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# Brothers in Arms: Americans in the Canadian Expeditionary Force

Michael L. Strauss, AG

*CEF recruiting offices couldn't legally recruit Americans within the United States, but American Legion recruiting posters were plentiful along the border. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canada.*

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A professional genealogist and forensic investigator, **Michael L. Strauss, AG**, has a BA in history and is a US Coast Guard veteran. He is a qualified expert witness in courts in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia where he testifies on kinship and estate matters. Involved in Civil War reenacting for over twenty-five years, he belongs to the 99th New York Volunteer Infantry; Battery A, 5th US Artillery; and the Utah Living History Association.

On 4 August 1914, England declared war on Germany, entering World War I. The following day, across the Atlantic, Canada declared war on Germany. Nearly three years passed before the United States entered this conflict. Meanwhile, fifty-three thousand men with some connection to the United States enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). Some recruits were motivated to join the CEF due to the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania* on 7 May 1915; others were soldiers of fortune or driven by patriotism. The enlistees included both Canadians and Americans living in the United States and American-born residents living in Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of mobilizing the country's militia, the Canadian government raised an independent Canadian Expeditionary Force. Sir Sam Hughes, the Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence, authorized the creation of a battalion comprised partly of American citizens residing in Canada and the United States. This new unit, designated the 97th Battalion and headquartered in Toronto, was organized on 22 December 1915. The following February four more battalions—211th, 212th, 213th, and 237th—were formed respectively in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, and

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Websites cited in this article were viewed on 15 January 2018.

1. Chris Dickon, *Americans at War in Foreign Forces: A History, 1914–1945* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), 49–51.

Sussex. These five battalions came to be known as the American Legion.

The Legion existed until March 1917 when it officially disbanded, with the men discharged or transferred to other military units. Only two of the battalions (the 97th and 211th) were sent to England, and the other three served in Canada. None of the battalions fought in the trenches of France. After being disbanded, each unit was absorbed into other Canadian battalions.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout its history, the Legion and many other Canadian battalions enlisted Americans, and their continued commitment to the crown was not forgotten. Thanks to numerous genealogical sources, researchers are able to find men from the United States within the ranks of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.<sup>3</sup>

## CEF personnel files, 1914–1918

With the start of World War I in August 1914, Canada sent soldiers overseas as part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The initial contingent of mobilized troops eventually grew to more than 620,000 men under arms. The personnel files detail the military service of officers and soldiers, including nurses and chaplains.<sup>4</sup>

Most personnel files contain attestation (enlistment) forms for the enlistees (NCOs and enlisted personnel). Officers were required to fill out officers' declaration papers. Both forms represent the initial paper trail for anyone joining the military. Information on the forms includes the following:

- name, address, birthplace, birthdate, and age of the enlistee
- name and relationship of the next of kin
- regimental or battalion number assigned to each soldier

- details about the enlistee's marital status, occupation, religion, and prior military service
- full physical description (not included on the officer's declaration)
- an oath of allegiance (to King George V)
- a signed and dated affidavit in front of a local magistrate (justice) certifying the truthfulness of the information.

The files contain an average of twenty-five to seventy-five pages. Other records found inside the files may include

- casualty forms
- training records
- field and regimental conduct sheets
- medical reports and examinations that could include dental reports
- court of inquiry proceedings and statement sheets
- final discharge certificate (on parchment paper)
- pay records for the soldier
- passports
- personal photographs
- correspondence related to the soldier and/or his family.

The original personnel files including the attestations are housed in the Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, which has scanned and indexed over 540,000 of the 640,000 files for online viewing.<sup>5</sup> Most of the collection is online at Fold3.<sup>6</sup> Ancestry has separate collections of the entire set of attestation papers and the personnel files for Adair to Newman.<sup>7</sup>

## United States Residents Serving in the CEF, 1917–1918

Another source to determine military service for individuals residing in the United States who joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force from 1917 to 1918, after the disbanding of the American Legion,

2. John F. Meek, *Over the Top! The Canadian Infantry in the First World War* (Orangeville, Ontario: John F. Meek, 1971), 91, 131, 139.

3. Fred Gaffen, *Cross-Border Warriors: Canadians in American Forces, Americans in Canadian Forces* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1995), 13–15.

