

November 2015

We shall not forget.

British Home Child Group International

Remembering the Fallen

by Bob Wilkinson and Glenna Walkden

On October 12, 2015 Glenna Smith-Walkden, Violet Smith and Bob Wilkinson set out on a journey to follow Canadian soldiers many of them being British Home Children as they fought for their adopted country and their homeland.

After a quick thirty minute tunnel crossing we arrived in Calais then set off for or 1st stop, visiting the Vimy Ridge Memorial.

The **Canadian National Vimy Memorial** is a memorial site in France dedicated to the memory of the Canadian Expeditionary Force members killed during the First World War at the Ypres Salient.

It also serves as the place of commemoration for First World War Canadian soldiers killed or presumed dead in France that have no known grave. The monument is the centrepiece of a 100-hectare preserved battlefield park that encompasses a portion of the ground over which the Canadian Corps made their assault during the Battle of Vimy Ridge, a military engagement fought as part of the Battle of Arras.

The **Vimy Memorial** overlooks the Douai Plain from the highest point of **Vimy Ridge**, about eight kilometres northeast of Arras. The memorial can be viewed from miles away and upon approach to the monument it becomes apparent of the gargantuan size of it.



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Tragedy of the Athenia

by Sandra Joyce

On September 3rd, 1939 after the German invasion of Poland, Britain declared war on Germany and her allies. Ten hours later, in an act of unmitigated cowardice and contrary to the Hague conventions, the London Naval Treaty of 1930 as well as the German 1936 Prize Rules (*Prisenordnung*), the passenger

ship S.S. Athenia was torpedoed and sank, resulting in the deaths of 98 passengers and 19 crew members.

According to international laws, it was forbidden to fire on unarmed passenger ships unless they were considered to be carrying contraband or military supplies. In any case, there needed to be sufficient

warning so that passengers could be transferred to a place of safety. *Oberleutnant* Fritz-Julius Lemp, who commanded the *UBoot* that had been tracking the Donaldson line SS Athenia, gave the order to fire on the ship without warning.

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Remembering the Fallen continued.....



Private F.W. Wilkinson

As well as the beautiful monument, visitors may walk the trenches. Along the perimeter there are electric fences. I asked at the visitors centre and it was explained to me that there are many unexploded bombs in these areas. I found it surreal to be in the actual spot where my two grandfathers, one of whom was a British Home Child fought the battle of Vimy Ridge with the 20th battalion.

I think that one of the most poignant moments at the monument was the viewing of a sculpture of a woman standing at the edge of the monument crying and looking down onto a coffin.

The next stop on our journey was the First World War British grave in Arras called Bac-du-sud British Cemetery at Bailleul. My BHC grandfather's half-brother died here in 1918 at age twenty. I left a poppy.

Time to head to Ypres to prepare for our wreath-laying ceremony.

Following the Menin Gate Memorial opening in 1927, the citizens of Ypres wanted to express their gratitude towards those who had given their lives for Belgium's free-



dom. Carved into this monument are the names of more than 54,000 officers and men of the Commonwealth, that include 1000s of Canadian soldiers whose graves are not known.

Every evening at 8:00 pm the road is closed then buglers from the local fire brigade sound the Last Post under the arch. Except for the occupation by the Germans in the Second World War when the daily ceremony was conducted at Brookwood Military Cemetery in Surrey, England, this ceremony has been carried on uninterrupted since 2 July 1928. On the evening that Polish forces liberated Ypres in the Second World War, the ceremony was resumed at the Menin Gate despite the fact that heavy fighting was still taking place in other parts of the town.

On Monday October 12, 2015, Glenna Smith-Walkden and Bob Wilkinson were pleased and honoured to lay a wreath on behalf of British Home Children who died in The Great War and whose resting place is known unto God. This was the 30,095th ceremony.

The following day we went to Adagem Cemetery in Flanders Fields, where my great-uncle is buried (my Mother's Uncle). My Mother, who is almost ninety, finally had the chance to pay her respects to an Uncle who she remembers when she was eighteen. His medals were brought from Canada and laid at his grave. A hero and his medals finally reunited after seventy-one years. He was killed September 23, 1944 at the battle for the Scheldt.

