

Gunner John Thomas Tozer[©]
Regimental number: 86862
8th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery

born: 16 January 1895–died: 2 October 1918

Gunner John Thomas Tozer came from a military family. His father was a career soldier and his brother enlisted in the British army well before the Great War.

Gunner Tozer's father, also named John Thomas, the son of William and Mary Tozer, was born in about 1857 in Saint Sedwell, Exeter, in Devon.¹ John Sr. enlisted at the age of 19 in the Royal Artillery (RA) (regimental number 31938).² When he joined in Woolwich, near Greenwich—the home of the RA—on 19 January 1877, he was a smith (or metalsmith) and his next of kin was his mother Mary, who was living at 2 Summerland Street in Exeter. He first signed up for 12 years.

Nearly two years after he enlisted, John Sr. married Elizabeth (also known as Ellen Elizabeth or just Ellen) Graham, born on 21 January 1855³ in Dundee, Scotland,⁴ the daughter of William and Ann (née Winter) Graham. When John Sr. and Elizabeth were married on 23 December 1878 in the parish church of St Andrew in the Burgh of Dundee, Scotland, he was a gunner with the RA, stationed in Woolwich.⁵

Whether John Sr. was in Scotland at the time of the birth of his first child is not clear. His daughter, Annie, was born on 7 January 1882 in Dundee.⁶ In September of the following year, John Sr. left with his regiment, the RA's 4th Brigade, for India. The next year, the couple's second child, William, was also born in Dundee on 7 April 1884,⁷ but again it is not known if John Sr. was there.

No record of Elizabeth's travel to India was found. However, John Sr. remained in India until 1892 and, during that time, he and Elizabeth had another daughter, Lizzie. She was born in Bareilly, Bengal, India, on 3 December 1887 but probably was not thriving at birth, because she was baptized the following day and then died on 6 December.⁸

In Bareilly, John Sr. reengaged for a second period of service in the RA and then returned to the UK in January 1892. Another daughter, Ellen Elizabeth (known usually as Ellen), and John Thomas were born in Shorncliffe, near Elham, Kent—Ellen on 29 September 1892⁹ and John Jr. on 16 January 1895.¹⁰ John Sr. was stationed at Shorncliffe Army Camp, near Folkestone, Kent, at the time. Both Ellen and John Jr. were baptized in the Garrison Church in Shorncliffe—Ellen on 19 October 1892¹¹ and John on 2 February 1895.¹²

It was with the birth of John Jr. that John Sr. and his wife were brought on to the army's married establishment. Only a limited number of soldiers were permitted to marry while in service. There is no evidence that John Sr. had permission to marry when he did so in 1878¹³ but, after the birth of his fifth child, his wife and children were added to the regimental Roll of the Married Establishment. They began receiving rations¹⁴ and were living in the married quarters at the Shorncliffe Camp.¹⁵

When their last child, Winnifred Rose, arrived, John Sr. may have been at the Custume Barracks in Athlone, since that is where she was born on 5 September 1899.¹⁶ In December 1899, John Sr. went to South Africa where the Boer War had just broken out. During his time there, the Royal Artillery was separated into three branches, of which the Royal Field Artillery (RFA) was one. John Sr.

remained in South Africa until November 1900, when he had completed nearly 24 years of service and was discharged from the RFA in Gosport, Hampshire.

John Sr. had been a good soldier. His character was described as very good; he had received five Good Conduct badges and, during his last years of service, the Queen's South Africa medal with the clasp for the relief of Ladysmith, which took place in early 1900.¹⁷ When he was discharged, he became a Chelsea Pensioner and probably received his pension as an "out-pensioner"—that is, one who was not living at the Royal Hospital in Chelsea.¹⁸ He had indicated that on discharge he was going to live in Dundee, and he did. He was working as a hall caretaker when he was found dead on 12 January 1911 at 7 Douglas Street in Dundee. He had committed suicide by shooting himself in the head.¹⁹ His death was reported by his son William, also a soldier, who was stationed at the Wellington Barracks in the south camp at Aldershot, England.

