



**A Crown of Life**  
**Edmund DeWind, VC**



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Front Cover:

A postcard portrait of Edmund DeWind in the uniform of the Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion with a black border added by the family to signify his death.

Edmund's "Union Jack," the flag of the United Kingdom, which was formed between Great Britain and Ireland by the Act of Union in 1801. Through colonial expansion, the flag came to represent the British Empire, which Edmund committed himself to defend in World War 1.

W. Thurston Topham  
"Trenches in the Chalk, The Somme"  
CWM 19710261-0731  
Beaverbrook Collection of War Art  
Canadian War Museum

## Preface and Acknowledgements

“Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.”<sup>1</sup>

When I was about ten years old, my grandfather opened a small leather box to show me a bronze medal in the shape of a cross, which was embossed with the image of a lion standing on top of a regent’s crown. Underneath ran a banner saying “For Valour.” He told me that his brother, Edmund, had been awarded this medal, the Victoria Cross, after he was killed by the German army while he was defending what was called the “Racecourse Redoubt” in France during World War 1. Over the next sixty-five years I did not learn much more about my great uncle although the medal was eventually passed down to me. My grandfather had left it to his eldest son, my uncle, who then gave it to me, perhaps on the basis of a gendered logic that I am the eldest male in the next generation of Edmund’s family. I tucked the medal away in a drawer where it remained unattended for close to a decade.

Then in early March of 2017 I received an email, forwarded by my cousin, Johanna Brink Flynn, with an invitation from the Edmund De Wind VC Centenary Committee, based in Comber, County Down, to attend the launch of a year-long commemoration of Edmund’s death, which would culminate with the unveiling of a memorial stone to him in Comber Square on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the date he died: 21 March 1918. The invitation came with a press release, which included three short paragraphs outlining key events in Edmund’s life: his 1883 birth and subsequent residence in Comber, education and early employment in Ulster, emigration to work in Canada, enlistment and fighting in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, commission as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant and transfer to the Royal Irish Rifles, and his final hours defending the Racecourse Redoubt until he was fatally wounded. Though brief, the press release told me a bit more about Edmund than I had previously known and I was curious that there was a committee in Comber organizing his commemoration.

I wrote back to the committee that, while I would be unable to go to Comber for the initial ceremony, I could explore what the family might contribute to the final centennial commemoration. I consulted not only with Johanna, who had recorded family stories that had been handed down to her mother, Margaret O’Meara Brink, from Florence DeWind, who was also Edmund’s sister, but also with another cousin, Robin DeWind Heid, who had inherited an archive of family memorabilia assembled by our grandfather, Norman DeWind, who was also Edmund’s brother. With their agreement, I wrote to the centennial committee offering to share whatever we could pull together about Edmund that would add to a commemoration not only of his valorous death but also of his life, about which I knew so little. An account of the Centennial Committee’s inaugural event was published in the *Newtownards Chronicle and County Down Observer* on 30 March 2017 (See references on page 91) . The article provided new biographical information about Edmund from Keith Haines, former Chief Archivist at Campbell College, where Edmund had been schooled and it inspired me to look further.

Over the next nine months Robin sifted through the family archive for relevant letters, photographs, documents, and personal objects of Edmund and Johanna excerpted relevant parts of her mother’s oral history of the family and sent photos and documents. These materials gave us a fragmented story out of which Edmund’s life began to emerge. I then turned to published histories that provided information about Comber and described the lives of the DeWind family and relatives who had lived there. With internet searches I found what seems to be an endless fount of documents and publications, particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Revelation 2:10 from the plaque to Edmund DeWind in St. Mary’s Parish Church, Comber. (See pg. 76.)

related to Edmund's military experiences. My old friend and research collaborator, Julian Laite, made and sent copies of Edmund's thick military file in the British National Archives and shared his father's vivid World War 1 stories from Bapaume, near to where Edmund fought in France.

Over time, I was able to contact a number of dedicated local historians who were extraordinarily generous in guiding my investigations. Within Northern Ireland (in alphabetical order) Sandra Gilpin, who had previously helped me figure out the DeWind family's genealogy going back to Malacca, composed an elegant and concise overview of Ireland's and Comber's religious history and helped me place Edmund's family within it. Keith Haines, who was the first person to pull together a thorough biography of Edmund, assisted me in building on his work by providing innumerable pictures, documents, sources, comments, and an unending supply of wise counsel, patience, and deep kindness. Gordon Lucy sent me copies of many of his social and political writings; particularly helpful were those about the Andrews family and World War 1, which helped me to understand the family's dual Liberal and Unionist economic and political commitments. Lester Morrow scrupulously read, corrected, and reorganized my jumbled understandings of military order and history and he volunteered many pictures and documents. And Michael Nugent kindly provided advice and documents from his own related research. Comber's premier story teller, Desmond Rainey, who with his co-authors, has written wonderfully detailed and richly illustrated histories of the town, also supplied me with pictures, documents, corrections, and comments which enabled me to establish many of the ties that Edmund and the DeWinds had with the Andrews and Stone families and the town of Comber.

Outside of Northern Ireland Colonel Paul Oldfield generously sent me an early draft of his account of the German Spring Offensive and Edmund's role at the Racecourse Redoubt along with pictures and documents. Nick Metcalfe provided me with an ever expanding flow of pictures, documents, videos, and detailed and thoughtful comments, all of which supplemented his earlier careful reconstruction of the Racecourse Redoubt action, a portion of which is incorporated into this biography.

Rarely, if ever, has such a wonderful team of family, friends, and historians striven as diligently to coach and educate such a needy pupil. I feel blessed to have had their endless contributions to my efforts to reconstruct Edmund's life within the contexts of family, Comber, Northern Ireland, Canada, and World War 1. This biography of Edmund is the result.

Nonetheless, I am uncomfortably aware that my account is limited by factual ellipses spanned by bridges of my own interpretation. I can only hope others with a greater familiarity with Edmund's world than mine will forgive and, perhaps one day, fill in my omissions and set straight my errors.

None of this process would have unfolded without the initiative and hard work of the members of Edmund DeWind VC Centennial Committee: Councillor Trevor Cummings, Philip Smith (Comber Regeneration Community Partnership), Carol Conway (Royal British Legion, Comber Branch), Irene Atherton (CRCP), Desmond Rainey (Comber Historical Society), Robert Bennett (Comber Historical Society), Alan (Joe) Stevenson (Comber Loyal Orange District Lodge), Jim Hamilton (interested citizen), and Roy Murray (CRCP). I am deeply indebted to them for their invitation, warm welcome to Comber, assistance with this biography, and parting gift of a glass plate bearing Edmund's portrait.

Finally, at the time of Edmund's commemoration, one of my last relatives still in Comber, Johnny Andrews, not only helped me to identify extended family relations and their homes but also, welcomed me, my wife Dee, and son Sam into Maxwell Court, enabling us to renew ancestral ties.

Adrian William Andrews DeWind, Jr. (Josh)  
New York City, 6 August 2018



# A Crown of Life

## Edmund DeWind, VC

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## **A Crown of Life Edmund DeWind, VC**

### **Introduction**

A little more than a month after the United Kingdom declared war against Germany on 4 August 1914, Edmund DeWind wrote from Edmonton, Canada to his older brother Norman about the duty and determination he felt to join the fight on behalf of the British Empire. Even that early in the war, Edmund was personally well aware of the potentially mortal consequences of enlistment. Indeed, his letter mentions having learned from the first dispatch of Field Marshal Sir John D.P. French, who was the Anglo-Irish cavalryman who had become the first Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe, that soldiers with whom he had been familiar back in Ireland had already likely been killed in the earliest battles. “The fighting must have been very heavy,” he observed, “and the Allies outnumbered at first.” But affirming his conviction to join-up, he wrote:

[Secretary of State for War, Lord] Kitchener wants lots of men, and there is no doubt that single men without ties are the ones who should come forward. Then I have belonged to the Volunteers and would feel it very much did I not try my best and get out, as this is going to be a big business and it will help the Empire out a lot if they can put half a million trained men into the firing line, fresh and trim at the end of the first 5 or 6 months. (Edmund DeWind, 10 September 1914)

By the time Edmund was able to enlist, another month later, he had revised his will, assigned power of attorney to his brother, and put his affairs in order should he possibly not return. On the day of his attestation and enlistment into the 31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion, which would go to war as part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade within the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces, he wrote his brother that his landlords at 353 Third Street in Edmonton, the Hamiltons, “are very kindly storing my cabin trunk and kit bag until further notice, and the clothes I travel in to Calgary will go into Military Stores in a bag, be labelled and kept until I claim them or in the event of anything happening, would return them to home address.” (Edmund DeWind, 16 November 1914)

But Edmund did not reclaim his belongings. After enlisting and undergoing preliminary training in Canada, he sailed with his battalion to England for additional training and then to Belgium where he fought in battles near Ypres. In France he fought with his battalion near the Somme River. In preparation for an officer’s commission, he went to Wales for cadet training and then, at the end of 1917, he was transferred back to the Western Front in France as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant with the 15<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles. On 21 March 1918, soon after his battalion relocated near the small town of Grugies, the Germans launched their massive Spring Offensive. Edmund died defending the Racecourse Redoubt, which his battalion had been ordered to hold at all costs. (Metcalf, “My Family...”) On 15 May 1919 the *London Gazette* announced Edmund had been posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross: “His valour, self-sacrifice and example were of the highest order.”

The following pages describe and seek to provide some understanding of what in Edmund’s upbringing, social context, and experiences motivated him, first, to enlist to fight in the war and, then, to display such courage and sacrifice his life on behalf of the British Empire.

## A Family of Empire

The formation of Edmund's attachment and loyalty to the British Empire goes back in his family to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the British took over the Dutch colony of Malacca, to which earlier generations of DeWinds had come from Amsterdam and settled in 1727 as employees of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (the Dutch East India Company). Soon after taking charge of Malacca in the 1820s, the British colonial government confiscated the DeWinds' extensive land holdings, which had comprised over 200 square miles, extending 11 miles along the coast and roughly 20 miles inland. The DeWinds adapted: they began to speak and write in English, transferred their allegiance from the Dutch Reform to the Anglican Church, and sent five of nine children to London for their educations. A son and daughter remained in Malacca but all the other siblings emigrated to near and far reaches of the Empire: as close by as the recently created British colony of Singapore and as far away as the United Kingdom. Among the dispersed siblings was Edmund's father, Arthur Hughes DeWind (1837-1917), who after completing initial studies in a London private school, obtained a degree in civil engineering from the University of London in 1858, and then began employment as assistant engineer with the London and North Eastern Railway. Then in 1860-61 he obtained a position as a construction engineer with the Belfast and County Down Railway. (For pictures and information about Arthur Hughes DeWind and other family members, see Appendix 3.)

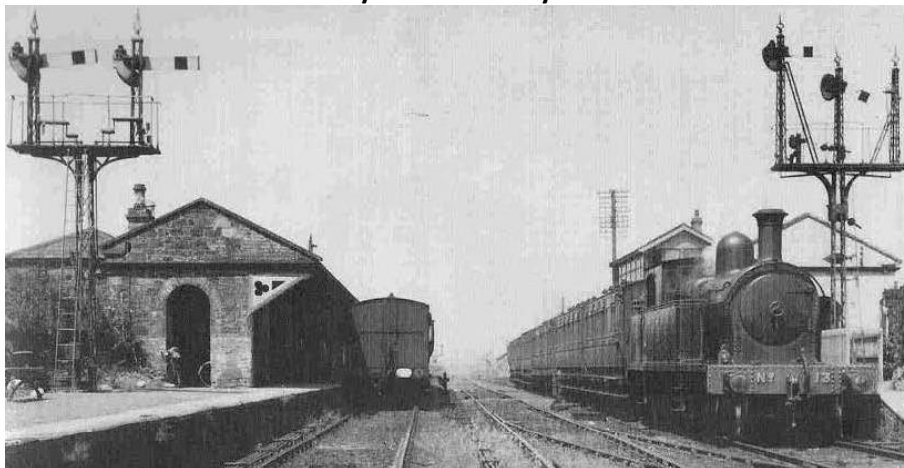
In Ireland Arthur Hughes DeWind would become affiliated through his own marriage and later his son's marriage with two families whose long histories and good fortunes relied on Northern Ireland's political union with Britain. These were the Stone and the Andrews families, whom *The Belfast and Ulster Directory of 1870* identified as being part of the town's "gentry." (Rainey and Spence: 184) Working for the BCDR Arthur became acquainted with Guy Stone (1808-1862), who had been a member of the original committee that met at the Donegall Arms Hotel in Belfast to promote approval of the railway's construction to the Parliament and then had on and off served as the company's chairman, a position later filled by Thomas Andrews of Ardara. The railway transected part of the Stone family's "plantation," Barn Hill, for which Stone received £200 in compensation for the land and related damages, some of which went to his tenants. (Haines, n.d.: 2) The Stone family had originally leased the property as early as 1767 from the Marquess of Londonderry, who was the owner of much of Comber and its surrounding townlands.<sup>2</sup> Arthur frequently visited and dined at Barn Hill, singing evenings with Guy's daughters.

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<sup>2</sup> The Stone family's acquisition of the Barn Hill "plantation" benefited from the "Protestant Ascendancy" – the process in which English monarchs had seized and then distributed lands of Irish Catholics to loyal Protestant subjects. In Comber, in 1543 Henry VIII, as part of his displacement of the Catholic Church, confiscated the lands and buildings of the Cistercian monastery, which had been built at the confluence of the Glen and Enler Rivers, around which the town of Comber would later develop. With the endorsement of Queen Elizabeth Lord Mountjoy fought and defeated the Catholic O'Neill clan and took possession of the province. Surrounded by considerable intrigue, James I endorsed a division of the provincial lands with the result that that Hugh Montgomery and James Hamilton – both originally from Ayrshire in Scotland – came to own unequal shares of Comber's townlands. Initiating Comber's development, Montgomery began to settle fellow Scottish Protestants there in 1606 and in 1622 built Mount Alexander castle overlooking the town, for his son on the occasion of his son's marriage. On the grounds of the old monastery, the two families together founded St. Mary's Parish Church, whose first Episcopalian minister was appointed in 1622. Hamilton, Montgomery, and their descendants were raised in the peerage later to become, respectively, Viscount of Claneboye and Earl of Mount Alexander, but over generations much of the families' lands passed – through further intrigue, war, death, inheritance, division, debt, and finally sale – into the hands of Sir Robert Colvil, who in turn sold his Comber holdings in 1744 to Alexander Stewart, father of the first Lord Londonderry, who in turn sold the Stones their plantation at Barn Hill. Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>

Arthur sought and received Guy Stone's reluctant permission to marry his eldest daughter, Margaret Jane Stone. Apparently to improve his economic prospects in the eyes of his future father-in-law, Arthur returned to London to work on the Great Northern Railway. (Stone 1862) But the next month Guy unexpectedly died and ten months later, on 13 April 1863, the couple married at St. Mary's Parish Church in Comber. They proceeded at once to Singapore, where Arthur served as Commissioner of Public and Municipal Works until 1872 and Margaret gave birth to their first five children. Believing that the climate was unsuitable for children older than six, Margaret took their children back home to a cottage near the Stone family's home at Barnhill. Weeks later her husband finished up his responsibilities and returned to Ireland to resume work with the Belfast and County Down Railway. He resettled the family in Donaghadee, a railway terminus, where Edmund's sister, Alice Maud, was born. (Norman DeWind, n.d.) After four years with the railway, when it was beginning major reinvestments to upgrade its sleepers and rails, Arthur was appointed to take charge as the Permanent Way Engineer. (Belfast News Letter, 1 September 1876) Keith Haines observes that this was perhaps "not the happiest of appointments." (Haines, n.d.: 2) Inheriting shabby stations, outmoded equipment and worn out track, Arthur instituted a "flying squad" to make needed renovations quickly and introduced steel rails. Nonetheless he had to contend with a number of accidents due to failing stock and a Board of Directors skeptical of his innovations. When the Board expressed displeasure with his report of an accident at Downpatrick, where floods frequently disrupted traffic, he claimed his health would not suffer further exposure to the Downpatrick marshes and offered his resignation. (Coakham 2010: 48-49) After quitting the railway in December 1877, Arthur practiced as an architect and land surveyor until his death in 1917.

#### **Belfast and County Down Railway Station in Comber**



(Source: Comber Historical Society)

The family moved to Comber in 1874 and, although some dates are not certain, they lived in large homes close to the town: Hill View (perhaps later known as Inla House) on Railway Street (1874-1886), the home of Frances McConnell on Castle Street (1886-1903), and then a house with an office and small garden on Bridge Street (1903-1909). While they were living on Railway Street, Margaret gave birth to three more children: Florence (1877-1971), Norman (1875-1974), and Edmund, who was their last child and was born on 11 December 1883.

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century, Lord Londonderry sold off most of his Comber lands to his tenant farmers. For more detailed accounts of this complicated history see Nevin 2008 and Ball and Rainey 2002.

## Some of the Comber Homes of the DeWind, Andrews, and Stone Families

**Uraghmore**



(Source: Ball and Rainey: 41)

**Maxwell Court**



(Source: DeWind Archive)

**Ardara**



(Source: Landed Families of Britain and Ireland)

**Barn Hill**



(Source: Comber Historical Society)

**Kinvara with  
Margaret, Ethel, Arthur, "Norrie" & Norman DeWind**



(Source: DeWind Archive)

**Hill View (center) on Railway Street**



(Source: Desmond Rainey)

**Bridge Street**



(Source: Lester Morrow)



About the family's life on Castle Street, Norman wrote in his memoirs: "From 1886 till 1903 our family lived in my Aunt's (Fanny McConnell) house in Comber as she did not care to live in such a large house after her husband died in 1886. That 16 years of a large family in a large house saw us all growing up to young men and women. I believe it was the happiest period for our mother having us all around her. Then our separations began. Adrian the eldest went to Assam. Catherine married James G. Allen, with whom I cast my lot after 3 years in the Belfast Banking Co. Then came 1906 when I accepted an offer to go to Chicago to design a [gasoline powered] motor road roller for Austin Manufacturing Co." (Norman DeWind n.d.: 9) In 1909 Arthur moved the family to Kinvara, which Norman had designed to include central heating and had built for his father on Killinchy Road, at the town's edge.

### DeWind Home on Castle Street



(Source: Geograph)

During the same year, Norman married Ethel Andrews (1876-1976), who had grown up in her family's home Uraghmore on Castle Street only a few doors down from the DeWinds' earlier home. Her ancestors had come to County Down from Scotland in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike the Stones, the Andrews family did not start as landed gentry but as tenant farmers, likely first on Mahee Island, where they were under muster to one of Comber's two major landholders, James Hamilton. Although some of the Andrews descendants would engage in commercial farming and one family member, John Andrews (1792-1864), would serve as management agent for Lord Londonderry's properties, the family's fortunes rose largely through the processing of agricultural products. Beginning as sub-lessors of water and wind-powered mills in Comber, throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Andrews family developed various enterprises including the rendering of animal fats into soap and candles; the milling of grains into flour; the milling, bleaching, and spinning of flax into linen; and the milling, roasting, and fermentation of grain into whiskey. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Andrews family expanded the productive capacity of their mills by introducing steam engines and they expanded their markets by purchasing raw materials and selling products internationally in Great Britain, Europe, and the United States. The family contributed not only to Comber's development as an "industrial village" (Macneice: 174) but also to Belfast's and Northern Ireland's becoming the center of the greatest commercial and industrial expansion in the United Kingdom at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Andrews 1958; Haines 2016: 18-20)

At the time of Ethel's marriage to Norman, her father, John Andrews (1838-1903), listed himself as a flax spinner and Justice of the Peace in the 1901 Census. Before moving to Uraghmore, the family had lived at Maxwell Court, a large home just outside of Comber and next door to Ardara, a similarly large home built by John's brother, Thomas, who along with his sons, led the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century growth of the Andrews' family businesses in Comber. Following the establishment of the Northern Ireland government in 1921, Andrews family members assumed prominent roles in Ulster's economic and political affairs. Ethel fondly remembered growing up and playing with her neighboring cousins, especially Thomas Andrews Jr., who became the managing director of the Harland and Wolff ship yards in Belfast, supervised the design and construction of the R.M.S. Titanic, and went down with the ship when it sank on its maiden voyage in 1912. One of Thomas Andrews Sr.'s other sons, John Miller Andrews (1871-1956), represented County Down (1921-29) and Mid-Down (1929-53) in the Northern Ireland Parliament, served as Minister of Labor (1921-37) and Minister of Finance (1937-40), and became the government's second Prime Minister (1940-43). A third brother, James Andrews, became Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland in 1937. For more on the Andrews family's history see especially

Andrews (1958) and Rainey and Spence (2011). During the war, Edmund would draw upon the DeWind and Andrews families' shared unionist political sympathies and connections to seek a commission in the British army.

## Unionist Politics

When in 1912 the British Parliament, under the Liberal government of Herbert Henry Asquith, began to debate a bill that would bestow Home Rule on all of Ireland, many Ulster Protestants anticipated that their social, economic, and political positions and the overall prosperity of Northern Ireland would be undermined by the disconnect from Britain and overwhelmed by the nationalist, largely Catholic, majority in Ireland. Edmund grew up in a context of his extended family's engagement in social and political organizations and activities steeped in Protestantism and linked to the United Kingdom: the Orange Order, Ulster Unionist Council, campaign for the Covenant and Declaration of 1912, and the Ulster Volunteer Force, which together provide background to Edmund's choice to defend the Empire.

Beginning as a semi-militarized, fraternal organization, the Orange Order had since the 18<sup>th</sup> century been dedicated to promoting Protestant principles of individual civic and religious liberties and opposing the subordination of individual conscience to papal authority attributed to Catholics. Named after the Protestant Prince, William of Orange, whose troops defeated the army of the Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, hundreds of Loyal Orange Lodges were organized across Ireland, particularly in Ulster, where they fostered moral and social solidarity, perhaps most overtly through public parading. Just prior to World War I the Orange Order became a base for mobilizing support for unionist politics and engaged many members of Edmund's familial network. (Fitzpatrick: 21-40)

Edmund's relatives among the DeWind, Stone, and Andrews families were closely associated with the Orange Order well before and long after World War I. The Stones, who had "early and abiding links" with the order, hosted at Barn Hill in the late 1790s what was Comber's, and perhaps Ulster's, first Orange parade. (Ball and Rainey: 64; Haines, n.d.: 41) In 1914 Edmund's aunt, Elizabeth ("Bessie") Stone purchased for the Comber Old Standard, Loyal Orange Lodge No. 567, a parade banner portraying Prince William at the Battle of the Boyne. In return the lodge unfurled a banner with her picture in 1936 (see pg. 75). (Rainey and Spence: 158; Ball and Rainey: 82)

### The Orange and Protestant Hall, Comber



(Source: Sandra Gilpin)

The DeWinds and Andrews were also supporters of Orangeism. Edmund's father furnished without charge plans for the construction of the town's Orange and Protestant Hall, which was inaugurated in 1877. The hall served as the meeting place for four of Comber's Loyal Orange Lodges whose combined membership included 249 townsmen. (County Down Grand Orange Lodge 1904: 30-31) The original members of the Comber White Flag, Loyal Orange Lodge 244, were drawn from employees of the Andrews' Mill. (Ball and Rainey: 80) One family member prominently engaged in the Orange Order was John Miller Andrews, who began as Grand Master of

County Down in 1941, rose to serve as the Grand Master of Ireland 1948–1954, and was in 1949 appointed Imperial Grand Master of the Grand Orange Council of the World. Throughout he prominently defended the order's political role in sustaining Northern Ireland's "constitutional position" within the United Kingdom. (Kenneway 2006)

When passage of the Home Rule Bill seemed imminent, leaders of the Ulster Unionist Council, notably Sir Edward Carson and MP James Craig, organized a series of public protests across Ulster and rallied signatories for an anti-Home Rule petition. By mid-1912 the council had organized 316 Unionist Clubs, all but ten of which were in Ulster. (Bowman 2007: 20) In preparation for a public demonstration in Comber, which would feature Lord Carson, Conservative Party leader Bonar Law, and Lord Londonderry, the town's residents flew Union Jacks from their house tops and the Orange Lodges and Unionist Club formed an honor guard to escort the speakers into the square. (Rainey and Spence: 160-161)

### Bessie Stone and the Loyal Orange Lodge 567



Families in and around Comber will be eyeing closely this photograph of the Comber Old Standard L.O.L. 567, which was taken almost sixty years ago. The lady sitting proudly in the centre is Miss Bessie Stone, who lived in Barnhill on the Belfast Road side of the town, this area now being known as Stone's Plantation. Miss Stone, though not a member of the Orange Institution, purchased the banner for the lodge and she is pictured here after she had unfurled it.

(Source: Comber Cultural Forum)

On 28 September 1912, which the Unionist Council had designated as Ulster Day, the provincial network of Unionist Clubs, Loyal Orange Lodges, and clergy of sympathetic Presbyterian and Anglican Churches were able, through the coordination of Ulster Day Committees, to mobilize 218,206 men to sign the Solemn League and Covenant. They pledged "to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a home rule Parliament in Ireland." Indicating their supportive rather than bonded commitment, some 228,991 women signed a Declaration "to associate ourselves with the men of Ulster in their uncompromising opposition to Home

Rule.” (Lucy: 49-50) Well over 70 percent of County Down’s and Ulster’s adult Protestants signed the covenant and declaration. (Fitzpatrick: 243)

In Comber, Thomas Andrews, who in 1892 had been elected President of the Ulster Liberal Unionist Association to oppose an earlier Home Rule bill, was in 1911 elected president of the town’s and district’s Unionist Club. (Rainey and Spence: 159) Although a Liberal, Thomas had long led efforts to sustain the union, convinced that Home Rule would result in nationalist economic policies that would harm the family’s businesses and Ulster’s economic wellbeing. According to Gordon Lucy,

The Andrews’ family history is a striking example of how many Presbyterian families which were sympathetic to the United Irishmen at the end of the eighteenth-century became liberal unionists during the course of the nineteenth century and unionists pure and simple in the twentieth....Thomas Andrews, was the proprietor of a linen spinning mill, a wealthy landowner and a director of the Belfast and County Down Railway. He was President of the Ulster Liberal Unionist Association in 1892, delivered one of the best speeches at the great Ulster Unionist Convention of that year, and was a close friend and collaborator of Thomas Sinclair, the author of the Ulster Covenant. (Lucy n.d.)

Thus, on Ulster Day, Comber’s 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church held a special united service after which the town’s men and women divided to sign the covenant either in the church or at other sites: the Orange and Protestant Hall, the Square, the Reading Room, and the vestries of other churches. Among the more than 1,500 signatory residents of Comber were both of Edmund’s parents, two of his sisters (Florence and Alice), Bessie Stone, and fourteen Andrews family members. (PRONI, Ulster Covenant)

Despite the massive Protestant mobilization, the Liberal-led British Parliament remained committed to passing the Home Rule bill. Building on the covenant’s pledge to use “all means that may be found necessary” and led by Lord Carson, the Ulster Unionist Council sponsored the creation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), threatening to resist Home Rule militarily. (Bowman 2007: 15-44) Perhaps 80,000 men or more were mobilized into the UVF’s paramilitary units. To join the UVF, a man had first to sign the covenant’s oath. Although some recruits had weapons that were supplied locally, many others became armed only after a group led by Major Fredrick Crawford and guarded by the UVF’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion North Down Volunteers smuggled 20,000 German-made rifles and 3 million rounds of ammunition. (Haines 2009) In Comber John Miller Andrews styled himself UVF captain and recruited, equipped, and trained a company of 89 men who were virtually conscripted from the family’s mills along with a reserve of 87 additional men who were employed in the “night work section.” (Bowman 2007: 49, 207)

Soon after the Parliament passed the Home Rule bill and only royal assent was needed for it to become law, the British were drawn into war with Germany. The Parliament suspended implementation of the Home Rule bill until the war would end. Unionist leaders in Ulster embraced the war effort with the expectation that doing so might lead to a modification of the Home Rule bill or at least to enable the predominantly Protestant Ulster counties to retain their ties to Great Britain, which is what eventually resulted. Lord Carson wrote to the commander of the UVF, Lieutenant General Richardson, endorsing enlistment by members of Unionist Council and the UVF into the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division, which was one of over forty divisions that Lord Kitchener formed to wage war in Europe. (Bowman 2003: 166-7) Because the nearly 16,000 men of the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division were recruited geographically, many soldiers and officers, who as family, friends, fellow employees, or neighbors had formed local UVF units, also ended up fighting together within the battalions of the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division. The 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal



**John Miller Andrews and Ulster Volunteer Force, c. 1913, probably at Clondeboy Camp**



(Source: Comber Historical Society)

Irish Rifles (North Belfast Volunteers) – into which Edmund would eventually transfer with a commission late in 1917 – was grouped with three other battalions of recruits drawn from South, West, and East Belfast to form the 107<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. The 1<sup>st</sup> County Down Volunteers became the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Irish Rifles and were put into the 108<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade and the 2<sup>nd</sup> County Down Volunteers became the 16<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Battalion Royal Irish Rifles. (Falls: 8-11)

Edmund perhaps hoped to join his fellow Ulstermen in one of the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division's battalions. Soon after he arrived in England on 29 May 1915 to begin military training in preparation for going to France, the staunch but aging unionist Thomas Andrews wrote in an unsteady hand from the Slieve Donard Hotel in Newcastle, probably at the request of Edmund's father, to the UVF leader Colonel Robert Sharman Crawford seeking an officer's commission for Edmund in the British army.

