

**Sapper James Feathers<sup>©</sup>**  
**Regimental number: 681430**  
**10th Battalion, Canadian Engineers**

**born: 5 April 1890–died: 6 October 1918**

Sapper James Feathers was a twin. He and his sister Nina were born on 5 April 1890—James at 9:00 a.m. and Nina at 9:30 a.m.—at The Rowans, Barnhill, Monifieth, Scotland.<sup>1</sup> They had three older sisters: Margaret Duff (born in 1884),<sup>2</sup> Agnes Barland (born in 1886)<sup>3</sup> and Isabella (born in 1889).<sup>4</sup>

James was the only son of James Feathers Sr. (born in Dundee, Forfarshire (now Angus), in about 1846) and the former Ellen Ann Sturrock (born in Moulin, Perthshire, in about 1865),<sup>5</sup> who married on 29 June 1883 in Moulin.<sup>6</sup> In 1891 and 1901, James Jr. and his family were living on Collingwood Crescent, The Rowans, in Monifieth, where James Sr. was a nautical instrument maker.<sup>7</sup>

Ten years later, life had changed considerably for James Jr. He immigrated to Canada, arriving in Toronto on 20 May 1911,<sup>8</sup> and on 20 September he married Euphemia Russell Alexander in York, Ontario.<sup>9</sup>

Euphemia was born in about 1888 in Glasgow, Lanarkshire,<sup>10</sup> the daughter of George Russell Alexander and the former Elizabeth Tait Munro.<sup>11</sup> She obviously met James in Scotland because, when she arrived in Quebec City on the SS *Cassandra* on 17 September 1911, she indicated that she was heading to Toronto to get married. She was married three days later.

James and Euphemia were living at 377 Wellesley Avenue in Toronto when James enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 13 March 1916.<sup>12</sup> He was an oxy acetylene welder, 5' 8" tall and had a fair complexion, grey eyes and fair hair. Soon after he enlisted, his wife returned to Scotland,<sup>13</sup> probably to live near James' family in Broughty Ferry, near Dundee.<sup>14</sup>

James was hospitalized in Camp Borden before leaving Canada. He had scabies and was treated there for about two weeks in September 1916. He embarked for England in October 1916, arriving on 31 October.

He spent several months at the Canadian military camps in Bramshott and Witley before going to France on 11 February 1917 with the 116th Battalion. About six months later, he was injured near Lens, in northern France. He received three penetrating shrapnel wounds to his back and right arm on 3 September 1917. He was invalided to England, where he went to the Reading War Hospital in Berkshire. About the end of September was transferred to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital in Woodcote Park in Epsom, Surrey. He was discharged on 16 November and went to the military camp at Sandling. He then transferred to the Canadian Engineers Reinforcement Pool and then went back to France on 12 August 1918 and joined the 10th Battalion of the Canadian Engineers. He made his first visit to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station (CCCS) with a problem with his dentures but does not appear to have been admitted. He would return to No. 1 CCCS two weeks later.

In early October 1918, the 10th Battalion was stationed near the Canal du Nord, in northern France.<sup>15</sup> The battalion was engaged in the Allies' Hundred Day Offensive that eventually led to the Armistice. For the first few days of the month, the battalion was involved mainly in maintenance and clean up chores. For 6 October, the battalion's war diary notes simply that two Other Ranks

were evacuated to a field ambulance. This may have been the only mention of the tragic accident that would befall James.

“[James] was one of a party who were injured by the explosion of bombs buried under a thin layer of earth on which they had lighted a fire. They did not know the bombs were there nor did anyone else until they exploded.”<sup>16</sup>

In the words of one of James’ comrades:

At Canadian Staging Camp “B” on 6.10.18 at about 8:30 a.m., I was sitting around a fire built in a shell hole, with about six other men.

The fire had been lighted [*sic*] about 7: 30 a.m. and we had heated some water.

We had finished washing and were all grouped about the fire talking, when an explosion occurred.

The fire that we had built was placed on the same spot where a fire had previously been placed. Before we built the fire there was no signs of any bombs or explosives in the shell hole.

In my opinion the cause of the explosion was the heat of the fire exploding [*sic*] a buried bomb beneath it.

I saw that a number of men were injured some severely and saw some men dressing their wounds.

I accompanied two of the injured men to addressing station and brought an ambulance back with me.

When I returned with the ambulance, the other men had already been taken away in an ambulance which arrived before me.<sup>17</sup>

James was indeed taken to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with a fractured femur and wounds that penetrated his chest. He died the same day.<sup>18</sup> Another soldier injured in the accident, Corporal Robert Richard Johnson (regimental number: 408472) of the 27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion, also died of his injuries at No. 1 CCCS the same day.<sup>19</sup>

A casualty clearing station was a military medical unit behind the front lines, usually located near transportation. Casualties who did not die or could not be adequately treated in the CCS were stabilized before being transported to a field or military hospital.<sup>20</sup>

He was buried on 7 October 1918 in Duisans British Military Cemetery (Plot 7, Row B, Grave 25) with the Canadian chaplain A. D. Reid presiding. Duisans British Military Cemetery is located in Étrun, near Arras, France. The first burials in the cemetery took place in March 1917.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

A letter was sent to his wife, who was still living at 9 Ramsay Park in Broughty Ferry, to notify her of her husband’s death.

