

**The Wind of Death: A Wartime Biography of Private Wellington Murray Dennis**

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On a late April day in 1916, Wellington Murray Dennis, barely twenty-two years old, stepped toward a recruitment table in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan and forever interwove his life to the story of the Great War - the most horrific, all-encompassing, and technologically advanced conflict the world had ever seen.<sup>1</sup> What motivated Dennis to enlist may forever remain a mystery; perhaps a lust for adventure, the gentle prodding of his fiancé, Margaret Munro, or a sense of shame from the propaganda that permeated his simple life in Weyburn. It may have been a continuation of the "Spirit of 1914", a deeply rooted patriotism, a sense of duty to the Empire, or 1916's deadening reality that the Great War was quickly becoming a horrific war of attrition.<sup>2</sup> Whatever his reason, or perhaps a combination of these factors, Wellington Murray Dennis put pen to paper and found himself thrown into a conflict that would ultimately cost him his life.

Dennis was born in Maplewood, Ontario on April 10, 1894.<sup>3</sup> His mother, Jennie Dennis, became a widow at some point in Dennis's formative years and affectionately called her son "Murray", after her maiden name.<sup>4</sup> Dennis had a brother, D'Arcy, and sister in law, Esther, who were farmers in Pasqua at

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<sup>1</sup> Attestation Paper, Wellington Murray Dennis. Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File. <https://web.viu.ca/davies/H482.WWI/ServiceFile.Dennis.Wellington.PDF>, 2. Accessed 10 February 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Enlistment can be attributed to a myriad of factors, most of which have been written about at great length. For a brief overview of some of the most popular motivators for enlistment, the following resources are suggested. Eric Dorne Brose, *A History of the Great War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 37-40, 146-56. See also *London Free Press*, "Ontario's Immediate Reaction To The News That War Had Been Declared." 5 August 1914. From Stephen Davies' primary document collection for VIU's History 482. <https://web.viu.ca/davies/H482.WWI/reaction.to.war.Ont.Cda.1914.htm>. Accessed 4 January 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Attestation Paper, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File. 2.

<sup>4</sup> The author of this paper noticed that Dennis's uncle was named Angus Murray and that Jennie Dennis moved to Saskatchewan to be near to him. Although there is a small margin for error, it is a reasonable deduction that "Murray" was Jennie Dennis's birth name. Newspaper Article, Weyburn Obituary, August 1918. Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. The Canadian Letters & Images Project, accessed 11 February 2016. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

the time of Dennis's enlistment.<sup>5</sup> While growing up in Stratford, Ontario, Dennis was active in five years of youth military training.<sup>6</sup> At around the age of 16 or 17, Dennis began a relationship with the love of his life, Margaret Munro.<sup>7</sup> Though their relationship was at times tenuous and strained, it was Margaret who would be Dennis's North Star, guiding him through the loneliness, monotony, horror and grief of the final chapter of his life.

In spite of his relationship with Margaret, Dennis moved west with his mother and D'Arcy in 1910 or very shortly thereafter.<sup>8</sup> After working as an implements dealer with International Harvester in Estevan, Saskatchewan, Dennis joined his uncle, Angus Murray, partnering as implements dealers in Weyburn.<sup>9</sup> But on April 28, 1916, Dennis's life would change forever when he enlisted in the 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Western Cavalry) Saskatchewan Regiment, deemed healthy and fit, and approved for service by the Lt. Colonel of the Commanding 229 Overseas Battalion.<sup>10</sup> Dennis's "Form of Will" indicates that he was still in Saskatchewan in the fall of 1916, ostensibly for training in the fall and winter months.<sup>11</sup> Although his service file does not confirm, Dennis's personal correspondence shows

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<sup>5</sup> Weyburn Obituary, Wellington Murray Dennis and Margaret Munro Collection. Canadian Letters and Images Project.

