

Private William Arthur Light[©]

Regimental number: 514144

2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles

born: 26 March 1899—died: 2 October 1918

Private William Arthur Light was the only son of, and named after, his father, William Arthur Mark Light, and his wife, the former Laura Sarah Pugh. He was born on 26 March 1899 in Paddington, Westminster, London, and baptized on 23 July at St Paul's Church.¹ Both his parents were born in 1874—William Sr. in St Pierre Port, Guernsey, in the Channel Islands on 11 September 1874² and Laura Sarah in Clerkenwell, London, on 28 July 1874.³

When William Sr. was a little boy, the family left the Channel Islands and moved to Wales.⁴ His father had been a quarryman in Guernsey and became a mason's labourer in Wales. The family moved to London before William Sr. married Laura on 4 June 1898, also at St Paul's.⁵ In 1901, he and Laura were living at 5 Thorngate Road, Paddington, where William Sr. was a wood paviour (he laid wooden blocks for a road surface⁶).⁷

The family immigrated to Canada in 1905⁸ but returned to England five years later. They left from Montreal, arriving in Liverpool on 25 June 1910 on the SS *Tunisian*. By then William Sr. was a butcher.⁹ In the spring of 1911, the family was living at 415 Wightman Road in Hornsey North, London. William Sr. was working on his own as a general grocer and his wife was helping with the business. William, aged 12, was in school.¹⁰ They returned to Canada a year later, leaving Liverpool, again on the SS *Tunisian*, arriving in Quebec City as returning Canadians, on 23 June 1912.¹¹

They went back to Toronto, where William Sr. was a caretaker. Sadly, he died of myocarditis less than a year later. He died on 22 April 1913¹² and was buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery two days later, in a plot purchased by William Sr.'s cousin, Richard Meech.

The family remained in Toronto and Laura worked in dry goods for a time.¹³ When William left school, he had been involved with the YMCA, where he had been awarded a lifesaving medal. He had also worked with Richard Meech, who owed a butcher shop on Yonge Street in Toronto.¹⁴ Decades later the shop was still there and described as:

... one of those quaint little long-and-narrow stores with sawdust scattered on the floor, and big sides of beef and pork suspended from heavy hooks down one wall.¹⁵

William was living with his family in Toronto, at 2259 Yonge Street, when he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force.¹⁶ When he signed up on 5 March 1917, he claimed that he was born in 1898, making him 18 years and 11 months old. In fact, he was just short of 18 years of age. He was a salesman, 5' 6½" tall and had a medium complexion, blue eyes and brown hair.

He sailed from Halifax on the SS *Justice* on 3 May 1917—this would be William's fourth transatlantic crossing in 12 years—arriving in Liverpool 11 days later. From there he was taken first to the military camp in Chisleton, Wiltshire, and then to the Canadian camp at Witley, Surrey, where he joined the 198th Battalion. He appears to have remained in England until March of the following year—perhaps because of his age. He joined the 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMR) and went to France on 9 March 1918. He joined his unit on 26 March 1918—his 19th birthday.

He was wounded just six months later. At the end of September 1918, the 2nd CRM was near Arras, in northern France.¹⁷ The battalion was in the trenches between 12 and 19 September. After it was relieved by the 7th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, the 2nd CRM moved by train to Wanquetin, 13 kilometres west of Arras. There the soldiers attended a church parade, had clothing and kit inspections and engaged in training.

On the 26th, the battalion proceeded by train and on foot to Riencourt-lès-Cagnicourt, southeast of Arras. There, five sappers from the Canadian Engineers helped them search for German mines and booby traps. On 27 and 28 September, the battalion moved to Inchy and then back to Bourlon Village. From the morning of the 29th, the battalion was engaged in multiple engagements that were part of the Allied forces Hundred Days' Offensive that eventually lead to the armistice in November. The 2nd CRM suffered a lot of casualties on 29 September and the battle continued the following day. Not including the battalion headquarters, at the end of the month, the strength of the battalion was estimated at 7 officers and 180 Other Ranks. At the beginning of the month there had been 29 officers and 576 Other Ranks.

