



Arthur James Ernest Kirkpatrick

1876 – 1955

“Hang-on Kirkpatrick”

Tim Martin
Midland, Ontario
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Foreword

This is the story of an early member of the Kirkpatrick family who were prominent in Toronto social and military circles. Having joined the Denison family by marriage, they did not hesitate to answer the call for service to King and Country. Being 38, Arthur was relatively old, but his years of experience with the Queens Own Rifles demanded that he not sit on the sidelines in a time of national peril.

Little did he know at the time of enlistment, he would not only experience the horrors of war but also incarceration and long-lasting emotional trauma.

His record of service is well documented and his descendants are fortunate to have access to his journal of 152 pages written in 1938. In it he described the lead-up to his participation in the war, his capture and conditions in the POW camp.

His nephew Douglas served and died alongside Arthur in the same battalion at the same time. Arthur barely took note of that in his journal and the limited notations were quite detached and business-like. Perhaps that was due to military discipline or a “stiff upper lip” attitude common amongst senior military personnel at the time.

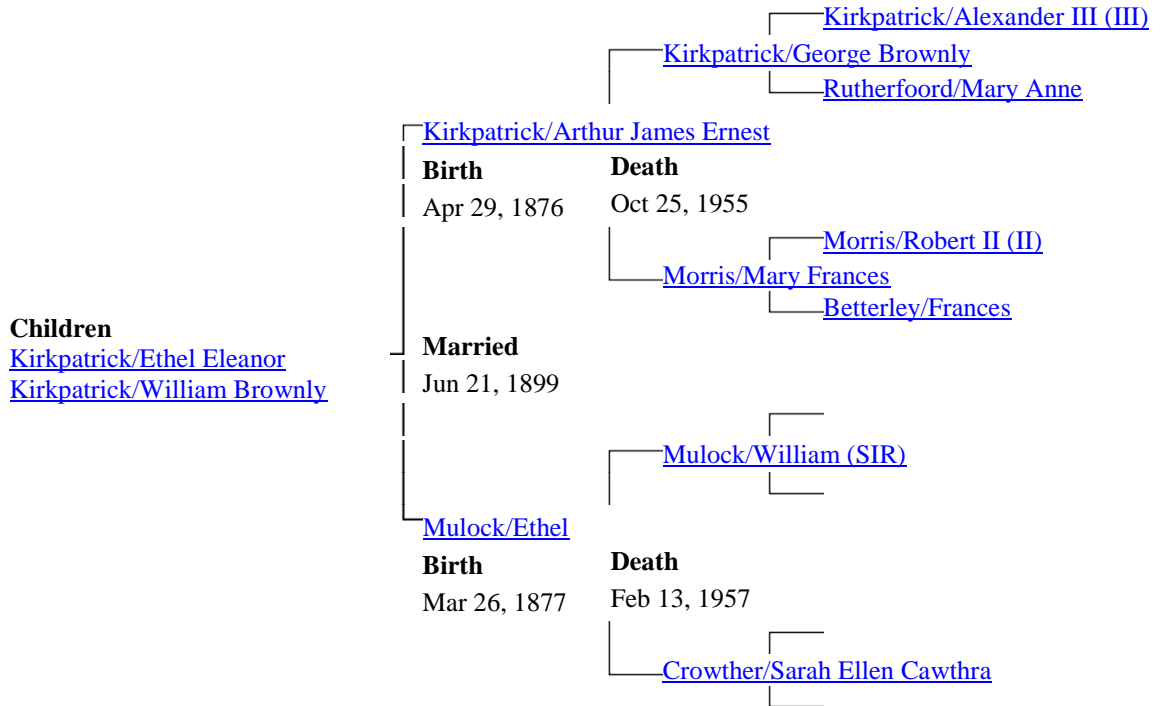
By contrast, during incarceration and after the war Arthur displayed a more human side openly discussing his war-induced mental health issues. Whether one calls it Neurasthenia, Nervous Prostration, Shell Shock or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder it was a condition not well understood in the medical community and certainly not discussed in social circles at the time.