<sup>6</sup> Attestation Paper, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis sent Margaret an intimate and reminiscing note on May 24, 1917. In it, he referred to a moment "7years ago" and wrote "I know you'll remember". If accurate, this note would place Dennis in Stratford in 1910; he would have been in a relationship with Margaret as a 16 year old youth. Postcard 28 of 50, Wellington Murray Dennis. May 24 1917. Dennis, Wellington Murray & Margaret Munro Collection. The Canadian Letters and Images Project, accessed 11 February 2016. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

<sup>8</sup> Weyburn Obituary, Wellington Murray Dennis and Margaret Munro Collection. Canadian Letters and Images Project.

<sup>9</sup> Weyburn Obituary, Wellington Murray Dennis and Margaret Munro Collection. Canadian Letters and Images Project.

<sup>10</sup> Attestation Paper, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File.

<sup>11</sup> Form of Will, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File. 4.

strong evidence that he engaged in training in Kenora, Canada, as well as in Moose Jaw during this time.<sup>12</sup>

At last, it was time for Dennis to leave with the Saskatchewan Regiment for Bramshott, one of the largest military training camps in England. He was in good company; by the end of December 1916, 7240 officers and 128,980 other ranks of the Canadian Expeditionary Force were either stationed or training in the United Kingdom.<sup>13</sup> On April 17, 1917, Dennis boarded the *SS Northland* in Halifax, Nova Scotia, en route to Liverpool.<sup>14</sup> "Father Neptune", as many soldiers called the sea, appeared to be kind to Dennis.<sup>15</sup> He arrived in England on April 29 and quickly made his way to Hampshire, where Bramshott was situated.<sup>16</sup> By the next day, Dennis had officially entered training in a camp that was described as "no better training area in England, and no better organized."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Postcard 43 of 50, Wellington Murray Dennis. May 20 1916. Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. The Canadian Letters & Images Project, accessed 11 February 2016. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

<sup>13</sup> Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D, *Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919* (Ottawa: Authority of the Minister of National Defence, 1964), accessed February 19, 2016, : [http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/dhh-dhp/cdn\\_expeditionary-e/CEF\\_e.PDF](http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/dhh-dhp/cdn_expeditionary-e/CEF_e.PDF), 202.

<sup>14</sup> Form R. 122, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Canadian newspapers from the Great War offer a fascinating look at life inside the segregated Bramshott Camp, a place cameras were not permitted and outgoing media was censored. The author of this paper is indebted to *The Globe* for offering several high calibre articles related to segregated camp life at Bramshott. *The Globe (1844-1936)*, "AT BRAMSHOTT" Sep 30, 1916. Proquest Historical Newspaper. <http://exproxy.viu.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1354398015?accountid=12246> (accessed 22 February, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Casualty Form - Active Service, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *The Globe (1844-1936)*, "BORDEN SEES MIMIC BATTLE." April 10 1917. Proquest Historical Newspaper. <http://exproxy.viu.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1351616279?accountid=12246> (accessed 22 February, 2016).

Indeed, the idyllic and tranquil countryside of Hampshire stood in sharp juxtaposition to the sea of wounded men convalescing in Bramshott Military Hospital. The peace of the picturesque corner of England seemed like a direct affront to the gravity of thousands of men preparing to fight and die as they trained at the military base. Dennis wrote to Margaret on May 4, 1917, describing the quaint and idyllic countryside, "roads flanked with hedges", small communities peppered with the elderly and cryptically absent of young men, an ivy-covered church dating nearly a millennia, and an estate formally belonging to Lord Tennyson.<sup>18</sup>

In stark contrast to England's postcard-perfect backdrop stood the reality of the Great War and the incredible influx of soldiers the conflict brought from all parts of the empire. "On every street of every city in the United Kingdom and along highways throughout all parts of the country soldiers of the Dominion are to be seen," wrote *The Globe* in response to massive surge of soldiers making themselves welcome in England.<sup>19</sup> Dennis's morale was high during his early days in Bramshott; he informed Margaret in his correspondence dated May 20, 1917 that he intended to sightsee in London and Bristol while on leave.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Dennis wrote highly of life at Bramshott camp and the idyllic surrounding countryside in much of his correspondence from England. The noted letter is perhaps the best example, in which Dennis's morale was particularly high and he marvelled at Hampshire's beauty. Letter, Wellington Murray Dennis. May 4 1917, Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. The Canadian Letters & Images Project. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

