

September 29, 1918: Private Archibald  
Nicholas DeCoste



**Date of Birth:** January 1, 1895 at Cape Jack, Antigonish County, NS

**Parents:** David & Jessie (Roi/King) DeCoste

**Siblings:** Brothers: Nicholas (died young), Pierre Clement, John Freeman, David William, Elias (died at age 14), Joseph Clifford, Vincent Christopher, Eugene Leo, Lawrence (died at age five); sisters Marguerite, Mary Jane, Catherine Philomene, Charlotte Mabel & Agnes Amelia

**Marital Status:** Single

**Occupation:** Farmer/ Blacksmith

**Enlistments:** March 31, 1915 at Truro, NS (40th Battalion); October 18, 1915 at Halifax, NS (85th Battalion)

**Units:** 40th Battalion (Halifax Rifles); 85th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders); 13th Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada)

**Service #:** A14388 & 222727

**Rank:** Private

**Previous Military Service:** None

**Next of Kin:** Jessie DeCoste, Cape Jack, Antigonish County, NS (mother)

**Date of Death:** September 29, 1918 near Cambrai, France

**Final Resting Place:** Quéant Communal Cemetery Extension, France

\*Date of birth obtained from the 1901 Canadian census. The date on Archie's attestation paper is January 1, 1894.

Archie Nicholas DeCoste was born at Cape Jack, Antigonish County, near or along what is called the DeCoste Road, above the Cape Jack Wharf Road. Archie was the son of David DeCoste, Cape Jack, and Jessie Roi/King, Rear Havre Boucher, now known as Frankville. David farmed at Cape Jack with his father, Elias, and his uncles, Michael and Alexander. The trio also worked as fishermen. The last family member known to have lived at Cape Jack was Archie's young brother, Christopher "Chris." Archie was listed as "Nicholas" in the 1901 census, the second child in the family to bear that name, as the first died in childhood.

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Archie was a descendant of Claude Coste and his wife, Marguerite Vigneau, pioneer settlers of Havre Boucher who were originally from Port Toulouse (St. Peter's) and were living at Arichat

in 1771. The couple moved to Havre Boucher in the late 1780's, and Claude was one of the settlers who paid a poll tax there in 1794. Archie's grandfather, Elias, and his great-uncles, Michael and Alexander, were sons of Simon (De)Coste, grandsons of Jean (De)Coste Sr., and great-grandsons of Claude Coste.

David DeCoste's farm was located near George Kavanagh's and Colin Chisholm's properties on the main Cape Jack Road, and was adjacent to the land of Lucien DeCoste, a great-grandson of Jean Coste (Jr.), who was a brother to Simon. Lucien's son, Raymond DeCoste, was killed in action on March 22, 1917, near Vimy Ridge. David William DeCoste—Archie's brother—and Raymond had enlisted together with the 106 Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) at Truro.

Archie Nicholas' and David William's mother was Jessie Roi (King), daughter of Peter Roi (King) and Charlotte Perrault (Pero). Peter was the son of Isaac Roi (King), another early Havre Boucher settler. [The Acadian spelling of names around this time began changing to more anglicized spellings.] The DeCoste family experienced tragedy even before its combat losses, with the deaths of Elias and Lawrence, for unknown reasons, on January 26, 1915.

Archie began training with the 40th Battalion (Halifax Rifles) on March 6, 1915, and attested with the unit at Truro on April 26. At the time, he stood five feet six and a half inches, weighed 127 pounds, and listed his occupation as "farmer." While he passed his initial medical examination on March 31, for unspecified reasons, Archie was discharged from the 40th's ranks on June 22, 1915.

Determined to serve overseas, Archie enlisted with the 85th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders) at Halifax on October 18, 1915. His attestation documents listed four months' service with the "40th Regiment." Archie trained with the 85th in Nova Scotia for almost one year and departed from Halifax aboard SS *Olympic* on October 12, 1916.

On December 4, 1916, Archie was transferred to the 13th Battalion and proceeded to the Canadian Base Depot, Le Havre, France the following day. He joined his new unit in the forward area on December 15. The 13th Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada) was a Highland outfit recruited by a Montreal militia unit affiliated with Scotland's "Black Watch." Assigned to the 1st Canadian Division's 3rd Brigade, the 13th's men wore kilts during combat in all seasons.

At the time of Archie's arrival, the 13th was serving a regular rotation in sectors near Souchez, east of the city of Lens, France. The weather was dull and rainy, its war diary reporting that the unit was finally "up to strength," having received a draft of reinforcements that enabled the "men to work in reliefs," draining wet trenches.

