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A "Soldier of the Line"

Sergeant John Anderson Church, 38th Battalion, CEF

Ken Reynolds

Sergeant John Anderson (Jack) Church was awarded no bravery decorations, returning home from the First World War entitled to the Victory and War Medals like many other Canadians. He did not serve until the end of the war, nor even close to the conclusion of that dreadful conflict. Indeed, of the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who served in the war there would seem to be nothing especially noteworthy about Sergeant Church, a member of the 38th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). Perhaps this is why Jack Church was, and is, so special. After all, in statistical terms, the number of Canadian recipients of the Victoria Cross was insignificant. In addition, the typical Canadian soldier did not die during the First World War. Instead, the majority suffered – slightly or severely – with physical and mental wounds they would carry with them for the rest of their lives. In Jack Church's case these burdens would be borne until his passing in the late 1980s.

Jack Church was 18 years old when he joined the CEF. He was born in Smiths Falls, Ontario on 8 April 1896. He had no previous militia experience, was a Presbyterian, and listed his mother (Mrs. Elizabeth Church) as his next-of-kin. Church's physical examination showed him to be five feet ten inches in height, with a 36.5-inch chest, brown hair, brown eyes, and a "ruddy" complexion. On 24 February 1915, the 38th Battalion's

medical officer, Lieutenant James Munro, M.D., found him "fit" for service with the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force. Lieutenant-Colonel Cameron Edwards, the commanding officer of the 38th, then signed Church's attestation form. With that, Jack Church was a Private – serial number 410472 – in the 38th Battalion.¹

The material Jack Church left behind allows much more to be said about his war than his personnel file reveals. A long-time member of the postwar Toronto Branch of the 38th Battalion Association, Church wrote his memoirs, *Soldier of the Line*, recounting his wartime experiences for his grandchildren. His story is of interest to us all.

Jack Church missed the British declaration of war in August 1914. At that time he was working with a survey party in the Algonquin District of Ontario and so did not hear about the start of the war for an entire week. On his way home he passed through Ottawa, heard the news, and attempted to join the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, then being raised in the nation's capital. His attempt to join was, as he put it, "rudely repulsed."²

In September 1914 Church returned to Smiths Falls Collegiate where, in addition to his studies, he served with the school's cadet corps, taking his "duties very seriously." But the call to serve before the war was over – it would be by Christmas,

everyone knew – kept beckoning him. "As the only unmarried son I felt it my duty to represent the family in the defense of our country."³ In early November he tried to join the 2nd Battalion, CEF. Unfortunately for him, anyone under the age of 21 required parental consent to enlist. Mrs. Church would not cooperate:

When I came home and told my parents Mother immediately called the recruiting officer, Sid Gilroy, telling him he well knew I was under age and she would not give her consent. The next morning he tore up my attestation papers.⁴

Upon reflection, Church seemed somewhat relieved at his mother's decision given the incredibly large number of casualties which the "Iron 2nd" suffered in France.⁵

Nevertheless, getting into the military remained his primary goal. To him, this meant only the infantry as he was certain he did not want to shovel coal aboard a warship or be "hampered with a horse" as a member of the cavalry. Just before Christmas 1914 he was offered the prospect of an officer's commission in 1915 if he finished his school year. However, Church could not wait. On 14 January 1915 he and three friends met at the local recruiting office where the 43rd Regiment, Duke of Cornwall's Own Rifles, from Ottawa was enlisting soldiers for service with the 38th Battalion.

On the spur of the moment I decided to join my friends and when I told Capt. Grey [the recruiting officer] I was recommended for a commission he said the war would be over before I could get to France. That did it. Mother refused to sign my release but Dad did and I was in the army.⁶

In late February the recruits enlisted in Smiths Falls for the 38th Battalion were sent to Ottawa to join "C" Company at its headquarters in the former Ottawa Ladies' College on Albert Street. Accommodated in a nearby warehouse, the new recruits were issued uniforms and "long cotton underwear which we all swore was woven of barbed wire." Recruit Church was formally attested as a member of the 38th and, one week later, was promoted to the rank of Sergeant with No.11 Platoon, "C" Company, because of his experience in his high school's cadet corps.⁷

Basic military training was the highest priority after enlistment. Under the watchful eye of the 38th's first regimental sergeant-major, Warrant Officer Class I William Henry Marsden, the battalion concentrated on squad, company, and rifle drill in the small confines of the parade ground at the college. There was also the occasional route march through the snowy streets of Ottawa and, for Sergeant Church, additional duties such as conducting the drill of "C" Company's non-combatants (its cooks, batmen, clerks, etc.).⁸

