

# For King Country

WRITTEN BY MEGHAN J. WARD  
ART DIRECTION BY DEE LAROSA

ONE CENTURY AFTER THE  
ARMISTICE, WE LOOK BACK ON  
BANFF AND THE GREAT WAR.

Canadian soldiers returning from Vimy Ridge.  
W.I. Castle, Canada. Dept. of National Defence,  
Library and Archives Canada (PA-001332)

“After a long and tiring sea voyage and a very tedious passage on the train, I arrived back in Banff last night. How good it was to be heading west into the mountains in the moonlight and hear the conductor's familiar refrain, “Banff... Banff is the next stop.”\*

On November 5, 1916, Ebenezer William Peyto stepped off the train at the Banff station. It was long past midnight and not a soul was there to greet him. As hotel transportation had ceased for the season, he walked alone in darkness to his cabin near the Bow River.

In that brisk, cold air, all was still. For Peyto, a quiet spot was a welcome refuge after three months spent fighting in France amidst bloodshed and exploding shells – one of which had wounded him badly in the thigh. So too would have been the lack of fanfare at the Banff station. “That is ‘Bill’ Peyto’s style,” noted an article in Banff’s local newspaper, the *Crag & Canyon*, the weekend after his return. “He never toots his own horn.”

For 30 years, until 2016, a sign featuring Peyto’s iconic portrait greeted visitors to Banff, just steps away from the Banff station. It embodied everything we know about “Wild” Bill Peyto, the outfitter, guide and park warden whose wild antics and hardiness made him a local legend. But few people know he carried that same fortitude and grit with him to war – that he, like many “Banff Boys,” left behind his post in the mountains to fight in the muddy trenches of World War I.

The Great War left no one, anywhere, untouched, and Banff was no exception. Wartime called people to unimaginable acts of bravery. It demanded ingenuity amidst uncertainty, forever changing the face of the national park. The following stories provide a glimpse into what transpired for Banff and its residents during that fateful era after war broke out on July 28, 1914.

Personnel records of the First World War - CEF 576771a.  
Library and Archives Canada (Ref. RG 150,  
Accession 1992-93/166, Box 7781 - 25, Item #573508)



Bill Peyto. Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Archives General File (V8/acc. 3183)

Forms I. 1237 10 **19051** MEDICAL CASE SHEET. Army Form I. 1237.

No. in Admission and Discharge Book. 117477  
Year 1916  
Station and Date MOORE BARRACKS CANADA

Regimental No. 117477  
Rank.  
Surname. Peyto  
Christian Name. Ebenezer  
Age. 17 1/2  
Service.

R. 148. PEYTO, EBENEZER WILLIAM 117477

Name PEYTO, Ebenezer William. PTE.  
Unit 3rd. Can. Div. M.G.C. (7th. Co)  
Next of Kin Canada.

Date	Movement	Place	Casualty	List No.	Notif. N/R
7-6-16	3rd. Northern G.S.W.	Sheffield G.S.W. Thigh. B3.			
13-8	K.C.R.C.H.	Bushey pk.	do	B46	
22-8	Discharged		do	B46	
3-9	Moore Bks.	Shorncliffe	do	B51	
25-9	Discharged				

CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE  
Discharge Certificate

This is to Certify that No. 117477 (Rank) Lance-Corporal  
the Ebenezer William Peyto  
Twelfth Overseas Canadian Mounted Rifles enlisted in  
day of April 1915 at Calgary, Alta. on the Third  
HE served in France, with the 7th. Bde. M.G. Coy.  
and is now discharged from the service by reason of Being Medically Unfit For  
Further Service On Account Of Wounds Received In  
THE DESCRIPTION OF THIS SOLDIER on the  
Age 41 Yrs

\*This is the November 6, 1916, entry from E.J. (Ted) Hart's fictional, though heavily researched, book, *Alm't It Hell: Bill Peyto's Mountain Journal*.





## The Banff Boys

As a self-governing dominion of the British Empire, Canada took up arms shortly after war was declared in 1914. Although Britain initially requested that Canada provide 25,000 troops, in the end, 620,000 went to war – an astonishing ratio considering the country's population of just 8 million. Sadly, just under 60,000 were killed overseas; nearly 173,000 were wounded.

By all accounts, Banff's response to the war was equally admirable and, in the beginning, enthusiastic. By February of 1915, 102 men from Banff had enlisted. "When one takes into consideration the fact that the winter population in Banff is not greatly in excess of 1,000, this town has contributed more men for king and country than any other town or city, in proportion to population, in the Dominion," the *Crag & Canyon* proudly reported. Within two years, with conscription in place, as well as looser regulations for new recruits, a total of 266 "Banff Boys" had enlisted.



