

Private Oscar Franklin Thorsteinson[©]
Regimental Number: 252283
10th Battalion, Canadian Infantry (Alberta Regiment)

born: 14 November 1893–died: 14 March 1918

Oscar Franklin (Frank) Thorsteinson was born on 14 November 1893 in Selkirk, Manitoba, to Gudni Thorsteinsson and Vilborg Arnadottir.¹ Both of Frank's parents were born in Iceland and immigrated to Canada in 1885.² Vilborg, a widow, was travelling with her daughter, Anna Jonsdottir (born on 18 July 1873 in Iceland). Vilborg had left behind two sons, whom she would not see again.³

Gudni was born on 25 November 1854 to Thorsteinn Feligsson and Helga Jonsdottir⁴ and Vilborg was born on 20 January 1855.⁵ Gudni and Vilborg met on board ship⁶ and married a few years after arriving in Canada. They married on 15 November 1888 in Gimli, Manitoba⁷ and had four children:

- Lara, who was born on 9 December 1888 in Gimli.⁸ Lara died at the age of 14 on 21 October 1903 in Selkirk;⁹
- Fanny, who was born on 1 February 1891 in Gimli;¹⁰
- Oscar Franklin and
- Eddvin A., who was born on 30 August 1895 in Manitoba¹¹ and probably died at a young age.¹²

During the same period, Gudni was having a relationship with another woman, with whom he had four more children:

- Wilbert Percival (known as Bill), who was born on 19 September 1893 in Gimli.¹³ Wilbert was also a soldier of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (regimental number 294129), who signed up on 3 April 1916 in Winnipeg.¹⁴ He returned from the Great War, and on 14 July 1922 married Holmfidur Freeman;¹⁵
- Sigridar Clara (known as Clara), who was born on 11 September 1898 in Manitoba;
- John Marino, who was born on 25 April 1901 and
- Gudrun Jakobina (known as Runy), who was born in 1903.¹⁶

In 1901, the family was living in Gimli, where Gudni was a general merchant.¹⁷ Vilborg was the local midwife.¹⁸ However, in 1902, Gudni and Vilborg separated.¹⁹ The same year, Vilborg's daughter, Anna, married Johann Ingimundarson,²⁰ a butcher, who had immigrated from Iceland in 1886.²¹ In 1906, Vilborg, Fanny and Frank were living in Selkirk.²² No information was found as to the whereabouts of Wilbert, Eddvin or Sigridar; however, they may have been living with Anna and her husband. Anna and Johann had six children: Larus (known as Lawrence), who was born in 1905; Johann Ingimar, who was born in 1907; Finny, who was born in 1909; Thidvik Alexander, who was born in 1911; Franklin Ingiberg, who was born in 1913;²³ and June Lillian, who was born in 1917.²⁴



Private Frank Thorsteinson

Source: Jim Busby

In 1906, Gudni was living in Selkirk with Kristen Ingjaldsson, 31 years his junior, and a son, Victor Hope, who was born in 1904.²⁵ Gudni and Kristen had at least three more children: Ethel, who was born on 31 October 1906; Violet May, who was born on 29 August 1908; and Sylvia, who was born on 1 August 1910.²⁶



The Winnipeg Falcons hockey team

Source: <http://www.winnipegfalcons.com/teampics/falcons19121913.jpg>

the 209th Battalion was absorbed into the 9th Reserve Battalion. From that battalion, Frank was posted to the 10th Battalion and joined it near Vimy Ridge. He saw action in two major battles, at Hill 70 in August 1917 and at Passchendaele in November 1917. Shortly afterward, in December 1917, he was hospitalized with the mumps, taking four weeks to convalesce.

