

Private Ernest Harrison[©]
Regimental number: 13243
5th Battalion, Canadian Infantry

born: 1 April 1890 – died: 17 February 1916

“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord”¹—these were the words chosen by his father to be on the gravestone of Private Ernest Harrison, who died at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 17 February 1916.²

The same day, Private James William Harrison, also of the 5th Battalion, died there.³ In the journal recording soldiers’ deaths, the chaplain included the notation “brothers.” However, there is no evidence to suggest that they were brothers, beyond being “brothers in arms.”

The two men had different parents and were born in different countries. Ernest was born on 1 April 1890 in Saginaw, Michigan, in the United States,⁴ the eldest son of Arthur and Ellen Harrison.⁵ James, on the other hand, was born in Newcastle, Northumberland, in England,⁶ the son of Henry and Elizabeth Jane Harrison.⁷

It is not known when Ernest’s parents, Arthur and Ellen, both of whom were born in England—Arthur in October 1865 and Ellen in February 1870⁸—immigrated to the United States. They possibly married in 1889 in Burnley, Lancashire,⁹ and immigrated to the United States between 1889 and 1894. In 1900, they were living in Saginaw, with Ernest and his three younger siblings: Fredrick (born in about 1894), Lewis (born in about 1897) and Ruth (born in 1899)—all of whom were born in Michigan.¹⁰ Ernest’s father was a contractor builder.

Ernest’s father moved to Canada in 1908 and the family followed the next year. Two years later, the family was living at 1656 Parker Street in Vancouver, British Columbia.¹¹

Ernest was a carpenter and living at 2106 Trutch Street in Vancouver, British Columbia, when he enlisted right at the beginning of the Great War.¹² He enlisted as a private in the 5th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Valcartier, Quebec, on 18 September 1914. He was 5’ 10½” tall and had medium complexion and grey eyes and dark brown hair. He was a member of the Wesleyan church.

Ernest joined the Front in France on 15 February 1915. He had a week’s leave in the field in October/November 1915. Just three months later he was wounded and died at No. 1 CCCS.

In February 1917, Ernest was serving with the 5th Battalion, probably near Bailleul, in northern France.¹³ The battalion had done a tour in the trenches, before being relieved by the 8th Battalion on 14 February. Ernest died of his wounds on 17 February 1916.¹⁴ The day before he died a “[s]hell hit in court yard just outside Orderly Room killing a team of mules, smashing a limber, a watercart [*sic*] & a wheeled stretcher. Wrecked inside of Orderly Room & Officer’s [*sic*] mess.” Five Other Ranks were wounded that day. Perhaps Ernest or William were among the wounded because the following day, the battalion’s war diary notes that “One of the men wounded yesterday died in BAILLEUL today.” Altogether, 867 soldiers were admitted to No. 1 CCCS in February 1916, of whom 22 died.¹⁵

Ernest was buried in Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Grave Reference: Plot II, Row C, Grave 151).¹⁶ Bailleul is in France, but near the Belgian border, about 15 kilometres southwest of Ypres.¹⁷ It was occupied in October 1914 and became an important hospital centre for not just No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station but also for No. 1 Australian and five British Army casualty clearing stations.

Ernest would have been awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).

The medals were sent to his parents, who were then living at 2343 Victoria Drive in Vancouver. In 1921, Ernest's parents and his sister Ruth were still living at the same address.¹⁸ Arthur, at the age of 55, was a manufacturer of ready-cut homes.

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¹ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, (www.cwgc.org: accessed 3 December 2017), entry for Harrison, Ernest, Service No: 13243

² "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 2 January 2017), entry for Harrison, E.

³ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 2 January 2017), entry for Harrison, W. The journal maintained by the chaplains at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station records that both died there on 17 February 1916. However, the war diaries of the No. 1 CCCS records only one death there that day. ("War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G))

⁴ "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 Harrison, Ernest, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4102 - 47, Item number: 443095, Digitized service file - PDF format: B4102-S047

⁵ "1900 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 10 October 2017), entry for Ernest Harrison

⁶ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 8 February 2017) entry for Harrison, James William, Volume 10B, Page 67

⁷ "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 Harrison, James William, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4106 - 43, Item number: 96019, Digitized service file - PDF format: B4106-S043; "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2017), entry for Elizabeth Jane Ronel [sic], Registration district: Newcastle upon Tyne, Inferred county: Northumberland, Volume: 10b, Page: 48

⁸ "1900 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 10 October 2017), entry for Ernest Harrison

⁹ "England & Wales Marriages 1837–2008," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 5 February 2017), entry for Arthur Harrison, District: Burnley, County: Lancashire, Volume: 8E, Page: 393

¹⁰ "1900 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 1 February 2017), entry for Ernest Harrison

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- ¹¹ "1911 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 February 2017), entry for Ernest Harrison, Province: British Columbia, District: Vancouver, District number: 12, Sub-district: 31 - Vancouver City, Sub-district number: 31
- ¹² "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 1 February 2017) entry for Harrison, Ernest, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4102 - 47, Item number: 443095, Digitized service file - PDF format: B4102-S047. Unless otherwise specified, all information about Ernest's military career comes from this source.
- ¹³ "War diaries - 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=5th+infantry+battalion&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FIN&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G; accessed 23 March 2017)
- ¹⁴ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 1 February 2017), entry for Harrison, E.
- ¹⁵ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FIN&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G)
- ¹⁶ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 3 December 2017), entry for Harrison, Ernest
- ¹⁷ "Bailleul Community Cemetery, Nord," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 17 January 2017)
- ¹⁸ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 1 February 2017), entry for Arthur Harrison, Province or territory: British Columbia, District: Vancouver, District number: 13, Sub-district: Ward 5, Sub-district number: 43, City, town or village: Vancouver City