



Ernest Dumas was born on May 16, 1919, in St. Malo, Quebec. It is the highest point (approximately 640 m) in Canada on the border with the United States.

He is the son of Joseph Arthur and Bernadette Dumas. According to the 1931 census, his father was a blacksmith/mechanic.

Ernest is the second youngest. The 1945 family file lists him as having seven older sisters, two of whom still live at home, and five brothers.

The youngest, Rudolf Roland, is a soldier in the Régiment de la Chaudière. His mother, Bernadette, died before 1945.

The family is French-speaking and Roman Catholic. When Ernest was 17, he left school to go to work.

Like many others, Ernest was conscripted under the N.R.M.A.

In 1940, Prime Minister King introduced the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA).

This act required national registration of all eligible men for homeland defense and authorized the government to "conscript every man in Canada for military training in the defense of Canada."

The NRMA also granted the federal government powers of conscription and exemption, but only for homeland defense. Soldiers engaged in homeland defense as a result of the NRMA were called "Zombies," after the living dead in a Hollywood horror film. The term denotes contempt for those who did not wish to fight overseas.

It should be noted that French Canadians were fiercely opposed to the NRMA. In the province of Quebec, for example, almost three-quarters of the population had voted against the NRMA.



Anti-conscription rally, Quebec City

Ernest reported to Lauzon, Quebec, on July 31, 1941. The family was then living in Quebec City itself.

As preliminary training, Ernest had already completed a short basic training course from early October to early November 1940. When he registered, he indicated his preference for the air force.

He listed his job as an apprentice tailor at J.B. Laliberté in Quebec, a well-known clothing atelier.

His medical document reads the usual information: 5'7½" tall, weight 127 lbs. He had blue eyes and brown hair. He was classified " fit for all duties.

In October 1941, Ernest was transferred to Valcartier, Quebec, for further training. He was officially assigned to the Home Defence and, before the end of the year, was transferred to Camp Borden in Ontario.

Ernest didn't receive his first leave until March 1943, reporting back in mid-April. He was then assigned to the 13th Infantry Brigade, marked "'for all duties'; he was taken on strength by the Régiment de Hull.

His new station was Nanaimo on Vancouver Island.

Ernest would remain there for an extended period. At the end of 1942, he received a few weeks' leave, but by the end of the year, he was back in the barracks.

The 13th Infantry Brigade, Ernest's regiment as well, was deployed in the occupation of Kiska, one of the Aleutian Islands. Preparations for the attack on Kiska began in July 1943.

On July 12, 1943, Ernest was deployed in these operations. A month later, on August 15th and 16th American and Canadian troops landed on Kiska. The Japanese had already left the island after heavy Allied bombardment.

The Aleutian Islands are an archipelago in the North Pacific Ocean, located between the United States and Russia. The Japanese occupied the Aleutian Islands of Attu and Kiska between June 1942 and July 1943. Although Canadian NRMA conscripts could not be deployed overseas without their own consent, the Aleutians, partly due to their strategic location, were not considered "overseas territory." A number of NRMA soldiers were deployed for this operation.



Landing 13th Inf. Brigade
Note: the men are wearing US helmets

In early December 1943, Ernest returned to base and received his postponed leave and some extra days. He was supposed to report back on January 3, 1944.

He failed to do so and wasn't back in the barracks until the 7th.

The consequences were well known: a week and a half 'Confined to Barracks' and 10 days' pay withheld.

In April 1944, things became more serious; he was sentenced to 27 days' detention. According to the paragraph recording his sentence, it must have been a serious confrontation with a superior. This was possibly because 1944 also witnessed the so-called "Conscription Crises", a growing resistance among French Canadians against the NRMA.

The start of the crises was a consequence of the deployment of conscripts during the Aleutian Islands invasion.

The only struggle the 13th Brigade had to face during its six-month stay on Kiska was a fight with the Revenue Department. The question was of whether they were overseas or not, as the former meant exemption from paying taxes. Servicemembers used the fact that they were west of the International Date Line to argue that they were in fact in Asia, making them deployed overseas. The Revenue department won.

Later in 1944, there was also strong resistance to the possibility of deployment overseas.

Ernest served his detention in May 1944 in Vernon, BC.

The other months of 1944 are sparsely documented in his files.

It is clear that he was allowed leave in December before being transferred to the United Kingdom (UK).

On January 10, 1945, he boarded a troop ship bound for the UK, arriving there on the 17th. Ernest was assigned to a general reinforcement battalion.

In early March 1945, he was taken on strength by Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal.

On March 7, 1945, he set foot on land in Western-Europe.

Ernest's file then contains only one entry:

'April 29, 1945: Killed in Action'.

What Ernest experienced in less than two months can only be deduced from the troop movements of the FMR.

Ernest would have lived to see the final phase of the Rhineland Offensive.

Between March 7 and 15, 1945, the FMR fought their way to Xanten and the northeast side of the Reichswald in Germany.

After the Allies crossed the Rhine at Wesel and Rees on March 29, the Canadian troops prepared to liberate the eastern and northern parts of the Netherlands.

On March 31, 1945, they crossed the German-Dutch border.

Ernest would also have witnessed the FMR advance into northwest Germany. It took them through the eastern region of Gelderland, Laren/Holten, and Beilen to the city of Groningen, where the regiment had to fight house-to-house.

The advance continued into northwest Germany.

There, on April 29, 1945, came his fateful day.

The regiment's war diary records the following:

29 Apr 45 Weather: cloudy in the afternoon with rain at night. Visibility good.
At 0900 hrs battalion with 1 troop of tanks, 1 troop of tank flame trowsers and tank mine sweeper started operation to clear the village of MUNDERLOH, MR 4295 sheet M-2 guarding the approaches of the city of OLDENBURG.
Many snipers encountered but the flame trowsers soon immobilized them. The operation was completed by 0700 hrs and 8 Recce regt took over while our men came back to their original positions.

On that day, the FMR had to clear the town of Munderloh, west of Delmenhorst (Germany), to secure the access road to Oldenburg on the southeast.

Private Ernest Dumas likely fell victim to one of the snipers.

He was given a temporary grave near Kirchhatten.

His final resting place was the CWGC Canadian Cemetery in Holten.

Grave reference: Plot 8, Row E, Grave 15.

He was awarded:

1939-1945 Star; France-Germany Star; Defence Medal and War Medal 1939-1945.

Sources:

www.cwgc.org; www.ancestry.com; www.canada.ca/library-archives; wikipedia, project '44.

