

# *Memorial United Church*

## *War Dead 1914-1918*

### *Introduction*

In Eric Bogel's song, "The Green Fields of France", the singer sits by the graveside of Private Willie McBride, who died at age 19, in 1916, and wonders, who was the real Willie McBride?

Did you leave a wife or a sweetheart behind?  
In some faithful heart, was your memory enshrined?  
And though you died back in 1916,  
In that faithful heart, were you always 19?

Or are you just a picture, without even a name?  
Enshrined forever, 'neath a glass pane  
In an old photograph, torn, tattered and stained  
And faded and yellow in a brown metal frame...

And I can't help but wonder, now Willie McBride,  
Do all those who lie here know why they died?  
Did they really believe when they told them the cause?  
Did they really believe that this war would end wars?...

In June of this year, I was attempting to memorize and internalize the words and lyrics of Bogel's song. The thought then struck me, how much do I know about the 15 fallen in whose honour our church, Memorial United, is named? How much does the congregation know? Out of this concern grew the project which you see in this section of our Centenary Commemorative Booklet, an attempt to highlight the service of our 15 heroes and to see them, where the evidence will allow, as real, warm, living, ordinary human beings with the cares, concerns, loves, joys and human weaknesses that engulf all of us.

They gave their all, but they were not the only ones willing to do so. Sometimes it was mere luck and blind chance that determined who fell or who remained standing and would return home after the war. Those who fell were not, necessarily, always the bravest or the boldest. Admittedly, this work pays tribute to those who did not return, but it is well to remember and to recognize the heroism of all those who served. Of course the big difference is that some paid a high price in blood, pain and the loss of a future. Their families, and other loved ones, paid a high price in grief and sorrow, which in some instances left them with an indelible and life-altering negative stain.

Nonetheless, most coped well. In *The Danger Tree*, (Toronto: Macfarlane Walters & Ross, 1991) David Macfarlane related his great-grandmother Louisa Goodyear's initial reaction at the news of her third war loss, Lieutenant Stanley, and how she recovered and carried on with exemplary strength and fortitude:

She trembled slightly ... and turned away before anyone could see her expression. But she recovered her self and three years later, when the first service was held in the new Memorial United Church at Grand Falls, she was asked to read aloud the names on the honor roll. She did so, standing with imperious dignity in her pew and pronouncing the names of the war dead – including her three lost boys – without so much as a quiver in her voice. My Grandmother, who was a pretty woman of twenty-one at the time, used to say that she would never forget that Sunday morning. (Macfarlane, pp. 175-176)

Those who gave their lives were just ordinary soldiers with the strengths, and the weaknesses, generally associated with soldiers, or indeed with all of us. One was disorderly on parade. One was absent from parade on three separate occasions. He was fined and confined to barracks accordingly. Another was absent from parade on four separate instances. These incidents occurred while the Regiment was training in Scotland. Could we blame their misdemeanors on the young Scottish Lassies whose company was, without doubt, more attractive and comforting than that of the parade square Sergeant Major. One man lost some military equipment and had to make compensation. In one instance, there is a hint of a possibly questionable financial transaction. One of our officers purposely disobeyed a superior when the best interest of the Regiment dictated that he do so. Another one of our boys was "absent from Church Parade". (Saturday evening date, late night, Scottish Lassies again?) Incidentally, his punishment was forfeiture of a day's pay and confinement to barracks for the following weekend. Rough Justice!

None of our boys were married, but there is evidence that, to answer Bogel's question, some did leave a

None of our boys were married, but there is evidence that, to answer Bogel's question, some did leave a sweetheart behind.

How much does a soldier know about the real cause for which he will, possibly, lay down his life? Probably, in most instances, very little. Most ordinary soldiers were not well educated or well informed. They often fought for slogans or catch words and in some cases, were carried along by the patriotic tide. Even in our day, if we examine places such as Iraq or Afghanistan, what are the soldiers really fighting for? Even the politicians and the government, that sent them there, are not quite certain or consistent about what the real reasons and issues are.

Some soldiers, though, do have a vision of what their sacrifices could mean in the overall long-term unfolding of events. Such a soldier was Lieutenant Hedley Goodyear M.M. of Grand Falls. In the famous letter known as "the Last Letter Home of a Hero", he wrote:

August 6, 1918

*Dearest Mother,*

*This is the evening before the attack and my thoughts are with you all at home, but my backward glance is wistful, only because of the memories and because of the sorrow that would befall and darken your lives should anything happen to me in tomorrow's fray. Otherwise my eye is fixed on tomorrow with hope for mankind and with visions of a new world. A blow will be struck tomorrow which will definitely mark the turn of the tide—*

*I have no misgivings for myself in tomorrow's encounter. It does not matter whether I survive or fall. A great triumph is certain, and I shall take part in it. I shall strike a blow for freedom, along with thousands of others who count personal safety as nothing when freedom is at stake—*

*We shall strive only to achieve victory. We shall not hold our lives dear. The hour is all the more dramatic for me because, for the first time since I came to France, I am close to the spot consecrated by the blood of our gallant dead.*

*It was here that noble Raymond fell and Joe and Kenneth shed their blood in freedom's cause. I trust to be as faithful as they.*

*I shall be my mother and father's son tomorrow. Again God bless you all.*

*Your son Hedley*

I would like to express thanks and appreciation to the Archives Staff at The Rooms for their help with my research. They were always kind, courteous and accommodating. My nephew, Michael Ward, provided invaluable assistance at many aspects of the internet research and at putting the package together. His advice on content, as well, was a most positive factor. Wally Robinson did some of the original typing. David Macfarlane's book, The Danger Tree, was replete with information on the three fallen Goodyear soldiers and is recommended to anyone who would like to be better informed on these men and on some aspects of the war. Reverend Howard Crooks was always interested and supportive. Thank you to Luz for allowing me to go to St. John's, alone, for seven days to do research. But most of all:

**Thank you to our fifteen brave and gallant fallen heroes. You gave your all for us. We love, honour and admire you. We trust that, in our hearts and minds, much more than before, you are now, in some small way, in terms of knowing the real you, something more than a name on a plaque.**

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