By late May the 38th Battalion had recruited to its full strength and moved to Barriefield Camp, near Kingston, Ontario. The soldiers, housed in bell tents in the wet and unseasonably cold weather, carried



Sergeant Jack Church with his friend, Gert Dunham, in 1915

out battalion-level drill, conducted manoeuvres, and practiced their musketry skills at the rifle range. On his first weekend leave Sergeant Church spent part of his pay (he received \$1.50 a day) on a train trip to Orillia, Ontario, to visit a friend, Gert Dunham. An awkward moment arose during this visit as a result of an army regulation (according to Church) that forbid a soldier from shaving his upper lip so as not to effect his eyesight

and in turn effect rifle firing. As a result my upper lip was covered with a dark fuzz as I had matured late. Gert took one look at it and said she would not go out with me unless I shaved it off. That would be

against orders so I refused with the result [that] we spent the evening on the sofa while she clipped [them] off with a pair of scissors that were not too sharp.⁹

The 38th continued its training in Barriefield through June and July 1915. In late June the battalion sent 250 soldiers to France as reinforcements for the decimated 2nd Battalion. Church had mixed feelings about not being selected to go, as he felt that Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards was sending "his best trained troops." At the same time he realized how dangerous the situation in France was at the moment.¹⁰

At the end of July the 38th Battalion boarded a train for Ottawa where it received its colours in a ceremony held on Parliament Hill on 1 August 1915. Sergeant Church

participated in the ceremony as a member of the colour party, along with two subalterns and two warrant officers. After the ceremony the battalion marched down the street to the train station to head to Montreal and then, it was believed, to England for training with other Canadian units preparing for service in France and Flanders. Final goodbyes to family and friends were said at the station, and Church remembered his own "mother crying quietly on the station platform thinking she would not see her baby again. A lot of mothers and wives who were there didn't."¹¹

In Montreal the 38th boarded the SS *Caledonian* and began its voyage down the St. Lawrence River. After the ship had passed Quebec City a ceremony was held onboard involving Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards and the battalion's Colour party. The

commanding officer made a speech, gave each of the party's subalterns a bottle of champagne, and each of the warrant officers a large bottle of beer. Church recorded:

When it was my turn I had just started to say "Sorry, Sir, but I don't drink." but before I could finish I felt a sharp kick on the side of my leg as CSM [Company Sergeant-Major] Tim Carroll said out of the side of his mouth "Take it you dam [sic] fool." There was a roar of laughter from the crowd who had seen my hesitation and Tim's kick. Immediately [after] the colonel turned his back to walk away the bottle was snatched out of my hand as Tim said "Here you are too young for that."¹²

Soon, after the *Caledonian* reached the Gaspé Peninsula, it received reports of German submarines operating near the Canadian east coast and the troopship was forced to return to port. The battalion landed in Lévis, Quebec, and encamped in the area for the next few days. Then the 38th boarded trains for the trip to Halifax, only to learn on the way that the unit was not going to England but to the island of Bermuda to replace The Royal Canadian Regiment on garrison duty. Church noted: "There was a big row amongst the officers but to give them credit they kept it from the other ranks. It was as well they did as many were very angry at not being sent to France."¹³

The 38th Battalion arrived in Bermuda on 12 August 1915,



Regimental Museum of The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa

Sergeant Jack Church during his time on garrison duty in Bermuda.

and was sent to various locations throughout the British colony. No.11 Platoon (Church's sub-unit) was initially stationed on St. David's Island at the east end of Bermuda. The battalion had a rough initiation to its tour on garrison duty, as many of the soldiers had gotten sick on the journey from Halifax and a hurricane greeted the unit's arrival in Bermuda. However, the officers and men soon settled into their duties and readily adjusted to the beautiful scenery of the area.¹⁴

The majority of Bermuda's population were of African descent and a social separation existed between them and the British army and navy personnel on the islands. This distinction became apparent to the Canadian soldiers in several situations. For Jack Church the most personal of these occurred when he attempted to go to church in the town of St. George one Sunday morning. Arriving at the local Anglican church at 1000 hours, he followed other parishioners inside:

The service was in the basement and I sat down at the rear. It was then I noticed that the congregation was all black and they were turning around to give me some hostile stares. Presently two big blacks came up to me. "White man you are in the wrong place." "But this is a Christian church?" "Yas

sir but we don't want you. You go upstairs at 11 o'clock." They stood there till I got up and went out. Naturally I was too upset to



Left: Sergeant Church poses on the primary symbol of the British Empire.

