, France. By 6th January 1915 they had taken up positions in trenches to the south west of Ypres, at Dikkebus and La Brasserie in Belgium and were now part of the 80th Infantry Brigade, 27th Division.

Edmund wrote letters to his parents in the early months of 1915 which were reproduced in the pages of a local newspaper^v. Written over several weeks during moments of inactivity his first letter tells of the mud and the devastation all around him and warns of the threat of German Snipers. Food is the main topic. *Hot tea and food when it's most needed ... in the trenches.* What thoughts were going through his head when, almost as an afterthought, he closes the letter: *'One of my friends Pepler was killed last night. Poor chap!'* (Lance Corporal Roger Crook Pepler, Service No. 652 died on 24th Jan 1915 killed by a Trench Mortar near St. Eloi. They both joined the Battalion the same day, 20th Aug 1914)

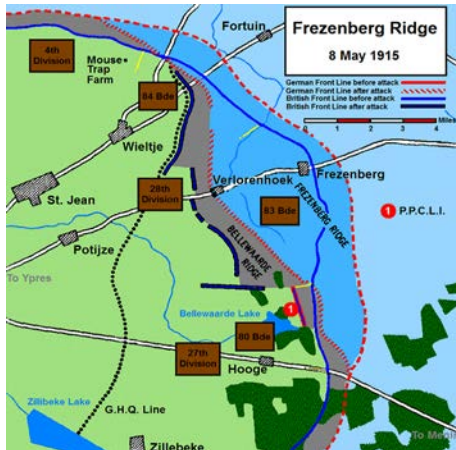
The Battalion was still in positions around Dikkebus, La Brasserie and St. Eloi when in March Edmund's next letter was received. *'The food is still cold but the trenches are now drythough very close to those of the enemy'*. The letter conveys a feeling of pride that he has for his Battalion which has received praise for their actions from the Generals and Canadian politicians. He has also taken on new responsibilities. *'At present I am acting as guide to the company. I go in the trenches at night to show the way, and to guide anyone who wants to go to the trench. I have to guide the relief in also. It is by no means an easy job, because there are so many disused trenches, and the guide is held responsible for any mistakes'*.

By the end of March the Battalion had moved to rest billets in Popperinghe, Belgium, west of Ypres. Casualties reported since arriving in Belgium, 83 dead, 151 wounded and 4 missing. Lieut. Col. Faquarhar D.S.O. – Officer Commanding, was included in the dead.

Edmund started his third letter on the 20th April, the day the regiment moved to trenches in Polygon Wood. He though, was based with Headquarters Company in a hut in the wood, behind the firing line. He tells his parents that he now feels safer and because of the cover, the Germans are not shelling its position. (Concentrated bombardments would later strip the landscape of its Woodland). He now acts as a guide to Colonel Buller, who has taken over as Commanding Officer, and goes everywhere with him. His comrades envy him and he feels lucky that out of his original platoon of around 50, he is one of four who has not been killed, wounded, fell sick or suffered breakdowns. *I hope the war will be over by the end of June.....*

On the 30th April Edmund was promoted to Lance Corporal^{vi} and with it an extra five cents per day increase in pay^{vii}.

During the opening phases of the Second Battle of Ypres the 'Patricias' came under severe bombardment and on the night of 3-4th May 1915 withdrew to positions around Bellewaerde Lake, 500 metres from Hooze. On the 6th and 7th the enemy bombardment continued and at 5.30 am on Saturday the 8th the shelling started again but this time the enemy attacked, pushing forward against the Bellewaerde and Frezenberg Ridges. As casualties built up every



available Canadian, signallers, pioneers, cooks, orderlies were called up to man the support trenches.

If the Patricia's were forced back there was a risk that the whole Divisional Front would collapse. Another mass German attack by infantry two hours later was again repulsed inflicting huge losses to the enemy but nevertheless their own losses were described as 'Terrible'. *'Machine guns pushed forward by the enemy swept the battered line as the Canadians exposed themselves to fire, and many men went down.'*^{viii} But the line held firm and when relieved just before midnight only 4 officers and 150 men remained, with 400 casualties of which 112

were dead. The Battalions stand at the Battle of Frezenberg, as it became known, has been referred to as the 'Death of the Originals' but ranks as the greatest of its Battle Honours and according to the Official history 'was among the most historic episodes of the war'.

Towards the middle of May 1915 a fourth letter was delivered to the home of Mr. and Mrs Parke in Chestnut Square, Wellesbourne^{ix}. It read:

I am writing to tender you my deepest sympathy on the death of your son Ted, and to give you a few particulars, which I am sure you would like to know. On the morning of the 8th.we got the word to retire, and so fell back on the support trenches, where he was with the Headquarters Company. Here we had another sharp brush with the enemy, who were coming on in large numbers, and it was here, while looking over the parapet, to shoot (as we were all doing) that one of their snipers saw him. Death must have been instantaneous. He was one of the most popular men in the company. All the officers and his fellow NCO's thought very highly of him, and all of us feel his loss deeply. They buried him at dusk behind the trench, and have since I believe, marked his grave with a cross. Someday, perhaps, if I'm spared, I'll give you a map showing the spot, also the names of the surrounding villages and some landmarks. My brother has just been called away, too, both for "King and Country". Who would wish for a more glorious end?" Yours, very truly, R. T. Fowler.