His journal is preserved both physically and digitally at the Canadian Government Library and Archives in Ottawa.

The portrait above is hung in the Queens Own Rifles museum located at Casa Loma in central Toronto.

About Arthur James Ernest Kirkpatrick

Arthur was born in Toronto on April 29, 1876 to George Brownly Kirkpatrick and Mary Francis Morris. He married Ethel Mulock on June 21, 1899. Together they had two children, Ethel Eleanor born in 1900 and William Brownly born in 1912. Arthur had five siblings - four brothers and one sister.



Upper Canada College 1877-1891

Following family tradition, Arthur was privately educated and attended Upper Canada College from 1885 to 1890.

In 1893 he joined The United States Fidelity and Guaranty Co. of Baltimore, Maryland in the Toronto Office. That same year he joined the Queens Own Rifles (QOR) as a private.

Arthur kept busy in the pre-war years achieving success in the insurance industry and rising to the rank of lieutenant in the QOR in 1897.

On June 21st 1899, he married Ethel Mulock, daughter of Sir William Mulock who fought with the QOR at the battle of Ridgeway in 1866 during the Fenian raids. The society wedding took place at St. James Cathedral in Toronto. Their two children were born in 1900 and 1912. The family lived at 99 St. Clair Ave West (known as "Closeburn") also in Toronto.

Arthur and the War

On August 4th, 1914 Britain declared war on Germany. At the time, Canada was obligated to also declare war. Canada quickly responded with the formation of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). The storied Queen's Own Rifles was one of the local militia units which made up the CEF.



Arthur Kirkpatrick

Arthur rushed to join and was attested on September 22nd, 1914 in Toronto as a Major in the 3rd Battalion, Toronto Regiment of the CEF. He was 38 years old, 5'11", hazel eyes and brown but graying hair. He was found to be fit for service.

Leaving his two young children and wife behind, Arthur and the QOR marched to Toronto's Union Station and traveled by rail to the hastily prepared camp at Valcartier, Quebec for equipment and training in preparation for overseas service. At Valcartier, his rank was adjusted to Junior Major of the 3rd Battalion.

The first Canadian contingent sailed for England on October 3, 1914. A convoy of 36 ships with over 31,000 troops – an extraordinary achievement in such a short time. Arthur and his nephew Alexander Douglas Kirkpatrick (Douglas) were part of this contingent aboard the *SS Tunisian* for its two-week long journey.

Training continued aboard ship with concerts, drills, sports and lectures to keep the men busy. The contingent arrived at Plymouth and off-loaded on October 19th to cheering crowds as the first arrivals from Britain's overseas dominions.

After a quick march and train ride, the contingent ended up on Salisbury Plains for further training where they endured five months of constant rain and churned-up mud. Finally Arthur and Douglas left for France with the battalion on Feb 9th 1915 from Avonmouth arriving at St. Nazaire two days later. Shortly after their arrival, Arthur was appointed battalion second in command and the battalion moved northward toward the Ypres Salient.

In the Second Battle of Ypres he had command of "C" and "D" companies and took up an advance position at St. Julien. There he earned the title of "Hang-on Kirkpatrick", as he held his machine gun position until the battalion was entirely surrounded by the Germans. As he was tending to the wounded gunner, he was taken prisoner with what were left of his men.

The following entry can be found in the 3rd battalion war diaries dated April 24, 1915:

203 p.m. The following message was ordered to be sent to MAJOR KIRKPATRICK – “Retire on G.H.Q. line”

This message was taken up by LCE. CORPL. GRAVELEY, under very heavy rifle and shell fire, and was delivered to MAJOR KIRKPATRICK personally. The retirement began.

