

## **Private Ernest Weller<sup>©</sup>**

**Regimental number: 60040**

**21st Canadian Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force**

**born: 28 February 1888 or 1881–died: 26 March 1916**

Private Ernest Weller was born in Swanley, Kent, either on 28 February 1888 or in 1881,<sup>1</sup> the son of Sarah Stedman (born in 1859).<sup>2</sup> Sarah married Augustus Weller (born in 1860)<sup>3</sup> in Wilmington, Kent, on 23 October 1886.<sup>4</sup> After their marriage, they had three children:

- Maria Ruth (born in 1887, but died the following year)<sup>5</sup>
- Ada Rosina (probably born on 21 November in either 1887 or 1888)<sup>6</sup>
- Ethel (born in 1892, but died in 1893)<sup>7</sup>

In 1891, the family was living at 7 Button Street in Farningham, near Dartford, Kent, where Augustus was an agricultural labourer.<sup>8</sup> Ten years later, the family had moved to 33 High Croft Cottages in Farningham; Augustus was now a railway platelayer and Ernest was a railway porter. Two boarders were living with the family: Herbert G Stedman (age 21), the brother of Ernest's mother Sarah, and Ernest J Dunster (age 23).<sup>9</sup>

Seven years later, at the age of 20, Ernest left England for Canada. He sailed on SS *Canada* from Liverpool on 7 May 1908 heading to Quebec City.<sup>10</sup> Three years after his arrival, he was a boarder in the home of William Long and his family at 15 Greenwich Street, Brantford, Ontario, and was working as a factory labourer.<sup>11</sup>

Ernest's family in England was still living at High Croft Cottages in 1911. In addition to their daughter Ada, there were two adopted children<sup>12</sup> living with them: Ernest Walter Cade (age 11) and Dick Broadbridge (age 9).<sup>13</sup>

At the beginning of the war, Ernest enlisted in the 21st Infantry Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Kingston, Ontario.<sup>14</sup> When he signed up on 5 November 1914, he was 5' 8" tall and had a dark complexion, blue eyes and brown hair.

It was six months before Ernest left Canada to join the war effort in Europe. On 6 May 1915, he sailed with his battalion on SS *Metagama* from Montreal to England. The battalion arrived in England on 15 May and went to the West Sandling military camp.<sup>15</sup> Over the next four months, various members of the battalion received training in such things as the use of Ross rifles,<sup>16</sup> musketry, machine guns, bayonet fighting, bombing, signalling and scouting. The battalion took part in technical exercises in the English countryside—imitating the tactical challenges of the Front. However, provisions were made for the presence of the troops among civilians and on private property. The standing orders for an exercise on 13–14 August specified that

The very greatest care will be exercised by all ranks to prevent damage to standing crops. When fields of growing cereals are found to block operations, umpires are authorised to permit the troops to be withdrawn, and placed without penalty (other than loss of time) at the furthest edge of the fields in question.

The Newingreen lamb sales will be taking place on the 13th inst. [sic] it is therefore important that any flocks of sheep and lambs that may be met on the roads be given free movement.

On 14 September 1915, the battalion embarked in Folkestone for Boulogne, France, but halfway across the Channel, the vessels were ordered back by the naval authorities. They left again the following morning, arriving in France at midday. Upon arrival, the soldiers went by train to Saint-Omer and from there marched to Dranouter, a kilometre or two across the French-Belgian border. By 19 and 20 September all men of the battalion were in the trenches—eleven months after Ernest had first enlisted.

In March 1916, the battalion was stationed near La Clytte, Belgium, about 5 kilometres from the French border. The battalion's war diary reports for 16 March that "Hun artillery fairly active—our artillery shelled front line enemy trenches . . ." The battalion's machine guns had succeeded in dispersing a German working party. The diary concludes "Enemy attitude on the whole very quiet." However, it would not have been a quiet day for Ernest. He was injured, suffering from what was identified as a shell shock. He was transferred to a field ambulance and then to another three days later, where his diagnosis was changed to neurasthenia. He was subsequently transferred to a casualty clearing station before arriving at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, where he died of a cerebral hemorrhage at 1.15 a.m.