Dear Col. Crawford, I enclose [for] you a form of nomination for a Commission for my friend Edmund DeWind. I shall be much obliged if you will find it any assistance in your honor. I will be staying here for a few days. Yours sincerely, Thomas Andrews (PRONI, courtesy of Keith Haines)

Known for his role in international yacht racing and recognized as one of the leading signatories of the 1912 Covenant, Lt.-Col. Sharman Crawford had been appointed commander of the recently formed 18<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles, which was based close to Comber in Holywood, County Down. He was an uncompromising unionist who had used his family's fortune to fund the formation of his own UVF brigade, which he trained at his family's estate, Crawfordsburn. He also served as the day-to-day manager of the UVF's general finances. (Nixon; Bowman 2007: 140, 155-156)

We cannot be certain of the extent to which unionist sympathies motivated Edmund's enlistment into the Canadian Expeditionary Force or his subsequent transfer to the Royal Irish Rifles. Nonetheless, one of his first biographers reported that Edmund had "taken a keen interest in the Ulster Volunteer Force while living in Canada." (Creagh and Humphris: 325) Although his having left Ireland for Canada in early November 1911 meant that he missed direct participation in the 1912 covenant campaign or the formation of the UVF, he seemed to be referring to the UVF when, in the letter to his brother cited



earlier, he mentioned his having “belonged to the Volunteers” as one reason he wanted to “get out” and join the fight. If so, he was not alone. Some historians have suggested that unionists generally were “imprisoned by their patriotism” and that the leadership of the UVF had “little choice” but to offer its services to the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division in order to defend the sovereign and empire (e.g. Bowman 2007: 64, 163). Equally or perhaps more compelling might have been the solidarity created between townsmen and family members by their participation in activities of the Orange Order, the Ulster Unionist Clubs, and the UVF. Of Comber’s total population of about 2,700 some 426 men enlisted in the army. (Ball and Rainey: 84) Family allegiance to the unionist cause might also have contributed. Among the birthday, Christmas, and remembrance cards that Edmund’s mother sent to him during his first winter in Canada were three political cards opposing Home Rule. That sentiment may well have also been encouraged in 1914 by the resettlement in Canada of his sister, Florence, who had earlier signed the Covenant in support of unionism.

**One of Several Unionist Cards Sent to Edmund in Canada by His Mother**



(Source: DeWind Archive)

### **Youth, Career, and Emigration**

Like his father and brothers, Edmund pursued an overseas career, though within the British Empire. His eldest brother, Adrian (1864-1908), had emigrated to Assam, where for fifteen years he managed the Dehing Tea Estate outside of Dibrugarh, became an avid big game hunter (of boars, tigers, Sambah deer, black bear, buffaloes, and other game) and died of malaria contracted while on a trip hunting tigers. Edmund’s only other brother, Norman (1875-1974), apprenticed for three years as a “junior” in the Belfast Bank Company, first in Armagh and then in Belfast, but in 1896 he resigned to work for the mechanical engineering firm of his brother-in-law, James G. Allen, in Comber. A few years later Norman accepted an offer to go to Chicago and design and market a gasoline powered road roller for the Austin Manufacturing Company. (Norman DeWind, n.d.: 1-10)

## Edmund



(Source: North Down Cricket Club)

According to family oral history passed down from Edmund's sister, Florence, as a lad growing up, Edmund's health was quite delicate and it continued to attract family concern when he was an adult. (Flynn) Nonetheless, he was physically very active and engaged extensively in sports. Among his boyhood friends were George O'Meara, who lived at the Killinchy Rectory and would later marry Edmund's sister, Florence, and William (Willie) Andrews who lived at Ardara. The boys played tennis, cricket with the North Down Cricket Club, and golf, and sailed on the nearby Strangford Lough. Edmund was also a good shot with a rifle.

Both Edmund and his youngest sister, Florence, began their schooling at home with a "blue stocking" governess named Miss Riddel, who was well versed in maths and science and later would obtain a bachelor's degree in science from Queen's University in Belfast. Edmund attended the Campbell College as one of its earliest students, beginning in May 1895 and continuing until December 1900. The school's Board of Governors resolved to provide both nationalist and imperial educations in that they aimed not only at "satisfying Irish wants and ideals" by preparing their students for Irish examinations and commercial life in Ireland, but also instilling in their students a tradition of imperial military service and sacrifice. (Haines 2012) These goals, a rigorous education

based on an English model, and the establishment of an Officers Training Corps, led many of Northern Ireland's prominent families to send their sons to the school. Some 594 boys or at least half of the school's graduates who were of age, enlisted to fight in World War 1 and a good number of its students

## Campbell College Gate



(Source: Postcards Ireland)

## Edmund's College Patch



(Source: DeWind Archive)

would become officers in the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division. The head master of the school and members of the Board of Governors were strong proponents and leaders of the unionist movement. (Haines 2004: 8; 2014: 10-11; 2016: 7-11)

Edmund's earliest employment of which there is record was with the Bank of Ireland, first in Belfast and then farther south in the town of Cavan. There he rented rooms from two sisters, Annie and Eliza Elliott, on the town's rural outskirts in Drumelis and engaged in an active social and sporting life within the town. In addition to becoming a member of the local tennis and badminton clubs, he visited the theatre

### **Mollie with Tiger Claw**



(Source: DeWind Archives)

in the Protestant Church. Likely while working in Cavan, Edmund met and became close to Mary Emily Evelyn Robinson ("Mollie"), who was the daughter of William J. Robinson, a solicitor in Boyle, County Roscommon. From among Edmund's possessions, a photograph of Mollie shows her wearing a tiger claw pendant, identical to others passed down through the DeWind family from Edmund's brother Adrian, a trophy from his hunting expeditions in Assam.

Although Edmund seemed to thrive in Cavan, his mother continued to worry about his health. Following a visit with her son, she wrote a (not entirely legible) thank-you note expressing her concerns:

"My darling son, This is just a few lines to tell you how much I enjoyed our 2 weeks with you & to ask you to cheer up & do all you can to keep well & strong for the future's before you, be what it may, & pray to God always to keep you in His sight safe way. I hope you will attend to what Dr. A may tell you & don't run any risk of chills. After tennis always put on your coat & do try to wear the 2 thin wool vests I gave you, even if you do put

on a lighter shirt. Now dear, don't [indistinct] old mother [indistinct] & God bless you & thank you for giving me such a good time. I am going back refreshed & happier about you. Your loving Mother."

(Margaret Jane Stone DeWind, n.d.)

Whether it was to pursue overseas adventure or advance his career, Edmund accepted a job offer to go to Canada and work for the Canadian Bank of Commerce. By this time, both of Edmund's brothers had emigrated and he would be Margaret's last son to leave home. On hearing the news she wrote from Kinvara:

My dearest Son,

I too congratulate you heartily about this appointment I think it is splendid & I am trusting that this change of life & climate may do you good & being free from the [indistinct] of dragging on so slowly you know dear son that I love you dearly. I shall miss you & having glimpses of you at times but I am thankful, dear Ted, that you are to get a chance of finishing for yourself in a land where things look hopeful & fresh & where no doubt you will meet people whom you may know or friends known something of....You will have a lot to do & think of so I will not expect any but unheeded letters to tell me of what you are to do & when most likely to go. God bless I'm in all your doings I pray to him to [indistinct] you aright & thank him for all this good luck as I think it will be for you & old mother will do all she can to help you safely & keep well & brave & all will go well even then. Your Caring Mother. (Margaret Jane Stone DeWind, 21 September 1911)

Within the next two weeks, on 1 November, Edmund embarked on the Royal George from Bristol to Montreal. (Ancestry.com, Canadian Passenger Lists) His mother sent him a telegram aboard the ship: “Goodbye God Bless and prosper you all well Mother.” On arrival in Toronto he rented rooms at 56 Palmerston Gardens, began work at the bank, and pursued a social life that may have included eight other graduates of Campbell College, who had also come to Canada to work for the bank (Haines, n.d., *Somtye....: 7*),

**Edmund (second from right) with Friends in Canada (perhaps fellow Campbellians)**



(Source: DeWind Family Archives)

Edmund quickly advanced within the bank. He transferred to Saskatchewan, where he worked at the Yorkton and Humboldt branches, before moving as the Chief Accountant, to the branch in Edmonton, Alberta. While working for the bank, Edmund began to make small investments in real estate and stocks, based on surprisingly slim financial advice. In Toronto he purchased a residential lot in Forest Hill Park, following the recommendation of a general interest magazine, *Toronto Saturday Night*, which assessed the property to be a “good hold” as northern Toronto was quickly developing. He also purchased two lots in New Hazelton, British Columbia, on the basis of what he described as “an advertising scheme put on the market by *Canadian Magazine*, of Yonge St. Toronto, a very reputable paper,” which anticipated the lots would become valuable because of surrounding large anthracite coal deposits. Similarly, in the midst of a “boom” in Alberta, he purchased stock in three oil companies based on the view of “experts” that, if the oil field developed, the companies – Bonanza King Oil Co., Stokes-Stephens Oil Co., and Prudential Oil & Gas Co. – might become of considerable value. In retrospect, the oil stocks proved quite risky. Within months the boom collapsed and the companies were charged with fraud, became caught up in law suits, and soon went out of business. (Breen: 15-16; Canadian Supreme Court; Petroleum History Society)



After settling in Edmonton, Edmund resumed a social and family life. He became an avid golfer and joined the local gun club. As a bank employee he at times was required to carry a gun. He also became Chief Warden at the All Saints Anglican Cathedral.

#### **Edmund in Chicago for His Godson's Christening**



(Source: DeWind Family Archives)

Although busy, Edmund and his siblings made time to visit one another. In October 1912 he went to Chicago for the Christening of his nephew and Godson, Norman John Stone ("Norrie") DeWind, the first son of Edmund's brother and wife, Norman and Ethel. They were joined by Edmund's and Norman's sister, Edith, who had come from Ireland to become the Godmother and by Ethel's cousin Mike Andrews of the Ardoyne Linen Mills family in Belfast, who served as "proxy" Godfather for Ethel's brother John D. Andrews, who remained in Ireland.

*Edmund (lower left), Ethel and baby Norrie (center), Edith (left above Ethel) and Mike Andrews (lower right). Others were family friends.*

#### **Florence and George's Marriage, 1914**



(Source: DeWind Family Archives)

Edmund's boyhood friend, George O'Meara also immigrated into Canada and bought a piece of land in Wainwright, Alberta in preparation for marrying Edmund's youngest sister, Florence. On her trip to Canada, Florence's ship was forced to take a northern detour to avoid German submarines, perhaps adding a personal threat to Edmund's motivation to enlist in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. She came to stay in Edmund's boarding house until 2 November 1914 when they went together by train to Wainwright for her wedding to George. An obituary of Florence written after her death in 1971 describes the simple marriage and Edmund's role: "The Groomsman, the late Edmund DeWind, V.C., gave the bride away in place of his father; and, in-as-much as he helped the Bride with her dress and hat, they felt he also qualified as a Bridesmaid! The other witness was the

Church cleaning-lady who stood throughout the ceremony wiping soap suds off her hands." Two week later, Edmund would be able to complete his enlistment into the Canadian army.



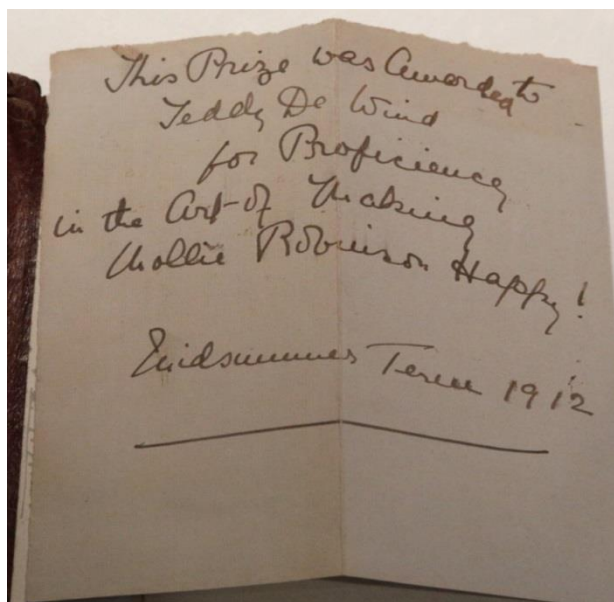
While in Canada, Edmund corresponded with Mollie. Just before Christmas she sent him a postcard:

Thanks for P.C. [post card] rec'd yesterday, also for very pretty calendar of [indistinct]. I haven't had a letter since Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> so I think yrs. must have gone astray. Let me know if it has. Am so glad that you are spending xmas in Chicago [with Edmund's brother Norman]. Had letter from yr. brother & Tookie [Ethel Andrews] DeW. today. Am awfully busy. L.M.E.E.R [Love Mary Emily Evelyn Robinson].

A couple of weeks later, on 11 January 1912, Mollie's father died leaving her with an estate of £1,115 5s 7d. (National Archives of Ireland) We do not have copies of any correspondence regarding her father's death but a few weeks later, Mollie wrote another post card to Edmund expressing her concern for his health rather than her own wellbeing:

Thanks awfully for P.C. [post card] & letter recd. on Mon. So sorry you are not so "fit." Hope you are all right again. You shd. skate in the evgs. or try to fit in some exercise. I hear this is the coldest winter they have had in yrs. in Canada. We have lovely weather here, so dry and bracing. I am A.1. as usual. This is a very good view of F'brook. [Frybrook is a large home in the town of Boyle where Mollie grew up.] Thought you'd like to have it, Ted – love – Ever yrs. M.R.

We do not know how Edmund responded but by summer, indicating that she was in good spirits, Mollie sent him the following grateful note:



(Source: DeWind Family Archives)

This is the last communication that we have between Edmund and Mollie, though they apparently would see each other again in Ireland during the war.

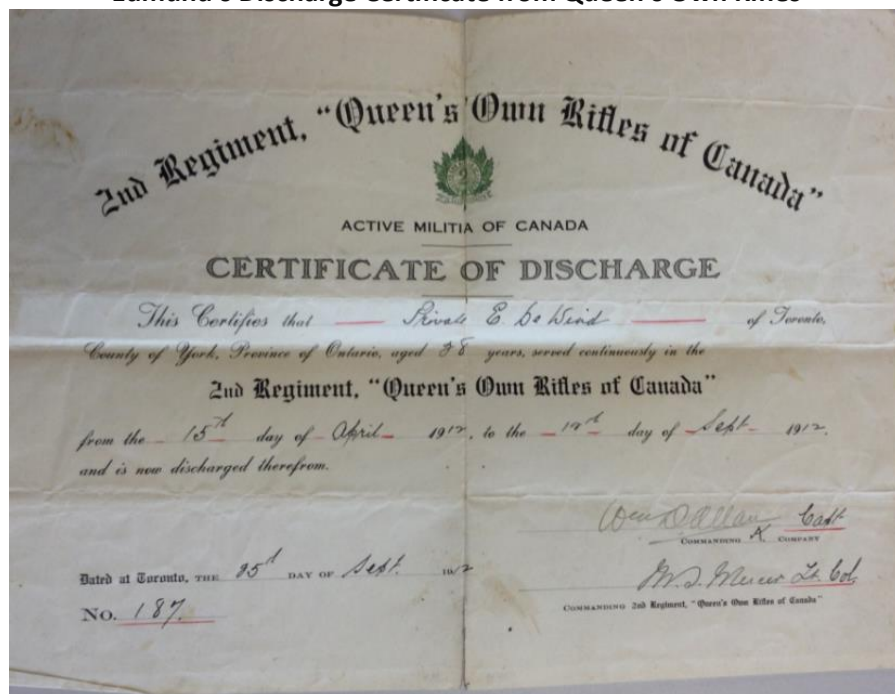
While in Toronto, Edmund served for five months in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Queen's Own Rifles of Canada which, having been formed in 1860, was Canada's oldest active militia. Why he joined up is not clear



(Source: Queen's Own Rifles Museum)

in his letters to family. Regardless of the nature of his military interests, Edmund resigned from the Queen's Own Rifles when the bank transferred him to Saskatchewan and then Alberta, where he would soon sign up with a private militia and then, after the war began, enlist in the Canadian army.

#### Edmund's Discharge Certificate from Queen's Own Rifles



(Source: PRONI, D1147, courtesy of Keith Haines)

## Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force

Soon after Great Britain declared war on Germany Edmund sought to enlist in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Because the Minister of Militia and Defence, Sam Hughes, sought to organize close to 100 infantry battalions nearly overnight, recruitment became decentralized and a bit chaotic among existing militias, newly organizing military units, and existing geographic district commanders. In Alberta, recruitment of the 31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion was carried out in various locations by different actors: in Edmonton by a battalion officer, in Calgary by a local militia, and in smaller cities nearby by others. (Holt: 104-120) The chaotic process suffered from long delays, about which Edmund would express considerable frustration.

### Officers of Legion of Frontiersmen, Edmonton Command



(Source: Glenbow Museum)

In Edmonton, Edmund first joined up with the Legion of Frontiersmen, which unlike the Queen's Own Rifles, had no formal connection with either the Canadian government or army. (See picture of Edmund in Legion of Frontiersmen uniform in Appendix 2) Edmund expected that Legion members would be able to enlist together into the Canadian army. The Legion of Frontiersmen was a curious paramilitary organization. It had been formed in London in 1904 by Roger Pocock, who was an ex-Canadian North West Mounted Police officer and a somewhat eccentric soldier of fortune.

Pocock saw the Legion's mission

as providing political intelligence and military support to the empire from its frontiers. He recruited adventurers who like himself had knocked about a good deal, had some military experience, but were said to be too independent in spirit to withstand the permanent discipline required by the regular army. (Shandro, n.d.) Edmund reported that the Legion's commandant in Edmonton, Justus Duncan Wilson, had offered to furnish Ottawa with a contingent of 200 to 300 men, but Sam Hughes replied by wire somewhat equivocally that "he will let us know later."<sup>3</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> Alberta Dragoons, which was already part of the Canadian army, was waiting to send 160 soldiers. While waiting, Edmund became sure that some 2,000 Alberta men had been able to enlist before him and he resented that the Liberal government of Sir Wilfred Laurier, the French Canadian prime minister, had not made clear whether it would accept the Frontiersmen. Edmund criticized the "Canuks" for earlier not having given a "hoot" about the country's defenses and letting them "go to rot" in times of peace. He also found fault with

<sup>3</sup> The group enlistment of some Frontiersmen apparently did finally take place in the formation of the 49<sup>th</sup> Battalion's D Company, which went to France as part of the Canadian Corps' 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and under the command of Edmund's friend, Commandant Justus Duncan Wilson. (Shandro 2010)

local western Liberal politicians for “grafting and general rottenness.” (Edmund DeWind, 10 September 1914)

While waiting impatiently for an opportunity to enlist, Edmund seemed to embrace the Frontiersmen’s self-assigned mission of seeking intelligence to protect Canada. He proposed in a letter to his brother that the government needed to guard “all the big bridges” that would be vitally necessary to bring in the fall harvest and support the war effort. He worried that the majority of the local population were either German or Galician. Repeating rumors, he wrote: “One of our men reported that a man had told him there is a body of men being drilled in the early morning up on the Hudson Bay Reserve, a stretch of unused land...” and that the group’s marching orders might have been given in German. The Legion’s drill instructor, Mr. Wright, offered Edmund use of a nice grey mare to ride to the reserve and discover what, if anything, was happening. If he were to find something amiss, Edmund noted reassuringly that not only was the Edmonton Motor Cycle Club part of the Frontiersmen and could act quickly to help the Royal North West Mounted Police but also that a local “motor carrying firm” was willing to “place their wagons at our disposal at any time, should necessity arise.” Vacillating, first he considered the rumors “may not be anything at all,” and then he worried that “one must be watchful as we have so many foreigners taken into the fold in Canada...and they are entitled to carry arms.” Finally, he concluded, “I don’t for a moment suppose we shall have trouble unless the Allies get beaten at first, then some [of the Germans in Canada] might get ‘uppish’ at first.” (Edmund DeWind, 16 November 1914)

Of course, such a beating was exactly what Belfast’s newsman, Arthur Moore, who had been a contemporary of Edmund’s at Campbell College, reported to a special edition of *The Times* from Amiens, giving a great shock to the until-then-optimistically-misinformed British and Canadian public. (Haines: 12-14; Singer and Peebles: 9-10) Nonetheless, Edmund gleaned from the evening paper’s first official dispatch of General French that the “fighting must have been very heavy, and the allies outnumbered at first...[as] some of the regiments have lost pretty heavy, especially the Yorkshire Light Infantry, Irish Guards, and some of the Cavalry Regts.” (Edmund DeWind, 16 November 1914)

Meanwhile, Edmund continued to prepare for war with the Frontiersmen:

I think that the Militia Dept. would do well and take a contingent from the Legion in the N. West, as the most of the men are old soldiers and volunteers, and you can see the difference when we are out on parade, as the men march so well. The local Piper band asked to join us and we do a route around the town about once a week to try and bring the movement before the people and get more recruits and the pipers attract the crowd. We drill down by the Govt. buildings two nights per week, and there are two squad drills on other nights in the Armoury, where the 19<sup>th</sup> Dragoons have lent us a large room, and then on Sunday afternoons we have a big drill down on the golf links. (Edmund DeWind, 10 September 1914)

Were he not soon able to get out as part of the Legion of Frontiersmen, Edmund was considering getting back in contact with the Queen’s Own Rifles in Toronto to see if he could enlist with them, provided that he could pass the medical exam.

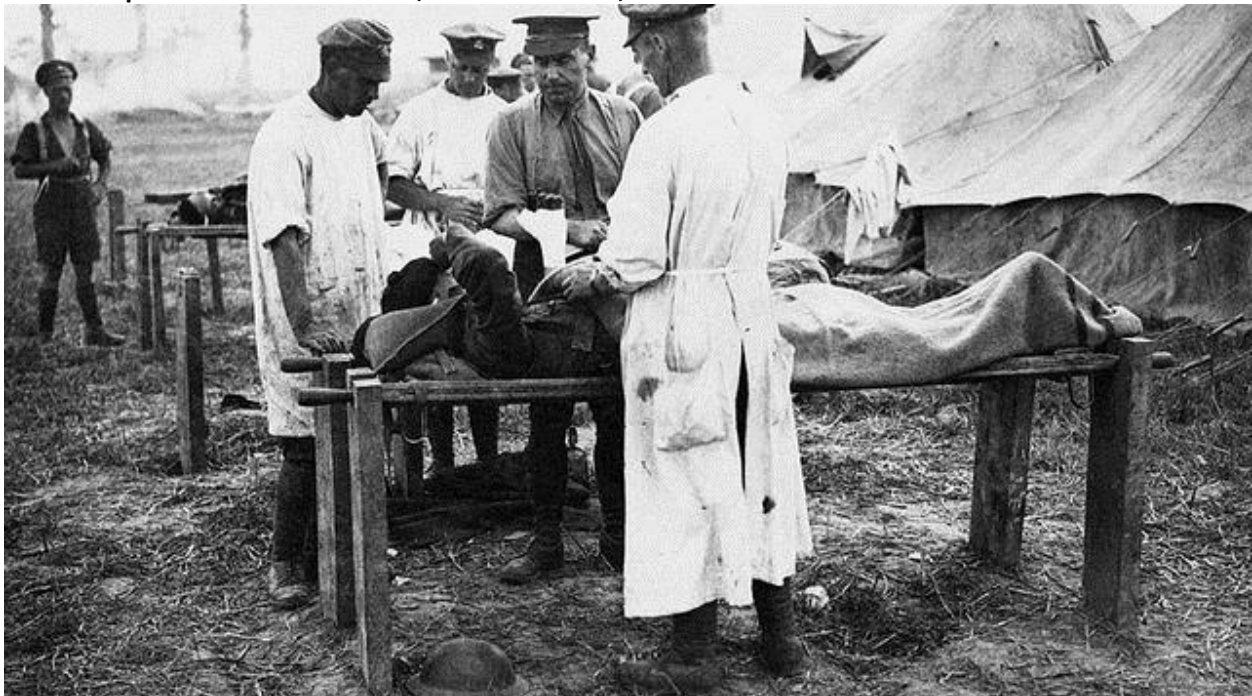
When enlistment into the Canadian Expeditionary Force began, the Ministry of Militia and Defence set fairly strict requirements related to age, marital status, height, health, teeth, and – worrisome for Edmund – vision. (Holt: 55-64) In September 1914 Edmund took a month’s leave from work to “rest my eyes which have got sore from long hours in this office where the light is wretched.” (Edmond DeWind,

10 September 1914) Weeks later he reported having his eyes tested by the “best Specialist here,” a Dr. Wells, who told Edmund his sight was good but that he would require slightly green tinted glasses to relieve them of having worked by artificial light. Edmund believed that there was little the matter but expected Dr. Wells would give him boracic acid to wash his lids and “strengthen” his eyes. Edmund also noted he had “been pulled down quite a bit in weight.” (Edmund DeWind, 15 November 1914)

While awaiting enlistment, Edmund put his financial affairs in order. He gave his brother power of attorney to manage his investments and to continue making payments for two insurance policies: one with the Scottish Widows Fund & Life Assurance Society, which he had taken out while working for the Bank of Ireland in Cavan, and the other with the Ocean Accident & Guarantee Corporation, Ltd. in Toronto, though the latter would automatically become invalid, he told his brother, once he would enlist. Edmund also sent to his brother a copy of his will, which left equal shares of his assets to all his siblings. But Edmund also requested that his brother add a codicil to the will that would leave an equal share to Mollie.

Finally, on 16 November 1914 Edmund wrote his brother a hurried and excited letter announcing that “recruiting opened today and most of the Legion men went up and a lot of us have got through O.K.” Edmund was physically examined and approved by Lieutenant Harold W. McGill, who would go on to command the 5<sup>th</sup> Ambulance Corps, provide medical support to the 31<sup>st</sup> and other battalions, and receive the Military Cross for his service in France. Edmund added that, “I wanted to go with the men I

**Captain Howard W. McGill, Medical Officer, 31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion at the Front in France**



(Source: Glenbow Museum)

knew and my chances of a commission in this country are ‘nil’ as most of them are going to men who have considerable political pull, and even Wright [the Legion’s drill instructor] who has held an Old Country commission, has been turned down several times.” (Edmund DeWind, 15 November 1914)



After passing his physical exam, Edmund signed a declaration that he would serve in the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force for at least a year and for as long as six months after the war between Great Britain and Germany might end. And he took an oath that,

I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs and Successors, and that I will as in duty bound honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, in Person, Crown and Dignity, against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and all the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God. (Canadian National Personnel Record Centre)

Edmund enlisted as a private in the newly created 31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion.<sup>4</sup> But despite this decisive step forward, he would still have to undergo almost a year of training in Canada, ship to England for additional training, ship to France, and go by train to Flanders where he would finally arrive at the Western Front.

### **Training: November 1914 to September 1915**

In October of 1914 the British Government accepted the offer of the new Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, to send a second contingent of troops to serve in the Great War. (Nicholson: 109) As one of the twelve battalions comprising the Canadian Expeditionary Force's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, the 31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion officially became organized on 17 November 1914 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel A. H. Bell, who only two weeks earlier had been authorized to raise and train a battalion of infantry in Calgary. As there were many more applicants than could be taken on, within ten days the battalion was brought nearly to the full establishment strength of 36 officers and 1,134 soldiers of "other ranks." In Calgary the newly formed battalion took up quarters in the town's Horse Show Buildings and began their training. Unlike the battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, whose somewhat chaotic training was centralized in a hastily assembled camp at Valcartier, north of Quebec City, the training of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division battalions took place in previously extant military districts spread across Canada.

As with the many other Canadian battalions formed in 1914-1915, the accommodations, clothing, and arms that the government could provide for training were limited, especially out west in Alberta. (Holt: 142-152, 154; Nicholson: 110) The history of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, which was written by Major Horace Cecil Singer and Andrew Auberon Peebles, says little about the military aspects of the training Edmund and others received beyond pointing out that "the syllabus was similar to that of other Canadian units" and citing the "rigours and occasional monotony of continual drilling and route marching." Further, to the extent that the Canadian troops were being trained for battle, it was with strategies based more on troop mobility than emplacement in trenches, which was where they would gain firsthand experience fighting during most of their first year in Flanders. (Singer and Peebles: 11-12)

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<sup>4</sup> The 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion was one of four battalions that comprised the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which was in turn one of three brigades that made up the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, which would follow the 1<sup>st</sup> Division to England and then to Flanders and France. The Battalion was itself divided into A, B, C, and D companies and Edmund was assigned to C Company. (See Appendix 1.)

### 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion Marching in Calgary, Alberta, Winter 1915



(Source: Glenbow Museum)

Reflecting what Singer and Peebles saw as the “psychology of the time” the military aspects of the training were not as effective as they would become for the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions, which would subsequently join the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions in Europe to form the Canadian Corps. The idea that the Germans would be easily swept back to their own country within six months prevailed and, as a result, Singer and Peebles suggest, a lack of urgency permitted carpenters to continue working on buildings for a poultry show and delayed the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion’s training. (Singer and Peebles: 11) The battalion history’s list of training activities reflects a greater emphasis on parading and entertainment than on preparation for battle:

- the battalion’s “first military tournament” (fencing, tent-pegging, the V.C.’s race, physical drill, bare-back wrestling, an inter-company relay race, and the awarding of prizes by the Commanding Officer A. H. Bell’s wife);
- a concert at the Grand Theatre to which all ranks were invited;
- an inspection by Defence Minister Sam Hughes at Victoria Park;
- a parade to the City Hall and reception by the Mayor and other civic officials; and
- the first public appearance of the regimental band at a service to commemorate the disturbing number of soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division who had been slaughtered in the Second Battle of Ypres.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the battalion’s somewhat diffuse military training, the second in command, Major W. H. Hewgill, who had witnessed Edmund’s attestation only four months earlier, felt confident to write in the battalion’s war diary of 10 March 1915 that “The Battalion has put in a splendid period of training and is in first class shape...No finer body of men were ever brought together.” (Singer and Peebles: 13) Their preliminary training completed, the jubilant battalion departed on 17 May 1915 by train from Calgary on the Canadian Northern Railway to arrive in Quebec five days later.