A few men of “C” Company, mostly wounded, reached the G.H.Q. line. No further report has been received from MAJOR KIRKPATRICK, as to the position of himself or his command. [Kirkpatrick and the remainder of C and D Companies were taken prisoner.]

That same day while being captured he came across his nephew Douglas' corpse. The German captors, perhaps respecting his rank, agreed to let Col. Kirkpatrick retrieve four gold sovereigns and a trench watch from the body for shipment back home to his mother.



Alexander Douglas
Kirkpatrick

It is not clear if Col. Kirkpatrick sent the money and trench watch back to Canada after being captured or if he had it with him when he returned to Canada in 1918.

It seems likely that the former was the case, as surely he would have had the money confiscated while he was a prisoner of war.

The Colonel's diary indicates that the body was removed back to the Canadian lines for burial preparations.

Unfortunately, due to on-going German bombardment, his body was lost in the confusion. He is memorialized on the walls of Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium and on the cenotaph in St. John's Cemetery on the Humber in Toronto.

Arthur as a POW

Arthur and the remnants of his battalion were relatively fortunate enough to be captured by Saxon German troops. He was transported via Staden and Roulers in Belgium and across Germany to a POW camp in Bischofswerda, Saxony near Dresden.

When interviewed by the Toronto Star years later, he complained that while being treated reasonably well on the trip, the food consisted of substitute coffee made from dried acorns and black bread.



The camp - reserved for officers - was newly constructed, situated near the town and had not been used before the war having been abandoned by the German 12th Army Corps. Arthur's incarceration was officially confirmed by the American Embassy in neutral Switzerland on June 2nd, 1915.



At the same interview (above) he discussed the boredom and overcrowded conditions at the camp as well as his suffering from Neurasthenia (or Nervous Prostration), old terms for "shell-shock" which was not well understood at the time.

Arthur James Ernest Kirkpatrick - top row, centre

As was the practice at the time, a Swiss medical board arrived at the camp to investigate the conditions of the prisoners. Arthur applied for repatriation due to his Neurasthenia but was initially turned down. Six months later, the medical board returned and this time he was successful, and after 22 months of imprisonment he was transferred to Murren, Switzerland via rail.

Arthur rode in 4th class carriages with little food or comfort sharing space with a French African private who had been gassed and coughed incessantly along with a French Captain with a bullet wound in his leg. He arrived on Dec 13, 1916 for further evaluation and internment in a hotel enjoying good food and sympathetic treatment from Swiss officers.

Meanwhile, Arthur's wife Ethel Mulock had closed up the family home in Toronto and followed her husband to England in 1914. Upon hearing the good news of Arthur's transfer to Switzerland, she joined him there in February, 1917.

A Swiss medical board determined that his health was not improving and recommended repatriation back to England. With wife in tow, he arrived in England on December 3rd, 1917 and was admitted to the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital in Portsmouth where his diagnosis was quickly confirmed and he was recommended for light duty only.

After further reviews and approvals, the couple sailed for Canada from Liverpool on the SS *Metagama* on December 23rd, 1917. Arthur was retired and taken off strength in June of 1918 with the rank of full Colonel.

After the War

Upon their arrival in Canada, they took the train to Toronto, where they joined friends and family at his house at 99 St. Clair Avenue, which had been closed since 1914. Shortly thereafter, he was interviewed by reporters, with an article published the following day in the Toronto Star.

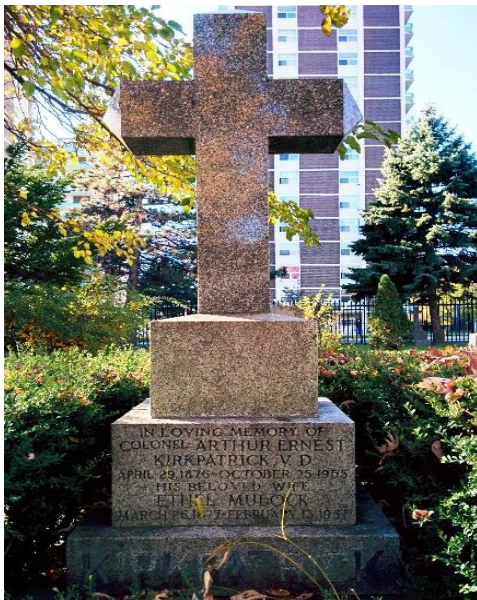
Unlike many returning veterans, Arthur was not shy about recounting his war-time experiences as a prisoner and often lectured to eager audiences.

