

GOWER REMEMBERS

Private Herbert Smith Peters (1896-1918)



“Killed in Action. Whilst acting as a scout during the attack North East of Haynecourt he was hit in the stomach and killed by shrapnel from a shell.” (Official record of Herbert Peters death, T.H.Q. File No. 649-P-14770.)

Herbert Smith Peters was born in St. John's on March 18, 1896, the third of four children of Alice Emily Smith and Alfred Mayne Peters. He was baptized at Gower Street Methodist Church on July 04, 1896, by his uncle, the Rev. John S. Peters. His siblings were Edward Cole (b. 1890), Gertrude Evans (b. 1893), and John Edgar (b. 1905).

On December 10, 1894, two of the three Newfoundland banks, the Union and the Commercial, were unable to meet creditors' demands and closed their doors, never to re-open. In their place, several Canadian banks established branches in St. John's, halting the very serious risk of the collapse of the Newfoundland economy. One of these banks was the Bank of Montreal, which opened for business in St. John's on January 8, 1895. One of its first employees was Alfred M. Peters.

Peters appears to have been a quick study. In 1902, when the Bank of Montreal decided to open its first branch outside St. John's at Curling¹, he became its first manager.

Herbert Peters began his schooling at the Methodist College in St. John's, as he was five years old at the beginning of the school year in 1901. With the family's move to Curling the following year, he spent the next five years attending the local Methodist school. In 1907, his father was transferred to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, becoming manager of the Bank of Montreal branch there. Six years later Alfred made the trans-Canada trek to Calgary, Alberta, to undertake a similar role. It was in Calgary that Herbert completed his formal schooling before entering the workforce.

The Peters family was very active in the Methodist church in each of the places where they lived. In Calgary, their church home was Central Methodist, a church that still stands on the corner of 7th Avenue and 1st

¹ At the time, Curling was the largest community in the Bay of Islands; it is now part of the city of Corner Brook.

Street in downtown Calgary. One of the church groups to which Herbert belonged was the Young Men's Club, and a sub-group of that club known as the Anti-Knockers Bible Class. This group was engaged in Bible study and various outdoor pursuits, a practice that has been dubbed Muscular Christianity. The group had a distinct lapel pin with the letters A-K clearly evident. At the time of its formation, it was led by Mrs. G. W. Kerby, wife of the minister, but not long after his arrival in Calgary, the mantle of leadership was taken on by Alfred Peters. Herbert was a member of that group.

Herbert and his family arrived in the growing frontier town of Calgary in 1913. One year later, war broke out in Europe. The patriotic fervor engendered by this call to arms resulted in Herbert's older brother, Edward, enlisting in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) on July 15, 1915. Herbert was not far behind. He enlisted in the CEF a little over a month later, on August 19, 1915, and was assigned to the Alberta Regiment (10th Battalion). It should come as no surprise, given their commitment to Muscular Christianity, that by the late summer of 1915 almost all members of the Anti-Knockers had enlisted.

According to his Attestation Paper, Peters was 6 feet, 1¾ inches tall; he had a medium complexion, with blue eyes and brown hair. It was noted that he had a scar on his right elbow, another on his left forearm and the tell-tale remnants of two vaccinations on his left arm, as well. He listed his occupation as an accountant. He was given regimental number 540083; his rank was Private.

Peters saw action in many of the engagements in Europe that involved the 10th Battalion, including at Arras, Vimy and Passchendaele in 1917. It was during a lull in the fighting at Passenchedaele that he wrote a letter to his grandfather, John Edgar Pickavant Peters (1839-1919), back in St. John's.

France
25/10/17

Dear Grandfather:

Cannot remember whether or not I answered your last letter, but as I have received none from you for a long time, the fault must be on my part.

As you see I am again in France, but not with A C clerks, rather with the 10th B'n, which is in the 1st Can. Division. Spent a few weeks at the base, prior to coming up, while there had a good time as the training was not over strenuous, and in addition the sea, a few miles distant, afforded an excellent beach for swimming.

Letters from home report all well. Mother and Edgar having returned alright, & gald to see father again & I believe he was equally glad to see them.

I have not yet seen Uncle Char,² as he is in the 4th Div'n, & we seem to change places. I have tried to find him several times but with no success.

Have not heard directly from Helen lately, the last word being she was enjoying the work more and more as the work is becoming more interesting.

I have been doing quite a bit of marching lately, passing thru' some interesting country. Was billeted near a canal, & was greatly interested in watching the method of navigation. Canals are 100 feet wide, & the barges that are used some 125 or so feet, drawn by horses that walk along the bank, or in one case by 3 girls, great big girls who drew it with little exertion.

Weather has been fair but getting cooler, but as we have had a good billet the last few weeks, we cannot complain.

Give my regards to all the St. John's folks & best wishes for yourself.

*Your grandson,
Herbert*

*Address #540083 Pte. H. S. Peters
c/o Mrs. F. J. Etherington
"Sandford"
Swindon, Wiltshire, England.*

² "Uncle Char" is Charles Ayre Peters (1872-1968), his father's brother, who was a member of the Canadian Army Medical Corps.

The 10th Battalion was one of several Canadian units to take part in the Battle of Canal du Nord in the later stages of the war. The fighting took place along the Canal du Nord and the outskirts of the French town of Cambrai, and lasted from September 27 to October 1, 1918. Peters was involved in the fighting at Canal du Nord. While carrying out scouting duties during the second day, he received gunshot and shrapnel wounds which brought about his death. The only consolation was that his Battalion, together with the 1st and 11th Canadian Divisions, was successful in capturing its objective.

Herbert Peters was buried at Haynecourt British Cemetery, 3¾ miles northwest of Cambrai. By coincidence, Cambrai is one of the sites of the six caribous in honour of the Newfoundland Regiment that are located in France and Belgium. His name, along with his brother's, appears 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 at Prince of Wales Collegiate in St. John's.

In 1921, Herbert's parents and his brother Edgar travelled to Europe, where they visited his gravesite at Haynecourt and Edward's at the White House Cemetery in St-Jean-Les-Ypres, Belgium. Family lore records that shortly before she died in 1950, Alice Peters "remarked that she was happy to go [as] she would be with her boys again."

Central United Church, Calgary



Located in the sanctuary of Central United Church, this brass plaque is in memory of those who served and those who died in World War I who were from the congregation of the then Central Methodist Church in Calgary. The names of Edward C. Peters and Herbert S. Peters are sixth and seventh from the bottom of the centre column.

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.