



Vernon Eric Box, nicknamed Vernon, is born on September 23, 1912, in Sackville, New Brunswick.

His father, Leonard Charles and his mother, Gertrude Elizabeth Box, arrived in St. John, New Brunswick, from Hornsey, Middlesex, England, in 1911, together with Vernon's older brother, Selwyn Clifford.

After Vernon, the family had another son, named Douglass Stapleton.

English was spoken at home and the United Church was attended.

In 1921, the family moves to Fredericton, New Brunswick. Here, Vernon attends the primary school and subsequently high school.

Vernon is a true academic; after high school, he attends the university in Fredericton. He graduates in 1935, specializing in 'Electrical Engineering'.

Vernon apparently is also interested in the military side of society. He is already active as a reservist from 1931 through 1935. He also serves in the university cadet corps for several years, is a member of the shooting team and assigned to the York Regiment.

In mid-1936, he re-enlists for another three years as a reservist.

Vernon is assigned to the Carleton & York Regiment after enlisting for active duty in July 1941.

He has already passed the medical examination and is declared extremely fit.

Physical characteristics listed: 5'6" tall, weighed 134 lbs.

He has blue eyes and brown hair. He has a small mole on the right side of his neck.

Then Vernon's training begins at the district depot in Woodstock, Ontario. This is followed by basic infantry training in Fredericton, until he ends up in the hospital with a severe case of the flu in late November 1941. Apparently, he is susceptible to this, as he has already been admitted for about ten days for the same a year earlier.

In July 1941, Vernon is promoted to corporal, and in January 1942, he receives the rank of sergeant. He is transferred to the officers training in Brockville, Ontario.

There, he obtains various driving licenses, including those for wheeled motor vehicles, as well as motorcycles.

In 1943, Vernon also serves at Pennfield Ridge, New Brunswick, known at the time as 'Camp Utopia'.



Camp Utopia after WW2

*Camp Utopia, at the time the largest military facility in New Brunswick, was located a few kilometers from RCAF Station Pennfield Ridge.
It opened on August 1, 1942, as an advanced infantry training center and served as a training base for members of the Carleton & York Regiment and the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment. Canadian soldiers began training at this location in 1943 in preparation for the invasions of Italy and Northwest Europe.*

On June 6, 1943, Vernon marries his fiancée Dorothy Spague Deming from Woodstock, Ontario.

In late 1943, Vernon is assigned to the Pictou Highlanders in St. John and serves as an instructor.

In late 1943, negotiations took place at the government level to allow Canadian officers to serve in the British Army. Vernon volunteers to go to the United Kingdom as an officer and to serve in a British regiment.

He is selected and his CANLOAN number is: CDN/331.

CANLOAN-OFFICERS

In the autumn of 1943, the British Army faced a severe shortage of lieutenants and captains in the infantry regiments. These ranks were associated with positions such as platoon- or company-commander.

These infantry officers see actions on the front lines.

By then, the British Army had already been fighting on multiple fronts for several years, and losses in the aforementioned positions were heavy.

With the planned invasion looming, this was going to pose a major problem.

In Canada, there was a surplus of these young officers, motivated and willing to take part in the fight.

After much British-Canadian negotiation, the green light was given in February 1944 for the following setup:

- A maximum of 1,450 infantry and 50 ordnance officers could be loaned out.
- Participation was exclusively on a voluntary basis.
- Payment by Canada according to Canadian standards.
- Age limits: 33 years for lieutenants, 37 years for captains.
- British rules for promotion would be applied.
- If necessary, the officers could be recalled by Canada.
- The entire operation was given the code name CANLOAN.

A large number of applications was expected in Canada because many officers believed they could achieve faster promotion by participating in the battle. Others were so focused on deployment that they had themselves demoted in rank to qualify.

Nevertheless, the pre-estimated number of applications was not reached.

Ultimately, 623 infantry and 50 ordnance officers were selected.

