

## Lest We Forget: Remembering Peter Henry “Harry” Loutit, A Soldier of World War I

“Peter H. Loutit” is engraved on Column 6, Row 30 of the National Metis Memorial Monument at Batoche, along with the names of over 5,000 Metis servicemen and servicewomen. Engraved in Michif, English and French, this Monument stands “to honour and remember all Veterans and to express our pride and gratitude to the Metis servicemen and servicewomen who bravely served our country to preserve our freedom.”

Peter H. Loutit, who was he? He was a Metis who volunteered for service in World War I, and who was killed in action during the Second Battle of Ypres. He was a son, a grandson, a great-grandson; a brother; a dog train musher; a tinsmith; a soldier; a soldier who died at age 20 in the service of his country.

Born on 13 September 1894, at Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca, Peter Henry Loutit was the oldest son of Peter Loutit Jr. (1871-1909) and Catherine Fraser (1871-1967). He was a grandson of Peter Lowe Loutit (1847-1921) and Ellen Flett (1852-1927), and of John Henry Fraser (1841-1919) and Sarah Jane Vincent (1847-1929). His paternal great-grandfathers were Lowe Loutit (1816 -1865) (m. Jane McDougall), Orkney man and HBC blacksmith at Fort Edmonton and the Red River Settlement, and Colin Fraser (1805-1867) (m. Nancy Beaudry), HBC Trader and Piper for George Simpson, Governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company.

Peter Henry Loutit, called Henry or Harry by his family, lived the early years of his life around Fort Chipewyan. There he learned from his father, Peter Loutit Jr., the skills of a trapper and dog train musher. In 1907, The Edmonton Bulletin newspaper published a front page story, “A Great Dog Train Drive”, that describes how as a boy he took charge of the dog train transporting his father, mother, and one of his sisters from Fort Chipewyan to Athabasca Landing, Alberta. To quote the newspaper, “Peter [Loutit Jr.] is justly proud of his ten-year-old son who was down with him, and who also bears the name Peter. The little fellow took charge of the dog train from Chippewayan, all the way to Athabasca Landing, a distance of nearly 600 miles, and appeared to be none the worse for his experience [...]”.<sup>1,2</sup>

A tinsmith by trade, Peter Henry Loutit was among the first men from northern Alberta to volunteer for service in World War I, initially signing up with the 101<sup>st</sup> Regiment Edmonton Fusiliers on August 5, 1914.<sup>3</sup> This was one day after Britain declared war on Germany.<sup>4</sup> His next of kin was given as his widowed mother, Mrs. C. Loutit.

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<sup>1</sup> The Edmonton Bulletin. A Great Dog Train Drive: Indian Trapper and Family in From Fort Chippewayan, 10 Year Old Boy in Charge of Dog Train. April 9, 1907, page 1.  
<http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/EDB/1907/04/09/1/Ar00107.html?query=newspapers%7CLoutit%7C%28publication%3AEDB%29%7Cscore>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> In April 1907, Peter Henry Loutit was actually 12 years old when he drove the dog train over 600 miles.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Henry Loutit, Military Service Record. Personnel Records of the First World War. Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>4</sup> On August 4, 1914, Britain declared war on Germany. Canada, as a member of the British Empire, was automatically at war.

On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1914 the 101<sup>st</sup> Fusiliers with Henry Loutit marched down Jasper Avenue to the C. P. R. station in Edmonton. Dense crowds lined the streets and bands played, as friends and relatives cheered and shouted their good-byes.<sup>5</sup> “We were 940 men, some in khaki, some in scarlet tunics, but the majority in civilian clothes, with a white band round their arms. [...] There was great shouting and shaking hands with friends and relatives. Alas, all too often by one who would never come back”, recalled Major Pete Anderson, the officer in charge.<sup>6</sup>