Below left: Sergeant Church (left) with some his mates.



Regimental Museum of The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa

Regimental Museum of The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa

go to church that morning.¹⁵

The 38th's daily routine consisted largely of practicing drill movements, mounting sentries to watch for German submarines, patrolling the beaches, and keeping a police-type watch on the local population (the main occupation of the prewar British garrison). In the summer months the Canadian soldiers typically awoke at 0600 hours, ate breakfast at 0630 hours, practiced drill on the parade ground until 0730 hours, practiced more drill or carried out route marches until 1130 hours, frequented the canteens until lunch was served at 1230 hours, relaxed in the heat of the afternoon until 1600 hours, paraded, drilled, and marched some more until supper at 1700 hours, and had free time again until "lights out" at 2300 hours. The cooler days of winter allowed for an 0800 to 1700 hours "work" day.¹⁶ Extraordinary activities for the battalion included being inspected by the island's governor general, Sir William

Bullock; overseeing the disciplining of soldiers (especially if you were a platoon sergeant like Church); being relocated to another camp as the battalion's companies exchanged duties; and training in rifle firing and grenade throwing.¹⁷

Despite their constant activity, it was all too clear to the men of the 38th that they were missing the war. Finally, in the spring of 1916 the unit was informed that, having completed its training, it would be going overseas. At the end of May the battalion was replaced in Bermuda by the 163rd Battalion, a French-language unit formed in Montreal. The 38th boarded the SS *Grampian* on 29 May for the journey across the Atlantic. Compared to the ship that brought them to Bermuda from Canada, the *Grampian* was a pleasant ride, with bunks and "excellent meals" for the troops. However, in hindsight, Jack Church noted: "We all were excited at leaving Bermuda but were not in France two weeks before we were all wishing we were back there."¹⁸

Upon arrival in Plymouth on 9 June the troops disembarked and immediately boarded a train. Despite the fact that several of the Canadians – themselves railroaders – could not believe the tiny locomotive attached to the English coaches could pull the entire battalion to its destination, the 38th arrived at Camp Borden later that afternoon. Church remembered:

The driver was standing at the cab and called out "What have you got to say now Canada?" The next thing we known Sgts Killarney and Barnhart were passing their hats around then stepped up to the driver and gave him two hats full of pennies. [The driver said:] "Thanks, chaps, that will go to the Red Cross. We get a lot that way."¹⁹

The barracks at Camp Borden were "very old and dismal, built of concrete and brick with iron bunks, iron straps and straw palliases." The rain that met the Canadians' arrival did not do much for the camp's appearance and a logistical problem that left the battalion without a hot supper made the situation even worse. However, the men simply made a meal out of the plentiful supplies of bread, jam, and tea on hand.²⁰ Church recorded that, after about a week in Camp Borden, half of the battalion was given five days' leave, followed by the other half soon after the first group returned. He and five other sergeants pooled their money, went to London and stayed at the Shaftesbury Hotel where they "had a bed, two to a room, and breakfast for five shillings a night – what a bargain."²¹ The six sergeants spent their leave visiting the usual sights – the Tower of London, the Thames River, Piccadilly Circus – and going to shows until they ran out of money and returned to camp.²²

After the leave cycle was completed the 38th returned to a full training curriculum. Musketry practice on targets and exercises with live grenades "made it more interesting." Bayonet training was also carried out, accompanied by the advice: "Dont [sic] stick it in more than four inches or you wont [sic] get the bloody thing out in time for the next one."²³

On 13 August 1916, the soldiers of the 38th Battalion (now assigned to the 12th Brigade of the 4th Canadian Division) boarded a train for Southampton. There they exchanged train for troopship, boarding SS *Archangel*. After a wait of two and a half hours the unit finally set sail on what was bluntly described in the battalion's war diary as a "rough passage, many men sick."²⁴ Finally arriving in the coastal city of le Havre on the morning of 14 August, the battalion marched to a local holding facility, lovingly titled Large Rest

Camp Number 1, where they spent the next two days trying to complete a "bathing parade" before heading inland. After being transported close to the front lines near Poperinghe, Belgium on the morning of 18 August, the battalion marched off in the direction of a camp in the St. Lawrence area. For at least part of the battalion, introduction to the war was rapid. That night, 18 August 1916, "A" and "C" Companies "went into the trenches for instruction."²⁵