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<sup>5</sup> Subsequently the band regularly marched with Anglican troops to Sunday services. But Major Bell “suppressed” a similar pipe band organized by Presbyterian soldiers to escort them to Sunday services. Singer and Peebles speculated his decision might have been “to spare the Citizens of Calgary unnecessary suffering, or merely to prevent bloodshed and an internecine religious war.” (Singer and Peebles: 15)

## 31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion: Training and Shipping to England

Concert, Calgary, 1915



(Source: Glenbow Museum)

Awaiting Transport in Montreal



(Source: Toronto Life)

Parading at Calgary City Hall, 1915



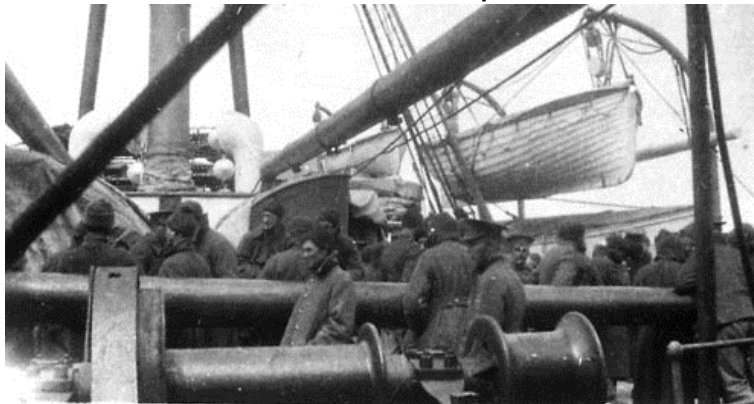
(Source: Glenbow Museum)

R.M.S. Carpathia



(Source: Gjenvick-Gjenvik Archives)

Aboard the R.M.S. Carpathia



(Source: Glenbow Museum)

Within hours after arrival in Quebec and following a quick breakfast and inspection by Defence Minister, Sam Hughes, the soldiers boarded the R.M.S. Carpathia along with members of the 27<sup>th</sup> (Winnipeg) Battalion and Borden's Motor Machine Gun Battery. By mid-afternoon they set sail for England.<sup>6</sup> The Carpathia, which had rescued 705 survivors from the sinking of the Titanic in April 1912, carried 2,200 troops. The ship was so crowded that some men were compelled to seek shelter for their bedding on deck in the lee of hatch covers or other structures as protection from snow at the beginning of their eleven day voyage. Because the passenger ship had no protective naval escort, it took a detour off the coast of Ireland after the captain learned that a German submarine had sunk another ship, the Nebraska, only twenty miles away. Then, running without lights in the dark, the Carpathia narrowly avoided by only a few feet collision with a friendly ship. Escaping peril, on May 28<sup>th</sup> the ship arrived in Plymouth Sound.<sup>7</sup> The following day, the battalion disembarked and most of its members proceeded 280 miles by train via London to Shorncliffe, long a training ground for British armed forces.

The 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion was housed in various tented camps within marching distance of Shorncliffe – including Dibgate, Lydd, Beachborough, and Otterpool – depending on the particular focus of their training. Here the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion received four months of “more strenuous and exacting training, and under a much sterner discipline, than any unit had so far experienced.” (Singer and Peebles: 21) The battalion spent most of its time with drilling, maneuvers, field days, trench digging, bayonet fighting, grenade throwing, machine gunnery, musketry, signaling, map reading, and first aid. Some of the training with arms was limited by a shortage or lack of ammunition. (Singer and Peebles: 21-27) For reasons not explained in his personnel record, one day Edmund was “absent” for 13 hours spanning the night of 29-30 July 1915. Despite the intensity of the training, Edmund might have been distracted by a concert or movie at the local YMCA Hut or one of nearby Folkestone's resort attractions. (Step Short) Whatever the reason, Edmund was eventually docked two days of his \$1.10 daily pay. (Canadian National Personnel Records Centre)

The war was not far away. When the winds were favorable, the battalion members could hear the distant rumble of guns in France and Belgium. Troops reported being able to see submarines and torpedo boat destroyers in the English Channel and wrote home that airplanes and dirigibles were a common sight. (Step Short) The Otterpool camp was at least once bombed by a German Zeppelin while some of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion was in tents there.

“Lights out” had just been sounded when the humming of Zeppelin engines announced its approach. Almost at once, and before it could be realized that a raid was intended, five bombs were dropped in rapid succession, exploding with terrific force in an oblique line across the camp of Otterpool. The first landed in a hedge bordering the field, the second struck the guard tent squarely, the third fell in the men's lines, and the fourth in the horse lines, the fifth striking a temporary road and exploding without damage. The Zeppelin then crossed the road and straightening his course parallel to the Westenhangar Camp dropped

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<sup>6</sup> Edmund's personnel record confusingly indicates that he embarked for England both on the S.S. Carpathia on 17 May 1915 from Quebec and on the S.S. Northland on 29 May 1915 from Montreal. Most likely he was on the Carpathia as the Battalion's embarkation nominal roll shows that the vast majority (1,073 officers and other ranks of the battalion) sailed on the Carpathia while only a few (90 members of the battalion, probably reinforcements) sailed on the Northland from Montreal. (Canadian Expeditionary Force) The larger first contingent arrived at Shorncliffe Station on 29 May 1915 and the subsequent and smaller contingent rejoined the rest of the battalion on 9 June 1915. (Singer and Peebles: 17-22)

<sup>7</sup> In July 1918 the Carpathia would be sunk in the same area by three torpedoes from the German submarine U-55.



five more bombs...It was presumed at the time of the raid that the Zeppelin, in making its way towards London, had drifted too far south...although the position of the two camps in relation to one another seemed to be fairly accurately known. (Yodel Out! Canada)

The culmination of all the battalion's training was the inspection on 2 September 1915 by King George V, whom Edmund had pledged to obey and defend against all enemies.

#### **King George V Inspecting 31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion, England, 1915**



(Source: Glenbow Museum)

The King addressed the assembled troops:

Six months ago I inspected the 1st Canadian Division before their departure for the front. The heroism that they have since shown on the field of battle has won for them undying fame. You are now leaving to join them, and I am glad to have the opportunity of seeing you to-day, for it has convinced me that the same spirit which animated them inspires you also. The past weeks at Shorncliffe have been for you a period of severe and rigorous training; and your appearance at this inspection testifies to the thoroughness and devotion to duty with which your work has been performed. You are going to meet hard-ships and dangers, but the steadiness and discipline which have marked your bearing on parade to-day will carry you through all difficulties. History will never forget your loyalty and the readiness with which you rallied to the aid of your Mother Country in the hour of danger. My thoughts will always be with you. May God bless you and bring you victory. (Yodel Out! Canada)

Although it is impossible to know how these words affected Edmund, given his own explanation for enlisting in the army and the social and political milieu within which he grew up, these words may well have inspired his conduct as a soldier. On the morning of 18 September 1915 the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion boarded the transport Duchess of Argyll, crossed the Channel, and disembarked just outside Boulogne, France.

## War in Belgium and France: September 1915 to March 1917

A breath from Calgary's city, flung where the fight is worst,  
Still more of Canada's manhood in the gallant THIRTY-FIRST;  
From prairie land and city they answered to the call,  
And bravely shouldered rifle, lest their Empire's honour fall.  
(A verse of the "Canadian 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade Marching Song," in Singer and Peebles: 128)

In Belgium and then in France Edmund would over more than two years take part in battles of two of the most important theaters of war on the Western Front: the Ypres Salient and Somme River. (See page 26 for MAP of the Western Front noting locations where Edmund fought) Within two days of landing near Boulogne, the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, including its 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade and Edmund's 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, travelled by train to Belgium and to a part of Flanders surrounding the city of Ypres. There the Allied Force, including the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division, and the German army had earlier fought each other to a standstill. Rather than one army quickly overrunning the other, as had initially been expected on both sides, the battle lines between the German and Allied Forces had become "stabilized" in a system of trenches, which became known as the Western Front and extended all the way across Europe between the contending armies from the channel coast of Belgium to the mountains of Switzerland.

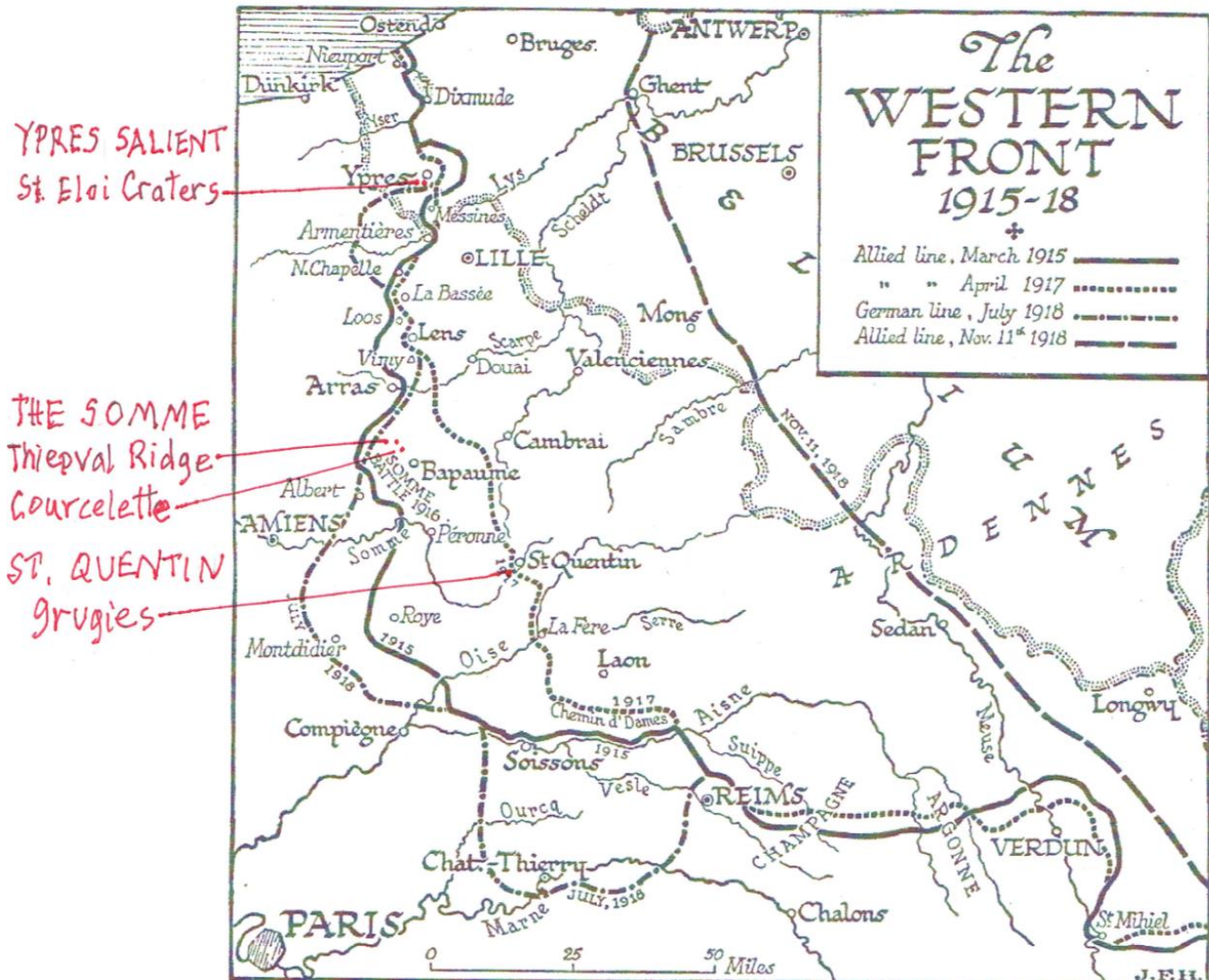
Unable to obtain victory through mobility and sudden force, both sides now sought to win through attrition – grinding down the other's manpower and armaments while trying to replenish their own more efficiently – and then breaking through the other's weakened lines to outflank and defeat their enemy. Retrospectively in 1921 the Canadian Battles Nomenclature Committee would dub the two components of this strategy "trench" and "offensive" warfare. While he was with the 31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion in 1916, Edmund would take part in both types of battles: primarily defensive trench warfare in the Ypres Salient and offensive warfare near the Somme River in France. He would finally die in 1918 in defensive warfare near St. Quentin and the Somme River with the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Irish Rifles.

### *The Ypres Salient*

Between the fall of 1915 and the spring of 1916, the Canadian 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade was occupied in defending trenches in the southern half of the Ypres Salient, which was roughly a semi-circle whose radius pushed out three to five miles to the North, East, and South of Ypres into German-held territory and was, as a result, somewhat vulnerable to attack from the sides as well as the front. (See pg. 27 for a MAP of Ypres Salient 1914-1918)

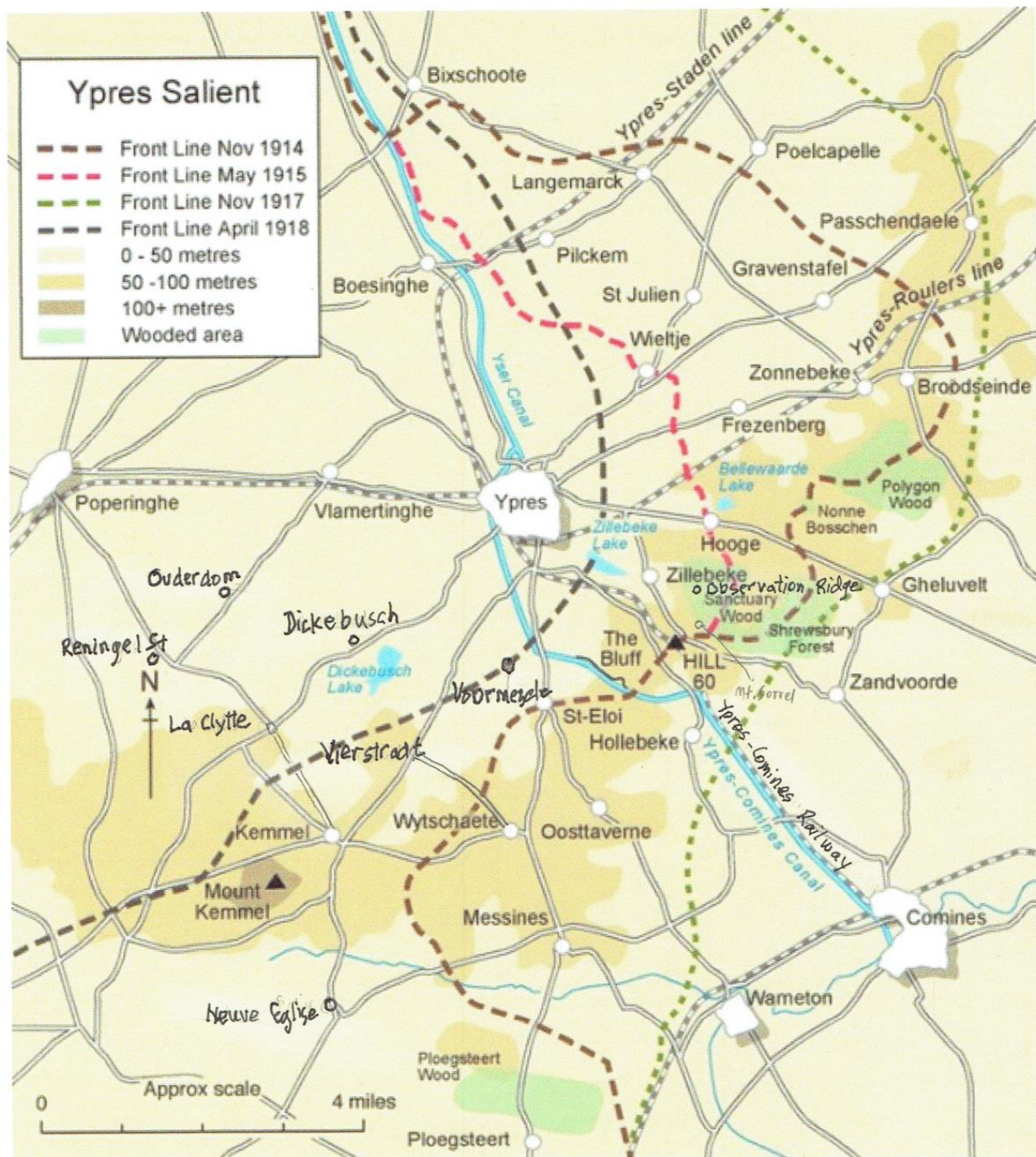
During these early months at the front Edmund's battalion typically entered the fire line for two to three weeks at a time along the lower slopes of the Wytschaete Ridge, which was located between the towns of Kemmel and Wytschaete. There they suffered various types of artillery bombardment and gas attacks from their German counter parts, who were dug into opposing trenches. The Albertas, as they were often called, were then relieved by one of the other three battalions that comprised the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade. In between their postings in the fire trenches, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion would typically be stationed as reserves in either the second line of trenches, from which they could support troops in the fire trenches if needed, or behind the lines near Kemmel, where they could rest in camp billets, recuperate, incorporate new recruits replacing the dead and wounded, drill, and prepare to return to the front line.

The Western Front  
and  
Where Edmund Fought During World War 1



<https://etc.usf.edu/maps/pages/3600/3695/3695.htm>

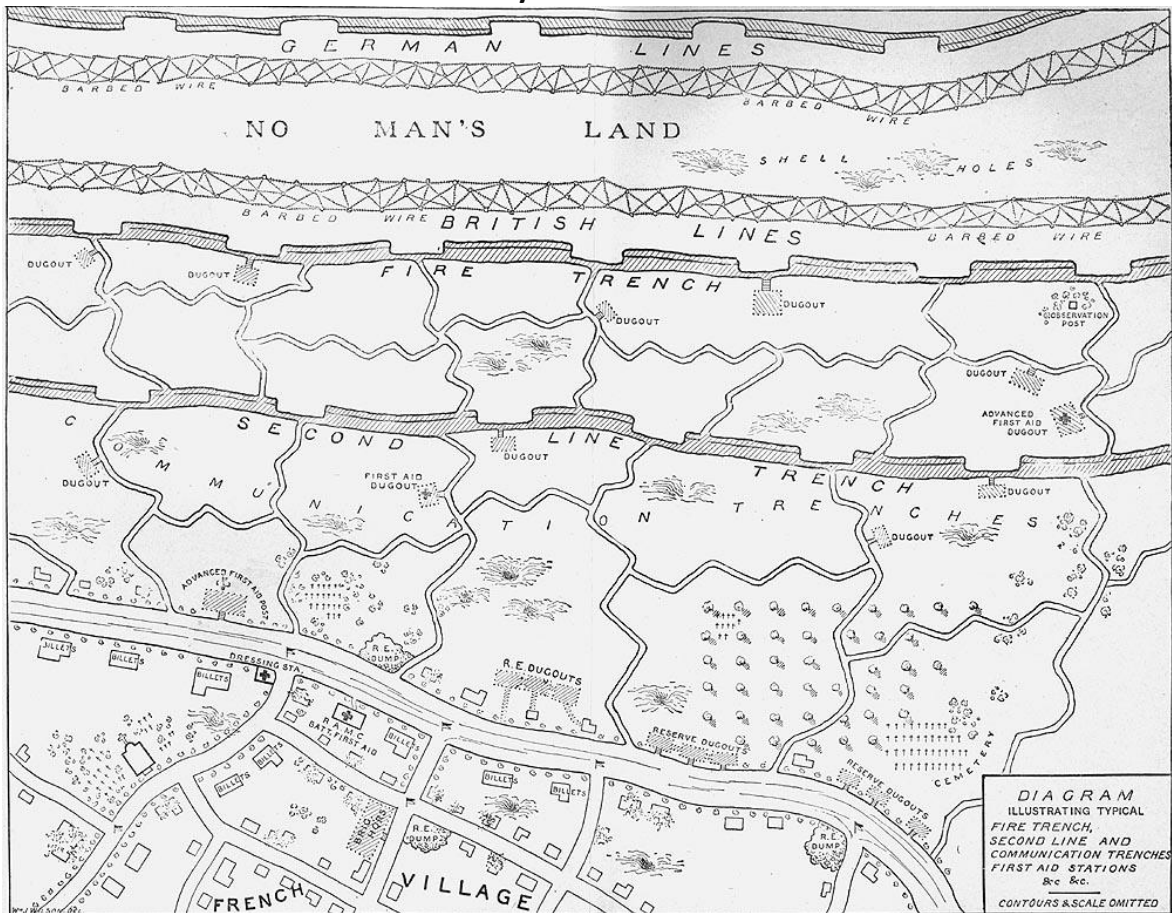




(Source: Our Family Stories)



## Trench Warfare System on the Western Front



(Source: Beauchamp, Lee, and Yglesias)

The above illustration shows the elaborate trench systems that the French, British, and German armies constructed across hundreds of miles of the Western Front. In front of the trenches was barbed wire, an innovation developed in the American West that helped to slow advancing troops who tried to charge across the no-man's land. Then came the fire trench where soldiers would keep watch and resist attacks. These were connected to the second line of trenches by narrower communication trenches, which were used to rotate soldiers and supplies in and out of the front lines. Further back were additional networks of trenches for communications, first aid, and the storage of supplies. At the very back was the artillery, with guns powerful enough to send massive shells deep into enemy lines. Constant shelling, a lack of adequate shelter, and poor sanitation combined with bad weather to make trench life miserable for the soldiers.

(Beauchamp, Lee, and Yglesias)

Despite the soldiers' exposure to, and casualties from, German artillery, bombs, machine guns, snipers, and other attacks, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion's historian described the battalion's first experiences with trench warfare as relatively "uneventful," until that is, the April and May actions at the St. Eloi Craters, where Edmund's brigade earned the appellation "The Iron Sixth."

When not under attack, the troops' greatest challenge was to endure the trenches. The alluvial plain that extends from the coast of Flanders to the area around Ypres is, in some places, below sea level.

Dykes provided some protection from flooding. But the countryside was threaded by streams and small rivers that seeped underground and, along with frequent and intensive rains during the fall and winter, waterlogged the trenches. To protect themselves from enemy fire, the troops typically tried to dig trenches as deep as twelve feet, but in much of the Ypres Salient trenches that deep reached into the water table and flooded. So, they built up sandbag parapets and parapets, which respectively provided protection from fire in front or blasts to the rear of the trenches, but these heightened fortifications were easily broken up by German artillery barrages. And because draining the trenches was difficult or impossible, the walls would often collapse into knee or waist high mud. In the numbingly wet and cold winter months many soldiers suffered from "trench foot," which could cause their feet to rot, become gangrenous, and require amputation.

Despite these dangers and difficulties, the following spring Edmund wrote fairly cheerfully to his brother about conditions in the trenches.

Somewhere in France, 14 Mar. 1916

My dear Norman,

...I was rather seedy for a day or two, the result of my second inoculation for typhoid. I was done some 16 mos. ago in Calgary but of course we take as few chances as possible these days. I believe it must be a good idea as typhoid has been so rare when one considers that we spend so much time in damp rat infested trenches.

I must say however our portion of the line is A.1. We originally took it over a more or less dilapidated old half-wall-half-ditch [but] now it is a splendidly built line with good dug-outs, bomb proofs, etc., & the main & communications trenches well-drained & floored. An Imperial officer I believe stated some weeks ago that these trenches were a "credit to the brigade." Some boost for the [Alberta] Westerns!!

...I must thank you ever so much for the second pair of gum boots; it is far too good of you. I have asked Mother just to keep them at home for me as my present ones are still in excellent order. Those boots are the real thing Norman for the trenches; have anything beaten I've seen.

I think you must have taken me up wrong about the wounded Calgary boy we helped out that night sometime back, as it was down a communication trench & not under fire so it was not anything for recognition....

We had a pretty nice change while out on the brigade rest which bucked us up a bit; it was nice to get a few country walks & not have to walk around among sand-bag walls....I guess we are in for about 3 weeks trench duty now between front & reserve line spells & after that we hope to get a break for about a couple of weeks, but even while resting you are on duty in as much as you are on "Corps Reserve" & liable to be hauled up for an emergency....

Nothing much is happening here of note. We are having lovely Spring days & sunshine. I had quite a lazy day basking until during the afternoon a juggins blew in with a trench mortar & his gang with him. The "wags" here call them "The Strolling Players" as they all troupe along carrying various junk, set up their darned machine, plug a few shots over &

beat it for some distant spot. Our part in the drama is to be interested spectators of Fritz's gunners trying to locate the spot with high explosive shrapnel. As they say of Sunday School Feasts, "a pleasant afternoon was spent" & the papers of 2 or 3 days hence remark "all is quiet in the Western Front"!!

Love to all and hope the boys are flourishing, your loving brother, E. DeWind.  
(Edmund DeWind, 14 March 1916)

Those quiet days were about to end.

### ***St. Eloi Craters***

A few weeks after writing his optimistic letter, Edmund's 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion and the rest of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade were ordered to replace British troops at St. Eloi, a village West of Kemmel and two and a half miles south of Ypres. Before the Canadians arrived, British troops had burrowed three long tunnels passing under the village and beneath the German front line, which ran East-West along a 600 yard elevated strip of land known as "The Mound." From underneath, the British troops detonated six explosions, each with between 600 and 31,000 pounds of ammonal. The blasts created huge craters and obliterated or collapsed the walls of nearby German trenches, sent smoke and debris high enough into the air to be seen for miles around, and were heard across the Channel in England.

#### **One of the St. Eloi Craters**



(Source: Library and Archives Canada)

After the explosions, British troops rushed in to seize the German's front line positions. Then after a week defending against fierce counter attacks, the British troops managed to keep most of the Germans off The Mound.

But on April 3, the night that they relieved the British troops, the Canadians found conditions had become nearly indefensible: persistent enemy bombardment had obliterated large sections of trenches and created eleven new craters; rain filled the craters and remaining trenches with water and, in some parts, waist deep mud; and the actual locations of the mine craters and the trenches had become indeterminate in the pockmarked landscape, which was littered with abandoned bodies of both German and British soldiers. A soldier from Calgary, who like Edmund had been a bank clerk, described the gruesome scene found by the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion the morning after their arrival:

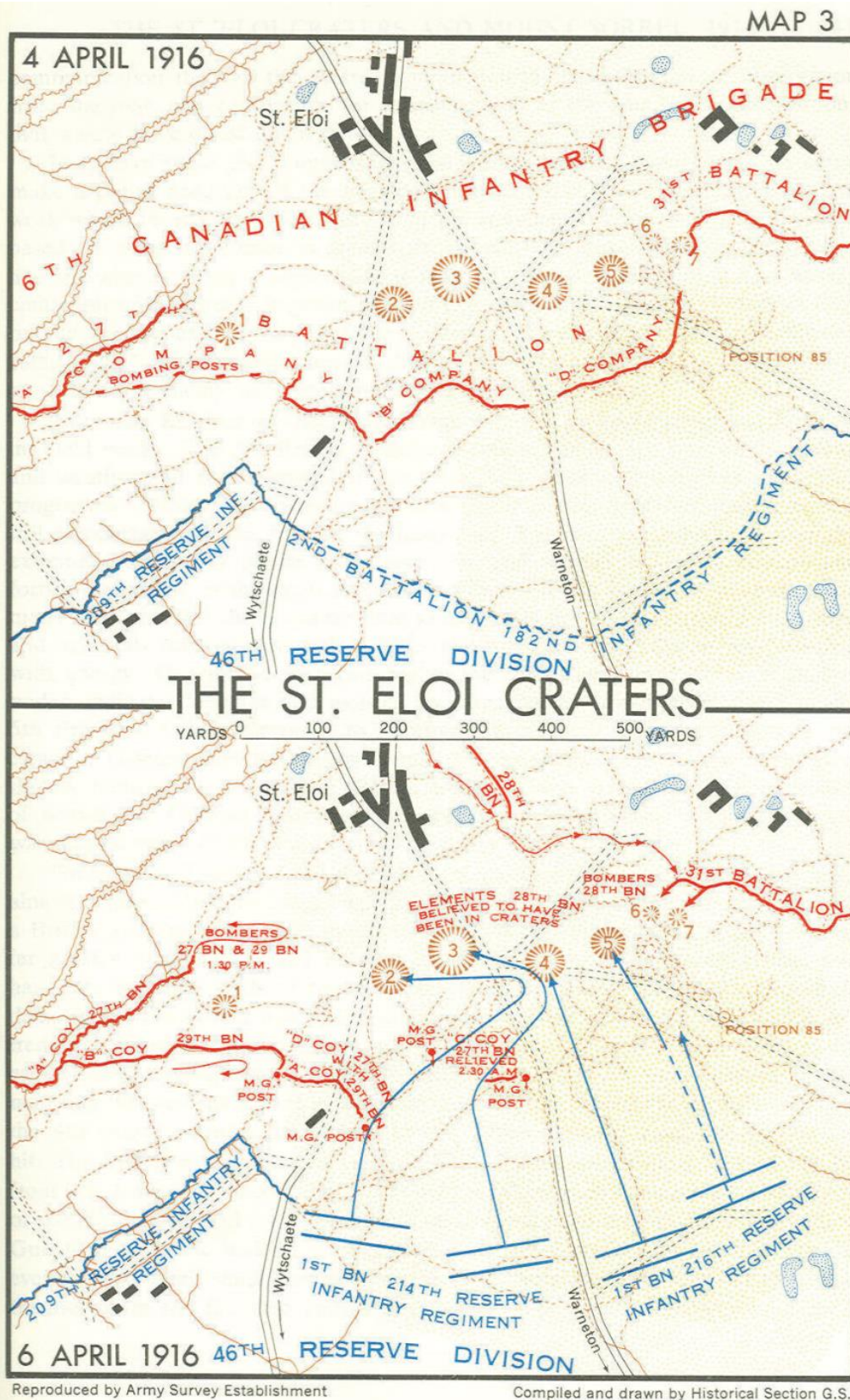
When day broke, the sights that met our gaze were so horrible and ghastly that they beggar description. Heads, arms and legs were protruding from the mud at every yard and dear knows how many bodies the earth swallowed. Thirty corpses were at least showing in the crater and beneath its clayey waters other victims must be lying killed and drowned. A young, tall, slim English lieutenant lay stretched in death with a pleasant, peaceful look on his boyish face. Some mother's son, gone to glory. (Fraser: 113)

The next day, renewed German bombardment destroyed all efforts that had been made the previous night to restore the trenches, a pattern that was to be repeated in the following nights and days. Front-line and communication trenches were destroyed and contact among platoons, companies, and the battalion were disrupted. Small groups of Canadian troops became isolated in discontinuous pockets and were exposed along the flanks of the hill to continuous enemy bombardment and machine gun fire. The officers of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion had no maps and, in the inevitable chaos, thought their troops were occupying Craters No. 4, 5, and 6, when they were actually occupying Nos. 6 and 7 and some of the smaller craters behind No. 4. (See pg. 32 for a MAP of St. Eloi Craters) Due to the unrecognized gap of at least 150 yards between the Canadians' positions, on April 6<sup>th</sup> German troops managed to slip between the craters and retake possession not only of Crater No. 5 but also Nos. 2 and 3 and, possibly No. 4. On April 8<sup>th</sup>, after five days of punishing and insupportable conditions, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, which had been defending not only Craters 6 and 7 but also the trenches extending farther east, was relieved by the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

It was not until more than a week later, on April 16,<sup>th</sup> that the weather cleared enough for aerial photographs to reveal that the Germans had regained Crater Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5, though the Canadians still held Nos. 1, 6, and 7. Then on April 19<sup>th</sup>, after the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion had moved up to support the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the front lines, German artillery decimated the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion's D Company, whose members sought in vain to defend Crater Nos. 6 and 7. Those few who survived were taken prisoner as they stood waist deep in muddy water with their rifles jammed with mud and inoperable. As a result, almost all the initial gains that the British soldiers had made in taking The Mound were now lost.