They were given a registration number starting with CDN and a sequential number based on their application.

The commitment and performance of the CANLOAN officers were beyond all doubt.

The list of decorations and promotions is long.

Their dedication and courage also have a dark side.

The balance: 128 killed in action; 310 wounded, 27 prisoners of war, and one missing.

Eleven of the fallen are buried in Holten.

Their graves can be recognized by the Maple Leaf on the headstone, the registration number beginning with CDN, the designation Royal Canadian Infantry Corps, and the British regiment to which they were assigned.

Vernon is transferred, is assigned to the Special Officers Training Centre (SOTC) in Sussex, New Brunswick, in early March 1944.

He is there for a short time.

On April 14, 1944, he embarks the 'Bayano' in Halifax, which takes him and 47 other CANLOAN-officers to the United Kingdom. (UK)

On May 1, 1944, they arrive in Liverpool.

Vernon is assigned to 103 Reinforcement Unit of the 21st Army Group.

On June 17, 1944, this unit leaves the UK and arrives in Normandy.

Vernon, and two other CANLOAN officers, are assigned to the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers Regiment (6 RSF) on June 27, 1944.

This regiment had suffered heavy losses the day before during an attack on the village of Saint Mauvieu where they were confronted by a unit of the Hitler Youth. Quote from the war diary:

6th Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers is severely affected by the fighting. The regiment records the loss of 21 killed commanding officers, in total 113 wounded and 9 missing.

On July 20, 1944, according to a note in his file, Vernon is wounded and admitted to the hospital for a few days. Probably not too seriously; he is discharged after three days.

Again, he is assigned to a reinforcement unit, this time No. 32 Reinforcement Holding Unit (RHU).

In October 1944, Vernon joins 6 RSF again, until mid-November.

He is transferred to the headquarters of the 21st Army Group and serves as a Liaison Officer.

(Liaison Officer: an official responsible for communication and cooperation between various army units)

Vernon remains attached to the headquarters until February 17, 1945. As of that date, he is reassigned to 6 RSF.

The regiment is then involved in Operation Veritable, launched on February 8, 1945, it is the first phase of the Rhineland Offensive. (February 8 – March 25, 1945)

Following the largely unsuccessful Operation Market Garden, a massive Canadian/British force was assembled in the Nijmegen region during the winter of 1944/1945. Approximately 400,000 men and nearly 35,000 vehicles. A similar American force gathered near Roermond. The objective was to push the German units back behind the Rhine.

On February 8, 1945, the Canadians and British launched their attack with Operation "Veritable." They encountered fierce resistance in the Reichswald. It became the bloodiest battle ever fought on German soil. By March 10, the western bank of the Rhine had been virtually cleared of German troops.

February 22, 1945, considered the final day of Operation Veritable, is the fatal day for Lieutenant Vernon Eric Box.

The German city of Goch is largely in Allied hands by then, but the surrounding area is still a war zone. This also includes the area around Kalbeck Castle and the surrounding forests.

During the advance towards Uedem, the Royal Scots Fusiliers face a German counterattack.

The war diary reads:

*An enemy counter attack came in on B Coy while the Coy Comd was giving out his orders and "O" Group suffered casualties of two platoon commanders (**one being Lieut. VE BOX**) and CSM Barlow killed.*

Lieutenant Box is initially reported wounded, but it soon becomes apparent that he is killed.

He is given a grave southeast of Goch, where a temporary cemetery has been established next to a farm.

On August 8, 1946, the CWGC Canadian War Cemetery in Holten becomes his final resting place. The grave reference is: plot 12; row H, grave 12.

He is awarded:

The 1939-1945 Star, the France-Germany Star; the War Medal 1939-1945 and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp.



Sources:

www.cwgc.org; www.ancestry.com; www.canada.ca/library-archives; wikipedia, wartimesproject.com; codeword CANLOAN ISBN 1-55002-167-2