Prize Platoon of 31st Battalion receiving Medals. May, 1918. Canada. Dept. of National Defence, Library and Archives Canada (Mikan # 3522123)

Much of what we know about the experience of Banff's contingent of soldiers can be found in articles and correspondences published in the *Crag & Canyon*. The newspaper provided an integral connection between the home front and those on the battlefield, and in many cases was the sole source of information for people desperate to know what was happening across the pond.

"Sergt. Harry Laycock writes a letter from France," began one article in the *Crag & Canyon* on June 23, 1917. "He can't speak too highly of the way the Banff boys have come to the colors, and says that there can't possibly be any 'git' left in the old mountains." The article described Laycock's gratitude for gifts from home, such as socks and cigarettes. "He often meets the Banff boys and Banff is their main topic of conversation," the article continued. "What a beautiful place Banff is to them from the distant battlefields surrounded by desolation and destruction...."

Between 1914 and 1918, the newspaper covered new enlistments, general updates from the front, notable achievements – such as Colonel Philip Albert Moore's rise to high ranks and responsibility – and sobering news regarding injuries and deaths.

"Into our peaceful valley the news comes that another Banff lad has given up all for his friends and country. Pte. John Lomax has died of wounds in the official notice," wrote the *Crag & Canyon* about the 19-year-old on April 21, 1917. John's two older brothers also died, before their 24th birthdays, as a result of the war.

War diaries, 31st Canadian Infantry Battalion. Library and Archives Canada (Mikan #. 2005928)



(TOP) From L-R: John, George, and William Lomax in Banff in 1916. Courtesy Edward McDonald

(BOTTOM) Canadians captured guns and ammunition on Vimy Ridge. May, 1917. Canada. Dept. of National Defence Library and Archives Canada (Mikan # 3397815)

Fifty-two Banff boys did not come home. Those who did faced a tough re-entry. "You can bank on the fact they were all in the thick of the scrap, doing their duty fearlessly like true men and soldiers," commented the *Crag & Canyon* on May 17, 1919. "Some day, when recollection of the horrors has been softened by the flight of time, the boys may loosen up and relate some of the sights witnessed and deeds done."

Time has taught us just how many of these wounds would never heal.

Phil Moore Now  
Brigadier-Major

Banff man rapidly climbing  
the top. To be in  
10,000 men

The Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund exists to support projects that "commemorate and recognize the experiences of ethno-cultural communities affected by the First World War Internment," according to [internmentcanada.ca](http://internmentcanada.ca).

## Prisoners in the Park

In the early years of the 20th century, thousands of men made their way to Canada from eastern and central Europe in search of work, primarily in railroad construction. When work dried up, they migrated to the cities to find new opportunities. When the war broke out, however, many of these migrant workers became "enemy aliens" under Canada's 1914 *War Measures Act*. Over 8,500 of them were interned as prisoners of war, some of them in the Banff area.

Built in 1915, the Castle Mountain Camp was the first internment camp established in a national park, and during its operation housed 660 prisoners of war from Ukraine, Austria, Hungary and Germany. Internees were tasked primarily with the responsibility of building the highway to Lake Louise in order to better equip the park for future tourism.

Conditions in the camp were atrocious, physical and psychological abuse ran rampant, and the tents were insufficient for winter temperatures.

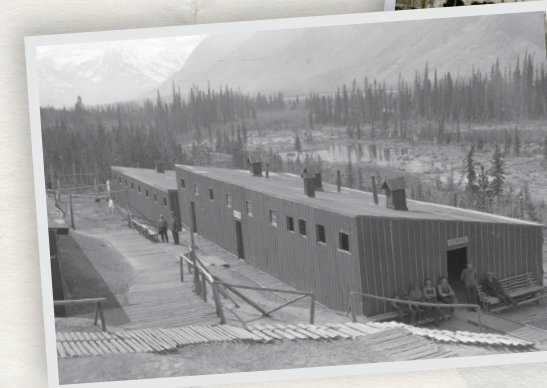
For the colder months, the camp was relocated to a series of barracks built adjacent to the Cave and Basin National Historic Site. Still, the prisoners – and guards – would walk four to six miles each way to reach their project sites. "To make matters worse," writes Bill Waiser in *Park Prisoners*, "the distance from the camp precluded a warm midday meal and the men had to choke down frozen food."

"...We are as hungry as dogs," wrote prisoner Nick Olynyk to his wife in the fall of 1915. "Things are not very good... in the tents [in] which we sleep everything is wet... such conditions we have here in Canada, I will never forget."