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 clearing station were stabilized before being transported to a field or military hospital.<sup>17</sup>



**Private E Weller's gravestone**

Source: *The 21st Battalion CEF*  
<http://21stbattalion.ca/page1.html>

The chaplains at No. 1 CCCS maintained a journal of deaths at the station. Ernest's death was reported in the journal to be as a result of uraemia convulsions and cerebral hemorrhage. However, it was also noted that he was unconscious when he arrived at the station and had no papers with him.

He was buried in Bailleul Community Cemetery Extension (Plot II, Row B, Grave 26).

Ernest was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).

His parents died just before the Second World War: **Sarah** in 1935<sup>18</sup> and **Augustus** in 1936.<sup>19</sup>

Ernest's only surviving sister, **Ada Rosina**, married Francis W. Tillman in 1913<sup>20</sup> and they had at least one son, Augustus—named after his maternal grandfather—born on 13 January 1919. Francis was a nursery foreman and, in 1939, the Ada, Francis and Augustus were living at Pembroke House in Dartford.<sup>21</sup> Ada died in 1976.<sup>22</sup>

Ernest's parents reported having two adopted sons in 1911. There is no evidence to suggest why either of these boys were adopted by the Wellers. **Ernest Walter Champion Cade** was born in Northfleet, Kent, on 28 July 1899,<sup>23</sup> the son of Walter Henry Cade and Esther Eva Cooper.<sup>24</sup> In 1901, Ernest was living with his parents and a younger sister in Northfleet. Ten years later he was living with the Wellers and three years after that, he left England for Canada. At only 15, apparently travelling on his own, he sailed from London on 28 July 1899 and arrived in Quebec City. He settled in Toronto at some point, where he was a steam fitter. He was living with his aunt and uncle—Lucy and Arthur Cade. Arthur was Ernest's father's brother.<sup>25</sup>

Ernest Cade joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force after the end of the war, enlisting on 21 March 1919 in Toronto, Ontario, in the Canadian Garrison Regiment (regimental number 3236702). Garrison regiments were set up in April 1918 to perform garrison duty in Canada, with one battalion in each military district.<sup>26</sup> Cade did not go overseas and was discharged on 31 January 1920. In July 1921, he married Dorothy Irene Faith Deviney in York, Ontario,<sup>27</sup> but sadly died just over a year later. His death certificate indicates that he died of gas poisoning—"probably accidental." However, a newspaper article indicated that he was found unconscious in his room on 18 September 1922, with gas escaping from an open jet. The article indicated that his wife had left him and "[t]his is given as the reason for Cade attempting to take his life."<sup>28</sup> He died on 22 September at 23 years of age.

The Weller's second adopted son, **Dick Broadbridge**, remained in England. He was probably the son of Charles William Broadbridge and Miriam Sillence, who married in Dartford in 1885.<sup>29</sup> Mariam died in 1904<sup>30</sup> and Charles in 1906,<sup>31</sup> which may explain why Dick was adopted by the Weller family.

At the age of 11, Dick joined the Training Ship *Exmouth*,<sup>32</sup> managed by the Metropolitan Asylums Board, "which gave naval training to pauper boys aged from thirteen to sixteen, many of whom went on to join the Merchant or Royal Navy."<sup>33</sup> Dick did exactly that—he served on the *Exmouth* from February 1913 until September 1915. In June 1919 he joined the Royal Navy (service number J 60062), serving until 1927<sup>34</sup> and then again from 1929 to 1941.<sup>35</sup>

In 1922, he married Eliza A Johnson in Bromley, Kent.<sup>36</sup> In 1939, Eliza was living in Orpington, Kent, and working as a school caretaker. Dick died in 1982 in Bromley, London.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>; accessed 8 April 2023), entry for Weller, Ernest, Reference: RG 150, Accession 10216 - 38, Box 1311-26, Item number: 288836, Digitized service file - PDF format: B10216-S038. Ernest's personnel file indicates that his birthdate was 28 February 1888. However, no record in the General Register Office files was found for an Ernest Weller with mother's maiden name Stedman. However, there was an entry for Ernest Stedman, with no mother's maiden name, born in the middle of 1881 in Hollingbourne, about 30 kilometres from Swanley.