William's service file suggests he was wounded on 29 September:

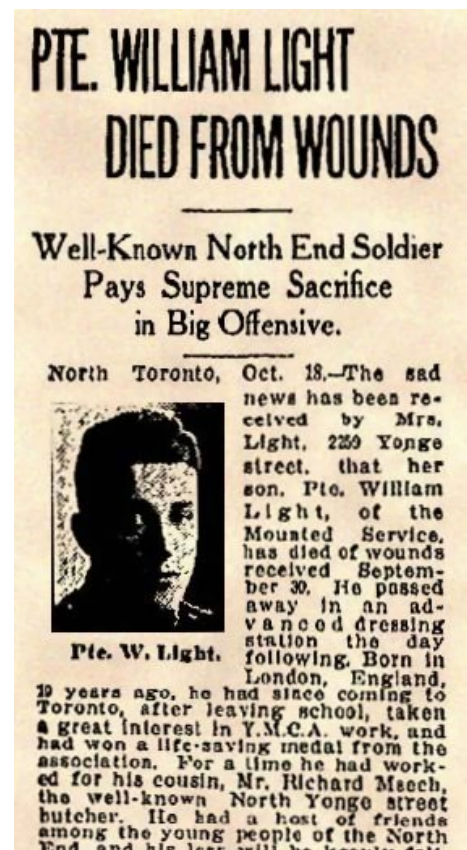
During attack near Neuville St Remy on the morning of September 29th, 1918, he was severely wounded in the elbow and abdomen by enemy machine gun fire. His wounds were dressed and he was taken to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station where he died three days later.¹⁸

He was admitted to No. 1 CCCS on 30 September 1918 with gunshot wounds to his abdomen and right elbow. He died two days later, as the CCCS chaplains' journal notes.

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.¹⁹

William was buried on 3 October 1918 in Duisans British Military Cemetery (Plot 8, Row A, Grave 73) with the Canadian chaplain W. Fisher presiding. Duisans British Military Cemetery is located in Étrun, near Arras, France. The first burials in the cemetery took place in March 1917.²⁰ 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.²¹

His mother Laura was still living at 2259 Yonge Street and a telegram was sent to her on 9 October 1918 to notify her of her son's death. The death was announced in the *Toronto Star* on 18 October.²²



**PTE. WILLIAM LIGHT
DIED FROM WOUNDS**

**Well-Known North End Soldier
Pays Supreme Sacrifice
in Big Offensive.**

North Toronto, Oct. 18.—The sad news has been received by Mrs. Light, 2259 Yonge street, that her son, Pte. William Light, of the Mounted Service, has died of wounds received September 30. He passed away in an advanced dressing station the day following. Born in London, England, 19 years ago, he had since coming to Toronto, after leaving school, taken a great interest in Y.M.C.A. work, and had won a life-saving medal from the association. For a time he had worked for his cousin, Mr. Richard Masch, the well-known North Yonge street butcher. He had a host of friends among the young people of the North End, and his loss will be keenly felt.

Newspaper announcement

Source: *Canadian Virtual War Memorial*

William was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre). His mother had the following inscription included on his gravestone:

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN
THAT HE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE
FOR HIS FRIENDS

In 1921, Laura had moved to 456 Lansdowne Avenue and was living alone.²³ She died in Toronto on 3 May 1948.

The son of William Sr.'s cousin Richard Meech, also called Richard and also a butcher, served in the Great War (regimental number 3039062), but he survived.²⁴ Like his cousin, Richard Jr. was born in England—on 9 February 1891 in Bristol. He and his family came to Canada in 1895.²⁵ He enlisted in May 1918 and was initially expected to go England with the 69th Battery of the CEF. However, in September 1918, he transferred to the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force and sailed in February 1919 to Vladivostok, Siberia. Canadian forces were sent to Vladivostok during the Russian revolution to bolster the Allied presence and keep Russia in the war with Germany. They saw little fighting—most Canadians remained in Vladivostok doing routine drills and policing duties in the troubled port city.²⁶ In fact, Richard's service was short. In June 1919, he sailed back to Canada and was demobilized on 30 June 1919. Five months after his return, he married Jean Irene Jones at Trinity Methodist Church in Toronto;²⁷ in 1921, they were living at 36 Maitland in Toronto²⁸ and Richard was working with his father in the butcher shop at 1066 Yonge Street.²⁹

