

Lance Corporal Clarence Ellyn Fletcher
Regimental Number: 484359
18th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force

born: probably 13 March 1898 - died: 2 December 1918

Clarence Ellyn Fletcher was born on 13 March, probably in 1898; however, the year of his birth is not certain.¹ He was the son of Clarence and Mary Fletcher. His father was born in Ontario² in 1864 and his mother, Mary (née Maxwell), was probably born in about 1877 in the United States.³ At some point, his father apparently went to the United States.

Finding information about Clarence's early life was greatly aided by finding a biography of his younger brother, Gordon Ellwyn, who had a long career in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.⁴ There was much variation in the surnames used by the family or appearing in the official records – Fletcher, Ellyn, Ellwyn and Ott. "For some unknown reason, Gordon's father changed the original family name from Fletcher to Ellyn after immigrating to Canada from Pittsburg Pennsylvania."⁵ Clarence retained the name Fletcher for his military service, but appears in other records with the surnames Ellyn or Ott.



1904 – Photograph of Ellyn family: Clarence, Mary, Douglas and Gordon (Source of photo – Barrie Ellwyn)
"S/Sgt. Gordon Ellwyn," *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association* (<http://www.rcmpveteransvancouver.com/ssgt-gordon-ellwyn/>; accessed 9 April 2015)



Clarence (Source of photo – Barrie Ellwyn)

Clarence had three younger full siblings: Gordon Carlyle (born in 1900),⁶ Margret (born in 1901, but died in 1902)⁷ and William Douglas (known as Douglas) (born in 1902).⁸

In 1901, Clarence's father was a coal miner in Fernie, British Columbia.⁹ The family's time in British Columbia was marred first by the death, on 29 April 1902, of his sister, Margret. Then less than a month later his father was killed in a mining accident at Cold Creek, British Columbia.¹⁰ On the night of 22 May, there was a massive explosion at the Crows Nest Coal Co. at Coal Creek near Fernie, resulting in the death of 150 – 175 miners.¹¹ Clarence's father was one of them. He was raising horses and/or mules – a "Driver Boss" – and was reportedly delivering a load of horses or mules at the time of the accident.¹² His body was not found for quite some months. In spite of reports that the "company will pay all funeral expenses, relieve against immediate want and

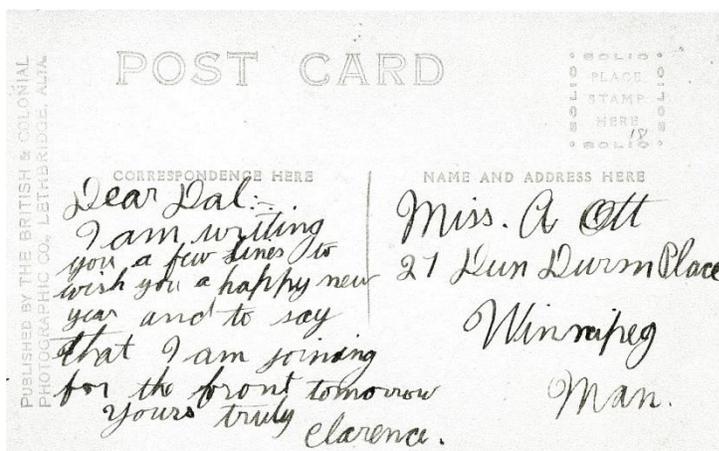
suffering and provide permanently against destitution,"¹³ family reports suggest that no compensation was paid to the widows. It was a difficult time for Clarence and his family. The strain on the family would have increased with the birth, only a few months later, on 25 December 1902, of Clarence's brother, Douglas.¹⁴

However, more stability came to the family in the next few years. “By 1906, Mary Ellyn had moved back to Lethbridge and married William Albert Ott who was 12 years her senior. William Ott was a well established and affluent businessman in Lethbridge Alberta. He had been married previously and brought five of his children into this new blended marriage. Together William and Mary had three children: Ralph, Glen and Albert. ... To avoid further confusion, the three girls and two original Ott boys kept the surname of OTT.”¹⁵ Gordon and Douglas did not like being teased for having a name that sounded like the girl’s name “Ellen,” so they changed the name to Ellwyn.¹⁶ So later, the original Ellyn boys and the last 3 Ott boys (Ralph, Glen & Albert) would all use the surname of Ellwyn.



Clarence (Source of photo – Barrie Ellwyn)

Clarence enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, joining the 50th Battalion, on 21 January 1915, claiming to be 19 years old.¹⁷ He indicated that he was born on 13 March 1895 in Lethbridge, Alberta. However, his brother’s profile indicates that he lied about his age by three years in order to enlist. “With the outbreak of World War I, both Clarence Ellyn-Fletcher and Gordon Ellwyn were anxious to join the



Postcard prepared by Clarence (but not sent) to his sister, Alice, possibly in January 1915. (Source of photo - Barrie Ellwyn)

Canadian Expeditionary Forces and contribute to the fighting in Europe. Clarence was, therefore, only 16 years old when he enlisted. He was 5’ 10” tall, with a fair complexion, grey eyes and black hair.¹⁸ “After his basic training, he was shipped off to Europe and was attached to the 18th Battalion (Western Ontario Regiment).”