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). These were sent to his wife. His wife and mother received a Memorial Cross (often called the Silver Cross) awarded to mothers and widows of Canadian soldiers who died on active duty or whose death was attributed to such duty.<sup>23</sup>

James' sister **Agnes** married William Stewart Russell in 1908.<sup>24</sup> She was not at home with James' family in 1911, but the other children were.<sup>25</sup> She died in Aberdeen in 1971 at the age of 85.<sup>26</sup> **Margaret** died on 24 July 1952 in Broughty Ferry.<sup>27</sup> **Isabella** married Ernest Barry in 1920<sup>28</sup> and died on 7 Jun 1949, probably in Edinburgh.<sup>29</sup> James' twin sister **Nina** was living at 13 Tirearra Place, Abertay St. Barnhill, Dundee, when she died on 7 August 1971.<sup>30</sup>

While all James' siblings remained in Scotland, his wife did not. Euphemia moved to England and died on 19 March 1968 in Suffolk.<sup>31</sup> She had not remarried.

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<sup>1</sup> "Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 21 August 2020), entry for Feathers, James, Reference: 310/ 81, Registration district name: Monifieth; Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 21 August 2020), entry for Feathers, Nina, Reference: 310/82, Registration district name: Monifieth

<sup>2</sup> "Index of Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 20 August 2020), entry for Feathers, Margaret Duff, Reference: 282/4 1128, Registration district name: St Andrew (Dundee)

<sup>3</sup> "Index of Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 20 August 2020), entry for Feathers, Agnes Barland, Reference: 282/4 340, Registration district name: St Andrew (Dundee)

<sup>4</sup> "Index of Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 20 August 2020), entry for Feathers, Isabella, Reference: 310/7, Registration district name: Monifieth

<sup>5</sup> "1891 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2020), entry for James Feathers, Enumeration district: 7, Household schedule number: 62, Line: 22, Roll: CSSCT1891\_103

<sup>6</sup> "Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople*, entry for Feathers, James

<sup>7</sup> "1891 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2020), entry for James Feathers; "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 August 2020), entry for James Feathers, Enumeration district: 9, Household schedule number: 92, Line: 13, Roll: CSSCT1901\_111

<sup>8</sup> "U.S., Records of Aliens Pre-Examined in Canada, 1904–1954," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 August 2020), entry for James Feathers

<sup>9</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 April 2020), entry for James Feathers

<sup>10</sup> "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 August 2020), entry for Euphennia [sic] R Alexander, Enumeration district: 6, Household schedule number: 101, Line: 3, Roll: CSSCT1901\_111

<sup>11</sup> "Scotland, Select Marriages, 1561–1910," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 August 2020), entry for George Russell Alexander, FHL film number: 6035516

<sup>12</sup> "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 17 August 2020), entry for Feathers, James, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166, Box 3021 - 41, Item number: 384536, Digitized service file - PDF format: B3021-S041. Unless otherwise stated, all information about James' military service comes from this source.

<sup>13</sup> "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 17 August 2020), entry for Euphemia R Alexander

<sup>14</sup> "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada*, entry for Feathers, James

<sup>15</sup> "War Diaries - 10th Battalion, Canadian Engineers," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 20 August 2020) File: RG9-III-D-3, Volume/box number: 4999, File number: 671, Copied container number: T-10843

<sup>16</sup> "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada*, entry for Feathers, James

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>18</sup> “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 15 August 2020), entry for Feathers, J.
- <sup>19</sup> “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 29 November 2020), entry for Johnston [*sic*], R. R.
- <sup>20</sup> “Casualty Clearing Station,” *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualty\\_Clearing\\_Station](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualty_Clearing_Station): accessed 2 May 2020)
- <sup>21</sup> “Duisans British Cemetery, Etrun,” *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 7 October 2015)
- <sup>22</sup> “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)
- <sup>23</sup> “Memorial Cross,” *Veterans Affairs Canada* (<https://www.veterans.gc.ca>: accessed 21 August 2020)
- <sup>24</sup> “Index of Statutory Registers–Marriages,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 20 August 2020), entry for Feathers, Agnes Barland, Reference: 310/47, Registration district: Monifieth
- <sup>25</sup> “Index of 1911 Scotland Census,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 21 August 2020), entry for Feathers, James, Reference: 310/ 9/ 4, Registration district name : Monifieth, County/City: Angus
- <sup>26</sup> “Index of Statutory Registers–Deaths,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 20 August 2020), entry for Russell, Agnes Barland, Reference: 168/2 268, Registration district: Aberdeen
- <sup>27</sup> “England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 August 2020), entry for Margaret Duff Russell
- <sup>28</sup> “Index of Statutory Registers–Marriages,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 20 August 2020), entry for Feathers, Isabella, Reference: 310/47, Registration district: Monifieth
- <sup>29</sup> “Web: UK, Burial and Cremation Index, 1576–2014,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 20 August 2020), entry for Isabella Barry
- <sup>30</sup> “England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 20 August 2020), entry for Nina Feathers
- <sup>31</sup> “England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 20 August 2020), entry for Euphemia Russell Alexander