

WW I Enlisted Men & Women of Whitewater Region

Pte. John Alexander Robertson

Pte. John Alexander Robertson, son of **John Robertson** and **Elizabeth Wood**, was born on 4 Nov 1886 in Glasgow, Lanark, Scotland. He had at least two siblings in Canada. Elizabeth, Mrs. Clifton Henry O'Brien of Westmeath Twp., and Margaret, Mrs. Hugh Shields of Westmeath Twp¹. I have not found the family unit in the Ontario census. John listed his occupation as labourer when he enlisted².

Pte. Robertson enlisted on Jun 11, 1915, in his 29th year, at Niagara Falls, Ontario. He served with the 37th Bn (Manitoba Regiment), CEF. In August of 1917 he was admitted to hospital in London with a gunshot wound to his face and gas poisoning after which he returned to duty. He was posted to the 87th Canadian Battalion when killed in action on died 2 Sep 1918, during the 2nd Battle of Arras in France². "When near the 'jumping off' trench during an attack on enemy positions Southwest of Dury, he was wounded by shrapnel and evacuated to the Field Ambulance where he succumbed to multiple wounds."³ In the first four days of September, Canadian casualties amounted to 5,600 men⁴. In another 2 months he would have reached the age of 32. Pte. John Alexander Robertson was buried in Arras, Pas de Calais, France, at Faubourg d'Amiens Military Cemetery^{5,6}.

It is not often that we are able to read of a soldier's war life from their own words. Pte. Robertson's sister Margaret received a letter which she placed in The Renfrew Mercury.

Pic 1⁷: Letter from Pte. Robertson to his sister Margaret.

PTE. ROBERTSON WRITES

Mrs. H. M. Shields, Cobden R. No. 3, has received the following letter from her brother, Private Robertson:

Pte. J. A. Robertson, 48871, 2nd C.C. D., Bramshott Camp, F Coy, Hut C 14, Hants, Eng. January 6th,

My Dear Sister. -- I just received your letter of December 9th night, January 5th, and I was dead glad to hear from you as I haven't heard from Canada a long time. Well I am all O.K., I have a bad cold from sleeping the cold.

The weather is very damp in England at present. Today is a special day of prayer in the camp peace, and everywhere else I understand. We all paraded to the Bramshott Garrison theatre this morning to church service, and it sure was fine. This afternoon at 3 p.m. there is to be a lecture on the war, which I guess I'll take in. Well you had a good time in dear old Glasgow, and I didn't like leaving, I then I had to. That sure is the place to go on leave. I just wished I could have been there. I was over; and I was really at the house where mother died. Just at the end of Cowcaddens street is the Canadian railway station, you'll remember that, for it is quite close to our old home. There is a big change in Glasgow now. You got the car I sent from there, did you? I would scarcely know the place now. Cowcaddens street seems to be the same, only the store that Mr. Sutcliffe used to keep has changed hands. It was nice to hear the Scotch language again. The people there are nice too, and they think a great deal of the Canadians. There are not so many go there, but I would rather spend my leave there than in London. I sent Hugh a photo I had taken while I was there. I hope he got it all right. It is a nice place and there is quite a bit of excitement there. Well I had a lot too and you bet I put it in for I send us reinforcements in the battle line, and we want men to fill up the gaps that have been made.

I was only in Uxbridge ten days and I got all of your letters before I left London. I got thirteen letters from Canada, so don't worry, they did not get to the bottom of the ocean as I thought. They had been held at the record office in London. We hear all about the conscripts, so let them come. They have a right to fight for their country as we, who voluntarily came to face the enemy who had forty years to prepare for this awful conflict, but she has a hard nut to crack yet, for the Allies will never stop fighting until she gets down on her knees. Well it is a war all right that we won't forget for a while. I am not sorry that I joined up March 1st, 1915. Almost three years in uniform and I am proud to say that I have done my bit if I never go across the channel again. Fifteen months under shell fire and bullets and everything imaginable to kill a man I've seen, but I have been lucky and I thank God that He has kept me safe through it all. In that battle of Ypres June 2nd, 1916, we got an awful cutting up. Death was staring us in the face all the time. We went into action eleven hundred strong and came out with about two hundred and fifty men, so you can see that there was some stuff flying in the air. I shouldn't tell you this, but I guess it will get through. I will close for now, hoping that 1918, will bring a lasting peace. With love to all,

From your brother,
JACK.

