

Mons Liberation Parade 11 November 2018 and Lieut. Cecil Whyte, Royal Flying Corp

On the morning of 11 November 1918 official word was passed to the Canadians in Mons, Belgium, to hold their place and cease hostilities. Later that morning, the Pipes and Drums of the Royal Highlanders of Canada would lead Canadian troops in an impromptu celebratory parade through the streets of Mons, a city they had just liberated, to celebrate the end of The Great War.

100 years later on 11 November 2018, the Royal Highlanders of Canada – now known as the Black Watch Royal Highland Regiment of Canada once again led a parade through the streets of Mons to mark and commemorate that historic moment. Many relatives of the men that fought there in WW1 travelled from Canada to remember and honour their family members, of whom many didn't return and are buried on Belgian soil.

One such family on their personal pilgrimage of Remembrance was Scott Whyte and family. When war broke out his grandfather's cousin, Cecil Whyte joined the Canadian Engineers. He travelled from Canada to the UK in April 1915 and went through various training camps at Shornecliffe, Dibgate and Sandling. By September 1915 he was in the trenches.

He was badly wounded on 13 November 1916 with shrapnel in both legs during the battle of Ancre in France, the final large British attack of the Battle of the Somme. He was hospitalized in England and then returned home to Canada in 1917. Five months later he was declared fit and returned back to England to fight again. Cecil Whyte applied for a commission and was then sent to the Cadet School for an officer's course. He was attached to the Artists Rifles Officer Training Corp at St Omer, France.

Much of what is known about Cecil comes from his war diaries which he kept throughout his service. There were three diaries but only two have survived. The first diary covers April 1915 when he left Canada until 20 November 1915. The diary covering the period from the end of November 1915 until October 1917 when he was detached to the Artists Rifles in June 1916 for his training, has sadly been lost but photographs of his Artists Rifles Cadet group survive. After his training Cecil was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Scots Regiment and then finally joined No 98 Squadron, Royal Flying Corp (RFC). The third diary begins in October 1917 as Cecil is leaving for RFC training and ends a few days before his death.

RFC 98 Squadron's time in combat in France starts on 21 March 1918. An extract from the 98 Sqn History for this period is "The following message of congratulation was issued on 18th April: The General Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force in the Field, wishes me to express his thanks and good wishes to the Officers, NCOs and men of No 98 Squadron for their fine work at the start of the present battle. He hopes that the same spirit of doggedness, determination and sacrifice will still be maintained by the Squadron as a whole in the battles that are to come, and looks to No 98 Squadron to keep up the reputation it has already gained never failing".

In the photographs below the soldiers are wearing armbands with the words 'Cadet School' embroidered on them. Some of the cadets are wearing Artists Rifles cap badges. But there

are many other cap badges on display and Cecil Whyte is still wearing his Royal Engineers cap badge.



Cecil Whyte – second row seated, second on the left

Cecil Whyte's Canadian Army records show him attached to the 28th Bn, London Regiment. The records state he is "struck of strength", a term which signifies that an individual has become the responsibility of another unit.

According to the official record Cecil's aircraft, a DH9 was shot down near Geluwe, Belgium on 3 May 1918. The aircraft broke up at 4000 feet and one of the two occupants was seen to fall from the aircraft. Cecil was the Observer in the aircraft. The pilot Richard Holiday, like Cecil Whyte, has no known grave.

Also marching with the Canadians at the Liberation Parade in Mons on 11 November 2018, was the Artists Rifles Association. The Artists Rifles Regiment in WW1 started at Mons in 1914 and ended in Mons in November 1918. The last three Artists Rifles soldiers were killed in action on the 9 November and are buried in Harveng Cemetery Belgium. In total nearly 1500 men went through the Officer Training programme of the Artists Rifles. A Memorial will be unveiled at the site of Artists Rifles Hare Hall camp in Gidea Park, Essex in 2019 to remember them.

Almost 1000 of the Artists Rifles recruits were commissioned to the RFC/RAF. A third of these men were killed in action and many have no known graves but are mentioned on the Arras Flying Services Memorial. The Arras Flying Services Memorial commemorates 990 British casualties who died on active service on the Western Front in France and in Belgium and who also have no known grave. This Memorial commemorates those who served with the Royal Naval Air Service, the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Air Force and can be found in the Faubourg-d'Amiens Cemetery, Boulevard du General de Gaulle, Arras.

Scott Whyte, a relative of Cecil's was pleased to meet members of Artists Rifles Association by chance, on 11 November 2018; and so another connection in history is made and perhaps one day, 2nd Lieutenant's Cecil Whyte's grave may be found.



Cecil Whyte – back row, first on the left

Written by Greg Ruthven

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