

The Buchan Boys Go to War

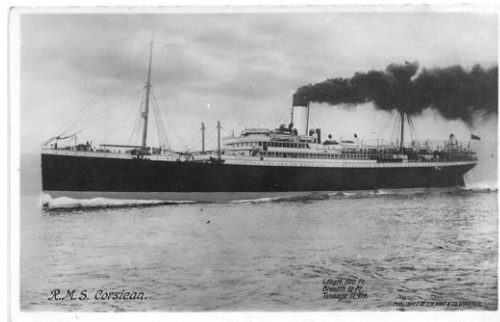
Iain S. Sneyd & E. Clare Stewart

Before the War, the Buchan family of Waterdown, Ontario was a typical farming family. On their father's side they were descended from Scottish-born Thomas Buchan who immigrated to Canada in the early 1800s. There is said to be a family connection to Lord Tweedsmuir (né John Buchan) who was Governor-General of Canada from 1935 until his death in 1940. On their mother's side they were descended from John Pheifer who was born in Germany and came to Canada in the mid 1800s settling in the Hamilton area. Robert Oliver (1890-1981) and Stanley Eli Buchan (1896-1991) were two of 11 children born on the family farm to Eli Buchan and Annie Fifer (Pheifer) Buchan. They both served overseas, Robert as a volunteer and Stanley as a conscript under the Military Service Act of 1917. They had one older brother who did not serve, two much younger brothers, and six sisters. Of the sisters, two had military connections. In 1920 Minnie (1901-after 1974) married Norman Neil McLean (1895-before 1953), a farmer from Orillia, who had been conscripted in July 1918 and assigned to the First Central Ontario Regiment. In 1921 Elsie (1893-1980) married John Woolley (1896-1983), who enlisted in April 1916 and was assigned to the 205th Battalion CEF. Unfortunately, neither of these men's Service Records is yet available.



Robert, whose profession was shown as "gardener", enlisted on 20 April 1915 at the age of 25 in Hamilton, Ontario. He was assigned to the 36th Battalion where his Regimental Number was 406684. The 36th Battalion had been authorized on 7 November 1914 and recruited in Hamilton and District. It trained at the Ravina Barracks in Toronto, the Hamilton Armoury and Camp Niagara before heading overseas.

The 36th Battalion sailed from Montreal on 19 June 1915 on the SS Corsican and arrived in England on the 28th. The 36th was posted to Shorncliffe where training took place. It was tasked to provide reinforcements for the units in the field.



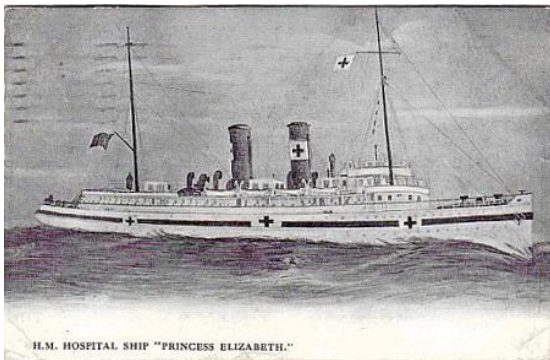
On September 25th Robert Buchan was transferred to 15th Battalion France, one of three Battalions perpetuated by the 48th Highlanders of Canada. Four days later he proceeded to join the 15th Battalion in the field. At that time the Battalion was manning the trenches in the area of La Touquet Berthe in Belgium, just north of Armentières.

Robert Buchan was promoted twice in July 1916, first to Lance-Corporal, and then to Corporal. The 15th Battalion fought in the battle of Vimy Ridge, which took place 9 – 12 April 1917. Two days after the battle Buchan was hospitalized at 7 Canadian General Hospital Étaples for P.U.O. (Pyrexia (Fever) of Unknown Origin) He rejoined his unit on May 12th.

The Regimental History of the 48th Highlanders and the Battalion War Diaries tell us that in June the Battalion was based at Paynesley House, on Vimy Ridge about half a mile north-west of

Neuville St. Vaast . On the 10th the entire battalion moved off at 9:30 p.m. to work on CANADA Trench in the Vimy area. The enemy was shelling the ridge fairly heavily. On the way back to the camp, at 2:30 a.m., German shelling killed one officer and one Private and wounded 12 other men.

Robert Buchan was one of these men. He was severely wounded in the left forearm by shrapnel when walking on the road. The wound was dressed almost immediately at an Advanced Station. One hour later he was inoculated at 3 Canadian Field Ambulance. Eighteen hours later he was operated on at 23rd Casualty Clearing Station. No foreign body was found, but the wound was irrigated and a Carrel's Tube was inserted to drain the wound. From the 12th to the 20th he was hospitalized at 26 General Hospital Étaples and the wound was dressed.



On June 20th Robert Buchan was transferred to a British hospital in England on HMHS Princess Elizabeth. On the 21st a cable was sent to his next of kin, his mother, informing her of his wound and admission to hospital. At the Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley (also known as Welsh Netley) the arm was x-rayed and a foreign body was discovered lying on the *flexor sublimis* (the muscle from which the tendons control finger movement). On the 23rd the foreign body was removed under General Anaesthetic and two sutures were

inserted in the operative wound. His health was good, the wound was clean and the operating doctor recommended that he be transferred to a Canadian Hospital. On June 29th Buchan was transferred to Canadian Divisional Convalescent Hospital, Epsom for 27 days' hospitalization.