Insubordination often meant corporal punishment, including solitary confinement for up to 42 days. Many prisoners attempted to escape, some successfully, while others were shot at, recaptured, and punished. Others died by suicide or due to the difficult conditions and maltreatment. In total, 107 interned prisoners died in camps across Canada.

Returned Soldier's Handbook (Repatriation Committee, ca. 1919).  
Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research  
Collection. University of Western Ontario, London

(RIGHT)  
Castle Mountain Internment  
Camp, ca. 1915. Whyte  
Museum of the Canadian  
Rockies, Dave White family  
fonds (V681/B-7/pa-30)

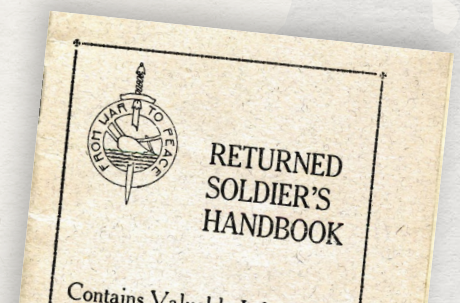


(LEFT) Internment camp  
near Cave and Basin,  
ca. 1918, Byron Harmon  
(photographer). Whyte  
Museum of the Canadian  
Rockies, Byron Harmon  
fonds (V263/na-3571)

Today, this dark era in the park's history is commemorated by a small memorial built along the Bow Valley Parkway, as well as a larger interpretive centre built just beyond the Cave and Basin.

### Last Man Down

The last Canadian airman to die in WW1 was George Emerson Dowler, whose plane went down just hours before the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. His parents are buried in the Old Banff Cemetery and a plaque there commemorates George with the words "Sleeps in Flanders Fields."





## A New Era for Tourism

As war broke out in Europe, Banff National Park (then Rocky Mountains Park) was on a path of growth and new developments. Thanks to special initiatives prior to the war that increased visitation (1915 saw the park's highest numbers to that date, with 90,000 visitors), there was a delay to the impact of the war on Banff's tourism industry. That reality hit in 1916, when just 57,350 visitors entered the park.



Banff Winter Carnival men's ski race on Banff Avenue, ca. 1918, Byron Harmon (photographer). Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Byron Harmon fonds (V263/na-3958)

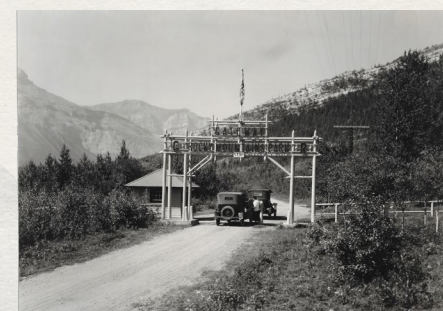
As E.J. Hart writes in *Banff: A History of the Park and Town*, "While park soldiers were fighting and dying in Europe, the local economy limped through the war's final years." New projects were put in place to bolster tourism outside of the summer months, including the promotion of winter activities like skating, curling and skiing. Prominent locals Norman Luxton and Barney Collison initiated the idea of the Banff Winter Carnival, a two-week festival of winter activities beginning on February 6, 1917, and catering to visitors from the western provinces. The Banff Winter Carnival would continue as a popular annual event into the 1960s.

Another initiative was the improvement of amenities for campers in the national park, including the establishment of an official campground below the Banff Springs Hotel – a popular camping spot with impending management problems, and also one strategically located next to the Banff Springs golf course. The course itself would be expanded to 18 holes in the years just after the war.

The biggest change to tourism came on four wheels when, in light of Banff's dwindling numbers, commissioner of Dominion Parks James B. Harkin and park superintendent Simon J. Clark made regional automobile traffic a new focus. In 1916, after years of prohibition, restrictions and an onerous licensing system for personal vehicles, a park gate was created at the eastern boundary of Rocky Mountains Park, and automobiles were welcomed into the park. This shift would forever change both the types of visitors coming to the park and the way visitors could interact with the mountain park environment. In that first year, 786 vehicles registered at the gate.

Read more about the park's first gatekeeper, Annie Staple, at [bit.ly/guardianofthegates](http://bit.ly/guardianofthegates).

(BELOW) Courtesy Canada, Dept. of National Defence, Library and Archives Canada. (Mikan # 2075805)



The official archway that greeted visitors at the east gate to Rocky Mountains Park (renamed Banff National Park in 1930) was first constructed in 1917. Staple Family Collection

### Indigenous People in the Forces

According to the authors of *A Commemorative History of Aboriginal People in the Canadian Military*, though exact numbers are unknown, about 4,000 Indigenous people served in the Canadian forces during the First World War. Only twenty-nine Albertans served – 17 of them from the Blood reserve.