After several days, the two troop trains transporting the 101<sup>st</sup> Regiment arrived at Valcartier, Quebec. Contingents from across Canada were reorganized at Valcartier, and Edmonton’s 101<sup>st</sup> Regiment was now known as the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion.<sup>7</sup> Henry Loutit signed attestation papers again, on September 21<sup>st</sup>, and was cleared as medically fit for the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force as Private Henry Loutit, #18965, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Infantry, First Canadian Division, Canadian Expeditionary Force.<sup>3</sup>

Henry had barely two weeks of military training at Valcartier before he was shipped overseas. The 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion sailed from Quebec City aboard the S.S. Zeeland on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1914 and arrived at Plymouth, England on October 18<sup>th</sup>. The next four months of infantry training took place at Bustard Camp on the Salisbury Plain. During the winter of 1914-1915, it rained on 89 of 123 days, turning Bustard Camp into a muddy quagmire.<sup>8</sup> On a typical day, Henry woke to a bugle call at 5 AM, answered roll call, went on route marches, did target practice, bayoneting drills, digging of trenches, and weapons training. “We worked very hard and gained quite an efficiency, according to the idea of military training in those days”, wrote Major Anderson.<sup>6</sup>

Henry’s main weapon was the Canadian made Ross rifle, notorious for jamming and losing its affixed bayonet. When used in training in Quebec, one observer noted that the Ross “seemed to misfire too frequently for rifles that were going to be asked to stop the German rushes.” He also noted that “the bayonet also had the unfortunate habit of jumping off the rifle when firing was carried on with fixed bayonets.” In his opinion, the Ross’ rating as a combat rifle was summed up by a soldier who after several attempts to keep the bayonet on said in disgust, “To hell with the gun, I’ll take a club.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Edmonton Daily Bulletin. Never to be Forgotten Scenes As 101<sup>st</sup> Fusiliers Leave City. Fifteen Thousand Line Streets and C.P.R. Station as Two Sections of Train Pull Out for Quebec – Many Sad Farewells by Husbands, Sons and Brothers. August 24, 1914, page 1.

<http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/EDB/1914/08/24/1/Ar00109.html?printable=true>

<sup>6</sup> Lieut. Col. P. Anderson (1920?). I, That’s Me: Escape from German Prison Camp and other Adventures. Self-published memoir. “To My Comrades in Arms Who Sleep in Foreign Soil, This Book is Dedicated, Lest We Forget”. Accessed from <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/bibliography/4560/reader.html#7>

<sup>7</sup> David W. Love (1999). A Call to Arms: The Organization and Administration of Canada’s Military in World War One. Ottawa: Bunker to Bunker Publishing.

<sup>8</sup> Nathan M. Greenfield (2007). Baptism of Fire: The Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada, April 1915. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

<sup>9</sup> Canadian Press (August 18, 2014). [Why Canadians ditched Ross rifle during First World War: ‘It’s murder to send out men with such a weapon’ | National Post](#)

Having put in months of hard training as a battalion, it came as a shock that the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion was to be dissolved in January 1915 and the men split up. Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Anderson explains what happened: “We, the 101<sup>st</sup> regiment, the only complete unit, and to spare, in the First Division, were to be broken up for the reinforcement of Eastern battalions. [...] One fine day at the end of January orders came to send the men in batches to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> Bat. It was an awful blow having worked with these men all winter; after what I had promised fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers [...] that I would look after them.”<sup>10</sup>

Henry Loutit was ordered to proceed to the Tidworth Infantry Base Depot, Wiltshire in February 1915.<sup>3</sup> At Tidworth, he was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, originally an Eastern Ontario Regiment.<sup>11</sup> On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, his new unit embarked for France, and on the 28<sup>th</sup> he was officially taken on strength with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel David Watson.

