

GOWER REMEMBERS

Private Edward Cole Peters (1890-1916)



“The passing of Edward Peters was also referred to, and sympathy extended to his parents and grandparents. He [J. Alexander Robinson] asked all of us to remember the immortal words of Tennyson, and may it be said of us ‘I have fought for King and State, I have done my duty as a man ought to do.’” (St. John’s Daily Star, June 12, 1916, reporting on an address by Robinson to the Gower Street Methodist Sunday School)

Edward Cole Peters was born in St. John's on October 22, 1890, the oldest of four children of Alice Emily Smith and Alfred Mayne Peters. He was baptized at Gower Street Methodist Church on December 19, 1890 by the Rev. Humphrey P. Cowperthwaite. His siblings were Gertrude Evans (b. 1893), Herbert Smith (b. 1896) and John Edgar (b. 1905).

Alfred M. Peters joined the staff of the Bank of Montreal shortly after it set up business in St. John's on January 8, 1895, following the crash of two of the three Newfoundland banks on December 10, 1894. It appears that his employers had great confidence in his abilities and potential and he moved rapidly through the ranks. When the Bank of Montreal decided to open its first branch outside St. John's on the west coast of Newfoundland, in Curling, in 1902, Peters was appointed its first branch manager.

Before moving to Curling with his family, Edward attended the Methodist College in St. John's, where he proved to be a very good student. In 1898, when he was in the equivalent of Grade III, the College magazine, *The Collegian*, reported that he had claimed first place in General English in Miss Jardine's class. Two years later, *The Evening Telegram*, in a story on prize day at the College, indicated that he had received the highest marks for General Proficiency in Miss Woods' class. Not to be outdone on the scientific side, at the 1902 prize day he was presented with the award for the highest marks in Arithmetic in Miss Badcock's class.

That would be his last prize at the Methodist College: when the new school year began, he was attending classes at the Methodist school in Curling and no reports of his success appear extant. He did complete several grades there before travelling to Sackville, New Brunswick in the late summer of 1905 to attend the Mount Allison Academy. The following year he enrolled in nearby Mount Allison University, where

he spent the next two years. In the meantime, his father had been transferred from Curling to the Bank of Montreal branch in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island in 1907 and the following year, once he had completed the school year at Mount Allison, Edward began working at his father's branch in Charlottetown. In the years that followed he worked at Bank of Montreal branches in Amherst, Nova Scotia, and Moncton, New Brunswick, as well as at Charlottetown. While living in Moncton he met, fell in love with and became engaged to Bessie Lee, a native of that place, but the couple never married and what became of her is unclear.

Alfred Peters was moving ever higher in the Bank of Montreal hierarchy. In 1913, after six years in Charlottetown, he was relocated to Calgary as manager of the branch there. His wife and other three children went with him, but Edward took his time going west. He did make it as far as Ontario, working in Kingston and Ottawa, before he, too, settled in Calgary in 1914. There he worked first for the New York Life Insurance Company, the Canada Life Assurance Company and in the insurance department of Toole, Peet & Company, all three of which continue to operate.

While he may have been planning a career in the insurance industry, war intervened in young Peters' plans. Undoubtedly raised in a family where love of country and loyalty to the British Empire were taken for granted, it is no surprise that he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). That took place on July 15, 1915, in Calgary. He was given service number 475988 and became part of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

At the time of his enlistment, Peters stated that he was working as a cashier at the Central Life Company in Calgary. Prior to enlisting he had spent five months as a private in the 103rd Regiment, later the Calgary Rifles. When the war broke out, this regiment served as a

recruiting depot for the CEF, and that may explain why Peters spent five months as part of a militia regiment, undergoing training, before enlisting in the regular army. His Attestation Paper also indicates that he was 5 feet, 7½ inches tall, had a dark complexion, with brown eyes and black hair. It also noted that he had an appendix scar on his abdomen and a small mole on his right cheek.

After leaving Calgary with other enlistees, Peters headed for Montreal, where he underwent further training. Then it was off to Shorncliffe, England, in October, where they endured more training. In November he crossed the English Channel for France and in January 1916 he entered the trenches for the first time. It was while he was there that he wrote a letter to the students at his *alma mater*, Mount Allison University. It was printed in the March 1916 edition of the University magazine, *The Argosy*, and is reprinted here in its entirety.

*B.E.F., France,
January 14, 1916*

*Students of Mount Allison,
Sackville, N.B.*

Dear Friends: – I do not know what society or organization in the college was responsible for my receiving a small parcel which reached me a few days ago, but I do know that, owing to the energy and enthusiasm of some who are enjoying the privileges which were mine a few years ago, I spent a most enjoyable evening under very unpleasant conditions – living over again many of the scenes which took place in and around the buildings and grounds which were brought so vividly to mind by the card enclosed with the parcel.

