

Private Ralph MacFarlane[©]
Regimental number: 252710
102nd Battalion, Canadian Infantry

born: 12 November 1897–died: 1 October 1918

Private Ralph MacFarlane¹ was born at 11:30 p.m. on 12 November 1893 in Leith, Midlothian, in Scotland, the son of Thomas MacFarlane and his wife, the former Helen Hislop.² Both his parents were born in about 1856 in Scotland—Thomas in North Berwick, Haddingtonshire, and Helen in Forres, Morayshire.³ They had married in January 1878⁴ and Ralph was one of the couple's eight children:⁵

- Catherine Ann (born in 1878)⁶
- Mary Dewar (born in 1880)⁷
- Helen Hislop (born in 1884)⁸
- Thomasina (born in 1887)⁹
- Andrew Hislop (born in 1889),¹⁰
- John Hislop (born in 1892, but died shortly after birth)¹¹
- Ralph
- Thomas (born 9 February 1897)¹²

One cannot help but speculate whether, after having three daughters and no son to name after his father, Thomas and Helen chose to name their fourth daughter Thomasina after her father. They then had four sons, the last of whom was named Thomas, like his father.

In 1901, the family was living on Main Street, Hunter Square, in Borthwick, Midlothian, where Thomas was a joiner.¹³ Five years later, Ralph's mother Helen died at the age of 48. She died at 9 a.m. on 18 May 1905 of multiple causes—bronchitis, asthma, nephritis, anasarca¹⁴ and cardiac failure.¹⁵ By 1911, Thomas was still living at Hunter Square with three of his children: Thomasina, Ralph and Thomas. He was still a joiner but had also become an undertaker.¹⁶ He married a second time, wedding Jane Cochrane Johnston in 1911.¹⁷

Although Ralph, who had also become a joiner, was living at home in the spring of 1911, by November he was on his way to Canada. He left from Glasgow and arrived in Montreal on the RMS *Hesperian* on 6 November 1911. His passenger record indicates that he was a joiner and going to join his brother James in Regina, Saskatchewan.¹⁸ However, no record of a brother by the name of James could be found.

He did, however, go to Saskatchewan. When he enlisted to serve in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in World War I, he was farming in Nadeauville, Saskatchewan.¹⁹ He joined up on 5 April 1916 in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, about 90 kilometres from his home. He was 5' 7" tall and had a fair complexion, blue eyes and flaxen hair. He indicated that he was born in 1897, making himself 22 years of age when in fact he was not yet 19.

Ralph embarked for England on 1 November 1916, arrived ten days later and went to the Canadian camp at Shorncliffe. He went to France with the 102nd Battalion on 5 December 1916 and a year later, had two weeks leave in England.

He was wounded on 9 August 1918 and was admitted to the 3rd Australian General Hospital at Abbeville, in northern France, with gunshot wounds to his right leg. He transferred to a convalescent depot and then, on 20 September 1918, he returned to the field. He would be fatally wounded just 11 days later.

When Ralph rejoined his unit, it was stationed in Neuville Vitasse, west of Cambrai, and was expecting to move forward towards Cambrai momentarily.²⁰ On 24 September, the battalion received the orders to move to Bullecourt, as a staging area for the attack. The task of the 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions was to cross the Canal du Nord and take Bourlon Village and Wood, working their way to the north of Cambrai.

The troops moved out on the 25th and had to encamp that night in the open. Although it was cold, the weather was fine. At 10:30 p.m. on the 26th, the battalion moved to an assembly point at Bullecourt

... prior to taking part in what was to prove the most glorious episode in its history, viz. the capture of BOURLON WOOD and the advance and maintenance of positions won in the vicinity of BLECOURT.²¹

The first phase of the attack on the 27th, led by the 102nd Battalion, was effective and the troops were able to clear out the wood successfully in time for another Canadian division to pass through. Unfortunately, the battalion suffered heavy casualties. On the 28th, the battalion maintained a defensive position until it marched out to headquarters in the afternoon. Again there were hostile bombing attacks, leading to more casualties. In the second phase of the attack, beginning the next day, the battalion moved forward, but again suffered casualties from shell fire on the way. It remained the reserve battalion all day on 30 September and took up a defensive position just west of the Cambrai–Douai Road. It was then determined that the enemy attack was strong and, rather than achieving their objective for the day, the troops were to hold existing positions. The attack was renewed the following morning. By 10:00 a.m., the 102nd Battalion had achieved both its objectives. At 10:00 p.m. on 1 October, the battalion was relieved by the Canadian 82nd Battalion and the troops made their way back to Bourlon.

It is not known exactly when or where Ralph was injured. During both phases of the attack between 25 September and 2 October, the 102nd Battalion suffered many casualties—21 officers killed or wounded and 344 Other Ranks (non-officers) killed, wounded or missing. The battalion had captured 700 prisoners, 16 guns and 50 machine guns.

