

**Private Alexander Shields<sup>©</sup>**  
**Regimental number: 1042790**  
**38th Battalion, Canadian Infantry**

**born: 1 March 1897–died: 18 October 1918**

Almost all the Canadian soldiers who died at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station and whose deaths were recorded in the chaplains' journal were born in the United Kingdom. Many had only been in Canada for a few years before enlisting to return to the UK to serve in the Great War. Private Alexander Shields was one of the few born in Canada, as were both his parents.

Alexander was the son of Austin Shields, born on 18 May 1870 in Fitzroy, Ontario,<sup>1</sup> just to the west of Ottawa. His mother, Mary Cole, was born on 26 March 1874 in nearby Horton, in the county of Renfrew, Ontario.<sup>2</sup> They married on 9 July 1894 in Ottawa, Ontario.<sup>3</sup> Their first child, William John, was born on 18 April 1895 in Renfrew<sup>4</sup> and Alexander was born two years later, on 1 March 1897, also in Renfrew.<sup>5</sup> Sadly, their mother died of tuberculosis on 22 April 1897—less than two months after Alexander's birth.<sup>6</sup>

In 1901, Austin was a labourer and the family was living in Horton Township in Renfrew County.<sup>7</sup> Austin did not remarry for ten years. On 27 August 1907, he married Mary Jane Inglis, 13 years his junior, in Renfrew. Over the next 19 years, they had six children:

- Austin Lincoln, who was born on 24 June 1908, married Ethel Dowd in 1929 and died on 28 October 1989<sup>8</sup>
- Elmer James, who was born on 8 May 1914, married Gladys Grace Tucker, died on 13 September 1977 and was buried in Thompson Hill Cemetery in Renfrew<sup>9</sup>
- Mabel Marion, who was born in 1917, but died of pneumonia on 15 October 1918, aged 18 months<sup>10</sup>
- Evelyn Mary, who was born in the spring of 1921,<sup>11</sup> married Stan Hoffman and died in 2000<sup>12</sup>
- Cameron, who was born on 21 August 1922, married Alvira G. Thompson, died on 4 September 1985 and is buried in Rosebank Cemetery in Renfrew County<sup>13</sup>
- Florence Elizabeth, who was born in 1925, married Ivan Andrew Kippen and died in 2004 in Arnprior, Ontario<sup>14</sup>

In 1911, the family was living in Lavant Township, where Austin was a plasterer.<sup>15</sup>

Alexander volunteered for military service and enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Renfrew on 10 January 1917, just a month and a half before his 20th birthday.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, he reported his birthdate as 1 March 1896, which would have made him already 20 years of age. He presumably thought he was more likely to be accepted if he made himself a year older—yet, he was already over the age of 18 and eligible to serve. He was a labourer, 5' 6½" tall and had a ruddy complexion, blue eyes and brown hair.

He left from Halifax and arrived in England on 14 May 1917 on SS *Megantic*. He remained in England until 19 January 1918, when he joined the 38th Battalion and went to France. His time on the Front was not long.

In mid-October 1918, the 38th Battalion was stationed in Haute-Avesnes, 15 minutes northwest of Arras in northern France.<sup>17</sup> The days leading up to the day that Alexander was admitted to No. 12

Canadian Field Ambulance were quiet for the battalion—filled with rest, inspections, training and a football match—as it prepared to go into the line. The day before the battalion marched off to Agnez-lès-Duisans and then Sauchy Lestrée, Alexander was admitted to No. 12 CFA with pyrexia [fever] of unknown origin. By the time he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 14 October, he had been diagnosed with pneumonia. He survived four days but died on 18 October. He was buried on 20 October in Duisans British Military Cemetery (Plot 8, Row B, Grave 6) with the Canadian chaplain A. D. Reid presiding.<sup>18</sup>

This cemetery is located in Étrun, near Arras, France, and the first burials in the cemetery took place in March 1917.<sup>19</sup> No. 1 CCCS arrived in Duisans 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.<sup>20</sup>

His family would have received a letter from the chaplain after his death.<sup>21</sup> When Alexander signed a will in February 1917, he left everything to his uncle—his father’s brother—and after 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), these medals were also sent to his uncle, although the plaque and scroll went to his father.