Sergeant Church's combat experience began that evening. Sent forward to the support trenches in the early afternoon to relieve a British regiment, "A" and "C" Companies got lost and did not reach their destination until 2200 hours. When they did arrive, the Canadians discovered that their trenches were partly filled with water from two straight days of rain. Church had a difficult time sorting out his men and had just gotten them organized when orders were received for his No.11 Platoon to send a three-man patrol into no-man's-land on a scouting mission. Church later recounted:

We crawled along between our barbed wire and Fritz's, scampering from shell hole to shell hole till we knew where his trenches and barbed wire was in front of our company. Apart from the whine of a few bullets over our heads and a few hand grenades, all misses, nothing much happened.²⁶

After his return to the 38th's trenches, Church and a friend tried to sleep out in the open on ground sheets, the wire bunks in their dugout being submerged in water at the time. Despite the shelling, both men were "so dog tired we just lay there taking our chances and were soon sound asleep."²⁷ "A" and "C" Companies returned to the rear area the next evening with no report of casualties or anything else of particular importance.²⁸

In late August 1916 the 38th Battalion moved around in the area behind the front lines in the Ypres Salient. There the men received further training and spent short periods of time in the trenches. Finally, on 30 August, the entire battalion (less a small group left behind) marched forward for a three-week period of front-line and support trench duties. The soldiers carried out "listening patrols," formed working parties, and faced machine gun, sniper, and artillery fire. On 23 September the battalion withdrew from the trenches for the rear.²⁹ The battalion war diary says very little about casualties during the unit's first real time in the trenches, but a total of seven men were killed in action or died from their wounds during the period 30 August to 23 September 1916.³⁰

Remembering this early period of the 38th Battalion's battle history later brought to Jack Church's mind memories of sentry duty, repairing trenches, and the dreaded responsibility of occupying an observation post at Suicide Corner in the town of Kemmel. Memories of German snipers and artillery, the unit's frustration with the Ross rifle, rum rations, cheap cigarettes, and good and bad variations of food fill his short memoir. For example, he wrote:

Everyone carried his own mess tin, knife, fork, spoon, mug and water bottle. Mess tins were cleaned by wiping out with a handful of dirt then rinsing in a tub or bucket of water that had a few drops of disinfectant [sic]. In addition each man had his own iron rations that consisted of a small tin of bully beef and a hardtack biscuit carried in the corner of the jacket. In the other corner was sewn a first aid kit comprising a small bottle of iodine and a bandage. Hardtack was biscuits about a half inch thick and three inches square. They were made of coarse flour with bits of

Sergeant Church early in his recovery in England after being wounded during the battle for Desire Trench.

dried meat mixed in. They couldn't [sic] be bitten but could be broken with the haft of the bayonet then placed in your mouth to soften or soften in the tea.³¹

In late September 1916 the battalion, along with the rest of the division, began to move south to participate in Canadian operations along the Somme front. After a few days march, interspersed by training along the way, it arrived at Tara Hill Camp, near the town of Albert. The 38th had arrived in the Somme. The Germans welcomed the battalion by shelling it the first night and into the next day. For almost two weeks the 38th was used as a reserve battalion. Sergeant Church mostly remembered sleeping in chicken wire bunks in a farm's chicken house and discovering, to his great embarrassment, that his uniform was infested with lice: "to my amazement the seams were crawling and I didn't know I had them. Did I have to take a kidding but worse still, now [that] I was aware of it, I started scratching." The battalion provided working and funeral parties while under shellfire for almost the entire period. On 18 October its



war diarist reported: "Enemy shelling at night so intense and close that at one time it appeared that it would be necessary to occupy the trenches supplied for shell shelter." The fall season also brought poor weather in the form of heavy rains.³²

On 26 October the battalion moved into the front line trenches for a nine-day period.³³ Church would later write:

No.11 Platoon was placed in the front line in a zig-zag trench with duck boards, a firing step and sand bag parapet. In the back of the trench in each bay was a dugout about 2 feet above the bottom of the trench topped with sheet iron [sic] and covered with about 2 feet of earth.

