

Private William Charles Phillip[©]

Regimental number: 648712

13th Battalion, Canadian Infantry

born: 29 May 1897—died: 17 October 1918

Private William Charles Phillip was a miner in Copper Cliff, near Sudbury, Ontario, when he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 27 December 1915.¹ He had been born in Beith, Ayrshire, Scotland, on 29 May 1897, the son of William Phillip and his wife, the former Annie Cumming. His parents, both born in Ayrshire—William Sr. on 11 December 1865² and Annie probably in 1868³—were married in Colyton, Ayr, on 30 September 1887.⁴

In 1891, Annie was living with her two eldest children—Grace Fraser, born in about 1888,⁵ and James, born on 17 December 1889⁶—at 37 Wellington Street in Ayr.⁷ Her husband William Sr., a miner, was living with Annie's parents, probably not far from Ayr.⁸ The couple subsequently had two more children: Agnes Edgar, born in about 1892,⁹ and William Charles.¹⁰ In 1901, the family was living in Beith,¹¹ although their first child, Grace, was living with her maternal grandparents.¹² Ten years later, the family was living in St Quivox, Ayrshire, but only the two sons were at home with their parents.

The family obviously had an attraction to Canada. When William Jr. and his father went to Canada in 1914, William Sr. indicated that he had been to Canada six years earlier and had stayed for four years.¹³ He probably returned to Scotland in about 1912. In 1914, father and son went to Copper Cliff, where they were both miners.

When William Jr. enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, he was 5' 3½" tall and had a dark complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. Before enlisting, he has served four years in the 97th Regiment, later known as the Algonquin Regiment.¹⁴ When he enlisted, he was a member of the 159th Battalion (1st Algonquins) and left Canada on 31 October 1916 on the *SS Empress of Britain*, arriving in England 12 days later. All members of the 159th Battalion were absorbed into the 8th Reserve Battalion in January 1917 at the Shoreham military camp in Sussex. He transferred to the 5th Battalion of the Canadian Railway Corps in early February 1917 and went to France on 24 February.

Little information was found about William's service with the 5th Battalion. He was granted 20 days leave to go to Scotland in February 1918. In April and May of the same year, he faced two charges related to being absent without leave. As a consequence, he forfeited several days of pay and faced three days of Field Punishment No. 2.¹⁵ At the end of May 1918, he requested a transfer from the Canadian Railway Corps to the 13th Battalion. It was granted and he joined the new battalion on 2 June, but his stay was short-lived—four and a half months later he died.

His military file indicates that he was missing on 1 October 1918; the chaplains' journal indicates that he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station¹⁶ on 1 October with gunshot wounds to his chest.¹⁷ Both records concur that he died on 17 October at No. 1 CCCS. He was buried in Duisans British Military Cemetery (Plot 8, Row B, (Grave 1) 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 1917.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

William's brother James also died as a result of his service in the Great War. Like his father and brother, he was mining in Copper Cliff when the war broke out. He enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 25 September 1914—just two months after the start of the war. He had previously served for three years with the Royal Scots Fusiliers. On 1 May 1915, he was with the 13th Battalion and went to France. Early in his time in France, he suffered a number of injuries and illnesses, starting in June of that year with a gunshot wound to his head. In November, he received a gunshot wound to his left forearm and was sent back to England for treatment. After his discharge from hospital, he went to work at the Canadian Headquarters and remained in England for the rest of the war. In March 1918, he was treated for influenza.

On 30 May 1919, he was diagnosed with a mediastinal tumor²⁰ and an aneurism. He was discharged from the army in England on 9 August 1919. He went back to Scotland to join his wife, Janet Fletcher Smith, whom he had married in 1916.²¹ Although he had been declared “seriously ill” several times during his service, James survived the war but died of lymphatic carcinoma on 25 August 1919 in the Victoria General Hospital in Glasgow. His death was determined to be “due to his service.”²²

It is difficult to know where both soldiers' parents were during the war. From the brothers' service records, it appears that William's father was still living in Copper Cliff, while his mother may have been in Ayr. However, when **Agnes** married a shepherd, John Murdoch, in Carsphairnars on 25 August 1915, her father William was a watchman and probably living in Scotland.²³

In March 1919, a few months after William Jr.'s death and before James' death, William Sr. and his



wife travelled across the border from Canada to the United States, presumably on their way back to Scotland. They declared their last permanent residence to be Crean Hill, just to the west of Sudbury.²⁴ No evidence was found of Annie going to Canada before this. William Sr. died just months after returning to Scotland, succumbing to aortic valvular disease on 17 July 1919 in Carsphairnars, 30 miles from Ayr.

