

Private William Henry Schaefer[©]
Regimental Number: 126278
1st Canadian Mounted Rifles, Saskatchewan Regiment

born: 18 August 1888–died: 21 April 1918

Private William Henry Schaefer was born in Milverton, Perth County, Ontario, on 18 August 1888,¹ the second child and oldest son of Henry M. Schaefer and the former Isabella McKay. He had an older sister, Dorothy, who was born in July 1886² and two younger sisters, Ida May (born on 2 May 1892³) and Margaret Isabel (born on 5 May 1896⁴), as well as a younger brother, Maurice John (born on 16 August 1900⁵).

William's paternal grandparents, Conrad and his wife Margaret Goppel Schaefer, were born and married in Germany. They immigrated to Canada between the birth of their first child, Margaret, and their second, Lydia,⁶ and settled in Perth County, Ontario, in 1855. Henry was their third child, born on 2 June 1860.⁷ Conrad was naturalized in 1881.⁸

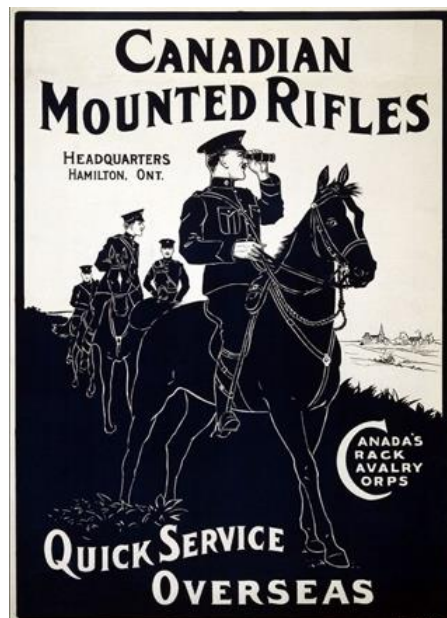
William's mother, Isabella McKay, was born in Michigan, USA, on 24 January 1863,⁹ and baptised in Milverton, Ontario on 1 January 1865.¹⁰ Her father, Josiah McKay, was born in Ontario, and her mother, Dorothy Atkins, in England.¹¹ Henry and Isabella married on 20 August 1884 in Milverton.¹² Dorothy's family immigrated from England before the 1851 Census and no immigration information was found. Josiah was born in Canada but he and Dorothy must have lived for a while in the US because Isabella was born there. There is no record of them crossing the border in either direction.

Henry (a tailor like his father before him) and Isabella raised their young family in Milverton. At the time of the 1911 Census,¹³ William was 23 years old and no longer living with the family. He could not be found living anywhere in Canada in that census. His obituary noted that he had lived in western Canada for a few years.¹⁴

In 1914, Henry accepted a position with the local customs department, and the family moved to Birmingham Street in Stratford.¹⁵ That same year, William moved back east to live with the family until he enlisted in the CEF. The Stratford city directory of 1914¹⁶ indicated that William was employed as a plumber. In the following year, he worked as a tinsmith for the Grand Trunk Railway before his enlistment.¹⁷ He was not entirely new to military life, having served for a year in the 28th Perth Regiment, but was no longer a member at the time of his enlistment.¹⁸

William's attestation papers, signed upon his enlistment on 8 September 1915, tell us that William was of small stature, standing only 5' 3½" tall, with a medium complexion, grey eyes and dark brown hair. His occupation was listed as tinsmith. He was certified as fit to serve, although he was not always in good health during his service.¹⁹

He was treated several times for muscle strain, noted in his file as myalgia, and was released back to duty within a short time after each occurrence. His last hospitalization with myalgia was in October of 1917. William was also repeatedly treated for trench fever during his service.



Recruitment Poster for CMR

Source:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Canadian_Mounted_Rifles_poster.jpg

Shortly before Christmas 1917, he was sent briefly to the Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp (CCRC) before rejoining his unit.

Initially assigned to the 71st Battalion of the CEF, William sailed from Halifax on the *SS Olympic* on 1 April 1916, arriving on 11 April. This was the sister ship to the ill-fated *Titanic* and served so well as a troopship in WWI that it became known as “Old Reliable.”²⁰

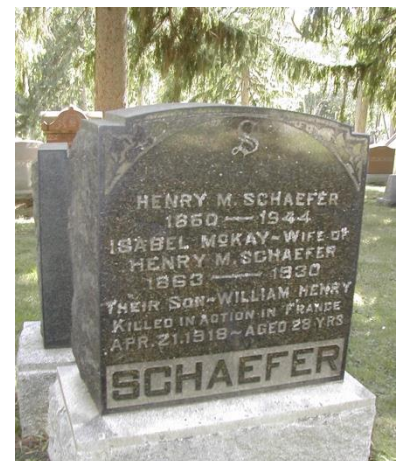
William embarked for France on 9 June 1916 and was taken on strength of the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMR), and assigned to the Saskatchewan Regiment, also known as the 1st Battalion, on 14 June 1916.