<sup>19</sup> *The Globe (1844-1936)* "CANADIAN SOLDIERS SPREAD OVER ENGLAND: Three great training camps now at Shornccliffe, Bramshott, and Brighton". 28 December 1916. Proquest Historical Newspaper. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.viu.ca/docview/1366381617/9CEDBB08B8134890PQ/3?accountid=12246> (accessed 22 February 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Letter, Wellington Murray Dennis. May 20 1917. Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. the Canadian Letters & Images Project. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

Rightly concerned that Dominion soldiers were fraternizing too heavily with the local population, military officials sought to turn Bramshott into a well oiled efficiency machine. Witnesses described the food as subpar, luxury items were massively inflated, and there were 30 soldiers to a hut.<sup>21</sup> English skies were sporadically peppered with air raids and even the occasional zeppelin.<sup>22</sup> On the ground below, men such as Dennis were kept busy in preparation for warfare; anti gas drills, bayonet and trench warfare practice, fire control, and horsemanship were part of the regular rhythm of camp life.<sup>23</sup> "In fourteen weeks the recruits are turned into first-class fighting men, specially trained for the conditions of France," boasted *The Globe* of Bramshott's rigorous schedule.<sup>24</sup> Organized sports and religious events were designed to keep men busy and morale high.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately for Dennis, free time (and possibly expendable income) was not in short supply. Shortly after completing training and subsequently being sent to France with what would later become the 5th Battalion (Western Cavalry) CEF, Dennis was returned to Bramshott Military Hospital with a surprisingly common condition: syphilis.<sup>26</sup> Admitted into care on July 16, Dennis would spend a total of 24 days in hospital treating his condition, ultimately being released on August 9, 1917.<sup>27</sup> The lesions in Dennis's mouth, an advanced secondary symptom, suggest that Dennis did not immediately seek

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<sup>21</sup> *The Globe (1844-1936)*, "AT BRAMSHOTT".

<sup>22</sup> *The Globe (1844-1936)*, "AT BRAMSHOTT" .

<sup>23</sup> *The Globe (1844-1936)*, "BORDEN SEES MIMIC BATTLE. "

<sup>24</sup> *The Globe (1844-1936)*, "BORDEN SEES MIMIC BATTLE. "

<sup>25</sup> *The Globe (1844-1936)*, "BORDEN SEES MIMIC BATTLE. "

<sup>26</sup> Medical History Sheet, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Medical History Sheet, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File, 10.

treatment for venereal disease. He may, in fact, have become infected prior to leaving Halifax, and certainly become infected no later than the leave he took to London in May 1917.<sup>28</sup>

In spite of its relative commonality, Dennis's contact with syphilis was cloaked in a degree of quiet. The commanding officers of Bramshott Military Hospital were Lieutenant Colonel RC McLeod and Lieutenant Colonel H.E. Kendall, with S.C. Mclsaac as the presiding matron.<sup>29</sup> Etchinghill and Witley were both dedicated venereal hospitals; Dennis's second stay at Bramshott suggests either an overflow of patients or a degree of secrecy about the wide spread nature of venereal disease from the public, likely a combination of the two.<sup>30</sup> It was a painful and arduous summer for Dennis; the dismal rain did little to help morale.<sup>31</sup> While an inpatient, Dennis wrote twice to Margaret; in one instance he sent a postcard fittingly called "The School for Scandal," making no mention of his hospitalization, condition or the activities that had caused it.<sup>32</sup> Dennis did well in maintaining his secret during his lifetime; many soldiers experienced harsh financial penalties or cuts in pay while hospitalized for venereal disease; Dennis's record shows no change in the pay his mother received in the summer of 1917.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> A working understanding of the symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases has proved indispensable in analyzing Dennis's medical file and creating an educated hypothesis regarding how long he had been experiencing symptoms before seeking professional treatment. M. E. Kent and F. Romanelli. "Reexamining syphilis: an update on epidemiology, clinical manifestations, and management," *Annals of Pharmacotherapy* 42 (February 2008): 228.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Macphail, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919: The Medical Services* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1925), 179.

