

**Driver Robert John Humphries©**  
**Regimental number: 324935**  
**55th Battery, 13th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery**

**born: 18 June 1889 – died: 26 January 1919**

Driver Robert John Humphries was born on 18 June 1889 in Guelph, Ontario,<sup>1</sup> the son of Edwin Humphries (born in England in January 1844)<sup>2</sup> and Agnes Storrie (born on 16 October 1861 in Ontario).<sup>3</sup> Agnes was Edwin's third wife. He first married Henrietta Egans on 16 May 1870 in Guelph.<sup>4</sup> Henrietta was also a widow when she married Edwin—her maiden name was probably Johnson. Sadly, Henrietta died of a liver complaint on 16 September 1875, at the age of 31,<sup>5</sup> leaving probably two children: Edwin William Churchill (born 1871)<sup>6</sup> and Maggie Elizabeth (born 1873).<sup>7</sup>

Edwin remarried, marrying Rosanna Kernighan, a spinster, on 12 December 1878 in Guelph.<sup>8</sup> Edwin and Rosanna had a daughter, Grace Beatrice, on 10 June 1879<sup>9</sup> but, sadly, she died at the age of 14 months on 30 August 1880.<sup>10</sup> In 1881, the family—Edwin, Rosanna and the two children from his first marriage—was living in Guelph, where Edwin was a builder.<sup>11</sup> Tragedy struck again when Rosanna died on 8 June 1881, at the age of 33, of uterine disease.<sup>12</sup> Edwin was once again on his own with two children.

Two years later, Edwin married for a third time. He married Agnes Storrie, a spinster of 23, on 20 June 1883 in Underwood, Ontario.<sup>13</sup> By then, Edwin was living in Paisley, Ontario—about 20 kilometres east of Underwood and 120 kilometres northwest of Guelph. He was a stone cutter. Eight years later, the family was living in Guelph again<sup>14</sup> and, by now, Edwin and Agnes had three children. They went on to have at least five children: James Henry (born about 1884),<sup>15</sup> Albert Edward (born in 1886),<sup>16</sup> Robert John, George Alma (born 1891)<sup>17</sup> and Ernest Edmund (born 1894).<sup>18</sup>

Robert enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 30 March 1916.<sup>19</sup> He was a steam fitter, 5' 4¾" tall and had a dark complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. He was a Presbyterian. Prior to enlisting, he had served with the 30th Wellington Rifles.

When he enlisted, he joined the 56th Battery of the Canadian Field Artillery. On 11 September 1916, he embarked in Halifax on the SS *Metagama* for England. Soon after arriving, he signed a will leaving all his possessions to his mother. On 29 January 1917, he transferred to the 55th Battery, 13th Brigade and went to France in August 1917, arriving in Le Havre on 21 August 1917. A few months after joining the Western Front he received three days Field Punishment No. 1 for "[w]hile on active service – disobedience of [illegible] No 430, Trotting heavy draught horses."

In January 1919, the 13th Brigade was stationed in Siegburg, Germany, 15 kilometres northeast of Bonn.<sup>20</sup> Days were occupied with routine matters, such as harness and stable cleaning. On 18 January, the 2nd Canadian Division took on the 42nd American Division in a number of sports, but "[t]he Americans were unable to win a single event." However, two days later, there was a boxing match between the brigade and the American troops and here the Americans were successful in every bout. Robert probably did not participate in any of these events because it was on 20 January 1919 that Robert was taken by the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with influenza. Four days later he was described as "dangerously ill" and he died two days afterward, on 26 January.<sup>21</sup>

The day after his death, his battery left Siegburg to march to Wahn, just outside Cologne, from whence it took the train to Namur, Belgium. None of Robert's comrades would have been around when he was buried in Poppelsdorfer Cemetery in Bonn, Germany (Grave 8, Plot B, Row A) on 28 January, with the Canadian chaplain W. Fisher presiding.

His father, who was his next of kin and living at 15 Paisley Street in Guelph, was notified of his death.<sup>22</sup>

Sometime later, his body was exhumed and reburied in Brussels Town Cemetery (Grave Reference: Plot X, Row 10, Grave 8).<sup>23</sup> Brussels Town Cemetery is located in the northeast corner of Brussels, Belgium. Brussels was occupied by the Germans from August 1914 to the end of the Great War. There are only 54 Commonwealth Great War graves, which include the graves of 50 prisoners of war whose bodies were brought back from Germany by the Canadian Corps in April 1919.<sup>24</sup>

Robert's younger brother Ernest also served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force.<sup>25</sup> He was a clerk when he enlisted in the 53rd Battalion (Regimental number: 602757) on 19 July 1915—over a year before Robert. He sailed to England in November of that year and went to France with the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMR) in April 1917. Unfortunately his military career was plagued with a number of illnesses. He suffered from impetigo and "contagion" before leaving England for France. He went to France with the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles in June 1916. Soon after arriving, he had an accident, resulting in a sprained right ankle. Three months later, he had trench fever and was hospitalized in France and then in England.

