

Sapper Edward Boyer®
Regimental number: 2009040
12th Battalion, Canadian Engineers

born: February 1873–died: 12 October 1918

Although Sapper Edward Boyer's enlistment papers for the Canadian Expeditionary Force state that he was born on 2 February 1876, they are probably not correct.¹ When he enlisted on 8 May 1918, this would have made him 42 years old. He was, in fact, born in 1873² (perhaps on 2 February), making him 45 years old at enlistment—at the upper age limit for military service in World War I.³ He likely took three years off his age to ensure that he would be accepted—after all, he had come all the way from Pennsylvania in the United States to serve with the Canadian troops. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records correctly identify him as being 45 at his death in 1918.⁴

When the United States joined the Great War in April 1917, it had a regular army much smaller than most European nations. The *Selective Service Act* of 1917 required all males between the ages of 21 and 30 to register for potential military service, which would have excluded Edward from the draft. This may explain why he chose to enlist with the Canadian forces, in spite of the fact that the Americans had joined the war effort. The Act was amended in August 1918 to include men from 18 to 45,⁵ but by then Edward had already enlisted in the CEF.

In 1918, Edward and his wife Martha (née George)⁶ were living in St. Clair, Pennsylvania,⁷ with their two children—Jack, also known as John, (born in Australia in about 1908)⁸ and Mary (born in St. Clair on 10 April 1911).⁹ Edward and Martha married in about 1906¹⁰ and the family came to the United States from Wales, arriving in New York on 16 February 1910; their previous permanent home had been Australia.¹¹ Having been a coal miner earlier in his life,¹² Edward was now a pipe fitter.¹³ However, when he enlisted eight years later, he described himself as a tunneller—making him well-experienced to serve with the Canadian Engineers.

Edward served for 12 years in the 69th Welsh Regiment before he left Wales, and this may have contributed to his desire to serve in the Great War. He was 5' 6½" tall with a medium complexion, hazel eyes and grey hair when he enlisted in the CEF in Toronto. When he came to Canada to enlist in May 1918 he could not have imagined that the war would be over just six months later.

He arrived in England on 15 July 1918 and went to the Canadian military camp at Seaford. He went to France in mid-September and joined the 12th Battalion of the Canadian Engineers on 28 September. The battalion was near Bournonville—just 10 kilometres west of Cambrai in northern France—and he was one of 79 Other Ranks (non-officers) joining the battalion as reinforcements.¹⁴ Just three days later he was taken to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station¹⁵ suffering from pneumonia. He battled the pneumonia and pleurisy for 11 days but died on 12 October. He was buried the next day in Duisans British Military Cemetery (Plot 7, Row B, Grave 64) with the Canadian chaplain A. D. Reid presiding.¹⁶ On the day he died, his battalion celebrated its first battalion dinner since the formation of the unit, complete with the brigade band and guests from other units.¹⁷

Even though he had only been at the Front for three days, his death was described as being “due to service in the field.”¹⁸

The chaplain sent a letter to notify his wife of his death,¹⁹ and she later had the following inscription included on his gravestone:

BELOVED FATHER TRUE AND KIND
NO FRIEND LIKE YOU
ON EARTH WE'LL FIND²⁰

By 1920, Edward's wife and children had moved to St Louis, Missouri.²¹ When she received his two medals—the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre)—she was living at 3715 Lee Avenue in St. Louis. At one point, she also appears to have lived at 3932 North 25th Street in St. Louis.²² It is not known what happened to Edward's daughter Mary after 1920. In 1930, his wife and son were still living in St Louis, where Jack was working as a clerk for a newspaper. Ten years later, they were on the same street and Jack was a salesman. It is not clear where either of them lived after that, or when they died.

Little is known about Edward's family in Wales after the war. He was the son of Mary Boyer and her husband George.²³ Mary (née Lewis) was born in Crickhowell, Wales, in 1843²⁴ and married George Boyer, a man about 30 years her senior, in 1862.²⁵

George was born in St Margaret's, Leicestershire, and had served for nearly 23 years in the 19th Regiment of Foot, which eventually became the Green Howards (Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment). He served abroad for over seven years—including in the Mediterranean, the West Indies and Turkey. He joined in 1835 and, when he was discharged in January 1857, he was a colour sergeant and was appointed to the permanent staff of the militia.²⁶

It is not known where George was living when he married Mary five years later. The couple had two sons—Thomas (born in 1862)²⁷ and William (born in 1870)²⁸—before Edward's birth in 1873. All were born in Crickhowell, Wales. In 1871, Mary and her first two sons were living with her mother, Rachel Williams, and her stepfather, William Williams, in Llanelly.²⁹ George was not with them. It is also not known where Mary, George or their 8-year-old son Edward were ten years later, when their eldest two sons were still living with her parents.³⁰ By 1891, Mary was a widow and she and three boys were still living with her mother, who was also widowed.³¹

Mary and her son Thomas, who was then a collier, were living together in 1901.³² Edward's other brother William, also a coal miner, had married and was living with his wife, Mary Hannah, and their son, Daniel, in Llanelly.³³ Mary and Thomas was still living together in 1911,³⁴ but Mary likely died in 1917,³⁵ so never knew about the death of her son. Nothing is known about what became of Edward's brothers.

