

TEDDY IN THE TRENCHES



Aileen's teddy bear.

Photo: Canadian War Museum CWM 20040015-001

Even tough soldiers can get lonely during times of war. Ten-year-old Aileen from Quebec seemed to understand this when her father Lawrence Rogers went off to serve far from home in the First World War. She gave him "Teddy," her favourite stuffed bear, hoping the present would keep her daddy company and bring good luck. Lieutenant Rogers kept Teddy with him for more than two years as a cherished connection to his family back home. Lawrence wrote in a letter to his wife in 1916:

"Tell Aileen I still have the Teddy Bear and will try to hang on to it for her. It is dirty and his hind legs are kind of loose but he is still with me."

Lawrence Rogers' son, Howard, also missed his father. He wrote him a letter on September 8, 1917, but it never reached his father. Rogers died before reading the final letter from his young son:

"Dear Daddy, We have had holidays ever since the 3rd and I have played all the time and have to go back tomorrow morning. I went to the movies twice, a little boy just came to the door selling tickets for some movies 5¢ but we would not take one. I try my hardest at school to come first. I joined the YMCA and have been there twice at gym. I haven't had a swim yet. I will have to close because I am burning up all the electric light."

Sadly, Aileen and Howard's father died during the muddy Battle of Passchendaele in Belgium in 1917, with the tiny stuffed bear lovingly tucked away in his pocket. Teddy and the unread letter were sent back home to Canada. This year marks the 100th anniversary of that awful battle. Every Canadian who fought there has now died, but Aileen's Teddy and Howard's letter are still around. The bear is now on display at the Canadian War Museum with the letter beside it. Both are powerful connections to the First World War. They symbolize the many families, like that of Aileen and Howard, who were separated from their loved ones in times of war. It is nice to know that cherished keepsakes like Teddy the tiny bear provided comfort and a reminder of home for the brave Canadians who were serving far away.