



Herne Bay Historical Records Society

Report of Meeting November 5th 2015

“Through Heat and Battle to Herne Bay- My young father’s story”

Members had the privilege of hearing Peter Gausden's fascinating story of his father's World War 1 experiences in his talk entitled “Through Heat and Battle to Herne Bay”. He said that his father Donald was born on 4th June 1894 in Beckenham Kent to parents Percival and Florence. His early education was at the City of London School and on leaving school he joined a bank in 1909. After the declaration of war in August 1914 Donald immediately volunteered and joined the Rifle Brigade on 5th Sept 1914. He completed 8 months training at Aldershot from where he sent detailed letters and sketches of his surroundings, equipment and colleagues home to his mother copies of which Peter showed members. He was sent out to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force in May 1915 by this time being part of the newly formed 7th Machine Gun Corps and encountered his first action at Hooze just outside Ypres where the Germans made their first use of the deadly liquid fire guns “*flammenwerfer*” in a surprise early morning attack on 30 July 1915.

In two days of severe fighting the British lost 34 officers and 751 other ranks but Donald survived and spent the next six months in the Ypres area. All this time he was still sending back home letters and detailed humorous pen and ink sketches of life in the trenches all carefully kept by his mother which Peter had on display in an album for members to see during the evening

By the middle of 1916 he was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant and joined the Royal West Kent Regt. After taking part in the Third Battle of Ypres at Passchendaele in 1917 he spent six months in the UK where he became First Class Instructor at the rifle ranges at Bisley and Sandwich. He was recalled back to the Western front in March 1918 to take part in the last

100-day push of the war and after one narrow escape he was finally wounded badly in the hip in September 1918 at St. Quentin Cambrai which prematurely terminated his military service. Peter showed members the original metal hip flask which bore the large indentations and bullet holes caused by the German bullets which had inflicted his injuries.

After a period of recuperation and surgery which left him with a stiff and shorter leg supplemented by a special surgical boot Donald decided to retrain as a dentist in 1920 (an occupation also followed by his mother before him) He eventually bought a practice over the Lloyd Bank Chambers in Herne Bay High Street. He met and married Kathleen Wakeling in 1930 when her parents had bought a house in Beltinge and they bought a bungalow in Albany Drive. Their only son Peter was born in 1932 and he worked in Herne Bay until he retired in 1959.