Surrounded by the ravages of war, Henry went AWOL (absent without leave) from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, “somewhere in France”, during the last four days of March. Being absent without leave was an offence under Section 15 of the Army Act.<sup>12</sup> As punishment, he was fined \$8.80 as lost pay, and put in detention for four days.<sup>3</sup>

Events at the Ypres front were about to escalate for Private Loutit and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division. In early April 1915 the Allied forces on the Ypres front comprised elements of the two corps of the British Second Army – which included the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division – commanded by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, the French 45<sup>th</sup> (Algerian) and 87<sup>th</sup> Territorial Divisions, and the Belgian 6<sup>th</sup> Division. Opposite was the German Fourth Army under Albrecht, Duke of Wurttemberg.<sup>13</sup> On April 14 reliable and detailed information was received at the British and French headquarters that the Germans intended to use a new weapon, asphyxiating chlorine gas discharged from cylinders, opposite the northern edge of the Ypres salient at Langemarck. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was cautioned to expect an attack, but the intended use of gas was not communicated to the troops.

At 5:00 PM on April 22 a heavy greenish yellow haze rose from the German trenches opposite Langemarck and rolled southwestward on the gentle breeze of that sunny afternoon. Soon French troops were seen staggering back through a storm of high-explosive and gas shells, past the Canadian artillery batteries and reserve infantry battalions, including the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. Gaps in the line opened as the French retreated, leaving the entire left flank of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian

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<sup>10</sup> Lieut. Col. P. Anderson (1923?). I, That's Me: Escape from German Prison Camp and other Adventures. P. 35

<sup>11</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Eastern Ontario Regiment), CEF.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2nd\\_Battalion\\_\(Eastern\\_Ontario\\_Regiment\),\\_CEF](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2nd_Battalion_(Eastern_Ontario_Regiment),_CEF)

<sup>12</sup> Library and Archives Canada. Courts Martial of the First World War. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/courts-martial/Pages/courts-martial.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> Second Battle of Ypres. The forces at Ypres. Britannica Online Encyclopedia. <https://www.britannica.com/print/article/2098362>

Division exposed to attack.<sup>14</sup> On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Battalions counterattacked with reinforcements from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions to capture the Bois des Cuisiniers – an oak forest whose name the British and Canadians had translated as “Kitchener’s Wood” – roughly 1,000 yards west of the village of St. Julien. Artillery support for the counterattack was negligible, according to official reports, and casualties so heavy that little ground was regained.

The deficiencies of the Ross rifle made the situation worse for the Canadian infantry men who faced attackers armed with magazine rifles and machine guns. An unidentified Canadian officer wrote: “It is nothing short of murder to send men out against the enemy with such a weapon.”<sup>7</sup> During the Second Battle of Ypres, rifle bolts jammed. Boot heels and entrenching tool handles opened some of them.<sup>15</sup>

On the morning of April 24<sup>th</sup>, the Germans released a poisonous gas cloud toward the re-formed Canadian Line just west of St. Julien. Word was passed to the troops to urinate on their handkerchiefs and place them over their nose and mouth. That was it: pee on a hanky and hold it up to your face for protection. No gas masks had been distributed to the troops for protection; none were available.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had replaced the survivors of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Battalions in the frontline trenches near St. Julien, and was under constant attack along the entire line.<sup>16</sup> Ordered by Brigadier General Richard Turner to retreat from the trenches, 528 men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion lost their lives when they were forced to run over open terrain under sweeping artillery fire and sniper attacks.<sup>16,17</sup> Henry Loutit was among those who made it back to the rear line, alive.

Out of the front line on April 25, the Canadians had suffered over 6,000 men killed, wounded and captured.<sup>16,17,18</sup> Among them was 19-year-old Private Frank Cathcart, #18926, Henry’s buddy and neighbour from the Highlands district in Edmonton. Like Henry, Frank was a tinsmith by trade. His service record shows that he was in the same unit as Henry since the time they volunteered with the 101<sup>st</sup> Edmonton Fusiliers, in August 1914, to when they were transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. Both went AWOL from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in late March 1915. Initially listed as wounded and missing during the Battle of St. Julien, Frank Cathcart was “presumed to have died on or since April 22<sup>nd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, 1915”.<sup>19</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion’s relief from the front line was brief. In the early hours of April 26, the British High Command ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division to support an attack by the Lahore Division.

