

Lieutenant John Andrew Dow Elder[©]

Regimental number: -

38th Battalion (Eastern Ontario Regiment), Canadian Infantry

born: 12 August 1894 – died: 30 October 1918


Lieutenant John Andrew Dow Elder was the eldest of the three sons of Reverend John Elder and his wife, Janet (née Baird). Born in Rutherglen, Scotland, a lowlands town not far from Glasgow, on 12 August 1894,¹ he was closely followed by a brother, Dougald, born in 1896.² The Elder family had moved to Pulteneytown in the very north of Scotland by the time that John started school in 1901.³ John's youngest brother, Arthur, was born in 1904.⁴ When John was 13 the family sailed on the SS *Athenia* from Glasgow,⁵ bound for Montreal, Quebec, Canada, with their ultimate destination being Toronto, Ontario. Whether they stayed in Toronto for any time is unknown because by 1911 the family was established near London, Ontario.⁶

When he enlisted on 8 May 1916, John was a student at McMaster University, then located in Toronto (it moved to Hamilton, Ontario, in 1930).⁷ It is possible that the timing of John's enlistment was influenced by the fact that Dougald had enlisted as a private in January. John, however, because of previous training as a member of the Canadian Officer Training Corps (COTC), was appointed a lieutenant. Though Dougald enlisted with the 135th (Middlesex) Battalion, he joined John in the 147th (Grey) Battalion, based in Owen Sound, in time to sail with him from Halifax, Nova Scotia, on the SS *Olympic* (sister ship to the *Titanic*) on 13 November 1916. Together, the Elder boys arrived in England a week later.

Once in England, John was posted to the 38th (Eastern Ontario) Battalion, joining them in the field on New Year's Eve. The 38th Battalion, 4th Canadian Division, had arrived in France in August 1916, moving immediately to a forward position on the southern end of the Ypres salient in Belgium.⁸ By the time John joined the battalion it was already at Vimy, north of Arras, France.⁹ In January and February 1917, he took aerial contact, grenade and platoon commanders' courses. Back with the battalion, though he would not have appreciated it at the time, John was part of what would be considered by many as the moment that Canada came of age: the attack on Vimy Ridge of 9–12 April 1917.

Lieut. J. A. D. Elder Dead.

Lieut. John A. D. Elder died from wounds on October 30, according to word received by his father, who is a Presbyterian minister in London, Ont. Prior to enlisting with the 147th Battalion he was a third-year student at McMaster University, and previously was a bank clerk in London. A brother, Pte. Don, is in the paymaster's office in London, England. Lieut. Elder went across two years ago as signalling officer, and refused two offers for promotion as captain.



Toronto Star - November 15th, 1918

Obituary for Lieut. J. A. D. Elder

Source: Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Veterans Affairs Canada

He was granted his first leave (10 days) at the end of July 1917 and two weeks in December.

When not on leave, John was with the battalion as it moved up and down the Western Front. The battalion took part in routine patrols, small sorties and major battles. During the battle for Passchendaele, Belgium (30 October 1917), John was the 38th's Signalling Officer. The following month he was the "Officer-in-Charge of Brigade Signallers" for a period of unknown duration, the battalion's war diary for 28 November simply noting that "Mr. Elder" had returned. At the beginning of August 1918, John was granted 14 days leave to England. After he returned, the battalion took part in the Battle of the Droocourt-Quéant Line^{10, 11} which forced the Germans to a defensive position behind the Hindenburg Line. Late in September, the battalion moved forward to be

part of the battle for the Canal-du-Nord, specifically to capture the high ground of Bourlon Wood.^{12, 13} After a respite behind Arras, the battalion was dispatched past Denain to Rouvignies on 23 October and to the front line at La Sentinelle on 28 October.¹⁴ The next day, on the outskirts of Valenciennes, John was shot in the hip. He was transported to No.1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station at Auberchicourt, about 25 km behind the battle line, where he succumbed to his wound on 30 October.¹⁵ The 38th Battalion was relieved at Onnaing east of Valenciennes on 6 November and did not return to the field again before the Armistice.¹⁶

John was buried in the Emerchicourt Communal Cemetery near Denain on 31 October 1918.¹⁷ His remains were later removed to the Douai British Cemetery (Grave G 20), 24 km northeast of Arras.¹⁸ He was awarded the Military Cross posthumously for action during the assault on Cambrai. The citation given to his parents read: "During operations in the vicinity of Bourlon between Sept. 27th and Oct. 2nd, 1918, he as battalion signalling officer personally superintended the upkeep of communications under heavy shell and machine gun fire. The communication in the battalion was maintained throughout the entire operation in a most satisfactory manner, which made possible several quick changes in disposition necessary owing to enemy counter attack. He showed great gallantry and energy throughout."¹⁹



Grave marker for Lieut. J. A. D. Elder

Source: Canadian Virtual War

John's brother Dougald survived the war. Though arriving in England at the same time as John, Dougald did not join the 38th Battalion in France until July 1917, after six months with the 8th Canadian Reserve Battalion in England. His time with the 38th was very short as he suffered an acute pleurisy attack a month later. Because his illness was subsequently diagnosed as a chronic condition, after six months convalescence, Dougald was transferred to the Paymaster Corps and other duties in England for the remainder of the war. He married Violette Emily Braid in the spring of 1919²⁰ and was discharged in England at the end of November. Dougald and Violette had a daughter, Joan, in the spring of 1920.²¹ They remained in the London area, although they seem to have separated sometime between 1938, when they last appear together on a voters list,²² and 1939, when Dougald is living by himself.²³ He remained in England until at least 1965.²⁴ Dougald passed away in 1986 and was buried in the Mount Pleasant Cemetery in London, Ontario,²⁵ with his and John's parents, who both died in 1942.^{26, 27} Violette Elder died in London in 1977.²⁸