It is not clear when Clarence left Canada for England but, in September 1915, he was with the 23rd Canadian Reserve Battalion while attending a Colt Machine Gun course, probably in

Shorncliffe, England.¹⁹ In January 1916, he was transferred from the 23rd to the 18th Battalion. On 20 January 1916, he was at the Canadian Base Depot in Le Havre and he joined his Battalion in the field about a week later.

Eight months later, Clarence began the first of a number of hospitalisations – this time for an injury sustained on the Front. On 19 September 1916, he was wounded by shrapnel that perforated the front of his left thigh and injured his foot. He was taken to the 1st Australian General Hospital and was transferred two days later to England. He was hospitalised in the Queen Mary’s Military Hospital in Whalley, Lancashire. By early November, the wound had almost healed, but the flexibility in his knee was limited to a right angle and he was still experiencing pain in the front of his thigh. In November he was sent to the Military Convalescent Hospital in Woodcote Park, Epsom.

He was discharged from Woodcote Park on 3 January 1917, but was admitted to hospital again just a few weeks later. He was admitted to a specialized military hospital at the Chisledon Camp in

Wiltshire for treatment of gonorrhoea. The 1,100-bed hospital was focused on the treatment of venereal disease.²⁰ He appears to have been there until late April. He was probably sent to the Canadian Convalescent Depot in Bramshott sometime in the spring of 1917.

Clarence's third hospitalisation occurred just months later. In late July 1917, he scratched his right thumb and the scratch became infected. He was treated for about a week at the Bramshott Hospital. While he was in hospital in August, he signed a will, leaving everything to his mother.

In February 1918, he was hospitalised for a fourth time, this time at Bramshott Hospital where he was hospitalised for two months with dermatitis. He had had scabies in January, which resulted in a red rash over most of his body. In April he transferred to the 4th Reserve Battalion. On 1 September, he was appointed a Lance Corporal and later that month he was transferred to the 18th Battalion.

In November 1918 Clarence was hospitalised for the fifth and final time. He was admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 24 November.²¹ The day he was admitted to the 1st CCCS, the 18th Canadian Battalion had left Chapelle-lez-Herlaimont in Belgium in the morning for a full-day march to Fleurus, just over 20 kilometres to the east.²² The Battalion had begun its journey to Germany as an army of occupation on 18 November 1918. Every day since the march began, one or more other ranks had been admitted to hospital and the war diary entry for 24 November notes that "15 O.R.s [other ranks] admitted to hospital." Clarence may have been one of these.



C Fletcher in Gosselies Communal cemetery
(Source: Author)

Clarence died at the 1st CCCS, just over a week later of influenza. He was buried the same day in Gosselies Communal Cemetery (Grave 254), with the chaplain W. O'Neill Fisher presiding. The chaplain also notified his mother, Mrs W. A. Ott, of his death at 320 7th Avenue, South Lethbridge, Alberta.

Influenza accounted for most deaths at the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station after the Armistice.²³ In spite of the horrific number of soldiers killed in World War I, the influenza pandemic, which affected the whole world and scourged Europe in 1918-1919, killed more people than the war itself.²⁴

It is unlikely that Clarence saw any of the celebrations of the Canadian soldiers that took place along their march route. On 19 November, "A Dance was given by the villagers at night in the Town Hall to the members of the battalion. The Regtl. Band provided the music."²⁵ On 25 November, "Shortly after the arrival of the Battalion, a civilian Brass Band and Bugle

Band played through the streets."

Clarence was probably awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).²⁶ He missed qualifying for the 1914-15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915) by less than month, since he only joined the Front in late January 1916.

His brother, Gordon, wanted to follow in his brother's footsteps and applied to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force but was rejected because he was too young. However, in April 1918, he applied and was accepted for the Cavalry Draft for the Royal NorthWest Mounted Police



Graves of nine WW1 soldiers in Gosselies Communal cemetery (Source: Author)

(RNWMP).²⁷ New RNWMP recruits were also being taken into the CEF and Gordon signed an attestation on 3 May 1918. He could not serve at the front until he was 19 on 30 May 1919. Gordon sailed to England in June 1918 where he was sent to Camp Shorncliffe in Kent for training. He was just about to be shipped to the Western Front when the Armistice was signed. Gordon returned to Canada in May 1919. He then joined the Saskatchewan Provincial Police and, when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) took over policing in Saskatchewan, he joined the Manitoba Provincial Police. Then when the RCMP took over policing in that

province, Gordon joined the RCMP, where he served until his retirement in 1950. He died on 17 June 1961 in Powell River, British Columbia.