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<sup>14</sup> Nathan M. Greenfield (2007). *Baptism of Fire: The Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada*, April 1915. HarperCollins Publishers.

<sup>15</sup> Tim Cook (2007). *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*. Toronto: Viking Canada.

<sup>16</sup> George Cassar (1985). *Beyond Courage: The Canadians at the Second Battle of Ypres*. Oberon Press.

<sup>17</sup> Nathan M. Greenfield (2007). *Baptism of Fire: The Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada*, April 1915. HarperCollins Publishers.

<sup>18</sup> Canadian War Museum. Second Ypres. <https://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/battles-and-fighting/land-battles/second-ypres/>

<sup>19</sup> Frank Cathcart. Military Service Record. Personnel Records of the First World War. Library and Archives Canada.

Later in the day, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Brigade, including the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, was ordered to attack the area around Kitchener's Wood in cooperation with a planned French assault on Het Sas/Langemarck.<sup>20</sup> "Their advance was carried out under extremely heavy shellfire, the heaviest shelling yet experienced by the Brigade", according to the official report of General Arthur Currie, in charge of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division.<sup>9,16,17</sup> On that day, during operations "north of St. Julien, in the area of Langemarck", Henry Loutit was killed in action.<sup>21</sup> He was just 20 years old.

During the Second Battle of Ypres Major John McCrae, an officer and surgeon with the Canadian Field Artillery, tended the wounded and dying. "The general impression in my mind is of a nightmare," McCrae wrote to his mother. "We have been in the most bitter of fights. For seventeen days and nights none of us has had our clothes off, nor our boots even except occasionally. In all that time that I was awake, gunfire and rifle fire never ceased for 60 seconds - and behind it all was the constant background of the sights of the dead, the wounded, the maimed, and a terrible anxiety lest the line would give way."<sup>22</sup> On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1915 McCrae penned his famous poem, In Flanders Fields, as a tribute to a friend and a call to action, to remember those who had perished during the Second Battle of Ypres. Among them was, as we know, Peter Henry Loutit.

In Flanders fields the poppies grow  
Between the crosses, row on row  
That mark our place: and in the sky  
The larks still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.  
We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow.  
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.  
Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands, we throw  
The Torch: be yours to hold it high!  
If ye break faith with those who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

News of Henry Loutit's death reached his mother on May 11<sup>th</sup>, and was reported in The Edmonton Bulletin under the headline, "Six More Edmonton Men Killed in Action; Local Casualty List Indicates the Severity of the Fight; Special Message from Ottawa Announces that Harry Loutit, Well Known in North [...] Killed in Action". The Bulletin article went on to report: Died in Action. Harry Loutit, son of Mrs. Caroline Loutit, 11019 74<sup>th</sup> Street, and of the late Peter

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<sup>20</sup> Nathan M. Greenfield (2007). *Baptism of Fire: The Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada*, April 1915. HarperCollins Publishers.

<sup>21</sup> *Circumstances of Death, Peter Henry Loutit*. Circumstances of Death Registers, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>22</sup> John F. Prescott (1985). *In Flanders Fields: The Story of John McCrae*. Erin, ON: Boston Mills, p. 85.

Loutit. The family, now located at Edmonton, formerly resided at Fort Chipewyan and is well known in the north. Mrs. Loutit received the sad news this morning by special message from the militia department in Ottawa".<sup>23</sup>

In August 1920, \$136.00 was issued by the Canadian Government to Mrs. Caroline Loutit as a "War Service Gratuity to Dependents of Deceased Soldiers". Based on Harry's nine months of service, at \$20.00/ month, \$44.00 had been deducted for a "Special Pension Bonus". Mrs. Loutit later received his war medal, the 1914-15 Star, engraved with his name and service number.<sup>24</sup> In 1921, an engraved Commonwealth plaque, nicknamed the Dead Man's Penny, and a commemorative scroll issued on behalf of King George V to the next of kin of all Commonwealth soldiers killed in World War I, was sent to her.<sup>3</sup>