<sup>30</sup> "Canadian Army Medical Corps Overseas Hospitals," Canadian Great War Project, accessed 23 February 2016, <http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/hospitals/camcHospitals.asp>.

<sup>31</sup> Letter, Wellington Murray Dennis. August 4 1917. Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. the Canadian Letters & Images Project. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

<sup>32</sup> Postcard 8 of 10 "School for Scandal", Wellington Murray Dennis. July 27 1917. Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. the Canadian Letters and Images Project. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

<sup>33</sup> Separation and Assigned Pay, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File, 16.

Dennis was far from alone in his experience with syphilis during the Great War. The Entente was "woefully unprepared" for the unprecedented spread of syphilis by the influx of soldiers stationed throughout Europe.<sup>34</sup> By 1918, there were 23,900 hospital beds dedicated to the treatment of British and Dominion soldiers for syphilis and gonorrhoea.<sup>35</sup> David Michael Simpson has noted that "Among Canadians, one in nine soldiers were infected with a venereal disease during the war. It was the leading cause of non-battle related illness among them, even exceeding influenza."<sup>36</sup> Other historians have suggested that the unusually high numbers of syphilis cases among Canadian troops could be attributed to the fact that Canadian soldiers could not return home to their partners while on leave, and had considerable expendable income compared to other troops, with Canadian soldiers being paid up to five times as much as their British counterparts.<sup>37</sup> Although Trench Foot had become synonymous with squalor in the public imagination's interpretation of the Great War, soldiers were actually five times as likely to be hospitalized for a venereal disease than they were for Trench Foot.<sup>38</sup>

After Dennis was released from Bramshott Military Hospital, he did not immediately return to France.<sup>39</sup> His correspondence to Margaret on October 28, 1917 indicated that he was still at Bramshott Camp on guard with the Ordnance Corp, which organized and maintained weaponry, munitions, and

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<sup>34</sup> David Michael Simpson. "The moral battlefield: Venereal Disease and the British Army during the First World War." The University of Iowa, 1999. 32.

<sup>35</sup> Simpson, *Moral Battlefield*, 34.

<sup>36</sup> Simpson, *Moral Battlefield*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> W.G. MacPherson et al., *Medical Services: Diseases of the War Volume 2, History of the Great War, Based on Official Documents* (London: HSMO, 1923), 118.

<sup>38</sup> Major T.J. Mitchell and G.M. Smith, *Medical services; casualties and medical statistics of the great war* (Public Domain, 1931), accessed 27 February 2016, [http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b744277;view=1up;seq=5.88](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b744277;view=1up;seq=5.88).

<sup>39</sup> Casualty Form - Active Service, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File, 7.



military equipment.<sup>40</sup> Only 11 days prior, he had been taken on strength with the 15th reserve Battalion, which had absorbed the 19th, which would later become part of the 5th CEF.<sup>41</sup> Historians have noted the complex nature of these battalion arrangements; Nicholson refers to the complete organizational overhaul that occurred when fifty seven Canadian battalions were absorbed into twenty six reserve battalions groups in six Reserve Brigades.<sup>42</sup> Across the Atlantic, another overhaul was in progress; during the autumn 1917 and spring 1918 that Dennis was with the Ordnance Corp, the Military Service Act was being enacted in Canada.<sup>43</sup>

What little remained of Dennis's sense of safety was quickly thrown into a tumultuous theatre of war when he left Bramshott for a second time to "proceed overseas for service" with the 5th CEF, joining with that battalion on March 4, 1918.<sup>44</sup> Affectionately known by the men as "Tuxford's Dandy's", the 5th battalion had extensively recruited men throughout western Canada, making stops in Brandon, Saskatoon, Regina, Moose Jaw, Red Deer, Merritt, and Vernon.<sup>45</sup> Dennis joined the battalion at a time of

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<sup>40</sup> Letter, Wellington Murray Dennis. October 28 1917. Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. the Canadian Letters & Images Project. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

<sup>41</sup> Casualty Form - Active Service, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholson, "Canadian Expeditionary Force," 202-204.