<sup>2</sup> "1871 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 27 January 2023), entry for Sarah Stedman, Registration district: Hollingbourn, Sub-registration district: Lenham, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 7, Household schedule number: 64, Piece: 947, Folio: 79, Page: 11

<sup>3</sup> "Kent, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1538–1914," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 12 February 2023), baptism entry for Augustus Weller

<sup>4</sup> "Kent, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1538–1914," *Ancestry*, marriage entry for Augustus Weller

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<sup>5</sup> “GRO online index (birth),” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 15 February 2023), entry for Weller, Maria Ruth, Registration district: Dartford, Volume 02A, Page 479; “Kent, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1538–1914,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 12 February 2023), death entry for Maria Ruth Weller

<sup>6</sup> Ada’s birth was registered in the General Registry Office in 1889: “GRO online index (birth),” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 15 February 2023), entry for Weller, Ada Rosina, Registration district: Dartford, Volume 02A, Page 484). The 1939 Register records her birth as 21 November 1887: “1939 England and Wales Register,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 27 February 2023), entry for Ada R Tillman, Schedule number: 228, Sub-schedule number: 2, Enumeration district: Djdl, Registration district: 43/2. The civil registration of her death gave her birthdate as 21 November 1888: “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 17 December 2023), entry for Ada Rosina Tillman, Registration district: Dartford, Inferred county: Ken, Volume: 16, Page: 0584s.

<sup>7</sup> “GRO online index (birth),” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 15 February 2023) entry for Weller, Ethel, Registration district: Dartford, Volume 02A, Page 520; “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 February 2023), entry for Ethel Weller, Registration district: Chichester, Inferred county: Sussex, Volume: 2a, Page: 303

<sup>8</sup> “1891 England Census,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 February 2023), entry for Ernest Weller, Registration district: Dartford, Sub-registration district: Farningham, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 4, Piece: 644, Folio: 44

<sup>9</sup> “1901 England Census,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 December 2022), entry for Ernest Waller [*sic*], Registration district: Dartford, Sub-registration district: Farningham, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 7, Piece: 709, Folio: 26, Page: 14, Household schedule number: 91

<sup>10</sup>

“UK, Outward Passenger Lists, 1890–1960,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 April 2023), entry for Ernest Waller [*sic*]

<sup>11</sup> “1911 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 February 2023), entry for Ernest Waller [*sic*], Province: Ontario, District: Brantford, District number: 57, Sub-district: 31 - Ward 5, Sub-district number: 31

<sup>12</sup> Formal legal adoption was not recognized in the United Kingdom until 1926 with the passage of the *Adoption of Children Act 1926*. However, informal adoption had existed for centuries.

<sup>13</sup> “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 5 January 2023), entry for Augustus Weller, Registration district number: 13, Sub-registration district: Farningham, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 09, Piece: 3802

<sup>14</sup> “Personnel Records of the First World War,” *Library and Archives Canada*, entry for Weller, Ernest. Unless otherwise indicated, all information about Ernest’s military service comes from this source.

<sup>15</sup> “War Diaries – 21st Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>: accessed 16 February 2023) File: RG9-III-D-3, Volume/box number: 4927, Microfilm reel number: T-10725, File number: 402. Unless otherwise specified, all information about the battalion’s activities comes from this source.