4. Dickon, *Americans at War in Foreign Forces*, 34.

5. "Personnel Records of the First World War," index and digital images, *Library and Archives Canada* (<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/personnel-records.aspx>). "Digitization of the Canadian Expeditionary Force Personnel Service Files – Update of January 2018," 15 January 2018, *Library and Archives Canada Blog* (<https://thediscoverblog.com/category/digitization-2>).

6. "World War I Canadian Soldiers," files for soldiers, nurses, and chaplains who served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, index and digital images, *Fold3* (<https://www.fold3-com>). The "current completion status" is given as "100% complete," but it is incomplete; several groupings by initial letter are missing or incomplete.

7. "Canada, WWI CEF Attestation Papers, 1914–1918," index and digital images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com>); citing *Soldiers of the First World War (1914–1918)*, Record Group 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4930–35, Library and Archives Canada. "Canada, WWI CEF Personnel Files, 1914–1918," index and digital images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com>); citing *Canadian Expeditionary Force, CEF Personnel Files, 1914–1918*; Accession 1992-93/166, Record Group 150, Library and Archives Canada.

can be found in Record Group 163 at Archives II in College Park, Maryland, and on Ancestry.<sup>8</sup> Called Lists of United States Residents Serving in the CEF, 1917–1918, the collection consists of twenty boxes of three by five index cards detailing 24,512 US residents who joined the CEF. The files of 224 Americans who joined the Australian Imperial Force are part of the collection as well. Enlistments were reported to the Provost Marshal General Office (listed as PMGO on each card), since this office was responsible for registering draftees in the United States.

Each index card in the collection lists the following information:

- name of the resident and mailing address in the United States
- the person's birthdate and place of birth (full dates and places sometimes given) and nationality (including a number of Americans)
- occupation of each soldier
- marital status (single, married, widowed, divorced, or separated)
- information about when and where the enlistee entered the Canadian military service and from where in the United States each was transported to Canada to be inducted into the CEF.

## Nominal rolls of the Canadian Expeditionary Force

Created to record the names and relevant information for each enlistee who served during World War I for the honor of Canada, these rolls include men of American birth scattered throughout multiple battalions. Nominal rolls include all of the officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted men who served in a specific unit in the Canadian Expeditionary Force at an exact time. The rolls list

NAME	Evans, Wesley	SERIAL NO.	338
ADDRESS	210 Stafford Cr. Eastwood, N.Y.	OCCUPATION	Machine operator
YEAR OF BIRTH	1899	PLACE OF BIRTH	Us
NATIONALITY	American	EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS	
GENERAL INFORMATION			
C. E. F. Syracuse to Toronto - 1-4-18			

**Copy for P. M. G. O.**

American resident Wesley Evans who resided in Eastwood, New York, joined the CEF on 4 January 1918. National Archives and Records Administration, Lists of United States Residents Serving in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, RG 163.

the name of each soldier, his rank, country of birth, next of kin (with address), former corps, regimental number, and the date and place the enlistee joined the CEF.

The rolls are organized by battalion and regimental number and are separated to include the individual military units of the Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery, Cyclists, Machine Gun Units, Medical Corps, Engineers, Signal Corps, Tunneling Units, Pioneer Corps, Railway Troops, and Forestry Corps. Typically compiled prior to the departure of units from Canada to England and the front, the rolls also record the date of embarkation to Europe and the name of the vessel transporting the troops.

Most military units in the Canadian Expeditionary Force experienced considerable personnel changes during the course of the war due to battlefield casualties, transfers, desertions, reinforcements, and replacements, which meant the rolls were short-lived. Many of the rolls contain details about enlistees who may have come from the same community or were relatives enlisting together.

8. "U.S., Residents Serving in Canadian Expeditionary Forces, 1917–1918," index and images, Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com>); citing War Department, Office of the Provost Marshal General, Lists of United States Residents Serving in the Canadian Expeditionary Force and Australian Imperial Force [1917–1918], Series PC-26 21, textual records, NAI: 1157734, Record Group 163: Records of the Selective Service System (World War I); National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

The Nominal Rolls are housed in the Library and Archives Canada. Most of the rolls have been scanned and made available online at the Archives website, but access is complicated. For direct links to the rolls of individual battalions, see “Nominal Rolls of the Canadian Expeditionary Force” on *Doing Our Bit: Military and Family History*.<sup>9</sup>

## Commonwealth War Graves Registers, 1914–1919

War Graves Registers were created for soldiers who died while in service in France, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. Often called “Black Binders,” the registers were intended to record the final resting places of those killed. In cases where a body was never recovered, the registers served to publicly commemorate a lost soldier.

