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Les soldats de la Grande Guerre : Projet de biographies historiques sur les soldats de Fredericton

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Osgood, Giles Dever

Lieutenant
140th Battalion
26th Battalion

Background

Giles Dever Osgood was born August 14, 1883 in Fredericton, New Brunswick to Margaret Ann Laferty and Giles Osgood Sr. According to census records, Giles had five siblings named Harry, Sarah Jane, Mabel, Alice, and Eliza Osgood. For much of his early life, Giles lived with his family in Fredericton where his father was employed at a local bank, while his mother more than likely was a homemaker. Newspapers also reveal that Giles came from a military family, his father having once served with the Imperial Army, seeing service overseas during the Boer War. In 1906, Giles' father would pass away leaving his mother a widow and likely impacting the early childhood of all siblings in the home. By all accounts, Giles appears to have been incredibly popular locally and an active member of the community for most of his life. Newspapers report that he was once a popular employee at the Oak Hall establishment; however, after his father's death, Giles took a job working in Saint John with the Scovil Brothers. Being popular everywhere he went, it appears natural that he would leave his job in Saint John to accept a position with the Sussex Mercantile Company as a manufacturing agent and salesman, then as a representative for the Maritime Hat and Cap Company of Moncton.

The year of his father's death marked another important part of his life, he would get married. According to marriage records, Giles would marry Edith Hazel Bell on May 10, 1906 in Saint John. Edith was from the Saint John area and, although little is known of how they met, the young nineteen-year old Edith was likely charmed by the older Giles who, documents suggest, was extremely popular with whomever he met. Together, Giles and Edith would move to Sussex where they would have two sons, Winston Mersereau Osgood and Bryne Fenwick Osgood.

By the time war had broken out, Giles had very little military experience, although records suggest he belonged to the 74th New Brunswick Rangers. Newspapers would reveal that when Giles first applied to the recruiting office, he was informed that he was physically unfit for service and that he would have to undergo a medical procedure if he wanted to serve overseas. His medical records suggest that it may have been the result of a stomach hernia that had developed. After his operation, Giles would again reapply for service in the winter of 1915 with the 140th Battalion. This time his application would be accepted and Osgood promptly went to Halifax for officer training where he would be granted the rank of Lieutenant. At the time of his formal enlistment on

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November 28, 1915, Giles was 32 years old and was described as having blue eyes, brown hair, medium complexion and standing about five feet six inches tall. After leaving for Valcartier, Quebec with the 140th Battalion in the winter of 1915-1916, records suggest that he arrived again to New Brunswick in the summer of 1916 to sign his formal will at Saint John before going overseas. After leaving for Nova Scotia, Giles would never return home again to family, friends, or to his wife Edith and their two young boys Winston and Bryne.

Wartime Experience

On September 25, 1916, Lieutenant Giles D. Osgood embarked from Halifax, Nova Scotia aboard the S.S. Corsican for Liverpool, England arriving October 6. After less than one month of training in England, on October 28 Giles would land in France with the 60th Battalion, arriving just as the battle of The Somme was drawing to a close. The battle of The Somme had lasted a total of five months from July to November where Canadians had suffered approximately 24,029 casualties and of those nearly 8,000 were killed. Giles' arrival to the front then was a direct consequence of what had been happening over the previous three months in France with the Canadians and their Allies.

Over the next few months, Giles would write home often with his letters usually being printed in New Brunswick newspapers. While his service record reveals that he would have a small case of laryngitis in February of 1917, it appears he always took the time to write when he could. By the early spring of 1917, Lieutenant Osgood would be with 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles as they prepared for the Vimy Ridge offensive, and then the 26th Battalion from Saint John after successes on the ridge. Two months before Vimy Ridge, Giles would write home to his friend W.H. Plummer:

"Dear Bill, your welcome letter from the 5th came to hand a few days ago, and I was glad to get it, as I had begun to think you had forgotten where I lived. We are now in rest billets for about three weeks getting a general brush up! We work about two hours a day and are having a very good day compared to trench life. We are billeted in a good-sized town and the people are very kind, and are most anxious to do all for our comfort. There seems to be plenty of everything in the eating lines here, despite the so-called sub-blockade, but prices are fairly-high but from what I can see, that applies to every country. I am enclosing a little parody on the sun-shine of my soul. I found it in one of the letters the boys were sending out, and I thought it was pretty good. You know if a fellow gets wounded badly enough to get sent back to a hospital in England, which is called a "blighty", they think he's pretty lucky. About the sub-warfare, don't worry about it, as John Bull has the situation pretty well under hand and ships are arriving and sailing over here just the same as usual. Many thanks for the parcel which you say is coming along. I will advise you when it shows up. You have certainly had some weather home this winter. I guess our cold weather is over. The last few days have been nice and sunny and very similar to weather we get home about the last of April. We are having a great time trying to parley French. I think if I were to stick around one of these French towns for a while, I might pick up quite a bit of it. At present, I have to rely on my batman. As he talks good French, and he is my interrupter at the billet where I sleep. I tell you it certainly is a pleasure to roll in to a nice soft bed at nights with real white sheets. If you get the record you will find part one of my letters to Mrs. Robinson, but where they say trench fever it should read trench feet. There is trench fever over here but what causes it the M. D's don't seem to know. It isn't serious, as a rule. A man may have a very high fever for a few days and then he is as well as ever again after. I expect we will get back in the line again before to the big push, which is bound to come pretty soon. We just got word that fritz has withdrawn on quite a large frontage, which means he is shortening up his line. Looks as if he didn't have any more men than he knows what to do with. Write me again soon. -Giles".

After being taken on strength with the 26th Battalion in May of 1917, Giles would be in northern France as they continued to push the German line back beyond the Arras sector. For the next few months Osgood would be with his unit as they prepared for the coming battle of Hill 70. According to his circumstances of death record,

Giles was near Lens, France with his unit on the opening day of the attack, August 15, 1917, when he was killed moving forward with his unit. His body would never be recovered. News of his death spread quickly in local papers a week after his death, offering condolences to his wife, children, and extended family. Lieutenant Giles Dever Osgood was thirty-four years old.

Lest We Forget

Lieutenant Giles Denver Osgood is honored on the Vimy Memorial located in Vimy, France. Giles is one of approximately 11,000 names honored on the Vimy Memorial created to honor fallen soldiers in France whose bodies have never been found.

**This biography was researched and written by Sunaa Hansen 8A, Javen de Jong 8C, and Mohammed Shawesh 8E, Grade 8 students at George Street Middle School located in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada.*