On March 7, 1917, Archie received a "GSW" (gunshot wound) to his left ankle and was admitted to No. 16 General Hospital, Le Tréport, France. He was subsequently invalided to England on March 16 and spent time recovering from his wounds in a number of hospitals. Posted to the 20th Reserve Battalion (Quebec) at Shoreham on April 7, 1917, Archie relocated to Bramshott, England, with the unit on October 17. Following a lengthy stay in England, Archie returned to

the 13th Battalion's ranks on March 29, 1918 and rejoined the unit at Duisans, near Arras, France, on April 3.

During the months of March and April 1918, Canadian Corps units occupied sectors near Lens as the Germany Army mounted its "Spring Offensive" in sectors to the south, specifically the junction between the British 5th Army and French forces. Within days, the British 5th Army appeared to be in full retreat, as the Germans attempted to end the war before Americans troops arrived on the Western Front in large numbers.

On April 9, German units also attacked sectors north of the Canadians, hoping to capture the strategic Channel ports along the French coast. The Germans also launched three offensives against the French Army, expending some of their best soldiers and exhausting those who survived. While British forces bent, they did not break. By mid-April, they managed to halt German progress east of Amiens, although the strategic city was now within range of German artillery.

In late July, British Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig moved the Canadian Corps—well-rested and at full strength—from sectors near Vimy and Arras southward to Amiens, in preparation for a counterattack that marked the beginning of Canada's "One Hundred Days." Private Archie DeCoste took part in the campaign's early stages, which commenced on August 8 with a surprise attack that pushed German forces back a distance of eight miles in one day. A second "push" occurred during the Second Battle of Arras, from August 26 to September 5, bringing Canadian units to the incomplete Canal du Nord, on the outskirts of the city of Cambrai.

The Canadians would have to pass through what was in reality a huge, dry ditch about 2,600 yards in length and about 40 to 60 yards wide, with a well-defended German trench located on its eastern banks. Two Canadian Corps Divisions—the 1st on the left and the 4th on the right—would attack, with only two battalions from each Division leading the advance. It was a bold and risky strategy. Once across the canal, Canadian units would "fan out." The British 11th Division to the Canadians' left faced marshes and a "wet" canal. Meanwhile, Archie's 13th Battalion was stationed to the southwest of the Paviland Wood, north of Inchy-en-Artois, and was to be the first battalion to cross, after the initial push.

In the early morning hours of September 27, the 13th crossed the canal behind the 14th Battalion, one of its Brigade mates. The 13th's war diary described the unit's soldiers making their way across a small stream at the bottom of the canal: "It was a sight to remember to see the men's kilts floating around them while Piper G. B. MacPherson waved them across with the tune of BLUE BONNETS OVER THE BORDER."

As the battalion climbed the bank on the eastern side, its personnel were forced to pause, as the 14th Battalion ahead of them came under fierce machine gun fire. The 13th sustained considerable casualties during the wait, but soon pushed on toward its final objective near Sains-lès-Marquion. Its war diary later reported one Officer killed, one who died of wounds, and 12 wounded, while 29 "other ranks" (OR) were killed, 4 died of wounds, 169 were wounded, and eight were missing by day's end.

There is no record of casualties on the 28th, a cold, wet day during which rear units moved forward and the men enjoyed a well-deserved rest. The following morning—September 29, 1918—was cold and frosty—almost wintry—as personnel found a local water source, shaved and cleaned up after their recent engagement. German artillery shelled the area intermittently during the afternoon, wounding one OR.

The wounded soldier was Private Archie Nicholas DeCoste. His “circumstances of casualty” card states: “He was severely wounded in [the] abdomen by shrapnel while in the trenches at Sains-lès-Marquion. He received attention at the Regimental Aid Post and was evacuated to the No. 12 Canadian Field Ambulance, where he succumbed to his wounds.”

Archie’s brother, David, was transferred to the 87th Battalion (Canadian Grenadier Guards) following the 106th Battalion’s dissolution. He suffered a gunshot wound to his right hand at Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917 and was invalided to England. While David underwent surgery to remove shrapnel from his hand on April 19 and the wound eventually healed, his hand was in poor shape. David spent considerable time in English hospitals before returning to Canada on February 11, 1919. He underwent an examination at Camp Hill Hospital, Halifax on March 19 and was discharged at Halifax on May 9, 1919. David subsequently married and his descendants currently reside in Nova Scotia.