Brydges, Walter Robert Private 8-B-2



Walter Robert Brydges—known as Walter—is born on January 11, 1924, in Galetta, Ontario. He is the first child of William John Brydges and Elizabeth Ann "Lizzie" Brydges (née Ferguson).
Following Walter, the family grows to include eight more daughters and two sons.
The family attends the United Church, and English is their primary language.

On July 6, 1944, Walter enlists for active service in the Canadian Army in Kingston, Ontario. At that time, the family lives in Calabogie, Ontario—a place they had moved to for employment opportunities. Before enlisting, Walter has worked at the Black Donald mine.

During the 1940s, the Black Donald Graphite Mine near Calabogie (Ontario, Canada) experienced a remarkable resurgence due to World War II. At the time, it was Canada's primary producer of graphite. The immense demand for graphite—used as a lubricant for heavy machinery during the war years—breathed new life into the mining village.



Mine shaft Black Donald

Like all recruits, Walter must see the medical board before being officially inducted into the service.
His recorded physical details: 5'6½" tall; weight 134 lbs; blue eyes, brown hair. No specific physical markings were noted for identification purposes.

For Walter, the military carousel starts at the district depot in Kingston.
After a few weeks, he is transferred to St. Johns, Quebec, for basic infantry training. He remains there until mid-September 1944. While in St. Johns, he incurs a minor disciplinary penalty for taking a 24-hour leave without official authorization—the price being a few days of confinement to barracks and the forfeiture of a few days' pay.

In mid-September 1944, Walter is transferred to Farnham, Quebec, for further training. By this time, the invasion of Normandy has taken place several months earlier, and troops in Western Europe were in urgent need of reinforcements to replace those lost in action. Plans are already in place for Walter to cross over to the United Kingdom (UK). During the second half of November 1944, he is granted leave, which coincides with his embarkation leave.

Then, there is a notable entry in Walter's file: permission to marry Mary Agnes Dodge on or after December 11, 1944.
There is no evidence to suggest that a wedding took place, as Walter remains registered as "single."
However, he is "absent without leave"—meaning he took time off without requesting permission—from the evening of December 8 until late in the afternoon on December 12.
Could he have been celebrating a private occasion after all?

On December 14, 1944, Walter is transferred to Camp Debert, Nova Scotia—a vast encampment where troops destined for the United Kingdom are assembled.
Four days later, Walter and thousands of others board a troopship bound for the UK, arriving on Christmas Day, 1944.

Assigned to a reinforcement unit, Walter remains in the UK until February 12, 1945. On that day, he is transferred by plane to the European mainland. By then, the southern part of the Netherlands has already been liberated. While a few airstrips were in operation, they were reserved exclusively for combat aircraft; it is likely that Walter landed in Belgium.

On March 6, 1945, Walter is assigned to the Algonquin Regiment. After only six weeks of front-line experience, he is killed in action on April 23, 1945.
The war diary of the Algonquin Regiment provides some insight into what Walter endured during that brief period.

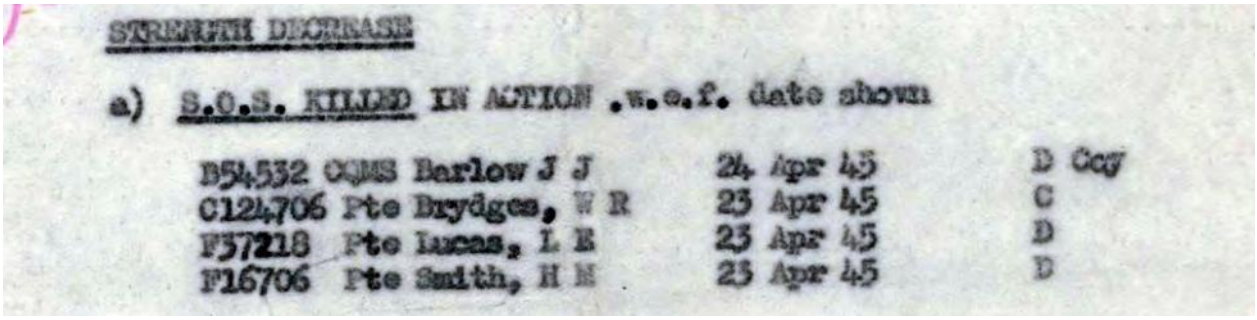
In April 1945, the Algonquin Regiment takes part in the advance through northwestern Germany.
On April 11, 1945, they reach the town of Esterwegen. Further north is the Küstenkanal (Coastal Canal), which becomes the regiment's next objective. Following the crossing and the establishment of a bridgehead, they are tasked with securing the route toward Edewecht and Friesoythe.
The operation to cross the canal and establish a bridgehead proves costly, resulting in significant casualties for the Algonquin Regiment.

The regiment's advance continues toward Edewecht-Bad Zwischenahn.
Near Edewecht, the regiment is tasked with clearing the area on both sides of the main road.
Their route of advance leads straight through the expansive Vehne-Moor.
For the German forces, this terrain is highly defensible.
The marshy ground is so soft that tanks and heavy vehicles sink into it immediately.
The Algonquin infantrymen often find themselves knee-deep in mud and icy peat water.
Although the resistance is not exceptionally fierce, it takes the Algonquins several days to gain control of the area.
The German forces, aware that the Canadians are confined to the few paved roads, subject the advancing Algonquins to constant fire.

A small river, the Vehne, cuts across the line of advance, posing an additional obstacle.
Because frontal assaults through the marsh would have been too costly in terms of lives, the Algonquins move along the flanks to outflank the German positions near the Vehne River.



Walter's C Company suffers relatively few casualties on April 23, 1944:
a few wounded and one man killed in action.
The soldier killed is Private Walter Robert Brydges.



STRENGTH DECREASE

a) S.O.S. KILLED IN ACTION .w.e.f. date shown

B54532 CQMS Barlow J J	24 Apr 45	D Coy
C124706 Pte Brydges, W R	23 Apr 45	C
F57218 Pte Lucas, L E	23 Apr 45	D
F16706 Pte Smith, H E	23 Apr 45	D

He is given a temporary grave near Osterscheps.
On 8 March 1946, he is laid to rest in his final resting place at the CWGC Canadian War Cemetery in Holten—Plot 8, Row B, Grave 2.

He is awarded:
the 1939–1945 Star, the France and Germany Star, the War Medal 1939–1945, and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp.

His headstone reads:
We loved him,
Yes, we loved him
But Jesus loved him more



Sources:
www.cwgc.org; www.ancestry.com;
www.canada.ca/library-archives; wikipedia, wartimesproject.com; War Diary Algonquin Regiment, project ’44.