<sup>43</sup> Nicholson, "Canadian Expeditionary Force," 320.

<sup>44</sup> Casualty Form - Active Service, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File, 7.

<sup>45</sup> For more information on specific Infantry Battalions in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, including recruitment patterns throughout Canada and a summary of each of the 266 numbered battalions, see John F. Meek. *Over the Top! The Canadian Infantry in the First World War*. Orangeville, Ont.: The Author, 1971. Accessed 18 February, 2016. <https://archive.org/details/OverTheTopTheCanadianInfantryInTheFirstWorldWar>. 63.

relative safety with few daily casualties. Prior to the spring of 1918, the 5th had seen horrific and bloody action in Ypres, the Somme, Vimy, and Passchendaele.<sup>46</sup>

Sure enough, Dennis arrived at the calm between the storms. The spring of 1918 was full of moves between camps; Grand Rullecourt to Frevillers, and on to Agnez-Lez Duisans and Maison Blanche among other communities.<sup>47</sup> Dennis's days were consumed with training and drills. His superiors reported few casualties that spring, and Dennis's correspondence reports church services, Brigade sports, magazines, "Picture Show[s]" and stays with billets in French villages.<sup>48</sup> "Our stay here portends to be a very happy one and full of socialibility [sic]," wrote one supervisor on June 3, 1918 in the battalion's war diary.<sup>49</sup><sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The 5th CEF had a long history of engaging in battles during the Great War. Nicholson took tremendous pains to specifically map the conflicts in which they were involved. Nicholson, "Canadian Expeditionary Force," 57, 71, 73, 76, 82, 122-125, 150, 153, 253, 271, 290, 291.

<sup>47</sup> This rapid move between locations can be referenced immediately after Dennis's arrival with the 5th and can be followed all the way through his death at the Battle of Amiens and beyond. The author suggests following the 5th's war diaries from March 4th onward to track Dennis's many moves between camps. War Diary, 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion, March 4, 1918. Library and Archives Canada. [http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn\\_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText\\_1=2005887&Operator\\_1=AND&SearchIn\\_2=&SearchInText\\_2=&Operator\\_2=AND&SearchIn\\_3=&SearchInText\\_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText_1=2005887&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn_3=&SearchInText_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10). Accessed 12 February 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Dennis's emotional stability in his correspondence became slightly more erratic in the early summer of 1918. His moods range from irritation with Margaret, to lonely, to affectionate, to nostalgic, to overtly sexual. The letters from this time are fascinating when taking a psychological and historical cross disciplinary approach. Primarily, however, the 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion was kept busy with training and activities to recuperate and enhance morale. The following letters are the main examples of this R&R. Letters, Wellington Murray Dennis. June 10, 1918; June 23, 1918; July 27, 1918. Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. The Canadian Letters and Images Project. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

<sup>49</sup> War Diary, 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion, June 3, 1918. Library and Archives Canada. [http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn\\_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText\\_1=2005888&Operator\\_1=AND&SearchIn\\_2=&SearchInText\\_2=&Operator\\_2=AND&SearchIn](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText_1=2005888&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn)

July came in like a lamb and left like a lion for the 5th Canadian Battalion. The revelry and "gaiety" of Dominion Day at Ostreville quickly gave way to reports of German activity in the Broken Mill sector.<sup>51</sup> The men, as usual, were constantly on the move; upon reaching Arras on July 22, "...preparations were commenced for "pulling-off" a raid on enemy posts... in the near future."<sup>52</sup> The writer of the 5th Battalion's war diary hinted that officials were secretly preparing for a major offensive against the German army; his musings proved absolutely correct.<sup>53</sup>

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\_3=&SearchInText\_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10. Accessed 12 February 2016.