Alexander’s eldest brother William also enlisted to serve in the Great War, but it was not to be. He was a farmer living in Granum, Alberta, when he enlisted (regimental number 523275) in Calgary on 11 May 1916, with the intention of joining the Army Medical Corps. He arrived in England in December of that year and, by February 1917, he was in the Shorncliffe Military Hospital with influenza. He was discharged in May, but stayed on at the hospital working as an orderly. In July he was admitted to the Lord Derby War Hospital in Warrington, Cheshire, in a semi-stupor condition and “... could only answer questions slowly and with difficulty, diagnosed mental deficiency and transferred here, for mental observation.” This was a mental hospital and he was later diagnosed with “dementia,” but described as follows “... he is dull and considerably below par poor education. ... Has had poor social advantages. He is simple childish but good natured and easily pleased.”

In October 1917 he was invalided back to Canada on the hospital ship *HS Araguaya*. On arrival, he was taken to the Ontario Military Convalescent Hospital in Cobourg, Ontario—a mental health facility. He was discharged in January 1918, not having ever served in the CEF. Eight months later he married Eleanor Susan Roberts on 19 August in Renfrew. He died on 8 April 1969 in Renfrew.

Alexander’s father died on 11 March 1951, at the age of 80, and was buried in Thompson Hill Cemetery in Renfrew County.<sup>22</sup> Alexander’s stepmother died 28 years later on 13 November 1979.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Ontario, Canada, Births, 1832–1916,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 10 May 2022), entry for Shields Austin [sic]

<sup>2</sup> “Ontario, Canada, Births, 1832–1916,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 29 April 2022), entry for Mary Cole

<sup>3</sup> “Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 2 May 2022), entry for Austin Lincoln Shields

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- <sup>4</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1832–1916," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 29 April 2022), entry for William John S Sheilds [sic]
- <sup>5</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1832–1916," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 5 May 2022), entry for Alexander Shields
- <sup>6</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Deaths and Deaths Overseas, 1869–1948," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 29 April 2022), entry for Mary Sheilds
- <sup>7</sup> "1901 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 29 April 2022), entry for Alex Shield [sic], Province: Ontario, District: Renfrew (South/Sud), District number: 111, Sub-district: Horton, Sub-district number: 1, Family number: 150
- <sup>8</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1832–1916," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 29 April 2022), entry for Austin Lincoln Shields; "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 29 April 2022), entry for Austin Lincoln Shields; "Canada, Newspapers.com Obituary Index, 1800s–Current," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 5 May 2022), Newspaper title: *The Ottawa Citizen*, entry for Austin Lincoln Shields
- <sup>9</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1832–1916," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 May 2022), entry for Elmer James Shields; "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 11 May 2022), entry for Elmer James Shields; "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 May 2022), entry for Elmer James Shields
- <sup>10</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Deaths and Deaths Overseas, 1869–1948," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 May 2022), entry for Mabel Marion Sheilds [sic]
- <sup>11</sup> "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 29 April 2022), entry for Austin Shields, Province or territory: Ontario, Enumeration district: 124, Sub-district: Renfrew (Town), Sub-district number: 31, Line number: 10, Family number: 210
- <sup>12</sup> "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 May 2022), entry for Evelyn M. Hoffman
- <sup>13</sup> "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 May 2022), entry for Cameron F. Shields
- <sup>14</sup> "Canada, Newspapers.com Obituary Index, 1800s–Current," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 5 May 2022), Newspaper title: *The Ottawa Citizen*, entry for Florence Elizabeth Kippen
- <sup>15</sup> "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 29 April 2022), entry for Austin Shields
- <sup>16</sup> "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 8 April 2022), entry for Shields, Alex, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166, Box 8864–13, Item number: 226641, Digitized service file - PDF format: B8864-S013. Unless otherwise sourced, all information about Alex's military service comes from this source.
- <sup>17</sup> "War diaries - 58th Canadian Infantry Battalion," *Library and Archives Canada* (<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 8 May 2022), Reference: RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4938, File number: 432
- <sup>18</sup> "Search Name Index," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 5 September 2021), entry for Shields, R. [sic]
- <sup>19</sup> "Duisans British Cemetery, Etrun," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 7 October 2015)
- <sup>20</sup> "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)
- <sup>21</sup> "Search Name Index," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa*, entry for Shields, R. [sic]
- <sup>22</sup> "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 May 2022), entry for Austin Shields
- <sup>23</sup> "Ontario, Canada, The Ottawa Journal (Birth, Marriage and Death Notices), 1885–1980," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 8 April 2022), entry for Mary Jane Inglis