

Quartermaster Sergeant William Ernest Fitzgerald©

Regimental number: 2

2nd Heavy Battery, Canadian Garrison Artillery

born: 1875–died: 1918

Battery Quartermaster Sergeant William Ernest Fitzgerald was born in Bristol, England, on 3 October 1875,¹ the son of William Thomas and Eliza Jane Fitzgerald.² Their other children were Francis William (b. 1871), Caroline Elizabeth (b. 1872), Charles James (b. 1874), Stephen Joseph (b. 1877), Emma Louise (b. 1879), and Alice Maud (b. 1880).³

William Thomas Fitzgerald (b. 1847)⁴ was a coach builder,⁵ probably working for the well-known Bristol Wagon & Carriage Works Ltd.⁶ He married, in 1870,⁷ Eliza Jane Hinton (b. 1844),⁸ the daughter of a mariner.⁹ Sometime after all their children were born, they moved across the Welsh border to Cardiff, where William Thomas was still working as a coach builder in 1891.¹⁰

However, in 1896 Eliza Jane died,¹¹ and three years later in 1899 William Thomas travelled to Canada,¹² marrying Clarinda McDonald on 25 July 1900 in Prince Edward County, Ontario.¹³ The 1901 Census finds them living in Brighton, Ontario, with her daughter Ada. It indicates that William Thomas immigrated to Canada in 1876,¹⁴ but as noted above he was in Britain for the 1881 and 1891 censuses, with his first wife. He died in 1910 in Cobourg, Ontario, of liver cancer.¹⁵

William Ernest was living at home in Cardiff with his family in 1891 and working at age 15 as a telegraph messenger.¹⁶ By 1901 he was back in Bristol and working as a coach builder like his father,¹⁷ who was now in Canada. In 1907 he travelled across the Atlantic, via New York, to visit his father in Brighton, Ontario.¹⁸ After his father's death in 1910 he continued living with his stepmother, her daughter, and his sister Caroline in Cobourg, and found a job as a carriage builder.¹⁹ He was working at the Cobourg Car Works,²⁰ which began making passenger coaches for the railway companies in 1878, and must have earlier attracted his father to come and work for them.²¹

In June 1913, William Ernest married Emma Frances McNeill (b. 1 December 1885)²² from nearby Brighton Village.²³ She was the daughter of an Irish farmer, Malcolm McNeill, born in East India.²⁴ William Ernest and Emma Frances had a son, Gerald, in 1914.²⁵ Emma Frances lived until about 1962, passing away in Florida.²⁶

On 7 November 1914, not long after war was declared, William Ernest enlisted in Cobourg.²⁷ His attestation paper indicates that he had spent five years previously with the South African Police. There is a passenger record of him returning from Capetown to Southampton, England, in March 1907, a month before he left to visit his father in Canada, so this may have been him returning from his five years with the South African police.

William Ernest was assigned to the 2nd Heavy Battery Ammunition Column of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) and was quickly promoted (on 6 December 1914) to the position of Battery Quartermaster Sergeant (BQMS). This position was a non-commissioned officer (NCO) responsible for supplies.²⁸ The battery trained in Canada until 15 June 1915, when it left from Halifax on the SS *Caledonia*, arriving in England on 22 June. Three months later they were in France, arriving in Le Havre on 16 September 1916.

The battery proceeded to Northern France, near Arras. The first few months were quiet, and the battery did not suffer its first casualty until 27 April 1916.²⁹ BQMS Fitzgerald received eight days leave in May 1916 and was briefly treated at the 13 Canadian Field Ambulance on 15 September 1916 for some dental work. He had further periods of leave in September 1917 and October 1918.

After his last leave, he rejoined his unit on 21 October 1918. The battery was located in Bellaing, just outside Valenciennes, the last major French city still under German control.³⁰ When the men were moving up to support the attack on Valenciennes, there was heavy shelling on both sides. On 27 October the battery received a number of direct hits, killing one gunner and wounding four men, including BQMS Fitzgerald. Seven horses were also killed and 14 wounded (the battery still used horses to move the guns around).³¹

While the war diary gives 27 October as the date of BQMS Fitzgerald's injury, his personnel record gives it as 26 October, as does the Canada, War Graves Registers (Circumstances of Casualty) record, which describes the circumstances of his wounding as follows:³²

During heavy enemy shelling of the wagon lines at Heron by a 5.9 gun, about 12.30 on the morning of October 26th, 1918, several rounds landed near the Quartermaster stores. Whilst seeking a place of safety, a shell exploded near a wagon, seriously wounding him in the left thigh, legs and right knee, the wagon overturned so that a rear wheel rested on his legs. He was removed by comrades to a house some 300 yards distant, where first aid was rendered, and afterwards removed to the Field Ambulance, but he succumbed to his wounds the following day at No. 1 Casualty Clearing Station [CCS].

BQMS Fitzgerald was buried that day in the Emerchicourt Churchyard (Grave 15), two miles south of Auberchicourt. However, in 1950 his grave was transferred to the Daoui British Cemetery, Cuincy (Grave G 28).³³ There was no personal inscription on his gravestone.

A CCS was a military medical unit behind the front lines, usually located near transportation.³⁴ Casualties who did not return to their unit, die or could not be adequately treated in the CCS were stabilized before being transported to a field or military hospital.

