

ON THE WAR MEMORIAL TRAIL RESEARCH PROJECT..... WITH PIETER AND DARIA VALKENBURG

This includes the Borden- Carleton Cenotaph Research Project.....Let us never forget their sacrifice!

On The War Memorial Trail..... The WW2 Stretcher-Bearer Whose Compassion Cost Him His Life

July 27, 2022. Before we travelled to North Bay, Ontario in May for an Author Talk at the North Bay Public Library, Pieter and Don Coutts prepared a letter to the editor for the local newspapers to see if photos could be found for two North Bay soldiers buried in the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten, The Netherlands: **Albert Joseph COTE** and **John 'Jack' Langford WALKER**.

The letter ran in the North Bay Nugget on April 19, 2022, and resulted in family of Jack Walker submitting a photo. No family of Albert Joseph Cote came forward, but we soon uncovered enough information and references in other sources to determine that his story needed to be told.



The letter to the editor incorrectly lists Flora's maiden name as Larose. It was McGinnis. When she remarried, her surname changed from Cote to Larose.

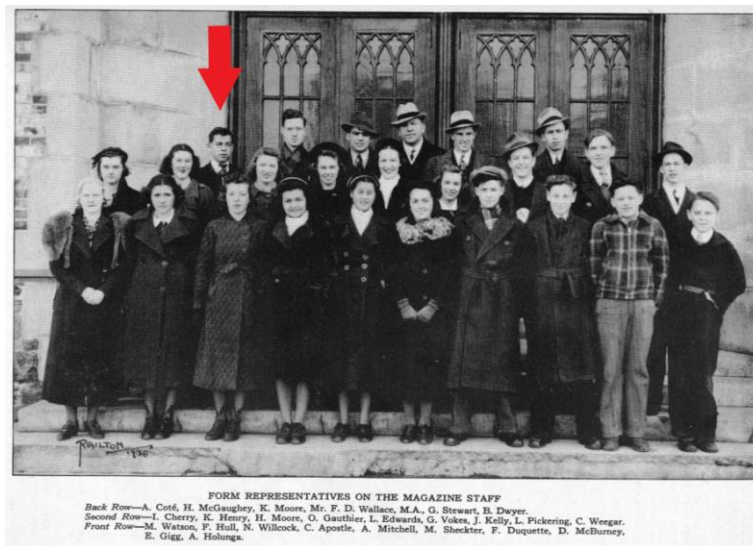


Albert Joseph Cote. (Photo source: October 3, 1944 edition of North Bay Nugget newspaper)

Albert Joseph COTE was born in Quebec on July 12, 1920, the son of Augustin and Flora (nee McGinnis) Cote. His father died in 1922 in Hull (now Gatineau), Quebec and his mother remarried to Xavier Larose. When Albert was 5 years old the family moved to North Bay.

...Albert was an active participant at the North Bay Vocational School...

Albert attended the North Bay Collegiate Institute and Vocational School (in 1958 the name changed to North Bay Algonquin Composite School) in North Bay. Judie Klassen contacted archivist Edward Drieger of the Harris Library at the University of Nipissing, who wrote that Albert was “*...a member of Form II B Vocational with Mr. K.E. Thomson in 1938. It also appears that Albert was a member of the Junior Literary Society and a Form representative to the Northland Echo Staff....*” He also sent her two photos that included Albert.



FORM REPRESENTATIVES ON THE MAGAZINE STAFF
Back Row—A. Cote, H. McGaughey, K. Moore, Mr. F. D. Wallace, M.A., G. Stewart, B. Dwyer.
Second Row—L. Cherry, E. Henry, H. Moore, O. Gauthier, L. Edwards, G. Volkes, J. Kelly, L. Pickering, C. Wergar.
Front Row—M. Watson, F. Hull, N. Willcock, C. Apostle, A. Mitchell, M. Sheekter, F. Duquette, D. McBurney,
E. Gagg, A. Holunge.

