

Pte. Robert W. "Bobby" Robertson (1893-1917)

Bobby Robertson was born in Boston, Massachusetts, 28 June, 1893, to parents William and Margaret I. Robertson. He had two younger sisters - as much as is known at this time. His whole family was born in the United States, but the 1911 Canadian Census finds the Robertsons residing in Creston, B.C. Bobby was just shy of his 18th birthday at the time. Both he and his father were employed in the lumber business, Bobby being listed as working in a "lumber camp."

Bobby had an uncle residing in Hedley in 1911, a Wm. Henderson, his mother's brother, and he may have been the link that brought the Robertsons to Hedley as well. Wm. Henderson also served overseas in France, in the Canadian infantry.

The first notice of Bobby in the pages of the *Hedley Gazette* is in January 1914 when he attended a fund raising masquerade ball for the Hedley Hospital. Later that year, for Labour Day, he engaged in an exhibition boxing match with Blair Mills, another young man who would later join the 54th Battalion as well.

24 August 1915, Bobby went to Penticton with 16 other Hedleyite men to enlist in the Canadian Army. For whatever reason (perhaps he had to get his affairs in order), his actual enlistment date was delayed until 9 September when he and another recruit, Roy Corrigan, departed for Vernon Camp together. And the last thing they did before leaving the Similkameen Valley was to participate in a Keremeos baseball game against Princeton.

The 54th trained in Vernon, B.C., and then England and finally left for the action in France a year later, in mid-August 1916. In October of that year, Bobby wrote home to his mother in Hedley, saying he had received "a slight shrapnel wound above the right knee." He went on to say, "Well, possibly this time next year I will be home letting you do the nursing." Such was not to be...

Bobby would have received news of his uncle, Lcp. Wm. Henderson's death, while convalescing. Lcp. Henderson was in the 102nd Battalion, a sister unit to the 54th - the two battalions were constantly relieving each other of the front line. Bobby may have had a chance to see his uncle in passing, before Lcp. Henderson died of wounds from the accidental explosion of a Stokes mortar shell, 29 September 1916.

Bobby returned to the action with his Battalion in time to weather severe cold in the trenches of Vimy in the first two months of 1917. In preparation for a major assault, trench raids and patrols were used as a way of gathering information and giving the troops experience. A large trench raid was launched on March 1st 1917 but went disastrously wrong and the Canadians suffered 637 casualties. The Canadians had come

under heavy attack by artillery, machine guns and poison gas.

In this attack, Bobby Robertson was badly wounded in the arms and leg. He was transferred to the big base hospital at Estaples on the Pas de Calais, France. There he fought the last fight of his life and on 28 April 1917, six weeks after being wounded, he died and was buried in the largest Commonwealth cemetery in France – Estaples Military Cemetery, Pas de Calais. He was 23 years of age.

It is a well known fact many families suffered multiple losses from their sons, brothers, uncles and husbands going to fight in the war. Here we have a solid example in Margaret Robertson, mother to Bobby Robertson and sister to Wm. Henderson. Her two loved family members died just seven months apart from each other. As far as we know, Bobby was Margaret's only son. And despite her own demise taking place in Coalmont, B.C., twelve years later, Margaret's body was returned to Hedley for internment in the cemetery here. Perhaps she left her heart in Hedley...