"My mother, who is almost ninety, finally had the chance to pay her respects to an Uncle"

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Remembering the Fallen *continued.....*



Returning from Adegem we visited the Tyne Cot Cemetery which commemorates nearly 35,000 servicemen from the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand who died in the Ypres Salient after 16 August 1917 and whose

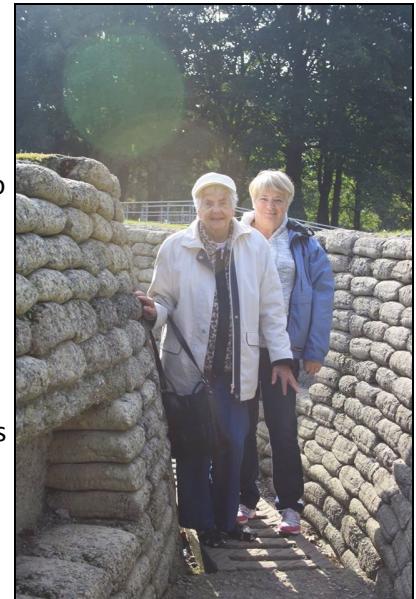
graves are also not known.

On the trip back from Ypres while simply driving along country lanes we kept noticing war cemeteries. Stopping at one at random (Sanctuary Cemetery) this was discovered to be yet another Cana-

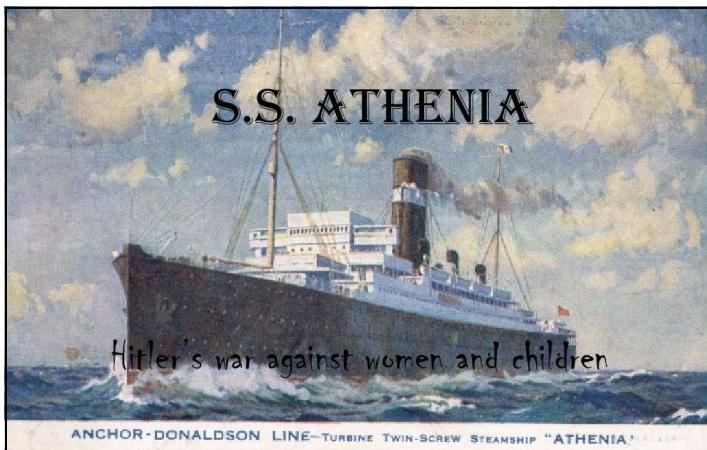
dian cemetery where another 637 Canadians are buried, this time most are identified.

If my Mother is able to do this trip at age ninety, then anyone can do it.

It was a wonderful experience to be able to visit so many war graves. There are so many more to visit and looking forward to continuing this journey.



Tragedy of the Athenia *continued.....*



Two torpedoes hit the Athenia and she began to settle by the stern. Of the 1200-odd aboard, the ship was carrying

500 Jewish refugees, 469 Canadians, 311 Americans, 72 Brits, and 315 crew.

It wasn't until twenty-one days later that Lemp reported that he had sunk The Athenia in error. Up to that point in time,

of the sinking. After Lemp's admission, Raeder reported the incident to Hitler, who decided that the incident should be kept secret for political reasons: mainly because of the 28 Americans who were killed. Rumours were spread that Great Britain had sunk its own vessel in order to influence world opinion against the Nazis. A month later the *Voelkischer Beobachter*, the Nazi party's official newspaper, published an article blaming the loss of the Athenia specifically on Winston Churchill, the then First Lord of Britain's Admiralty.