WW I Enlisted Men & Women of Whitewater Region



PTE. JOHN A. ROBERTSON
Died of Wounds.

On Wednesday, September 18th, Mrs. H. M. Shields of R.R. No. 3, Coblen, received a telegram from her sister at Sault St. Marie, that her brother, J. A. Robertson, No. 49871, had died of wounds. A few days later she had a letter from the same person stating that she had had official notice that he had died of multiple gunshot wounds, on September 2nd, in the third Field Ambulance Depot. On Friday, September 27th, Mrs. Shields received a letter from her brother written the afternoon of August 31st. He had just got back out of the firing line that morning, after marching all night through a drenching rain, but had great comfort when he got in to find a box waiting for him from her. He said he had come through the "big push" so far safely and was glad to be able to write to her again. This "most likely was his last message home, as a few days later he was reported to have died of wounds. Jack obeyed his country's call to arms by enlisting at Sault Ste. Marie in the 37th Battalion in March, 1915, training for a while at the Sault and from there going to Niagara-on-the-Lake, and in November, 1915, sailed for England. In England he trained as a Lewis gunner, and in April, 1916, sailed for France, having been transferred to the 87th Battalion as a Lewis gunner. He came through practically all the heavy fighting from June 1st, 1916, up to last of July, 1917, when he was slightly gassed, and received shrapnel wounds, at Lens. After spending a few days in an hospital in France he was transferred to an hospital in London, England, here he remained for a few months, and from there again to the training camp to toughen up for, as he said, another crack at the Huns. He sailed again for France in April, 1918, and was again in the thick of it, until the end came on September 3rd ult. He was 33 years of age, and had spent the greater part of the last three years of his life fighting for his king and country that we might be free. He leaves two sisters to mourn his loss—Mrs. H. M. Shields of Snake River and Mrs. C. O'Brien of Sault Ste. Marie. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

In Memory Of
Private

JOHN ALEXANDER ROBERTSON

Service Number: 408871

87th Bn., Canadian Infantry who died on 02 September 1918 Age 29

Son of John and Elizabeth Robertson, of Glasgow.

AT REST

Remembered with Honour

FAUBOURG D'AMIENS CEMETERY, ARRAS

V. F. 32.



|||||
COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES
|||||

COMMEMORATED IN PERPETUITY BY THE COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

Pic 36: Commonwealth War Graves Certificate

Pic 28: Obituary of Pte. Robertson

WW I Enlisted Men & Women of Whitewater Region



Pic 4⁹: First World War Book of Remembrance for Pte. John Alexander Robertson

WW I Enlisted Men & Women of Whitewater Region

Sources:

1. Bennett, Fay E., Faysgenealogy.com. www.faysgenealogy.com : family history database & images; 2001-present. Cobden, ON. (Original sources noted in database)
2. "Personnel Records of the First World War." Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Digital images. Library and Archives Canada. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/search.aspx>.
<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=614501>
3. "Circumstances of Death Registers, First World War." Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Digital images. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?op=img&app=microform&id=31829_B016704-00898
4. Library and Archives Canada. Canada and the First World War, "The 2nd Battle of Arras" <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/canada-first-world-war/Pages/arras.aspx> Jan 16, 2019.
5. The Canadian Virtual War Memorial: Veterans Affairs Canada. "The Canadian Virtual War Memorial (CVWM)." Database. Veterans Affairs Canada. www.veterans.gc.ca/eng.
<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/574851?John%20Alexander%20Robertson>
6. Commonwealth War Graves Commission. "Commonwealth War Graves Commission." Database. www.cwgc.org <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/574851/JOHN%20ALEXANDER%20ROBERTSON/>
7. The Renfrew Mercury, "Private Robertson Writes" Feb 1, 1918 p. 1, digital images, Paper of Record (<http://www.paperofrecord.com/Default.asp>) Subscription (note no longer available on site)
8. The Renfrew Mercury, "Pte. John A. Robertson Died of Wounds" Oct 4, 1918 p. 1, digital images, Paper of Record (<http://www.paperofrecord.com/Default.asp>) Subscription (note no longer available on site)
9. Books of Remembrance, Veterans Affairs Canada; digital image.
<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/books/page?page=492&book=1&sort=pageAsc>