Let's Go CANADA!

## No One to Guide

Prior to the First World War, guides and outfitters "had provided the sole means for tourist-explorers of all descriptions to see the wilderness of the Canadian Rockies away from the railroad lines," says E.J. Hart in *Diamond Hitch*. The war would mean the end of that epoch, one we romanticize today as a bygone era of exploration and hardy life on the trail.

The changes began as guides and outfitters answered the call to arms, which took them away from their posts in the wilderness and onto the front lines. Many of them did not see each other again before the war came to a close, and a number were wounded, captured or killed during their time overseas.



One of the first of Banff's Boys to respond to the call, Sergeant Sidney Unwin – perhaps best known as the guide who accompanied Mary Schäffer on her Maligne Lake explorations – lost his right arm in combat and later died of his wounds in June 1917. Jasper National Park's Mount Unwin, which he first ascended in 1908, is named after him.

In one remarkable case, when Sid Unwin enlisted in 1914, he left his outfitting business in the hands of his sister, Ethel. "With characteristic Unwin determination, she immediately applied to the government for a guide's license, the first granted to a woman in the parks," writes Hart in *Diamond Hitch*. The temporary arrangement became a permanent one when, in 1917, Sid was hit by shrapnel at Vimy Ridge and later died of his wounds.

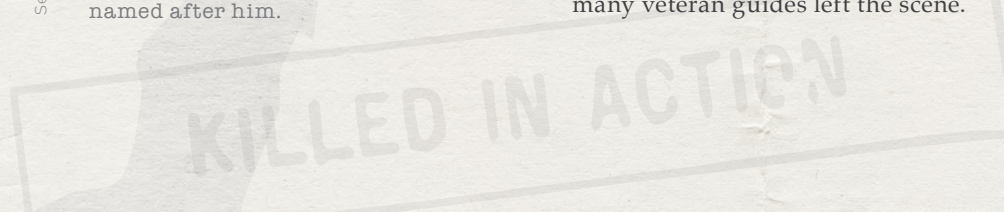
As horses made way for automobiles, it became increasingly the norm to view the sights in one's own car or on a motorized tour, such as the ones offered by the Brewster Transport Company. Fearing that roads would eventually penetrate into more isolated parts of the park, many trailmen began to develop other businesses; outfitter Jimmy Simpson would later acknowledge it was during this time he set his sights on building a mountain lodge at Bow Lake.

Furthermore, as Hart describes, "The day of the wealthy tourist-explorer, who wished to visit unexplored lakes, valleys and mountains and could afford to hire men and outfit for several months at a time, was drawing to a close." Banff began to see more middle-class tourists with constrained budgets. Even though some wanted to venture off the beaten track, they could only afford to do so for a short time – hardly sustainable for guiding businesses that needed to keep reliable workers on the payroll. Still, other operators would succeed by offering new types of backcountry trips, such as Caroline B. Hinman, who led large group trail rides.

Feeling like the glory days were over, many veteran guides left the scene.

## ADVANCEMENT IN WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In the greater Canadian context, women took jobs in factories and other industries to replace men who had gone to war. Though women had been advocating for suffrage in Canada since the 1870s, these newfound roles in society gave their cause more weight and agency. The right to vote at the provincial level was enacted on a province-by-province basis starting with Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1916. In 1917, the *War-time Elections Act* extended the federal vote to women in the armed forces and to female relatives of military men (it disenfranchised "enemy aliens" and conscientious objectors, however, even those previously franchised under provincial laws). It would take until 1918 for women to gain the right to vote at the federal level. It wasn't until 1960 that portions of the *Canada Elections Act* were repealed in order to grant federal voting rights to First Nations people, male or female.





## Mary Schäffer and the War

Women in Canada had a significant impact on the war effort, both at home and abroad. In addition to the over 3,000 nurses who served in the war – 46 of whom died – women back in Canada got involved in fundraising and morale-boosting efforts. Like their female counterparts across the country, Banff women were actively involved in volunteer organizations, raising money, knitting socks, and sending gifts and holiday packages overseas.

Famed Rockies explorer Mary Schäffer Warren, originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, contributed to the home-front effort in Banff with the Ladies Overseas Club, knitting woollen socks for soldiers at the front.



Canadian journalists on Vimy Ridge. July, 1918. Canada. Dept. of National Defence, Library and Archives Canada (Mikan # 3522414)

Mary's war contributions took an interesting turn when, in late 1915, she received a letter from Cpl. T. Shannon of the 32nd Battalion, thanking her for the socks and describing life in the trenches. Moved by his letter, she sent it to the *New York Times*, as the Americans had not yet entered the war.

