

Private James Kelman[©]
Regimental number: 253085
102nd Battalion, Canadian Infantry

born: 29 July 1893–died: 22 October 1918

Private James Kelman was born on 29 July 1893¹ in McDuff, Banffshire, Scotland, to William Kelman and Ann Wilson.² He had an older half brother, Stanley Mackay (or McKay) Wilson (b. 1890),³ and five other siblings: Maggie (b. 1896), John (b. 1898), Charlotte (b. 1902), Mary (b. 1904), and Alexander (b. 1907).⁴ All the children were born in Scotland before the Kelman family decided to emigrate to Canada; they sailed aboard the Allan Line ship SS *Scandinavian* from Glasgow on 31 May 1913 bound for Montreal,⁵ arriving in Canada on 9 June.⁶ It appears that the family followed Stanley, who had moved to Canada two years earlier, arriving on 3 April 1911 via the SS *Scotian*.⁷

Based on passenger lists, everyone in the family qualified for the British Bonus,⁸ a commission paid by the Canadian government to steamship booking agents to encourage them to recruit immigrants from the United Kingdom and other European countries. The immigrants themselves did not receive the bonus; however, there was a separate monetary bonus for those who settled western homesteads.⁹ In the 1916 Census of the Prairies¹⁰ both William and Stanley described themselves as farmers, in the Qu'Appelle and Maple Creek districts of Saskatchewan respectively; however, Stanley qualified and received a land grant¹¹ and was working on his "own account" while William was employed as a farm labourer.

James was living with his half-brother when he signed up to join the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force (CEF) on 12 June 1916 in Aneroid, Saskatchewan.¹² His medical form describes him as a fit young man just over 5 ft. 10 in. tall with dark hair and blue eyes.

Assigned to the CEF 209th (Swift Current) Battalion, James left Halifax, Nova Scotia on 1 November 1916 aboard the SS *Caronia* and arrived in England on 11 November 1916. On 5 December, he was transferred to the 102nd Battalion of the Canadian Infantry, travelling to the Canadian Base Depot in France the next day; he was one of a group of 195 men sent to reinforce the battalion in the first week of January 1917.¹³ The 102nd Battalion was part of the 11th Canadian Brigade that made up the 4th Canadian Division.¹⁴ James joined the battalion in the Zouave Valley near Souchez in the township of Vimy, north of Arras in the Pas-de-Calais region of northern France.

From January to March, the battalion moved frequently between the front lines in the valley and the reserve location at Berthonval Woods. At 5:30 a.m. on the morning of 9 April 1917, Easter Sunday, the battalion began its part on the assault on Vimy Ridge. By the end of the next day the battalion casualties were severe: four officers killed, two dead later of wounds and nine wounded; 113 other ranks (non-officers) killed, six dead of wounds, 180 wounded, and 27 missing. Though the Battle of Vimy Ridge and the First Battle of the Scarpe that took place over the same period as part of the same Allied offensive were successful in capturing new ground and pushing the Germans back, the offensive nevertheless bogged down into what has been described as "an attritional slog."¹⁵

During a raid on the enemy's dugouts on 9 June, James was shot in the face and nose but remained with his unit.

On 15 August 1917 the battalion took part in the battle for Hill 70 on the outskirts of Lens, north of Vimy. The intent of the engagement was to draw German attention and troops away from the

battlefields around Passchendaele in Belgium. The battalion's casualties were relatively light (one officer and ten other ranks killed; three other ranks dead of wounds; four officers and 86 other ranks wounded or gassed; and two other ranks missing) when compared to the overall Canadian casualties (9,000 killed or wounded) after four days of fighting and 21 German counterattacks.¹⁶

On 4 September James was finally sent to No. 22 (British) Casualty Clearing Station so that his gunshot wound could receive necessary medical attention. From there he was sent to No. 1 Canadian General Hospital at Étaples. After convalescing and some time spent at reinforcement camp, James returned to his unit on 8 December 1917, when the battalion was "at rest" at Divion, about 30 km west of Lens. Because the battalion was due to be in the trenches for both Christmas and the New Year, there was an early Christmas dinner for the other ranks on 15 December at the Hotel Moderne in Bruay. The battalion war diary notes that the dinner was "a great success . . . very thoroughly appreciated" by all. The battalion returned to the front line on 20 December, once again between Arras and Lens not far from Vimy, but James was not with them: he had been granted 14 days leave on 19 December and was able to enjoy the holidays in England. He returned to his unit in the field on 8 January 1918.

