

Private James Amos®
Regimental number: 799721
15th Battalion, Canadian Infantry

born: 17 February 1893–died: 6 October 1918

Private James Amos was a signaller with the 15th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.¹ Being a signaller was a dangerous occupation in the Great War. Signallers were close to the front lines, providing signals back to the battalion headquarters. Where possible wired telephones were used; however, laying the cable for telephones was also dangerous work. At the beginning of the war, if cables could not be laid, flags were used but, after that, reflected light from the sun (during the day) and lamps (at night) were used. One signaller sent the message using reflected light or lamps and the other used a telescope to read the messages signalled back. Many signallers lost their lives, being so near the front lines.² James was one of them and his time on the Front was very short indeed.

James enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Toronto, Ontario, on 27 January 1916. He was a butcher, 5' 7½" tall and had a fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. He was living at 186 Broadview Avenue in Toronto. It was early August before he left Canada, embarking on the SS *Scotian* in Halifax. He arrived in Liverpool on 19 August 1916 and went to the Canadian military camp in Witley, Surrey. On 6 November 1916, he was appointed an acting lance corporal. At the end of March the following year, James was sent to the Canadian Engineers Training Depot in Crowborough in East Sussex for signalling training. He arrived at the CETD on 29 March 1917 and when his training course finished, he returned to Witley. He remained in England until February the following year, but it is not known what he was doing. He reverted to being a private to go overseas. On 28 February he joined the 15th Battalion and on 3 March reached his unit in the field.



"A Signaller in World War 1"

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Eighteen days later he was gassed; he was sent to No. 1 Canadian Field Ambulance, then admitted to No. 2 CFA on 23 March. He rejoined his unit four days later.

At the beginning of October 1918, James' battalion was in brigade reserves near Raillencourt, just west of Cambrai in northern France.³ That day, the troops relieved the 28th Battalion and, by 2 a.m. the following day, they were in Boulon, about 5 kilometres away. They rested that day and the following days were occupied with inspections and generally cleaning up. On 4 October, they received news that the next morning they would move to the Visen-Artois area, 20 kilometres further west. During the night, enemy aircraft were active—although there were no casualties, two mules were injured. The march to Visen-Artois was completed at about 1.30 p.m. on 5 October. The next day was spent in preparation to relieve the 3rd Essex Battalion that evening. The battalion moved off at 5 p.m. Within half an hour, enemy shelling started near transport lines; two men were killed and three wounded. One of the wounded may have been James.

On 6 October 1918, James received multiple gunshot wounds to his left leg and foot, fracturing it, as well as to his right leg and head. He was taken to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, where he died the same day.⁴ A casualty clearing station was a military medical unit behind the front lines, usually located near transportation. Casualties who did not soon die or could not be adequately treated in the CCS were stabilized before being transported to a field or military hospital.⁵

He was buried on 7 October 1918 in Duisans British Military Cemetery (Plot 7, Row B, Grave 28) with the Canadian chaplain W. Fisher presiding.⁶ Duisans British Military Cemetery is located in Étrun, near Arras, France. The first burials in the cemetery took place in March 1917.⁷ No. 1 CCCS arrived at the beginning of September 1918 and was stationed near Duisans for two months. 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.⁸

The desperation of German soldiers, as the war neared its end, is reflected in translated extracts from captured German documents that appear in the 15th Battalion war diaries.⁹

One man writing to another soldier:

It is to be hope that this “swindle” will soon come to an end and if things continue to go as they have been going during the last two weeks, then it is going well, otherwise it will probably never end. These organized retreats of the Prussian Army are a serious matter. You will have seen it yourself in the paper. Up to yesterday 33,000 prisoners taken and this is “a withdrawal according to plan”. Really these reports are a joke.

A soldier writing from the German lines:

If it had not been for parcels received from home, I would certainly have starved before now. “Jailbirds” are treated far better than our “Field Grays.”

A soldier in the trenches writing to his cousin:

Soon we shall doubt whether we should live to see the end of this terrible drama in the History of the World, – whether there will be any end to the horrors. From all appearances we cannot hope for a favourable settlement for a long time to come. . . Certainly the people in Austria seem to be wary of this hideous game. The news we received from that country indicates absolute weariness of the war. Nor the people to be blamed for it, for they are considerably nearer starvation than we.

As challenging as the conditions were for Allied soldiers, they probably did not rival those of the German army.

A letter about James’ death was sent to his mother, Isabella Amos, who was living at 4 George Place in Peebles, Scotland.¹⁰ She was his next of kin and was also named as his beneficiary in his will.

James was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).¹¹

James was the son of William Lockie Amos and Isabella Glass. His father was born on 20 September 1854 in Traquair, Peeblesshire, Scotland,¹² and his mother in Newcastle upon Tyne, Northumberland, England, in 1857.¹³ They married in Newcastle in 1883¹⁴ and had nine children:

- Margaret (born in 1883 in Traquair)¹⁵
- John (born in 1885 in Traquair)¹⁶
- Thomas (born in 1886 in Traquair)¹⁷
- William (born on 29 January 1888 in Traquair)¹⁸
- Robert (born in 1889 in Tonbridge, Kent)¹⁹
- Jesse (born in 1891 in Tonbridge)²⁰
- John (baptized as James) (born on 17 February 1893 in Tonbridge)²¹
- Elizabeth Mary (born in 1896 in Tonbridge)²²
- Isabel (born in 1899 in in Tonbridge)²³

James' birth was registered as John, but this may have been an error, because he was known as James and was baptized as James on 30 April 1893 at St John the Evangelist Church in Hildenborough, Kent.²⁴ Although James was born in Kent, his four eldest siblings had been born in Traquair, the hometown of his father. The family had moved to Kent, in the south of England, by 1891. That year they were living at Lodge House on Coldharbour Lane in Hildenborough, just a few miles from Tonbridge. James' father was a joiner.²⁵ In 1901, the family was probably still in the same house, but the address was now Orchardmain, which was off Coldharbour Lane.²⁶

