

REMEMBRANCE DAY



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8 Pages

Fighting Jack exuded the spirit of a young nation

By Greg Ferguson
Special to The IFP

As we approach Nov. 11, I wish to share with the people of Halton Hills the name of a true Canadian hero who is interred in Acton's Fairview Cemetery.

John A. Munroe, or as he was better known Fighting Jack, was an extraordinary Canadian. Yet little has been written about his exploits.

Born in the tiny village of Boulderville, N.S. and raised in the mining camps around Glace Bay and Cape Breton, Munroe worked in the pits until old enough to set off on his own and headed out west to seek his fortune.

He ended up a hard-rock miner in Montana and it was there that he was introduced to professional boxing in a travelling exhibition with the then-world-champion James J. Jeffries.

On Dec. 20, 1902, in Butte, Montana, Munroe defeated Jeffries in a four-round bout. It was reported that he gave as good as he took for three rounds and then decked the champion for a nine

count in the fourth round. In February 1904, he gave top-ranked heavyweight contender Tom Sharkey a fierce beating in a six-round match in Philadelphia.

Fighting Jack fought 20 major fights and won nine by knockouts. He lost only three fights.

At some point while in Mexico City, Munroe met Bobbie Burns, a stray collie dog that adopted him. They bonded and became inseparable. Munroe was often heard to tell friends that Bobbie Burns was Highland royalty in another incarnation.

Munroe continued to box for a few years and ran a horse book in Frisco using his wages from the Jeffries fight, before returning to Canada and settling in the Yukon briefly and heading back east. Shortly after moving to Ontario, Munroe settled down and became reeve of Elk Lake.

At the outset of the Great War, Munroe was one of the first to enlist with Canada's famous Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. This group of soldiers became what is still known as the Originals amongst Patricia's and hold



John A. Jack Munroe died in Toronto in 1942 and is buried in his wife's family plot in Acton's Fairview Cemetery. The only indication of this real Canadian legend and hero is a metal Lest We Forget plate installed by the Royal Canadian Legion.

an honoured place in the regiment's history.

The PPCLI, or Patricia's, was a regiment raised with private funds by Captain Hamilton Gault

of Montreal. With the storms of war brewing, Hammy had been working behind the scenes with the government to form a regiment to send overseas. While working through the process and trying to come up with a name, he approached the then Governor General of Canada, the Duke of Connaught, Queen Victoria's youngest son for permission to use the name of his daughter, Princess Patricia as the name of the regiment.

The PPCLI set up recruiting across Canada using Lansdowne Park in Ottawa as the primary base and within days more than a thousand men were on the nominal role. Most of these soldiers had prior military experience, some from the recent Boer War. One of these Originals was Munroe along with Bobbie Burns. When Munroe enlisted so did Bobbie Burns. After arriving in Valcartier prior to leaving for France, Bobbie got into a fight with a much larger dog. Bobbie won handily and it has been reported as the first fight won by a Patricia. Shortly after this, Princess Patricia proclaimed Bobbie regi-

mental mascot and presented him with a jeweled collar inscribed: Bobbie Burns PPCLI.

Munroe and Bobbie were inseparable and as such the collie was smuggled on trains, carried onto a troop ship in a gunny sack and slipped past England's animal quarantine. The PPCLI were sent overseas as a separate unit from the Canadian Expeditionary Force and were initially attached to the British Army. As a result, they have long gone by the moniker, First to Fight and were the first Canadian unit in combat in World War One. Interestingly, Munroe actually may have been the first Canadian to arrive in France to fight in the war. He leaped off the side of the ship onto the dock before the boarding ramp was up. The Patricia's also participated in the Second Battle of Ypres.

Munroe and Bobbie fought in all the regiment's major battles until Munroe was seriously wounded. On June 16, 1915, a German sniper picked Fighting Jack off.

The round exited close to his spinal column. Arterial blood spurted

Continued on page 3



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Lest we *forget*



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