

Private Robert Anderson[©]

Regimental Number: 736364

85th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Nova Scotia Regiment)

born: 12 April 1881 – died: 21 March 1918

Robert was born on 12 April 1881 in Belfast, Northern Ireland, to George and Mary Jane Anderson.¹ He was the first of several children born to George and Mary Jane, including:

- Hugh Herron, who was born about 1883², and who died in the USA in 1909;³
- David Herron, who was born on 2 June 1888 at Donaghadee, County Down. David emigrated after 1911 to Canada and enlisted with the CEF at Valcartier, Quebec, on 22 September 1914, when he was single and a plumber; he was assigned regimental number 6293. He fought with the 1st Canadian Infantry Battalion, and was having \$20 of his monthly salary paid to his mother in Northern Ireland. David was wounded and presumed dead at Ypres on 23 April 1915. He is remembered on Panel 10-26-28⁴ of the Menin Gate Memorial, in Ypres, Belgium, which bears the names of 55,000 men who were lost without trace during the defence of the Ypres Salient.⁵ He was also remembered with his father and several brothers on a gravestone at Donaghadee Church of Ireland Cemetery;⁶
- Eleanor, who was born about 1891.⁷ Robert named Eleanor as his sole beneficiary in his military will;
- William, who was born about 1894;⁸
- Annie, who was born about 1897;⁹
- Frank, who was born about 1899;¹⁰
- Two other children, George and Anna, were identified on George's gravestone as having died in infancy.

Robert immigrated to Canada, possibly prior to 1901, as he did not appear with the family in the 1901 Ireland Census. In December 1908, Robert, a carpenter, and his brother Hugh, a teamster, crossed the border traveling from Canada to Spokane, Washington.¹¹ Robert's service file shows he enlisted with the CEF at Lethbridge, Alberta, on 21 January 1916 at the age of 35. He was a lumberman and single. His medical documents diagnosed him with the "disease: flat feet." He assigned \$15 of his monthly pay to his mother in Northern Ireland. Robert arrived in England with the 113th Canadian Battalion aboard SS *Tuscania* on 6 September 1916. After additional training, he landed in France on 11 November 1917, where he joined the 85th Canadian Infantry Battalion¹² just after Passchendaele.

In early November 1917, when Robert joined the 85th Battalion, it was resting at a camp near Caestre. A large number of recruits brought the battalion back to normal strength after its having lost so many members at Passchendaele. There, in addition to training, the men enjoyed time for sports, concerts and movies. On 16 December 1917 the battalion commenced marching south, led by the battalion band. On a bitterly cold 23 December the battalion went to the front line in Avion, where there were no dugouts or shelters in the trenches. On Christmas, "dinner consisting of bully beef and hard tack was eaten on the frozen fire step of the front line to the accompaniment of Hun 'Pine Apples,' whiz bangs, five-point-nines and high explosives."¹³

On 29 December 1917 the battalion was relieved and marched to Niagara Camp on the grounds of Chateau de la Haie. There, they finally enjoyed their Christmas dinner, complete with turkey, vegetables, plum pudding, candy, fruit, nuts and cigarettes.¹⁴



Grave marker for Private Robert Anderson

Source: "Global, Find A Grave Index for Burials at Sea and other Select Burial Locations, 1300s-Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 13 November 2017), entry for Private Robert Anderson

On 12 March 1918, the battalion again broke camp and returned to the Vimy area. "There was a good deal of tension all along the line now. It was known that the long talked of big German drive for final victory was now near at hand. The numbers in the line were being increased and every section was put on a siege basis. The storm broke on Thursday March 21st, against the Imperial 5th Army in the Amiens Sector."¹⁵

Sadly, Robert was dangerously wounded on 20 March 1918 with shrapnel wounds on his left side, leg, back, and arm. He was taken to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station where he died the next day. Robert was buried at Houchin British Cemetery, Row G, Grave 22.¹⁶ Houchin Cemetery was opened in March 1918 when the 6th Casualty Clearing Station came to Houchin. From April to September the German advance made Houchin unsafe for hospitals, and the cemetery was used by the 55th (West Lancashire) Division. In September 1918, the 6th Casualty Clearing Station returned to Houchin and was joined by the 15th CCS in October.¹⁷

Robert's father George died at the age of 73 on 18 March 1916, shortly after Robert had enlisted. Robert and his brother David are memorialized on the cenotaph at Bangor, Northern Ireland, to those who died in service to their country during the Great War.

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¹ "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 24 February 2017) entry for Robert Anderson, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 165-3, Item number: 9308, Digitized service file - PDF format: B0165-S003

² "Ireland, Census, 1901," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 24 February 2017), entry for George Anderson, Townland/Street: Albert Street, District: Bangor, County: Down

³ "BillionGraves Index," *BillionGraves* (<https://billiongraves.com/grave/George-Anderson/17850530/#/>: accessed 24 February 2017), entry for George Anderson; grave marker includes Hugh

⁴ "Service Files of the First World War, 1914-1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* ([http://www.bac-lac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx](http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx): accessed 24 February 2017) entry for David Anderson, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 145-57, Item number: 8124, Digitized service file - PDF format: B0145-S057

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- ⁵ “Canadian Virtual War Memorial,” *Veterans Affairs Canada* (<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/921798>: accessed 24 February 2017), entry for David Anderson
- ⁶ “BillionGraves Index,” *BillionGraves* ([https://billiongraves.com/grave/George-Anderson/17850530#/:](https://billiongraves.com/grave/George-Anderson/17850530#/) accessed 24 February 2017), entry for George Anderson; gravestone includes David
- ⁷ “Ireland, Census, 1901,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 24 February 2017), entry for George Anderson, Townland/Street: Albert Street, District: Bangor, County: Down
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ “U.S., Border Crossings from Canada to U.S., 1825–1960,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 10 October 2016), entry for Hugh Anderson, Record Type: Manifests, Line Number: 4
- ¹² “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 24 February 2017) entry for Robert Anderson, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 165-3, Item number: 9308, Digitized service file - PDF format: B0165-S003
- ¹³ “The Eighty-Fifth in France and Flanders,” by Lt. Col. Joseph Hayes, 1920, *Archive.org* (<https://archive.org/details/eightyfifthinfra00hayeuoft>: accessed 24 February 2017), pp. 103–105
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, page 109
- ¹⁶ “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 24 February 2017), entry for Robert Anderson. Although the No. 1 CCCS chaplains’ journal indicates that he died on 20 March, other military records suggest that he, in fact, died on 21 March.
- ¹⁷ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, (www.cwgc.org: accessed 24 February 2017), entry for Robert Anderson