William's mother Annie died in Dalmellington in 1931,²⁵ just two years after her daughter **Grace** married Robert Currie Brown, a labourer, on 27 April 1929 in Ayr.²⁶ They were living in Dalmellington.

William's mother had erected a stone to commemorate the deaths of several members of her family—her husband William Sr., her two sons William and James and James' wife, Janet (also known as Hettie).

Phillip's family gravestone

Source: Canadian Virtual War Memorial

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¹ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 22 March 2022), entry for Phillip, William Charles, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 7788 - 58, Item number: 284764, Digitized service file - PDF format: B7788-S058. Unless otherwise noted, all information about William's military service comes from this source.

² "Scotland, Select Births and Baptisms, 1564–1950," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 25 March 2022), entry for William Phillips [sic]

³ "Index of Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 3 April 2022) entry for Cumming, Anne, Reference: 597/684, Registration district: Kilmarnock (Ayr)

⁴ "Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 28 April 2022), entry for Phillip, Agnes Edgar, Reference: 578/ 66, Registration district: Ayr

⁵ "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 March 2022), entry for Grace Fraser Phillip, Enumeration district: 19, Household schedule number: 36, Line: 4, Roll: CSSCT1901_217

⁶ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 22 March 2022), entry for Phillip, James, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 7788 - 7, Item number: 284713, Digitized service file - PDF format: B7788-S007. Unless otherwise noted, all information about James' military service comes from this source.

⁷ "1891 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 March 2022), entry for Annie Philips [sic], Enumeration district: 19A, Household schedule number: 279, Line: 2, Roll: CSSCT1891_199

⁸ "1891 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 March 2022), entry for William Phillips [sic], Enumeration district: 7, Household schedule number: 26, Line: 20, Roll: CSSCT1891_201

⁹ "Statutory Registers–Births," *ScotlandsPeople*, entry for Phillip, Agnes Edgar

¹⁰ A family gravestone shows William's second name as Cumming and the Canadian Virtual War Memorial record states "Family headstone in Ayr Scotland, showing names of William Cumming Phillip and his only brother, James, both of whom died of injuries sustained in World War One. Please note that William's middle name was Cumming, not Charles." Cumming was William's mother's maiden name. However, William's second name is shown as Charles in all other records. *Canadian Virtual War Memorial* (<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/>: accessed 4 April 2022)

¹¹ "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 March 2022), entry for William C Phillip, Enumeration district: 12, Household schedule number: 36, Line: 8, Roll: CSSCT1901_220

¹² "1901 Scotland Census," *Ancestry*, entry for Grace Fraser Phillip

¹³ "Canada, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 March 2022), entry for William Phillip

¹⁴ "The Algonquin Regiment," (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Algonquin_Regiment: accessed 31 March 2022)

¹⁵ Field Punishment No.2 involved the prisoner being placed in fetters and handcuffs, but not attached to a fixed object. As such he was still able to march with his unit. ("Field punishment," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Field_punishment: accessed 20 August 2018))

¹⁶ A very comprehensive description of the casualty clearing stations is presented in the blog "[Casualty Clearing Stations During WW1](https://chiddicksfamilytree.com/2021/05/09/casualty-clearing-stations-during-ww1/)" *Chiddicks Family Tree* (<https://chiddicksfamilytree.com/2021/05/09/casualty-clearing-stations-during-ww1/>: accessed 13 May 2021)

¹⁷ "Search Name Index," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 5 July 2020), entry for Phillip W. C.

¹⁸ "Duisans British Cemetery, Etrun," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 7 October 2015)

¹⁹ "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)

²⁰ “A mediastinal tumor is a tumor in the mediastinum, the cavity that separates the lungs from the rest of the chest. It contains the heart, esophagus, trachea, thymus, and aorta.” (“Mediastinal tumors” *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediastinal_tumors: accessed 4 April 2022)

²¹ “Index of Statutory Registers–Marriages,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 2 April 2022), entry for Phillip, James, Reference: 578/1 67, Registration district: Ayr

²² “Canada, War Graves Registers (Circumstances of Casualty), 1914–1948,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 March 2022), entry for William Charles Phillip

²³ “Statutory Registers–Births,” *ScotlandsPeople*, entry for Phillip, Agnes Edgar

²⁴ “U.S., Border Crossings from Canada to U.S., 1895–1960,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 22 March 2022), entry for William Phillips [*sic*], Line number: 24

²⁵ “Scotland, Modern And Civil Deaths & Burials 1855–2021,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 8 May 2022), entry for Ann Phillip, Registration district number: 586/1

²⁶ “Statutory Registers–Marriages,” *ScotlandsPeople* (<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>: accessed 1 April 2022), entry for Phillips, Grace Fraser, Reference: 578/1 77, Registration district: Ayr