<sup>50</sup> John Hughes has noted that "Having escaped the worst of the German spring and summer offensives, the four Canadian divisions were extremely well rested and prepared (they were withdrawn from the line in mid-May for training) for their participation in the highly successful 8 August Amiens offensive, dubbed the German Army's Black Day by its *de facto* commander-in-chief, Erich von Ludendorff." John McKendrick Hughes and John R. Hughes, *The unwanted: Great War letters from the field*. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), xxvi.

<sup>51</sup> As a late spring of training and recuperation end for the 5th CEF, the tension in the war diary inevitably surfaces. July 1918 is fascinating in that it begins with a high degree of gusto and revelry; by the end of the month, the writer reveals that plans are in the immediate works for a secret and monolithic offensive. War Diary, 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion, July 1, 1918. Library and Archives Canada, [http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn\\_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText\\_1=2005888&Operator\\_1=AND&SearchIn\\_2=&SearchInText\\_2=&Operator\\_2=AND&SearchIn\\_3=&SearchInText\\_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText_1=2005888&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn_3=&SearchInText_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10). Accessed 12 February 2016.

<sup>52</sup> War Diary, 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion, July 22, 1918. Library and Archives Canada, [http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn\\_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText\\_1=2005888&Operator\\_1=AND&SearchIn\\_2=&SearchInText\\_2=&Operator\\_2=AND&SearchIn\\_3=&SearchInText\\_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText_1=2005888&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn_3=&SearchInText_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10). Accessed 12 February 2016.

<sup>53</sup> War Diary, 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion, July 26, 1918. Library and Archives Canada, [http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn\\_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText\\_1=2005888&Operator\\_1=AND&SearchIn\\_2=&SearchInText\\_2=&Operator\\_2=AND&SearchIn\\_3=&SearchInText\\_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText_1=2005888&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn_3=&SearchInText_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10). Accessed 12 February 2016.

On the mist-shrouded morning of August 8, under the cover of darkness near the village of Caix, the 5th battalion mobilized with Canadian and Australian divisions for a surprise attack of enormous proportions. An "unmistakable atmosphere of success" permeated the trenches; the men were described as "cheerful and confident". In the dead of night and with the element of surprise with the Allied troops, Dennis took a ration of rum to steady his nerves and fixed his bayonet. With the roar of planes and 420 tanks, a noise like the "crack of doom" swept over the field of battle and the men sprung out of the trenches and into the heavy mist. With surprise on their side, the Canadians were able to advance 13 kilometers through German defenses, a pulse of exhilaration swept through the troops as the rising morning sun illuminated the newly acquired territory. Their objective reached by 3:00, the men camped near the wooded swamplands along the banks of the river Luce, where the German army had abandoned many of their supplies.<sup>54</sup> Dennis was undoubtedly exhausted and exhilarated by the first day of an enormously successful battle that would change the tempo of the war and usher an end to hostilities.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> War Diary, 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion. August 8, 1918. Library and Archives Canada, [http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn\\_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText\\_1=2005888&Operator\\_1=AND&SearchIn\\_2=&SearchInText\\_2=&Operator\\_2=AND&SearchIn\\_3=&SearchInText\\_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText_1=2005888&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn_3=&SearchInText_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10). Accessed 12 February 2016.

<sup>55</sup> The Canadian victory at Amiens was met with a surge of pride and swept through news outlets throughout the world. *The Globe* reported Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig as saying, "On the front of the British Fourth army the Canadian and Australian troops, with admirable dash, have captured the line of outer defences of Amiens, and advanced beyond them to a depth of two miles after severe fighting at a number of points...The number of [German] prisoners has reached 17,000, and between 200 and 300 guns have been taken, including railway guns of heavy calibre. Trench mortars and machine guns have been captured in large numbers, and also immense quantities of stores and materials of all description... Our casualties yesterday were extremely light." *The Globe (1844-1936)* "Smashing Forward South of Somme". 10 August 1918. Proquest Historical Newspaper. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.viu.ca/docview/1351634584/A490F34CDE954B7EPQ/10?accountid=12246> (accessed 22 February 2016).