Photo from the 1938 Algonquin Composite School yearbook. (Source: Harris Library at the University of Nipissing)

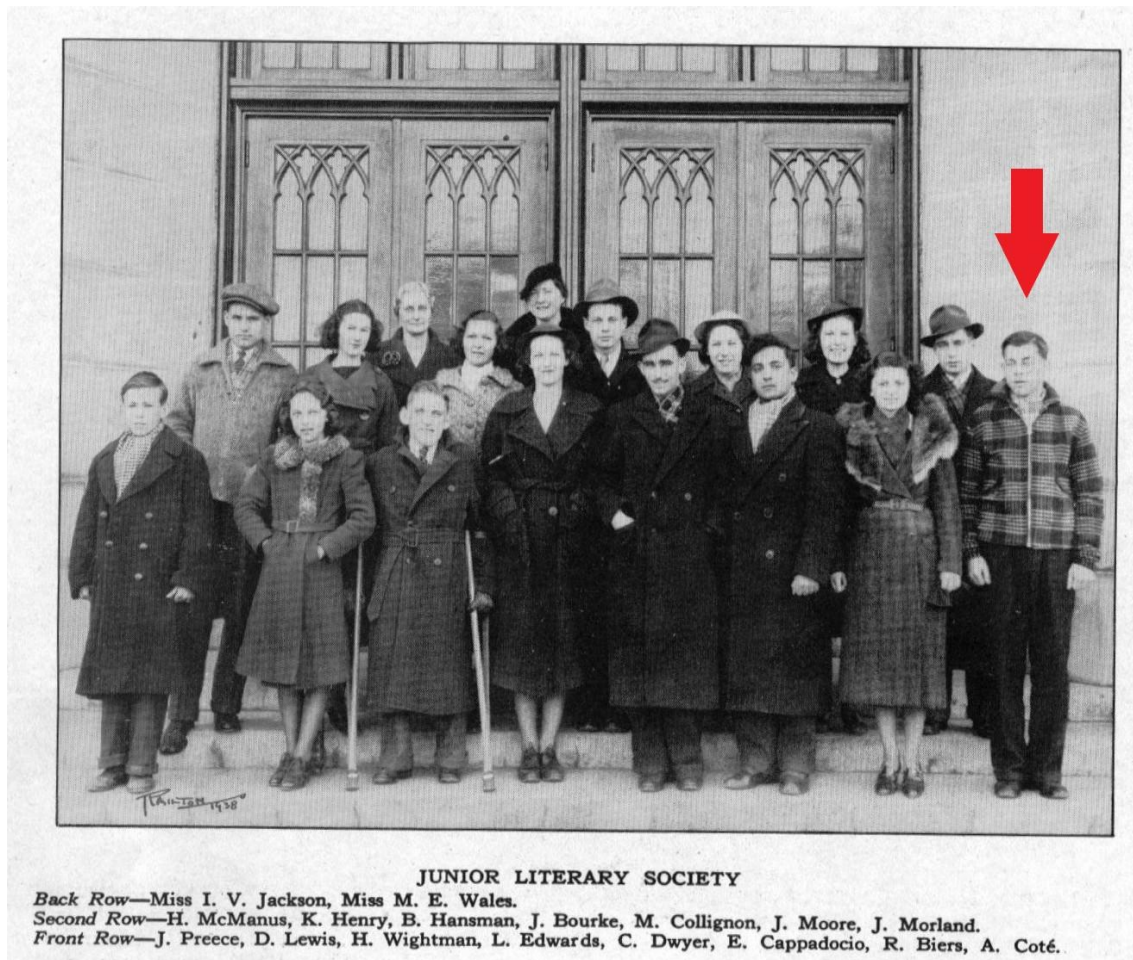


Photo from the 1938 Algonquin Composite School yearbook. (Source: Harris Library at the University of Nipissing)

...Albert enlisted shortly after his 20th birthday...

