

FUTURE MEMBERS OF THE HALL ANSWER THEIR COUNTRY'S CALL By Eric Zweig

It must have seemed impossible to Canadians 100 years ago that the assassination of a little-known Archduke in far-off Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 would lead to the most horrific war the world had ever seen. Yet, as old alliances increased the tensions already being felt by European powers, that soon became the case. On July 28, 1914, Austria declared war on Serbia. On August 1, Germany, which had pledged its support of Austria, declared war on Russia. Two days later, Germany declared war on France and invaded Belgium to get there. Britain, which had an old treaty promising to protect Belgium, declared war on Germany on August 4. When it did, Canada, as a proud part of the British Empire, automatically found itself at war as well. The First World War affected the lives of so many Canadians, and the game of hockey was not immune.

Aside from some 7,000 volunteers who had seen action in South Africa during the Boer War of 1899 to 1902, Canada had not been involved in major combat since the War of 1812 a century before. Strange as it seems today, for most young Canadian men in 1914, unfamiliar as they were with the horrors of war, the greatest fear was not of dying on a battlefield far from home, but that the war would be over before they could get there. By September of 1914, more than 32,000 Canadian volunteers had made their way to a hastily arranged army camp in Valcartier, Quebec. Among the first to arrive were two former hockey teammates from Kingston, Ontario: George Taylor Richardson and Allan "Scotty" Davidson.

Though Taylor and Richardson grew up in the same hometown, it's unlikely they would ever have met if not for hockey. Taylor was a graduate of Queen's University,

where he'd starred on the ice and on the football field. He then went to work for his wealthy family's grain brokerage business. Davidson, on the other hand, was from the school of hard knocks. His grandfather was a prison guard at the Kingston Penitentiary and his father worked at the Rockwood Asylum, where the criminally insane were housed. Scotty's skill in hockey raised him above his station, attracting the attention of his city's top team, the Kingston 14th Regiment, where Richardson was the star. They played together briefly in 1908–09 before the team was renamed the Frontenacs the following year and Richardson moved into management. Davidson led the Frontenacs to provincial junior championships in 1910 and 1911 before he moved on to pro hockey. He joined the Toronto Blue Shirts when the team entered the National Hockey *Association* (forerunner to the NHL) in 1912–13 and captained them to the Stanley Cup in the spring of 1914. Five months later, Davidson was in the army.

Davidson had already spent two years on active militia service with the Princess of Wales Own Regiment (PWOR), the formal name of Kingston's 14th Regiment. Very shortly after the outbreak of the war, George Richardson, who was a captain in the Regiment, formed a contingent of 80 men from the PWOR, including Davidson, who all became part of the 2nd Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). After spending most of August and September of 1914 training at Valcartier, Davidson and Richardson were among the thousands who sailed for England as part of the huge convey of Canadian ships that departed on October 3. After nearly four months of further training in the miserable cold and wet of Salisbury Plain, the 2nd Battalion left England for France on February 9, 1915. They entered the trenches at Armentières ten days later and saw their first major action near the end of April. In June, stories of their battles began to

appear in Canadian newspapers. Richardson had been wounded but it wasn't serious, and on June 8, 1915, the *Toronto Star* joked that, "Capt. Richardson's friends intimate that the Germans evidently thought he was playing hockey when they stampeded so many hot shots in his direction."

The same article mentioned Davidson's job as a bomb-thrower, which was a specialized role working with grenades to clear enemy trenches. "[He] carries a special harness to hold the bombs," the *Star* reported. "He also carries 200 rounds of ammunition in his cartridge belt – a rifle, a spade and handle, and, as Scotty puts it, a pair of those d--- heavy English boots, which weigh five pounds. 'A fat chance to get out of any German's way have I!' writes the husky hockey lad."

Tragically, Davidson's gallows humor proved all too prophetic when he was killed in action in the early morning hours of June 16, 1915. Richardson would write a glorious, if blood-thirsty account of Davidson's final hours for friends back home in Kingston, but he was actually killed when a shell fell on his trench. Another *Star* story on July 5 quoted a letter from a fellow soldier saying Davidson had been killed by the accidental discharge of friendly fire, although official records only list an exploding shell with no mention of sides. As for Richardson, he was beloved by his men from all accounts. A biographical entry from Queen's University states: "Richardson was known as a man who would never give an order he would not readily obey himself. He often used his own money to buy extra supplies, such as warm boots, gas masks, and cigarettes for his troops." But he too paid the ultimate price when he was killed in action on February 9, 1916.

The death of the two great Kingston hockey stars hit their hometown hard. James Sutherland had coached both men. As a longtime militia member himself, he had also helped to indoctrinate them with a patriotic zeal for King and Country. After the war, Sutherland would donate the Memorial Cup as a tribute to Davidson, Richardson and the many other great Canadian athletes – like the legendary scoring machine Frank McGee of the old Ottawa “Silver Seven” – who gave their lives in battle. Later, in the 1940s, Sutherland spearheaded the creation of the Hockey Hall of Fame. During the war, he was a one-man recruiting dynamo. Despite his advanced age of 45, Sutherland enlisted and served as a quartermaster overseas. Before departing, as the newly elected president of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association (a position he would serve mostly in absentia), Sutherland issued a challenge to the hockey players of the nation in a statement issued on December 30, 1915.