William had joined the army at a young age. By 1901, at the age of 16, he was already a "boy" in the RFA, stationed at the Government Barracks and Hospital in Maryhill, Glasgow.²⁰ He married Alice Herd in Devon in 1907²¹ and, as with his parents before him, the family appears to have at times been split up. In 1911, William was at the Okehampton Artillery Camp in Okehampton, Devon,²² and his wife and two-year-old daughter were living with Alice's parents in Starcross, Devon.²³ In 1939, William had left the military and was a bailiff in the county court in Holsworthy, Devon.²⁴ He died there in 1956.²⁵

Two of John Sr.'s children immigrated to Canada before his death. Three months after his death, all members of the family except William were in Canada. On 15 April 1905, Annie left Glasgow on the SS *Buenos Ayrean*, sailing on the same ship as her future husband, Robert McNeill, a 21-year old plumber. They landed in Quebec City and then made their way to Winnipeg.²⁶ Did they know each other before sailing? They did not marry until nearly a year and half later, suggesting that they may have met onboard. They were wed on 5 September 1906 in Winnipeg.²⁷

Three years after Annie had left, her sister Ellen sailed from Glasgow to Canada, arriving in Montreal on 9 June 1908 and heading again to Winnipeg.²⁸ Three years later, their mother Elizabeth also left Glasgow with her two youngest children—John Jr. and Winifred. They sailed on SS *Numidian* on 3 March 1911 and arrived in Halifax. John was just 16 years old but was described as a clerk.²⁹ Just after their arrival, they were living at 889 Arlington Street in Winnipeg with Annie and her husband Robert. John was described as a printer's apprentice.³⁰

John was again described as a clerk when he joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force less than three years later.³¹ Like his father and brother before him, he appears to have been keen to serve in the army. He enlisted in Winnipeg on 14 January 1914—his 19th birthday. However, he gave his birthdate as 14 January 1894, not 1895. Although at 19 he was eligible to serve in the CEF and to go overseas, perhaps he thought that aged 20, he was less likely to be rejected. John Jr. was a big man: at 5' 11" tall, he was well above the minimum height for a soldier. He had a fair complexion, hazel eyes and light brown hair.

Before he embarked for England, he was promoted to sergeant. He left Canada on 8 August 1915, arriving in Plymouth, Devon, on 18 August and went overseas to France on 15 January 1916 as part of the 5th Brigade of the Canadian Field Artillery (CFA). He became part of the 4th Brigade in May 1916, with the reorganization of the CFA establishment.

On 28 September 1916, John was admitted to No. 12 General Hospital in Rouen with a "pyrexia of unknown origin" that was later diagnosed as pneumonia. He went from there to No. 2 Convalescent

Depot in Rouen and was eventually discharged from the hospital on 11 October. However, after his bout of pneumonia, John went back to England to the Canadian Casualty Assembly Centre, where wounded soldiers were assessed for either further treatment or a return to duty. He did not return to the Front until he joined the 8th Brigade of the CFA on 23 September 1917. In April of the following year, he reverted to the rank of gunner at his own request.

At the end of September 1918, the 8th Brigade was stationed at Wanquentin, about 13 kilometres west of Arras in northern France. Throughout the second half of the month, the brigade had been engaged in extensive training, consisting of field manoeuvres and gun drills, in preparation for a battle that began on 27 September. "The battle commenced at 5:30 A.M. and the next few days promised to be busy ones. The brigade performed a feat which has never been surpassed during the war, or possibly never, to date, equaled." In the war diary, special mention was made of the work of the gunners, "Drivers did marvellous work hauling ammunition and the gunners fed it to their guns with untiring energy." The battle continued for several days and the "[n]ight of 30/1st was a nervous one and the teams stood to at the guns all night."³²

It seems likely that John Jr. was fatally wounded in this battle because, on 1 October 1918, he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station (CCCS) with shrapnel wounds to his right forearm and penetrating his abdomen. He died there the following day and was buried on 2 October in Duisans British Military Cemetery (Plot 8, Row A, Grave 71) with the Canadian chaplain W. Fisher presiding. A letter was sent to his mother, his next of kin, at 683 Furby Street in Winnipeg, to notify the family of her son's death.³³

Duisans British Military Cemetery is located in Étrun, near Arras, France. The first burials in the cemetery took place in March 1917.³⁴ No. 1 CCCS arrived at the beginning of September 1918 and was stationed near Duisans for two months in the autumn of 1918.³⁵ As a result of the serious and urgent nature of the cases admitted to No. 1 CCCS, the death rate was high in October—a total of 83 deaths occurred during the month.³⁶

John was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).