After it was published in May 1916, Mary received a letter from a New-Jersey-based Episcopal clergyman named William Henderson Watts, "praising her for bringing to the attention of Americans the realities of the war in Europe," writes Hugh Dempsey in an article in *Alberta History* called "Mary Warren's Letters from the War Front, 1916-1917." It was the beginning of two years of elaborate correspondence between the two, which lasted until the Americans entered the war.

When Mary's American nephew, Eric Sharples, was killed in France (he had moved to Canada as a teenager to enlist), she wrote to Watts, "I feel that his death should send a far cry to the land of his birth, that deaf ears should hear, selfish hearts give up their material gain and rush to help our brave boys in the trenches."

(LEFT) Canadian War Pictorial: A Photographic Record, No. 1. London: Canadian War Records Office



Mary Schäffer Warren by her fireplace. Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Mary Schäffer fonds (V527/lc/accn 3007/na66-527)

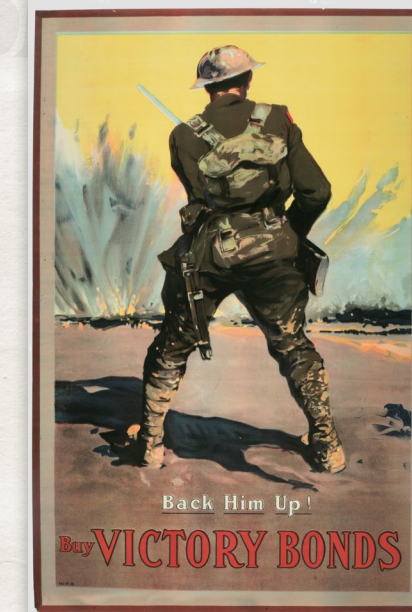
Dempsey notes that during the war, Mary – ever the advocate and connector – "responded to a steady stream of letters, mostly from wives of servicemen trying to learn the fate of their husbands, or if wounded, where they had been sent. With her numerous contacts, Mary interceded wherever possible." The Banff government office even gave Mary the responsibility of telling Ethel Unwin about her brother's death, and the *Canadian Alpine Journal* requested she write his biography.

Mary remained dedicated to her home-front effort until the war's end, adding her knit socks to the thousands of pairs southern Alberta women sent to soldiers at the front.

(LEFT) Illustrated War News. March 31, 1915. Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection. University of Western Ontario, London



These souvenir cards, with original art by Lewis E. Smith, were produced in 1919 to mark significant events of the First World War. Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection. University of Western Ontario, London



Back Him Up! Buy Victory Bonds. Canadian War Museum (CWM 19920108-016)

Canada began selling bonds to raise money during the First World War. Artwork like this was used to advertise the purchasing of Victory Bonds.



Children who had no access to actual badges of the Canadian Expeditionary Force could collect cards of the badges instead. Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection. University of Western Ontario, London

## One Hundred Years Later

The First World War was a dark and difficult period. Yet what we see in the correspondence from that time is an effort on the part of the local community to rise above the turmoil, to come together in support of the soldiers and to embrace resourcefulness in the face of scarcity and adversity. One hundred years later, we can find inspiration in the tenacity of those community bonds. We can work to right the wrongs experienced by those who were imprisoned within our beautiful national park. And we can take a moment of silence to reflect on the sacrifices of the Banff Boys who left their precious mountain life behind for the battlefield abroad. ▲

### Select Resources

*A Commemorative History of Aboriginal People in the Canadian Military*, by P. Whitney Lackenbauer et al; *Ain't It Hell: Bill Peyto's Mountain Journal*, by E.J. Hart; *Banff: A History of the Park and Town*, by E.J. Hart; *Crag & Canyon* (various, 1914-1918); *Diamond Hitch: The Pioneer Guides and Outfitters of Banff and Jasper*, by E.J. Hart; *Encyclopedia of Banff History* (Facebook); *Indigenous Services Canada*; "Mary Warren's letters from the home front 1916-1917," by

Hugh A. Dempsey (ed.), *Alberta History*, Vol. 63, no. 1 (Winter 2015); *In the Shadow of the Rockies: Diary of the Castle Mountain Internment Camp, 1915-1917*, Ed. by Bohdan S. Kordan and Peter Melnycky; *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada's National Parks, 1915-1946*, by Bill Waiser; *Parks Canada First World War Internment Exhibit*; *Provincial Archives of Alberta*; [warmuseum.ca](http://warmuseum.ca)