

DOWNED BY A FOLK SINGER!

Lt Frederick William 'Fred' Kantel, 54 Squadron RFC

by Stewart K. Taylor

Even when soaking wet, the 25 year old, sinewy framed and amply muscled Frederick William 'Fred' Kantel would not tip the scales beyond 110 pounds. A prominent Toronto athlete, he was a member of the Argonaut Eight who, in 1911, won several gold medals at regattas in the US and the UK. He was considered one of Canada's most brilliant oarsmen and was already a married man when he answered the call to arms; enlisting in November 1915 at Peterborough, Ontario with the Canadian Field Artillery, sometimes referred to as the Horse Artillery (18 pounders). Kantel soon became a section commander and, with the rank of lieutenant, commanded two sections of the unit, which consisted of four batteries under the jurisdiction of the 13th Brigade, CFA.

After months of practical training and preparation they embarked for England, later the next summer and in the summer of 1916 continued to train for a short period but, when the brigade was broken up and Lt Kantel, along with the other officers and men were shipped piecemeal as replacements to France, he turned his back on the idea. He used his mother's influence with her 'old flame', Richard Reid, now in the office of the Canadian High Commissioner in London, England, to help free him from CFA bondage.

Given such prominent assistance, Kantel went to London, called at Reid's office and met this charming gentleman. They shook hands and Mr Reid politely asked *Well Fred, is there something I can do for you?*

Kantel replied; *Yes get me into the RFC!*

And in ten days he was in 'like Flynn'. The date would be 30 October 1916, the same day of his arrival at Reading.

In 1973 from his home in Cuernavaca, Mexico, Fred Kantel rather casually told this author, *My old log book has been lost long ago but I remember I did my training beginning in Montrose, Scotland, on a Maurice Farman Pusher - rear engine - then to No 63 Instructional Squadron at Cramlington, flying Avros, next to a squadron of Sopwith Scouts at Oxford, then to France.*



Lt Kantel at the time of his 1915 enlistment in the Canadian Field Artillery. He was then in command of an 18 pounder section. :F.W. Kantel via S.K. Taylor

The men of this section of the 13th Brigade, CFA were all answerable to Lt Kantel, seen in this 1915 photo leaning on the barrel of an 18 pounder.

:F.W. Kantel via S.K. Taylor

