O’Neil, Edward Henry Private 11-A-3



Edward Henry O’Neil—known as Edward—is born on July 21, 1925, in North-West Arm, Nova Scotia.

North-West Arm is a 3.5-kilometer-long inlet, part of Halifax Harbour in Nova Scotia.

He is the son of Henry Marshall O’Neil and Rose Marion O’Neil (née Grant). Henry has one brother and four sisters.
English is spoken at home, and the family attends the Church of England.

Henry completes school up to Grade 9 and starts working at the age of 14.
On April 12, 1944, he enlists for active service in the Canadian Army in Halifax. He states that he has spent the previous year and a half working at the M.R. Chappell sawmill in Sydney, Nova Scotia.

During the Second World War, the local firm of M.R. Chappell carried out critical construction and defense-related projects around Sydney Harbour, which served as a vital staging point for the Allied navy.

First Edward has to see the doctors.
His record lists: 5’4” tall; weight: 130 lbs; brown hair and brown eyes. Edward mentions that he has chronic rhinitis, but a second check reveals no underlying issues. He is declared fit for service.
An interview, after his first few weeks in the service, provides further personal details: he plays the guitar and the harmonica. He also appears to be quite skilled with his hands, as he is recommended for training as a shoemaker.

After spending a few weeks at a district depot, Edward is transferred to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, for basic training.
For his follow-on training, Edward departs for Camp Aldershot, Nova Scotia.
Upon completion of the standard training, it is decided to further develop Edward’s specific skills.
In mid-August 1944, he is transferred to Camp Barriefield in Ontario—a training center for various, militarily useful, specialties.
Officially, this base is designated as the Canadian Ordnance and Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Training Centre (CO&EMETC).
Edward is assigned to a group slated to take a course for "shoemakers".
By the end of October, he has qualified as a "Category C" shoemaker and returns to Camp Aldershot.

He is granted two weeks of personal leave, supplemented by embarkation leave and two extra travel days. The inclusion of embarkation leave indicates that Edward is scheduled to cross over to the United Kingdom (UK).
In mid-December 1944—having just been promoted to Acting Corporal—he is transferred to Camp Debert, Nova Scotia, where all troops, departing from Halifax, are being assembled.

On December 18, 1944, Edward and thousands of other troops board a troopship bound for the UK, arriving there on December 25, 1944.
Assigned to a reinforcement unit, Edward remains on British soil for over a month. The Canadian units have suffered heavy losses, and reinforcements are urgently needed.
On February 10, 1945, the unit—with Edward among them—arrives in Antwerp.
After serving for a time with a reinforcement unit, Edward is posted to the Algonquin Regiment on April 19, 1945.
On April 28, 1945, he is struck off the strength of that unit with the notation: "Died of Wounds."

The regiment's war diary provides some insight into what Edward experienced during the few days with the Algonquins.
In April 1945, the regiment is on Dutch soil. Passing through places including Millingen and Lochem, they head toward Bornerbroek. After the hard-fought liberation of Wierden, the advance continues into German territory.
Esterwegen is reached on April 11, 1945. The Küstenkanal (Coastal Canal) is an excellent defensive line for the Germans.
Crossing the canal and establishing a bridgehead on its northern bank come at a high cost to the Algonquins. As soon as the engineers have completed a bridge across the canal, the advance continues toward Edewecht, with Bad Zwischenahn as the final objective. Before reaching Edewecht, the regiment is tasked with clearing the wooded areas on either side of the main road. This operation takes several days and results in many casualties among the Algonquins, including both the wounded and the fallen.

Private Edward Henry O'Neil is among the wounded. He is transported to the 15th Canadian Field Ambulance, the medics determine that he has sustained shrapnel wounds to his left upper arm, elbow, back, abdomen, and left knee. Nothing more can be done for him, and he passes away shortly thereafter.
He is initially laid to rest near Friesoythe, where a temporary cemetery has been established for those who fell in the region.

On March 9, 1946, he gets his final resting place:
the CWGC Canadian War Cemetery in Holten, Plot 11, Row A, Grave 3.

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:
Gone but not forgotten



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