

## 100 Years Ago in the Trenches

25 February 2015

Lieutenant Duncan Bell-Irving was born in England on January 3rd, 1888 and came with his parents to Vancouver in April of that same year. He attended school in Vancouver and graduated from the Royal Military College in Kingston, in 1908. He returned to British Columbia and was articled to Mr. G.H Dawson, B.C.L.S. the former Surveyor General, obtaining his commission as a BC Land Surveyor in 1913. He entered into partnership with Captain K.C.C Taylor, D.S.O., B.C.L.S. under the firm name of "Taylor and Bell-Irving" of Vancouver.

He was engaged on a Government survey on the Naas River when war broke out and immediately made arrangements to return to Vancouver to enlist. He left with the first draft from North Vancouver as a Lieutenant in the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Company, Canadian Engineers heading for Valcartier. He arrived in France in January of 1915 with the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division as a section commander in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Company, Canadian Engineers. (In those days, a field company had three sections, each with a strength of about 60 all ranks.)



On the evening of February 25th, he was working in the trenches 100 yards from the German lines with four other sappers. At 11:30 PM the Germans opened fire on their work area with rifles and machine guns. He was shot through the head by a sniper.

With this death, Lt. Bell-Irving had the unenviable distinction of being the first member of 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Company, the first Canadian Engineer officer and the first officer from BC killed in action. He was buried the next day in the yard of a field hospital. Many of the company officers, NCOs and Sappers attended the burial service with members of his section acting as his pall bearers. Corporal Stanley Fenwick a section NCO that was with him when he was killed called him "An awfully fine man."

It has been 100 years since Lt. Bell-Irving's death. Let us remember all members of our Sapper family who have fallen in the service of our country.

