

Private William Christian[©]
Regimental Number: 180194
No. 1 Company, 7th Battalion, Canadian Infantry (B.C. Regiment)

born: 10 May 1895 – died: 17 February 1918



The British Columbia Regiment
(Duke of Connaught) Badge
Source: Wikimedia Commons

William Christian was born on 10 May 1895 in Liverpool, England. He was the son of William (b. 1869)¹ and Elizabeth Jane Christian (b. 1869).²

His parents called him Willie.³

In 1901 William, his parents and his brother, Harold, (b. 1897)⁴ were still living in Liverpool, where William's father was employed as a shipwright.⁵ Sometime between 1901 and 1910, William's father left to find work in Canada, and in May 1910, William, his mother and his brother all boarded the *Empress of Ireland* in Liverpool and headed for Quebec City.⁶ On arrival in Canada, they then travelled across the country, to join William's father on Vancouver Island. By 1911, William Christian Sr. was working as a carpenter in Victoria, British Columbia, and William Jr., at the age of 16, had a job as a candy maker.⁷

William enlisted in the 7th Battalion, Victoria Fusiliers, Canadian Expeditionary Force, (CEF) on 1 November 1915.

He had a fair complexion, grey eyes and brown hair, was five feet, one inch tall and was 21 years of age. He listed his occupation as Rancher when he signed up.⁸

William left Halifax on 31 May 1916 aboard the *SS Olympic* and arrived in England on 8 June. On reporting for training in East Sandling he was appointed an acting corporal and on 18 July he was transferred to the 30th Reserve Battalion. A month later, he requested to be reverted to the rank of private and was subsequently transferred to the 7th Battalion, where he proceeded overseas to the Front in France. During William's period in France, the 7th Battalion participated in the following battles: Vimy Ridge, Hill 70, Adieux, Passchendaele, Amiens, Scarpe and Cambrai.⁹

After arriving at the Front, it wasn't long until William was again promoted to lance corporal,¹⁰ and by the end of March 1917, he had attained the rank of corporal in the field. On 10 April he was wounded at Vimy Ridge. This was towards the end of that battle. He was blown off his feet by an exploding bomb, was dazed for some time, but not unconscious, and received shrapnel wounds. William was admitted to the No. 2 Australian General Hospital with a shrapnel wound to his shoulder. He coughed and spat up blood for a day or two after being admitted, but had no other complications in his recovery. He was transferred to the Leith War Hospital in Edinburgh, Scotland, and then invalided to England, where he remained until fully recovered.¹¹

William returned to the field on 31 August 1917.¹² Just prior to leaving for the field, he went absent without leave for a period of 2½ days; he was absent for two roll calls.¹³ Perhaps he just wanted some time to himself before returning to the war; however, this was a serious offence and resulted in a court martial.¹⁴

William pled guilty with an explanation. He said, "Sir, I have been in the Canadian Expeditionary Force for two years. During that time I have been unfortunate enough to have always been posted to some duty and never allowed a pass of any sort with the exception of ten days sick furlough. I reverted from the rank of Corporal to Private to proceed to France and earned my present stripe in the line. I have a clear conduct sheet with the exception of one entry which was made last week." His sentence was to return to the rank of private.¹⁵

William returned to his unit at the front, in Flanders, in September 1917, where he would spend the rest of his days. He again overstayed a pass from 25 December 1917 to noon 27 December 1917; that time, he just forfeited seven days' pay as punishment.¹⁶

The 7th Battalion was engaged in the Battle of Passchendaele and William successfully survived through this period of time. His unit remained at the Front for the rest of the year and into 1918.¹⁷ The war diary for his battalion for 15 February 1918 reported that they were currently assigned to the front line in the St. Emile sector and that the situation that day was normal. It noted that, early in the morning of 16 February, the enemy began an attack with artillery, sending shells into the allied lines. Around 1:20 a.m. the enemy threw over a lot of gas shells and "immediately afterwards he sent over a salvo of gas projectors against our right flank." Four of the men in the battalion were gassed and the Allied artillery retaliated. No mention is made here of other casualties; however, later in the diary there is a list of casualties in the battalion in February and William Christian's name is one of these.¹⁸

William was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 16 February 1918 with a shrapnel wound to the chest and abdomen. He died three days later, on 19 February, and was buried that day at the Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension, 2 ½ miles southwest of Noeux-les-Mines, France. He is buried in Plot 3, Row E, Grave 30.¹⁹

Barlin is a village southwest of Bethune between the Bethune–Arras and Bethune–St. Pol roads. The Communal Cemetery and Extension lies to the north of the village on the road to Houchin.

