

Dr. Allen Buchanan (third from right in back row) aboard the Carpathia enroute to Europe in 1917 with the group from Grand Valley who enlisted in the 164th Battalion.

The Long March

Although Canadians were involved in World War I from its early stages, it was not always easy to recruit enough men to raise a battalion for duty overseas.

When the 164th Battalion began looking for recruits in the fall of 1916 it was unsuccessful. Then one of its founders, Colonel Donville, received permission for the battalion to march through Dufferin and Halton counties to find recruits.

The 164th were the only group to do this and they needed special permission to get this concession. Since Col. Donville was a brother-in-law of Sir Sam Hughes, the man at the head of the Canadian Army, it was easy to guess how the permission was granted says one of the men who marched with the battalion in its recruiting hike from Camp Borden to Oakville in the fall of 1916.

Dr. Allen Buchanan, a retired Acton dentist, remembers leaving school in Grand Valley as soon as he turned 18 and going to Camp Borden to join the 164th Battalion. They needed 1,000 men to form a battalion and there was only 600 to 700 men on the march.

It took them 18 days. They usually rested up a day at each town they stopped in. Most of the time they were bedded down in churches. Dr. Buchanan says they were given chicken dinners in Orangeville and Oakville and when the call for food went out in Erin after their arrival they got over 200 pies.

Their stops were Shelburne, Grand Valley, Orangeville, Alton, Erin, Georgetown, Acton, Milton, Burlington, and Oakville. They spent the winter of 1916-17 in the Westinghouse Barracks in Hamilton.

The 204th Battalion was broken up during the winter and some of its men filled up the 164th's ranks. In April, 1917, the battalion left Halifax aboard the Carpathia, a ship that was recognized in those days because it was the first one to reach the Titanic.

Dr. Buchanan was a signaller during WWI. He spent nearly a year in England before he was posted to the 102 North British Columbia Battalion and went to France. His first major engagement was the Battle of Arras.

"That was the last time the cavalry was used," he says. "They found a train bringing in reinforcements to the Germans and they sent the cavalry up the line and shot them as they were coming off the train."

He got a piece of shrapnel in his left arm in September and was shipped to hospital in England. He was fit again and on the parade ground ready to leave for France when word came through that the war was over.

"We took our own leave and headed for London then," he chuckles. "I never did get to bed that night."

He began his dental training in 1919 and spent the Second World War in the Royal Canadian Dental Corps.

"I'd never have enlisted if I'd known I couldn't get overseas," he says.

Since he was over age to go overseas, he settled for an administration course and ran dental clinics in Toronto and later in Winnipeg.

Robert Stewart, another Acton man who was on the Borden to Oakville march with the 164th Battalion enlisted in January 1916. He was only 15 at the time. He joined the Boy's Bugle Band in Milton and was sent from there to Orangeville. Then they were sent to Camp Borden to cut trees and clear the ground for the base.

Stewart can both remember Camp Borden as a city of bell tents with two big water towers and a railway siding nearby. They say there were about 10,000 men in the camp in 1916.

Mr. Stewart went to France with the 164th Battalion in January 1918. Prior to that he had been asked if he'd care to join the band because word had got around that he could play the bugle.

"I told them no," he said. "I enlisted to be a soldier and I'm going to carry a rifle. Boy, did I regret that when the big shells started flying around," he grins.

Mr. Stewart won the Military Medal at the battle of Cambrai. It was the last big scap of the war, he says.

He was one of three men left to guard about a dozen wounded men. Their senior officer promised to send a rescue party but when he did not arrive two days later, Mr. Stewart's sergeant ordered him to spike their gun and go for help.

If they had dared to return the German fire that was falling all around them the enemy would have been able to locate them and they'd all have died.

The three armed men made it back to their command and each earned the Military Medal because they carried a wounded companion along with them. The wounded men they left behind were captured. They survived however, and the sergeant raised so much fuss over the officer's neglect that the man was demoted, Mr. Stewart says.

When he arrived back at Canadian headquarters two surprises were waiting for Mr. Stewart. The Prince of Wales (Edward VII) was visiting Canadians on a tour

of the forces and the commanding officer had found out his age.

It seems his older brother had nagged his mother into going to Queen's Park with proof of his age and demands that he be sent home because he was too young.

Mr. Stewart was sent to a Young Boys' Battalion at a camp in Wales to wait until he turned 18 and could go back to the front.

While he was at the camp he took part in a riot at a local dance. It seems that boys from the camp had gone to the dance and were giving soldiers from the regular British army unit stationed nearby such a lot of competition for the local girls that the older men threw the boys out.

Some of the young men returned to camp for reinforcements and about 1,000 of the 1,200 boys in the camp returned to the dance with them.

