

HARRY VINCENT FULLER



My Uncle Harry Vincent Fuller was born 24 Feb 1894 at St Paul, Minnesota, USA. He was the oldest child of Charles Woodman Fuller d. 1937 and Grace Déchanet d. 1932. He was 10 when the family moved to Calgary, where father Charles first ran a dray service but soon took out at homestead near Carbon, Alberta. Coal was discovered on the river bank north end of the homestead. There were lots of boys to help with the farm work and also work in the Fuller Coal Mine. Harry was 22 when signed up for military service on 5 May 1916 to the 137th Battalion Canadian Expeditionary Force of Calgary, Alberta, Canada; his Registration No. 809174, Sapper.

While researching the family history, I found a small leather breast notebook that Harry carried with him throughout WW I and recorded events as he saw them. Sometime later we obtained his military file from the archives in Ottawa and are able to trace each of his movements from the time he left Calgary in 1916 to Europe and back to Calgary in 1919.

However this story about Uncle Harry will be told by Harry through his words as written into his small breast notebook. As I transcribed the following words, I imagined Harry taking out this little note book at the end of a day to make each of the following entries.

February 24 [1917]

Left England for France – Left Purfleet [Essex on Thames SE of London] Camp on Friday Feb. 23, 1917 at 10 PM and got on the boat at 10 AM, Feb. 24 and landed in France at 3 PM and marched for 4 miles to a camp and there we put up our tents which we stayed in until the 26th.

We all marched 2 miles on Sunday morning for a wash, which was cold. After dinner we went for a short route march in the afternoon. We left for the front at 2 AM in the morning and got on a train at 6:15. We saw camps all along the way. We got to the Base at 3:30 PM which was called “Albert”. I went to see the big RC church, which was blown to pieces on the 27th. On the 28th we left Albert at 7:00 in the morning and marched 3 miles in the mud up near the trenches. Left camp at 5:15 in AM to do some repair work on the railway which was blown up and took charge of a lot of CP men, got back at 11:15.

March 1, 1917 – one British pilot brought down on the 2nd, big snow storm on the 5th – worked on the track all day. One battle B plane brought down on account of the man being wounded. On the 6th of March, I was sent back to the transport and set up by the ___ for one week – I had one lame mule.

March 22, 1917 – Albert - We got up at 2:30 in the morning to load up to ___ camp and we got loaded on the train at 3 in the afternoon and got started after 4 and it started to snow at 5 and snowed all night. We pulled into St. Pol [sur Turnoise] at 5 in the morning and we stayed at St. Pol until 6 PM and then hitched up and drove until 2:30 in the morning and there we stayed until the 25th and then continued our trip to Arras. On the 26th the Sergeant and 4 fowl ups went for wood.

March 27, 1917 - On the 27th wrote a letter home and also received 2 letters from home. One of them was a note on Jan. 1 and the other one on Jan 17 and one had a dollar in it. On the first of April I went to D. la in the morning and in the afternoon it started to snow and lasted until the next night. On April 3, we moved to Arras and were camped right in with the big guns. On the 4th of April a big bombardment started and lasted for 72 hours. On April 8, Easter Sunday, old Fritz started to shell our camp and made us leave the tents and go into dugouts at 1:15 in the morning. The same night the British captured 200 prisoners and advanced three lines of trenches.

Arras May 1, 1917 – at 5:30 PM, shortly after we had supper, the Germans started shelling our camp and they landed shells all around us. The second shell set fire to a building 20 yards from the camp. The third shell hit in the street in front of the camp and several others came close but none of them hit right in to the camp. At 8 PM on the 1st they landed a fire shell into a cartage dump and when the shells started to go off it sounded like a hail storm on a tin roof and two of our boys went for a walk down the road and before they got very far an officer sent them over to help put out the fire. At 9 PM one of the boys was killed and the other one was badly wounded. The one that was killed was [Harry] Darkins [service number 649259] and the other was Marrin and he was taken to the house hospital at once and so we did not see him. We gave Darkins a good funeral.

On May 9th we moved from Arras to Bapaume and on May 24th we had some sports and we had a good time with foot and baseball, tug a war, foot races, sack races, mule and horse races. On May 26th Goalsack was wounded and on May 27th we packed up and moved again and went to Belgium, to a place called Poperinge [close to Passchendaele] and I went on the water wagon.

June 18, 1917 - we left Belgium on June 18th and went back to France.

Yes – the notes end abruptly and that is the last entry, leaving us to want more. But I can tell you that Harry did return to Carbon to work in the Fuller Mine after ending his military service on 4 Apr 1919. War Service Badge – Class “A” No. 70629

On 8 Oct 1925 at Carbon, Harry married Ellen "Nellie" Kyle, daughter of James Kyle and Annie Queen of Glasgow, Scotland. Aunt Nellie died 24 Dec 2003 at Lethbridge, Alberta at the age of 101. Harry and Ellen had two children, Annie Grace died in 1927 aged 18 months and Charles V. died in 2007 at the age of 79. Due to his involvement in the war, Harry received the rights to a quarter section of land about 50 miles west of Carbon near the town of Acme, Alberta and he and Nellie planned to move and set up a farm on this land. In the fall of 1928, Harry was injured in a mine accident and could not work in the mine but was able to do a little farming on his future farm.

On the evening of 2 Oct 1928, Harry was on his way back to Carbon with a wagon loaded with sacks of potatoes and sheaves of wheat. The wagon bumped off the last plank of the traffic bridge and the horses may have jerked forward causing the sheaves and Harry to slip onto the ground and under the wheels of the wagon.

Uncle Harry died 7 Oct 1928 in the hospital at Drumheller, Alberta, Canada, at age 34. He was buried on 9 Oct 1928 in the Cemetery in Carbon, Alberta, Canada. I and much of the family did not have a chance to meet and get to know Uncle Harry, but we have his little notebook and the story it contains.

W L Fuller

Note: wiki def: A *sapper*, also called *pioneer* or *combat engineer*, is a *combatant* or *soldier* who performs a variety of *military engineering* duties such as *bridge-building*, *laying* or *clearing minefields*, *demolitions*, *field defenses* and *general construction*, as well as *road* and *airfield construction* and *repair*.