Before he enlisted on July 27, 1940 with ‘B’ Company of The Algonquin Regiment, Albert worked as a messenger boy for a newspaper, a call boy for the Canadian Pacific Railway, and as a clerk in Ligget’s Drugstore. According to his service record he spoke French as well as English.

His Personnel Selection Record with the Canadian Army noted that he “... *takes part in most sports...*” and “...*reads anything – mostly fiction...*” The report also stated that he was taking the “...*Legion course – music group ‘C’...*” and it was recommended that he “...*continue as present bandsman...*” Unfortunately, no mention was made of which instrument he played!

...Albert and his Regiment served in Newfoundland...



Location of Botwood Military Base in Newfoundland. (Map source: <http://postalhistorycorner.blogspot.com/2012/12/wwii-canadian-forces-in-newfoundland.html>)

Albert went to Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay), Ontario for training, and then was sent to Botwood, Newfoundland in July 1942. Why Botwood? An RCAF base in Botwood had aircraft patrolling the east coast of the Atlantic. Canadian Army personnel, including members of The Algonquin Regiment, based at Botwood were charged with protection of military facilities that had been installed there. (See <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/politics/botwood-base.php>)

... Albert and his Regiment were sent to Normandy, France...

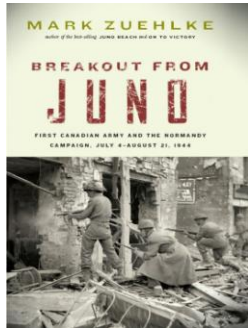
In January 1943 he left Newfoundland for #2 Transit Camp in Debert, Nova Scotia in preparation for going overseas.

On June 11, 1943, Albert and The Algonquin Regiment left for England, arriving on June 19, 1943.

A year later, he and his Regiment landed in Normandy, France on July 25, 1944, as part of the 10th Infantry Brigade, 4th Canadian Armoured Division. They were part of the contingent to capture Falaise as Allied troops moved through France following D-Day on June 6, 1944.

...Albert was mentioned for his heroism during Operation Tractable...

On August 14, **Operation Tractable** began north of Falaise, with Canadian and Polish troops, supported by a British tank brigade. The aim of this battle was to capture Falaise and then the smaller towns of Trun and Chambois. (See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Tractable)



Mark Zuehlke mentioned Albert in Chapter 27 of his book ‘*Breakout From Juno*’. On August 17, 1944, the Algonquin Regiment was in the area of Damblainville. “...*The Algonquins were the lead element in a long column of 10th Infantry Brigade and other 4th Armoured Division formations expecting to push across the Ante River bridge and advance on Trun...*”

After crossing the Ante River, Captain Clark Robertson’s platoon tried to seize a small railway bridge west of Point 77, where they were headed next. As one section of troops crossed the railroad, they were attacked by gunfire. Robertson was ordered to pull back.

Zuehlke explains what happened next. “...*Extracting the section across the tracks proved no easy matter, but the men escaped under covering fire from the rest of the company. When it was discovered that a seriously wounded man had been left behind, ‘A’ Company’s stretcher-bearer, Private A.J. Cote went to get him.*

As everyone else threw out fire, Cote dashed forward, found the man, quickly tended to his wounds, and carried him to safety. ‘Quite the bravest act I saw during the entire war’ Robertson said later, even though Cote’s gallantry went officially unrecognized...”