Unfortunately for Dennis, death is impartial to days of glory. Dennis awoke on August 9 to a warm and bright morning. In the early hours of the day, the 5th Battalion received orders that a further attack was to be carried out. Under heavy fire from German machine guns, Dennis's battalion quickly crossed the Quesnel-Caix Road to get in to attack positions. With their element of surprise gone and the kick-off delayed due to late tanks, the tension was palpable. Large open areas and machine gun fire from the woodlands awaited the 5th. At exactly twelve noon on that bright summer day, Dennis went forward in a "sectional rush".<sup>56</sup> The Circumstances of Death Registry reported that he "took part in the attack on Warvillers and shortly after leaving the "Kick off" he was hit in the body by machine gun bullets, death being instantaneous."<sup>57</sup> Dennis's fellow soldier E. Reynolds later wrote to D'Arcy Dennis that he had been standing directly behind Dennis when he was hit, and that he had taken his rations and ammunitions, as well as his personal effects prior to Dennis leaving the kick off. He confirmed the Circumstances of Death Registry that Dennis had been "hit by shrapnel" and "was killed before his battalion had advanced more than a couple of hundred yards..."<sup>58</sup>

The opening days of the Battle of Amiens claimed the lives of 14 officers and 292 other ranks of the 5th battalion. The men exhibited "tremendous dash and spirit"; their legacy at the Battle of Amiens

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<sup>56</sup> War Diary, 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion, August 9, 1918. Library and Archives Canada.

[http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn\\_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText\\_1=2005888&Operator\\_1=AND&SearchIn\\_2=&SearchInText\\_2=&Operator\\_2=AND&SearchIn\\_3=&SearchInText\\_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText_1=2005888&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn_3=&SearchInText_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10). Accessed 12 February 2016.

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/microform-digitization/006003-119.02-e.php?q3=2281&sqn=764&tt=1035&q2=28&interval=&PHPSESSID=m3q6ls6acr1t3oolquuh9908k7>. Accessed 12 February 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Circumstances of Death Registry, Wellington Murray Dennis. MIKAN 46246. Library and Archives Canada.

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/microform-digitization/006003-119.02-e.php?q3=2281&sqn=764&tt=1035&q2=28&interval=&PHPSESSID=m3q6ls6acr1t3oolquuh9908k7>. Accessed 12 February 2016.

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/microform-digitization/006003-119.02-e.php?q3=2281&sqn=764&tt=1035&q2=28&interval=&PHPSESSID=m3q6ls6acr1t3oolquuh9908k7>. Accessed 12 February 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Letter, E. Reynolds. November 7 1918. Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. the Canadian Letters & Images Project. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

would prove to be the beginning of the end of the Great War.<sup>59</sup> The price for victory was high: Canadians suffered more than 11,800 casualties during the Battle of Amiens, though the battle issued in the final phase of war and drastically changed the morale on both sides of the conflict.<sup>60</sup> War correspondent Philip Gibbs wrote: "After [Amiens] the tide turned in an astonishing way... It is now the enemy who is on the defensive... The change has been greater in the minds of men than in the taking of territory. On our side the army seems to be buoyed up with the enormous hope of getting on with this business quickly."<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the dawning light of August 8 that the 5th Battalion war diaries spoke of so poetically would also usher in the dawn of a conclusion to the hostilities that had cost Dennis and countless other young men their lives.<sup>62</sup>

Following Dennis's fall at Warvellers, Jennie Dennis and Margaret Munro found themselves immersed in a brief moment of solidarity. "Be brave," Dennis's mother telegraphed Margaret on August

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<sup>59</sup> War Diary, 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion, August 9, 1918. Library and Archives Canada.

[http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn\\_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText\\_1=2005888&Operator\\_1=AND&SearchIn\\_2=&SearchInText\\_2=&Operator\\_2=AND&SearchIn\\_3=&SearchInText\\_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText_1=2005888&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn_3=&SearchInText_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10). Accessed 12 February 2016.