After the war, Clarence's parents, William and Mary, were living in Vancouver with six of their children.²⁸ Gordon and his wife, Ada, were living in Lethbridge. On the day of the 1921 census, 1 June, Clarence's youngest brother, Douglas, a taxi driver, was with Gordon and Ada.²⁹ Douglas later married Beryl.³⁰ He moved to the United States – first to Seattle and then to Kansas City.³¹ Both Douglas and Beryl died in Kansas City.

Gordon and Ada did not have any children, but Douglas had two.³² The family names Fletcher and Clarence were worked into the names of his two children – Donald Fletcher Ellwyn and Barrie Clare(nce) Ellwyn.

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Special thanks are extended to Barrie Ellwyn, Clarence's nephew, for his assistance with this biography.

¹ Clarence gave his birth year as 1895 in his attestation for the Canadian Expeditionary Force. However, a biography written of his brother, Gordon, suggests that he was actually born on 13 March 1898. Census records give dates of 1897, 1898 and 1898. No birth record has been found.

² Some records suggest that he was born in Manitoba. "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 11 April 2015), entry for Gordon Ellison, Province or Territory: Alberta, District: Lethbridge District Number: 7, Sub-District: Lethbridge (City), Sub-District Number: 42, City, Town or Village: Ward E City of Lethbridge

³ "1901 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 9 April 2015), entry for Clarence Ellyn, Province: British Columbia, District: Yale & Cariboo, District Number: 5, Sub-District: Kootenay (East/est), (South Riding/Division Nord), Sub-District Number: E-8

⁴ "S/Sgt. Gordon Ellwyn," *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association* (<http://www.rcmpveteransvancouver.com/ssgt-gordon-ellwyn/>; accessed 9 April 2015)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "S/Sgt. Gordon Ellwyn"

⁷ "British Columbia, Canada, Death Index, 1872-1990," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 11 April 2015), entry for Margret Ellyn, Registration Number: 1902-09-166320, BCA Number: B13105, GSU Number: 1927133

⁸ "S/Sgt. Gordon Ellwyn"

⁹ "1901 Census of Canada," entry for Clarence Ellyn,

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- ¹⁰ "British Columbia, Canada, Death Index, 1872-1990," Ancestry(www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 9 April 2015), entry for Clarence Ellyn, Registration Number: 1902-09-166325, BCA Number: B13105, GSU Number: 1927133
- ¹¹ "Fernie's Horror," *The Cranbrook Herald*, May 29 1902 (<http://www.crowsnest.bc.ca/fernie01.html>; accessed 28 April 2015)
- ¹² Information from Barrie Ellwyn, April 2015
- ¹³ "Fernie's Horror"
- ¹⁴ "Border Crossings: From Canada to U.S. 1895-1956," Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 11 April 2015), entry for William Douglas Ellwyn
- ¹⁵ "S/Sgt. Gordon Ellwyn"
- ¹⁶ Information from Barrie Ellwyn, April 2015
- ¹⁷ "Service Files of the First World War, 1914-1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>; accessed 14 December 2015), entry for Clarence E. Fletcher, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 3144 - 35. Unless otherwise indicated, all information about his military career comes from this record.
- ¹⁸ "Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914-1918," Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 8 April 2015), entry for Clarence Ellyce Fletcher
- ¹⁹ "Service Files of the First World War, 1914-1918 - CEF," entry for Clarence E. Fletcher
- ²⁰ "Chiseldon Camp," *Guide to Swindon* (<http://www.swindonweb.com/?m=8&s=116&ss=763&c=2501&t=Chiseldon+Camp>; accessed 31 December 2015)
- ²¹ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," *Library and Archives Canada*, (records accessed 2013 & 2015), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 733
- ²² "War diaries - 18th Canadian Infantry Battalion," War Diaries of the First World War (http://data4.collectionscanada.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=18th+infantry+battalion&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=4&f=G; accessed 8 April 2015)
- ²³ "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/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G; accessed 15 December 2014)
- ²⁴ "The Influenza Pandemic of 1918," (<https://virus.stanford.edu/uda/>; accessed 3 February 2015)
- ²⁵ "War diaries - 18th Canadian Infantry Battalion"
- ²⁶ "Service Files of the First World War, 1914-1918 - CEF," entry for Clarence E. Fletcher
- ²⁷ "S/Sgt. Gordon Ellwyn"
- ²⁸ "1921 Census of Canada," Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 23 April 2015), entry for B. Alice Ott, Province or Territory: British Columbia, District: Vancouver, District Number: 13, Sub-District: Ward 6, Sub-District Number: 12, City, Town or Village: Vancouver
- ²⁹ "1921 Census of Canada," entry for Gordon Ellison
- ³⁰ "Border Crossings: From Canada to U.S., 1895-1956," Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 11 April 2015), entry for William Douglas Ellwyn
- ³¹ Information from Barrie Ellwyn, April 2015
- ³² Ibid.