

Private ROGER PALMER DEVOS – Houghton

02 H 5

Died on April 11, 1945, age 29
in the Netherlands.

A/6195

Essex Scottish Regiment.

Roger Palmer Devos was born on May 26, 1915,
to Camille and Emily Fermin-Devos in Izegem,
Belgium.

The first three years of his life were the last
three years of the First World War. While children
in Norfolk went to sleep to the sights and sounds
of lightning and thunder, Roger's days and nights
in German-occupied Belgium were filled with the
sounds of the cannon roar and exploding shells.

Mary De Cloet of Langton lent a letter from
Belgian relatives who lived through this period.

*The Germans had taken everything except a few cows that were left in the
neighbourhood. We hid our last cow in the woods for two days. There are no
horses left, only a few oxen, so it was difficult to plow or work the land and
the oxen that are left have a hard life. The churches were dynamited. Our
cousin and his wife were struck by a grenade. He is crippled and she is still
in the hospital. The baby was hit while sitting on its mother's lap. It died.*



Roger Devos

Roger shared life with two brothers, Nestor and Julius, and three sisters,
Florin, Julia and Marietta.

After his mother passed away, he, his father and stepmother left for Canada
in 1924, and were naturalized in 1930. He was living in Clear Creek when he
met Stella Isabel Baird of Clear Creek, daughter of Robert Baird and Amelia
Thompson. They were married in Fairground on Jan. 7, 1937, and they
would have one son, Roger Camiel Devos.

Roger enlisted on Sept. 7, 1944, in Red Deer, Alta., indicating that he was a
lathe operator, a member of the Roman Catholic Church and his hobbies
were skating, hockey, watching baseball, minor mechanics and reading.
Whether by choice or necessity, he was transferred to the Essex Scottish
Regiment whose home base was Windsor, Ont. On Aug. 19, 1942, the
Canadians – with the Essex Scottish – had taken part in the raid on the port
town of Dieppe, France. It was a devastating failure with more than 900
Canadians killed, the Essex Scottish Regiment suffering 121 fatal casualties.
It would take two years for the regiment to regain strength and return to
fighting form. It was during this phase that Roger joined the regiment,

arriving overseas in October 1944. In the interim, the Essex Scottish with the 3rd Canadian Division had landed on the beaches of Normandy in July 1944 as the Canadians began their push through France and Holland.

February 1945: The Canadians and British were slowly advancing through the pines of the Reichswald Forest (German Imperial Forest on the east side of the Maas River) until on Feb. 21, they cracked the vaunted Siegfried Line. The German defences about the Hochwald Forest and Balberger heights still barred the way to the Rhine. The assault against these formidable positions was launched on Feb. 26 by the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions and the 4th Armoured Division. The advance was an agonizing repetition of the Reichswald battle. Handicapped by rain and mud, they faced fierce enemy counterattacks. It took until March 4 to clear the enemy from both objectives. During the month of fighting, the First Canadian Army had gained the banks of the Rhine River – the last major line of German defence. The cost was 15,634 Canadians killed, wounded or missing.

On the morning of March 1, the Essex Scottish assaulted the Hochwald Forest. Despite withering machine gun fire, artillery and strong German defences, 'C' Company commanded by Acting Major Fred Tilston was able to gain a foothold and allow the other companies to solidify the position. The next operation was the capture of Xanten on March 8 and this wasn't much easier with 119 casualties compared to 138 at the Hochwald. After a period of rest, the battalion was moved back into Holland. With the enemy in retreat, events moved quickly. On April 14 the Essex Scottish captured the bridge into the old town of Groningen. It was probably during the work up to capture the bridge that Roger was seriously wounded. He was removed to hospital in Lochem, Netherlands, on April 10 and died there on April 11. He was temporarily interred near the hospital, and later his body was moved to the Holten Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands.

Roger rests 330 kilometres from where he was born.

Private Roger Palmer Devos is commemorated on Page 509 of the Second World War Book of Remembrance.



Written by Grant Smith.

Norfolk Remembers