

[Page 3 - Cape Bretoners in World War One](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 33](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1983/6/1

Above left, Iona soldiers in the militia, leaving for World War 1. About snapshot on the right (possibly the same day), Carl Bridenbaugh wrote: "This picture...is unfortunately somewhat blurred: it is sad beyond all description. About 150 of the local militia, 94th Argyle Highlanders, are sailing from the Baddeck wharf on the Blue Hill shortly after August 5. They thought they were just going to Sydney to guard the mines; but in red coats and blue trousers, and the Argyle plaid around their caps, they were sent to Flanders. Nearly every other soldier was named MacRae!" (Was it more patriotic or fun?) It was just fun. It got me in trouble, though. Well, I was called in in 1914. I was working in the lumber woods. And I got this letter, to report next day in Baddeck. And we didn't know where we were going or any? thing else. We knew the war was coming. And I did report--1914, August. And they sent us down to Marconi Towers--the wireless there--in Glace Bay. We were guards. They had about 50 masts there then, and they had--oh, it was foolish, when you come to think of it--had men hoisted up in them, up in the tower in a kind of a basket, watching, see if the enemy'd be coming. They kept men there all through the war. Then there was a cable in Sydney Mines--had some men there. Had a cable in North Sydney. There was a cable up in Can- so--had a company there. Those cables were going overseas. Vital to the country, you know, when the war was on. Whether they would be destroyed or not, I don't know. We'd drill. And then we were on guard duty at night, so many. (What did they tell you you were watching for?) Oh well, there were a lot of Germans and Austrians working in the mines here. They might come up there and blow it up. But there was no sabotage in Cape Breton in the First War. I was away five years. Went a few months to the towers there. Then I enlisted. We drilled a little while in Sydney, at Victoria Park. And then we went to Halifax and we were there for the winter--winter of '15. And the summer of '16 they sent us to Kentville. Then we went overseas from Halifax on the old Olympic. She was a big one--there were 7 decks on her. Went from Halifax to Liverpool. We were on the ocean about 5 days, made it in 5 days. They had them stacked, boy, and it was wonderful the way they had it arranged. Every 7th man was appointed to feed, to draw the grub for 6 other men. There was no confusion. There were so many appointed every day. And we slept in hammocks. On deck. There were 7000 numbered, 7000 men on that ship. (What did you think you were going to?) We were going to our deaths, that's where we were going. Sixty thousand of them stayed over there, in the First War. (3)