

April 27, 1917: Private Roderick Joseph MacDonald



Date of Birth: May 17, 1890 at Havre Boucher, Antigonish County

Parents: Roderick and Flora (MacDonald) MacDonald

Siblings: Sisters Mary & Catherine; brothers John, Duncan & Allan

Marital Status: Single

Occupation: Barber & bridge worker

Enlistment: September 24, 1914 at Camp Valcartier, QC

Unit: No. 1 Field Ambulance, Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC)

Service #: 32848

Rank: Private

Previous Military Service: None

Next of Kin: Roderick A. MacDonald , Havre Boucher Antigonish, County, NS (father)

Date of Death: April 27, 1917 at Vancouver General Hospital, Vancouver, BC

Final Resting Place: Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver, BC

Roderick Joseph MacDonald was born at Havre Boucher, the son of Roderick, a self-employed carpenter, and Flora MacDonald. At some point prior to the war, the family moved to Lourdes, Pictou Co., where young Roderick worked in his Uncle Charles' barbershop.

At the time of Great Britain's August 4, 1914 declaration of war on Germany, Roderick Joseph was working as a barber in Saint John, NB. Ten days later, he volunteered for service with the Canadian Army Medical Corps and travelled to Camp Valcartier, QC, where he completed his attestation papers on September 24. Roderick was assigned to No. 1 Canadian Field Ambulance (CFA), under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. Ross.

No. 1 CFA departed Quebec on September 30 aboard the Megantic, with a complement of 16 officers and 257 "other ranks." Two weeks later, the vessel arrived in England, where its personnel spent the winter of 1914-15. No. 1 CFA crossed the English Channel to St. Nazaire, France on February 4, 1915 as one of three field ambulance units assigned to the 1st Canadian Division.

The role of a field ambulance was to gather casualties from each battalion's Regimental Aid Post (RAP) and, as far as practicable, provide immediate medical treatment in the forward area. The unit operated between RAPs and larger "casualty clearing stations," processing the wounded according to the severity of their injuries. Soldiers with only minor injuries or illnesses recovered at a rest station and returned to their units, while more serious cases proceeded to a casualty clearing station for further medical care and possible evacuation to hospital.

In late February 1915, No. 1 Canadian Field Ambulance established operations at Sailly-sur-la-Lys, near Armentières, France. The location was approximately 30 kilometres from Ypres, Belgium, where the 1st Canadian Division first entered the line. The unit remained in the area adjacent to the Belgian border throughout the year, briefly relocating to Romarin in mid-July before "taking over the rest station work from No. 2 Field Ambulance" at Bailleul on October 9.

The facility serviced all Canadian units in Belgium and contained approximately 200 beds for patients recovering from illness or injury.

Roderick worked at the Bailleul facility until December 21, at which time he was admitted to a casualty clearing station and transported to No. 11 General Hospital for treatment of acute nephritis (kidney inflammation). Roderick had been sleeping outside on the grass throughout the summer and began to notice swelling in his legs. As time passed, his symptoms worsened—at the time of his admission, medical records reported pain in his back, swelling of the eyes, legs and feet.

On January 9, 1916, Roderick was invalided to England and admitted to Shorncliffe Military Hospital. Staff notes indicate that Roderick exhibited tiredness and shortness of breath following exertion. Transferred to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital, Monk's Head, Horton on March 6, Roderick was discharged two weeks later, only to be re-admitted to Cleve Hill Voluntary Aid Hospital, Bristol with pneumonia before month's end. A subsequent Medical Board determined that he was no longer "fit for duty" and Roderick was invalided to Canada in mid-June 1916.

After landing at Halifax on June 21, Roderick travelled by train to British Columbia for treatment of a suspected respiratory ailment. Following admission to Esquimalt Military Hospital, Victoria, he was transferred to Tranquille Sanitorium, as a Medical Board concluded: "He has beginning pulmonary tuberculosis."

Discharged to Rest Haven Convalescent Hospital, Sidney, BC, on January 4, 1917, Roderick's condition worsened several months later. He was transferred to Vancouver General Hospital, where he passed away on April 27, 1917. Roderick received a military funeral, his pallbearers consisting of returned soldiers. His remains were placed on a 68th Battery gun carriage, which carried Roderick to his final resting place in Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver, BC.