“In a few short weeks,” Sutherland stated, “our hockey season will be over, and if there are any who have not made up their minds regarding their future course of action, let me say that, in my opinion, there should only be one conclusion, and that should be to exchange the stick and puck for a Ross rifle and a bayonet and take your place in the great army that is being forced to sweep the oppressors of humanity from the face of the earth...

“It takes nerve and gameness to play the game of hockey,” Sutherland said. “The same qualities are necessary in the greater game that is now being played in France and on the other fighting fronts... With every man doing his bit, Canada will raise an army of brains and brawn from our hockey enthusiasts the like of which the world has never seen.

“The bell has rung,” Sutherland concluded. “Let every man play the greatest game of his life. Over to centre!”

Among the many hockey players who took Sutherland’s advice was Frank Fredrickson. Already captain of the Winnipeg Falcons (whom he would lead to the Allan Cup and an Olympic gold medal in 1920 after the war), Fredrickson joined the Canadian army early in 1916 and later transferred to the Royal Flying Corps in England. He proved such an adept pilot that he spent most of the war training others to fly and never saw combat himself. His greatest peril came when enemy torpedoes hit the ship returning him to England from his own RFC training in Egypt. Fredrickson remained on the sinking ship until the last possible moment, helping to free other men trapped below deck, before climbing into one of the last remaining lifeboats.

Joe Simpson’s World War I career began with him helping Winnipeg’s 61st Battalion hockey team win the Allan Cup in 1916. After being sent overseas he served with the 43rd Cameron-Highlanders. Simpson was wounded twice in battle but returned a decorated war hero. Red Dutton is said to have run away from school in Winnipeg and lied about his age in order to enlist. In April of 1917, he nearly lost a limb when he took dozens of pieces of shrapnel in his right hip and leg during the fighting at Vimy Ridge. It took him 18 months to recover. Fredrickson, Simpson and Dutton all returned to resume their amateur hockey careers, and later went on to pro careers and success in the NHL.

Pro hockey was not nearly as well established as the amateur game at the outbreak of World War I. There were dozens of amateur leagues across the country in 1913–14, but only three major pro leagues and just 13 teams. Punch Broadbent of Ottawa was the second pro star to enlist after Scotty Davidson, but few others followed. Still, the war had

its effects on the pro game. With the enlistment of so many other Canadians, people began to wonder if it made sense for fit young men to get paid to play hockey.

Attendance plummeted. By the end of the 1917–18 season, there were only two pro hockey leagues left (including the newly formed NHL) and just six teams in operation.

Professional hockey didn't pay like it does today, so everyone had an off-ice job too. Some pro players such as Odie Cleghorn and Jack Walker had or took jobs that were considered essential to the war effort. These jobs kept them from active military service, but also meant they couldn't play hockey. The Conscription Act of 1917 drafted many other players, such as Frank Foyston and Dick Irvin, into the army. They were allowed to complete the 1917–18 season but were called into service in the spring of 1918. Foyston and Cleghorn were training with the air force in Toronto by the summer of 1918. Another pro star, Frank Nighbor, was also with the air force as a mechanic. All were spared overseas service when the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. But even the end of the war didn't save everyone.

Hobey Baker, the great American amateur star, had already trained as a pilot and was anxious to ship overseas when the United States officially joined the War in the summer of 1917. He was soon in service with many former members of the famed Lafayette Escadrille, and later given command of his own U.S. Aero Squadron. More than a month after the end of the War, on December 21, 1918, Baker received his orders to return to the United States. Anxious for one last flight, he went up to test a recently repaired plane. The engine failed shortly after take-off and Baker crashed nose first into the ground. He survived the initial impact, but died in an ambulance just a few minutes after being freed from the wreckage.

The Great War, as it was known, took a devastating toll on the lives of Canadians and people all around the world. Hockey was no exception. And yet, the wreckage of the war years helped give modern hockey its shape, with the birth of the NHL and the creation of the Memorial Cup.

SIDEBAR

The following Honoured Members of the Hockey Hall of Fame are known to have seen military service during World War I:

Players

Hobey Baker*, Punch Broadbent, Odie Cleghorn, Bill Cook, Scotty Davidson*, Red Dutton, Frank Foyston, Frank Fredrickson, Herb Gardiner, Shorty Green, George Hay, Dick Irvin, Duke Keats, Percy LeSueur, Frank McGee*, George McNamara, George Richardson*, Jack Ruttan, Joe Simpson, Harry “Moose” Watson, Phat Wilson

(* indicates Killed in Action)

Builders

Frank Ahearn, John Kilpatrick, Paul Loicq, Frederic McLaughlin, Conn Smythe, James Sutherland