At the beginning of the war, John's mother Elizabeth was living at 821 Alverstone Street in Winnipeg.³⁷ She was still in Manitoba, but living in St Boniface, when she died on 12 July 1928, at the age of 73.³⁸

John's sister Ellen had married Edwin Pearce (born on 18 November 1882 in Shropshire, England)³⁹ on 4 April 1917 in Vancouver, British Columbia.⁴⁰ Later she and Edwin moved to Chilliwack, BC,⁴¹ and she remained there until her death on 23 August 1946.⁴²

John's youngest sister Winifred also married during the war. She wed Andrew McEwan on 28 March 1917 in Winnipeg⁴³ and remained there until her death on 11 February 1942. She is buried in Brookside Cemetery in that city.⁴⁴

All three men in John's family—his father, his brother and John himself—were military men. But only John gave his life in military service.

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- ¹ "British Army Service Records 1914–1920," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 21 April 2020), entry for John Thomas Tozer; "Statutory Registers–Marriages," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 19 April 2020), entry for Graham, Elizabeth, Reference: 28a2/4 301
- ² "British Army Service Records 1914–1920," *Findmypast*, entry for John Thomas Tozer. Unless otherwise specified, all information about John Thomas' father's military service comes from his source.
- ³ "Web: Manitoba, Death Index, 1871–1947," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Elizabeth Tozer
- ⁴ "1861 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Elizabeth Graham, Enumeration district: 17, Household schedule number: 410, Line: 2, Roll: CSSCT1861_38
- ⁵ "Statutory Registers–Marriages," *ScotlandsPeople*, entry for Graham, Elizabeth
- ⁶ "British Army Service Records 1914–1920," *Findmypast*, entry for John Thomas Tozer; "GRO Regimental Birth Indices (1761 to 1924)" *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 21 April 2020), entry for Annie Tozer
- ⁷ "British Army Service Records 1914–1920," *Findmypast*, entry for John Thomas Tozer; "GRO Regimental Birth Indices (1761 to 1924)," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 21 April 2020), entry for William Tozer
- ⁸ "British Army Service Records 1914–1920," *Findmypast*, entry for John Thomas Tozer; "India, Select Births and Baptisms, 1786–1947," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Lizzie Tozer, FHL film number: 510883 ; "India, Select Deaths and Burials, 1719–1948," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Lizzie Tozer, FHL film number: 510883, Reference ID: 510-883
- ⁹ "British Army Service Records 1914–1920," *Findmypast*, entry for John Thomas Tozer; "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Elizabeth Tozer, Registration district: Elham, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 946
- ¹⁰ "British Army Service Records 1914–1920," *Findmypast*, entry for John Thomas Tozer; "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for John Thomas Tozer, Registration district: Elham, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1041
- ¹¹ "Garrison Church, Shorncliffe, Kent: Baptism Register," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for Ellen Elizabeth Tozer, Archive reference: WO 156/411, Page: 116
- ¹² "Garrison Church, Shorncliffe, Kent: Baptism Register," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 19 April 2020), entry for John Thomas Tozer, Archive reference: WO 156/411, Page: 104
- ¹³ This may explain why, in the 1881 Census, when he in the barracks in Woolwich, Kent, he is shown as being single, not married.
- ¹⁴ Watts, Michael J., *My Ancestor Was in the British Army: A Guide to British Army Sources for Family Historians*, Society of Genealogists Enterprises Ltd. (2009)
- ¹⁵ "Electoral registers 1832–1932," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 April 2020), entry for John Thomas Tozer, Year: 1895, Archive reference: SPR.Mic.P.4/BL.H.90, Image number: 131
- ¹⁶ "British Army Service Records 1914–1920," *Findmypast*, entry for John Thomas Tozer; "Ireland, Civil Registration Births Index, 1864–1958," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 April 2020), entry for Winifred Rose Tozer, Volume: 3, Page: 5, FHL film number: 101067
- ¹⁷ "Queen's South Africa Medal," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen%27s_South_Africa_Medal: accessed 23 April 2020)
- ¹⁸ "UK, Royal Hospital Chelsea Pensioner Soldier Service Records, 1760–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 April 2020), entry for John Thomas Tozer
- ¹⁹ "Statutory Registers–Deaths," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 30 May 2020), entry for Frew, Isabella, Reference: 282/2 30, Registration district: St Mary
- ²⁰ "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for William Tozer, Enumeration district: Government Barracks and Hospital, Household schedule number: 1, Line: 24, Roll: CSSCT1901_243

