

Private George (aka Joseph) Chaplin®

Regimental number: 3031349

75th Battalion, Canadian Infantry

born: 21 January 1894–died: 1 October 1918

Private George Chaplin was conscripted into the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 21 December 1917.¹ He was a sailor with the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) Steamship Line, working out of Port McNicol, Ontario, on the Great Lakes. He probably worked on a route that travelled between Port McNicol and Port Arthur/Fort William (now Thunder Bay).² He was 5' 3½" tall and had a medium complexion, blue eyes, brown hair and good physical development.

George left Halifax to go to England on 23 January 1918 and arrived in Liverpool on 6 February and, from there, went to the Canadian military camp in East Sandling. He transferred to the 75th Battalion and went to the Front on 11 May 1918.

At the time, his battalion was in billets in Caucourt, 20 kilometres southwest of Bethune.³ They had moved to Caucourt on 9 May, when they had been relieved in the trenches. George joined his unit on 23 May—a day when two drafts of 20 and 32 soldiers arrived. The troops, which were involved mainly in training and sports activities, remained in Caucourt until 25 May, when they moved to Camblain Chatelain, 20 kilometres to the northwest. The training and sports activities continued. They did not leave until 10 July and, when they did:

The inhabitants of CAMBLAIN CHATELAIN were out in force to see us off, and seemed to be genuinely sorry to see us go, but we are all glad to get back to business again. It is realized that it is doubtful if we will ever have such a time again as we have had since 9th May.⁴

Indeed, George had had seven weeks, an unusually long time, to adjust to being in France before relieving the 10th Scottish Rifles in the trenches.

Unfortunately, George's time on the Front was very short. In September 1918, his battalion was again in the trenches.⁵ On 29 September, the 11th Infantry Brigade, of which George's battalion was part, was preparing to support an attack led by the 12th Brigade and exploit it, if it were successful. Unfortunately, the 12th Brigade had very stiff opposition and was unable to take the objective. So, late at night it was decided that the 11th Brigade would attack at dawn the next day. The 75th Battalion would lead the attack, with the 54th in support.

Guns had moved up during the night and the barrage was heavy. The troops moved forward with the barrage, but the enemy machine gun fire was intensive and caused many casualties. As a result of heavy losses in both British battalions and the fact that the enemy was assembling for a counter-attack, the battalions fell back a bit and adopted a defensive position. The battalions maintained their positions and the troops learned from prisoners that their attack had just preceded a large-scale enemy attack. This explained the strong enemy response to the British attack.

Considering the already weakened position of the two Battalions, the fact that they advanced against a picked enemy force, greatly superior in numbers to our own, and held practically all the ground game, was indeed a remarkable achievement.⁶

The battalions' attack had denied the enemy access to one of its strong defensive positions. But it came at a price for George and his battalion. Eight officers were killed and 16 wounded; 85 Other Ranks were killed and 280 wounded. This was such a blow to the 75th Battalion that the remains of the unit were combined with the 54th Battalion. It was a difficult period for the battalion, as noted in the battalion's war diary:

The month of September has been by far the most eventful month in the history of the Battalion and in fact of the whole war. Although our losses have been heavy in the two attacks, we have inflicted severe casualties on the enemy, broken through his best defended lines and reclaimed many square miles of territory. Many prisoners, machine guns and material has [*sic*] been captured in the two operations, particularly the operation of September 2nd. We mourn the loss of many good officers and men and while our sacrifices have been great, they have not been in vain. The battalion, and in fact the whole Brigade, had upheld the splendid reputation which it attained in our first experience in open warfare in August. . . Many glorious deeds could be recorded, and it is felt by all ranks that the Battalion has done its full share towards being about the present wavering and retreat of the defeated Hun armies.⁷

George had done his bit but, on 30 September 1918, he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with shrapnel wounds to his neck, right buttocks and left hand. He died there on 1 October and was buried the following day in Duisans British Military Cemetery (Plot 8, Row A, Grave 41) with the Canadian chaplain A. D. Reid presiding.⁸

But who was George Chaplin? According to his CEF service file, he born on 21 January 1894, the son of Caroline Chaplin of 20 East Street in Ipswich, Suffolk. Caroline (nee Mason) had married Charles Chaplin in 1881 in Ipswich⁹ and they had nine children:¹⁰

- Charles Edward William (born on 13 March 1882),¹¹
- Lucy Ann (born in 1883 but died at the age of 1),¹²
- Eliza Susanna (born on 15 December 1884),¹³
- Elizabeth (born in 1886, but died soon after birth),¹⁴
- James Henry (born in 1887),¹⁵
- William (born in 1889),¹⁶
- George Harry (born in 1893, but died the following year),¹⁷
- Joseph (born in 1895)¹⁸ and
- Thomas (born in 1900).¹⁹

Their only son George died when he was less than a year old. So, who was the George who served with the CEF? One possible explanation is that George and Joseph were the same person.²⁰ The two birthdates do not match, but other facts do. In 1911, Joseph, at 16, was a cook on board *Sunbeam*, a trading schooner that was moored at Deptford on 30 March 1911. Before entering the CEF, George was a sailor on a CPR steamship. It is not known when Joseph/George went to Canada, but there is also no evidence of Joseph in England after 1911.