Arthur resumed his duties as General Manager with The United States Fidelity and Guaranty Co and with the Queen's Own Rifles where he went on to become Commandant on April 9, 1922 for three years and later as an honorary colonel for ten years.

As if that wasn't enough to keep him busy, Arthur belonged to no fewer than ten social clubs in the city as listed in the *1921 Torontonians Society Blue Book and Club List*. He was active in liberal politics, championing causes such as police accountability, arming bank tellers, installing bi-lingual traffic signs and sex education in schools.

He served as President of the Empire Club of Toronto in 1926 and President of the Royal Canadian Military Institute in 1928.

He was appointed Toronto police commissioner from 1936 to 1946.



Arthur died on October 25, 1955 at Sunnybrook Hospital, followed by his wife on February 13, 1957. They are buried at St. James Cemetery in Toronto.

The "VD" decoration awarded to Arthur was created on May 24th 1894 by Royal Warrant for long serving commissioned officers of Volunteer Forces throughout the British Empire, defined as being India, the Dominion of Canada, the Crown Colonies and the Crown Dependencies

Epilogue

Mothers and wives were known to sew coins into soldiers' jackets for emergency use if captured. The four gold sovereigns retrieved and sent back by Arthur to Douglas' parents have been passed down through the generations. One coin is with Shelagh Bowden in Thornbury, two others are with Anne Macklem in Ottawa and the fourth is with Douglas Kirkpatrick, living in Kingston. The trench watch was also passed down, has been authenticated and is with Tim Martin in Midland.

Housing, feeding and guarding prisoners of war was a monumental logistical problem for all combatants. Records indicate that 6778 officers & 168,846 men of the British and Commonwealth forces were captured on the 'western front' alone in WWI. Nearly 10% of these were held for all 4 years by the Germans having been captured at the battles of the Marne & Ypres. By war's end, a total of 2,415,000 allied prisoners from all actions were held.

For his war service, Arthur was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. In addition, he was awarded the Volunteer Officers' Decoration and the Colonial Auxiliary Forces Long Service Medal.

Bischofswerda's notoriety is not limited to the great war. In the 1980's it became a base for Soviet SS-12 nuclear missiles during the cold war tensions between Western Democracies and the Eastern Communist Bloc. The depot for the missiles and their launchers was built just outside town. The missiles were finally withdrawn in 1988.

Major A. J. E. Kirkpatrick 3rd (Toronto Regiment) Battalion



*With ammunition gone, bleeding and bent,
With hunger, thirst, and weariness near spent,
With foes in crowds on every side to hem
Them in, to capture these, God pity them.
Their day was done, their suffering still to come.
They were to know the full and total sum,
Wearily marching to captivity,
How long? God knows! An eternity*

(A. E. Kirkpatrick, *Toronto Globe*, 22 Apr 1931)

Acknowledgements

The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada Regimental Museum and Archives

Upper Canada College War Book

Toronto Star – 1918 interview with A.J.E. Kirkpatrick

www.emedals.com auction house

Library and Archives Canada – A.J.E. Kirkpatrick diary

Wikipedia

1921 Torontonians Society Blue Book and Club List

Mr. Nick Macklem

Mr. Ned Martin

Mr. Matthew Barrett, historian and illustrator

Addendum

Arthur Kirkpatrick's busby and storage box recently sold at auction