On July 25th Buchan was discharged from treatment with "slight stiffness of wrist and fingers when not rotated. No disability now. May treat through special gymnasium training and light duty here". He was assessed as Category AIII fitness.

On August 1st Buchan was discharged from Canadian Divisional Convalescent Hospital, Epsom, and taken on strength with the 5th Reserve Battalion in West Sandling. An examination by a Medical Board in mid-November found him still Category AIII.

On 15 February 1918 Robert Buchan was transferred from the 5th Reserve Battalion to the 12th Reserve Battalion in West Sandling as a Corporal. This transfer was due to administrative restructuring of the Canadian Expeditionary Force which saw the 5th Reserve Battalion absorbed into the 12th.

Meanwhile, back in Waterdown, Stanley, now age 21, was working on the family farm along with his father and two younger brothers, aged 11 and 8. It is not known if Stanley applied for exemption from conscription because of farm work, but it would have been unlikely that exemption would be granted due to the family situation.

Under the Military Service Act of 1917, 400,000 men registered for conscription. Of the approximately 100,000 who were actually drafted, only 24,132 were sent overseas. Stanley Buchan was one of them. Stanley was called up in Hamilton, Ontario on 9 May 1918 and was originally assigned to the First Depot Battalion, 2nd Central Ontario Regiment where he was given Regimental Number 3109401. He served with them in Canada from that date to June 2nd.

Stanley Buchan sailed to England on the SS Cassandra and arrived on June 21st. He was taken on strength with the 8th Canadian Reserve Battalion in Witley, being posted there until October.

In August 1918 Robert Buchan was appointed Acting Sergeant with pay at Witley. It is quite possible that the brothers were able to get together during their time in England.



On October 28th, Stanley Buchan was sent to France and taken on strength with the 54th Battalion, part of the 11th Infantry Brigade, 4th Canadian Division. The history of this Battalion was documented in 1919 in *Cinquante-Quatre* by John Beswick Bailey. Stanley joined the Unit in the Field on 1 November 1918. Between November 1st and the Armistice on November 11th, the Battalion fought at Valenciennes, participating in the liberation of the town of Marly and its citizens. After the Armistice the 54th were garrisoned in Jauche.

On December 3rd Robert Buchan was transferred to Kinmel Park, Wales preparatory to being returned to Canada. On December 6th he had Discharge and Dental Exams at Kinmel Park which found him Generally Fit, but recommended 32 dental extractions. Four days later at Rhyl, Wales Robert Buchan was struck off strength from the 12th Reserve Battalion to transfer to CEF Canada and embarked on HMT Melita which arrived in St. John, N.B. on December 18th. He was received from Overseas at No. 2 District Depot and posted to Casualty Clearing Camp, Exhibition Camp, Toronto.

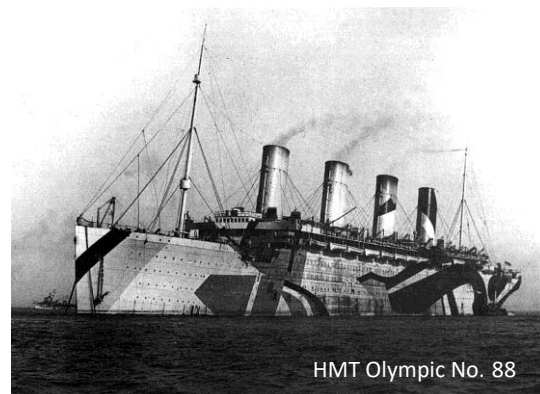


While this was going on, Stanley Buchan was attached on December 23rd to the Canadian Corps Headquarters and carried on effective strength. Headquarters moved around between France, Belgium, and Germany until after all Canadian troops were returned to Britain by mid-April 1919.

On 18 January 1919 Robert Buchan underwent an examination by a Medical Board at Exhibition Camp, Toronto. He was judged to be category DIII (Discharged, having been found medically unfit for further service.) A finding of *Condylmata Acuminata* and a positive Wassermann Test the next day yielded a diagnosis of syphilis which led to treatment with Arsenic and Mercury as an In-patient for 6-12 months. (It should be noted, however, that Buchan was asymptomatic for syphilis. *Condylmata Acuminata* are now known to be associated with Herpes. A positive Wassermann Test is not specific to syphilis and is also indicative of other diseases including systemic lupus

erythematosus, malaria, and tuberculosis.) On the 24th Robert Buchan was discharged at Toronto having been found medically unfit for service.

At the end of April 1919, Stanley Buchan proceeded to England and was transferred to the Canadian Record List. In mid-May he was taken on strength "R" Wing in Witley. On June 6th Buchan was struck off strength of Overseas Military Forces Canada to CEF in Canada and taken on strength No. 2 District Depot, Toronto. On the same date he embarked on HMT Olympic No. 88 in Southampton. On the 12th Buchan disembarked in Halifax and proceeded to Toronto where he was discharged on June 16th. Stanley Buchan received the Class A War Service Badge.



On October 20th the War Service Gratuity Declaration indicated that Robert Buchan's service consisted of 4 years, 9 days. He received the Class A War Service Badge. In November 1922 his service was registered. He served with the 15th Battalion Canadian Infantry in France beginning 26 September 1915.

After the war both brothers married and raised families in the Waterdown area.

The Buchan Boys' story was prompted by Doug Buchan of Hamilton, Ontario, who wanted to know more about his grandfather Robert's service in World War I. Information was obtained from Robert's and Stanley's Personnel Files and the various Units' War Diaries and histories.

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