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¹ "London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813–1917," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 August 2020), entry for William Arthur Light

² "Channel Islands, Select Births and Baptisms, 1820–1907," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 August 2020), entry for William Arthur Light, FHL film number: 473984

³ "London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813–1917," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 August 2020), entry for Laura Sarah Pugh

⁴ "1881 Wales Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 January 2020), entry for William Light, Registration district: Cardiff, Sub-registration district: Cardiff, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 39, Piece: Cardiff, Folio: 37, Page: 69

⁵ "London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754–1932," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 August 2020), entry for William Arthur Mark Light

⁶ "Old Occupation Names," *Hall Genealogy Website* (<https://rmhh.co.uk/occup/index.html>: accessed 5 August 2020)

⁷ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 6 August 2020), entry for William Light, Registration district: Paddington, Sub-registration district: St Mary, Paddington, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 16, Piece: 4, Folio: 131, Page: 63, Household schedule number: 580

⁸ "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 August 2020), entry for Laura Light; "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 July 2020), entry for Laura Light, Province or territory: Ontario, District: Toronto, District number: 113, Sub-district: Toronto (City), Sub-district number: 84

⁹ "UK, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878–1960," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 August 2020), entry for Wm. Light, Official number: 111248

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- ¹⁰ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 July 2020), entry for William Arthur Light, Registration district: Edmonton, Registration district number: 132, Sub-registration district: Hornsey, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 07, Piece: 7199
- ¹¹ "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry*, entry for Laura Light
- ¹² "Ontario, Canada, Deaths and Deaths Overseas, 1869–1948," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 11 August 2020), entry for William Light
- ¹³ "Digital Toronto City Directories," *Toronto Public Library* (<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/history-genealogy/lh-digital-city-directories.jsp>: accessed 9 August 2020), entry for Light, Laura, 1915–1921
- ¹⁴ *Canadian Virtual War Memorial* (<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/>: accessed 4 August 2020), entry for William Arthur Light. Richard was probably William Sr.'s cousin.
- ¹⁵ "Me and my family . . . the story of the Conachers," Charlie Conacher, March 2 1957, *Macleans* (<https://archive.macleans.ca/article/1957/3/2/me-and-my-family-the-story-of-the-conachers>: accessed 27 July 2020)
- ¹⁶ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 28 July 2020), entry for Light, William Arthur, Reference: G 150, Accession 1992–93/166, Box 5641 - 37, Item number: 531348, Digitized service file - PDF format: B5641-S037. Unless otherwise specified, all information about William's military service comes from this source.
- ¹⁷ "War diaries - 2nd Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 28 July 2020), Reference: RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4947. File number: 466. Container: T-10756. File Part 2, Item ID number: 2006070
- ¹⁸ "Canada, War Graves Registers (Circumstances of Casualty), 1914–1948," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 11 August 2020), entry for William Arthur Light
- ¹⁹ "Casualty Clearing Station," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualty_Clearing_Station: accessed 2 May 2020)
- ²⁰ "Duisans British Cemetery, Etrun," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org; accessed 7 October 2015)
- ²¹ "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)
- ²² *Canadian Virtual War Memorial* (<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/>: accessed 4 August 2020), entry for William Arthur Light
- ²³ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry*, entry for Laura Light
- ²⁴ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 28 July 2020) entry for Meech, Richard, Reference: G 150, Accession 1992–93/166, Box 6093 - 39, Item number: 193065, Digitized service file - PDF format: B6093-S039. Unless otherwise specified, all information about Richard's military service comes from this source.
- ²⁵ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 11 August 2020), entry for Richard Meech, Province or territory: Ontario, District: Toronto (ward 3), District number: 113, Sub-district: Toronto (Centre), Sub-district number: 42
- ²⁶ "Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Siberian_Expeditionary_Force accessed 10 August 2020)
- ²⁷ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 July 2020), entry for Richard Meech
- ²⁸ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry*, entry for Richard Meech,
- ²⁹ "Digital Toronto City Directories," *Toronto Public Library* (<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/history-genealogy/lh-digital-city-directories.jsp>: accessed 9 August 2020), entry for Meech, Richard, 1921