Ralph was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 1 October with shrapnel wounds to his buttock and abdomen. He died there the same day.²² A casualty clearing station (CCS) 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.²³

He was buried on 2 October in Duisans British Military Cemetery (Plot 8, Row A, Grave 45) with the Canadian chaplain A. D. Reid presiding. This cemetery is located in Étrun, near Arras, France. The first burials in the cemetery took place in March 1917.²⁴ 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 considered to be high in October—a total of 83 deaths occurred during the month.²⁵

A letter was sent to Thomas MacFarlane to notify him of his son's death.²⁶ Ralph's father was indicated as next-of-kin, but it was his sister **Mary**, who received part of his pay during his service, was named as the beneficiary in his will and received his medals.²⁷ Ralph was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).

Perhaps Ralph had a special relationship with Mary since he left his possessions to her. Mary left home before 1911. Unfortunately, little is known about her life during and after the war. She was married to Thomas James Elliott²⁸ and during the war they were probably living at two addresses in Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne—75 Henry Street and 78 Beaumont Terrace.²⁹ Mary died on 18 May 1961 in Lewes, Sussex. Probate was awarded to her husband, then a retired engineer.³⁰

Ralph's sister **Helen** married William Black in 1907,³¹ but sadly died just seven years later. She died at the age of 30 on 13 December 1914 of pulmonary tuberculosis, from which she had suffered for a year. William was an under mining manager.³²

Thomasina followed her brother to Canada. She arrived in Montreal on 31 August 1912, heading to Regina—perhaps to join her brother.³³ Less than a year later, she married Robert Cecil Paris on 2 January 1913 in Prescott, Ontario.³⁴ Robert, also from Midlothian, had come to Canada a few months before Thomasina, with the intention of moving to Winnipeg.³⁵ Why they married in Ontario is not clear because, in 1916, they were living in Melita, an hour southwest of Souris, Manitoba, where Robert was a teacher.³⁶ By 1921, they had moved not far away to Waskada, Manitoba.³⁷ They had two children: Roland Cecil (born in 1914)³⁸ and Ralph Walter Walker (born in 1916)³⁹—and Robert was a schoolmaster.⁴⁰ Both Thomasina and Robert died in British Columbia—Robert on 15 August 1964⁴¹ and Thomasina in about 1978—and both are buried in Mountain View Cemetery in Vancouver.⁴²

Andrew was probably the first sibling to come Canada. He arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 27 March 1911 and, like his father and brother, was also a joiner.⁴³ In 1921, he was living with his wife Ellen (née Cooper) and two children, Norman Cooper and Thomas John, at 5 Holland Park in York Township.⁴⁴ Sadly, Norman died of accidental drowning in 1938 at the age of 24⁴⁵ and is buried in Prospect Cemetery in Toronto. His father and mother died in 1955 and 1961, respectively.⁴⁶

Ralph's youngest brother **Thomas** also served in the Great War and lost his life. He was with the Royal Navy (regimental number M/12053), serving on HMS *Indefatigable*. He was a wireman 2nd Class when he died on 31 May 1916⁴⁷ in the Battle of Jutland, which was the largest naval battle of the war that took place off the North Sea coast of Denmark's Jutland Peninsula.⁴⁸ Thomas is remembered on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial in Portsmouth.⁴⁹

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¹ The journal maintained by chaplains at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station indicates that his last name was McFarlane, as do other records. However, the name on his birth certificate is MacFarlane and this has been used throughout this biography.

² "Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>; accessed 12 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, Ralph, Reference: 692/2 1363, Registration district: Leith South

³ "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 23 March 2020), entry for Ralph Macfarlane [*sic*], Enumeration district: 2, Household schedule number: 48, Line: 7, Roll: CSSCT1901_405

⁴ "Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople*, entry for MacFarlane, Ralph