The 10th Battalion participated in every major Canadian battle of the Great War and at Hill 70 set a record for the most decorations earned by a Canadian unit in a single battle. The unit was known to its contemporaries simply as “the Fighting Tenth.”³²

On 11 March 2014, Frank’s grand-nephew authored an article, found on *Historica Canada*, based on his mother’s family research.²⁷ It recounts that prior to the war, Frank, known as Buster to his teammates, played hockey and was an outstanding forward with the Winnipeg Falcons Hockey Club. He was a clerk in Winnipeg at the Northern Crown Bank and, after the 1915/16 season with the Falcons, he moved to Swift Current with the bank.²⁸ In the 1916 Census, Frank was recorded as a ledger keeper at a bank and living with Vilborg and Fanny in Winnipeg, although there is an annotation that he was already at Camp Hughes.²⁹

Frank signed up with the CEF on 1 March 1916.³⁰ He was 21 years old and unmarried, with a scar on his right knee from a hockey skate. He enlisted with the 209th Battalion and sailed to England on RMS *Caronia* in November 1916.³¹ Soon after he arrived in England,

Frank had returned from leave on 10 March 1918 and was assigned to D Company's eight-man raider section, which undertook a mission on 12 March. While the raiders were crossing No Man's Land in an area known as Twisted Alley, German mortars showered them with gas projectiles they called "pineapples." Though the men wore gas masks, seven of the eight men, including Frank, reported ill effects of the gas after leaving the Front. Frank and three others were evacuated to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 13 March 1918, where Frank died the next day of gas poisoning. Two weeks later his Falcons teammate George Cumbers was killed and buried eight graves away from Frank.

Frank was buried on 15 March 1918 at the Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension, Barlin, France, at Plot II, Row E, Grave 28.³³ The extension was commenced by French troops in October 1914, but it was taken over by Commonwealth forces in March 1916. In November 1917, Barlin began to be shelled and the hospital was moved back to Ruitz, but the extension was used again in March and April 1918 during the German advance on this front. The extension contains 1,095 Commonwealth burials of the Great War.³⁴

Virtually every member of the Falcons hockey team was of Icelandic heritage and enlisted with the CEF, but sadly two did not return home—Frank and George Cumbers. After returning from the Great War, the Winnipeg Falcons hockey team reformed, with the memory of Frank being the inspiration for the 1919–20 season. That season culminated with the Winnipeg Falcons winning the very first gold medal in an Olympic hockey tournament, scoring 29 goals and having only one goal scored against them.³⁵ This feat is described in one of *Historica Canada's* Heritage Minutes, which can be viewed at: https://www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/winnipeg-falcons?media_type=41&. Although Frank is not named in the video, he is portrayed as a player and then as inspiration when the two blue jerseys are shown hanging on the dressing room wall.

In 1921, Frank's mother Vilborg was living at 505 Beverley Street in Winnipeg³⁶—a home she bought many years earlier.³⁷ His sister Fanny died in Winnipeg in 1931.³⁸ By then Frank's mother had lost so much—she had left behind two sons in Iceland, lost two children in childhood, lost her last son in the Great War and then lost her only living child. A few years later, Vilborg died in Winnipeg at the age of 83 on 21 June 1938.³⁹

In 1940, Frank's father was the postmaster living in Selkirk with Kristen and daughter Sylvia.⁴⁰



Frank Thorsteinson (seated right) and Bill Thorsteinson (standing right)

Source: Jim Busby

Special thanks are extended to Patricia McLean and Jim Busby for their considerable assistance in putting together this biography and providing additional resources.