Hoping to retake the craters that same evening, the Brigade Headquarters put the commander of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Colonel A.H. Bell, in charge of all the front line troops and ordered him to counter attack the Germans. He immediately combined companies of the 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Battalions to mount a 10 p.m. assault. But in the dark the companies' officers and men were unable to determine the enemy's locations and a reconnaissance team reported that the German artillery and machine guns, along with the deep trench mud, would make an attack impossible. At 11 p.m. the Brigade Headquarters repeated its order to attack, with all possible dispatch. Under accurate bombardment from the Germans, however, the battalion's commander again found it impossible to advance and he sent the assembled troops back. When Col. Bell requested further orders, the Brigade Headquarters for the third time ordered him to return the troops to the front line and attack. But as day broke, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion troops found that they still could not identify which craters were which, enemy artillery and machine guns were accurately registered on them, and the mud was too deep to wade through. Col. Bell phoned the Brigade Head Quarters and explained that an attack would inevitably result in futile loss of life. Only then did the Brigade Commander finally accept that the situation was hopeless, call off the attack, and allow the Germans to retain control of The Mound.





(Source: Nicholson: 139)

After the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion's six days on the St. Eloi front line, 29 of its men had been killed and 147 were wounded or missing. Taking into account prior losses, only 570 of the original 1,023 Battalion members who had sailed from England were left to answer the roll call that evening. Total Canadian casualties at St. Eloi – both killed and wounded – numbered 1,373. In an account Col. Bell composed in early 1919, based on reports he had written earlier, he seems to have concluded that the original plan to launch the St. Eloi actions and take over The Mound had been doomed from the start.

The line in front of the craters was so exposed and the enemy's artillery so well placed to concentrate upon it and bring fire to bear from the left flank and rear as well as from [the] front that, even had it been possible to consolidate a good trench line, it could not have been held for any length of time. Tactically the position was thoroughly unsound; the enemy had the advantage and was determined to press it to the limit. (Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion War Diary, April 1916: 1-76)

Evaluating the "St. Eloi fiasco," generals leading the British Army viewed the Canadians' unsuccessful actions, including the misinformation about the craters' locations and the failure to recapture The Mound, to be the result of serious and wide spread errors made at various levels. The British held the commanding officers of both the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade responsible and sought their removal with "severe disciplinary measures." But to avoid what he feared might become a "dangerous feud" between the Canadians and the British," the British Army's Commander in Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, accepted that in "abnormally difficult circumstances" mistakes were to be expected. Nevertheless, six weeks later, just before the British were to launch their most ambitious (and perhaps equally unfortunate) offensive of the war around the River Somme, the overall commander of the Canadian Corps was abruptly reassigned to a non-combat post, though without official censure.<sup>8</sup>

After the St. Eloi actions the Canadian Corps took over the front line defense of most of the South East quadrant of the Ypres Salient, starting just North of Hoge and extending clock-wise around South to St. Eloi. The Germans launched continuous bombardment along all sectors of the Salient and made incursions into Canadian-held territory, most significantly taking not only the village of Hoge, along the road east of Ypres, but also a number of high points from which they could observe and shoot down upon the Canadians: Observation Ridge (which ran through Sanctuary Wood), The Bluff, and Hill 60. During the summer months the Canadians were able to win back these territories previously lost to the Germans. (See MAP pg. 27.)

By the end of August 1916, after a year of fighting, the front lines between the Canadians and the Germans in the Ypres Salient had not moved significantly. The 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion was ordered to relocate to France to take part in offensive battles near the Somme River.

### ***Edmund's Experiences in the Machine Gun Section***

It is possible to form an understanding of Edmund's role and experiences during the action at the St. Eloi Craters from his having become a member of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion's Machine Gun Section. Although his mother reported that Edmund had received machine gun training at Shorncliffe (MJS DeWind ca. 1919), whether he joined the Machine Gun Section in Calgary, during his Shorncliffe training, or subsequently

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<sup>8</sup> The foregoing abridged description of the actions at St. Eloi and its aftermath is derived from fuller accounts in the Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion War Diaries (April 1916, pages 1-76) and in the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion and Canadian Corps histories written respectively by Singer and Peebles (Chapters 6 and 7) and Nicholson (pgs. 137-147).

at the front is not noted in his Canadian personnel record. However, on 15 October 1915, soon after his battalion arrived in the Ypres Salient, a corporal of his C Company and three machine gunners were all wounded by a single rifle grenade. It might have been these casualties that created an opening for

### **31<sup>st</sup> Battalion Machine Gun Section in Calgary, 1915**



(Source: Carter)

Edmund to join the Machine Gun Section. (Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion War Diaries, 15 October 1916; McGill: 102) Two weeks later, Edmund wrote to the Canadian Bank of Commerce:

...I am now in the Machine Gun Section of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion and like the work very much, and we have an awfully nice willing bunch of fellows in it. We have been in first and second trenches for over a month, and at present are having a week's rest in an old farm house near a village. Our buildings are pretty well intact, but it is awful to see miles of trenches and sand-bag parapets all around. It will be two or three decades after the war before things are in any sort of good shape. It is beautiful, rich, mixed farming country, but a good lot of rain and fog in the fall apparently. "Sunny Alberta" will look mighty good again to those of us who are lucky enough to pull through.

The Balkan crisis will probably add several months to the war, but I think the German combine is showing signs of breaking up. The Allies are well off for munitions now, though I must say our Canadian troops would welcome the sight of any of the new machine-guns which are ready in Canada.

We are all very well, and are being splendidly equipped this year with skin coats, rainproof

capas, rubber waders, heavy boots, etc. and food is generally very good and plenty of it.  
(Edmund DeWind 1920)<sup>9</sup>

At the time he wrote this letter, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion's Machine Gun Section was comprised of 35 soldiers of all ranks. They were divided into four teams, each deployed with one of the section's four US-made Colt machine guns to A, B, C, and D Companies, Edmund having been assigned to C Company.

Soon after Edmund wrote he had become part of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion's Machine Gun Section, the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was authorized to form separate Brigade Machine Gun Companies. The nucleus of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade's Machine Gun Company was formed at Kemmel, not far from St. Eloi, by taking personnel and guns from the machine gun sections of the brigade's four battalions. In return, in February and March prior to the April St. Eloi actions, the new 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade Machine Gun Company twice organized nine-day machine gun schools in Kemmel for members of each of the battalions' Machine Gun Sections. Although there is no record of Edmund's having participated in these trainings, other members of his battalion machine gun section did. (Canadian 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade Machine Gun Company War Diary: February-March 1916 and Appendix 10; Canadian 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade War Diary, February-April, 1916)

At the beginning of the war the Canadian and British commanders, in contrast with the German army, had not given particular importance to the tactical advantages of machine guns. (Grafton: 38-40; Singer and Peebles: 33-35) But over time it became apparent not only that a single machine gun could deliver rapid and lethal fire equivalent to many infantry rifles but also that machine guns offered tactical capabilities different from those of rifles: "overhead" shooting back and forth against the enemy as the infantry charged its lines, "enfilade" shooting from the side and down the lines of advancing enemy troops, and "surprise effect" shooting by a well-hidden machine gun catching unsuspecting enemy troops in the open. Precisely because of their devastating power, machine gun units became prime targets for return fire not only from snipers or soldiers with rifles or bombs to throw, but also from "minenwerfers" (trench mortars), and larger artillery – a danger that led to machine gun units' being referred to as "Suicide Squads." In response to their vulnerability, Canadian machine gunners invented "indirect" shooting: they rained bullets onto enemy formations in an arc over intervening parapets or other physical obstacles which could protect them from return fire. (Logan and Levy: 42, 50, 51)

Although Edmund was part of C Company's Machine Gun Section when the St. Eloi Craters actions began, occasionally the brigade headquarters assigned the company sections to support other brigades, battalions, or companies in forward trenches and strong points. Further, because of a general shortage of machine guns, the Machine Gun Sections were often required to continue holding their positions even after the brigade's or battalion's other soldiers were relieved from the front line. (McGill: 102-3, 109-110, 122, 125; 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary, March-May, 1916) During the first few days of the fighting at St. Eloi, the A and B Companies took over forward trenches close to Craters No. 6 and 7 and C Company was posted to adjacent trenches which extended further East. A and B Companies were so heavily bombarded that they could not rebuild their crumbling trench walls, while C Company managed to put out 20 yards of protective apron wire in front of their portion of the trench. Because of their many casualties, B Company exchanged places with C Company, while their machine gun sections, presumably including Edmund, remained in their first positions.

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<sup>9</sup> This letter, dated 1 November 1915, was published by the Canadian Bank of Commerce first in one of a series of pamphlets titled "Letters from the Front" and then again after the war in 1920 as part of a two volume collection of such letters from bank employees. (Foster and Duthie 1920)



On April 6<sup>th</sup> the German bombardment of the Canadian trenches lasted seventeen and a half hours. The C Company trenches became so broken up that reinforcement troops had to lie on the duck boards at the bottom of the trenches for protection. The medical officer, Captain Howard McGill, reported,

A most terrible concentration of enemy bombardment is taking place on our position in front of and about St. Eloi, using trench torpedoes and shells of all kinds and sizes. Hundreds of shells must be bursting per minute. We must expect heavy casualties...Cases of shattered nerves coming in. The worst of these I send to Field Ambulance, but the majority I allow to lie down in adjoining dugout. There are only a half dozen cases. Some men have been buried by shells...Many dead and wounded are reported from the front line...Front trenches are pretty well battered to pieces. (Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion, War Diaries, April 6, 1916)

That afternoon, when 150 to 200 Germans advanced toward their trench, C Company opened fire on the attackers. Some were shot as they tried to surrender, some ran away, and others took shelter in a nearby shell holes. As dark fell, fifty to sixty Germans jumped out of the shell holes to run back to their trenches but C Company again opened fire and saw some of the Germans fall. The enemy bombardment continued all night. On the following morning, 7 April, fifteen Germans appeared in front of the Company C trench. The battalion diary reports they emerged "with their rifles slung" and that "they were acting like a lot of wild Indians and it was obvious that our artillery had demoralized them. Our men killed the entire party." (31<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary, April 1916, Appendix No. 16) After five days of fighting, including more than thirty hours of intensive bombardment with no water or food, C Company, probably including Edmund's machine gun crew, were finally relieved and retired to billets to rest and regroup. (Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion War Diary, 7 April 1916)

It was ten days later, after the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion had returned to the front trenches, that the Brigade Headquarters ordered the Canadian troops retake the St. Eloi Craters. The brigade also ordered the battalion's machine gun sections to accompany their respective companies. Two companies moved into front line trenches and two remained in support. The following night and the next morning, C Company, perhaps including Edmund, was twice ordered up to the forward trenches as part of the effort to retake The Mound but twice they returned to the support trenches after they found it impossible to launch attacks from the muddy trenches and craters while under bombardment and fire from the Germans. On April 21, after the orders to retake the Craters had been rescinded, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion was relieved and withdrew to the divisional reserve camp. The machine gun sections were ordered remain at the front one more day before rejoining the battalion. (Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion War Diary, April 1916; Canadian 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade War Diary, April 1916)

### ***Battles of the Somme***

In September 1916 the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion was sent from Belgium to France, near the Somme Canal and River. Nine months earlier the Allied Armies had agreed to mount here their largest offensive of the war against the Germans. Together the British and the French hoped to break the German lines, surround part of the German army, and bring the war to an end. But before their offensive could be launched, the Germans began their own major attack against the French farther south at Verdun and, although the British still hoped to break through the German lines, their immediate purpose with the Somme offensive became to distract German troops from Verdun and relieve the hard-pressed French army.

On 1 July 1916 the British and French forces initiated the Battles of the Somme along twenty-five miles of the Western Front stretching from the Thiepval Plateau in the North to Chilly in the South. (See pg. 38

for MAP of Battles of the Somme) The plan of attack was to begin with a heavy artillery bombardment that would neutralize German resistance. Then the artillery was to re-aim its shelling forward just in front of a first wave of advancing troops. After the first wave secured the battered enemy trenches, a second wave of “mop up” troops was to move in, clear out any remaining enemy, and consolidate these new positions. To rebuild the captured trenches and prepare for any counter attack, troops in the “mopping up” wave would carry picks, shovels, and sand bags in addition to their guns, ammunition, and grenades. If these offensive efforts were successful in establishing a new front line, the artillery would be moved forward to bombard the next German line and begin another cycle of attacks with fresh troops.

### ***Courcelette***

Following this battle plan, battalion after battalion threw themselves against the well-fortified German defenses. While the attacks gained yardage, the well-entrenched German guns and artillery decimated the advancing troops. After each assault, the depleted first wave of troops withdrew for reinforcement and reorganization and then went forward once again into what many later called the “blood bath of the Somme.” (Singer and Peebles: 139-140) This was to be the experience of Edmund and the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion in the battle for Courcelette, which was a village located in the northern sector of the attack.

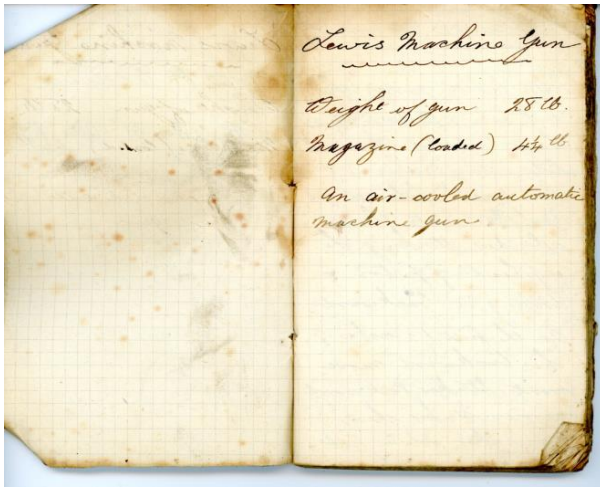
By the time the Canadian Corps entered into the Somme region, the fighting had been raging for over two months and was about to begin its third cycle of advance and consolidation. The Canadians replaced Australian troops who, in the previous six weeks, had advanced along with the British army well into German territory and established a front line just to the east of Pozieres. The Canadian Corps faced a six mile German front that extended from Flers in the east, through Martinpuch and Courcelette, to Thiepval in the west. The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade was assigned the specific mission of taking over the German trenches in front of Courcelette and then moving up to the edge of town to determine to what extent it had been fortified. If the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade determined a subsequent attack could be successful, the next day the Canadian 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade would take over and drive the Germans to the east and out of the town. One reason the Germans might put up a fierce resistance was that the large beet sugar factory on the town’s outskirts had a well from which they could draw water for their troops. Unlike Flanders, the plains of the Somme were relatively dry. Wells with plentiful water were few and far between, which had led the region’s rural populations to concentrate in towns with communal wells, such as Courcelette. (Reed: 7)

During the month prior to its arrival at the Somme, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion had received new troops and undergone strenuous training in mobile offensive tactics as a company and a battalion. The battalion received new weapons including both British Lee Enfield rifles (replacing the Canadian Ross rifles, which had frequently jammed with mud) and Lewis Guns (replacing the Colt machine guns which were transferred to the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade Machine Gun Company), thus completing a replacement process that had begun four months earlier. (Singer and Peebles: 127; 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary, February 1916, Appendix 7) The Lewis Guns were lighter than the Colts, could be operated by only one or, more easily, by two soldiers and were more versatile in fighting alongside an infantry on the move. Earlier, from 19 to 26 May 1916, after the St. Eloi actions, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisional School opened its first Lewis Gun course. Edmund attended and was reported to have attained “G” (good) in “efficiency.” (Canadian 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary, May 1916: Appendix 10, Brigade Orders by Brigadier General H.D.B. Ketchen, No. 229, 17 May 1916 and No. 240, 31 May 1916) Afterwards Edmund kept a well-worn notebook of carefully hand-written instructions about how to maintain and repair Lewis Guns. He continued to fight with C Company as part of a Lewis Gun team during the battle for Courcelette. (See pg. 39 for Edmund’s Lewis Gun note book and a MAP of Battle of Courcelette.

Map of the Somme region in France, showing the area around Bapaume, Comblès, and Chaules. The map includes a legend for English Miles (0 to 5), a scale bar, and a compass rose. It also features a legend for the advance of the front line: "Before advance July 1" (solid line), "Approximate line September 18" (dashed line), "Railways" (line with cross-ticks), and "Roads" (line with cross-ticks). The map shows the R. Somme, R. Ancre, and R. Sirey, along with numerous towns and villages. The area between the solid and dashed lines is shaded, indicating the territory gained by the Allies.

38

Edmund's Lewis Gun Notebook



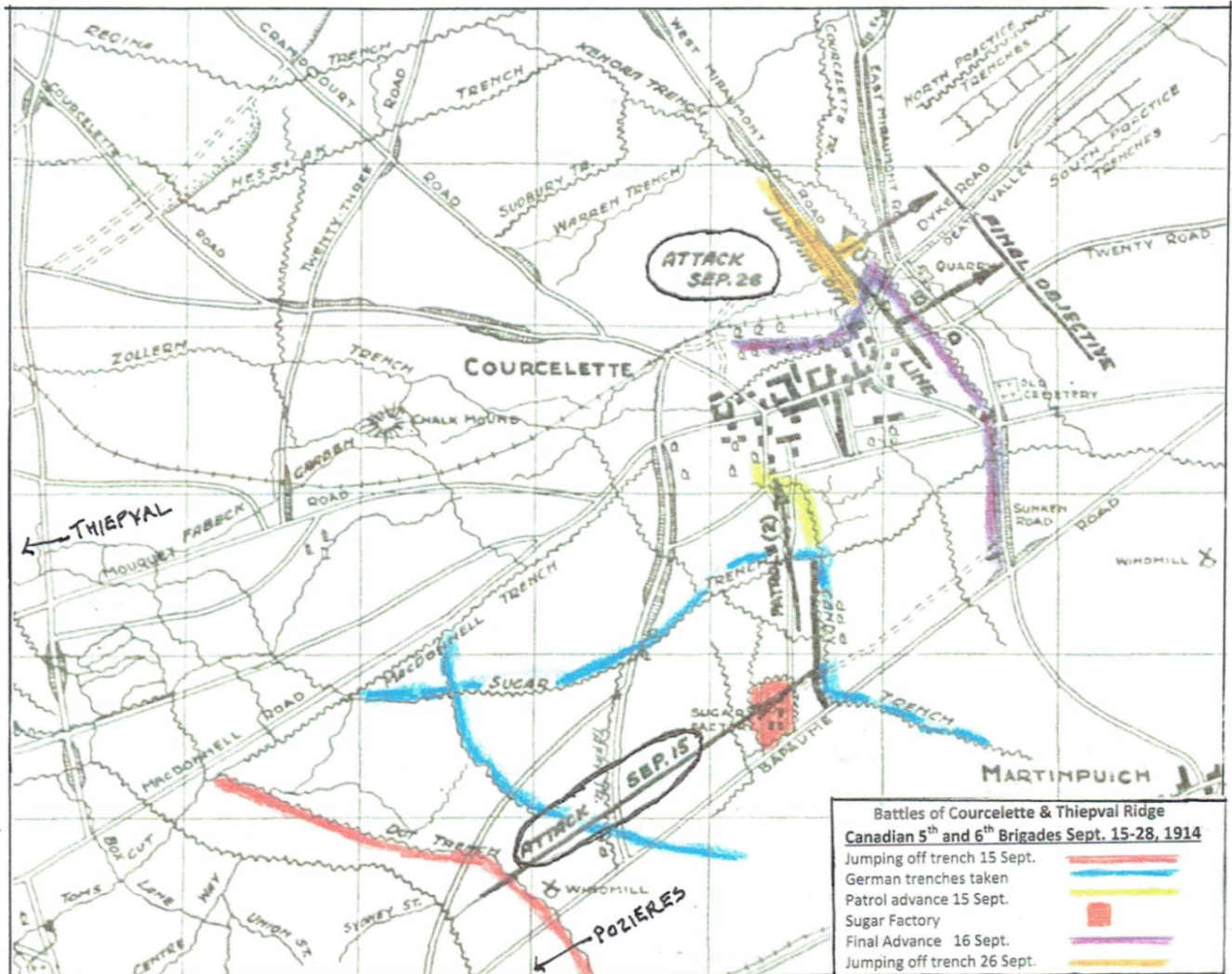
(Source: DeWind Archive)

A Lewis Gun Being Fired in the Trenches



(Source: Canadian Soldiers)

Battles of Courcellette and Thiepval Ridge



(Source: Singer and Peebles: 144)



The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade's 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Battalions were ordered to take the Sugar and Candy Trenches in the first wave of the attack and the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to follow in support and to "mop up" and consolidate the new positions. The Germans had fortified the adjacent beet Sugar Factor and a number of nearby sunken roads into strong redoubts, which formed hubs within the lacework of their front line and communication trenches outside the town.

Recognizing the difficulty of taking the Sugar Factory and sunken roads, the British Army provided the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade six tanks, the first time tanks were being used during the war. Although large (26½ feet long with an additional steering tail of 6 feet) and slow (3.4 miles per hour), the tanks were expected to lead troops through the German lines by flattening barbed wire, crossing trenches up to 10 feet wide, and with their quick-firing 6 lb. cannons and their own multiple machine guns, wipe out German machine gun nests. To increase the surprise and frightening effect of tanks on the Germans, their existence had been kept secret, even from Canadian troops, until the battle. (Nichols: 168; Singer and Peebles: 143)

British artillery fire against the German lines began on September 13 and continued until exactly 6:20 am on 15 September, when the attack was launched. The 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Battalions led the first waves toward the Sugar and Candy Trenches, advancing between the McDonnell trench on the north and Bapaume Road on the south. Companies A, B, and C of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion followed only a dozen yards behind. These soldiers carried not only their rifles, spare ammunition, bombs, and rifle grenades for "mopping up" but also sandbags, picks and shovels to consolidate the seizure of the German trenches.

Despite the earlier heavy bombardment, the German troops were at first able to halt the A Company's advance with devastating fire, as was vividly described by Private Donald Fraser in his diary:

Word had just eked out that we are in for our third engagement: first, St. Eloi, second, Third Battle of Ypres; and now the Somme, this time not as defenders, but as aggressors primed up for the event....We were entrusted with the job of cleaning or mopping up the trench, killing all those who showed fight or defiance, digging out the enemy from dug-outs and passing them out as prisoners; in short, disposing of all opposition and taking complete possession of the enemy front line, manning and consolidating it in event of a counter-attack begin launched....[But with all the] equipment, speedy manoeuvre was practically impossible. I therefore, was glad to turn my overcoat over to the Q.M. [quarter master] to be obtained back at billets, rather than carry it during the attack, notwithstanding that it may be badly required later on....

As zero hour approached I glanced around looking for signs to charge. The signal came like a bolt from the blue, right on the second the barrage opened with a roar that seemed to split the heavens....It was at this juncture that instinct told me to avoid the shell holes and move along the edges. I raised my head for the first time and looked at the Hun trench, and to my astonishment, saw Heiny after Heiny ranging along the line, up on firing step, blazing wildly into us....The air was seething with shells. Immediately above, the atmosphere was cracking with myriad of machine-gun bullets, startling and disconcerting in the extreme. Bullets from enemy rifles were whistling and swishing around my ears in hundreds, that to this day I cannot understand how anyone could have crossed that inferno alive....All around men were falling....The wounded writhing in their agonies, struggled and toppled into shell holes for safety....Further progress and it is more than likely that we would have stepped into a volley of grenades....

As the attack subsided and not a soul moved in No Man's Land save the wounded twisting and moaning in their agony, it dawned on me that the assault was a failure and now we were at the mercy of the enemy....[Then] lying low in the shell hole contemplating events....away to my left rear, a huge gray object reared itself into view, and slowly, very slowly, it crawled along like a gigantic toad, feeling its way across the shell-stricken field. It was a tank, the "Crème de Menthe," the latest invention of destruction and the first of its kind to be employed in the Great War....Down and up the shell holes it clambered, a weird, ungainly monster moving relentlessly forward.

### **Tank "Crème de Menthe" during the Battle of Courcellette**



(Source: McEwen)

Suddenly men from the ground looked up, rose as if from the dead, and running from the flanks to behind it, followed in the rear as if to be in on the kill....Instinctively I jumped up and quickly, though warily, ran to where I could see into Fritz's trench, with bayonet pointing and finger on the trigger.... When I jumped into the trench, the sign I beheld for sheer bloodiness and murder, baffles description. Apparently our artillery had sent over a last minute shrapnel barrage, for the Huns were terribly mangled about the head and shoulders which coupled with our sniping, completely wiped out every Heiny in the bays in front of us. Every one of them was either dead or dying and the trench literally running with blood....it required no imagination to picture the carnage....

Finding the trench complete in our possession, we started shaking hands and telling each other who was killed and wounded....The survivors of the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Battalions, with odds and ends of the 31<sup>st</sup>, jumped over Fritz's front line, and continued their way to the objective. The last I saw of them they were on the skyline, going over the ridge, their numbers pretty well thinned out. A few patrols of the 31<sup>st</sup> penetrated to the outskirts of Courcellette. (Fraser: 200-211 [reordered into chronological sequence])

Companies B and C, later supported by D, faced similarly harrowing conditions but, like A Company, they all managed to secure their targeted German trenches. (Singer and Peebles: 147-152)

Of the three patrols mentioned by Private Fraser as reaching the edge of Courcellette, two had been recruited from B Company and one from C Company. Each patrol included an officer, approximately 30 men, and one Lewis Gun. Given the limited number of Lewis Guns allotted to each company, the Lewis Gun team recruited from C Company likely included Edmund. Their mission was to advance to Courcellette and probe the German defenses for subsequent attack the following day. After leaving the jumping off trench at the beginning of the battle, the patrols had followed and then passed through both the preceding attack and "mopping up" waves of troops. When the commander of the C Company patrol was wounded and then his replacement was killed, the patrol members joined up with the first patrol of B Company. As the second patrol of B Company crossed No Man's Land, their advance ranks were decimated by German machine gun fire and its Lewis Gun was put out of commission by a shell. Undaunted, the surviving patrol members somehow secured another Lewis Gun and kept going toward the village, clearing out German dugouts along the way.

The three patrols then converged at the South West corner of Courcellette and waited for the leading Canadian artillery barrage to shift. Then they took up the series of positions they had been instructed to secure, which extended from north of the Sugar Factory, which the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion had earlier captured with assistance from two tanks, past the village church, and to a point 50 yards farther East and just outside the village. While the patrols consolidated these positions, scouts pushed forward to the village, bombed a number of deep dugouts, and captured six prisoners. Clearing out a German trench, the patrols encountered a group of approximately 150 Germans. With a Lewis Gun brought forward, perhaps Edmund's, its rain of bullets halted the Germans' resistance and survivors were taken prisoners. (Singer and Peebles: 152-156; Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary, September 14-16, Appendix 6.)

Once the patrols' had established positions on Courcellette's edge, the brigade commander requested permission to order his troops to take the town, but the division commander declined, perhaps wisely as only five battered platoons and the weakened reserve of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion were available to support the proposed attack. (Stewart: 111) That afternoon, the Canadian 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade took over from the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade and all four companies of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, other than the men in the patrols, were relieved and sent back to the jumping off trenches. The next morning, 16 September, the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade troops advanced to the edge of Courcellette, absorbed the patrol members into their ranks, and began the final fight for the village against German machine guns, snipers, and bayonets. By dusk the Canadian troops had taken control of Courcellette and established a new front line north of the village, thus accomplishing their mission. The surviving patrol members, likely including Edmund, rejoined the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion behind the jumping off trenches. The following day, 17 September, the battalion withdrew from the battle zone along with the rest of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and moved well in back of Pozieres to replenish and reorganize their troops. (Singer and Peebles: 154-158; Stewart: 123-127)

During the 15 September attack, the Canadian forces had pushed back the German lines an average of 1,500 yards along a 4,000 yard front. The new forward line established by the Canadians ran from north of Courcellette to the west toward Mouquet Farm and to the East toward Martinpuch. Of the original 722 soldiers of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion who began the battle, only 318 regathered behind the jumping off trenches on the morning of Sept. 16. Two days later, it was reported that 7 officers and 54 troops were known to have been killed, 52 troops were missing, and 120 were wounded. The list of soldiers "Admitted to Field Ambulance" included "79152 Pte. E. Dewind (Machine Gun Section) C Company 16-9-16." (Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary, 14-16 September 1916, Appendix 6, Battalion Orders No. 259)

### Field Ambulance Station at the Battle of Courcellette



(Source: Library and Archives Canada)

No additional information about the nature, cause, or outcome of Edmund's condition has been found, though he did rejoin his battalion.