They tore the place apart, Mr. Stewart says, and the authorities had to call in a unit of British Young Boys with fixed bayonets to try to stop them. They were scared, he says, and looking back he feels sorry for them.

"We could have taken their guns away from them," he says, "because most of us had been to the front and we knew how. But they hadn't any experience and they didn't want to hurt us."

The Canadian camp authorities did a bed check at midnight and everyone who had been to the riot forfeited a month's pay, he says.

When WWI broke out, Mr. Stewart enlisted again. This time he spent his service supervising construction of new telephone lines in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

propaganda back to Britain. He'd tell the British how badly they were doing and how well the Germans were doing. The British called him Lord Ha Ha, he says, but he no longer remembers what his proper

name was. Once he broadcast about how Germany had destroyed Saitly Docks in a bombing raid on Birmingham. Since Birmingham is not on the coast, Tom says, he was quite puzzled about the docks until he found a member of his company who was a Birmingham native and could explain that Saitly Docks was the local nickname for the sewage works.

"It sounded pretty impressive until you found out the truth," he chuckles. Boredom drove him to volunteering again in early 1942. He and his mates expected to wind up in North Africa. Not so. It turned out to be Hong Kong, but the city fell before their arrival so they went to Ceylong instead with the 14th British Army, the "forgotten army."

They weren't needed in Ceylon either, when they arrived so they got sent on to Bombay. While they were in Ceylong, however, their commanding officer decided to take them for a route march to keep them busy while they awaited further orders. He

look them through the VD hospitals. "They looked awful. Scared the hell out of us all," he grins. At one point he was stationed north of Assam. Women carried water from a stream up a hill and poured it into a reservoir on the top, he says. This was the camp's water supply and the women worked at maintaining it all day, every day. He was fooling around with a youngster in the camp one day and at one point held him over the water pretending he was going to dunk him. A fearful hulla-balloo broke out and the boy ran away. He discovered to his horror that the natives thought he had

let the boy touch the water and because he was an un-touchable the reservoir was now polluted in their eyes and had to be drained. He was going to be charged with paying women to refill it, he says, only he was transferred inside a week of the incident.

When Japan surrendered he found he couldn't get home until all the prisoners of war had gone unless he volunteered for fatigues on a hospital ship. The hardest part of the whole trip home was seeing the men getting "Dear John letters" when their mail started catching up with them after all those months in prison camp, he says.

Tom Gadd is a World War II veteran who served in the British Army. He married a Canadian girl in 1942, but they didn't arrive in Canada until 1956. He freely admits that the painful memories have been packed away and any stories he tells are about the funny things he and his mates had to endure.

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He enlisted with the Royal Artillery. They drilled, but it was pretty useless because they had no guns to practise on.

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When war actually broke out they got equipment and the fooling around stopped. But not the boredom. At one point early in the war, Tom says, he was so bored he volunteered for a job that was supposed to get him to the front.

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SOME VETERANS WONDER. . .

Is Remembrance really meaningless?

Nov. 11 with all its pagentry and proud traditions is meaningless and unimportant to a great many of Canada's younger citizens in the opinion of a number of Halton Hills veterans of two world wars.

Robert Stewart who left his home near Acton to serve his country in 1916 adds that Remembrance Day will die out once the World War II veterans are gone.

"Do we remember the soldiers from Waterloo?" he asks. "What makes us any more important than they were?"

"It was a useless war anyway (World War I)," he says. "The theme we heard over and over was that this was the war to end all wars."

Yet 21 years later we turned around and did it all over again. We hadn't learned a thing."

Mike McGill, first world war veteran from Georgetown agrees that the significance of Nov. 11 is passing and also wonders if it is worth preserving.

"The kids don't want to hear about what we did or saw," he says. "I don't know how we could make it mean something to them. They're just not interested and I'm not sure we should try to impress them with Nov. 11's importance."

Mrs. S.J. Henderson, of Glen Williams, was a child in England during the Second World War and later married a pilot. She also feels that

today's generation has no interest in remembering past glories.

"They aren't interested in what we did. They want to live their own lives. We had to learn from our own mistakes and so do they."

All veterans agreed, however, that remembering is important to them as individuals.

"I don't believe in living in the past but once a year I like to go and talk over old times with others who shared similar experiences," says Gord Browne, a WWII veteran from Norval.

Mr. Stewart says he never bothered with Remembrance Day all the years he lived away from Acton. Then when he retired and came back he

found he enjoyed attending the parade and the service.

