

War Memories across Canada Conversation Kit:

When They Marched To War 26th Battalion - Canadian Expeditionary Force Saint John, New Brunswick



Musée du Nouveau-Brunswick – New Brunswick Museum/1988.67.16

On Saturday, June 12, 1915 in Saint John, New Brunswick, the 26th Battalion paraded through the city for embarkation overseas. They marched from the Barrack Green Armoury to the wharf where their ship, the *Caledonia*, awaited. Crowds of civilians lined the streets, cheering and waving farewell as the brass bands played. Crowds assembled again the following morning as the *Caledonia* departed, loaded with soldiers. Lieutenant Harry Ferguson called the fanfare “an inspiring sight.”

Established in November of 1914, the 26th Battalion Canadian Expeditionary Force included soldiers from New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and the United States. Of the 5719 who served, 918 never returned home.

Discussion Questions:

What do you think it was like for loved ones when the 26th Battalion left for war?

Why was it important to send soldiers to war with a celebration? What is the importance of camaraderie and morale among soldiers in war? How were veterans welcomed home after the fighting was over?

Lieutenant Harry Ferguson was 25 years old when he left Canada for the Western Front. Compare life and the responsibilities of young adults today to those who lived 100 years ago.

Activities:

Research the life of Lieutenant Harry Wensley Ferguson, whose diaries are quoted in the vignette. What was his fate during the First World War?

Use the resources on the next page to find information about Canadians who fought in the First World War. Do you have ancestors who fought in the war? If so, try to locate their records of service. Hint: Library and Archives Canada is a good place to start. Are their names listed on any war memorials in Canada or overseas?

Read the daily journal entries of Lieutenant Harry Ferguson, as posted on the Facebook page, *The 26th Battalion Today*. Describe your emotions as you read the journal entries. Why do you think it's important to preserve the journals of individuals who experienced the war first hand?

What role do personal diaries have in the documentation of Canadian history? Think about other ways we document history (photos, documentaries, literature and movies). How do diaries tell a different story? Can we use social media to remember Canadian veterans?



Henry W. Ferguson - Veterans Affairs Canada

Resources:

Websites

The 26th Battalion Today

<https://www.facebook.com/newbrunswick26th/?fref=nf>

Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC)

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead.aspx>

Fighting 26th Battalion's departure for WWI remembered – CBC News (June 25, 2015)

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/fighting-26th-battalion-s-departure-for-wwi-remembered-1.3109448>

Library and Archives Canada – First World War
<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/Pages/introduction.aspx>

New Brunswick Museum - Musée du Nouveau-Brunswick

<http://www.nbm-mnb.ca/>

The Canadian Letters and Images Project

<http://www.canadianletters.ca/>

An online archive of the Canadian war experience, including diaries, letters and photos of soldiers.

Books

New Brunswick's "Fighting 26th" : a history of the 26th New Brunswick Battalion, C.E.F., 1914-1919, by S. Douglas MacGowan, Harry M. Heckbert & Byron E. O'Leary. Neptune Publishing, 1991.

At the sharp end : Canadians fighting the Great War, 1914-1916. & Shock troops : Canadians fighting the Great War, 1917-1918, by Tim Cook. Viking Canada, 2007 & 2008.

From Vimy to victory : Canada's fight to the finish of World War I, by Hugh Brewster. Scholastic Canada, 2014 (De Vimy à la victoire : le combat du Canada durant la Première Guerre mondiale)

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