The extension was begun by French troops in October 1914 and when they moved south in March 1916, it was used for burials by the 6th Casualty Clearing Station, largely for Commonwealth casualties. In November 1917, Barlin began to be shelled and the hospital was moved back to Ruitz. The extension was used again in March and April 1918 during the German advance on this front. It was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and contains 1095 Commonwealth, 63 French and 13 German burials from the First World War.²⁰

William was survived by his grandmother Mrs Christian, living at 53 Ivernia Rd, Queen's Drive, Walton, Liverpool, England; his parents, William and Elizabeth Christian, 2828 Blackwood St., Victoria, B.C.; his lady friend, Miss. M. Climpson, 79 Ashford Rd, Eastbourne, East Sussex, England; and his brother Harold.²¹

Harold had also enlisted in the CEF. He signed up on 15 October 1917 with No. 5 Company, Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery. He went to England in January 1918 and was deployed to the field; he served in France from July 1918 and returned to Canada on his discharge from the CEF, in April 1919.²² In 1921, Harold was again living in Victoria, British Columbia.²³ His parents were, by that time, living in Errington, Comox, British Columbia.²⁴

At the 2011 Remembrance Day services for the Royal Canadian Legion Vedder Crossing Branch No. 280 of the Officers' Mess of the British Columbia Regiment, Private William Christian's Victory Medal was presented to the Regimental Association by Branch President Tom Quirke, along with other archival material. His medal is now displayed with those medals of William's comrades in arms in the Regimental Museum.²⁵ Lest we forget.

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¹ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 July 2016), entry for William Christian, Registration district: West Derby, Sub-registration district: Bootle, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 28, Household schedule number: 153, Piece: 3462, Folio: 163, Page: 27

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865–1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 22 July 2016), entry for Elizabeth Christian, William Christian and Harold Christian

⁷ "1911 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 11 July 2016), entry for William Christian, Province: British Columbia, District: Victoria, District number: 13, Sub-district: 7, Sub-district number: 7

⁸ "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 12 July 2016) entry for William Christian, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 1696-41 Item Number: 100350, Digitized service file: B1696-S041

⁹ "National Defence and the Canadian Forces," *National Defence* (<http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/ol-lo/vol-tom-3/par1/arm-bli/BCR-eng.asp>: accessed 14 November 2016,), entry for The British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught's Own), Volume 3, Part 1: Armour, Artillery and Field Engineer Regiments - Armour Regiments

¹⁰ "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 12 July 2016)

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 17 November 2014), entry for Arthur Edward Conley, Service No: 925809

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/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 17 June 2016)

²⁰ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 25 July 2016), entry for Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension

²¹ "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 12 July 2016)

[cef/Pages/search.aspx](#): accessed 12 July 2016) entry for William Christian, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 1696-41 Item Number: 100350, Digitized service file: B1696-S041

²² "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 12 July 2016) entry for Harold Christian, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 1696-9, Item Number: 100319, Digitized service file: B1696-S009

²³ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 11 July 2016), entry for Harold Christian, Province or territory: British Columbia, District: Victoria (City), District number: 24, Sub-district: Ward 2, Sub-District Number: 19, City, Town or Village: Victoria

²⁴ "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 11 July 2016), entry for William Christian, Province or territory: British Columbia, District: Comox, District number: 15, Sub-district: Cameron District, Sub-District Number: 34, City, Town or Village: Errington

²⁵ "RCL Vedder Crossing Branch No.280," *The Duke*, Volume 1, Issue 17, December 2011, (<http://www.bcregiment.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Duke-December-2011.pdf>: website accessed 12 November 2016)