

Private Virgil Ross Phelps[©]
Regimental number: 2529409
102nd Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force

born: 23 December 1897—died: 1 October 1918

Private Virgil Ross Phelps was the last of six children born to Norman and Jane Logan Phelps of North Bay. He was born on 23 December 1897 in Nipissing, Ontario.¹ Virgil had three older brothers—Ray Stanley (born on 23 July 1886),² Hugh Dyson (born on 7 July 1891)³ and Harry Stephen (born on 12 May 1894)⁴—and two older sisters—Nora Amelia (born on 10 August 1884)⁵ and Clara May (born on 2 March 1889).⁶ Sadly, his brother Ray died of diphtheria on 29 April 1890, at just 3 years of age.⁷

Norman and Jane Logan Liddle married in Dutton, Ontario, on 31 January 1883.⁸ Dutton is in southern Ontario, about 45 kilometres southwest of London. Jane had been born to Scottish parents on 31 January 1862 in Iona, Ontario,⁹ just a few kilometres from Dutton. But Norman was from Leeds County east of Kingston, Ontario. He was born there on 16 June 1852.¹⁰ Before his marriage Norman was living in Norwich Township—between Toronto and Dutton.¹¹ After their marriage, Norman and Jane remained in the Dutton area, where their first three children were born. In 1891, this Baptist family was living in Oxford South Riding, 100 km northeast of Dutton, where Norman was a printer.¹²

Norman and Jane's fourth child was born in July 1891 in Nipissing, Northern Ontario, so the family had probably moved north that summer. Norman and Jane remained in the Nipissing/North Bay area for the rest of their lives.

In 1901, the family was living in North Bay, where Norman was now a publisher,¹³ as he continued to be into 1911, when the family was living on Worthington Street, North Bay.¹⁴ On 16 June 1909, Virgil's sister Clara had married Abel Watters Chamberlain in Nipissing.¹⁵ In 1911, they were living next door to her parents at 163 Worthington Street, with their young daughter, Helen.¹⁶

Virgil's mother died the following year. Jane had had pernicious anaemia for five years and she died of exhaustion on 15 March 1912.¹⁷ Her husband remarried three years later, marrying Annie Margaret McFeggan on 4 May 1915 in Toronto, Ontario.¹⁸

Virgil was a munitions worker in Toronto and living at 220 Langley Avenue when he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 7 September 1917.¹⁹ He was 5' 7½" tall and had a medium complexion, blue eyes and medium hair. On 16 October 1917 he signed a will, leaving all his possessions to his father.

His brother Hugh, a printer, had enlisted a couple of months earlier in Sudbury.²⁰ When he enlisted on 25 June 1917, he joined the Canadian Mounted Rifles Depot. Both brothers went overseas with the Canadian Mounted Rifles Depot, leaving Halifax together on 20 October 1917 and arriving in Liverpool on 1 November. From there, they went to the Canadian camp at Shorncliffe, where they stayed until March 1918. They transferred to the 102nd Battalion when they arrived in France on 29 March 1918.

Both brothers spent little time at the Front. Hugh was wounded on 9 August 1918 and was eventually sent to County of Middlesex War Hospital, near St Albans in Hertfordshire, with a

gunshot wound to his right shoulder. On 27 August, he was sent to a military convalescent hospital in Epsom, Surrey, and from there to the nearby Canadian camp at Witley. It does not appear that he returned to the Front before the end of the war. He returned to Canada on 30 December 1918 and was discharged in Toronto on 25 January 1919.

Hugh was in the camp at Witley when his brother Virgil was fatally wounded and admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 30 September with gunshot wounds to his chest that penetrated his abdomen. He died there the next day.

It is not known how Virgil was wounded, but at the time of his death, his battalion was stationed near Blécourt in northern France.²¹ The 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions were tasked with crossing the Canal du Nord and taking Bourslon Village and Wood and then heading to the north of Cambrai. The offensive began on 27 September and continued on to 1 October. By the time Virgil's battalion was relieved by the 28th Battalion in the early hours of 2 October, it had experienced great losses. During the whole operation, five officers were killed and 16 wounded; 56 Other Ranks were killed, 274 wounded and 15 missing. Virgil was likely one of the wounded.

Virgil was buried on 1 October in Duisans British Military Cemetery (Plot 8, Row A, Grave 10) with the Canadian chaplain A. D. Reid presiding. A letter was sent to his father in North Bay to notify the family of their son's death.