<sup>60</sup> The Battle of Amiens is a focussed area of study at The Canadian War Museum, and is an indispensable resource for a greater understanding of the Canadian wartime experience, as well as creating lesson plans for all levels of educators. "Amiens," The Canadian War Museum, accessed 21 February 2016, <http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/battles-and-fighting/land-battles/amiens/>.

<sup>61</sup> Philip Gibbs was an officially accredited war journalist and his style inevitably reflects that reality. His positivity, however, is justified in that the Battle of Amiens did indeed help draw a close to hostilities. His report on the conflict is worth reading in its entirety. Charles F. Horne, *Source Records of the Great War, Vol. VI*, (National Alumni: 1923), 281.

<sup>62</sup> War Diary, 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion, August 8, 1918. Library and Archives Canada.

[http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn\\_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText\\_1=2005888&Operator\\_1=AND&SearchIn\\_2=&SearchInText\\_2=&Operator\\_2=AND&SearchIn\\_3=&SearchInText\\_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText_1=2005888&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn_3=&SearchInText_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10). Accessed 12 February 2016.

28 when sharing the unfortunate news.<sup>63</sup> Margaret appeared to have kept her composure. "We can be proud of our own," she responded to Jennie the next day.<sup>64</sup> They each experienced a massive outpouring of condolences in the months following Dennis's death. Dennis was described by a fellow soldier who witnessed his death as "Brave & very courageous at all times," in a note of sympathy penned to Jennie.<sup>65</sup>

Life continued on with the promise of renewal. Jennie Dennis was briskly and methodically issued a cheque for \$180.00 on August 16, 1920 as compensation for her son's death.<sup>66</sup> In May 1922, she opened her mail to find the Memorial Cross, a constant reminder of her son's untimely death and sacrifice.<sup>67</sup> Margaret would marry in 1930 and have a family; her past relationship with Dennis was kept private and hidden, shrouded in mystery for generations. In spite of the tensions that accompanied their youth and miles of separation, Dennis remained the first great love of her life, evidenced by the fact that she kept his letters to her dying day. In 2014, a symphony was written honoring Margaret, Dennis, and the sacrifices of young people who had paid the price as the Greatest Generation.<sup>68</sup>

The peaceful village of Moreuil, France lies in stark contrast to the devastation that haunted it one hundred years earlier. Today, one can take a simple eight mile drive North East of the hamlet.

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<sup>63</sup> Telegram, Jennie Dennis. August 28 1918. Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. the Canadian Letters & Images Project. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

<sup>64</sup> Telegram, Margaret Munro. August 29 1918. Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. the Canadian Letters & Images Project. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

<sup>65</sup> Letter, W.J. Ferguson. November 5 1918. Dennis, Wellington Murray and Margaret Munro Collection. the Canadian Letters & Images Project. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.

<sup>66</sup> War Service Gratuity to Dependents of Deceased Soldiers, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File, 11.

<sup>67</sup> Form 649-D-9742, Dennis, Canadian Expeditionary Force Service File, 26.

<sup>68</sup> "WWI Love Story From Clip Project Memorialized In Symphony," Vancouver Island University, accessed 21 February, 2016, <https://www.viu.ca/news/wwi-love-story-clip-project-memorialized-symphony>.

There, one will encounter the Manitoba Cemetery, the resting place of Canadian men who had the happiness of youth cut all too short by the violence of war. In this tranquil and idyllic setting, in row C, rests the remains of Wellington Murray Dennis. His headstone bears no cross, but immortalizes the pain of his mother, who requested "The wind of death for you has slain life's flowers" as an epitaph.<sup>69</sup> As a mighty gust from a far off land, the thirst and violence of war had slain a generation of young men. Like lilies placed in Margaret's outstretched fingers, Dennis would linger only as a memory, a reminder that in warfare, there truly are no victors, but only a loss of innocence.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Wellington Murray Dennis. <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/616676/DENNIS,%20WELLINGTON%20MURRAY>. Accessed 15 February 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Postcard 28 of 50, Wellington Murray Dennis. May 24 1917. Dennis, Wellington Murray & Margaret Munro Collection. The Canadian Letters and Images Project, accessed 11 February 2016. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/20525>.



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