The assumption has thus been made that this was George's family. In 1901, Charles and Caroline Chaplin lived at 20 Long Street in Ipswich, where Charles was a plough painter.²¹ Sometime after the census was taken in 1901, Charles died—by 1911, Caroline, a widow, had moved to 20 East Street with two of her children.²²

George/Joseph was the second son that Caroline had lost in the Great War. His older brother William enlisted in the British Expeditionary Force in the autumn of 1915.²³ He died less than a year later. He first served with the Royal Field Artillery (regimental number 1592), but later transferred to the 4th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment (regimental number 201213).²⁴ In August 1916, his battalion moved to the front line northeast of Amiens, France, to work on improving trenches. On the afternoon of the 18th, the British attacked the German trenches opposite the battalion position and, for a while, the British occupied the enemy trench. However, they had to retreat when reinforcements did not arrive. At the end of the day, in addition to the officers killed and wounded, 29 Other Ranks had been killed and 102 wounded; 50 were missing.²⁵ William was one of the missing and presumed dead.²⁶ He is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial (Pier and Face 1 C and 2 A) in the Somme.²⁷

There is no evidence of whether Caroline's other sons served in the Great War and limited information on the other children. Charles married Ada Evans in 1903 and died in Ipswich in 1977. Eliza married George Isaac Fulcher in 1909²⁸ and 30 years later was living at 19 Cromer Road in Ipswich, with her husband, who was a dental mechanic.²⁹ Eliza died on 22 Dec 1977.³⁰

In 1939, Caroline was living with her daughter Eliza and her husband.³¹ Caroline probably died two years later in Ipswich.³²

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¹ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 5 February 2020), entry for Chaplin, George, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 1621 - 6, Item number: 95636, Digitized service file - PDF format: B1621-S006. Unless otherwise noted, all information about George's military service comes from this source.

² *The Ship's List* (<https://www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/cp.shtml>: accessed 10 February 2020)

³ "War diaries 75th Canadian Infantry Battalion," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://lac-bac.gc.ca/>: accessed 10 February 2020), Dates: 1916/08/11-1918/08/31, File: RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4943, File number: 452. Copied container number: T-10750<->T-10751

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "War diaries 75th Canadian Infantry Battalion," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://lac-bac.gc.ca/>: accessed 10 February 2020), Dates: 1918/09/01-1919/04/30, File: RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4943, File number: 452, Copied container number: T-10751

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 1 January 2020), entry for Chaplin, G

⁹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 February 2020), entry for Charles Chaplin, Registration district: Ipswich, Inferred county: Suffolk, Volume: 4a, Page: 377

¹⁰ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 February 2020), entry for Caroline Chaplin, Registration district: Ipswich, Registration district number: 213, Sub-registration district: Ipswich Eastern, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 25, Piece: 10850

¹¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 February 2020), entry for Charles Edward W. Chaplin, Registration district: Ipswich, Inferred county: Suffolk, Volume: 4a, Page: 2679

¹² "GRO online index-birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 10 February 2020), entry for Chaplin, Lucy Ann, Registration district: Ipswich, Volume 04A, Page 757; "England

& Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 21 January 2020), entry for Lucy Annie [sic] Chaplin, Registration district: Ipswich, Inferred county: Suffolk, Volume: 4a, Page: 468

¹³ “1939 England and Wales Register,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 February 2020), entry for Eliza S. Fulcher, Schedule number: 56, Sub-schedule Number: 2, Enumeration district: TVA0, Registration district: 213-1

¹⁴ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 10 February 2020), entry for Chaplin, Elizabeth, Registration district: Ipswich, Volume 04A, Page 798; “GRO online index–death,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 10 February 2020) entry for Chaplin, Elizabeth, Volume 04A, Page 455

¹⁵ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 10 February 2020), entry for Chaplin, James Henry, Registration district: Ipswich, Volume 04A, Page 801

¹⁶ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 10 February 2020), entry for Chaplin, William, Registration district: Ipswich, Volume 04A, Page 802

¹⁷ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 10 February 2020), entry for Chaplin, George Harry, Registration district: Ipswich, Volume 04A, Page 831; “GRO online index–death,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 5 February 2020), entry for Chaplin, George Harry, Volume 01A, Page 435

¹⁸ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 10 February 2020), entry for Chaplin, Joseph, Registration district: Ipswich, Volume 04A, Page 943

¹⁹ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 10 February 2020), entry for Chaplin, Thomas, Registration district: Ipswich, Volume 04A, Page 1023

²⁰ This is the assumption made in the presentation of biographical information for George/Joseph on the website of the Ipswich War Memorial (<https://www.ipswichwarmemorial.co.uk/>: accessed 10 February 2020), entry for Joseph Chaplin.

²¹ “1901 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 February 2020), entry for Caroline Chaplin, Registration district: Ipswich, Sub-registration district: Ipswich Eastern, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 11, Piece: 1778, Folio: 105, Page: 14, Household schedule number: 85

²² “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry*, entry for Caroline Chaplin

²³ Based on “War Gratuity Calculator” (<https://wargratiuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 May 2017); “UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 February 2020), entry for William Chaplin

²⁴ “UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 February 2020), entry for William Chaplin

²⁵ “UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 13 February 2020), Regiment or unit: Suffolk Regiment, Sub-unit: 4th Battalion, Division: 33rd Division, Diary dates: 1915 Nov–1918 Jan, Piece description: Piece 2427/2: 4 Battalion Suffolk Regiment (1915 Nov–1918 Jan), Piece number: 2427

²⁶ “UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929,” entry for William Chaplin

²⁷ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 3 December 2020), entry for Chaplin, William, Service No: 201213

²⁸ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 10 February 2020), entry for Eliza Susannah [sic] Chaplin, Registration district: Bosmere, Inferred county: Suffolk, Volume: 4a, Page: 1715

²⁹ “1939 England and Wales Register,” *Ancestry*, entry for Eliza S. Fulcher

³⁰ “England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 February 2020), entry for Eliza Susanah [sic] Fulcher

³¹ “1939 England and Wales Register,” *Ancestry*, entry for Eliza S. Fulcher

³² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 21 January 2020), entry for Caroline Chaplin, Registration district: Ipswich, Inferred county: Suffolk, Volume: 4a, Page: 2679