John's youngest brother, Arthur, became a teacher; he married Agnes Myrtle Foster in London, Ontario in 1933.²⁹ They appear to have had at least one child, a son, Arthur John Roy, born in 1937.³⁰ Agnes passed away on 21 September 1983³¹ and Arthur on Christmas Eve 1990.³² Both are buried in the same cemetery as Arthur's parents and his brother.

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¹ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (www.bac-lac.gc.ca: accessed 25 April 2018), entry for John Andrew Dow Elder, Reference: Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2857-20. Unless otherwise specified, all information about his military career comes from this source.

² "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (www.bac-lac.gc.ca: accessed 25 April 2018), entry for Dougald B. C. Elder, Regimental number: 802659, Reference: Canadian Expeditionary

Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2856-44. Unless otherwise specified, all information about his military career comes from this source.

³ "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 25 April 2018), entry for John A. D. Elder, Registration district: Wick, Civil Parish: Wick, Town: Pulteneytown, County: Caithness; Household number: 259 Line: 10, Roll: CSSTCT1901_12

⁴ "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 25 April 2018), entry for Arthur William St. Clair Elder

⁵ "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 25 April 2018), entry for John A. D. Elder

⁶ "1911 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 25 April 2018), entry for John Andrew Elder, Province: Ontario; District: Middlesex North; District number: 96; Sub-district: 13 - Lobo; Sub-district number: 13

⁷ "History of McMaster University," *McMaster University* (www.mcmaster.ca: accessed 25 April 2018)

⁸ "War Diaries - 38th Battalion, Canadian Infantry," *Library and Archives Canada* (www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/Pages/war-diaries.aspx: accessed 28 April 2018), Reference: RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4938. File number: 432, Copied container number: T-10743

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ "War Diaries - Arras," *Library and Archives Canada* (www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/firstworldwar/025005-1000-e.html: accessed 5 May 2018)

¹² "War Diaries - 38th Battalion, Canadian Infantry," *Library and Archives Canada* (www.bac-lac.gc.ca: accessed 28 April 2018), Reference: RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4938. File number: 432, Copied container number: T-10743

¹³ "War Diaries - Canal-du-Nord and Cambrai," *Library and Archives Canada* (www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/firstworldwar/025005-1000-e.html: accessed 5 May 2018)

¹⁴ "War Diaries - 38th Battalion, Canadian Infantry," *Library and Archives Canada* (www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/Pages/war-diaries.aspx: accessed 28 April 2018), Reference: RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4938. File number: 432, Copied container number: T-10743

¹⁵ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo: accessed 25 April 2018), entry for J. A. D. Elder

¹⁶ "War Diaries - 38th Battalion, Canadian Infantry," *Library and Archives Canada* (www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/Pages/war-diaries.aspx: accessed 28 April 2018), Reference: RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4938. File number: 432, Copied container number: T-10743

¹⁷ "Canada, CEF Commonwealth War Graves Registers, 1914–1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 April 2018), entry for J A D Elder

¹⁸ "Canadian Virtual War Memorial," *Veterans Affairs Canada* (www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial: accessed 1 May 2018), entry for John Andrew Dow Elder

¹⁹ "Canada, Military Honours and Awards Citations Cards, 1900–1961," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 1 May 2018), entry for John Andrew Dow Elder, Award Date: 15 February 1919

²⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916–2005," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 1 May 2018), entry for Violette E Braid, Registration district: Brentford, Inferred county: Middlesex, Volume: 3a, Page: 136

²¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Births Index, 1916–2005," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 3 May 2018), entry for Joan B Elder, Registration district: Brentford, Inferred county: Middlesex, Volume: 3a, Page: 483

²² "London, England, Electoral Registers, 1832–1965," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 3 May 2018), entry for Dougal Baird Clark Elder, County or Borough: Twickenham, Ward or division/constituency: Twickenham, Reference number: MR/PER/C/0660

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- ²⁴ "London, England, Electoral Registers, 1832–1965," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 3 May 2018), entry for Dougald B G(sic) Elder, County or borough: Wandsworth, Ward or division/constituency: Battersea South, Street address: 55 Elspeth Road, Reference number: LCC/PER/B/2989
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- ²⁷ "Canada, GenWeb Cemetery Index," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 3 May 2018), entry for Janet Elder
- ²⁸ "England & Wales, Civil Death Registration Index 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 September 2018), entry for Emily Violet Elder, Registration district: Wandsworth, Inferred county: Greater London, Volume: 15, Page: 1440
- ²⁹ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages 1826–1936," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 3 May 2018), entry for Arthur William St Clair Elder
- ³⁰ "Elder Family Tree," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 3 May 2018), entry for Arthur William Sinclair Elder
- ³¹ "Canada, Find A Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 3 May 2018), entry for Agnes Myrtle Elder
- ³² "Canada, Find A Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 3 May 2018), entry for Arthur William St. Clair Elder