"Somebody always had to work Nov. 11 so I'd work and let the other men have the day to go to the parade. I go the service now we're back in Acton. The names on the cenotaph mean something here. The first name on the list in the furniture store window this week is A. Anderson. I knew Art. He was killed about 50 yards away from me in France in 1918."

Pte. Allison Henderson, a member of the regular army stationed at Camp Borden feels that Remembrance Day means something to all the men and women in the Canadian Forces.

Brian Chamberlain, the son of WWI veterans Pat and

Dorothy Chamberlain, feels that Remembrance Day is a good idea, but need not be confined to thoughts of those killed in battle.

Brian was in Vietnam and Germany with the United States Army. He says he was casually acquainted with half a dozen men who were killed in Vietnam during the 19 months he was there, yet his memories on Remembrance Day tend to centre on civilian friends he has lost through illnesses and accidents.

"The idea of setting aside a day to remember friends we've lost is good, but it wouldn't have to be Nov. 11," Brian says. "It could be any day. Nov. 11 just happens to be the one the government

has picked."

Mrs. Kay Bludd, a Georgetown woman with three sons in the Canadian Forces feels that Remembrance Day is being neglected. Giving school children the day off gives them no idea of what the holiday stands for, she says.

"We didn't get Nov. 11 off school," she says. "We had two minutes silence during school and we were told what it was all about. Maybe they should go back to that idea because kids don't understand it these days. Most parents are working Nov. 11 so they don't take their kids to the parade and the kids won't turn on the service from Ottawa when they're home alone."

Enlisting was the thing to do

Jim Yates says that when he left Georgetown early in 1942 to join the navy, he enlisted because it was what everyone was doing.

He found himself facing the same problem other servicemen faced and boredom drove him to asking for transfer that got him off a quiet job into something more active.

Jim began his service as a radar operator on board HMCS Baddeck a minesweeper plying between Victoria and Dutch Harbour, Alaska.

During the five months he was on it the only event he recalls was picking up survivors off a Russian transport vessel that sank.

When he was drafted to a corvette, the HMCS Outarde (the Indian word for Flying Goose) his ship, plus four

other corvettes and a destroyer, were escort vessels for convoys crossing the North Atlantic.

There were 50 to 100 vessels in each convoy, he says, and crossing took 15 or 17 days depending on the route.

Weather claimed nearly as many ships as the enemy did, he says. He remembers being caught by the tail end of a hurricane 500 miles south-east of Newfoundland in 1943.

They made the crossing with smashed turrets and no lifeboats or Carlie floats but two other escort vessels had to turn back to have damage repaired and five Liberty ships were lost in that storm.

After Jim had made three crossings on the Outarde the ship was loaned to the Royal Navy and he spent 22 months in the English Channel and the

North Sea. At the end of the war the Outarde had the longest overseas service record for any Canadian corvette. The ship was scrapped in July, 1945.

The Outarde was one of the ships that took part in D-Day. Jim says they were well warned about being sure that they were some part of their uniform, had their identification in some waterproof wrapping in their wallets,

and wore their dogtags when they headed for Normandy. They must be able to identify themselves as enlisted men just in case they were forced to abandon ship because if they had been caught in the casual gear they normally wore aboard ship, they could have been accused as spies and shot by the Germans.

Jim says that once when they got lost in the fog in the

North Atlantic they picked up a ship on radar that wouldn't identify itself.

They sent out a request for identification three times before they threatened to open

fire if they got no answer. The answer came back finally saying that it was a British battleship and encouraging them to "carry on Canada with your gallant little ship."

Stories

By Maggie Hannah

Herald staff writer

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JIM YATES

FRIEND FROM FOE

By SYLVIA VINCENT

In peace I'd gently walked the earth
I'd not been first to strike a blow,
But when past bloodshed found rebirth
I had no choice in war but "go!"

Out there at night in cold, damp sod
The bloody stench of death was nigh;
Instinctively I turned to God,
In time of need He heard my cry.

For then one night in that hell place
Tormented, yes! each poised to flee
My foe and I came face to face:
I couldn't shoot...yet...nor could he!

Since then I've tried in life's unfold
To look upon all men as "friend";
Remembering horrors still untold
It's not been easy so to bend.

But with God's help in daily prayer
Anger and hate became outcast,
True understanding grew from fear,
Now peace within is mine at last!

**A SPECIAL
HERALD FEATURE**

It's a time to remember humor

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TOM GADD

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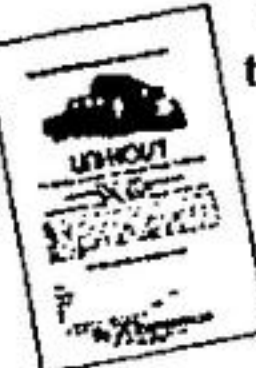
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