No. 1 Canadian CCS, originally designated as No. 2 Clearing Hospital, was organized at Liverpool, Nova Scotia, and at Valcartier, Quebec, in August and September 1914. It was part of the first contingent of the CEF sent to Europe, arriving in England in October 1914. CCSs were not stationary: after being first established at Aire, France, in March 1915, No. 1 CCS moved 12 times to various locations in France, Belgium and finally, Germany. It ceased operations in February 1919.³⁵

The unit was shelled at least three times in 1916 and 1917. At the conclusion of the war, it was one of the foremost medical units operating on the advance into Germany. An incomplete record of the unit's operations underestimates a total of 42,489 admissions to the unit, of which 37,546 were transferred to other hospitals, to base, or returned to the field. At least 879 servicemen died at No. 1 CCS.³⁶

No record was found, but BQMS Fitzgerald was eligible to receive posthumously the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918). He would also have received the 1914–15 Star, for service in any theatre of the war in 1914–15.

Other members of the Fitzgerald family were to live out their lives in different parts of the world.

Sometime after the family moved to Wales, **Francis William** got married at age 19, to Frances Hollinshead in 1890.³⁷ She was the daughter of Enoch Hollinshead, a glass and china dealer.³⁸ Francis was working as a coach wheeler in 1891, and a coach inspector in 1901, continuing in the footsteps of his father.^{39,40}

On 26 November 1915 Francis William enlisted at Woolwich, London, in the Army Service Corps. He appears to have negotiated special treatment, as handwritten on the front page of the form is: "Specially Enlisted Wheelwright. Pay 5/- per day". He was 44 years old, much older than most recruits.⁴¹ He went to war in France with the Army Service Corps from 4 May 1916 until the end of the war. His rank was recorded as both "wheeler" and "driver".

After the war Francis William had his own company, Fitzgerald and Co. Coach Builders, on Merthyr Road in Abergavenny, Wales. One of the employees was his son-in-law, John Smith, who had married his daughter Edith and was living with him and his wife.⁴² John was working as a coach painter.

Francis William's wife Frances died in 1934,⁴³ and he remarried three years later, to Elizabeth Coles.⁴⁴ She passed away seven years later at The Mental Hospital, Whitchurch, Glamorganshire.⁴⁵ Francis William died in 1952.⁴⁶

Caroline Elizabeth was living in London as a live-in parlourmaid in 1901.⁴⁷ Five years later she travelled with her younger sister Alice Maud to Canada to join her father in Brighton, Ontario. Her profession was given as dressmaker.⁴⁸ In 1911 she was still working as a dressmaker and living with her brother William and her new stepmother and stepsister.⁴⁹ In 1921 and 1931, still unmarried, she was living in Toronto with her sister Alice Maud and her family.^{50, 51} No further records were found for her.

Charles James did not live long. Born in 1874, and baptized on 5 April 1874,⁵² he died age 1 in December 1875.⁵³

Stephen Joseph worked as a coppersmith in Wales.⁵⁴ He married Beatrice Ann Eynon in 1898;⁵⁵ she was the daughter of David Eynon, a foreman in an ordinance factory.⁵⁶ Sometime between 1901 and 1911 the family moved from Cardiff to Swansea, where Stephen Joseph continued to work as a coppersmith.⁵⁷ He died in Swansea in 1945.⁵⁸

Emma Louise was married in 1898 to John Danson Hopkins,⁵⁹ a commercial clerk.⁶⁰ In 1911 they were living with John's mother and their two children, Gerald Danson and Dorothy May, in Whitchurch, Glamorgan. John was now working as an undertaker's clerk.⁶¹ That same year, the four of them emigrated to Australia on the SS *Somerset*, arriving in Brisbane on 17 July 1911.⁶²

That is the last record found for Emma Louise. Within two years, John Danson was living with another woman, Florence, in Coorparoo, Queensland.⁶³ It is not known whether Emma Louise died, moved out, or returned to the UK. However, it appears that her two children remained with John Danson, as he reported to police in January 1921 that his daughter Dorothy May had left the home on the night of 2 January and not been seen since.⁶⁴ In addition, John Danson signed his son Gerald's application to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force in 1918.⁶⁵

Alice Maud accompanied her elder sister Caroline Elizabeth to Canada in 1906 to visit their father in Brighton, Ontario.⁶⁶ She appears to have remained in Canada. Note that the 1911, 1921, and 1931 Canada censuses all give different dates for her immigration to Canada (1908, 1896 and 1906 respectively), but 1906 is the only date substantiated by an incoming passenger record.^{67, 68, 69}

Alice Maud married Thomas Carter in York County, Ontario, on 29 January 1910.⁷⁰ He was a carpenter who had also recently arrived from England, in 1908.⁷¹ Thomas enlisted in Toronto on 12 April 1915, served in the 3rd Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, was wounded in France in the left shoulder, was promoted to Corporal, and was awarded the Military Medal and bar for acts of bravery under fire.⁷²

After the war, Thomas and Alice continued to live in Toronto with their two children and Alice's sister Caroline Elizabeth.⁷³ The 1931 Census is the last record found for them.⁷⁴

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