The index cards are two-sided and contain relevant details about the soldier killed in action: his name, rank, and military unit; the date, cause, and place where the death occurred; the date and place of burial; and the name, address, and relationship of the nearest relative. The collection does not include those men in the Canadian Expeditionary Force who died in Canada or in the United States. For example, soldiers who contracted an illness and died in Canada are not listed in this register.

The original records are located in the Library and Archives Canada. Scanned images are on its site and on Ancestry.<sup>10</sup>

Additional information about the burial plot, row, and grave can also be found online with scanned images of registers and, in some cases, photographs of the soldiers, on the websites of two Canadian government offices—namely, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and Veterans Affairs Canada.<sup>11</sup>

## Putting it all together: Edgar Smith, CEF soldier

The story of an enlistee’s military experience can be reconstructed from a wide variety of records. Records of when and where an individual enlisted

in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, received military training, served overseas, or died as a result of military service are part of the overall story. Examining all available resources can answer questions about the life of an enlistee before or after military service. The records of Edgar Smith provide an example.

Edgar Smith was born 17 February 1879 in Lamar County, Texas.<sup>12</sup> On 26 December 1901 he married Ada Sanders in Paris, Texas.<sup>13</sup> Edgar’s mercantile business flourished until 10 June 1913, when a devastating fire destroyed most of downtown Deport, Texas, and its business district on Main Street. Smith suffered financial losses totaling \$3,500 resulting from the fire.<sup>14</sup> He recovered from the loss,

rebuilt his business, and continued to live in Lamar County.



Edgar Smith in uniform of 97th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force. Courtesy of Carol Owens Spears.

9. Jakealoo, “Nominal Rolls of the Canadian Expeditionary Force,” 18 April 2016, *Doing Our Bit: Military and Family History* blog (<https://militaryandfamilyhistory.blog/2016/04/18/nominal-rolls-of-the-canadian-expeditionary-force>).

10. “Commonwealth War Graves Registers, First World War,” digital images, *Library and Archives Canada* (<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/mass-digitized-archives/commonwealth-war-graves-registers/Pages/commonwealth-war-graves-registers.aspx>). “Canada, CEF Commonwealth War Graves Registers, 1914–1919,” index and digital images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com>); citing War Graves Registry: Circumstances of Death Records (RG150, 1992–1993/314, Boxes 39–144), Library and Archives Canada.

11. “Commemorating the Fallen,” *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<https://www.cwgc.org>). “Search the VAC Website,” *Veterans Affairs Canada* (<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/search>).

12. Edgar Smith, “Canada, WWI CEF Attestation Papers, 1914–1918,” index and digital images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com>).

13. Marriage of Edgar Smith and Ada Sanders, Lamar County, Texas, County Clerk, Lamar County Court, Paris, Texas; volume 19, page 148, number 933; FHL microfilm 1293681, Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

14. “Lamar County Town Has a Costly Fire,” *Dallas Morning News*, 11 June 1913, 8 (*GenealogyBank*).

For unknown reasons, Edgar Smith left his family and moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, where he gained employment as a clerk.<sup>15</sup> On 27 June 1916 he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Winnipeg. Smith was assigned as a private in the 97th Battalion of the CEF, one of the five battalions known as the American Legion.<sup>16</sup> His battalion was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Wade L. Jolly, another American (from Iowa) who raised this regiment of American recruits.

After receiving rudimentary military training in Canada, the 97th Battalion embarked on the *SS Olympic* in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, on 19 September 1916.<sup>17</sup> Smith's battalion was sent to England, but never saw fighting in France. While Edgar Smith was training in England, his leg was injured when a trench caved in, and he was granted a medical furlough. The Lamar County newspaper reported (incorrectly) that he sustained his injury in France.<sup>18</sup> Smith was transported back to Canada, where he received his honorable discharge in Winnipeg on 31 January 1918.<sup>19</sup>

While Edgar was away serving in the Canadian Army, his wife Ada Smith assumed the mantle of ownership with his business. After his discharge from the Canadian Expeditionary Force, Edgar returned home to Lamar County. Within eight months of his discharge, he registered there for the World War I draft.<sup>20</sup>

## Canadians and Americans come together

On 11 November 1918, the guns of war in Europe fell silent. The "War to End All Wars" was now a

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ATTESTATION PAPER.

