



Remembrance: Alexander Windram's Story (1881-1917)

📅 November 8, 2016 👤 ARTCi 💬 No comments



Sleet coloured November clouds press heavily upon the city giving it an air of solemnity. A damp carpet of newly fallen leaves is slippery underfoot. It is threatening to rain, and yet they come, lining the streets along Winslow Avenue near Blue Mountain Park and the roads leading to the cenotaph on Veteran's Way. Pinned on the left of each jacket, near the heart, each onlooker bears a splash of red, symbolic of sacrifice, a poppy for remembrance.

Every year at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month, the Royal Canadian Legion in Coquitlam, Branch #263 supports the local Remembrance Day ceremonies, a tradition dating back to the First World War when the guns fell silent, marking the end of military conflict and the remembrance of those who would never return home.

Veterans and their families parade through the streets, each revisited by their own memories. Bands play, cadets march in unison, sometimes bagpipes wail and a lone bugle sounds the notes of the Last Post as everyone bows

their heads, giving thanks for the peace we have now due to the valiant efforts of those who went before.

Remembrance Day is a time to look back with gratitude and forward with hope. It is a time of story. Many men and women from Coquitlam gave their lives in the Great Wars, in the wars that followed, and as Peacekeepers. Alexander Windram was one of them.

With the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge approaching, it seems fitting to share some of his story here. Born in 1881 in Eyemouth, Berwickshire, Scotland, he immigrated to Fraser Mills, BC where he worked as a steamfitter and had a wife, Mary and three children, John, Andrew and Elsie. He signed up for service and trained in the infantry.

Some of the postcards that he wrote home are stored at the City of Coquitlam Archives along with photos reminiscent of a different era. The words of these postcards give a human face to and preserve the legacy of a man whom history embraced nearly a century ago. They also speak in a voice about things that mattered to him then and continue to matter to us today, things such as family. They reveal a man eager to have word that his loved ones were doing well, longing for the day when they would be reunited.

Written in well-formed cursive, in ink faded and stained by time, he wrote to his daughter, Elsie. *"Dear Little Girlie, just a P.C. to you from your dad. Hope you are well girlie. We are passing through cold places now and always further away from you all. Now little girlie, it will be a long time before I see you again, but I hope you will be a good girl, and don't forget your daddie."*

Sadly, Alexander never did reunite with his beloved family. He was killed on the first day of the Battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917 and rests in Arras Road Cemetery in Pas de Calais, France.

On November 11th, at the cenotaph, and perhaps at other times throughout the year, we bow our heads and remember.



Windram family picnic at Brunette Creek, 1918. Photo courtesy of the Coquitlam Heritage Society collection: City of Coquitlam Archives.



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Photo of cenotaph taken from <https://www.cdli.ca/monuments/bc/coquitlam.htm>

- *Lori Sherritt-Fleming*

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