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¹ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>; accessed 21 May 2021), entry for Boyer, Edward, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 979 - 62, Item number: 58894, Digitized service file - PDF format: B0979-S062. Unless otherwise noted, all information about Edward's military service comes from this source.

² "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>; accessed 23 May 2021) entry for Boyer, Edward, Registration district: Crickhowell, Volume 11B, Page 136

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- ³ "The Canadian Great War Soldier," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-canadian-great-war-soldier>: accessed 23 May 2021)
- ⁴ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 23 May 2021), entry for E Boyer
- ⁵ "Selective Service Act of 1917," Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selective_Service_Act_of_1917: accessed 29 May 2021)
- ⁶ "Pennsylvania, U.S., Birth Certificates, 1906-1911," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 May 2021), entry for Mary B. Boyer [sic]
- ⁷ "Personnel Records of the First World War," entry for Boyer, Edward
- ⁸ "1910 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 May 2021), entry for Edward Bowyer [sic]
- ⁹ "Pennsylvania, U.S., Birth Certificates, 1906-1911," entry for Mary B. Boyer [sic]
- ¹⁰ "1910 United States Federal Census," entry for Edward Bowyer [sic]
- ¹¹ "New York, Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 May 2021), entry for Jack Bowyer [sic]
- ¹² "1891 Wales Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 January 2021), entry for Edward John Boyar [sic], Registration district: Crickhowell, Sub-registration district: Llanelly, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 4, Piece: 4576, Folio: 37, Page: 23
- ¹³ "1910 United States Federal Census," entry for Edward Bowyer [sic]
- ¹⁴ "War diaries - 12th Battalion, Canadian Engineers," *Library and Archives Canada*, (www.bac-lac.gc.ca/: accessed 23 May 2021), 1918/03/01-1919/04/29, Reference: RG9-III-D-3, Volume/box number: 5001, File number: 677
- ¹⁵ A very comprehensive description of the casualty clearing stations is presented in the blog "Casualty Clearing Stations During WW1" *Chiddicks Family Tree* (<https://chiddicksfamilytree.com/2021/05/09/casualty-clearing-stations-during-ww1/>: accessed 13 May 2021)
- ¹⁶ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 23 May 2021), entry for Boyer E
- ¹⁷ "War diaries - 12th Battalion, Canadian Engineers," *Library and Archives Canada*
- ¹⁸ "Personnel Records of the First World War," entry for Boyer, Edward
- ¹⁹ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa*, entry for Boyer E
- ²⁰ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, entry for E Boyer
- ²¹ "1920 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 May 2021), entry for Martha Boyer
- ²² "Personnel Records of the First World War," entry for Boyer, Edward
- ²³ The entry in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission entry for E Boyer indicates that he was the son of Mary Boyer, but there is no mention of his father. (*Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, entry for E Boyer)
- ²⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 21 May 2021), entry for Mary Lewis, Registration district: Crickhowell, Inferred county: Breconshire, Volume: 26, Page: 293
- ²⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2021), entry for Mary Lewis, Registration district: Crickhowell, Inferred county: Breconshire, Volume: 11b, Page: 225
- ²⁶ "UK, Royal Hospital Chelsea Pensioner Soldier Service Records, 1760-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 May 2021), entry for Color Sergeant George Boyer
- ²⁷ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 23 May 2021) entry for Boyer, Thomas, Registration district: Crickhowell, Volume 11B, Page 150

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- ²⁸ "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 23 May 2021) entry for Boyer, William, Registration district: Crickhowell, Volume 11B, Page 128
- ²⁹ "1871 Wales Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 May 2021), entry for Mary Boyar [*sic*], Registration district: Crickhowell, Sub-registration district: Llanelly, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 4, Household schedule number: 8, Piece: 5587, Folio: 51, Page: 14
- ³⁰ "1881 Wales Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 May 2021), entry for Thomas Boyer, Registration district: Crickhowell, Sub-registration district: Llanelly, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 4, Piece: 5465, Folio: 45, Page: 11
- ³¹ "1891 Wales Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 21 May 2021), entry for Edward John Boyar [*sic*]
- ³² "1901 Wales Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 May 2021), entry 1901 England Census," for Mary Boyer, Registration district: Crickhowell, Sub-registration district: Llanelly, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 4, Household schedule number: 88, Piece: 5173, Folio: 9469, Page: 15
- ³³ "1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 7 January 2021), entry for William Boyer, Registration district: Crickhowell, Archive reference: RG13, Piece: 5173, Folio: 45, Page: 14
- ³⁴ "1911 Wales Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 21 May 2021), entry for Harry Ernest Homer, Registration district: Crickhowell, Registration district number: 611, Sub-registration district: Llanelly, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 04, Household schedule number: 97, Piece: 33596
- ³⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 17 December 2021), entry for Mary Boyer [*sic*], Registration district: Crickhowell, Inferred county: Breconshire, Volume: 11b, Page: 127