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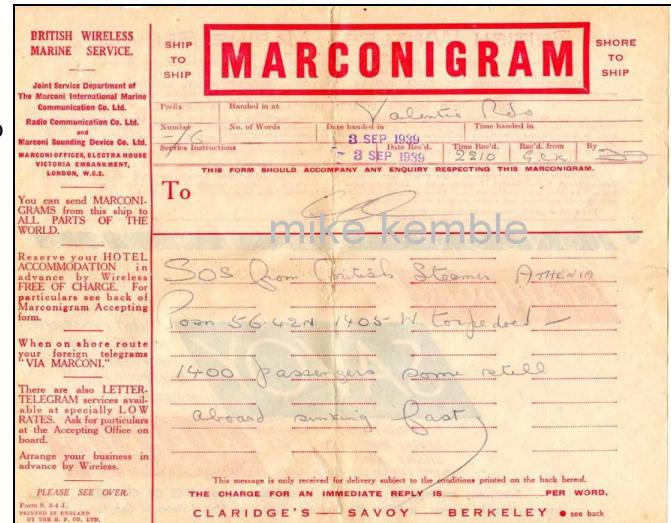
The Tragedy of the Athenia continued....

The lost British members of Athenia's crew are commemorated at the Tower Hill Memorial in London. The Canadian crew is commemorated on a memorial in Pleasant Park in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

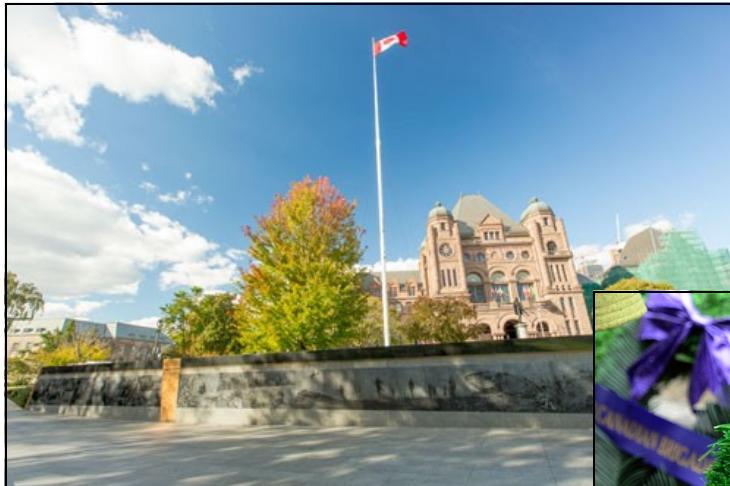
SS Athenia was built in 1923 to replace a previous Donaldson Line ship of the same name. The first SS Athenia, built in 1904, was also sunk by a German U-boat in 1917 in the unrestricted submarine warfare of the First World War. The first SS Athenia, at 7835 gross tons, was also the first Donaldson Line passenger ship, carrying 50 first and 450 third class passengers.

The Donaldson Line would never again name a ship, Athenia. The line continued passenger service until 1966 and finally ceased operation in 1967 with the sale of its remaining cargo ships.

In total, the two Athenias brought over 1462 British Home Children: the first between 1911 and 1916 and the second between 1923 and 1932.



Remembrance Day 2015



On November 11, 2015, Sandra Joyce and Karen Mahoney will be participating in the Remembrance Day celebrations at Queens Park in Toronto, Ontario. Karen will be placing a wreath on behalf of all British Home Children who served and perished in the Wars.





There are still a few spots left on our quilt that we have commissioned to be made, together with a memorial book. If you are interested, please contact Glenna Smith-Walkden at gwalkden@sympatico.ca to reserve your spot.

Contact Information

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Upcoming Events

Stoney Creek Baptist Church
November 10 @ 10:30 am - 12:00 pm

*Stoney Creek Baptist Church,
2225 Highbury Ave North
London, Ontario N5X 4A4 Canada*

Canadian Federation of University Women – Etobicoke Branch

November 12 @ 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm

*Unnamed Venue,
80 Lothian Place
Etobicoke, Ontario Canada*

Meadford Hall

November 15 @ 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

*Meadford Hall,
12 Nelson St. E.
Meadford, Ontario N4L 1N6 Canada*

University Woman's Club of Toronto

November 23 @ 12:00 pm - 2:00 pm

*University of Toronto's Faculty Club,
41 Wilcocks Street
Toronto, Ontario Canada*

Aurora Historical Society

November 25 @ 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm

*Hillary House,
15372 Yonge Street
Aurora, Ontario L4G 1N8 Canada*

Probus Club Oshawa

December 8 @ 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

*Oshawa Shrine club,
1626 Simcoe St North
Oshawa, L1G 4X9*