It seems to me that nearly every day I hear of other Mt. A. men who are doing their bit in some branch of the service, and it is indeed gratifying to know that so many of the boys are trying to live up to the

principles for which the old Alma Mater has always stood. Others will come when they can, and no doubt if the war lasts another year many of the boys who this year sent us "Greetings from Mount Allison" will be eating their Christmas dinner in the trenches. It's no cinch, fellows, but the work has to be done.

And to the girls – they always do most of the work in connection with sending out such Christmas reminders – I want to express my sincere thanks. The few who know me will remember that I was always a bashful youth, so perhaps I shall be excused for extreme brevity.

Time is up. We have to go up the line to pay Fritz another visit, and as we do not work on the theory that the pen is mightier than the sword, mine must be put aside.

Wishing you one and all every good thing which a new year can brings you.

Yours for Mt. A.,

E. C. Peters, Soph '07-'08

Address:

*Pte. E. C. Peters,
475988, 4th Co., P. P. C. L. I.,
B. E. F., France.*

Peters saw action with the Princess Patricia's through the Winter and Spring of 1916. On June 02, they were engaged with the enemy at Sanctuary Wood, near Ypres, in Belgium. One of his platoon mates, Sergeant A. J. Barlow, recounts Peters gallant action and subsequent death in a letter to Alice Peters dated October 16, 1918. He wrote:

Dear Mrs. Peters:-

It is with much regret that I write these few lines to you. No doubt by this time you have received the sad news of your son's death thro the official channel, but I thought perhaps there may be something you would like to know which they did not tell you, and any of us would only

be too pleased to be of any little service we could to you. Perhaps you have not heard how he was fatally wounded, so I will try and tell you what I know. It was on the second morning of the battle, when he received a gunshot wound in the arm, and was on his way to the dressing station, when he received another, which proved fatal. We did not know the worst ourselves until several days later when the list of names came in of those who had been buried by our Padre. It came as a shock to me, as I was just beginning to look forward to a letter from him, from somewhere in England, in fact, I couldn't believe it and went to our orderly room to see if there wasn't some mistake, but sorry to say it turned out only too true.

Dear Pete, as we all used to call him is greatly missed by us all. He was a favourite with everybody. He had been with us for nearly a year, and was one of our "star" ball players, and was also one of our quartette, who have helped us to pass many a weary hour away. He was a fine clean living boy. I never saw him smoke, and I know he never took a drink, as it was part of my duty at times to offer it to him, but at the same time, he was not narrow minded on those things, in fact, he was one of those fellows of whom there is far too few in this world. None of us has ever seen him do anything that wasn't an act of a gentleman.

I shall always consider it an honor to have known him, and had him in our section, which I might say is more like one big family than anything else, and when we lose one like him it is like losing a brother, but our loss is nothing compared with yours, but I hope you will be able to bear your great loss in the same noble way that your dear son endured the trials and hardships of our life out here.

I have the honor to remain,

Yours sincerely,

A. J. Barlow,

Sgt,

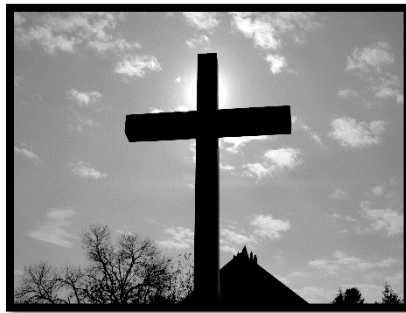
10th. Scouts.

P. S.

I nearly forgot to tell you that I had much pleasure in recommending Pete [for a medal] for the part he took in the capture of a German battery, during the first day of the battle. Our Colonel thought it was a great piece of work and it was.

A.J.B.

Edward Cole Peters died as a result of wounds received at Sanctuary Wood on June 02, 1916. His body was interred in the White House Cemetery in St-Jean-Les-Ypres, Belgium. His brother, Herbert, enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Calgary a little more than a month after Edward, on August 19, 1915. He, too, was killed on a European battlefield and buried in a foreign land. Both of their names appear on the memorial to the war dead at Central United Church in Calgary and on the memorial plaque to former students that once appeared in the Methodist College, and is now housed in the archives room at prince of Wales Collegiate in St. John's.



In Memory of

Geoffrey Ellis Peters (1940-2016)

Geoff Peters' father, Wilfred (1905-1970), was a first cousin of Edward Cole Peters.

On Sunday, November 16, 2014, Gower Street United Church initiated a program of commemoration that will last for approximately the next four years. On roughly every second Sunday through to the end of 2018, a brief write-up on one of these individuals, similar to this one, will appear as an insert in the Bulletin and there will be a reference to that person in the service. In this way we hope to recognize their contribution to the war effort, the many sacrifices they made, some with their very lives, and the debt of gratitude we owe to each of them.

We also hope to learn more about them from their descendants or other relatives, thereby fostering a link between our past and our present as we begin our 202nd year as a faith community.

If you know of any relatives of these servicemen and women please contact Bert Riggs at briggs@mun.ca or at 726-6169.