

# Cpl Bill May, Pte Harold May trained at Camp Hughes

## Grandchildren share grandfather's Great War scrapbooks

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Shilo Stag

A veteran of the Battle of Vimy Ridge a century ago left his descendants a treasure trove of black and white photographs and memories he kept in scrapbooks.

Using his trusty Kodak film camera, Bill May took photos at the now defunct Camp Hughes when it was a hive of activity as Canadian soldiers trained on the prairies before heading overseas as members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) during the Great War.

Each photograph tells a story as best Pte May could compose with the camera equipment of that era. Once printed off — usually in a postcard format where you could mail it after writing on the back, and placing a two cent stamp featuring King George V on it — he added to his First World War scrapbook.

One book called "One Man's Memories of WWI," May left remarks or identification of individuals he served with alongside the photo, or on the back. The scrapbooks also include postcards he sent home to the family farm in Millwood, the words scrawled in pencil or ink, that soldiers could purchase at Camp Hughes. These cards were taken by photographers working with Advance Fotos out of Winnipeg, or at the time Camp Sewell before it was renamed after MGen Sir Sam Hughes.

As you turn the pages it's like going back in time as you look into the faces of soldiers long gone, whether they died on the battlefields of Belgium or France, or returned home to raise a family and die as grandfathers on Canadian soil.

Like May, who died on Aug. 8, 1974 in Binscarth where he retired after leaving CFB Shilo. He was 82.

"He was meticulous in how he kept his scrapbooks," said grand-daughter Kathleen Mowbray (nee Schrot) of Minnedosa. "[Aunt] Margaret has held on to a lot of the scrapbooks, and photos, from her dad,



Cpl Bill May looks at his brother Harold having his hair cut in the Vimy sector at Houdain, France. He scrawled on the photo "Shorty cuts em down to size."

and we're now starting to share them with other family members."

Brother Kelvin Schrot thought it would be nice to share his grandfather's story with the *Stag* to coincide with Remembrance Day.

"I've learned things about my family I did not know since [the *Stag*] started looking at my grandfather's life, from being in the army to working on this Base for all those years," he said.

Born on April 8, 1892 in London, England to a family of eight brothers and a sister, Bill May was one of the first employees hired in Camp Shilo by the YMCA in 1940.

With his brother Harold, they arrived in Manitoba after their journey across the Atlantic Ocean brought them to Canada. With outset of the First World War, May first married Grace Murdoch and started a family.

Brother Harold enlisted first, with the Winnipeg Rifles, and began training at Camp Sewell. In a postcard letter sent to his brother written on July 23, 1915, he wrote: "You got the [address] all right, but you did not put 'Man' on it and it went way down to Montreal. What do you think of the picture taken outside the tent?"

The postcard shows seven soldiers, including Harold, standing in front of military-issued blankets on the ground outside of their tent.

May would join his brother at the renamed Camp Hughes that same year as Canada prepared its soldiers for overseas, including the Battle of Vimy Ridge in 1916 that was being planned for April 1917. Both served with the 61st and 44th Battalions, the latter part of the scout section.

Writing postcard letters was the norm for May after he arrived overseas, with brother Harold and him posing for photos to send home to his wife "Betsy". In one written on Dec. 7, 1916, he wrote: "Just received three letters from you, written in Oct and 3rd Nov, a little late but nevertheless very welcome, will write as soon as possible in the meantime what do



This photo featuring Cpl Bill May (right) and his brother Harold (sitting) was taken just after Vimy Ridge was taken by the Canadians after the battle started April 10, 1917. The brothers often posed for the postcard portraits with the intention of using them to send letters back to Canada.

wounds were mortal.

"Three days later, he was found in the mud alive," she recalled. "He was taken to the hospital and was one of the first recipients of reconstructive surgery. [Harold's] zest for life remained until his death [on Nov. 10] in 1951."

May would recuperate from his war wound in the "massage department" of the military convalescent hospital at Woodcote Park, Epsom.

In a letter he wrote home, dated Aug. 8, 1918, there was not much information shared about his wound with wife "Betsy" as he recuperated: "... let you know I'm still kicking around here. Will soon be on [leave] pass am going up to see Scotts for a day or so. Up to Corsock."

May was referring to his road trip to the Village of Corsock in Scotland while he recovered from his shrapnel wound.

Following the war, after returning to the family farm, May would raise a family of seven, including three sons who all enlisted in the Second World War. Son Harold, 23, was KIA in Holland on Feb. 8, 1945. Eldest son Walter died in 1971 after saving a co-worker's life.

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Pte Bill May poses for a photograph with his wife "Betsy" and son Walter prior to leaving for the Great War overseas following his training at Camp Hughes.

Photos courtesy May family