



## COLDWATER REMEMBERS

# PRIVATE ALEXANDER DUNKIN

Alexander Dunkin was born on December 26, 1898, in London, England. He was the son of Alexander and Ellen (Arnold) Dunkin. By the beginning of the First World War, the family, including Alexander, his widowed mother and his four siblings, had moved to Coldwater, Ontario. On May 23, 1916, Alexander enlisted in Orillia with the 157<sup>th</sup> Overseas Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He was 18 years old and single. On his Attestation Form he is described as 5 feet 8 inches tall, with brown eyes and dark hair. He identified his religious denomination as Presbyterian, and his trade as labourer, with no previous military experience.



Private Alexander Dunkin, regimental number 644154, sailed to England on the S.S. Cameronia, arriving on October 28, 1916. After training in England for several months, he landed in France on September 16. He later joined his front line unit, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion (Western Ontario Regiment), part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division. Along with the rest of the Canadian Corps, Private Dunkin and his unit fought at Vimy Ridge the following spring. Alexander suffered severe gunshot wounds in the legs on the fourth day of the Canadian troops' assault on Vimy Ridge, April 12, 1917, and returned to duty with his unit within a few months.

On November 6, 1917, after weeks of intense fighting, Canadian troops launched a final assault on the village of Passchendaele in Belgium, and managed to capture the village. But the victory came at a high price. More than 4,000 Canadian soldiers died in the fighting there, and almost 12,000 were wounded. Private Dunkin was one of the soldiers killed in action that day. During an advance in the vicinity of the village, just before reaching the objective, he was hit by an enemy machine gun bullet and was killed instantly.

Four years later, Alexander's mother Ellen (by then Rowell) would have received the awards her son was entitled to: the 1914-1918 British War Medal; the Inter Allied Victory Medal; a Memorial Plaque (a bronze medallion often referred to as "Dead Man's Penny"); and a scroll from King George V. She would also have received a "Mother's Cross".

Private Alexander Dunkin has no known grave. He is commemorated at Menin Gate Memorial at the eastern side of the town of Ypres in Belgium. In Canada he is commemorated on page 231 of the *First World War Book of Remembrance*, located inside the Memorial Chamber in the Peace Tower in Ottawa. And as of November 11, 2018, he is also commemorated on a plaque on the Cenotaph in front of the Coldwater Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion.

We will remember him.