At the end of the first day of the offensive the commander of the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, Major-General R.E.W Turner, wrote to the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, "I want to congratulate you on the splendid work carried out by your Battalion today. The Army Commander General Gough is particularly well pleased at the credit brought to his army by today's work." In personal his diary Gough added, "For 12 months I have waited with the Division for this opportunity. God knows they acted in a magnificent way. Nothing, losses or anything else, could stop them. They were out to even old scores of the Ypres Salient." (Quoted in Stewart: 126) This last comment reflected the Canadians' reputation for not taking prisoners and at times for killing troops who were seeking to surrender or were already prisoners. William F. Stewart suggests "revenge" was the main factor in such killings: "The Germans had subjected the corps to a year of misery, mining, sniping, and the wretchedness of St. Eloi and Mount Sorrel, and now the Canadians had a chance for vengeance." Commanders did little, if anything, to restrain their troops as, "In their minds, doing so would have carried the risk of inhibiting the troops' offensive spirit." (Stewart: 128-9)



Turner's initial praise was seconded two days later by the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion's commander, Lieutenant Colonel A.H. Bell, in his report describing the battle and listing each of the casualties by name: "The Commanding Officer desires to express to all ranks his appreciation at the excellent way in which they carried out their work in the operations of September 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>." (Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary, September 14-16, Appendix 6) Then a few days later the Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence, Major General Sir Sam Hughes, sent a telegram: "Kindly accept sincerest congratulations on splendid work of Canada and also convey to all other troops the hearty appreciation of their noble sacrifices and magnificent triumph. The hearts of all Canadians are with you and the boys. May Heaven bless you all." (Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary, 20 September 1916)

Twenty-three years later, the battalion's historians commented, "Grim fighting, crowned with spectacular success, had been the portion of the Canadian Corps in mid-September" but, they went on, by month's end there would be a "struggle still more grim and desperate, and lacking any swift success" – the battle for Thiepval Ridge. (Singer and Peebles: 159)

### ***Thiepval Ridge:***

The 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion returned to Courcellette on 26 September in order to undertake a second offensive battle, which would last until 29 September. The overall goal of the renewed offensive was to push the Germans north from the Thiepval Ridge, which extended west from Courcellette two and three-quarters miles to the town of Thiepval. The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade was specifically ordered to push farther northeast from Courcellette, between West Miraumont and Twenty Roads, and establish advance posts as far east as possible toward the Germans' Practice Trenches. The 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion's assignment in this offensive was to take the portions of the Kenora and Courcellette Trenches, which lay between West and East Miraumont Roads. (See pg. 39 for MAP of Battle of Courcellette and Thiepval Ridge.) Two waves of attack troops would open the assault, followed by a "mop up" wave to secure and consolidate hold on the ground gained. A fourth wave was to push past the consolidated advances and take the next German trenches. In addition C Company was to send out two patrols to establish forward posts. Again it is likely that Edmund was the Lewis Gunner of one of these patrols. (Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary, September 25, 1916, Appendix 12 and 13.)

The offensive began with an artillery bombardment that unfortunately fell to the rear of the German trenches. As a result the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion's first and second waves of troops met deadly rifle and machine gun fire, which caused severe casualties and trapped survivors in shell holes close to the German trenches. Only with night fall were they able to return to their jumping off trench. In early evening, German soldiers launched a counter attack but the Canadians repulsed them with similarly devastating fire. Ordered to renew their attack that night, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion found the second Canadian artillery advance bombardment had again gone over the enemy lines, but the German artillery made no such error. Despite heavy casualties, B Company launched a sudden attack with reinforcements from the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion and they captured a section of the German trench. They were able to keep their position after one of the patrols joined them with a Lewis Gun. The patrol then established a forward post close to West Miraumont Road so as to beat off any possible counter attack. To consolidate this success in reaching the battalion's objective, the commander sent up reinforcements.

The following afternoon, September 27<sup>th</sup>, the patrol pushed forward another 100 yards and discovered that the Germans had retreated, abandoning their entire front between Bapaume Road and Courcellette Trench. Members of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion quickly occupied and consolidated the unoccupied trenches, thus completing the whole of their original objective. That night patrols explored even further, going as far

north as the Regina Trench, which also seemed to have been abandoned by the Germans. Early the next morning, however, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion passed through the positions being held by the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion to find that the Regina Trench had overnight been reoccupied by the Germans, who met them with heavy rifle and machine gun fire. After suffering appalling losses, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion was relieved the following day, September 29<sup>th</sup>, and it retired to camps just east of Pozieres.

In four days of fighting the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion suffered 282 casualties of all ranks including 60 killed, 113 missing, and 219 wounded. Including reinforcements who had arrived the night of September 29<sup>th</sup>, the battalion was left with only 360 men of all ranks, of which little more than 100 had come with the battalion from Ypres and very few had been original members of the battalion when it departed Calgary a year and a half earlier. (Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary, 1916, September 29, Appendix 13; Singer and Peebles: 159-170, 175) Edmund would have witnessed that the total strength of the original 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion was now reduced to the equivalent of only one full company, approximately 50 men.

Despite their severe losses, after spending two days of reorganization, the battalion was sent back into reserve on the front lines in support of an effort by the Canadian 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Brigades to take the Regina Trench where it crossed between West and East Miraumont Roads. Finally on October 8, the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions, on whom the brunt of the fighting at Courcellette had fallen, were withdrawn from the front lines, leaving behind the recently-arrived and relatively un-battle-tested Canadian 4<sup>th</sup> Division. After five weeks, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division carried out successful attacks to occupy the Regina Trench and consolidate its position. This brought the Canadian Corps' role in Courcellette and the battles of the Somme to a close and they began to prepare for their next battle, that for Vimy Ridge.

The Somme offensive had driven a great wedge into the German positions and captured considerable territory, but the German front lines remained unbroken. Summarizing the outcome of the battles of the Somme, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, commander of the British Expeditionary Force, concluded that three main objectives had been achieved: relieving the French at Verdun, holding German forces from advancing, and diminishing the enemy's strength. Apparently breaking through the German lines was no longer considered to have been a goal. (Nichols: 198) Although the numbers are disputed, the Allied Force claimed to have captured 350 guns, taken 65,000 prisoners, and caused 600,000 casualties among the German forces, while it suffered 650,000 casualties of troops killed, wounded, or missing. (Singer and Peebles: 174) In his memoirs the German commander, General Erich Ludendorff, later wrote that his "Army had been fought to a standstill and was utterly worn out." He added subsequently, "We must save the men from a second Somme battle." (Nicholson: 199) Long after these battles of the Somme were over, the official Canadian history of the war concluded that, far from being a breakthrough offensive, "At best the five-month campaign that had opened on 1 July with such high expectations had resulted in a costly stale mate." (Nicholson: 200)

### **Interlude from Battle: March to December 1917**

After his battalion withdrew from the battle lines of the Somme, Edmund's involvement in warfare diminished or ceased during a period of about nine months. On leaving Courcellette, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion marched at a leisurely pace north for approximately 35 miles to Hersin. The village was close to Vimy, which would be the site of the Canadian army's next and perhaps most challenging but victorious battle of the war. In Hersin, whose buildings and streets were undamaged by the war, the troops were greeted by cheering residents and a band. The next day the battalion advanced to front line trenches, just outside of the village of Vimy where the German troops could look down upon them from their

fortifications atop of Vimy Ridge. But the sector proved quiet enough that school children approached within a mile of the front to sell chocolate and cigarettes to the soldiers. (See MAP pg. 26.)

As described in greater detail below, upon the battalion's arrival at Vimy, Edmund was granted a short leave during which he was able briefly to visit his home in Comber. After returning to Vimy, he would participate in holding actions and preparations for the upcoming battle, but just before the battle was to start, he would be posted to England to begin officer training. After completing the training and securing a commission as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, he would be re-posted to the 17<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles in Dundalk, which was fewer than sixty miles from Comber. He would serve there until December when he would return to the front lines in France as part of the 15<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles. During these months Edmund would restore his health, renew relations with his family and Mollie, and commit himself to taking a leadership role in the war as an officer.

### ***Home Leave and Family War Efforts***

After his battalion left the relatively happy village of Hersin and moved to trenches just outside of Vimy, Edmund was granted eight days of home leave, 17-25 October 1917. After Edmund spent two days travelling to and from Northern Ireland, his mother reported that he had been home for six days, but she provided no details about how he spent his time. (MJS DeWind, n.d. letter to Norman DeWind) No doubt he learned, in part, of activities undertaken by other family members to support the war effort.

His sister Edith, who before the war had trained to become a registered nurse at King's College Hospital in London and the General Hospital in Birmingham, had volunteered to work with the Friend's Ambulance Unit in France. (King's College London) "The Unit," as it was often called, was formed and supported by Quakers but, because its unpaid staff included non-Quaker volunteers, it never became an official Quaker organization. Edith arrived in France on 11 November 1914, just five days before Edmund's enlistment into the Canadian Expeditionary Forces. She worked as a Sister Nurse at the Unit's first hospital, the Villa St. Pierre in Malo-les-Bains, a neighborhood of coastal Dunkirk. The hospital had 50 beds, an operating theater, dispensary, and quarters for the nurses. It was run by one doctor and eight nurses. The hospital was closed down in July 1915, largely because wounded soldiers were being directed to new larger hospitals in the area. By that time the Villa St. Pierre Hospital had treated 413 patients including not only soldiers who had been severely wounded in fighting in the region of Ypres but also local civilians who suffered from a variety of maladies. (Tatham and Miles: 10-11, 67-68)

Edith then transferred with the rest of her team to the No. 3 British Red Cross Hospital in Abbeville, which was closer to the fighting around Ypres. There she was appointed Matron in charge of nursing. When this hospital closed in January 1916, in part due to its vulnerability to German bombing, it had treated 1,555 patients. Apparently not in the best of health, Edith then returned to Comber where she became engaged in local efforts to support the soldiers. (Tatham and Miles: 85-87)

For her nursing during the war Edith was awarded the Royal Red Cross, 1914-1915 Star, British War, and allied Victory medals. (Tatham and Miles: 215; National Archives WO/372/25) Edith was in Abbeville when Edmund's battalion arrived in France to join the fight in the Ypres Salient, but we have no record indicating whether they were in touch or saw each other before Edmund's leave permitted him to visit Comber, to which she would have earlier returned.

## Edith DeWind and the Friends Ambulance Unit in France and in Comber

**Villa St. Pierre Hospital in Malo-les-Bains**



(Source: Wulles)

**Soldiers Recuperating Villa St. Pierre Hospital**



(Source: *The Testimony*)

**Bessie Stone and Edith, Barn Hill**



(Source: DeWind Family Archives)

**Edith as Matron, British Red Cross Hospital No. 3, Abbeville**



(Source: Library of the Religious Society of Friends)



After the war, Edith's health remained frail but, as president of the Women of the British Legion (Comber Branch), she devoted herself to the welfare of ex-service men. Until late in her life she worked for related charitable causes through Comber's Parish Church and the Comber District Nursing Society. She also became the care giver for her Aunt Bessie, Elizabeth Stone. (*The Spectator* 1955; *Newtownards Chronicle* 1955)



**PRESENTATION TO MRS. T. J. ANDREWS, ON HER RESIGNATION AS HON. SECRETARY AND TREASURER OF THE COMBER DISTRICT NURSING SOCIETY. IN THE GROUP ARE (left to right)—MISS ELIZABETH STONE, MISS DE WIND, LADY HELEN STEWART, THE MARCHIONESS OF LONDONDERRY, D.B.E. (WHO PRESIDED), MRS. T. J. ANDREWS, AND LADY WICKHAM.**

(Source: Belfast News-Letter, 1927)

Between 1915 and 1916 Edmund's mother, sisters, and extended family were reported by the *Belfast News-Letter* as being involved in a variety of campaigns to assist the British war effort by sending goods to troops: socks to help soldiers protect their wet and cold feet from trench foot; sandbags to bolster trench parapets; and vegetables and fruit for the healthy diets of sailors at sea with the navy. (*Belfast News-Letter* 23 November 1914, 21 August 1915, 1 May 1915, 6 September, 1916) Their sister Florence, who was homesteading in Alberta with her husband, George O'Meara, planted grain to support the war effort and, like her sister Edith, Florence worked for health and welfare charities, such as the Independent Daughters of Empire to support veterans' children and orphans and the Nursing Mission Board to provide public health training at a local school of nursing. (Florence DeWind) These efforts were part of a much wider civilian war-support movement, which in the United Kingdom created 18,000 charities to provide medical services, refugee relief, "comforts" for soldiers (such as cigarettes, clothing, books and food), assistance to prisoners of war and the like. (Harris)

When Edmund returned to the front after his leave, he probably had no foreknowledge that he would not again see either his father, who would die four months later on 22 February 1917, or his sister, Louise, who would die shortly afterward on 5 May 1917.

### ***Officer Training***

Soon after arriving back in France from home leave, Edmund began a long and complicated process of obtaining a commission in the British army. On December 11, 1916, he signed a four page form with the elongated title, "Application for Admission to an Officer Cadet Unit with a View to Appointment to a Temporary Commission in the Regular Army for the Period of the War, to a Commission in the Special Reserve of Officers or to a Commission in the Territorial Force." Where an applicant was to state in what branch of service and in what unit he was "desirous of being appointed," the answer was rubber stamped: "INFANTRY" and "20<sup>th</sup> (Res.) Bn. Royal Irish Rifles." Applications to Cadet Training School required multiple endorsements including certifications of both his moral character over the previous four years (from John Brown, M.A., Dean of Down and Rector of Loughinisland in Seaforde, County Down, a village not far from Comber) and of his level of education (from Robert MacFarland, Headmaster of Campbell College). The acting commander of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, W. H. Hewgill, who had witnessed Edmund's initial 1914 attestation pledging to defend the King "in Person, Crown and Dignity" for the duration of the war, now certified Edmund to be "a suitable candidate in every way." A letter from the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, Major General H. E. Burstall, recommended that Edmund be sent to England to train for a commission in the 20<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles. Finally, the Lieutenant Colonel in command of the 20<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion, certified that he had interviewed Edmund and that he was nominating Edmund as a "suitable candidate in all respects" for a commission in the 20<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion, which was stationed in Newtownards, the next town northeast of Comber in County Down. (National Archives [UK]; Forces War Records, "Unit History...") What influence the earlier letter that Thomas Andrews had sent to Lt.-Col. Crawford-Sharman seeking a commission for Edmund may have had on either the success of his application for officer's training or his subsequent commission with the Royal Irish Rifles is not evident from his personnel records.

While Edmund awaited the results of his application for officer training, he and his fellow troops – between occasional skirmishes, raids, and bombardments between German and allied forces near Vimy – again became preoccupied by fighting rain, mud, and cold in the trenches, some of which collapsed and had to be abandoned. Nonetheless, on Christmas day they enjoyed a Yule-tide feast of turkey with sausage dressing, cabbage and potatoes, and plumb pudding followed by candy, cigarettes, tea, real English beer and a minstrel concert. Then, with a bit of humorous intent, members of his battalion sent

### **31<sup>st</sup> Battalion's Minstrel Society**



(Source: Glenbow Museum)

the Germans a New Year's gift: somehow they released a deluge of muddy water from their own trenches, across No Man's Land, and into the Germans' similarly-water-logged trenches. Soon after, the battalion began more serious preparations for a major spring offensive to take Vimy Ridge. (Singer and Peebles: 176-182) But two weeks before the opening attack, Edmund was transferred back to England to begin training for a commission in the British army.

As a first step toward Officer Cadet School Edmund was posted on 20 March 1917 to the Alberta Regiment Depot in Bramshott. (Canadian National Personnel Record Centre) However, before he could begin his training, perhaps because he had fallen ill or had a lingering malady related to his Field Ambulance visit at the battle of Courcelette, he was posted to the Canadian Casualty Assembly Center on 21 April 1917 and then on 31 May 1917 to the British Hospital. After two months of leaving France, whatever his health problems may have been, on 6 June 1917, Edmund was finally "shown on command" with the 17<sup>th</sup> Officer Cadet Battalion, Kinmel Park Camp, in Rhyl, Wales to begin officer training.

Earlier in the year it had become a requirement that soldiers, such as Edmund, who were seeking a "Temporary Commission" – a commission that would last only as long as their war service – undergo at least eighteen weeks of training and pass a final examination at one of the twenty-eight Officer Cadet Schools that had been organized across Britain to replenish officers at the front. At least 73,000 soldiers obtained infantry commissions in the British army after undergoing these trainings. (Long, Long Trail)

There is little information readily available about the nature of the training Edmund received at Kinmel Park Camp other than it focused on developing leadership skills, initiative, and self-confidence and that he was given specialized courses on tactics and technologies, such as the deployment of machine guns and poison gas. (Baker) The goals and nature of such training were described in official manuals:

The quality ultimately aimed at was leadership to be built up on a solid foundation of drill and discipline, with a superstructure of knowledge and practice in command, and with full emphasis on the moral qualities needed in those who have to lead men in the field. The maxim of Napoleon (the truth of which has been so irrefutably established during the war), that the moral is to the material as three to one, lies at the basis of Company training as much as the major operations of war. (Kenyon: 49)

Future officers were taught leadership skills by having them alternate in commanding one another as if enlisted men. To be drilled in the ranks was seen as essential to learning how to drill and discipline others. This principle of learning leadership by being led as well as leading was applied in the teaching and learning of basic military skills including musketry, field entrenchment, map reading, field work (attack and defense, advance and rear guards, wood fighting, reconnaissance, outposts), night operations, bombing, gas, Lewis gun operation, and bayonet fighting. In the end, the new officers would lead in a key intermediary role in the regimental hierarchy: high enough to be in a position of authority with some independence yet low enough to be free of regimental organization and paper work – a position in which to work personally with individual soldiers who would pass through their platoons and companies. As officers they were trained to become examples so that they could demand exemplary behavior from those under their command. (Kenyon: 57)

Despite the rigor of this training, life at Kinmel Park Camp was easy compared to that in the trenches and included various forms of recreation. The YMCA hut offered a huge concert hall and cinema, a

refreshment buffet, a bookstall, billiards, a WAAC room for female soldiers and nurses, and various reading and game rooms. Sporting events and concerts were organized frequently. (Griffiths: 28-93)

**Postcard of Kimmel Camp**



(Source: Rhyl History Club)

On completing his course of training, on 25 September 1917 and after two years and 344 days of service in the 31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion, Edmund was discharged by the No. 2 Canadian Discharge Depot in London to a commission in the Royal Irish Rifles. His discharge papers indicate that at the time he was in robust physical shape – his expanded chest size had increased by three inches since his enlistment and he had gained ten pounds. His military character was declared to be “VERY GOOD.” (Canadian National Personnel Record Centre) Nearly a century later, a historian of the mobilization and replenishment of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, Richard Holt, lamented the “loss of potential leaders such as Edmund DeWind” who transferred from the Canadian to the British armies. (Holt: 44)

### ***In the Reserve of the Royal Irish Rifles***

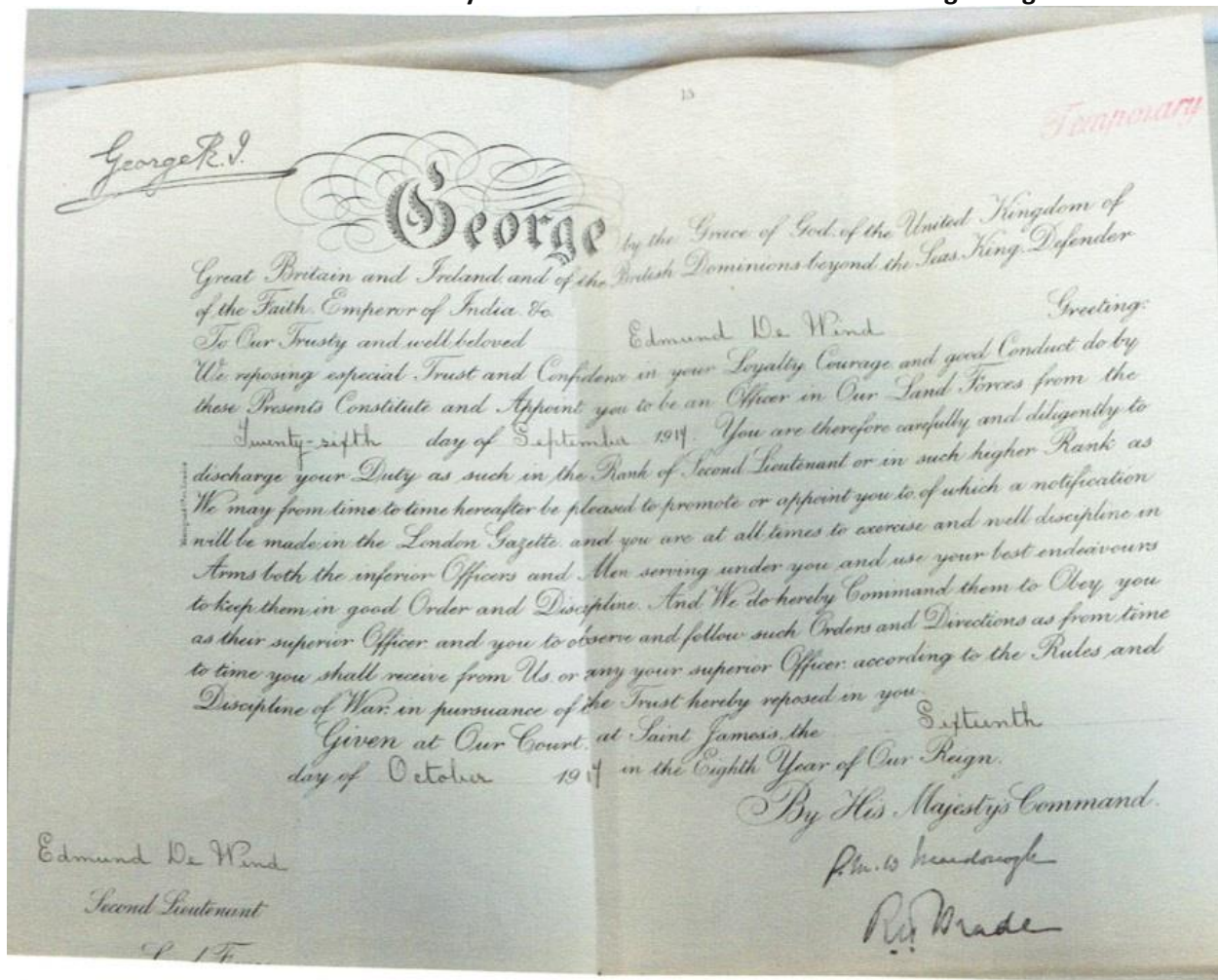
Even though Edmund had been nominated to join the 20<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, when he received his commission as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant on 29 September 1917 he was first posted to the 17<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, which was based in Dundalk, a sea port on the east coast of Ireland fifty-six miles from Comber.<sup>10</sup> The *London Gazette* announced his commission on 19 October 1917 but it would be three months before he would return to the front. His exit medical exam from the Canadian

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<sup>10</sup> In 1917 the Royal Irish Rifles included four reserve battalions (the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>) in Northern Ireland as part of the 15<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Reserve Brigade. They supported service battalions at the front by drafting and training recruits, holding soldiers and officers until they were required as reinforcements, and facilitating postings to the



Edmund DeWind's Infantry Commission as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant from King George V



(Source: PRONI, courtesy of Keith Haines)

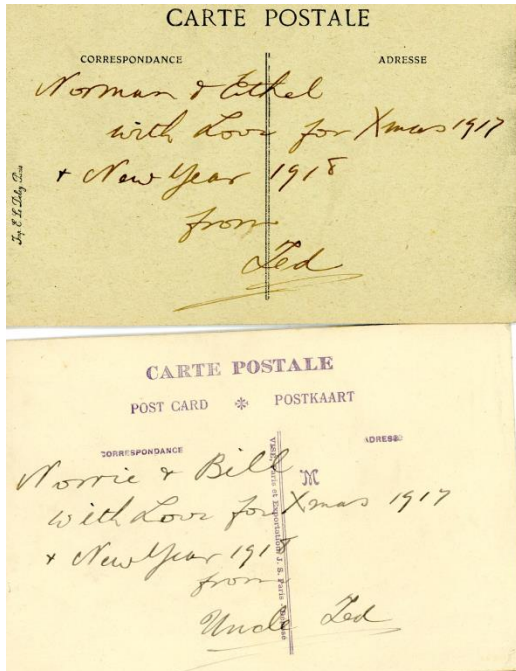
army certifying that he was fit for service as an officer was not completed until 10 December 1917. (Canadian National Personnel Records Centre) Finally, after a brief posting to North Belfast, Edmund was re-posted to the 15<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, in Doullons, France. He would soon be back at the Western Front.

At some point during Edmund's transition from the Canadian to the British armies – perhaps when he was home on leave or while he was stationed in Dundalk – he and Mollie agreed to marry. The first evidence of their betrothal is in Edmund's will, which he modified on 26 November 1917 to refer to Mollie as "my fiancée" and to leave her and his unmarried sisters, Edith and Alice, equal portions of his estate.

Soon afterward, Edmund sent cheerful Christmas and New Year's cards to his brother and sister-in-law and to his nephews in Chicago, one with a picture of a British pudding decorated with flags of the allied forces and the other with a panoramic view of Le Havre in France.

front. (Bowman 2003: 192; Hughes: 92; Metcalfe, "The Evolution of Regular and Service Battalions...;" Forces of War, "Unit History...")

### Postcards from Edmund to DeWind Family in Chicago, December 1917



(Source: DeWind Archives)

It may have been during these days of waiting that Edmund reconnected with his childhood friend, Willie Andrews, who later described himself as having been Edmund's "principal playmate." Willie wrote after Edmund's death that as young men he and Edmund,

...were together a great deal, until he [Edmund] went into business (banking). I also met him twice when he came over from Canada with the Canadian Force. Strange to say he told me that he was applying for a commission as if he got it he would have a better chance of obtaining a VC. Also when he [was] commissioned I was able to obtain for him through the Army Ordnance Corp - in which I was serving - some of the equipment which he required.  
(William Andrews)

### Willie Andrews in Entryway to Ardara



(Source: DeWind Family Archives)

After completing his officer training program and obtaining a commission, however, Edmund may have wanted to rejoin his comrades in the Canadian army. According to his siblings, Norman and Florence, Edmund had applied and been approved to transfer back into the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion but the necessary papers had still not yet been processed before Edmund was stationed along with the rest of the 15<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles to the town of Grugies, close to St. Quentin, just before the beginning of the German Spring Offensive. (Norman DeWind 1949; *The Journal*; Foster and Duthie: 119; *Lethbridge Herald* 1956)

### **The German Spring Offensive: 21 March 1918**

During the three months following Edmund's reposting to France with the 15<sup>th</sup> (Service) Royal Irish Rifles, major shifts among the allied and central powers foretold that the Germans would mount a major spring offensive. The Russian-German armistice in early December 1917 had freed up many German divisions and between that time and March 1918 the number of German divisions in Flanders and France increased from 146 to 192. (Falls: 186) It was expected that the Germans would attack before June, after which the build-up of American troops was expected to neutralize the German troop advantage. Indeed by the end of 1917 the Germans had already decided to launch a March attack with the goals of breaking through the Western Front, cordoning off and defeating the British troops to the north, bypassing the French to the south, and potentially opening up a path to Paris and victory. For this offensive the Germans assembled their largest concentration of troops and munitions of the war. (Hughes: 166-167)

Meanwhile, the British Army, which had suffered heavy losses at the battles of Passchendaele and Cambrai at the end of 1917, expected that, despite the beginning of conscription in 1916, they would not be sent sufficient new recruits to bring their battalions back to full strength by the spring. So the army undertook a somewhat drastic reorganization, which reduced the number of battalions in each brigade from four to three and redistributed the freed-up troops to the remaining battalions in order to bring each up to full strength. As a result, the 15<sup>th</sup> (Service) Royal Irish Rifles was one of only three battalions comprising the 107<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which was in turn one of only three brigades comprising the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division. (Edmonds: 27, 143-151; for Edmund's place in the order of battle see Appendix II)

Although in early 1918 it was still not yet clear where the Germans might focus their attack, the Allies anticipated that their weakest defenses would be targeted and they were stretched thin near St. Quentin. To prepare for the onslaught, the French sought to build up reserves so as to be ready to provide reinforcements wherever needed. To do so, they asked the British army to cover a wider part of the front near St. Quentin. As a result, the British 5<sup>th</sup> Army, including the III Corps with the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division, took over approximately 30 miles of additional trenches from just north of the Canal du Nord to just south of the Oise River, where the relocated French 6<sup>th</sup> Army's territory would begin. (See pg. 55 for MAP of St. Quentin Positions of the British 5<sup>th</sup> Army's III Corps and the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division.)