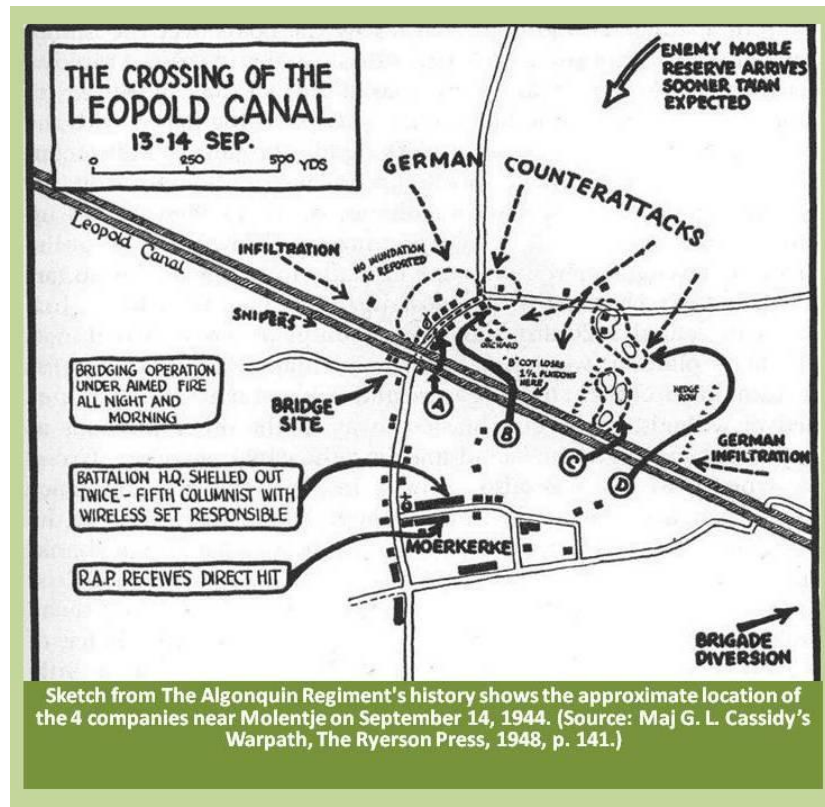
...Albert was in Belgium during the Battle of the Leopold Canal...

By September The Algonquin Regiment had moved up through northwest Europe into Belgium to be part of the preparations for the upcoming **Battle of the Scheldt** and the liberation of The Netherlands.



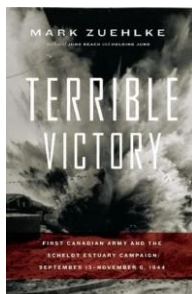
The Leopold Canal in peacetime. (Source: Wikipedia)

The Algonquin Regiment was tasked with establishing a bridgehead across the Leopold Canal. This was unsuccessful for many reasons, and resulted in the **Battle of the Leopold Canal** on September 13-14, 1944. They failed because “...a diversion failed to draw the German forces away, the boat launch was late and the artillery support ended too quickly. Many of the paddlers from other regiments assigned to assist The Algonquin Regiment never arrived, forcing the Algonquin troops to move the heavy assault boats across the canal and over the island where many German soldiers fired at them from hidden slit trenches...” (Source: <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/services/military-history/history-heritage/casualty-identification-military/battle-leopold-canal-september-13-14-1944.html>)



...Albert's heroism continued during the Battle of the Leopold Canal...

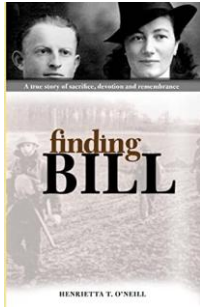
On September 14, 1944, in the midst of heavy casualties, Allied troops were ordered to withdraw, with gunners firing all their ammunition in an attempt to provide cover for the retreating men.



Mark Zuehlke mentions Albert Cote again in 'Terrible Victory': “...The firing had the desired result, holding the Germans sufficiently at bay to enable most of the Algonquins to escape...”

“...Not all the Canadians managed to get out, despite men attempting to drag or carry the wounded while others protected them with covering fire. A number of the more badly injured had to be left. Stretcher-bearer Private Albert Joseph

Coté volunteered to remain with three tourniquet cases. Soon after the other Algonquins headed off, shellfire wrecked the building where he and the wounded men sheltered. Coté was fatally wounded....”