The 1st CMR war diary for 14 April 1918²¹ laid out plans for the attack on German front lines in the Hill 70 section, with relief troops to arrive on the night of 18/19 April. They were to begin another attack at midnight on 22 April 1918.²² William never made it into this battle.

After seeing a lot of heavy fighting over his two years in France, William suffered fatal head wounds from shrapnel at Étaples, France, on 21 April 1918 and was taken to the newly constructed No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, where he died of his wounds.²³ William was interred the following day in the nearby Pernes British Military Cemetery in Plot 1, Row D, Grave number 2.²⁴ He was among the first to be interred there, as the cemetery was opened when No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station was set up at the location near Pernes.²⁵ In its first month of operation, No. 1 CCCS experienced 44 deaths.

Pte William Schaefer is memorialized in the First World War Book of Remembrance on page 497²⁶ and in the reading of the names of the fallen in the Allward Memorial Project, an audio file, in Stratford.²⁷ He was awarded posthumously, the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).²⁸ He is also named on his parents’ headstone in Stratford, as well as his own in Pernes, France.

During the time of his service, \$20 was sent to his mother every month c/o the Customs House where his father worked. In the first month, Mrs. Schaefer received \$25 before the amendment was made. William’s simple military will, dated 5 June 1916, bequeathed £10 to Miss Minerva Wreford of London, Ontario. Any additional money he might have at the time of death would go to his mother. When he died, \$49.16 was transferred to Ottawa for distribution to his named beneficiaries.



Schaefer Headstone, Avondale Cemetery, Stratford, Ontario
Source: *Find a Grave*

In the 1911 Census, Minerva was 17, living with her brother and grandparents and working as a dressmaker in a factory.²⁹ Her mother had died in 1899³⁰ and her father remarried in 1908,³¹ so perhaps she was more comfortable living with her grandparents. By the 1921 Census, she was a lodger in Stratford and worked as an operator in a dry goods store.³² After many fruitless searches, no further records have been found for Minerva.

The two Stratford newspapers, the *Stratford Daily Beacon* and the *Stratford Daily Herald*, printed the obituaries of local men killed in action. William’s obituary was published on 29 April 1916, just over a week after his death and a day after his parents were given the sad news.³³

William’s parents and all of his siblings outlived him. His mother, Isabel, died of heart disease on 2 March 1930.³⁴ After her death, Henry lived with his daughter Margaret and her husband Harold Wreford.³⁵ Henry died on 24 December 1944, also of heart-related issues.³⁶

Dorothy Schaefer married Carson Stewart Sleeman, on 11 April 1906.³⁷ They raised their family of five children in Guelph.³⁸ Dorothy passed away in 1955.³⁹ Her husband, Carson, outlived her by 13 years. They are buried in Park Lawn Cemetery, in Toronto, Ontario.⁴⁰

Margaret Schaefer married Harold Taylor Wreford in Stratford on 16 August 1921.⁴¹ Harold's sister, Minerva, the former sweetheart of William, was a witness at their wedding. Margaret and Harold raised two sons. Margaret was widowed when Harold passed away in September 1963, and she died in February 1989. They are buried in Avondale Cemetery, Stratford, Ontario.⁴²

Ida May Schaefer married Herman Schmidt on 23 March 1911 in Wellington County, Ontario.⁴³ They lived in Stratford with their two daughters.⁴⁴ Ida died in May 1972⁴⁵ and Herman died in November 1977.⁴⁶

Maurice married Florence Pellar in Stratford on 1 January 1924.⁴⁷ They lived in Stratford with their children.⁴⁸ Maurice died in 1969,⁴⁹ and Florence died in 2000.⁵⁰ They are buried in Forest Lawn Memorial Gardens in London, Ontario.

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¹ "Ontario Canada Births, 1832–1916," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 November 2023), entry for William Henry Schaefer

² "Canada, Ontario Births, 1869–1912," *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:VNGS-NFM>: 2 March 2021), entry for Dorothy Margaret Schaefer, 17 Jul 1885; citing Birth, Milverton, Perth, Ontario, Canada, citing Archives of Ontario, Toronto; FHL microfilm 1,845,875

³ "Ontario Canada Births, 1832–1916," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 November 2023), entry for Ida May Schaefer

⁴ "1901 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 November 2023), entry for Margaret Shayfer [*sic*], Province: Ontario, Census Place: Milverton (Village), Perth (North/Nord), Ontario; Page: 8; Family No: 92

⁵ "Ontario Canada Births, 1832–1916," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 November 2023), entry for Maurice John Schaefer

⁶ "1861 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 November 2023), entry for Conrad Schaefer, District of Waterloo, Page: 43, Number: 33

⁷ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths and Deaths Overseas, 1869–1948," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 November 2023), entry for Henry Schaefer

⁸ "1901 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 November 2023), entry for Conrad Schaefer, Perth County, Ontario, Page: 10, Family Number: 110

⁹ "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 November 2023), entry for Isabel [*sic*] Schaefer

¹⁰ "Web: Canada, Wesleyan Methodist Baptismal Register, 1828-1910," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 November 2023), entry for Isabella McKay.

