

Cpl. Arthur Percy “Doc” Martin (1888-1917)

Doc Martin was born in London, England, 22 February 1888. Nothing is known of his life before he came to Hedley. His parents remained in London, so it can be surmised he emigrated to Canada as an adult. From being raised in one of the foremost cities of the world, somehow Doc became a miner...

We know that Doc emigrated to Canada in 1906 at the age of 18. The 1911 census finds him residing as a lodger in the Point Grey neighbourhood of Vancouver. He was 23 years old and employed as a labourer in municipal services “on the streets.”

We next find Doc in the summer of 1915, age 27, living and working in Hedley as a miner. He donated \$5 to the Hedley Patriotic fund – a value of approximately \$120 today. And, in August, he was swept up in a wave of youthful enthusiasm and patriotism and enlisted into the 54th Kootenay Battalion, along with 15 other Hedley men. The Hedley townspeople sent them off to enlist with great fanfare and banners for their caravan which read “Recruits From Hedley, the Machine Gun Town.”

He was first placed in “C” Company along with the majority of the Hedley boys but by the time the Battalion got to France a year later, he was transferred into the machine gun section of the Battalion, along with Bert Schubert of Hedley and Sam McCurdy of Keremeos. Another Hedleyite machine gunner, Charlie Christiana, serving with the 15th Battalion, called this the “suicide club.” He further wrote, “the enemy likes to find out where the machine guns are and then shell hell out of us.” Certainly a disproportionate number of Hedley men that died in the First World War were machine gunners – exactly half of the twelve.

The *Hedley Gazette* printed three letters from Doc during his 18 months in the Canadian infantry, two while in training in England and one written from the trenches in Belgium. Please see these enclosed letters to read Doc's firsthand accounts of his life in the Canadian military and his war service. His lively and interesting personality is best discovered in his own words.

Doc's military records rank him as a corporal, although, where his name is engraved on the Hedley cenotaph it reads “Sgt. A.P. Martin.” Doc may have been an acting sergeant but never confirmed.

In preparation for a major assault, trench raids and patrols were used as a way of gathering information and giving the troops experience. Doc's battalion was involved in a

large trench raid which was launched on March 1st 1917. It went disastrously wrong and the Canadians suffered 637 casualties.... During the March 1st trench raid the Canadians came under heavy attack by artillery, machine guns and poison gas. Very few made it to the German trenches but one who did - but was wounded and captured - was Cpl. Arthur "Doc" Martin. He died of gunshot wounds to both shoulders and thigh, while a prisoner of war, on 3 March 1917.

Doc was reported as a German POW in mid-April of 1917, six weeks after having died. It would be another six weeks before the mistake was rectified and his mother was finally notified of his death at the end of May.

Cpl. Arthur P. "Doc" Martin is buried in the German section of Rouvroy Commonwealth Cemetery, in Cabaret Rouge, France. He was 29 years of age.