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- ⁵ “1911 Scotland census,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 11 May 2020), entry for McFarlane, Thomas, Reference: Census 698/B 2/13, Registration district: Stobhill, County/city: Midlothian
- ⁶ “Statutory Registers–Births index,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, Catherine Ann, Reference: 685/1 2269, Registration district: St George
- ⁷ “Statutory Registers–Births index?,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, Mary Dewar, Reference: 685/2 420, Registration district: St Andrew (Edinburgh)
- ⁸ “Statutory Registers–Births index,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, Helen Hislop, Reference: 685/2 264, Registration district: St Andrew (Edinburgh)
- ⁹ “Statutory Registers–Births index,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, Thomasina, Reference: 685/2 556, Registration district: St Andrew (Edinburgh)
- ¹⁰ “Statutory Registers–Births index,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, Andrew Hislop, Reference: 692/2 956, Registration district: Leith South
- ¹¹ “Statutory Registers–Births index,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, John Hislop, Reference: 692/2 126, Registration district: Leith South; “Statutory Registers–Deaths index,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, John Hislop, Reference: 692/2 934, Registration district: Leith South
- ¹² “UK, British Army and Navy Birth, Marriage and Death Records, 1730–1960,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Thomas MacFarlane
- ¹³ “1901 Scotland Census,” *Ancestry*, entry for Ralph Macfarlane [sic]
- ¹⁴ “Anasarca is a severe and generalized form of edema, with subcutaneous tissue swelling throughout the body.” “Anasarca,” *Wikipedia* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anasarca>; accessed 1 October 2021)
- ¹⁵ “Statutory Registers–Deaths,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, Helen, Reference: 698/B 21, Registration district: Stobhill
- ¹⁶ “1911 Scotland census,” *ScotlandsPeople*, entry for McFarlane, Thomas
- ¹⁷ “Statutory Registers–Marriages index,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 17 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, Thomas, Reference: 691/ 49, Registration district: Lasswade
- ¹⁸ “Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Ralph McFarlane [sic]
- ¹⁹ “Personnel Records of the First World War,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 10 May 2020), entry for McFarlane [sic], Ralph, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166, Box 6821 - 14, Item number: 151543, Digitized service file - PDF format: B6821-S014. Unless otherwise specified, all information about Ralph’s military service comes from this source.
- ²⁰ “War Diaries – 102nd Canadian Infantry Battalion,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://data4.collectionscanada.ca/>: accessed 10 May 2014), Reference: RG9-III-D-3, Volume/box number: 4945, File number: 456, Container: T-10752
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 10 May 2020), entry for McFarlane [sic], R.
- ²³ “Casualty Clearing Station,” *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualty_Clearing_Station: accessed 2 May 2020)
- ²⁴ “Duisans British Cemetery, Etrun,” *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org; accessed 7 October 2015)
- ²⁵ “War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13–1919/03/31,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca>: accessed 26 March 2018)
- ²⁶ “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa*, entry for McFarlane [sic], R.

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- ²⁷ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada*, entry for McFarlane [sic], Ralph
- ²⁸ "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Mary Dewar Macfarlane Elliott
- ²⁹ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada*, entry for McFarlane [sic], Ralph
- ³⁰ "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry*, entry for Mary Dewar Macfarlane Elliott
- ³¹ "Statutory Registers–Marriages index," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 16 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, Helen Hislop, Reference: 698/B 19, Registration district: Stobhill
- ³² "Statutory Registers–Deaths," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 12 May 2020), entry for MacFarlane, Helen Hislop, Reference: 694/ 34, Registration district: Mid Calder
- ³³ "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Thomasina McFarlane [sic]
- ³⁴ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1937," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Thomasina McFarlane [sic]
- ³⁵ "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Robert C. Paris
- ³⁶ "1916 Canada Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 March 2020), entry for Thomasina Paris, Sub-district: 17, Sub-district description: (A & B) Townships 3 and 4, ranges 26 and 27, W.P.M., including the Town of Melita
- ³⁷ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Thomaine [sic] Paris, Province or territory: Manitoba, District: Souris, District number: 36, Sub-district number: 13, City, Town or Village: Waskada Village Bunda Mun Souris
- ³⁸ "Genealogy Searches for Unrestricted Records–Births," *Manitoba Vital Statistics Agency* (<https://vitalstats.gov.mb.ca>: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Roland Cecil Paris
- ³⁹ "Genealogy Searches for Unrestricted Records–Births," *Manitoba Vital Statistics Agency* (<https://vitalstats.gov.mb.ca>: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Ralph Walter Walker Paris
- ⁴⁰ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry*, entry for Thomaine [sic] Paris
- ⁴¹ "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Robert Cecil Paris; "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Robert Cecil Paris;
- ⁴² "Web: Vancouver, British Columbia, Mountain View Cemetery Index, 1887–2007," **Ancestry?** entry for Thomasina Paris
- ⁴³ "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Andrew Macfarlane [sic]
- ⁴⁴ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Andrew MacFarlane, Province or territory: Ontario, District: York South, District number: 144, Sub-district: York (Township). Sub-district number: 34, City, town or village: Township of York
- ⁴⁵ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths and Deaths Overseas, 1869–1947," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 18 May 2020), entry for Norman Cooper MacFarland [sic]
- ⁴⁶ "Canada, Find A Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 May 2020), entry for Norman C Macfarlane [sic]
- ⁴⁷ "UK, British Army and Navy Birth, Marriage and Death Records, 1730–1960," *Ancestry*, entry for Thomas MacFarlane
- ⁴⁸ "Battle of Jutland," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Jutland: accessed 17 May 2020)
- ⁴⁹ "UK, British Army and Navy Birth, Marriage and Death Records, 1730–1960," *Ancestry*, entry for Thomas MacFarlane