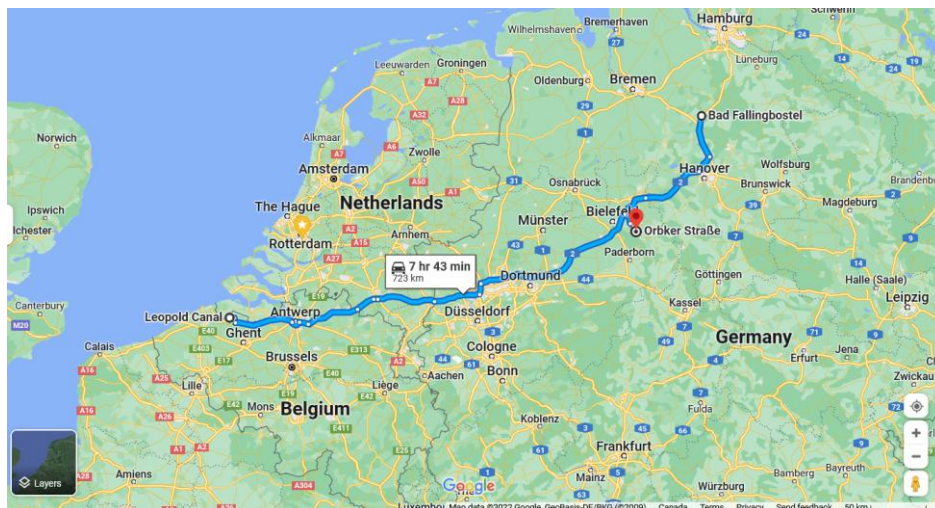


This wasn't the end of the story, however! Albert was mentioned in *'Finding Bill'* by Henrietta T. O'Neill, published in 2009. She records the recollection of Cpl Bill O'Neill in one excerpt: “...Back at headquarters, a request for air re-supply was denied due to lack of aircraft, and by 12:00 that afternoon a withdrawal order was issued, accompanied by a heavy artillery barrage and smoke screen. Realizing they were being surrounded in the barn, Private A. J. Coté, a young stretcher-bearer, volunteered to stay with three soldiers who were too wounded to move. Later, the building was shelled by the Germans and Coté fatally wounded...”

(<https://archive.org/details/findingbill0000onei/page/62/mode/2up?q=%22a+j+cote%22>)

Albert didn't die in the barn, but was badly wounded with a gunshot wound to his right thigh. He was taken prisoner of war.

...Albert's untreated wounds cost him his life ...



A badly wounded Albert Cote was transported from the Leopold Canal in Belgium, to a field hospital in Fallingb. in Germany. After his death, he was initially buried in a prisoner of war cemetery in Orbke. (Map source: Google)

Albert ended up in Kriegs Lagerlazarett (Field Hospital) Stalag 11B near Fallingb., Germany. Most likely, he would have been transported there by train along with other prisoners of war. International Red Cross reports from November 1944 indicate that conditions were dire there, with limited medical care, limited medical supplies such as dressings, and the supply of drugs was exhausted. (See https://www.pegasusarchive.org/pow/cSt_11B_History1.htm)

According to the German records, Albert died on October 5, 1944 and was initially buried in the Prisoner of War Cemetery in Orbke, 800 km northeast of Fallingbostal.

.....Albert is buried in the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten....

In March 1948, Albert was reburied in the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten.

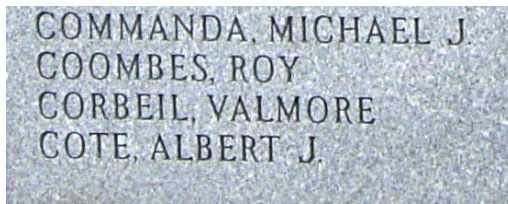


Albert Joseph Cote is buried in the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten, The Netherlands. (Photo courtesy of the Information Centre Canadian Cemetery Holten)

.....Albert Cote is listed on the North Bay Cenotaph in Memorial Park....