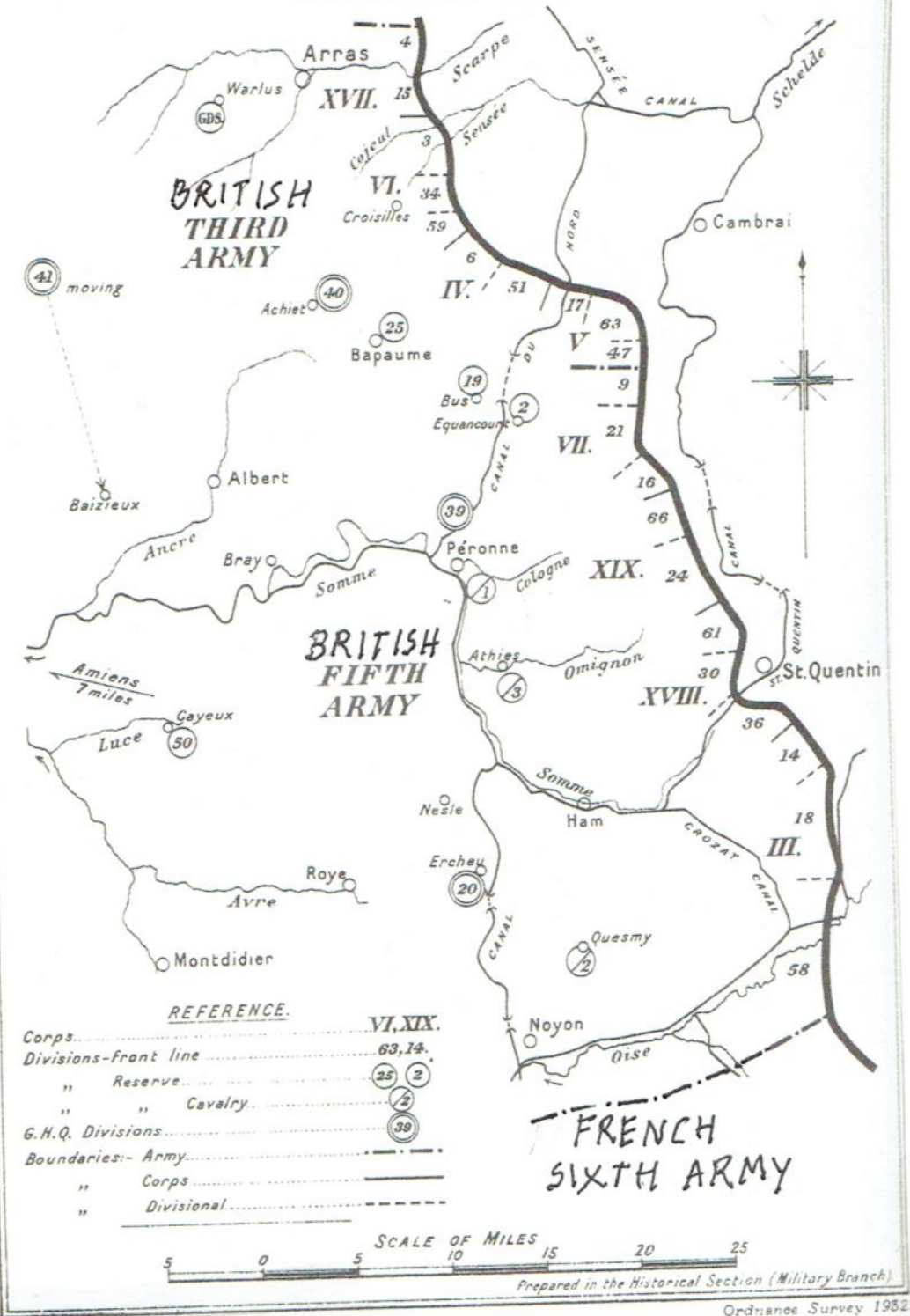
Anticipating the British army's difficulty coordinating with the French, the commanding General of the German Infantry, Eric F.W. Ludendorff, decided to concentrate the German attack against the diminished 5<sup>th</sup> Army, on the front where the British had just take over from the French. As explained by another German general,

The offensive is principally intended to strike the British. They now stand opposite us on the whole front of the Group of Armies which is to make the offensive. It need not be



Sketch 5.

# Distribution of CORPS AND DIVISIONS, FIFTH AND THIRD ARMIES, 21<sup>st</sup> March.



(Source: Edmonds)



anticipated that the French will run themselves off their legs and hurry at once to help their Entente comrades. They will first wait and see if their own front is not attacked also, and decide to support their Ally only when the situation has been quite cleared up. That will not be immediately, as demonstrations to deceive the French will be made by the German Crown Prince's Group. (Edmonds: 145-146)

The Germans' prediction proved correct. After the offensive began, the French waited a number of days before sending reinforcements to help the British. (Edmonds: 263-264) The British 5<sup>th</sup> Army had only 14 divisions to defend against 22 German divisions. While German history indicated a 2.5:1 ratio was sufficient to guarantee them victory over equally trained and valorous soldiers, by one estimate the ratio of German to British troops in this sector was 5:1. Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig had earlier planned on keeping British troops on the offensive during 1918, but these changing circumstances led him instead to adopt a defensive posture, which he intended to hold until the build-up of American forces would enable otherwise. (Edmonds: viii, 143-151)

The British devised new defensive tactics of "resistance-in-depth," which were not only untested but, ironically, had been adopted from the Germans.<sup>11</sup> These plans were based on establishing three zones: Forward, Battle, and Rear. The Forward Zone was to provide a "porous" defense. As implemented by the 5<sup>th</sup> Army, the Forward Zone was composed of three discontinuous front lines: the first line was a series of isolated outposts, the second was composed of segmented trenches, and the third a series of fortified redoubts. Unlike the continuous defensive trenches, filled with troops and arms, which the British Army had employed earlier in the war to halt an enemy advance, the purpose of the new Forward Zone was to check, disorganize, and begin to disintegrate – but not stop – major waves of attack which, after breaking through the Forward Zone, could then be more easily stopped at the Battle Zone. The separated posts and redoubts within the Forward Zone were located so that machine guns and other arms could sweep the ground in between them and, thus, take a heavy toll on enemy troops breaking through. After putting up a struggle, if Forward Zone positions were overwhelmed, the troops were expected to withdraw to the Battle Zone, two or three miles back. At the time, at least one company commander of the Fifth Army complained to his superiors about "the scanty way the front line was held" and, in retrospect, it seems that troops in the Forward Zone were being considered "expendable." (Middlebrook: 79-80; Hughes: 169-170)

The Battle Zone, which included three lines of firing trenches inter-connected by communication and switch trenches, was expected to offer stiffer resistance not only with rifles and machine guns but also trench mortars and two-thirds of each division's artillery. Among other tasks, the artillery was to lay down a barrage just ahead of the front line trenches at the first signs of enemy attack and then in front of a line of fortified redoubts. Reserve troops were to support the front lines with counter attacks.

Should both the Forward and Battle Zones give way, the troops and artillery were to retire to the Rear Zone, some four to eight miles behind the Battle Zone, and mount a final resistance. (Edmonds: 41, 123-125; Falls: 187-188; Metcalfe, "My Family...") Although this system of resistance-in-depth was in principle judged to be the most effective means of breaking up and containing a major attack, in practice, given the relatively slender British forces and unanticipated foul weather that would reduce vision

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<sup>11</sup> This defense system, based on the German army's three years of defensive warfare, was first outlined in a manual, *Allgemeines über Stellenbau*, issued by the German Chief of General Staff of the Field Armies in August 1917. Soon after, copies were captured by the British and adapted to British use prior to the Spring Offensive. The French army adopted similar tactics. (Edmonds: 41-42, fn. 4; 43, fn. 1)

between the disconnected defensive posts of the Forward Zone, it was to prove what the historian of the 36th (Ulster) Division, Captain Cyril Falls, would later judge to be, at best, a “shadowy defence.” (Falls: 188)

The 36th (Ulster) Division’s three infantry brigades were assigned to hold nearly three miles of the front between St. Quentin Canal and Sphinx Wood, with the 109<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the left, the 108<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the right, and the 107<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the center. (See MAP Racecourse Redoubt pg. 58) In accord with the 5<sup>th</sup> Army’s in-depth defensive plan, each brigade placed one of its three battalions in the Forward Zone, one in the Battle Zone, and one in reserve at the rear of the Battle Zone. When 107<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved into position on 22 February, Edmund’s 15<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles Battalion took charge of the Forward Zone. Two of the battalion’s four companies were responsible for the first line of outposts and trench positions. The third company was poised to make counter-attacks. The fourth, D Company, in which Edmund led a platoon, was to defend the fortified Racecourse Redoubt, which straddled the St. Quentin railway close to the village of Grugies and was also the battalion’s headquarters. Consistent with the 5<sup>th</sup> Army’s Forward Zone general orders, the company defending the redoubt was to “...hold out to the last in case of a general attack in order to give time for the Battle Zone to be manned. It will on no account retire until orders are received from higher authority” (107<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary quoted by Metcalfe, “My family...”; Middlebrook: 81) To the rear of 15<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles was the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Rifles manning the Battle Zone, with 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Rifles behind in reserve. Most artillery was placed to south of the Quarry and Station redoubts in the Battle Zone. (Falls: 190; Metcalfe, “My Family....” See MAP pg. 58.)

Less than a mile to the right of the Racecourse Redoubt was the Jean d’Arc Redoubt held by the 108<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The Boadicea Redoubt of the 109<sup>th</sup> Brigade was a similar distance to the left. Although each brigade had its headquarters in its respective redoubt and each was visible to the other, they were not in direct communication and were not close enough to provide mutual support. Rather, communication lines ran from the Forward Zone back to the Rear Zone and to the headquarters of the 36<sup>th</sup> Division, which intended to coordinate defensive actions between its three brigades and provide reinforcements.

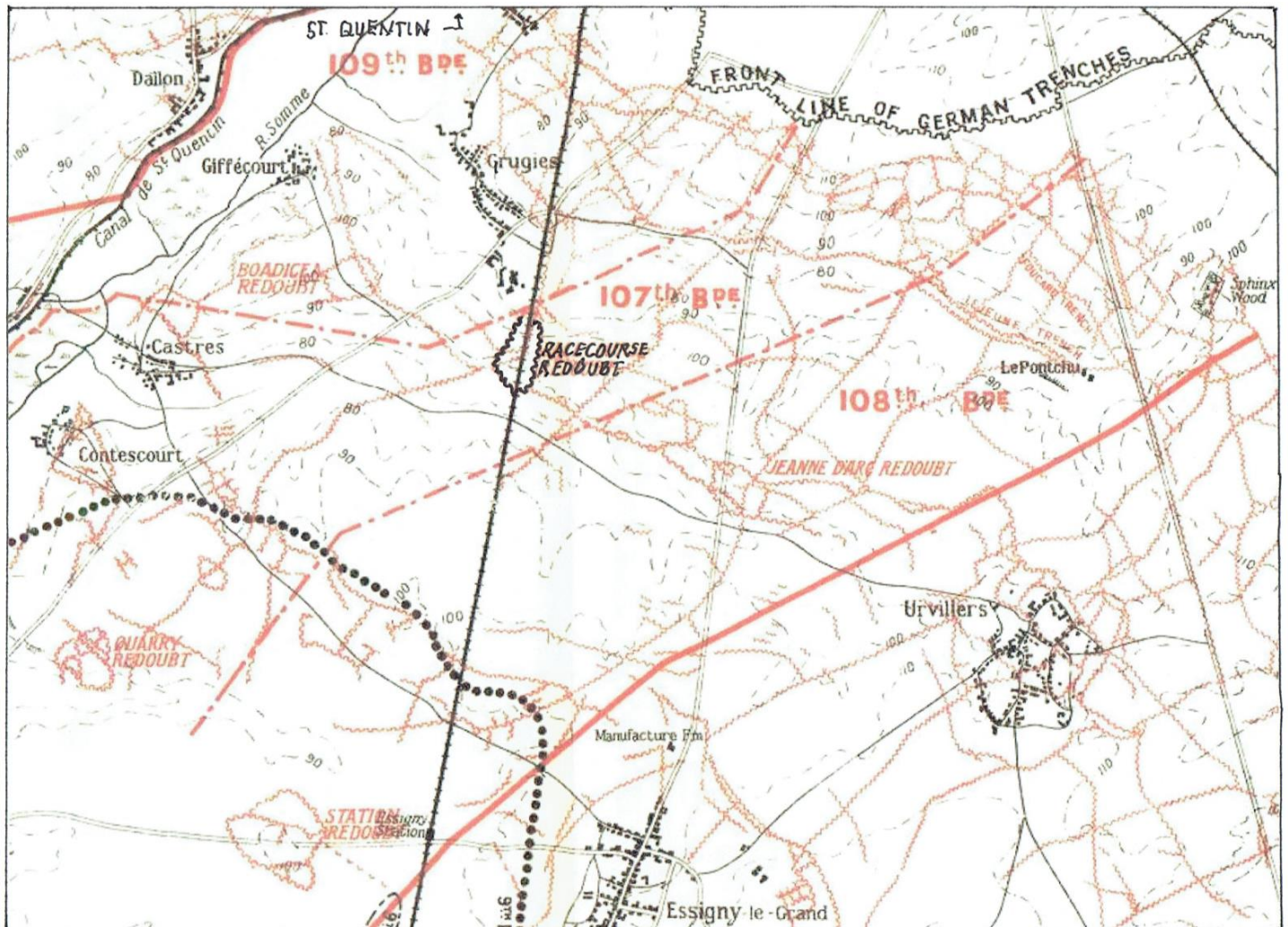
Running east-west in the 1,500 yards that separated the Forward Zone’s front line posts and trenches from its line of redoubts was an open valley that ran from Grugies toward Urvillers. As it would turn out, with visibility and communications cut off by weather and bombardment, when the Germans began their offensive, they would be able to infiltrate the valley unchallenged, attack the 107<sup>th</sup> Brigade’s front lines from behind, and surround the Racecourse Redoubt.

In the days leading up to the German attack there were numerous indications of its immanence. In response, from 12 March forward, the British began daily bombardments of German positions of likely assembly. Nonetheless, the noise of enemy traffic from around St. Quentin increased considerably after 17 March. The following evening, two German soldiers defected to the British side saying that they wanted to avoid being caught in the battle that the German army would soon commence. German troops and artillery “packed” St. Quentin. A British raid on 20 March captured two German soldiers who said the attack would be launched the next day. (Falls: 192)

That evening a fog began to accumulate. At 4:40 a.m. the next morning, when the Germans initiated their offensive with a terrific artillery bombardment, the fog had thickened all along the Forward Zone and reduced visibility to ten yards. The Germans concentrated their trench mortars on the front lines and accurately aimed heavy explosives and phosgene gas on the line of redoubts, the Battle Zone, and the artillery in the Rear Zone. When German’s infantry attack began at 9:40 a.m., communication lines between the front and rear battalions had been disrupted and runners were slowed by the fog. Without

visibility and telephone communications, it was nearly impossible for the headquarters to issue artillery barrage orders to support the forward redoubts.

### The Racecourse Redoubt, 21 March 1918



(Source: Royal Irish)

Hidden in the fog, the German troops, who attacked from the east and west, took the front lines troops and D Company in the Racecourse Redoubt by surprise. As described in 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division's history,

Hopeless indeed was the position of the men in this front system, outnumbered three or four times, taken in the rear by parties which came upon them without warning. The case of the machine-gunners, from whom, in the defence of the valley, much had been hoped, was equally desperate. The Germans swept up on them, as it were, out of nothingness. Few can have had an opportunity to fire a shot ere they were rushed. (Falls: 195)

Germans troops apparently had broken through the front lines to the right of Sphinx Wood and Le Pontchu and entered into the Grugies-Urville valley. On pulling back from their forward posts, which had been destroyed by the initial German bombardment, the 108<sup>th</sup> Brigade's 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion discovered German soldiers were already behind them in their trenches. That the Germans had penetrated farther south to attack the 108<sup>th</sup> Brigade's Battle Zone became apparent about noon when the fog lifted to

reveal a 300 yard-long German transport column marching down the St. Quentin-La Fere Road, following troops that had already captured Manufacture Farm and would soon take the town of Essigny le Grand. (Falls: 196) Similarly, to the left, just outside the 109<sup>th</sup> Brigade's portion of the Forward Zone, German troops by-passed the front lines of the 30<sup>th</sup> Division and, after taking Dallon, crossed through the 109<sup>th</sup> Brigade's Battle Zone to attack Contescourt, which was in the 107<sup>th</sup> Brigades' Battle Zone and behind the Racecourse Redoubt. (Falls: 198)

By 4:00 pm, the Germans had pushed across the rear of the Forward Zones of the 109<sup>th</sup>, 107<sup>th</sup>, and 108<sup>th</sup> Brigades and surrounded their three forward redoubts. The first wave of German infantry had pushed past the redoubts leaving the next wave to attack the redoubts with *minenwerfers* (trench mortars) and *flammenwerfers* (flamethrowers). On the right, after beating back multiple attacks, the Jean d'Arc Redoubt fell to the Germans at about noon. In the Racecourse Redoubt, the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Claude George Cole-Hamilton, hoped that D Company could hold on

**Lt. Col. Cole-Hamilton**



(Source: Imperial War Museum)

until dark and then break through the Germans to rejoin the British army in the Rear Zone. But during the afternoon the Germans took away trench after trench until the D Company was left defending only a small remaining portion of the redoubt between the Contescourt Trench and the railway cutting. At 4:00 pm the Germans brought up two additional *minenwerfers*, which smashed the remaining trenches and shelled the railway cutting. Lt. Col. Cole-Hamilton consulted his senior officers and they all agreed that it would not be possible to hold out longer. They surrendered at about 5:45 p.m.

After the Boadicea Redoubt fell at about the same time, the Germans released two captured British carrier pigeons with messages announcing they had taken all three redoubts; the messages were received by the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division Headquarters. Summarizing the situation, the historian Cyril Falls wrote, "...the three Redoubts of the Forward Zone, hopelessly beleaguered, completely surrounded by the enemy, had fought a battle that may be described as epic....a rare example of that 'cold courage,' unsupported by the ardour and excitement of an advance or the hope of ultimate victory, which has been so often

displayed by soldiers of British race in all periods of the history of British arms." (Falls: 201)

Although on the first day of their offensive the Germans were able to push British troops back along nearly 50 miles of the Western Front between the Sensee Canal in the north and Crozat Canal in the south, their greatest gains were around St. Quentin. (See MAP pg. 55) An analysis of the battle prepared by British officers two months later concluded that, "Fog was the main cause of our failure to beat off the attack, but intercommunication between strongpoints was generally described as faulty, and it was not possible to cover the ground between strong points with fire, except when visibility was good." (Edmonds: 259) Subsequent German accounts pointed out that General Ludendorff's having added six new divisions to his 18<sup>th</sup> Army had increased its numerical superiority; that his infantry's infiltration tactics were "eminently suited to the nature of the British defence;" and that they had been "favoured by the mistiness of the morning." (Edmonds: 262)

Over the following two weeks, the German forces continued to push the British back. But after still not being able to break through the British lines, the German troops had suffered extensive losses, were exhausted, and had over extended the capacity of their supply lines. With this result, perhaps the



porous and in-depth battle tactics had in the end been proven effective. After French reinforcements arrived, the British were finally able to halt the German advance during the first week of April. By then the Germans had captured some 240 square miles of territory and reached the Marne River, only 40 miles from Paris. But from that point on, the tide of battle began to turn and continued against the Germans until the war ended with an armistice on 11 November 1918.

### **Edmund's Fate: Doubts, Condolences, and Confirmations**

The 15<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles' war diary for 22 March 1918 recounts the prior day's battle with one bleak sentence: "The Battn. itself was gone, killed, wounded, and prisoners." (National Archives [UK], 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Irish Rifles) What had happened to Edmund during the battle at the Racecourse Redoubt was not immediately known to anyone in the British army other than those who had been captured by the Germans. Months of inquiry would pass before the certainty and nature of his death could be confirmed for his family. Responding to a 9 April 1918 letter of inquiry from Edmund's mother, the British War Office wrote to her that it had not received any casualty report regarding Edmund, "so it is presumed and hoped that he is quite well." (War Office 14 April 1916) But five days later the War Office sent his mother a telegram stating less optimistically, "Regret to inform you that 2/Lieut E. DeWind Irish Rifles reported missing twenty first March no details Secy War Office." (War Office 19 April 1916)

The bad news that Edmund was now officially "missing" traveled quickly and drew condolences that, while well-intentioned, must have been difficult for the family to bear. Perhaps because he was considering traveling to Ireland to be with his family, Norman apparently relayed the uncertainty of his brother's fate to his travel agent, H.M. MacCallum, who sent back a note hoping either that "your brother is alive even though in the hands of the Germans" or that there would be "better news." MacCallum passed on the news to Norman's bank, whose representative, Abraham Newton, presumed the worst and sent a letter affirming the "pride you undoubtedly feel in having lost a brother for so glorious a cause." MacCallum also informed Norman's fire insurance underwriter, A.L. McCrae, who sent a letter that both miss-spelled Norman's surname and declared boldly that with cases of "fighting for 'King & County'" the "usual expressions of sympathy become mere platitudes.... [W]here a chap makes 'the supreme sacrifice' in this war for Liberty and Democracy, it really becomes more a subject of congratulation." Similarly assuming the worst, a representative of Norman's club in Chicago reassured him presumptuously that, "later your pain will give way to pride in the splendor of your brother's sacrifice....[T]he dead are the real victors; for they have triumphed not only over the enemy, but over all the weakness of humanity." Investment banker, Watkin W. Kneath, wrote, "These are days when we must all be soldiers and face what we are called upon to face with faith and fortitude. I am sure that you, while mourning the loss of your brother, must have a sense of pride when you remember he gave his life for the great cause in which the Allies are engaged." More cautiously but only slightly more optimistically, the General Manager of Edmund's bank wrote, "We regret... [Edmund's having been] reported missing. We trust that you might be able to obtain further news...." (Letters of Condolence)

By mid-May, following an exchange of telegrams and letters, Arthur Willert at the British War Mission in Washington DC could confirm to Norman only that Edmund was still missing, that he had no further news from the War Office, and that he would do everything possible to trace Norman's brother. (British War Mission, 18 May 1918)

Then, in June Edmund's sister, Florence, received a letter sent from France by Captain L.S. Duncan of the 15<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles offering only a slight bit more information but much more hope:

A letter written by you to your brother, 2Lt. E. de Wind, has just reached this battn today. I have opened it and am replying at once.

I am very sorry to say that I can give you very little information about your brother, as I was not in his battn. when the attack started on 21<sup>st</sup> March. A large number of the battn. were taken prisoners, and although I have not seen his name amongst those which were published, there is a possibility that he may have been captured too. I trust that is so and that he is alright.

It may be a little consolation to you to know that the late Commanding Officer of the battn. (who was captured on March 21<sup>st</sup>) spoke in high terms of the work done by your brother during the fighting the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the attack. The C.O. also said he was not sure of his fate.

Perhaps you have already heard all I am telling you from some of the officers who knew your brother and who were there at the time.

I sincerely hope you will get good news from him in a very short time.  
(Duncan 1918)

Indeed, the family soon heard from other officers and, although the news was still not good, the information was increasingly concrete and the accounts of Edmund's actions laudatory. In August, the Enquiry Department for Wounded, Missing and Prisoners of War of the British Red Cross wrote to Edmund's mother enigmatically asking if she had received any news of her son as they were in possession of some information they could not "reconcile officially." She wrote back the next day that, while she had no official news from the War Office, she had heard from two officers of the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion who at the time of their writing were both prisoners in the German Offizier-Gefangennben-Lager, in Freiberg, Baden. She said 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant D. J. McGilton wrote that,

he was taken prisoner on 21<sup>st</sup> March, but was not near my son and did not see him, but that 2 or 3 days later he came on a man of my son's company, who told him that as he was being brought out a prisoner under escort, he saw my son lying in a trench, wounded in both legs, but as far as he could see not badly wounded.

Also, Captain J.E.S. Condon, commander of Edmund's D Company, had written her on 10 August 1918,

I fear the information I have at my disposal is not very cheering. The last I heard of De Wind who was some distance from me in the fight when it finished was that he had been wounded – afterward I made several enquiries but could get no satisfactory news about him. If they have not heard from him or about him since, I fear there's little hope – He was a splendid fellow and distinguished himself more than once in the earlier stages of the fight. His courage was the admiration of our C.O. himself, a cool-headed courageous man whose hearty "Well Done" was as much valued by those who had the good fortune to serve under him, as were the most prized decorations and as he was engaged in fighting his Sixth War, you will realize that to win the praise of such a man was to have done something very great. Poor De Wind [had] done all that and more. I had hoped to hear from some other

source that he was still in the land of the living and I am [illegible] to find that such is not the case. Men of his type are scarce. I have only met two like him in my 21 months of War, Henderson & another. (Condon 1918)

When the family received a copy of an account of the fighting at the Racecourse Redoubt written by the battalion's commanding officer, Lt. Col. Cole-Hamilton, is not certain.<sup>12</sup> Although the report was dated 31 March 1918, it was likely not posted from the prisoner of war camp in Karlsruhe, Germany or distributed until considerably later. While Cole-Hamilton wrote that he was uncertain of Edmund's fate, he described the actions of Edmund and two Non-Commissioned Officers with whom he fought, as having been worthy of the Victoria Cross:

ACCOUNT OF BATTLE ON 21st MARCH 1918 WRITTEN BY LT. COL. C. G. COLE-HAMILTON  
C.M.G., D.S.O.<sup>13</sup> AND SENT FROM KARLSRUHE, GERMANY

The bombardment began about 4.15 a.m. There was a dense fog which prevented our seeing more than at most 10 yards. This did not begin to clear off till 11.30 a.m. We, that is Headquarters and 1 company,<sup>14</sup> manned our posts in redoubt and were heavily shelled. At about 9.30 a.m. all communications, both forward and to rear, had gone bust, so we knew nothing that was happening. At 10.15 a.m. our outposts were driven in; at 10.30 a.m. fighting became heavy all round us – shortly after this, the left of redoubt was over-run. This left us with only the position of redoubt from Contescourt C.T.<sup>15</sup> to Railway Cutting inclusive. The 2 platoons on left had all been killed or captured also. From that or about 10.40 a.m. we had very close fighting, and were engaged by Flammenwerfer<sup>16</sup> (4 attacks) knocked out finally by the Adjutant<sup>17</sup> with Rifle Grenades, machine guns heavy and light, and minnenwerfers<sup>18</sup> [sic] while the enemy infantry made several attacks over open and along trenches with bombs.

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<sup>12</sup> Lt. Col. Cole-Hamilton wrote two accounts of the Racecourse Redoubt battle: The first, dated 31 March 1918, was that he sent from prisoner of war camp. At least three copies exist: One is in the Royal Ulster Rifles Museum, a picture of which can be found in Metcalf, n.d. "My Family..." A second is at the Imperial War Museum. (Documents 9246) I have learned from Michael Nugent that a third is in the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (D961/8). These accounts are essentially the same, though the opening sentence and sequence of closing sentences of the first two differ. The DeWind family archive has a copy handwritten probably by Edmund's sister, Catherine, who sent it to Norman with a note attached saying the report had been distributed to battalion members. The version used here is from the Royal Ulster Rifles Museum, with explanatory notes from Metcalfe. (n.d., "My family...") Lt. Col. Cole-Hamilton wrote the second account one year later, dated 31 March 1919, for a Military Board of Enquiry as surrenders by all officers were subject to review under the Manual of Military Law of 1907. This account gives a similar description of the battle but omits mention of Edmund and other individuals whose actions are described in the earlier accounts. But he did write, "Many acts of great gallantry were performed, and on my return to England, I submitted various names through Brig'dr Gen W. Withycombe, C.M.G., D.S.O., who commanded the 107<sup>th</sup> Bde at the time." The enquiry "attached no blame" to Cole-Hamilton. (UK National Archives (WO 339/8682, courtesy of Michael Nugent)

<sup>13</sup> Lt. Col. Claud George Cole-Hamilton CMG, DSO, Commanding Officer 15th Royal Irish Rifles. Captured.

<sup>14</sup> This was 'D' Company.

<sup>15</sup> 'C. T.' – Communication Trench

<sup>16</sup> 'Flammenwerfer' (Flame-thrower) – a short-range (25 yards), man-portable flamethrower.

<sup>17</sup> Captain John Hazelton Stewart MC. Captured.

<sup>18</sup> 'Minenwerfer' (Mine-thrower) – a short-range trench mortar.

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant [de Wind]<sup>19</sup>, Corporal Getwood<sup>20</sup> [sic] and L/Corpl Walker<sup>21</sup> did splendid work clearing Contescourt C.T. time after time. Twice they got out on top and walked along it, clearing enemy out of it with rifle and rifle grenades. They all three won the V.C. several times. I fear de Wind was killed during one of the bombing stunts. L/Cpl. Walker was wounded – I am not absolutely sure about de Wind. At 1.30 p.m. about – I ordered the Adjutant to send the pigeons off with message, giving what information we could. I did not see the message sent as I had to go to another post which was threatened at the time, but message was sent off and I saw the pigeons flying off. Before this – I think about 12.30 p.m. one of our planes came over us and we showed him our position by burning flares, etc. He came over us twice and we saw Farnham's<sup>22</sup> [Boadicea] Redoubt signaling to him with Very Lights, so knew they were holding out all right.

On our right we saw the enemy in and about Jeanne D'Arc Redoubt<sup>23</sup>, I think about 12.00 noon, and concluded it had fallen. This proved later to be correct as I met Hall<sup>24</sup> later and he told me he had been over-run earlier – I think about 10.45 a.m. or 11.00 a.m. I had hoped to have held out until dark and then had a try at getting through to the rear, but the number of enemy we saw in our rear as far as we could see (the fog had lifted at 12.00 noon partially, and finally at 1.00 p.m.) made this operation very doubtful indeed. The attacks continued without cessation, and about 4.00 p.m. I sent Captain Stewart<sup>25</sup> down for a little food and rest – he had been continually engaged since first attack planting Rifle Grenades wherever they were wanted and I attribute such success as we attained greatly to his skill with Rifle Grenades and to his magnificent example of cool courage. About 4.00 p.m. the enemy brought up 2 more Minenwerfer and gradually smashed in our remaining trenches and shelled the railway cutting heavily. At 5.15 p.m. I judged we could not hold on much longer – had conference with my senior officers – they were of opinion, and I agreed that it was not possible to hold out longer, nor to break out, so at 5.35 p.m. we gave in. It was a bitter moment, but I do not think we could have done more. The officer in command of the Battalion who captured us told me he had taken over command as his C.O. had been killed – that Battln. had been attacking us all day and a 2nd had been sent up to help them, and had been engaged for some time – so I think we did what we could to help the cause. I had only had about 30 men left unwounded, only 60 all told were able to walk away; this included various oddments T.M.<sup>26</sup> and M.G.<sup>27</sup> crews.

The Medium T.M. Officer (I regret I have lost his name) did splendid work, and worked his piece most gallantly to the end. Captain Condon<sup>28</sup> (O.C. Coy.) won a D.S.O. if ever a man did – cool and cheerful all the time, going about encouraging his men and setting the finest possible example of the greatest gallantry. Captain Stewart besides his work as Adjutant,

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<sup>19</sup> His surname is missing from the original typed report.

<sup>20</sup> Actually, his name was Sergeant Samuel Getgood, 15/1044. Captured.

<sup>21</sup> Lance Corporal Charles Hubert Walker MM, Actually 15/12170. Captured.

<sup>22</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Kenlis Maxwell, 11th Baron Farnham, North Irish Horse. Lord Farnham was commanding 2nd Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 109th Brigade at Boadicea Redoubt. Captured.