<sup>16</sup> The Ross rifle was a Canadian designed and produced rifle. When the British government refused to equip Canadian forces in the Boer War with British-made Lee-Enfield rifles because of a supply issue and the British manufacturer refused to license the guns to be made in Canada, Canada had to come up with a Canadian alternative. This led to the creation of the Ross rifle, which was first produced in 1903. Although, by 1910, the British were encouraging Canada to adopt the upgraded Lee-Enfield rifle, Canada preferred to continue production of the Ross rifle. It was this rifle that Canadian troops took into battle at the beginning of the 1914–18 war. However, there were many issues with the rifle that made it unsuitable for the conditions on the Western Front. By the fall of 1916, the Ross rifle had been withdrawn from service and replaced by the Lee-Enfield. (“Ross Rifle,” *Canadian Encyclopedia* (<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/ross-rifle>: accessed 20 February 2023)

<sup>17</sup> “Casualty Clearing Station,” *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualty\\_Clearing\\_Station](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualty_Clearing_Station): accessed 4 July 2022). A very comprehensive description of the casualty clearing stations is presented in the blog post

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"Casualty Clearing Stations During WW1" *Chiddicks Family Tree*

(<https://chiddicksfamilytree.com/2021/05/09/casualty-clearing-stations-during-ww1/>: accessed 4 July 2022)

<sup>18</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 February 2023), entry for Sarah Weller, Registration district: Dartford, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 962

<sup>19</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 February 2023), entry for Augustus Weller, Registration district: Dartford, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1179

<sup>20</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 November 2023), entry for Ada R E Weller, Registration district: Dartford, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1233

<sup>21</sup> "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry*, entry for Ada R Tillman

<sup>22</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry*, entry for Ada Rosina Tillman

<sup>23</sup> "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 8 April 2023) entry for Cade, Ernest Walter, Reference: RG 150, Accession 10216 - 38, Box 1367 - 49, Item number: 80842, Digitized service file - PDF format: B1367-S049

<sup>24</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 April 2023), entry for Ernest Walter Champion Cade

<sup>25</sup> "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 27 January 2023), entry for Arthur Cade, Registration district: Orsett, Sub-registration district: Grays, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 18, Piece: 1377, Folio: 117, Page: 91

<sup>26</sup> "Guide to Sources Relating to Units of the Canadian Expeditionary Force: Canadian Garrison Regiment." *Library and Archives Canada* (<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 1 March 2023)

<sup>27</sup> "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1826–1938," *Ancestry*, entry for Ernest Walter Champion Cade

<sup>28</sup> "Wife Leaves Hubby, So He Turns on the Gas," *Newspapers.com* ([www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com): accessed 18 February 2023), *The Expositor*, Brantford, Ontario, Canada, Tuesday, September 19, 1922

<sup>29</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 March 2023), entry for Miriam Sillence, Registration district: Dartford, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 503

<sup>30</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 March 2023), entry for Miriam Broadbridge, Registration district: Dartford, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 393

<sup>31</sup> "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 March 2023), entry for Charles William Broadbridge

<sup>32</sup> "London, England, TS Exmouth Training Ship Records, 1876–1918," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 March 2023), entry for Dick Broadbridge

<sup>33</sup> "The Metropolitan Asylums Board," *The Workhouse* ([www.workhouses.org.uk](http://www.workhouses.org.uk): accessed 1 March 2023)

<sup>34</sup> "UK, Royal Navy Registers of Seamen's Services, 1848–1939," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 March 2023), entry for Dick Broadbridge, First service date: 30 September 1916

<sup>35</sup> "UK, Royal Navy Registers of Seamen's Services, 1848–1939," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 March 2023), entry for Dick Broadbridge, First service date: 1 October 1929

<sup>36</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 March 2023), entry for Dick Broadbridge, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1277

<sup>37</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 March 2023), entry for Dick Broadbridge, Registration district: Bromley, Inferred county: Greater London, Volume: 11, Page: 1370