(Lance Corporal Richard Tarrant Fowler was originally from Cork in Ireland. His service number was 656 and he joined the P.P.C.L.I on 24th Aug 1914. He was also a Bank Clerk and joined in Ottawa. He was to survive the war.)

Edmunds death is recorded as the 8th May 1915. The Canadian Commonwealth War Graves Register records the map reference of his initial place of burial^x, East of Bellewaarde Lake, but that there is no cross marking its location. It further adds: 'This section now in enemy's possession' and as his body was never recovered finally stamped MENIN GATE MEMORIAL.

Unfortunately, there is no clear evidence that Edmund ever lived in or even came to Wellesbourne^{xi}, unless of course he was he able to visit his parents during the 2 months of his training in November and December 1914. It is certain that his name had been brought to the attention of the local vicar, Rev. Rudgard who mentions his death in the New Year's Eve service 1917^{xii} and it is most likely that his parents requested that his name be included on the Wellesbourne Memorial.

In addition to the medals received by British Soldiers, The 1914-1915 Star, Victory and British War Medals, the Memorial Plaque and scroll, his mother, as with all Canadian military deaths, received the newly created Memorial Cross also known as The Silver Cross^{xiii}.



The Memorial Cross

Edmund Fenning Parke is commemorated in the Canadian Book of Remembrance (Page 31), on the Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Belgium (Panel 10), the Newtown High School Memorial, the Newtown, Montgomeryshire (Powys) War Memorial, the Roll of Honour for the Dead St. Peters Church, Wellesbourne and on the Wellesbourne War Memorial.



The Princes Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Battalion Memorial stands on the ground that they held during the Battle of Frezenberg. The inscription reads: Here 8 May 1915 "The "Originals" of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry commanded by their founder Major A Hamilton Gault D.S.O. held firm and counted not the cost.

To see the full transcripts of

- Edmund's letters from the front and his
- Edmund's Army records and pay book

[return to the main Wellesbourne and follow the links](#)

Edmund's brother Stuart joined the Royal Canadian Artillery and survived the war. He returned home to the U.K. and lived till old age however he suffered severe mental problems as the result of the war.

[For sources see next page](#)

Researched by Grev Hudson (June 2014) (grev.hudson@tinyworld.co.uk)

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- ⁱ Census 1901
 - ⁱⁱ Canadian Passenger Lists 1865 – 1935(www.ancestry.com)
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Attestation Papers(P.P.C.L.I)
 - ^{iv} Attestation Papers(P.P.C.L.I)
 - ^v Stratford Upon Avon Herald editions of 5/2/1915, 19/3/1915 and 7/5/1915.
 - ^{vi} After the war the CWGC still refer to him as Private Parke.
 - ^{vii} EFP's pay records. Library and Archives, Canada.
 - ^{viii} Extract from. 'The story of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (1914- 1917)(1918) by R. Richards
 - ^{ix} Stratford upon Avon Herald 28/5/1915
 - ^x Map 28. Place of burial ref J.7.a.4.2
 - ^{xi} This assumption is based on the fact that he arrived in Canada, aged 18, on the 11th November 1910 and according the 1911 Census, his parents were still living in Wales but were known to be in Wellesbourne by 1914. His 2 years service with the Territorials would have been 1908 -1910.
 - ^{xii} Stratford upon Avon Herald 4/1/1918.
 - ^{xiii} Taken from The Silver Cross Story by Stephanie Jenzer.
- The faces have changed over the years, their sombre duty has not. Every November 11th, at the eleventh hour, around the eleventh minute, one Canadian woman makes a short, laboured journey to the foot of the National War Memorial in Ottawa on behalf of all bereaved mothers. For more than six decades now, a national representative tasked with carrying the burden of all Canadian families.
- This Remembrance Day, as another National Silver Cross Mother lays a wreath in Ottawa, you might want to take note -- to remember not just Canada's sons and daughters who fell in war, but also the women who many believe sacrificed those children. They belong to Canadian history just as much as the country's war dead. And have a legacy all their own, one rarely examined and unique to this country. www.cbc.ca/thenational/blog/.../producing-a-remembrance-day-story.ht...

Other Sources

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (www.birhofaregiment.com)
 Library and Archives Canada (www.collections.canada)
 Veteran's Affairs Canada. (www.veterans.gc.ca) Photo of EFP
 Canadian soldiers.com - Map