<sup>23</sup> Jeanne de Arc Redoubt was Battalion Headquarters with 'B' Company, 12th Royal Irish Rifles, 108th Brigade.

<sup>24</sup> Major Augustus Henry Hall MC, 12th Royal Irish Rifles. Captured.

<sup>25</sup> The Adjutant, Captain John Hazelton Stewart MC. Captured.

<sup>26</sup> 'T. M.' – Trench Mortar.

<sup>27</sup> 'M. G.' – Machine Gun.

<sup>28</sup> Captain James Edmund Smith Condon MC, Officer Commanding 'D' Company. Captured.



was a host in himself and nothing could have been finer and more inspiring to the men than his skill with the Rifle Grenades and his cheery example. A/R.S.M. Latimer,<sup>29</sup> who was I fear badly wounded, also did great work keeping all portions of defence well supplied with ammunition, water, food, etc., also cheering and setting a great example of cool daring. The Chaplain, Captain Morris<sup>30</sup> and Medical Officer, Captain Glanville<sup>31</sup> both did splendid work attending the wounded and dying – often under the greatest possible danger when it was impossible to get them into the dugout. The other Officers who splendidly stand out I have already mentioned. But every man – Officer, N.C.O. & men – under my command did their damndest, and I am proud to have had the honour to have commanded such men. So much for our own show – it was a very pretty fight indeed; I met some of my front line company officers and men, and they all agree that the Front Line was not attacked from the front at all, but from rear. At 9.15 a.m. one N.C.O. sent back from a front line company to Advanced Headquarters found on arrival a German Officer sitting at phone – apparently the enemy came in on flank or flanks (not sure if one or both). The whole show was a very fine performance on the enemy's part as to keep direction and touch in that fog, and was a great achievement. I have the names of all Officers, N.C.O.s and men whom I could find or hear of definitely as being prisoners, and if allowed will send them to you for forwarding. We were well treated and highly complimented on our defense by the officers who took us. You must be careful what you say in letters to me, and tell the others the same – if anything is said that should not be I understand that I do not get the letters at all. Dated 31st March 1918 – KARLSRUHE

Whatever uncertainty Col. Cole-Hamilton's account might have left about Edmund's fate, it was erased by a postcard Rifleman Albert Wright sent to Edmund's mother from the prison camp Offizier-Gefangennben-Lager Russenlager, in Rastatt, Baden (dated 10 July 1918 but postmarked 13 August 1918). He wrote:<sup>32</sup>

Dear Madam, In reply to your P.C. [post card] received to hand 6/7/18, in reference to Mr. De Wind, I sincerely regret to have to inform you, that he was killed on March 21<sup>st</sup> at ST. QUENTIN, myself being taken prisoner at the same time and place. I had already written Mrs. Wright asking her to inform you of the fact as I was unable to write direct, our correspondence being very limited, tendering to you my deepest sympathy in your great sorrow. I beg to remain yours, Faithfully, Rfm. A. Wright

Wright reconfirmed Edmund's death with additional detail in an official German Red Cross "Evidence Form" dated 21 August 1918 in which he testified that, "About 12 noon, March 21<sup>st</sup> the deceased Officer was with his platoon in the battle position, when a trench mortar landed and killed him instantaneously." Wright named 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Percy Hilder of the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion as having similarly witnessed the death.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Warrant Officer Class 2, Acting Regimental Sergeant Major James Latimer, 15/13011. Died of wounds on 21 March 1918 and is commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial.

<sup>30</sup> Reverend William Frederick Morris MC, Army Chaplains Department. Captured.

<sup>31</sup> Captain Llewellyn Stanley Howard Glanville, Royal Army Medical Corps. Captured.


<sup>32</sup> Another of Edmund's sisters, Catherine, had earlier in May 1918 similarly requested the Red Cross for any record of Edmund's being a prisoner of war and was sent a negative reply. Apparently, Rifleman Wright's testimony only subsequently became available, as was noted on a Red Cross record card. (Red Cross)

<sup>33</sup> Edmund's brother, Norman, wrote that Wright had been Edmund's "Batman" (a soldier-servant appointed to commissioned officers) and was the last to speak with Edmund alive. (Norman DeWind 1966)

### German Red Cross Evidence Form Confirming Edmunds' Death

Ausländer-Abteilung Ausschuss für Rat und Hilfe

5K  
184348/3

 Ausschuss für deutsche Kriegsgefangene.

## EVIDENCE FORM

Name, Surname, Rank Edward De Wind 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut

Regiment, Company (of the missing) 15<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles. D. Coy.

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Name, Surname, Rank Alfred Wright. "Private"

Regiment, Company Witness 15<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles. D. Coy.

Date and place of the disappearance March 21<sup>st</sup> 1918 "Cruges" Near St. Quentin

Particular details:  
In which circumstance did the Witness see the disappeared for the last time?  
About 12 noon, March 21<sup>st</sup> the deceased Officer was with his platoon in the battle position, when a French mortar landed and killed him instantaneously.

Was he killed outright? yes  
And by whom was he buried? yes

Can the witness (state the names) of other witnesses?  
2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut Hilder. 15<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles  
Prisoner of War (Address not known)

Special Remarks

In the presence of the Commandant: on: Wednesday  
22<sup>nd</sup> Aug. 1918

Signature of the witness Alfred Wright

(Source: National Archives [United Kingdom], Armed Forces Officers' Service Records)

With this testimony, the War Office's bureaucratic machinery began a long and grinding process of officially accepting that Edmund's status was no longer "missing" but "killed in action" and that his estate should, thus, be paid a "gratuity" for his service. On 30 September 1918, the War Office wrote,

In view of the above [Rifleman A. Wright's report], and of the lapse of time since this officer was reported as Missing, during which no other news has been received which would render it undesirable to proceed to the official acceptance of his death, the Army Council are now regretfully constrained to conclude that Second Lieutenant E. De Wind was killed in Action, on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 1918. (National Archives [UK], Armed Forces' Services Records)

The correspondence in Edmond's personnel files between the War Office and F.J. Orr, a Belfast solicitor retained by the family, indicates that payment of £59. 17.0 to Edmund's estate was finally authorized on 24 April 1919 for his 124 days of military service between 26 September 1917 and 21 March 1918 and that his brother and sister, Norman and Catherine, had been named executors. (National Archives [UK], Armed Forces' Services Records)

Afterward, a member of the 31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion learned that Edmund's death had been confirmed and sent his condolences to Edmund's mother with a picture of Edmund taken when they were undergoing training together at Shorncliffe. His letter said,

I am writing to say how sorry I am to hear of Edmund's death as I was one of his chums in the 31<sup>st</sup> Batn. I would have written before only I was not sure of the truthness [sic] of the reports, & I have only just got back myself. I have enclosed two pictures I took, one in Calgary before leaving for the front & one in camp in England. If at any time you care for any more I shall be only too pleased to send them too you. Yours, H.V. Green

**Private Green's Photo of Otterpool Training Camp, 1915 (perhaps Edmund, lower left)**



(Source: DeWind Family Archives)

Back in Comber the family worried about how Mollie would fare after losing her future husband. Edmund's estate was probated in April with assets of £178.11.0 in London (Ancestry.com, National Probate Calendar) and £1,020 15s 7d in Comber. (PRONI, Calendar of Wills) In June Catherine wrote that his insurance policies had paid out an additional £752.9.0. (DeWind, Catherine) If Mollie received only one-third share of these funds, as instructed in Edmund's will, it would not have provided living expenses for long. Catherine expressed her concerns for Mollie in a letter to Norman saying,

Mollie is leaving the Woods [family friends who lived in nearby Bangor] on 15<sup>th</sup> July. She says it is so lonely there she never has a soul to speak to except the children & no friends nearer than Comber. She thinks of getting a post in Dublin for the winter & then she wants

to go to Canada or the U.S. as a Lady Help or Companion help as pay is better out there & she says she must save for her old age. I feel sorry for her & she has got so thin, I also feel in a way I must look after her. Ted's last request to me was if anything happened to him in France to be good to Mollie & look after her, & yet I feel I can only advise. I begged her not to go on chance to either places, go to some fixed job. I thought as she was keen on Edmonton as Teddy told her so much about it perhaps Florence would write to Mrs. Hamilton [Edmund's prior landlady] or some of Charles McMaster's daughters they might know of someone wanting a Lady Help. She does not want Homestead life, rather be in a town<sup>34</sup>. Mother has asked her to Kinvara to stay when she leaves Bangor & then she is to come to me for a time, to rest before taking a job in Dublin. She will be useful to me while Kitty Ferrier [one of the Edmund's aunts who resettled in Scotland from Singapore] is with me in August, K.F. wants to see you & family, she is so nice. I am very fond of Kitty. (Catherine DeWind 1919)

Subsequent family correspondence from the late 1940s indicates that Mollie ended up staying in Ireland. She worked for a time in Dublin and at one point received medical treatment, which Edmund's sister, Alice, speculated had contributed to her having a temporary "mental upset." (Alice Maud DeWind 1947) A year later Mollie was back in Belfast visiting her friends the Frys and was by then seemingly available for new employment as a companion helper. (Lou) She died in 1953.

On 15 May 1919, some six months after the War Office confirmed Edmund's death, The *London Gazette* published a short announcement stating that Edmund had been awarded the Victoria Cross and adding some additional details about his actions.

The late 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Edmund de Wind, 15<sup>th</sup> Bn., R. Ir. Rif.  
For most conspicuous bravery and self-sacrifice on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, 1918, at the Racecourse Redoubt, near Grugies. For Seven hours he held this most important post, and though twice wounded and practically single-handed, he maintained his position until another section could be got to his help.<sup>35</sup> On two occasions, with two N.C.O.'s only, he got out on top under heavy machine-gun fire, and cleared the enemy out of the trench, killing many. He continued to repel attack after attack until he was mortally wounded and collapsed. His valour, self-sacrifice and example were of the highest order.

The delayed timing of the award may have been a result of Lt. Col. Cole-Hamilton's not having been released from prisoner of war camp until 14 December 1918 (Metcalf, "My Family..." fn. 13) and the long time it took the War Office to confirm his death and settle his accounts.

A month after the *London Gazette* announcement, Edmund's mother received a letter from the War Office asking if it would be "convenient" for her "to receive from the King the Victoria Cross awarded to your son..." (War Office 19 June 1919) A subsequent letter instructed her to attend Buckingham Palace at 10:30 am on June 28<sup>th</sup> for the investiture of the medal, weather permitting, in the palace Court Yard.

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<sup>34</sup> Presumably Catherine meant that Mollie would prefer life in a town as opposed to the rustic homesteading taken up by Florence and George O'Meara in Alberta.

<sup>35</sup> Drawing from a report Sergeant Alexander Colville sent to Martin Middlebrook as he prepared *The Kaiser's Battle* (1978), Dr. D.E. Johnston of Comber (1988) wrote, "A sergeant, Alec Colville, remembers being asked to take 6 of his men to help Edmund. Edmund kept the men but sent the sergeant back to his own platoon as they had no officer."

The letter included two tickets for relatives or friends to witness the ceremony and travelling warrants for first class return tickets between Comber and London. (War Office 24 June 1919)

Although Edmund's mother was aging and frail, she chose to make the trip to Buckingham Palace, as was explained by her daughter Catherine in a letter to Norman:

Doubtless you will have heard she intends going over herself to receive the Honours from His Majesty, it will be a big undertaking, but she decided it herself, no one said she ought. She thought it over & came down one morning & announced she would go as Ted would like it. Edith is going with her, but Jim [Catherine's husband and Norman's ex-employer] thinks I should go too, as in these days of no porters & carrying your own luggage, Edie [Edmund's sister, Edith] is not fit to do it. Sh[e can't] carry any weight on her left side. (Catherine DeWind 1919)

Despite these difficulties, Margaret made the arduous journey to London with her two daughters, Catherine and Edith. According to Edmund's brother, Norman, "While waiting in the Palace anti-room King George passed through and noticed my Mother waiting with others. He at once sent an equerry to offer her a PRIVATE AWARD instead of the usual waiting her turn." (N. DeWind 19 June 1966) After receiving the medal from the king, she returned home with it in a flat two by four-and-a-half inch leather hinged box. When she arrived home to Comber, she found the town had been decorated with flags and buntings in honor of the occasion. (*Newtownards Chronicle* 30 March 2017)

## **Conclusion: Memorialization**

Despite his nearly thirty-five years of a wide-ranging life, Edmund is today remembered and celebrated primarily for a single day's "valour, self-sacrifice, and example," which the Victoria Cross symbolizes. The Victoria Cross has provided the lens through which this biography has viewed Edmund's past in seeking to provide an understanding of why he enlisted to defend the Empire and bravely died in doing so. While focused on Edmund, most of his memorials have been created by people who revere his memory within different geographies of his life, first as a member of his community in Comber and North Down, then as a citizen in Northern Ireland and Canada, and finally as a subject of the British Empire. Within this social geography, the continued remembrance of his heroism and death takes on meanings for others that extend well beyond his own life. In celebrating the memory of Edmund and his Victoria Cross others have validated and reconfirmed their own shared histories and values.

Victoria Crosses are awarded only to individuals. Even when groups have together performed gallant acts, they must elect an individual to receive the medal. Typically, commanding officers make recommendations for awards along with supporting testimony from three witnesses. The recommendation is passed up through the military hierarchy to the Victoria Cross Committee, the Secretary of State for War, and then to the reigning sovereign for assent. (Wikipedia, Victoria Cross)

Since the medal's inception in 1856, some 1,358 have been awarded to 1,355 men who have, in accord with the original Royal warrant authorizing the award "served Us in the presence of the enemy, and shall have then performed some signal act of valour, or devotion to their country." (*London Gazette*, 5 February 1856) All the medals have been made by a single jeweler, Hancocks of London, from what was apparently a Chinese cannon captured from the Russians during the Crimean war. Although official



**Edmund's Victoria Cross,  
1914-1915 Star, British War, Allied Victory Medals, and Death Plaque**



(Source: DeWind Archives)

policy was at first not to make the award posthumously, the policy was reversed by 1907 and three quarters of the 628 awards made for World War 1 (the largest number given for any single war) were given posthumously, as in Edmund's case. Canadian Veterans Affairs includes Edmund on its list of 73 Canadians who were awarded the Victoria Cross during the war. (Hancocks; Forces War Records, "Victoria Cross (VC)"; National Archives, Defense Fact Sheet; Canada Veterans Affairs)

Although awarded to individuals, many Victoria Crosses have been brought together for collective remembrance. Although most of the medals are probably still held by awardees or their families, more than one third are in collections and made available to the public. The Lord Ashcroft Gallery in the Imperial War Museum, London, has the largest collection with over 200 medals, the purpose of which seems to be to contribute to the public's understanding of both the individual and shared aspects of extraordinary bravery. (Imperial War Museum) Smaller collections are held by various military museums in England, Scotland, and Wales including those of the National Army, Royal Green Jackets, Royal Engineers, Army Medical Service, Royal Artillery, and others who seek to promote the collective memories of their units. In Northern Ireland, the museums of the Royal Ulster Rifles in Belfast holds two Victoria Crosses, the Royal Irish Fusiliers in Armagh holds one, and the Inniskilling Fusiliers in Enniskillen at least one. (Morrow) The Canadian War Museum in Ottawa holds thirty of the ninety or so Victoria Crosses that have been awarded to Canadians since the medal's inception. A past director of the museum says its goal is to help Canadians understand not so much the nature of war but more how war has affected their lives. (Whitham)

Biographies of Victoria Cross awardees have similarly been collected for publication.<sup>36</sup> Published in 1999 *The Victoria Cross Bibliography* cites 634 books, chapters, or significant coverage "wholly-related to the VC or to one or more VC-recipients." The book cites eight biographies of Edmund. (Mulholland and Jordan: 192) Since then the number of VC biographical collections has continued to grow. Most biographies of Edmund include the *London Gazette* account that was the basis for his receiving the Victoria Cross and some add details about his family and life. The first collection in which Edmund's biography appeared may be the 1920 two-volume compilation of all VC biographies to date, published by Sir O'Moore Creagh and E. M. Humphris. More recently Edmund's biography has been included in collections based on geography or particular battles: those of Canadian VC awardees by Arthur Bishop in 1995, of Irish VC awardees by Richard Doherty and David Truesdale in 2000, and of VC awardees in the 1918 Spring German offensive by Gerald Gliddon in 2013. In 2018 Edmund's biography was included in Colonel Paul Oldfield's multi-volume history of soldiers who were awarded Victoria Crosses for actions on the Western Front during World War 1. Probably the most comprehensive portrayal of Victoria Cross awardees, this series places the VC awardees' actions in the wider context of the war, includes detailed individual biographies, and provides guidance for revisiting the battle fields. Many other similar collections of VC biographies can be found on private, military, and government websites by searching the internet for "Edmund De Wind." Examples of such websites which provide useful biographical accounts and access to relevant documents include:

- The Veterans Affairs Canada's "Virtual War Memorial,"  
<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/7600006?Edmund%20De%20Wind;>

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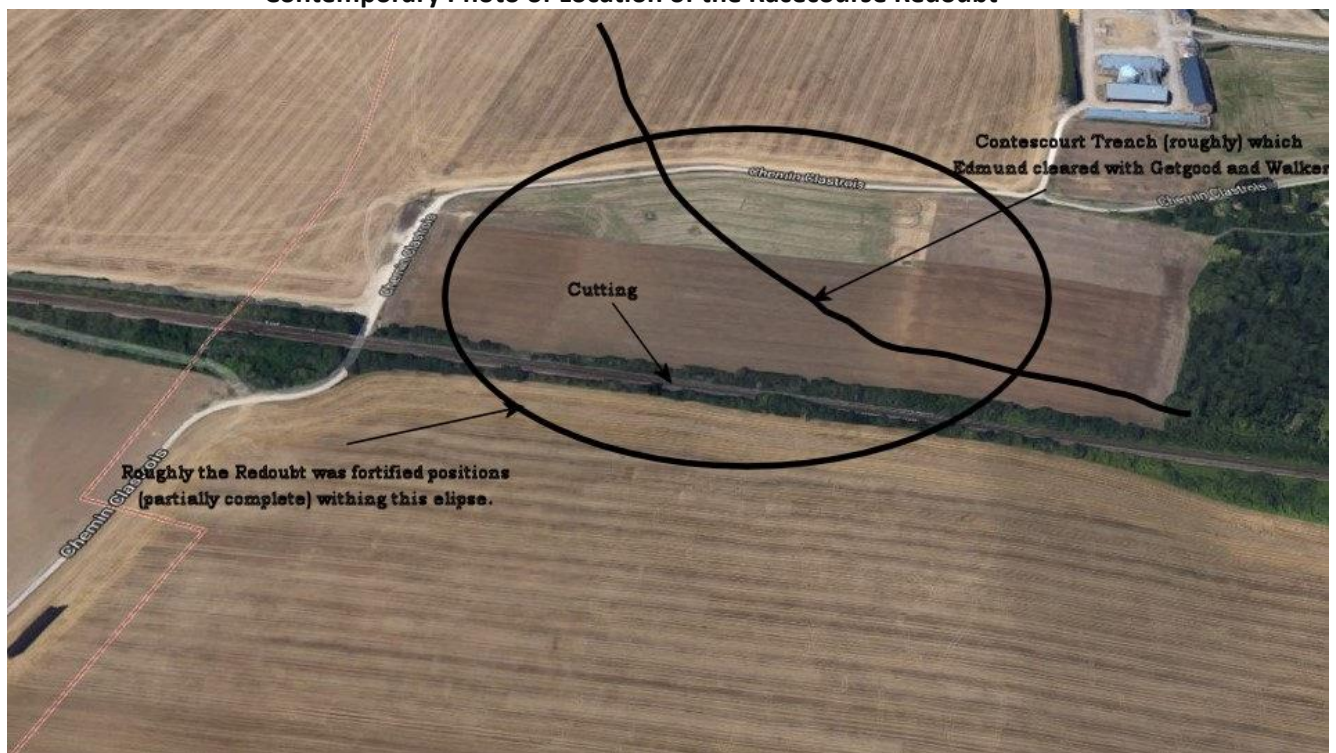
<sup>36</sup> The most thoroughly researched and detailed biography of Edmund, which has not been published either as part of a collection or separately, is that written by Keith Haines, composed when he served as Chief Archivist for Campbell College where Edmund was schooled from 1894 to 1900. (Haines, n.d.)

- Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial  
<http://svwm.ca/casualty-display/?ID=A000001490#>;
- Royal Irish Military Museum's "The Royal Irish: The Irish Soldier in Service to the Crown,"  
<https://www.royal-irish.com/persons/edmund-de-wind-vc>
- Barry Niblock's "The War Dead of North Down and Ards,"  
<http://barryniblock.co.uk/world-war-one-list-of-dead/names-listed-alphabetically-by-surname/daly-to-diver/de-wind-edmund/>
- The Imperial War Museum's website "Lives of the First World War" allows viewers to contribute to the construction of soldiers' biographies,  
<https://livesofthefirstworldwar.org/lifestory/1074201>.
- YouTube.com provides a narrated account Edmund's Victoria Cross award, posted by WikiWikiup, which is a YouTube channel dedicated to making Wikipedia available to people with limited vision. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tU38lDuKTs>.

This is only a small sampling of many internet biographies, some of which provide documents and accurate information and others which reproduce previously published biographies and, often, their errors. There are so many accounts that one wonders at the density of the international network of people in the world who are interconnected through the remembrance of Victoria Cross recipients.

In France Edmund is included in a number of collective war memorials, but outside of Grugies in the train cutting adjacent to the fields where he fought his last battle, there are today no obvious traces

#### Contemporary Photo of Location of the Racecourse Redoubt



(Source: Nick Metcalfe)

either of Edmund, the redoubt he defended, or seemingly of the war. The earth has been turned back to agriculture and the railway to transportation.



Five kilometers up the road in St. Quentin there is a memorial to local townsmen who died in World War 1 and other wars, but not to their allies. But approximately 60 kilometers to the North West, Edmund's name is included on the Memorial to the Missing in the Pozieres British Cemetery along with the names of 14,708 Imperial soldiers who were killed near the Somme between 21 March 1918 and 7 August 1918 and who have no known grave. (Commonwealth War Graves Commission) Then 1.5 kilometers to the northwest of the Memorial to the Missing, is the Ulster Tower, which commemorates all the men who served in the 36th (Ulster) Division. A memorial stone, which was placed there in 1991 by the Royal Irish Rangers, lists Edmund along with eight others who were awarded Victoria Crosses. (Wikipedia, Ulster Tower; Wikipedia, Pozieres)

### Memorial at the Ulster Tower, Thiepval



(Source: Keith Haines)

In Canada, soon after the war ended, Edmund's employer, the Canadian Bank of Commerce, compiled a two volume history of the war including descriptions of the roles that 1,701 of its officers played in it. The first and only full page portrait of the bank's employees is of Edmund and the text provides his biography. (Foster and Duthie) A plaque in Edmund's honor was posted next to the building, now on the edge of a parking lot, which was once the bank's Yorkton branch in Saskatchewan where Edmund had briefly worked. There is also a plaque in the Edmonton branch bank, which includes Edmund's name among the 33 other employees who served in the war. (Wikipedia, Edmund DeWind)

Also in Edmonton, the All Saints Anglican Cathedral, whose religious services Edmund attended, mounted a carved oak reredos, which is currently underneath the large stained glass window one sees upon entering the Cathedral and which is dedicated to the men of the congregation who gave their lives during the First World War. There are additional simpler memorials to individuals. (All Saints Anglican Cathedral)

Some of the collective memorials for all Canadian Victoria Cross recipients include specific mention of Edmund. In 2014 the British High Commission mounted inside its Ontario Offices a plaque honoring 70 Canadians who were awarded Victoria Crosses during World War 1. (British High Commission) A memorial to all of Canada's Victoria Cross recipients was created in Toronto's York Cemetery in 2017. (Inside Toronto.com) The creators of the York memorial, the Mount Pleasant Group, published a book

with biographies all Canadian VC awardees, including Edmund, and the book has been made available as a flip-book on the internet. (Mount Pleasant; Armstrong)

The most dramatic memorial dedicated to Edmund in Canada is the 2,438 meter (nearly 8,000 foot) mountain named Mount Edmund De Wind in 1949 by the Geographic Board of Alberta and the Canadian Board of Geographic names. The mountain is located at Latitude 53°, 34', 25" and Longitude 118°, 27', 20" and is one of two peaks of the Berland Range of the Willmore Wilderness Park and five peaks in Jasper National Park that were named after awardees of the Victoria Cross and became collectively designated the Victoria Cross Ranges in 1950. (Hoar)

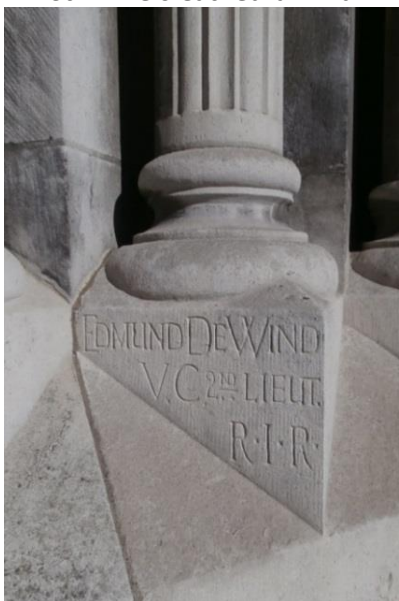
#### **Mount Edmund DeWind (the peak above the darkest vertical stains) in the Berland Range**



(Source: McGrenere)

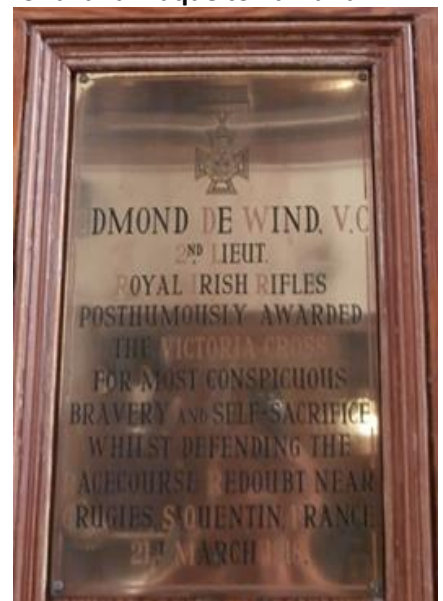
Edmund has been memorialized in many different ways in Northern Ireland. In Belfast in 1927 Bishop Charles Grierson dedicated the west front of St. Anne's Cathedral to Ulstermen who died in World War I. Paid for by his mother, one side of a pillar's base at the cathedral's entrance is inscribed, "Edmund DeWind VC 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut, RIR" and the other side (not visible below) says, "Fell Fighting, St. Quentin 21<sup>st</sup> March 1918." At Campbell College, just outside Belfast, a World War 1 Memorial in the college's Central

#### **St. Anne's Cathedral Pillar**



(Source: Sandra Gilpin)

#### **Campbell College World War 1 Memorial and Plaque to Edmund**





Hall includes Edmund in a list of students who served and were killed in the war. There are also a photograph and a brass plaque mentioning his “conspicuous bravery and self-sacrifice.” A college building is named after Edmund.

Closer to home, in Comber, quite a few memorials have been dedicated to Edmund. In the town square, is the statue of a World War 1 soldier, which was unveiled in 1923 as a memorial for all town members who served in the war, including Edmund and his sister, Edith. A captured World War I German 135 mm field gun stood in the town square bearing a plaque in Edmund’s honor until 1940, when the gun was cut up for scrap to support the World War II effort. The metal inscription plates from the gun are now hung on the west wall of St. Mary’s Parish Church as is another plaque made of marble in honor of all

#### **Comber World War 1 Memorial**



(Source: Lester Morrow)

congregation members who volunteered for war duty, including Edmund among thirteen who died and sixty-two “who happily returned.” (Niblock) A ground plaque dedicated to Edmund was installed in the Comber Square in 2015 by the UK Department of Communities and Local Government as one of 145 such plaques placed in towns of overseas Victoria Cross recipients (National Memorial Arboretum; Geograph)

The memory of Edmund is also celebrated by the Comber Ulster Defenders, Loyal Orange Lodge No. 100, whose members have carried his picture on their banner during July 1<sup>st</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and other occasions. Similarly Comber Old Standard, Loyal Orange Lodge 567, for whom Edmund’s aunt, Bessie Stone, once bought a banner with a picture of William of Orange, unfurled a banner carrying her image in 1939. (See the following page).

#### **Memorial Cannon to Edmund in Comber Square Being Cut up for Scrap**



(Source: Comber Historical Society)

**Banners of the Comber Ulster Defenders, L.O.L. 100 and Comber Old Standard, L.O.L 567 Bearing Pictures of Edmund DeWind and Bessie Stone**



(Source: Keith Haines)



(Source: Desmond Rainey)

Further, when an estate was built on the outskirts of Comber off Newtownards Road in the 1950s, one of its streets was named "De Wind Drive" after Edmund.

**DeWind Drive in Comber**



(Source: Lester Morrow)



Finally, in 2007, the Ulster History Circle posted a Blue Plaque in Edmund's honor on Bridge Street, close to where Edmund once lived growing up with his family. The plaque describes Edmund as a "soldier born and bred in Comber." At the occasion of the plaque's unveiling, Edmund's grandniece, Johanna Brink Flynn, repeated a question that had been asked about the World War I sacrifices made by Edmund and other of Comber's townsfolk by Len Ball and Desmond Rainey in their book, *A Taste of Comber: The Town and Its History*: "What sort of a world had they given their lives for?" (Ball and Rainey: 87) Johanna's answer pointed out, in part, what is reflected in the town's memorials: "Edmund was deeply rooted in his community, he was brave; family and countries were important enough to him. But a family is part of a larger community and it cannot thrive unless it shares and reflects the community's values. So while this man did an extraordinary act, it was an act that was rooted in his community of Comber." (Ulster History Circle) The many ways that Edmund's life, dedication to the Empire, and valorous death have been commemorated by the town's people attest to the truth in this statement.