No. 261561

Folio.

CANADIAN OVER-SEAS EXPEDITIONARY FORCE.

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QUESTIONS TO BE PUT BEFORE ATTESTATION.  
(ANSWERS)

1. What is your surname?.....	Smith
1a. What are your Christian names?.....	Edgar
1b. What is your present address?.....	Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
2. In what Town, Township or Parish, and in what Country were you born?.....	Lamar, Texas, U.S.A
3. What is the name of your next-of-kin?.....	Ada Smith
4. What is the address of your next-of-kin?.....	Deport, Texas, U.S.A.
4a. What is the relationship of your next-of-kin?.....	Wife
5. What is the date of your birth?.....	February 23th 1879
6. What is your Trade or Calling?.....	Clerk
7. Are you married?.....	Yes
8. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated and inoculated?.....	Yes
9. Do you now belong to the Active Militia?.....	No
10. Have you ever served in any Military Force?..... <small>(If so, state particulars of former Service.)</small>	No
11. Do you understand the nature and terms of your engagement?.....	Yes
12. Are you willing to be attested to serve in the } CANADIAN OVER-SEAS EXPEDITIONARY FORCE? }	Yes

*Attestation of Edgar Smith, 97th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Library and Archives Canada, Attestation Papers, RG 150.*

memory, but at a huge cost that affected families on both sides of the Canadian-American border. Nine years later, on Armistice Day in 1927, both governments came together to remember those American heroes who died while in service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Both countries pledged warm friendship around a Cross of Sacrifice unveiled and dedicated at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

The granite cross stands thirty feet high, emblazoned with a bronze sword. It was unveiled by Canadian Minister to the United States Vincent Massey and accepted by Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg of the United States. Massey pulled the cord releasing both the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack that draped the monument and stated that on behalf of the government of Canada, he presented to the government and people of the United States "this

15. Edgar Smith, "Canada, WWI CEF Attestation Papers, 1914-1918," *Ancestry*.

16. *Canadian Expeditionary Force 97th Battalion Nominal Roll of Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Men, 1917*, Accession 200908, R180-70-4-E, Library and Archives Canada (<http://data2.archives.ca/e/e444/e011092688.pdf>), 15.

17. *Ibid.*, title page.

18. "Local News," *Paris Morning News*, 15 February 1918, 2 (*Newspapers.com*).

19. Edgar Smith file, "Personnel Records of the First World War," Canadian Expeditionary Force, digital images (<http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/item/?op=pdf&app=CEF&id=B9028-S053>); Accession 1992-93/166, Record Group 150, Box 4930-35, Library and Archives Canada. This file has 54 pages.

20. Edgar Smith, Lamar County, Texas, "U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918," digital images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com>), imaged from Family History Library microfilm 1983378, Draft Board 2; citing United States, Selective Service System, World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, Record Group 163; National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

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King George VI places a wreath on the Canadian Cross of Sacrifice in Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, 9 June 1939. The cross was erected by the Canadian government in memory of United States citizens who served and died in the Canadian Army during World War I. Library and Archives Canada, PA-209854.

monument... to honor the memory of your citizens who served in the Canadian Army and gave their lives in the great war.”<sup>21</sup>

Thanks to the efforts of the Library and Archives Canada and the National Archives of the United States, the stories of these soldiers have been preserved and can be examined and appreciated by all researchers, especially the descendants of the soldiers. 🌳

## Resources

Dickon, Chris. *Americans at War in Foreign Forces: A History, 1914–1945*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014.

Gaffen, Fred. *Cross-Border Warriors: Canadians in American Forces, Americans in Canadian Forces*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1995.

Wright, Glenn. *Canadians at War, 1914–1919: A Research Guide to World War One Service Records*. Milton, Ontario: Global Heritage Press, 2010.

21. “Nations Honor War Dead; Canada Unveils a Cross in Arlington to Americans,” *New York Times*, 12 November 1927, 1 (*ProQuest Historical Newspapers*).