Duisans British Military Cemetery is located in Etrun, near Arras, in France. The first burials took place in the cemetery in March 1917.²² No. 1 CCCS arrived at the beginning of September 1918 and was stationed near Duisans for two months in the autumn of 1918. Virgil was one of 1681 Canadian soldiers admitted in September.²³

Virgil was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre). He is also remembered on the war memorial in North Bay.²⁴

Virgil's brother Harry appears to have moved to the United States at some time before, or in the first years of, the war. He married Margaret L. Robinson on 15 February 1916 in Monroe, New York.²⁵ He was a salesman for a dry cleaning company when he registered for the U.S. World War I draft in May 1917. He had one child.²⁶ He died in Rochester, New York, on 29 January 1940.²⁷

After the war, Virgil's father and stepmother were living at 157 Worthington Street. Norman had probably retired and he was not well. He had suffered from chronic endocarditis for ten years when he died on 24 December 1927 in Nipissing.²⁸

Virgil's eldest sister Nora married Albert Edward Clarke on 31 December 1917 in York.²⁹ In 1921, the couple were living in Calgary with their young son, Kenneth.³⁰ She was probably still living in Calgary when she died on 15 January 1978. However, she was buried in Toronto.³¹



War memorial, North Bay

Source: *Ontario War Memorial blog*. Used with kind permission of the author.

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- ¹ "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1858–1913," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 1 January 2020), entry for Virgil Ross Phelps
- ² "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1858–1913," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 January 2020), entry for Ray Stanley Phelps
- ³ "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1858–1913," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 January 2020), entry for Hugh Dyson Phelps
- ⁴ "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1858–1913," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 January 2020), entry for Harry Stephen Phelps
- ⁵ "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1858–1913," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 January 2020), entry for Nora Amelia Phelps
- ⁶ "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1858–1913," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 January 2020), entry for Clara May Phelps
- ⁷ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths and Deaths Overseas, 1869–1947," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 January 2020), entry for Ray Stanley Phelps
- ⁸ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1937," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 January 2020), entry for Norman Phelps
- ⁹ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths and Deaths Overseas, 1869–1947," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 January 2020), entry for Jane Lagan [*sic*] Phelps
- ¹⁰ "1901 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 1 January 2020), entry for Noigil [*sic*] L. Phelps, Province: Ontario, District: Nipissing, District number: 92, Sub-district: North Bay (Town/Ville), Sub-district number: 2
- ¹¹ "1881 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 January 2020), entry for Norman Phelps, Province: Ontario, District number: 165, District: Oxford South, Sub-district number: C, Sub-district: Norwich South, Division: 1
- ¹² "1891 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 January 2020), entry for Norman Phelps, Enumeration district number: 95 1/2
- ¹³ "1901 Census of Canada," *Ancestry*, entry for Noigil [*sic*] L Phelps
- ¹⁴ "1911 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 1 January 2020), entry for Virgel [*sic*] Phelps, Province: Ontario, District: Nipissing, District number: 99, Sub-district: 106 - North Bay, Sub-district number: 106
- ¹⁵ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1937," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 January 2020), entry for Clara May Phelps [*sic*]
- ¹⁶ "1911 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 February 2020), entry for Clara Chambrie [*sic*], Province: Ontario, District: Nipissing, District number: 99, Sub-district: 106 - North Bay, Sub-district number: 106
- ¹⁷ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths and Deaths Overseas, 1869–1947," *Ancestry*, entry for Jane Lagan [*sic*] Phelps
- ¹⁸ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1937," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 3 January 2020), entry for Norman Phelps
- ¹⁹ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>: accessed 4 January 2020) entry for Phelps, Virgil Ross, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166, Box 7785 - 42, Item number: 575514, Digitized service file - PDF format: B7785-S042. Unless otherwise specified, all information about Virgil's military service come from this source.
- ²⁰ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>: accessed 4 January 2020) entry for Phelps, Hugh Dyson, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166, Box 7785 - 26, Item number: 575498, Digitized service file - PDF format: B7785-S026. Unless otherwise specified, all information about Hugh's military service come from this source.
- ²¹ "War diaries 102nd Canadian Infantry Battalion," www.lac-bac.gc.ca: accessed 18 February 2020) Date: 1917/10/01–1919/05/30, Reference: RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4945. File number: 456. Container:

T-10752. Unless otherwise specified, all information about the battalion's movements comes from this source.

²² "Duisans British Cemetery, Etrun," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org; accessed 7 October 2015)

²³ "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; accessed 17 June 2015)

²⁴ "North Bay," *Ontario War Memorial blog* (<http://ontariowarmemorials.blogspot.com/>; accessed 2 January 2020)

²⁵ "New York, County Marriage Records, 1847–1849, 1907–1936," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 January 2020), entry for Harry S. Phelps, Film number: 000831343

²⁶ "U.S., World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 January 2020), entry for Harry S. Phelps

²⁷ "U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 January 2020), entry for Harry Stephens [*sic*] Phelps

²⁸ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths and Deaths Overseas, 1869–1947," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 2 January 2020), entry for Norman Phelps

²⁹ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1937," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 January 2020), entry for Nora Amelia Phelps

³⁰ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 12 March 2020), entry for Nora A. Clarks [*sic*], Province or territory: Alberta, District: Calgary West, District number: 4, Sub-district: City of Calgary (Part), Sub-district number: 27, City, town or village: Calgary

³¹ "Newspapers.com Obituary Index, 1800s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 12 March 2020), entry for Norman Phelps