He rejoined the 5th CMR in France in April 1917 and two months later was gassed. On 6 June, in Vimy, France, he and two other soldiers were exposed to gas for 10 minutes. His symptoms in the field were described as:

At once choked. Eyes watered. Could not see. Groped his way to a "funk hole"<sup>26</sup> and rested 12 hours. Then dyspnoea and choking grew worse. Appetite was gone. Couldn't get any air into his lungs. Send out to Dressing Station. Cough which came on at once grew progressively worse. Expectored profusely. Head ached severely.<sup>27</sup>

His gas poisoning led to hospitalization in France and then England. However, he recovered and rejoined his unit in the field in August 1918. He returned to Canada in March 1919 and was demobilized in Montreal. His return to Canada must have been a relief to his parents, who had lost their older son just two months earlier. In 1921, Ernest and his wife Maud were living with Ernest's parents at 15 Paisley Street in Guelph.<sup>28</sup>

Robert's father Edwin died on 18 September 1926 of "cardiac failure, myocarditis," compounded by senile arterial changes.<sup>29</sup> He is buried in Guelph. Agnes, Edwin's third wife, outlived him and died on 25 December 1933 at the General Hospital in Guelph of carcinoma of the large bowel, compounded also by "senior arterial changes."<sup>30</sup> She is buried at Woodlawn Cemetery in Guelph.

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<sup>1</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1869–1913," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Robert John Humphries

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- <sup>2</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869–1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939–1947," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Edward Humphrey [sic]
- <sup>3</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869–1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939–1947," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Agnes Humphries
- <sup>4</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1801–1928, 1933–1934," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Edwin Humphries and Henrietta Egans
- <sup>5</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869–1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939–1947," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Henrietta Humphres [sic]
- <sup>6</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1869–1913," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 11 January 2017), entry for Edwin Wm Humphries
- <sup>7</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1869–1913," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 11 January 2017), entry for Maggie Elizabeth Humphres [sic] Humphries
- <sup>8</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1801–1928, 1933–1934," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Rosomond [sic] Kernighan
- <sup>9</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1869–1913," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 11 January 2017), entry for Grace Beatrice Humphus Humphres [sic]
- <sup>10</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869–1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939–1947," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Grace Beatrice Humphries
- <sup>11</sup> "1881 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Edwin Humphries, Province: Ontario, District number: 151, District: Wellington South, Sub-district number: C, Sub-district: Guelph, Division: 4
- <sup>12</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869–1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939–1947," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Rosanne Humphries
- <sup>13</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1801–1928, 1933–1934," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Edwin Humphries and Agnes Storrie
- <sup>14</sup> "1891 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Robert Humphries, Province: Ontario, District number: 127, District: Wellington South, Sub-district: Guelph City
- <sup>15</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1801–1928, 1933–1934," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for James Henry Humphries
- <sup>16</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1869–1913," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 11 January 2017), entry for Albert Edward Humphries
- <sup>17</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1869–1913," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 11 January 2017), entry for Geo Alma Humphries
- <sup>18</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1869–1913," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 11 January 2017), entry for Ernest Edmund Humphries
- <sup>19</sup> "Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 17 February 2017) entry for Humphries, Robert John, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4615 - 24, Item number: 477312, Digitized service file - PDF format: B4615-S024. Unless otherwise noted, all information about Robert's military career comes from this source.
- <sup>20</sup> "War Diaries–13th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>: accessed 13 January 2017) File: RG9-III-D-3, Volume/box number: 4972, File number: 554, Copied container number: T-10798
- <sup>21</sup> "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 6 January 2017), entry for Humphries, R. J.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> "Canada, War Graves Registers (Circumstances of Casualty), 1914–1948," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Robert John Humphries, Service number: 324935

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<sup>24</sup> "Brussels Town Cemetery," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/>: accessed 22 November 2016)

<sup>25</sup> "Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 17 February 2017) entry for Humphries, Ernest Edwin, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4614 - 44, Item number: 472452, Digitized service file - PDF format: B4614-S044. Unless otherwise noted, all information about Ernest's military career comes from this source.

<sup>26</sup> A funk hole was a cubby hole scraped out of the side of a trench that provided some protection for one or two soldiers. ("Dug-Out," *Firstworldwar.com* (<http://www.firstworldwar.com/atoz/dugout.htm>: accessed 13 January 2017))

<sup>27</sup> "Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 17 February 2017) entry for Humphries, Ernest Edwin

<sup>28</sup> "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Edwin Humphries, Province or territory: Ontario, District: Wellington South, District number: 150, Sub-district: Guelph (City), Sub-district number: 29, City, town or village: Guelph

<sup>29</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869–1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939–1947," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Edward Humphrey [*sic*]

<sup>30</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869–1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939–1947," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 January 2017), entry for Agnes Humphries