It was not much protection but two men could lie down at a time when off duty. The network of trenches was on a rise and we could look through the peepholes, through the two sections of our barbed wire to the German trenches below in the valley.³⁴

This tour at the front was very active and, not surprisingly, quite dangerous for the men. Twenty-eight soldiers from the 38th were killed during the nine-day rotation. German artillery (including new trench mortars), a disagreement with the regimental sergeant-major over a soldier with shell shock, a deadly ration-gathering detail, repairs to trenches and the construction of new trenches, and patrols in no-man's-land were among the topics Church would later describe.³⁵

After their withdrawal to the rear on 3 November, the Canadians marched to Bouzincourt, where they remained for the next two weeks. The conditions so far forward were not hospitable. German shelling and aerial bombardment exploded a French ammunition dump and hit the battalion's transport lines. Heavy rains only made the situation worse. While the enemy continued its activity and Allied artillery responded, the battalion participated in brigade-level manoeuvres for upcoming operations. At 1230 hours on 16 November the 38th was ordered to move up to the front line near Pozières.³⁶

The battalion arrived at the front later that afternoon. The weather immediately turned colder, freezing the ground on the 17th. German artillery fire also increased and two direct hits on the battalion's transport lines caused a great deal of damage and a handful of casualties but, fortunately, no fatalities.³⁷ Sergeant Church was given command of No.11 Platoon for the upcoming attack. The regular platoon commander, Lieutenant Harold Frederick Hill, was among the 240 personnel held back at battalion headquarters "to act as a nucleus in case the battalion was cut to pieces and it could be brought back to strength with reinforcements."³⁸ Temporarily attached to the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade, the 38th Battalion was ordered (like the other battalions in the brigade) to capture the enemy position known to the Allies as Desire Trench (and its support system) north of the town of Courcellette.³⁹

Sergeant Jack Church never saw the launch of the battalion's attack.⁴⁰ Not long before the attack was to begin, a German 5.9-inch shell landed about 15 feet away from his position. Although he dove for cover as he heard the shell coming in, the concussion of the blast knocked him

back on his feet. He heard someone calling for a stretcher bearer. Other soldiers began to strip him of his equipment and tunic and placed a dressing on his chin that was bleeding profusely. Church wrote:

I saw then a hole plugged with shirt in the middle of my chest. I remember, momentarily, [wondering] why I was still alive after being shot through my heart but just then I blanked out. The next thing I knew I was lying on a stretcher on the side of the highway feeling very cold. No wonder as I was stripped to the waist, covered with my greatcoat and a wet snow was falling. The roar of the guns was loud but I was more concerned with the lorries and ambulances that whizzed by in the dark with their lights out, some missing me by inches. Presently I heard someone say "Here is another" and an ambulance stopped and I was lifted into it.⁴¹

Church was taken to a forward dressing station run by the 11th Canadian Field Ambulance where he was examined by a doctor who sent him out on another ambulance to the town of Albert. There he received further treatment and a much-appreciated poached egg on toast from a Red Cross nurse.

By this time it was about 9.30 am and I began to feel better so was loaded, with several other stretchers, onto a truck and driven about 20 kilos back to a clearing station. It was a rough ride but as far as the Battle of the Somme was concerned, Sergeant Church was out of it.⁴²

After approximately one week at No.49 Casualty Clearing Station, Church boarded a train for No.5 General Hospital in Rouen where he was placed in the "lung ward." His condition had worsened and

he later remembered that his "chest was badly swollen and gangrene [sic] had set in. It smelt terrible." On 7 December he was classified as "seriously ill."⁴³ Soon after, the young Canadian soldier was operated on. Only during his recovery did Church find out exactly what had happened to him on the morning of 18 November:

When the shell burst a piece of shrapnel about the size of a silver dollar hit my chin and the bone deflected it slightly. It then entered my chest but a rib deflected it more so that it followed the rib and came out my side. Rather than attempt to drain it, as gangrene [sic] had set in the surgeon decided to remove the whole chest muscle and hope for a skin graft. The size of the raw wound was the same as my right hand including the fingers. About a week later a specialist examined it and pronounced it too large for a skin graft and suggested it be left for crystalization but it would take some time. The surgeon drew the jagged edges of my chin wound together as best he could and sewed it up.⁴⁴

On 13 December 1916, almost a month after receiving his wound and after several rounds of treatment, Sergeant Church was placed on a hospital ship bound for "Blighty" (England).⁴⁵

One day later he arrived in Hastings and was sent to the 1st General Hospital (British) in Shoreham-by-Sea, west of Brighton.⁴⁶ Once his wounds had finally begun to heal he was transferred to the Bearwood Convalescent Hospital near Reading on 27 January 1917. This Canadian military hospital provided Church with the opportunity to continue his recovery, stroll the well-tended grounds of the estate and the local village, and play cards. He and some of the other patients even

played a game of field hockey against a local girls' team for charity:

They had heard that we played hockey in Canada and thought it was the field type. Unfortunately I was one of those detailed to play. Before the game we were warned not to be too hard on the girls as they might get hurt. What a ridiculous [sic] instruction as we soon found out. We were very out of condition but the girls were not so[,] what they did to us was sad. One girl threw me clean over her hip. The sticks were curved and flat on one side only so we couldnt [sic] control the ball but our shins were black and blue. It was a poor exhibition on our part but they did raise some money for their charity.⁴⁷

On 16 March 1917, Church was discharged from Bearwood and taken on the strength of the Regimental Depot of the Eastern Ontario Regiment (a reinforcement unit for the Canadian Corps in the field) in Seaford the same day. He remembered being "given ten days leave and ten pounds and told to report to the clearing depot at Seaford."⁴⁸ Sergeant Church spent his leave in London and parts of Scotland but came down with enteric fever while in Glasgow in early April. For the next two weeks he recovered at the 4th Scottish General Hospital and was sent back to Bearwood hospital (on 18 April) instead of the depot at Seaford. At Bearwood he was examined by a medical board composed of three doctors who classified his health as "B2," a rating which would only allow him to return to France in a rear area occupation. He later wrote: "If I was returning to France I wanted to rejoin the [38th] battalion and get my commission. Unfortunately, whether it was dur [sic] to army boots or the high crowned roads of France, I had developed a pair of

large bunions. The doctors told me that if I would agree to have them [taken] out I might be stepped up to A classification which would let me rejoin the battalion."⁴⁹

Church agreed to undergo the operation and was sent to Moore Barracks Hospital in Shorncliffe. The operation took place on 26 June 1917. It did not go particularly well and his recovery was further impeded when two of his toes were broken during a difficult attempt to calm down a "shell-shocked" patient in the bed next to him. After a few days Church was brought before another medical review board which further reduced his medical classification from B2 to B3 because of the problems arising due to complications from his operation. He later noted: "Because of that I would never walk properly again and would suffer foot pains for the rest of my life. [...] My classification meant that I would never go back to France and my days as a war soldier were over."⁵⁰

In early July 1917 Church was posted to the 3rd Canadian Command Depot in Seaford where he remained until April 1918 when he was given one year's unpaid leave from the Canadian military to attend the Imperial College of Science and Technology in London on a scholarship. It was during this time that he also met Peg – the woman who would become his wife. Jack Church finished his course at the college in June 1919 and he and Peg were married on 8 July in Seaford. Not wishing to return to school that fall, Church put his uniform back on, went to work at the War Office and waited to be repatriated to Canada. He and his British war bride landed in Quebec City aboard SS *Montcalm* on 11 November 1919. One day later he was discharged from the Canadian Expeditionary Force "by reason of demobilization."⁵¹ He ended his memoirs:

I was home in Canada again. So ends my story. Looking back a few things stand out. My stay in the line was comparatively short and was not marked by any conspicuous bravery. Peg's brother Norman fought in several battles but received only one bullet scratch. I earned no special medals nor any promotions, just like my brother Ed but it didnt [sic] bother me as I was thankful to the Good Lord that I was spared. That was enough.⁵²

Notes

1. Attestation Paper, in D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052, John Anderson Church, Service Records in The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa Regimental Museum [hereafter D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052]; Department of Militia and Defence, War Service Gratuity, in Ibid.
2. John Anderson Church, *Soldier of the Line*, March 1973, p.2, in The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa Regimental Museum, file A400-0017
3. *Soldier of the Line*, p.2
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.2-3; Promotions, Transfers, Discharges, etc. form, in D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052.
8. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.3-4.
9. *Soldier of the Line*, p.4.
10. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.4-5.
11. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.5-6.
12. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.6-7.
13. *Soldier of the Line*, p.7.
14. *Soldier of the Line*, p.8.
15. *Soldier of the Line*, p.9.
16. Ibid.
17. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.11-12.
18. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.12-13.
19. *Soldier of the Line*, p.13.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. *Soldier of the Line*, p.14
23. Ibid.
24. War Diary (WD), 38th Battalion, 13 August 1916, in National Archives of Canada (NAC), Record Group (RG) 9, Series III D 3, vol. 4938
25. WD, 38th Battalion, 14-18 August 1916, in Ibid.
26. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.14-15
27. *Soldier of the Line*, p.15
28. WD, 38th Battalion, 19 August 1916.
29. WD, 38th Battalion, 21-23 August 1916.
30. 38th Battalion CEF Association, "Master Personnel List for the 38th