During the spring the battalion moved from the front line to reserve positions, where they often supplied working parties, or went further back to billets at more secure locations, where they received reinforcements, undertook training and participated in other activities. For example, on Valentine's Day the battalion diary notes that ploughing commenced on the Battalion Agricultural Allotment, and on 9 March an inter-company baseball competition began.

After a number of such movements back and forth from the front lines, there is an eloquent, almost poetic entry in the battalion diary for 21 May 1918: "Seldom have we felt so cut off from the war when in Corps Reserve as we have done in this village. On the eve of the Third Great Offensive within earshot of our guns, which on most nights can be heard muttering distant barrages, close enough to St. Pol to hear the German bombs crashing therein at night, we seem to be in a world apart from the war. Never has our training been more severe, every day makes it clearer that when we move it will be to enter the bloodiest fight in which we will have taken part, but our hours of rest seem to belie this. It is probably due to the season and the phenomenal weather. We were in the Forward Area during the First Beginnings of Spring and came out to find ourselves plunged suddenly onto summer in an unravished part of the country where summer was at its best. A large number of men desert their billets at night and sleep under the trees in the open."

The battalion was at the time at Fréwillers, about 28 km northwest of Arras. The Allies' Third Offensive began with the Battles of the Marne in July, but the 102nd Battalion's significant involvement was at the Battle of Amiens in August, which was the opening phase of what later became known as the Hundred Days Offensive that ultimately led to the armistice in November.¹⁷ The battalion was awarded numerous battle honours for the period from August to early October, including for the battles of Amiens, Scarpe, Drocourt-Quéant, the Hindenburg Line and the Canal du Nord.¹⁸

On 18 October the battalion crossed the Canal du Nord by pontoon bridge at Arleux. James was not with them, however, as he had been left on guard over the battalion stores at Maroeuil, where he reported sick.¹⁹ Admitted to No.1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station already dangerously ill, James succumbed to pneumonia on 22 October 1918²⁰ and was buried two days later in Plot VIII. B. 25 of the Duisan British Cemetery at Etrun, about 9 km west of Arras. The inscription chosen by his family for the cross that marks his grave reads "How Glorious Is His Portion, How Undisturbed His Rest."²¹

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).

By 1921 James's father, William, had relocated to the area around Auvergne in the Maple Creek district of Saskatchewan.²² It is possible that he had taken over his stepson's farm, because William was now working on his own account and Stanley had moved to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, where he was employed as a teamster.²³ When James had enlisted in 1916 and was residing with Stanley, he gave his mailing address as Quimper Post Office, Aneroid, Saskatchewan; his medals were sent to his father in 1921 also care of the Quimper post office.²⁴ William remained in the area until his death in July 1957,²⁵ having been predeceased by his wife, James's mother Ann, who passed away in 1942.²⁶

Stanley married Margaret Lillian Clark sometime before 1916, when the first of their five children was born.²⁷ Stanley may have died in Prince Albert in 1957;²⁸ Margaret passed away there in 1972.²⁹

Of James's remaining siblings, his sister **Maggie** married John McKenzie, likely before their daughter was born about 1920.³⁰ It is also possible that they had a son born in 1925,³¹ shortly before Maggie died in Aneroid in 1926.³²

Little is known about **John**, other than that he remained in Aneroid until at least 1972³³ before moving to nearby Ponteix, Saskatchewan,³⁴ where he died in 1982.³⁵

Charlotte, also known as Lottie,³⁶ married Andrew Gammie Jr. in Aneroid in 1921.³⁷³⁸ The couple had five children, including a son who died at birth; they named their only surviving son James Kellman[*sic*] Gammie.³⁹ Andrew passed away in Aneroid in January 1954;⁴⁰ Lottie lived until May 1991, when she died in Ponteix.⁴¹

James's youngest sister, **Mary**, married Howard Broley sometime during World War II;⁴² Mary gave birth to a son in 1944.⁴³ Howard died in 1969⁴⁴ and Mary died in 2002,⁴⁵ both in Ponteix.

The youngest child in the Kelman family, **Alexander** or Alex, married Ruth Bush⁴⁶ in Aneroid on 10 July 1939⁴⁷ before moving about 250 km north to farm in Loreburn, Saskatchewan.⁴⁸ Alex and Ruth had two sons.⁴⁹ They passed away within a year of each other, Ruth in 1997 and Alex in 1998, and are buried side by side in Loreburn Cemetery.⁵⁰

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