¹¹ "1861 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 November 2023), entry for Josiah McKay, Oxford County, Ontario, Page: 101, Number: 36

¹² "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 27 November 2023), entry for Henry Schaefer

¹³ "1911 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 December 2023), entry for Henry Shader (*sic*), Milverton, Perth, Ontario, Page 7, entry number 87

¹⁴ Pers Comm., 3 August 2023 from Ellen Thomas, Archives Technician, Reference & Research, Stratford-Perth Archives. "The Stratford Daily Herald," Monday 29 April 1918, Page 1, Obituary of "Pte Will Schaefer Killed in Action."

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- ¹⁵ "Stratford-Perth Archives," *Perth County* (www.perthcounty.ca/en/living-here/resources/files/Archives/Vernon-Directories/1914.pdf: accessed 29 November 2023), entry for Henry Schaefer
- ¹⁶ "Stratford-Perth Archives," *Perth County* (www.perthcounty.ca/en/living-here/resources/files/Archives/Vernon-Directories/1914.pdf: accessed 29 November 2023), entry for William Schaefer
- ¹⁷ "Stratford-Perth Archives," *Perth County* (www.perthcounty.ca/en/living-here/resources/files/Archives/Vernon-Directories/1915.pdf), accessed 29 November 2023), entry for William Schaefer
- ¹⁸ "Canada, World War I CEF Attestation Papers, 1914–1918," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 23 November 2023), entry for William Henry Schaefer
- ¹⁹ "Canada, World War I CEF Personnel Files, 1914–1918," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 23 November 2023), entry for William Henry Schaefer. Unless otherwise noted, all information about William's military service comes from this source.
- ²⁰ "RMS Olympic," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Olympic: accessed 6 December 2023)
- ²¹ War Diaries for 1 CMR, *Canadian Great War Project* (https://canadiangreatwarproject.com/diaries/viewer.php?u=1st_battalion_canadian_mounted_rifles&m=04&y=1918&i=e001125318, accessed 5 December 2023), entry for 14 April 1918
- ²² *Ibid.*, https://canadiangreatwarproject.com/diaries/viewer.php?u=1st_battalion_canadian_mounted_rifles&m=04&y=1918&i=e001125320
- ²³ "Search Name Index," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 24 September 2020), entry for Schaefer, William Henry
- ²⁴ *Find a Grave* (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/123048526/william-henry-schaefer>: accessed 6 December 2023), entry for Private William Henry Schaefer
- ²⁵ "Canadian War Graves Commission," <https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/find-cemeteries-memorials/cemetery-details/11600/pernes-british-cemetery/>
- ²⁶ "Books of Remembrance," *Veterans Affairs Canada* (<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/books>: accessed 3 August 2023), entry for Pte William Henry Schaefer
- ²⁷ "Allward Memorial Project," *Perth County* (<https://www.perthcounty.ca/en/living-here/allward-memorial-project.aspx>: accessed 3 August 2023), audio file with name of William Schaefer
- ²⁸ "Canada, World War I CEF Personnel Files, 1914–1918," *Ancestry*
- ²⁹ "1911 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 1 December 2023), Year: 1911; Census Place: 43 - Stratford, Perth North, Ontario; Page: 14; Family number: 151
- ³⁰ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths and Deaths Overseas, 1869–1948," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 December 2023), entry for Dorcas Worford [sic]
- ³¹ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for George Curtis Wreford
- ³² "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 December 2023), Census Place: 71, London, Ontario; Page: 3
- ³³ Pers comm., Pers Comm., 3 August 2023.
- ³⁴ Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 December 2023), entry for Isabel Schaefer
- ³⁵ "1931 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 December 2023), entry for Henry Schaefer
- ³⁶ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths and Deaths Overseas, 1869–1948," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 December 2023), entry for Henry Schaefer
- ³⁷ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for Dorothy Schaefer
- ³⁸ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for Dorothy Sleeman

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- ³⁹ "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 December 2023), entry for Dorothy Schaefer Sleeman
- ⁴⁰ Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for Dorothy Sleeman
- ⁴¹ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for Margaret Schaefer
- ⁴² Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 December 2023), entry for Margaret Isabel (Schaefer) Wreford
- ⁴³ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for Ida May Schaefer
- ⁴⁴ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for Herman Schmidt
- ⁴⁵ "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for Ida Schmidt
- ⁴⁶ "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 6 December 2023), entry for Herman Schmidt
- ⁴⁷ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for Maurice John Schaefer
- ⁴⁸ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for Maurice Schaefer
- ⁴⁹ "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for Maurice John Schaefer
- ⁵⁰ "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 December 2023), entry for Florence Schaefer