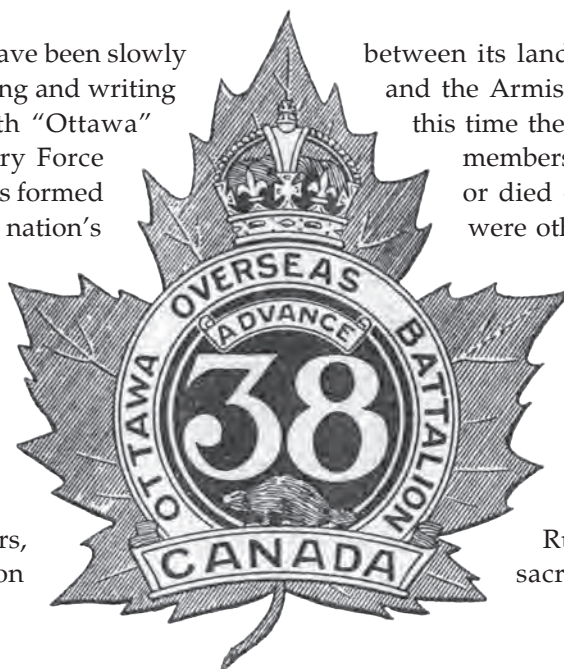
- Canadian Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force", in The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa Regimental Museum, file A400-0007
31. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.15-18
 32. WD, 38th Battalion, 23 September to 25 October 1916; *Soldier of the Line*, p.19
 33. WD, 38th Battalion, 26 October to 3 November 1916.
 34. *Soldier of the Line*, p.20
 35. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.20-22
 36. WD, 38th Battalion, 3-16 November 1916.
 37. WD, 38th Battalion, 16-17 November 1916.
 38. *Soldier of the Line*, p.23
 39. G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919* (Ottawa, 1964), pp.192-196
 40. The attack on Desire Trench began at 0610 hours on the morning of 18 November. On the right flank of the 38th was the 87th Battalion (Canadian Grenadier Guards), on the left flank the East Surrey Regiment. The war diarist recorded: "All battalions obtained their objective. Large list of casualties. Snow early in the morning, later turning to rain. Albert & vicinity of Transport Lines untroubled by enemy shelling or aeroplanes. Desire Trench occupied." (WD, 38th Battalion, 18 November 1916.) The war diary's description of the 38th Battalion's first offensive action does little to convey what actually happened. To be fair, the cost and brutality of 18 November 1916, for the battalion likely left the writer little opportunity and, possibly, little desire to provide many details about what happened that day. The 38th and 87th Battalions were entirely successful, capturing their portions of Desire Trench and its support trench and moving on to the next line, Grandcourt Trench, where they set up machine gun positions and took numerous German prisoners. Unfortunately, their success was not matched elsewhere and both Canadian units were forced to retreat to Desire Trench. In total, the 38th suffered 101 officers and men killed and 104 wounded (several of whom later died from their wounds) on the morning of 18 November. (38th Battalion CEF Association, "Master Personnel List for the 38th Canadian Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force"; Nicholson, p.196).
 41. *Soldier of the Line*, p.23.
 42. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.23-24; Casualty Form – Active Service, in D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052.
 43. *Soldier of the Line*, p.24; Casualty Form – Active Service, in D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052; Service Record, in Ibid.
 44. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.24-25.
 45. *Soldier of the Line*, p.25; Casualty Form – Active Service, in D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052.
 46. Casualty Form – Active Service, in D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052; Service Record, in Ibid.
 47. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.26-29; Service Record, in D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052.
 48. *Soldier of the Line*, p.31; Service Record, in D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052; Casualty Form – Active Service, in Ibid.
 49. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.31-33; Service Record, in D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052.
 50. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.33-35; Medical History of an Invalid, in D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052; Service Record, in Ibid.
 51. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.35-36; Casualty Form – Active Service, in D.S.C. Mackay Collection, 38-052; Service Record, in Ibid.; Department of Militia and Defence, War Service Gratuity, in Ibid.; Canadian Expeditionary Force, Discharge Certificate, in Ibid.
 52. *Soldier of the Line*, pp.35-36.

