

# Small-town, farm boys risked it all in Great War

BY FRED ROBBINS

Each Nov. 11, we gather to recall "Those who volunteered to put themselves in harm's way", and dedicate themselves to the protection of our home and country and way of life.

But who can name a First World War veteran from Whitchurch-Stouffville?

Whitchurch Township was a collection of small hamlets and rural families back then. Families went back four or five generations on the same farm. When the call was made, many stepped forward to serve.

I could name a couple. Lieut. R.C. Hollidge was a local boy from Vivian on Hwy. 48. He was to receive two medals for bravery in battle, the military medal and distinguished conduct medal, which was the army's second ranking gallantry award.

They were sent to his parents. Robert drowned in Musselman's Lake June 23, 1919. Not a strong swimmer, he had been wounded in the head and side. He survived the Great War but drowned while swimming back home. He was 20.

*... he received the Victoria cross posthumously for his action at Bournalon Wood in 1918. He died from gunshot wounds to the legs.*

His brother, Gunner Fred L. Hollidge, was returning home from the front May 26, 1919. The Vivian Station was well decorated with evergreen boughs and flags for his homecoming. "Ted", as he was known to his friends, was a very popular boy.

In 1917, Ted was severely wounded and spent a year in hospital and recovery camp. He was in France on active service again when the armistice was signed. Upon his return, he was met by his brother Robert who drove him out Vivian.

Another set of brothers was Fred Pearson, 21, and Thomas Cleveland. "Cleve" was 27 in 1916 when they signed up for overseas service with the Railway troops of the 127th Rangers. In 1919 Fred was gassed on the Ypres salient but refused to go to hospital. The Toronto Star said "Sixty men were gassed of the 127th regiment around Nieuport, during the famous

## DID YOU KNOW?

fighting in the sand dunes"

When Fred died in Stouffville shortly after the Great War, almost the whole town attended the funeral to support the family. He was 26.

Fred and Cleveland lived for a long time on Clarke Street just south of Main. "Cleve" lived a long and happy life and later inherited the family home.

The long forgotten Whitchurch boy was Lieut. Samuel Lewis Honey. The son of Rev. George Honey, the minister at Lemonville Wesleyan Church, he was teaching at Bloomington S.S. No. 10 School. On Jan. 22, 1915, he enlisted with the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force.

He was sent to Le Havre, France on Aug. 12, 1916 and received his sergeant stripes in the field six weeks later. Awarded the military and distinguished conduct medals, he received the Victoria cross posthumously for his action at Bournalon Wood in 1918. He died from gunshot wounds to the legs.

Ross "Shine" Davis enlisted in 1914 when the call for war was made. He became Sgt. Ross Kirby Davis in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. After returning to Stouffville, he went to work for Frank Rae for many years.

Some of the Stouffville boys had the privilege of serving under Lt. Col. Sam Sharpe. He was a soldier who served on the battlefield the French called "the graveyard of France".

He witnessed death and destruction on a scale that none of us can imagine - 800,000 casualties, 200,000 dead. He felt "a sacred trust" to bring his men home alive and he knew exactly how difficult it would be to honour that trust.

He had survived the bullets and bombs, but died in a Montreal hospital in 1918, of "complete mental and physical exhaustion". He was heartbroken by the loss of so many young men placed in his sacred trust.

We will remember them.

*Fred Robbins is a Stouffville historian. Did You Know is a periodic feature in The Sun-Tribune.*



STOUFFVILLE:1877/1977 A PICTORIAL HISTORY PHOTO

Whitchurch-Stouffville First World War veterans Fred Pearson (clockwise from top left), Del Jennings, Clarence Burkholder, Nelson Nendick, Ross Davis and Andy Cowie.



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