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WATERLOO REGION

Secret soldier of First World War may be a hero

By **Jeff Outhit** Record Reporter

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WATERLOO REGION — A century-old portrait found in a Guelph attic is bringing to light a hidden hero of the First World War.

The stylized photograph features an unnamed soldier in uniform. His eyes and hair are dark. His gaze is steady.

The Paul family of New Dundee purchased the mystery portrait at an antique market in St. Jacobs. They plan to recycle the oval frame for a portrait of their ancestor George Dusome, who was killed fighting in the same war.

But who is in the portrait they purchased? Did he fight overseas like George? Did he survive? Is he remembered by anyone?

Clues and research point to Sgt. Edward Earld Denny, who earned a Military Medal for bravery in battle.

In looking for his name, the Pauls are guided by the belief that we should remember all who fought for Canada more than a century ago.

"It's really important to remember what they were willing to sacrifice, to help everyone else," Naomi Paul said.

Paul, 21, respects long-ago sacrifices. Her great, great uncle George, a French-speaking labourer, lied about his age to enlist at 16. He reached the Western Front just six weeks before he was killed Nov. 7, 1917.

Paul visited Belgium three years ago to see where his name is carved on the Menin Gate Memorial.

George Dusome was 18 when he died in the dark, marching across a cratered battlefield at Passchendaele. Records indicate he slipped off a plank and disappeared.

Perhaps he drowned in mud deep enough to swallow a man whole. Perhaps he was targeted by a sniper. His remains were never recovered.

"He was willing to sacrifice his life to fight for freedom," Paul says.

What she has learned in researching Edward Earld Denny sheds more light on the rich, full, terrible experience of Canadians at war.

Born and raised not far from Listowel, Ont., Denny volunteered after he turned 19. It was the fall of 1915. The war had raged for a year and he was working as a printer.

He sailed to England in 1916 and was twice wounded on the Western Front in France. He was first wounded in May 1917, shortly after his 50th infantry battalion helped take Vimy Ridge from the enemy. Though he suffered multiple contusions, he was able to rejoin his unit five days later.

Late in September 1918, shrapnel to his head injured him more seriously. It happened when his battalion fought to cross the occupied Canal du Nord. By then the Allies had the mighty German army on the run.

The wound knocked Denny out of the war just weeks before victory was achieved on Nov. 11, 1918. It scarred his neck permanently, behind his left ear.

Denny fought well. The army valued him for it. He was twice promoted in the field, to corporal and to sergeant, before earning his medal early in September 1918.

While on leave he did what many other young soldiers did, seeking to affirm life in the face of death. He sought pleasure in the company of women.

From these encounters he contracted an intimate disease that put him in hospital for 87 days. Displeased, the army stripped him of 50 cents a day in pay while he recovered.

“I know it’s something that a lot of soldiers did,” Paul said. “There wasn’t much that they could do aside from fighting, so they tried to enjoy their experience while they were there.”

Like others fighting on the Western Front, Denny’s heart stayed partly at home.

Throughout his service he assigned \$20 of his monthly pay to Mary Frew of Galt, who became his bride. They married in Galt (now Cambridge) on Christmas Eve in 1919 after he returned home to become a postmaster.

He was 23 and she was 21 when they wed. By 1921 the young couple moved back to his home town in Fordwich, Ont. Denny was still a postmaster there when his kidneys failed him in 1943. He died at 46.

While no soldier is named in the mystery portrait, clues point to Denny’s identity.

Three chevrons on the sleeve signal a sergeant, matching his rank. The biggest clue is the name of his father, written on the back. Amos Denny died in 1953, reportedly in Guelph.

The Pauls hope a relative may emerge who wants the portrait. They were told it was found in the attic of a Guelph home.

“He was trying his best at fighting and doing his part. He was probably a pretty good leader,” Naomi Paul said.



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