- ¹ “Web: Manitoba, Canada, Birth Index, 1866–1912,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 February 2017), entry for Oscar Franklin Thorsteinsson. Frank’s attestation document identifies his birth as a year later, in 1894. The spelling of the family members’ names varied in different sources—notably between Thorsteinson and Thorsteinsson.
- ² “1901 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 February 2017), entry for Gudni Thorsteinson, Province: Manitoba, District: Selkirk, District number: 11, Sub-district: Gimli, Sub-district number: D 2.
- ³ Personal communication, Jim Busby, February 2018.
- ⁴ “Iceland, Select Baptisms, 1730–1905,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 January 2018), entry for Gudni Thorsteinsson.
- ⁵ “1901 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 February 2017), entry for Gudni Thorsteinson.
- ⁶ Personal communication, Patricia McLean, February 2018.
- ⁷ “Web: Manitoba, Marriage Index, 1879–1931,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 February 2017), entry for Gudni Thorsteinsson.
- ⁸ “Web: Manitoba, Canada, Birth Index, 1866–1912,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 February 2017), entry for Laura [sic] Thorsteinsson.
- ⁹ “Web: Manitoba, Death Index, 1881–1943,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 February 2017), entry for Lara Thorsteinson.
- ¹⁰ “Web: Manitoba, Canada, Birth Index, 1866–1912,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 February 2017), entry for Fanny Thorsteinsson.
- ¹¹ “1901 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 February 2017), entry for Gudni Thorsteinson, Province: Manitoba, District: Selkirk, District number: 11, Sub-district: Gimli, Sub-district number: D 2.
- ¹² Personal communication, Jim Busby.
- ¹³ “1901 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 February 2017), entry for Gudni Thorsteinson.
- ¹⁴ “Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914–1918,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 6 February 2017), entry for Wilbert Percival Thorsteinson.
- ¹⁵ “Web: Manitoba, Marriage Index, 1879–1931,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 February 2017), entry for Wilbert P Thorsteinsson.
- ¹⁶ “1916 Canada Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 4 February 2018), entry for Anna Ingimundsson, Home in 1916: Selkirk, Manitoba, Canada, Sub-District: 04.
- ¹⁷ “1901 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 February 2017), entry for Gudni Thorsteinson.
- ¹⁸ Personal communication, Jim Busby.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ “Web: Manitoba, Marriage Index, 1879–1931,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 February 2017), entry for Anna Jonsdottir.
- ²¹ “1916 Canada Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 4 February 2018), entry for Anna Ingimundsson.
- ²² “1906 Canada Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 January 2018), entry for Gud [sic] Thorsteinson, Province: Manitoba, District: Selkirk, Sub-district: 22A.

- 23 "1916 Canada Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 4 February 2018), entry for Anna Ingimundsson.
- 24 Personal communication, Patricia McLean.
- 25 "1906 Canada Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 13 January 2018), entry for Grohen [*sic*] Thorsteinson, Province: Manitoba, District: Selkirk, Sub-district: 12A.
- 26 "1911 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 13 January 2017), entry for Gudin [*sic*] Thorsteinson, Province: Manitoba, District: Selkirk, District number: 22, Sub-district: 43, Sub-district number: 43.
- 27 "Frank Thorsteinson and the Winnipeg Falcons at War," *Historica Canada* (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/thorsteinson>: accessed 8 February 2017), article by Jim Busby, published 11 March 2014.
- 28 Personal communication, Jim Busby.
- 29 "1916 Canada Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 January 2018), entry for Hilborg [*sic*] Thorsteinson, Home in 1916: Winnipeg Centre, Manitoba, Sub-District: 24.
- 30 "Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914–1918," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 6 February 2017), entry for Frank Thorsteinson.
- 31 "Frank Thorsteinson and the Winnipeg Falcons at War," *Historica Canada* (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/thorsteinson>: accessed 8 February 2017), article by Jim Busby. Unless otherwise indicated, all information about Frank's military service comes from this source.
- 32 "10th Battalion (Canadians), CEF," *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/10th_Battalion_\(Canadians\),_CEF](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/10th_Battalion_(Canadians),_CEF): accessed 8 February 2017).
- 33 "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 13 January 2017), entry for Thorsteinson, F.
- 34 *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery: accessed 8 February 2017), entry for Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension.
- 35 "Winnipeg Falcons," *Historica Canada* (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/winnipeg-falcons/>: accessed 8 February 2017).
- 36 "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 11 January 2017), entry for Vilborg Thorsteinson, Province or territory: Manitoba, District: Winnipeg Centre, District number: 38, Sub-district: Winnipeg (City), Sub-district number: 25, City, town or village: Winnipeg City Ward 2.
- 37 Personal communication, Jim Busby.
- 38 "Web: Manitoba, Death Index, 1881–1943," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 February 2017), entry for Fanny Thorsteinsson.
- 39 "Web: Manitoba, Death Index, 1881–1943," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 February 2017), entry for Vilborg Thorsteinson.
- 40 "Canada, Voters Lists, 1935–1980," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 February 2017), entry for Gudni Thorsteinson in 1940, Location: Selkirk, Manitoba, Canada, Electoral district: Selkirk.