**Memorial Plaque in St. Mary's Parish Church, Comber  
With Quote from Revelation 2:10**



(Source: *St. Mary's Parish Church Outreach*, March 2018, Volume 51, Number 2)



## Postscript: Edmund's Centennial Commemoration, 2018

Numerous groups in Comber and Northern Ireland organized commemorations of Edmund on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. I attended most of those described below with my wife, Dee, and son, Sam. Foremost was the initiative of the Edmund DeWind Centenary VC Committee in Comber and the Ards and North Down Borough Council, which together organized a service "Commemorating the Valour of Second Lieutenant Edmund de Wind VC" in the Comber Square. The service program (below) indicates the participation of church, Ards and North Down and Canadian government officials, Canadian and British military representatives, local musical groups, and family. The *Newtownards Chronicle and North Down Observer* reported the event and then posted a video of parts of the ceremony online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4NNeQrO8X8>.

### Program for Centenary Service, Comber Square, 21 March 2018

#### Order of Service

**Arrival of VIP Guests**  
**National Anthem (Please Stand)**

**Welcome**  
The Revd Canon Dr Jonathan Barry,  
Rector of Comber

Prayer  
Reading ~ St John 15: 9-17  
Prayers

**Hymn**  
O God Our Help in Ages Past  
O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home;

Beneath the shadow of thy throne  
Thy saints have dwelt secure;  
Sufficient is thine arm alone,  
And our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,  
Or earth received her frame,  
From everlasting thou art God,  
To endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight  
Are like an evening gone;  
Short as the watch that ends the night  
Before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away;  
They fly forgotten, as a dream  
Dies at the opening day.

O God our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Be thou our guard while troubles last  
And our eternal home.

Isaac Watts 1674-1748  
based on Psalm 90: 1-6

**Tribute to Edmund de Wind VC**  
Mr Josh De Wind, Great Nephew

**Victoria Cross Citation**  
Read by Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Robert Adair

**Extract from Lt Cole Hamilton's Letter**  
Read by Mrs Carol Conway, Edmund de Wind VC 100 Committee

**Message from Lieutenant Governor of Alberta,**  
**Her Honour, the Honourable Lois E Mitchell, CM, AOE, LLD**  
Read by LCol Simon Rushen,  
Chief of Staff, Canadian Defence Liaison Staff, London

**Unveiling of VC Memorial Stone**  
Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Robert Adair  
and Mr Josh De Wind

**The Last Post**  
Bugler Lutton - 2nd Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment

**Two Minutes Silence**

**Reveille**

**Lament**  
Flowers of the Forest  
Pipe Major Barr - 2nd Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment

**Dedication of Victoria Cross Memorial Stone**  
The Revd Canon Dr Jonathan Barry, Rector of Comber  
Very Revd Fr Martin O'Hagan will sing "This is My Will"

**Wreath Laying**  
Lord Lieutenant for County Down, Mayor of Ards and North Down,  
LCol Simon Rushen, Mr Josh De Wind, Major George McFarland,  
2nd Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment  
[Musical Accompaniment by Comber Silver Band]

**Poem: The Anxious Dead**  
by LCol John McCrae, Canadian Army (who died in France in 1918)  
Read by Mr Ken Brundle, Honorary Consul of Canada in Belfast  
and Patron of the de Wind Memorial Appeal

**Closing Words and Prayer**  
**National Anthem**  
Guests return to St Mary's Parish Church Hall  
Killaloo [Comber Silver Band]



The commemoration's highlight was the unveiling of a carved granite stone in Edmund's honor, with inscriptions on all sides describing his history in the town, military service in the Canadian and British armed forces, and his valorous death. The placement of the stone in the town's square was organized by the centenary committee and paid for by donations of organizations, businesses, and people of Comber. Amanda Martin, head of administration for the borough council orchestrated the preparations and ceremony and the Comber Silver Band provided music. (<https://www.comberbrass.co.uk> )

### Memorial Plinth in Edmund's Honor, Comber Town Square



(Source: Josh DeWind)

As Edmund's grandnephew, I read the following remarks seeking to put the attention that was being given to Edmund in a broader context of how World War 1 affected others in Comber and County Down:

My name is Josh DeWind and I am here speaking to you because Edmund DeWind was my great uncle.

We are here to commemorate the Edmund DeWind's death in part because he was awarded the Victoria Cross for his valorous actions 100 years ago today defending the Racecourse Redoubt outside of Grugies, France. The Victoria Cross is explicitly awarded to individuals for specific acts of gallantry. In a few minutes you will hear an account of Edmund's actions that led to his being awarded the Victoria Cross.



But we are not here only to remember Edmund or his actions. We are also here to remind ourselves of the values that the Victoria Cross represents.

Stephen Hawking, the astrophysicist who died only last week and was described in the *New York Times* as having “struggled with the marriage between time and space,” once said, “It is the past that makes us who we are. Without history, we lose our identity.”

I give thanks to the women and men of Centennial Committee, the Mayor and staff of the Ards and North Down Council, the North Down Museum, and to all others who have participated in the creating this opportunity to share our remembrances of World War 1 and its impact upon our lives.

I would like to share with you a bit of what I have learned of Edmund’s history in preparing for this commemoration: his valorous death, his being awarded the Victoria Cross, and his life, particularly with his youth and formation growing up here in Comber.

I learned that the Royal Warrant creating the Victoria Cross in 1856 announced its purpose was to recognize those soldiers who “served Us in the presence of the enemy, and shall have then performed some signal act of valour, or devotion to their country.” (London Gazette, 5 February 1856) On enlisting first in the Canadian Army and then the Royal Irish Rifles Edmund described his devotion as wanting to defend the Empire. That was the context within which he understood and appreciated the comforts of family that nurtured him as a boy, the social ties that he created growing up in Comber, the religious and political liberties that tied Ireland to the United Kingdom, and his access to considerable economic prosperity, which was made possible through his emigrating and resettling in Canada. It was this part of the Empire that Edmund pledged to defend and ultimately died in doing so.

Despite the significance of Edmund’s individual acts of valor 100 years ago today, on 21 March 1918, we are here to commemorate their wider and continuing significance for the community of Comber and County Down as a whole. I expect that all of us who have chosen to assemble here have memories of family, friends, and town members whose lives were deeply affected by World War 1. While we are at liberty to choose what aspects of that history we wish to embrace as part of our identities today, I suspect that each of us wishes to recognize and reaffirm our indebtedness to all those family, friends, and countrymen and women whose act of devotion in the past have made possible the lives that we enjoy today.

Let me leave you with one last thought: The plaque to Edmund in St. Mary’s Church quotes Revelation: “Unto death be thou faithful and I will give thee a crown of life.” The Victoria Cross has become Edmund’s crown and our commemoration recognizes and sustains the significance of its values in our identities and lives today.

A reception organized by parishioners was held at St. Mary’s Parish Church, whose Rector Reverend Canon Dr. Jonathan Barry placed a biography of Edmund in the church’s newsletter, *Outreach*, along with related pictures and later followed up by sending me Edmund’s baptismal record and his parents’ wedding certificate which he discovered going through church records.

**Members of the Edmund DeWind VC Centennial Committee and DeWind Family  
after the Unveiling of the Memorial Plinth, in Comber Square**



*Left to right in the two front rows are: Desmond Rainey, Desmond Mackey, Councillor Trevor Cummings, Alan (Joe) Stevenson (Comber Loyal Orange District Lodge), Samuel DeWind, Dona Ratterree DeWind, Jim Hamilton, Josh DeWind, Roy Murray, Irene Atherton (Comber Regeneration Community Partnership) Robert Bennett (Comber Historical Society), Carol Conway (Royal British Legion Comber Branch), and Philip Smith (CRCP). In the rear: Martin McIlheney holds the Canadian flag and David Dornan the British Legion flag.*

**Campbell College:**

On the evening prior to the commemoration service in Comber, Edmund's school, Campbell College organized its own remembrance of Edmund, which was part of a larger effort to renovate the college's memorials for all college members who fought in World War 1. Since then, the college has refurbished its memorial. The portion dedicated to Edmund now includes facsimiles of his Victoria Cross and other medals as well as his photograph and brass plaque. Edmund's biography has been included in a website history of the college's connections with World War 1, the "Men Behind the Glass."

<http://menbehindtheglass.co.uk/the-men/edmund-de-wind>

**Sam and Dee DeWind at Campbell College and the Subsequently Refurbished Memorial to Edmund and other World War 1 Soldiers**



(Source: Campbell College)



(Source: Campbell College)

**The Ards and North Down Borough Council:**

The Mayor of the Ards and North Down Borough Council, Robert Adair, took the DeWind family members on a tour of Mt. Stewart House, which was the home of the Londonderry family, whose 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century members were prominent in unionist politics. Edmund's great grandfather, John Andrews, managed the design and may have partly financed the construction of this neoclassical manor. His wife, Sarah, arranged furnishings. Their portraits hang in the dining room at Maxwell Court. Mt. Stewart House is now maintained by the UK National Trust.

**John Andrews**



(Source: Maxwell Court)

**Sarah Drennan Andrews**





### Ards and North Down Council Members at Pozieres



(Source: Stephen Reid)

Later, in July 2018, (left to right) Alderman Bill Keery; the newly elected Mayor, Councillor Richard Smart; Councillor Scott Wilson; and Chief Executive Stephen Reid visited the British Cemetery at the Pozieres Memorial, where they laid a wreath for Edmund under his name, which is carved into the wall.

### North Down Museum:

The North Down Museum, which is located in Bangor, North Down, and is under the direction of Heather McGuicken, created a travelling exhibit of panels describing Edmund's life and flipbooks describing his death as well as listing the names of other fallen soldiers from Comber and County Down. Edmund's story drew from an early draft of this biography, though the museum staff added information and photographs of Edmund and Comber. The panels and flipbooks were on display at St. Mary's Parish Church during the commemoration and circulated to other nearby sites subsequently.

### With Heather McGuicken in front of North Down Museum's Panels and Exhibit



(Source: Dee Ratterree)

### Ballyroberts Drummers:

On the evening of the commemoration in the Square, Stuart Coey of the Ballyroberts Drummers and his grandfather, Walter Coey, unveiled a new Lambeg Drum that was dedicated to Edmund with pictures of him, the memorial German cannon originally placed in the Square, and other pictures of Comber by the well-known banner painter Stuart Rogers. The presentation took place in the rebuilt Orange Hall, which replaced the original Protestant and Orange Hall that had been designed by Edmund's father. The *Newtownards Chronicle* and *North Down Observer* posted a video of the ear deafening event. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmRfHpR8pZA>

### Ballyroberts Drummers (Stuart Coey with Edmund's Drum on left)

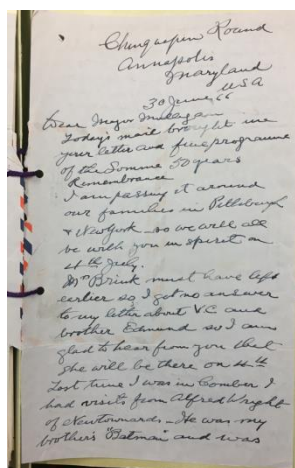


(Source: Josh DeWind)

### Royal Ulster Rifles Museum:

The museum's curator, Gavin Glass, and museum assistant, Christine Beggs, opened the museum's doors off schedule at the request of trustee Lester Morrow to show us their collection of weapons, uniforms, medals, and other regimental memorabilia. Their archives hold a file on Edmund, which includes letters from Edmund's brother, Norman, providing information about Edmund's "Batman," his mother's receiving Edmund's Victoria Cross from King George V in a private audience, and Edmund's having applied for transfer back to his Canadian battalion before his death at the Racecourse Redoubt.

### Norman DeWind's Letter Mentioning Alfred Wright, Edmund's "Batman"



(Source: Ulster Rifles Museum)





### The Somme Association Museum:

Directed by Carol Walker, the museum organized two concerts and lectures by Dr. Jack Sheldon, an independent historian of World War 1 specializing particularly of the operations of the German army. Because DeWind family members were in the audience on the night of 23 March, he specifically

addressed the battle for the Racecourse Redoubt. Carol arranged for Austin Cheevers to give us a tour of the museum, including a number of graphic dioramas depicting WW1 trench warfare, and for Dr. Sheldon to have supper with us. Subsequently on 20 June 2018, Austin sent a copy of a sympathy note he had discovered written by Alice DeWind to the mother of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Samuel McKee Geddis, who was a friend of Edmund from just outside Comber and was killed in France in September 1918, when the DeWinds had only recently confirmed Edmund's death.

<http://www.sommeassociation.com/visit/somme-museum>.

### WW1 Trench War Fare Diorama



(Source: Josh DeWind)

### Parade of the Goldsprings True Defenders Flute Band:

Three days after the commemoration ceremony in the Square, the “blood and thunder” Goldsprings True Defenders Flute Band organized a parade in Edmund's honor.

### Goldsprings True Defenders Flute Band Drum and Badge



(Source: Youtube)



*Alan (Joe) Stevenson wore the Goldsprings badge embroidered on his shirt sleeve along with Edmund's name and that of the 15<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles.*

View the parade, including the Schomberg Fife and Drum, at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qysqiRZgOkk>)

### The Ulster Scots Centre:

Gordon Lucy reported that the Ulster Scots Centre in Belfast (<http://ulster-scots.com>) hosted two poetry readings to mark the centenary of the German Spring Offensive and Edmund's death. The last of the poems to be read was Siegfried Sassoon's "Aftermath," which provides a brutal but apt coda for Edmund's biography:

#### **Aftermath**, by Siegfried Sassoon

*... Have you forgotten yet?...*

*Look down, and swear by the slain of the War that you'll never forget.*

Do you remember the dark months you held the sector at Mametz—  
The nights you watched and wired and dug and piled sandbags on parapets?  
Do you remember the rats; and the stench  
Of corpses rotting in front of the front-line trench—  
And dawn coming, dirty-white, and chill with a hopeless rain?  
Do you ever stop and ask, 'Is it all going to happen again?'

Do you remember that hour of din before the attack—  
And the anger, the blind compassion that seized and shook you then  
As you peered at the doomed and haggard faces of your men?  
Do you remember the stretcher-cases lurching back  
With dying eyes and lolling heads—those ashen-gray  
Masks of the lads who once were keen and kind and gay?

*Have you forgotten yet?...*

*Look up, and swear by the slain of the War that you'll never forget!*

#### **Comber Square, Spring 2018**



## **Post-Postscript: Centenary Remembrance of the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918 Armistice**

Eight months after the centenary of Edmund's death his memory was again celebrated during remembrances of the 11 November 1918 armistice, which ended World War 1. My son, William DeWind, returned with me to Northern Ireland to participate in services in both Comber and Belfast.

### **The Centennial Remembrance in Comber:**

As part of a morning service, which had been organized by Major J. Norman of the British Legion and the secretary of St. Mary's Church and led by Reverend Ian Gilpin, minister of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church, Will laid a wreath at the base of Edmund's plinth, which had been placed in the Square months earlier. Four cadets read the Roll of Honour with names of those from Comber who served and died in the war. Representatives of various military and civilian groups and individuals laid

### **Armistice Day Remembrance, Comber Square, 11 November 2018**



(Source: Josh DeWind)



more than twenty wreaths at the foot of the World War 1 memorial in honor of all those who served. The laying of wreaths was followed by a service at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Presbyterian Church.

Ten days later, the Edmund DeWind Centenary Committee presented to the Comber Army Cadet Corps a shield with Edmund's name, to which will be affixed the name of the cadet who has "improved" most over the prior year – thus, the shield will become a "perpetual memorial" to Edmund and cadets.



### Presentation of Shield to Comber Army Cadet Corps



(Source: James Hamilton)

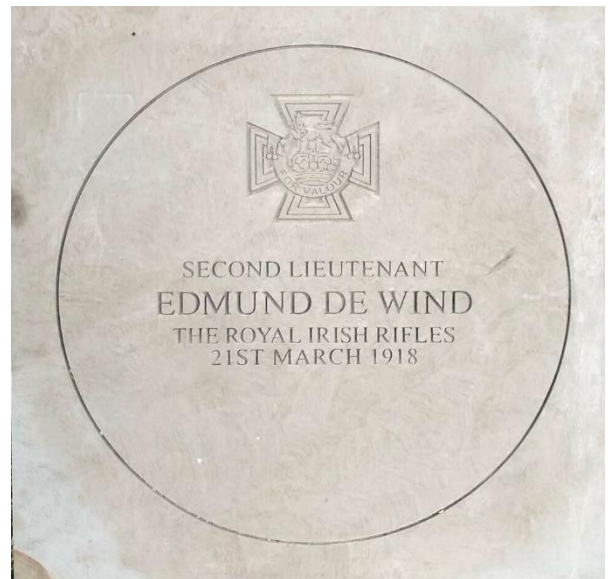
### Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin

As the remembrance in Comber was taking place, the president-elect of the Republic of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, spoke just outside of Dublin at the Glasnevin Cemetery ending what he called an “official amnesia” about World War 1 to recognize the “common humanity” of all the 14 million people who died in that “terrible conflagration,” which destroyed “the promise of the World War 1 generation” and “disfigured a century.” To honor the dead, plaques commemorating five Irish soldiers who had been awarded Victoria Crosses, including Edmund, were unveiled. The event was broadcast by Radio-Television Ireland: <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2018/1111/1010110-100th-anniversary-of-ending-of-world-war-1-today/>

### Glasnevin Cemetery World War 1 and Victoria Cross Memorials



(Source: Josh DeWind)



(Source: Will DeWind)



### **Belfast: St. Anne's Cathedral**

That afternoon, Will and I participated in the remembrance organized by the World War 1 Centenary Committee of Northern Ireland and the Cathedral Church of St. Anne. Although St. Anne's is the main cathedral of the Church of Ireland, representatives of other major Christian churches of Northern Ireland participated. In addition to the Church of Ireland archbishop and the bishop of the Diocese of Down and Dromore, the Irish Council of Churches president, Methodist Church president, Presbyterian Church moderator, and the Roman Catholic archbishop took part. Inside the cathedral is a military memorial presented by officers of the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division, which includes eight volumes of the Irish Memorial Records, which list the names of 49,435 Irishmen killed during the war.

The sermons and lessons of the service focused not only on remembrance but also, with indirect reference to contemporary political tensions, on reconciliation. Prince Andrew, the Duke of York KG, who had attended a St. Ann's commemoration of the beginning of the war, read movingly from John 14: 9-17 including, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Drawing the service to a close, four people with direct connections to Irishmen who died in the war carried the

**Saint Anne's Cathedral, Belfast**



(Source: <http://flickrriver.com/groups/belfast/pool/random/>)

Memorial Record books to the front of the cathedral and presented them to political and religious leaders. Will carried the book listing Edmund's name and handed it to Karen Bradley, Secretary of State of Northern Ireland. Then the marshal of the Royal British Legion gave Will and each of the other book bearers lit candle lanterns. Carrying their candle lanterns down the aisle toward the cathedral's entrance, the first stopped one-quarter of the way, the second in the middle, and the third three-quarters of the way. Will carried his lantern the cathedral's full length and out onto the front steps, where in the darkness he held it up to illuminate the pillar bearing Edmund's name. After the ceremony, at the request of Prince Andrew, Will and I, as the only descendants representing a Victoria Cross awardee, assembled with religious and military leaders to greet the prince.

## Will DeWind's Participation in the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018 Armistice Remembrance St. Anne's Cathedral

### Carrying the Candle Lantern out of St. Anne's Cathedral



(Source: BBC Television, courtesy of  
Lester and Roberta Morrow)



(Source: Josh DeWind)

### Holding the Candle Lantern in Front of Edmund's Pillar and Shaking Hands with Prince Andrew



(Source: Josh DeWind)



(Source: BBC Television, courtesy of Lester and Roberta Morrow)

**Still Remembering**

As Will was exiting St. Anne's cathedral with his candle lantern, Lt. Col. Kingsley Donaldson, who had organized the service, read out from the pulpit, "At the going down of the sun, we remembered them!" And we still do. On 4 December 2018, Sam and Sasha DeWind had a baby boy, whom they named, in part, after Edmund.

**Adrian Wesley Edmund DeWind**



(Source: Sam and Sasha DeWind)



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**Appendix 1:  
Order of Battle for Edmund DeWind**

**Canadian Expeditionary Force at St. Eloi and Courcelette in 1916:**

Private No. 79152  
C Company – Machine Gun Section  
31<sup>st</sup> (Alberta) Battalion  
6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade  
2<sup>nd</sup> Division  
Canadian Corps

**British Expeditionary Force at Grugies during the German Spring Offensive in 1918:**

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant  
D Company  
15<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion Royal Irish Rifles  
107<sup>th</sup> Brigade  
36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division  
5<sup>th</sup> Army



## Appendix 2: Pictures of Edmund DeWind in Military Uniforms

**2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Queen's Own Rifles, Toronto**



**31<sup>st</sup> Alberta Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, C.E.F.**



**Legion of Frontiersmen,  
Edmonton**



(Source: DeWind Archives)

**15<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion, Royal Irish Rifles,  
36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division**



### Appendix 3: Edmund's Family



**Arthur Hughes DeWind (1837-1917):** Edmund's father. Born in Malacca, Arthur was sent as a child to London for his early education and he then he studied civil engineering at the University of London. While employed by the Belfast and County Down Railway, he met Margaret Jane Stone. After their marriage 1863 the newly-wed couple moved to Singapore where he served as commissioner for municipal and public works and Margaret gave birth to five children. They returned to live in Comber in 1872, when Arthur resumed employment with the BCDR. After retiring from the railway in 1877 he took up practice as an architectural engineer and surveyor. He directed the choir and played the organ in St. Mary's Church for more than 40 years. He died while Edmund was fighting in France.



**Margaret Jane Stone (1843-1922):** Edmund's mother. Margaret was the daughter of Guy Stone and she was raised in the family's ancestral "plantation," Barn Hill, just outside of Comber. She married Arthur Hughes DeWind in 1863 and gave birth to eight children who reached maturity. As her husband had died in 1917, she represented the family regarding Edmund's death. She went to Buckingham Palace to receive the Victoria Cross which was given to her by King George V in 1919. Subsequently, she helped to make ends meet by renting out land around Kinvara for agriculture. After her death, Norman sold Kinvara and her surviving daughters moved to Barn Hill.



**Arthur Adrian DeWind (1864-1908):** Edmund's eldest brother. Called Adrian, he was born in Singapore where she was baptized at St. Andrews Church by Rev. C. J. Waterhouse, chaplain. As a youth he played for the North Down Cricket Club's Second XI and in 1892 his teammates gave him an appreciative silver plaque, which he nailed to his bat. Educated at the Royal Academical Institute, which had been founded by his ancestor, William Drennan, and the Methodist College Belfast, he became an engineer and then emigrated to Khowang, Assam to become a tea planter. There he managed Dehing Tea Company gardens comprising 360 acres worked by 500 coolies. He joined the Assam Valley Mounted Rifles, a local police militia, and as a Trooper he won a trophy cup presented by the commandant, Colonel James Buckingham CIE. He was one of four men who won another cup for "sectional tent-pegging" in the Rajghur Club Gymkhana of 1900. A naturalist, he published articles about animals and plants; was an accomplished taxidermist; and he donated 30 snakes, other reptiles, and insects from Assam to the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society. He died at the Bhamun Gardens of malaria, which he contracted on a tiger hunting trip, and was buried in the British Cemetery in Dibrugarh. This picture shows Adrian wearing the AMVR's dress uniform.



**Catherine Anne DeWind Allen (1865-1948):** Edmund's oldest sister. Called "Kitty" by the family, she was born in Singapore where she was baptized at St. Andrews Church by Rev. C. J. Waterhouse, chaplain. She attended finishing school in Switzerland and in 1893 married James Graham Allen (1858-1924), an engineer. Allen brought to Comber the production of steam road rollers in 1899 and the first "oil road roller" in 1904. They lived on the Square, Comber. Norman DeWind worked for Allen before emigrating to Chicago. Kitty kept the company's books. The couple had no children. When Kitty died, she was living as a widow with her sisters, Alice Maud and Edith Caroline at Barn Hill.



**Mary Frances DeWind (1866-1885)** Edmund's sister. Called "Lillie" by the family (after her paternal grandmother, who lived died in Malacca in 1872), she was born in Singapore where she was baptized at St. Andrews Church by Rev. C. J. Waterhouse, chaplain. She was sent to finishing school in Switzerland, as were Kitty and Edie. Lillie developed tuberculosis and on one of her last visits home, to Hill View, she spent time with Florence and Edmund in the nursery, but was not able to pick them up because of her disease, from which she soon died.



**Edith Caroline DeWind (1868-1955):** Edmund's sister. Called "Edie" by the family, she was born in Singapore she was born in Singapore where she was baptized at St. Andrews Church by Rev. C. J. Waterhouse, chaplain. She passed local examinations for the University of Edinburgh in 1887 and went on to become a certified nurse in London and Birmingham. Soon after WW1 began she volunteered to work with the Friends Ambulance Unit in France and cared for soldiers, first as a Nurse Sister in the Villa St. Pierre hospital in Malo-les-Bains, Dunkirk and then as Matron in the British Red Cross Society No. 2 hospital in Abbeville. She returned to Comber in 1916 and in subsequent years continued to support war efforts and provide care for veterans. For many years she cared for her mother's sister, Bessie Stone. From 1952-1954 she lived in Lethbridge with her sister, Florence, and George O'Meara. She returned to live in an apartment and then a nursing home, both on Eglantine Avenue in Belfast, where she died.





**Louise Margaret DeWind (1869-1917):** Edmund's sister. Called "Lulu" by some family members, she was born in Singapore where she was baptized at St. Andrews Church by Rev. J. Alleyne Beckles. The family archives contain little about this sister. She was born in Singapore and was baptized at St. Andrews Church by Rev. C. J. Waterhouse, chaplain. In the fall 1916 she went to visit for a year with Norman and his family in the United States, where she seemed shy of potential suitors. She returned to Comber and died while living with her parents in Kinvara and while Edmund was at the front in France.



**Alice Maude DeWind (1873-1947):** Edmund's sister. Born in Donaghadee, Alice, was baptized at the Comber Church by Rev. George Smith. Like Louise, she never married and remained with her parents and helped to take care of them in their later years. She too never married. Following Edmund's death and WW1, for many years she organized the Comber Poppy Day Appeal. She was living at Barnhill with her sisters when she died.



**Norman DeWind (1875-1974):** Edmund's brother. Norman was born in Donaghadee and was baptized at the Comber Church by Rev. George Smith. He emigrated in 1907 to Chicago, where he designed and marketed gasoline powered road rollers for the Austin Co. Edmund visited Norman and his wife Ethel from Canada. When Edmund enlisted into the Canadian army, Norman took on responsibility for managing Edmund's financial affairs. Norman supported his parents and sisters in Comber, including designing and paying for the construction of the family's home, Kinvara, where his parents and unmarried sisters lived after 1909, the same year that Norman married Ethel Andrews.





**Ethel Andrews (1876-1975):** Edmund's sister-in-law. Daughter of John Andrews, J.P. of Comber, Ethel (known by her family as "Tookie") grew up in Maxwell Court and Uraghmore within the large extended Andrews family with many cousins, one of whom she fondly remembered playing with was Thomas Andrews, who became the designer and construction supervisor of the Titanic at the Harland and Wolff ship yards in Belfast. She raised two sons, Norman John Stone DeWind ("Norrie") and Adrian William Andrews DeWind ("Bill").



**Florence Madeline DeWind O'Meara (1877-1971):** Edmund's youngest sister. Florence was born in Donaghadee and was baptized at the Comber Church by Rev. George Smith. She grew up in Comber and in 1914, following her sweetheart George O'Meara, she emigrated to Wainwright, Alberta, where they married and homesteaded until George began employment as a high school teacher. Florence undertook a number of charitable activities, including membership in the Red Cross Society sewing group (using a portable Singer Sewing Machine), and was for many years Educational Secretary of the Independent Daughters of the Empire, among many other medical, social, and athletic enterprises.



**George O'Meara (1886-1943):** Edmund's brother-in-law. George grew up with his uncle, who was rector of the Killinchy Church, just outside of Comber. He and Edmund were playmates growing up and remained friends when George emigrated and settled in Wainwright, Alberta. Soon after, he married Edmund's sister, Florence. George was not able to enlist because of a heart murmur resulting from childhood scarlet fever. He and Florence remained in Alberta as homesteaders until George took employment as a high school teacher and they raised their family in Lethbridge, Alberta.



**Mary Emily Evelyn Robinson (1886-1953):** Edmund's fiancée. Known as "Mollie," she was the daughter of William J. Robinson, a solicitor in Boyle, County Roscommon and Elizabeth Cherrie Robinson, who died 14 April 1902, when Mollie was 16. Mollie and Edmund may have met when he worked for the Belfast Bank in Cavan. After Edmund emigrated to Canada in 1910, they kept in touch affectionately through correspondence. Mollie's father died 1 January 1912. They were briefly reunited after Edmund had completed officer training in England in 1917 and was posted temporarily to Dundalk, in Ireland. Shortly after, he referred to her for the first time as his fiancée in his will, which left her an equal share of his estate with his unmarried sisters. After Edmund's death, other family members worried about Mollie's health and wellbeing. She seems to have supported herself working as a lady's help or companion.

History we know too often as a valley of dry bones. The shapes of the past it exposes are but skeletons, more or less bleached or broken as the time to which they belong is far away or near. What corresponds to mass, form, colour, and movement of living bodies, — the intimate, infinite detail of the life of long ago, — is missing. If the land of the life is our land, its long dead our forefathers, then, for sight of dry bones, — records of battles in field or trials in law-courts, of grants of acres and titles, — we crave the touch of beings in whom is “the heat of life.” We long to get close to the old folk in their daily round, — to know them as they ate, drank, married or were given in marriage, as they worked, talked, thought, prayed, loved or hated; — in their sweet contents and vexing disappointments. We wish, in short, to see them alive, — and the vision comes but seldom by way of history.

-- John Stevenson, 1920, *Two Centuries of Life in Down, 1600-1800* (Belfast: The Linenhall Press, M’Caw, Stevenson & Orr, Limited), pg. 1.

Back Cover: Edmund DeWind likely in Comber, at Kinvara 1917, and perhaps his last photograph.



