

Lcp. William Hugh Henderson (1879-1916)

Although Lcp. William Henderson's name is not engraved in memorial on the Hedley cenotaph, his association with Hedley and its residents befits that he should be included in this Honour Roll of "fallen" soldiers of the First World War from Hedley.

William lived "up top" at the Nickel Plate Mine town site, while employed there as a machinist from, at least, 1911 to 1914. He was a brother to Hedleyite, Margaret Robertson, and uncle to her son, Robert W. "Bobby" Robertson, whom also served with the Canadian infantry overseas, in the 54th Kootenay Battalion.

In August 1914, the *Hedley Gazette* printed an article stating William had been called up for duty by his troop, the "B.C. Horse," at Quebec. Although, his attestation paper does not list this unit as one he served with. Instead, his papers note him serving seven months with the "Independent Company of Rifles" in Grand Forks (later, in 1916). At any rate, the Loyal Orangemen of Hedley gave their brother a big send-off party at the end of August 1914, certain he was bound for overseas.

Instead, William returned to Hedley a couple of weeks later, having been stopped at Nelson, B.C., unable to pass the army's physical exam. We do not know what caused his rejection but it is known William was treated for blood poisoning in the Hedley Hospital a year earlier. We can only wonder if he did not have some lingering effects from this...

William re-applied for enlistment 16 months later on 26 January 1916, in Grand Forks. His attestation paper lists his place of residence at this time as being Grand Forks – although his next-of-kin is listed as his sister, Mrs. W. Robertson, of Hedley. This time he was accepted and assigned to the 102nd Battalion. He was joined by another Hedleyite, William McAlpine, who enlisted in the 102nd just a few days after him, in Vancouver.

The 102nd Battalion was a parent battalion to the 54th Kootenay Battalion, in which so many of our Hedley boys served. The two units were constantly relieving each other of the front line in numerous locations throughout France. It can be imagined the Hedley boys from the two different units surely crossed paths in the carrying out of their duties.

Lcp. Henderson was killed by the accidental explosion of a mortar shell while in training in France. From the Circumstance of Death Registers, "Whilst attending a Stokes gun course at the 2nd Army Grenade School in Terdeghem, on September 23rd, 1916, a premature explosion occurred which destroyed the mortar, and he sustained severe injuries to the left groin and a fracture of the right leg. After receiving attention he was evacuated to the No. 13 Stationary Hospital, Boulogne, where he died from the effects of his wounds a few days later."

William pre-deceased his nephew, Pte. Bobby Robertson, in the war by seven months; William died of wounds in September 1916 and Bobby died of wounds in April 1917. One can only sympathize with Margaret Robertson, the sister and mother, on her great double loss...