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The Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, and Men of the 38th "Ottawa" Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force

Ken Reynolds

For more than a decade now I have been slowly – very, very slowly – researching and writing a book-length history of the 38th "Ottawa" Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). The 38th Battalion, CEF, was formed starting at the end of 1914 in the nation's capital and throughout Eastern Ontario. During the course of its existence the battalion carried out garrison duty in Bermuda before serving in France and Flanders as part of the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 4th Canadian Division. Nearly 4,000 officers, non-commissioned officers, and men served with the battalion



between its landing in France on 13 August 1916 and the Armistice of 11 November 1918. During this time the 38th Battalion suffered nearly 800 members killed in action, died of wounds, or died of disease. Almost 2,000 members were otherwise wounded, raising the total casualty count for the battalion to an average of nearly three out of every four men who served in the unit, a ratio probably quite common to front-line infantry units. Approximately 300 members of the battalion were presented with British, French, Belgian, and Russian honours and awards. Such sacrifices and accomplishments were



recognized, years later, through the battalion's perpetuation by The Ottawa Regiment (The Duke of Cornwall's Own) (now The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa) and through the awarding of sixteen battle honours. All in all, I think everyone can agree that it's a history worthy of being remembered.

Above: The 38th Battalion at the Rockcliffe training area in May 1915.

Below: "A" Company, 38th Battalion, on Parliament Hill, Ottawa, in 1915

As my research has progressed over the years I have come across a large amount of information on

the individual members of the 38th Battalion, too much for use in a unit-level historical narrative. Someday, I'm hoping to research and write a collective biography of the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the 38th – a volume two to the battalion history, if you will. Unfortunately, the completion of



such a project is undoubtedly a long way off in my future.

That said, in November 2006 I had a brainwave. Well, at least I think it was. I had already been working on a Canadian military history blog, The Cannon's Mouth <www.cannonsmouth.ca>, using Blogger (Google's blogging software). What about a blog on the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men

conscription, service details, burial details (if necessary), information on honours and awards, and any available postwar information constitute the bulk of each entry. The entries are not particularly literary, the text being intended to present information, not provide flowing prose. At this point the entries tend to be fairly basic, relying on attestation forms, the personnel

I expect that it will take me years, if not a couple of decades, to complete that research. (I never said this was a short term project). In addition to the personnel records, there are other documents and collections I want to research and add to the entries as I go along. If I discover any additional textual information or imagery for a given individual their entry can be, has been, and will continue to be

Photo courtesy of Michel Litalien.



Unidentified members of the 38th Battalion, CEF.

of the 38th Battalion? Think blog as mini-encyclopaedia. The result, Soldiers of the 38th <38thbattalion.blogspot.com>, is, as I've written on its masthead, an "attempt at an ongoing mass biography of the officers and men of the 38th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, during the First World War."

The format is pretty straightforward – one entry (blog post) per individual member of the battalion. Background information, personal and medical data collected at the time of enlistment or

ledger of the postwar 38th Battalion Association, a similar document from the archives of the Canadian War Museum, burial details from the website of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and various other archival, online, and published materials. Information found on an individual's military personnel record held at Library and Archives Canada has been used to flush out a handful of entries, something that requires a pre-planned trip to the archives. Such visits have been few and far between for me of late and

updated. Errors can be corrected. No entry is ever meant to be considered "closed" or "final".

As I write this piece the number of entries on my blog recently passed 1,800 names. Only 2,200 or so to go! The process so far has been very rewarding. It's forcing me to think about aspects of the various subject matters involved – collective biography, honours and awards, the history of the battalion, etc. – in different ways. For example, how many personnel were available for use by the 38th on a given day



and how experienced were they? How did the battalion receive reinforcements and from what units and at what times? What were the “national” origins, backgrounds, and previous military experiences of the 38th’s personnel? Is it just me, or where there a lot of conscripts in the battalion’s ranks (approximately ten percent of the total so far)?

The work on the blog has also – and I had hoped for this from the very beginning – led to e-mails from numerous family members of the individuals I’ve written about so far (and even some I haven’t got to yet). Sometimes I’ve been able to provide these family members with extra information or answer their questions, at other times the family has been able to provide me with additional information, imagery, and documentation. The former provides me with an opportunity to give something back to the memory



Top left: Major William Stewart Wood, DSO, in battle gear.

Left: Unidentified member of the 38th Battalion, CEF.

Above: The presentation of the King’s Colours to the 38th Battalion, Parliament Hill, in 1915.

of the individual through his family. The latter helps me to flush out the information in the entry and to eventually write the collective biography.

In the end, this project permits me an opportunity to pay homage to these men – those who died, those who otherwise suffered wounds of body or mind or both, and those who served their King and country for a few days or five years. That, honestly, makes it all worthwhile.