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- ²¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for William Tozer, Registration district: St Thomas, Inferred county: Devon, Volume: 5b, Page: 110
- ²² "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for William Tozer, Registration district: Okehampton, Registration district number: 280, Sub-registration district: Okehampton, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 11, Piece: 13147
- ²³ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for Alice Tozer, Registration district: St Thomas, Registration district number: 270, Sub-registration district: Kenton, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 08, Piece: 12665
- ²⁴ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for William Tozer, Schedule number: 206, Sub-schedule Number: 1, Enumeration district: WFMA, Registration district: 287-1
- ²⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for William Tozer, Registration district: Holsworthy, Inferred county: Devon, Volume: 7a, Page: 580
- ²⁶ "UK, Outward Passenger Lists, 1890–1960," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for Annie Tozer
- ²⁷ "Genealogy Searches for Unrestricted Records–Marriages," *Manitoba Vital Statistics Agency* (<https://vitalstats.gov.mb.ca>: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for Annie Lazer [sic]
- ²⁸ "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for Ellen E. Fozer [sic]
- ²⁹ "Passenger Lists Leaving UK 1890–1960," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 19 April 2020), entry for John T. Tozer
- ³⁰ "Canada Census 1911," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 14 September 2020), entry for Elizabeth Tozer, District number: 24, Province: Manitoba, Film: T-20347, Page number: 4. The census records indicate that the three members of the family emigrated to Canada in 1905. This is likely an error caused by the fact that all members of the family in whose house they were living had emigrated in 1905. The census taker had also mistakenly recorded that Annie and Robert's son Robert, who was 6 months old, had emigrated in 1905.
- ³¹ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 25 April 2020), entry for Tozer, John Thomas, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166, Box 9756 - 28, Item number: 279140, Digitized service file - PDF format: B9756-S028. Unless otherwise noted, all information about John's military service comes from this source.
- ³² "War Diaries – 8th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery" *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>: accessed 1 May 2020) Reference: RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4964. File number: 526. Container: T-10783
- ³³ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 21 April 2020), entry for Tozer, J. T.
- ³⁴ "Duisans British Cemetery, Etrun," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org; accessed 7 October 2015)
- ³⁵ "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/>; accessed 17 June 2015)
- ³⁶ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13–1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca>: accessed 26 March 2018)
- ³⁷ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada*, entry for Tozer, John Thomas
- ³⁸ "Web: Manitoba, Death Index, 1871–1947," *Ancestry*, entry for Elizabeth Tozer
- ³⁹ "Newspapers.com Obituary Index, 1800s–current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for Edwin Pearce

⁴⁰ "British Columbia, Canada, Marriage Index, 1872–1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 April 2020), entry for Eleanor [*sic*] Elizabeth Tozer, Registration number: 1917-09-088766, BCA number: B11380, GSU number: 1983708

⁴¹ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 March 2020), entry for Ellen E. Pearce, Province or territory: British Columbia, District: Fraser Valley, District number: 16, Sub-district: Chilliwack, Sub-district number: 12, City, Town or Village: East Chilliwack Polling Division

⁴² "British Columbia, Canada, Death Index, 1872–1990," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 April 2020), entry for Ellen Elizabeth Pearce, Registration number: 1946-09-010634, BCA number: B13191, GSU number: 2032423

⁴³ "Web: Manitoba, Marriage Index, 1881–1937," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 April 2020), entry for Winnifred Rose Tozer

⁴⁴ "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 April 2020), entry for Winnifred Rose McEwan