James' sister Margaret had left home but was only living a few houses away and working as an under housemaid for Lord Arthur Gascoyne-Cecil and his first wife, Elizabeth Ann.²⁷ Lord Cecil was the fifth son of the 2nd Marquis of Salisbury.²⁸ The Amos' connection with this family went back a long way. In 1881, Lord Cecil and his wife were living at Orchard Mains House in Traquair and Margaret's mother, Isabella Glass, was a cook and domestic servant in their home before she married. (One wonders if the name Orchard Mains led to the naming of the small road near Tonbridge where both families later lived.) Lord Cecil was a farmer in Traquair—he had a 4,000-acre farm (of which 800 acres were arable) that employed 19 men, a woman and two boys.²⁹ Then, 20 years afterward, Isabella's daughter was working for the same family in Tonbridge. Ten years later, Margaret was still with Lord Cecil and his family—now as a parlour maid.³⁰

It appears as if the Amos family moved with Lord Cecil and his family. By 1891, both families had come down from Scotland to Kent. It appears, however, that Lord Cecil had also bought land in Hampshire, near Sway, sometime in the 1890s³¹ and owned land in Braunton, North Devon, as well.³² Sometime around 1906, both families moved from Kent to the Sway area.³³ In 1911, they were both living at The Mount, Sway, near Leamington, and William was an estate carpenter—undoubtedly he had been the carpenter for Cecil's estates for some time, and James was a butcher.³⁴

In 1913, James sailed on the SS *Ascania* from Southampton, arriving on 9 May 1913 in Quebec City, Canada.³⁵ James was the last of his brothers to go to Canada, following in the steps of John, Robert and William. His other brother Thomas and his sisters, Margaret, Elizabeth and Isabel all went back to Scotland, as did his parents by at least 1916.³⁶

It is not known how long **Margaret** remained with the Cecil family. Lady Arthur (Elizabeth) died on 11 October 1901 in Tonbridge.³⁷ Lord Arthur remarried on 4 November 1902, wedding Frederica Langensalza Von Klenck at the parish church of St Peter's Pimlico.³⁸ Lord Arthur died in on 16 July 1913,³⁹ but his second wife stayed on in Hampshire until at least 1920.⁴⁰ At some point, Margaret returned to Scotland and was a postmistress living at 60 Rosetta Road in Peebles. She died on 12 October 1958 in Traquair.⁴¹

Like his brother, **John** immigrated to Canada, arriving through Portland, Maine, on 14 April 1911.⁴² He does not appear to have served in the Great War. On 30 September 1916 he married Emily Gertrude Payne in York, Ontario. Like his father, he was a carpenter. His wife had emigrated from England the same year as John.⁴³ In 1921, he and his young family were living at 79 Eastwood Avenue in Scarborough, Ontario.⁴⁴

Thomas moved back to Scotland and was living with his parents at 4 George Place in Peebles when he married Christina Niven McCown on 27 August 1921 near Comrie, Scotland. He was a pressman⁴⁵ (a printing machine operator). He was working as a gardener when he died on 27 June 1958, as a result of an accident two days earlier. He died in the Hospital of Earn in Perth, about 25 miles east of Comrie. He had extensive injuries, including multiple fractures of his left ribs. He also had surgical emphysema (air or gas trapped under the skin, often in the chest and as a result of surgery) and hypostatic pneumonia (the collection of fluid around the lungs).⁴⁶

William was a chauffeur and, like his brother, immigrated to Canada. He was first in the country from 1902 to 1908 and then left, only to return on 9 May 1913.⁴⁷ He was living at 731 Ontario Street in Toronto when he enlisted in the British Expeditionary Force in Toronto on 8 December 1915.⁴⁸ He remained in Canada until January and then left for England mid-month. He was in England until 1 July 1916, when he went to France with the 2nd Water Tank Company. In April 1917, he transferred to the 11th Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. He had only been there for a month when he was transferred to the 3rd Boring Company of the Royal Engineers. He was in France until September 1918, when he appears to have gone on furlough for a few months. He was demobilized in April 1919. It is not clear where he was until 1927, when he returned to Canada on the SS *Andania*, arriving in Quebec City on 8 May 1927. On 21 November 1931, he married Isabella Shiach Forbes in Toronto.⁴⁹ He died of stomach cancer on 29 Dec 1942 and is buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery.⁵⁰

Robert also immigrated to Canada via the United States. He sailed from Southampton, arriving in Portland, Maine, on 22 April 1912. Three years later, on 26 June 1915, he married Lilian Clara Ball in Toronto, Ontario. Robert does not appear to have served in the Great War. In 1921, they were living at 104 Smith Avenue in Hamilton East, Ontario, where Robert was a painter. It is not known when Robert died, but he was still alive when his wife Lilian died in 1948.

Jesse had left home by 1911 and was working as a housemaid in the home of Keppel Pulteney in Lymington, Hampshire.⁵¹ Nothing more is known about Jesse's life.

James' youngest sisters, **Elizabeth** and **Isabel**, moved back to Scotland, possibly at the same time as their parents. Elizabeth married Hugh Horsburgh in Peebles in 1923⁵² and Isabel married John Lamb the following year.⁵³ Both died in Peebles—Elizabeth on 9 January 1991⁵⁴ and Isabel in 1975.⁵⁵ Elizabeth is buried in St. Andrew's Cemetery in Peebles.⁵⁶

James' parents both died in Peebles—Isabella in 1928⁵⁷ and William in 1939.⁵⁸

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