

Lance Corporal James Smyth

Regimental number: 9606

"C" Company, 2nd Battalion, Leinster Regiment

born: about 1894 - died: 30 April 1916

Lance Corporal James Smyth was born in Delvin, County Westmeath in Ireland,¹ probably in 1894.² He enlisted in the Leinster Regiment at Mosney Camp, in Drogheda, County Louth.³ The Prince of Wales' Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians) was formed on 1 July 1881.⁴ It perpetuated the historical links to the 100th (Prince of Wales' Royal Canadian) Regiment of Foot, which was based on an infantry regiment based in Canada in 1858 but integrated into the British Army. It merged with the 109th (Bombay Infantry) Regiment of Foot to form the Leinster Regiment in 1881.

The 2nd Battalion of the Regiment was at Cork at the beginning of the war. It moved to England in August 1914 and then to France in September 1914 landing at St Nazaire.⁵ James joined the Battalion in France on 19 December 1914.⁶ "Enemy released gas on our front. The first warning was heard from the [Battalion] on our right and a few minutes later the Bridge on our left. This was followed immediately by a report of gas from our left coming in C.2. ... The gas lasted from 15 to 20 minutes in various places. This was followed by a heavy barrage of shells of all calibre (and including gas-shells) on all routes of communication to the front line. ... British aircraft extremely active preventing enemy aeroplanes from reconnoitring extent of gas effects, bombardment, and evacuation of wounded and "gassed" cases. ... The casualties of the [Battalion] during the tour 24th – 30th April were Officers: wounded 4, gassed 1: Other ranks killed 6, wounded 47,⁷ gassed 19."⁸

Perhaps James was one of the Other Ranks wounded in these gas attacks because he died of gas poisoning on 30 April 1916 at the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station.⁹

John was a Roman Catholic.¹⁰ He was buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Plot II, Row D, Grave 112).¹¹ Bailleul is in France, close to the Belgian border. It was occupied on 14 October 1914 and became an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre. Several Casualty Clearing Stations, including the 1st Canadian, were quartered there for considerable periods. The earliest Commonwealth burials at Bailleul were made in April 1915. An extension was built and burials continued until April 1918, and occurred again in September and after the Armistice, when graves were brought in from the neighbouring battlefields.

No papers were found on his body, but his next-of-kin was his mother, Mrs Smyth in Devlin, County Westmeath.¹² He was probably the son of Thomas and Ann Smyth. Thomas, a general labourer, was probably born in about 1852 and Ann, a laundress, in about 1861.¹³ They probably had six children: Christopher (born in about 1881),¹⁴ Patrick (born in about 1888),¹⁵ Elizabeth (born in about 1889), Thomas (born in about 1891), James and Anne (born in about 1896).

James was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914-15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).¹⁶

It is likely that James' older brother, Patrick, also died in the Great War.¹⁷ He was probably a Private also in the 2nd Battalion of the Leinster Regiment (Regimental number: 3954) and died less than a year before James. He died on 13 July 1915 and is buried in Potijze Burial Ground Cemetery (Bl. 14), near Ypres in Belgium.¹⁸

-
- ¹ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 3 September 2015), entry for James Smyth
- ² "Ireland Census 1901," *The National Archives of Ireland* (<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Westmeath/Delvin/Delvin/1778284/>; accessed 3 September 2015), entry for James Smyth
- ³ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919," entry for James Smyth
- ⁴ "The Prince of Wales' Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians): A Short History," (<http://www.leinster-regiment-association.org.uk/history/theleinsterregiment-shorthistory.pdf>; accessed 12 September 2015)
- ⁵ "2nd Battalion, Leinster Regiment," *The Wartime Memories Project* (<http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/alliedarmy-view.php?pid=6553>; accessed 1 October 2015)
- ⁶ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 3 September 2015), entry for James Smyth
- ⁷ This figure of 47 was difficult to read, so may not be correct.
- ⁸ "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 12 September 2015), Regiment or Unit: Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians), Sub Unit: 2nd Battalion, Division: 24th Division, Diary Dates: 1915 Nov - 1918 Jan, Piece Description: Piece 2218/1: 2 Battalion Leinster Regiment (1915 Nov - 1918 Jan), Piece Number: 2218
- ⁹ "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 77
- ¹⁰ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 77
- ¹¹ "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," (www.cwgc.org; accessed 3 December 2015), entry for Smyth, J., Service No: 9606
- ¹² "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 77
- ¹³ These are their ages based on the 1901 census return. ("Ireland Census 1901," entry for James Smyth) In the 1911 census, they are shown as being considerably older but, apparently, there was tendency for people to exaggerate their ages on the 1911 census to make them eligible for state pensions. The *Old Age Pension Act* was passed in 1908, giving pensions to those over 70 years of age. Irish Pension Records – Census Search Forms (<http://www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com/irish-pension-records.html>; accessed 7 October 2015)
- ¹⁴ "Ireland Census 1911," *The National Archives of Ireland* (<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Westmeath/Delvin/Delvin/881090/>; 3 September 2015), entry for James Smyth
- ¹⁵ "Ireland Census 1901," entry for James Smyth
- ¹⁶ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," entry for James Smyth
- ¹⁷ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 7 October 2015), entry for Patrick Smyth; "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 7 October 2015), entry for Patrick Smyth
- ¹⁸ "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," (www.cwgc.org; accessed 7 October 2015), entry for Smyth, P., Service No: 3954