More tributes followed. On 8 July 1923, Prince Arthur, the Duke of Connaught, unveiled the St. Julien Memorial located in the village of St. Julien, Langemarck, Belgium. The tribute was made by French Marshall Ferdinand Foch, former Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers on the Western Front. In his speech, Foch stated: "The Canadians paid heavily for their sacrifice and the corner of the earth on which this Memorial of piety and gratitude rises has been bathed in their blood. They wrote here the first page in that Book of Glory which is the history of their participation in the war."<sup>25</sup> A sculpture of The Brooding Soldier overlooking his fallen comrades is the central feature of the St. Julien Memorial. A plaque on the side of the memorial is inscribed as follows: "This column marks the battlefield where 18,000 Canadians on the British Left withstood the first German gas attacks, the 22-24 April. 2,000 fell and are buried nearby."<sup>25</sup>

Along with more than 1,300 other Canadians who were killed in action during the Second Battle of Ypres and have no known grave, "Loutit P. H." is carved in granite, on panel 10-18-28-6-28 of the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing at Ypres, Belgium. Over the two staircases leading from the main hall is the inscription: HERE ARE RECORDED NAMES OF OFFICERS AND MEN WHO FELL IN YPRES SALIENT BUT TO WHOM THE FORTUNE OF WAR DENIED THE KNOWN AND HONOURED BURIAL GIVEN TO THEIR COMRADES IN DEATH. Each night at 8 PM, members of the local Fire Brigade sound the Last Post in the roadway under the Memorial's arches.<sup>26</sup>

Notably, Private Peter Henry Loutit and Private Frank Cathcart are the only soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, with a home address in Edmonton, Alberta, who were killed in action during the Second Battle of Ypres, and have their names inscribed on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The Edmonton Bulletin. Six More Edmonton Men Killed in Action; Local Casualty List Indicates the Severity of Fight. May 11, 1915, page 6.

<sup>24</sup> 1914-1915 Star. Veterans Affairs Canada. [1914-1915 Star - Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

<sup>25</sup> St. Julien Memorial. Veterans Affairs Canada. [St. Julien Canadian Memorial - Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

<sup>26</sup> Menin Gate (Ypres) Memorial. Veterans Affairs Canada. [Menin Gate \(Ypres\) Memorial - The Canadian Virtual War Memorial - Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

<sup>27</sup> Nathan M. Greenfield (2007). *Baptism of Fire: The Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada*, April 1915. Appendix D, In Memorium. HarperCollins Publishers.

The Memorial Chamber of the Peace Tower, Canadian Parliament Buildings, holds the national Book of Remembrance for the First World War. Every year, on January 25<sup>th</sup>, this Book of Remembrance is opened to Page 24, where “Pte. Henry Loutit 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn.” is inscribed, along with “1915”, “St. Julien”, “CEF”, and the names of over 100 others with a surname beginning with the letter “L” who died while serving Canada during World War 1.<sup>28</sup>

A Canadian Virtual War Memorial in tribute of Private Peter Henry Loutit is also maintained on the Veterans Affairs Canada website.<sup>29</sup> Information on his military service, next of kin, and a photograph of the inscription of his name, PH Loutit, on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing are located on this virtual memorial.

All this, Lest We Forget Peter Henry Loutit, a Metis soldier who was tragically killed in action in Flanders fields, and whose service to his country is honoured on the National Metis Memorial Monument.

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This story was written and respectfully submitted by Allison L. McKinnon in November 2020.

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<sup>28</sup> Book of Remembrance, First World War. Veterans Affairs Canada.

<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/images/remembrance/memorials/books/bww1/ww1024.jpg>

<sup>29</sup> Canadian Virtual War Memorial in Memory of Private Peter Henry Loutit, April 26, 1915.

<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/1593926>