Pieter and Don Coutts by a section of the Wall of Honour in Memorial Park in North Bay, Ontario. (Photo credit: Daria Valkenburg)



Albert Joseph Cote, buried in the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten. (Photo credit: Don Coutts)

Although he never received official recognition for his heroism, Albert Cote was remembered by several of the men he served with, and he is recognized on the Wall of Honour in Memorial Park in North Bay, Ontario where he grew up.

Researching this story took on a life of its own, as so many people volunteered their help. Thank you to Shawn Rainville and Judie Klassen for researching the newspaper archives. Judie also found the book references in which Albert Cote was mentioned and researched the Cote family. Thank you to archivist Edward Drieger of the Harris Library at the University of Nipissing for the information about Albert Cote's school activities.

Staff at the North Bay Public Library, the Nipissing District Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society, and Captain Tim Feick and Cpl Brayton of The Algonquin Regiment independently dug into the archival material. Special thanks go to the North Bay Nugget newspaper for its extensive coverage of WWII soldiers from the time period.

Both Mark Zuehlke and Henrietta T. O'Neill were contacted in case they had additional information on Albert Cote other than what was in their books. Both responded, but nothing more could be added.

As our North Bay adventures conclude, we thank Don Coutts for guiding us around North Bay and arranging for the events we were able to participate in, and the North Bay Public Library for the invitation to do an Author Talk.

If you know of any soldiers that are buried in The Netherlands please let Pieter know. You can email him at memorialtrail@gmail.com, comment on the blog, or send a tweet to [@researchmemori1](https://twitter.com/researchmemori1).

...Missed the previous postings about our North Bay Memorial Trail visit?...

- **John 'Jack' Richard MARACLE:** <https://onthewarmemorialtrail.com/2022/07/17/on-the-war-memorial-trail-remembering-ww2-soldier-john-jack-richard-maracle/>
- **John 'Jack' Langford WALKER:** <https://onthewarmemorialtrail.com/2022/07/13/on-the-war-memorial-trail-in-north-bay-the-ww2-soldier-who-lost-his-life-on-the-day-hitlers-death-was-announced/>

- **Anthony PETTA:** <https://onthewarmemorialtrail.com/2022/06/29/on-the-war-memorial-trail-in-north-bay-the-ww2-soldier-who-was-appointed-company-sergeant-major/>
- **Cecil Edward GOODREAU:** <https://onthewarmemorialtrail.com/2022/06/17/on-the-war-memorial-trail-in-north-bay-remembering-ww2-soldier-cecil-edward-goodreau/>
- <https://onthewarmemorialtrail.com/2022/06/11/on-the-war-memorial-trail-in-north-bay-the-north-bay-public-library-author-talk/>
- <https://onthewarmemorialtrail.com/2022/06/08/on-the-war-memorial-trail-in-north-bay-the-north-bay-cenotaph-in-memorial-park/>
- <https://onthewarmemorialtrail.com/2022/06/07/on-the-war-memorial-trail-in-north-bay-adventures-in-north-bay/>
- <https://onthewarmemorialtrail.com/2022/05/15/on-the-war-memorial-trail-author-talks-in-north-bay/>

...Want to follow our research?....

If you are reading this posting, but aren't following the blog, you are welcome to do so. See <https://onthewarmemorialtrail.com/> or email me at dariadv@yahoo.ca and ask for an invitation to the blog.



Daria's book '*No Soldier Buried Overseas Should Ever Be Forgotten*' is available in print and e-book formats. For more information see <https://nosoldierforgotten.com/>

Upcoming Author Talk: Thursday, August 11, 2022 – Victoria-By-The-Sea, Prince Edward Island, part of the 'Our Island Talks' series, and hosted by Victoria Playhouse and Victoria Historical Association. Time: 2:00 pm.

You are also invited to subscribe to our YouTube Channel: *On The War Memorial Trail With Pieter Valkenburg:* https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ591TyjSheOR-Cb_Gs_5Kw.

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