

WW I Enlisted Men & Women of Whitewater Region Project

Private Donald Francis Coffey

Donald Francis Coffey, son of **William Ross Coffey** and **Harriet McDonald**, was born on 4 Jul 1893 in Pembroke but was a native of Forester's Falls.¹ He had 4 older living step-siblings from his father's first marriage to **Margaret Bell**; 4 natural siblings; and after his mother's death in 1900, his father married a third time to **Harriett Elliott**. Some of his siblings married into the local families of McDonald, Coleman, and McGinnis. Many of his siblings later lived in Edmonton¹.

Pte. Donald F. Coffey enlisted into 194th Battalion (Albert Regiment) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on May 24, 1916 at Edmonton. He was 22 years old and at the time listed his occupation as farmer. He was described as 5' 6 1/2" tall and 138 lbs., with a ruddy complexion, grey eyes and brown hair². He was transferred to the 10th Battalion on April 21, 1917. He was reported killed in action in the field on Aug 15, 1917 at age 24³. The casualty report stated:

Killed in Action: while taking part with his battalion in an attack on Hill 70, he was killed by enemy shell fire, just after 'jumping off' in "no Man's Land" at Lens³

The Battle of Hill 70 took place on the outskirts of Lens, France between Aug 15-25, 1917. Lens lay inside German-occupied territory near Vimy and it was tactically planned to take the higher elevation just outside Lens in an effort to draw troops away from the 3rd battle at Ypres and to make the hold on Lens untenable. The capture of Hill 70 was an important victory for Canadian Troops. On that first day when Pte. Coffey died, 1,055 other Canadians⁴ also died including Pte. Archie Coleman, another Foresters Falls native.

Pte. Donald Francis Coffey was buried in Maroc British Cemetery at Grenay, Departement du Pas-de-Calais, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France.^{5,6} His name is also listed on the Honor Roll for WWI, Trinity United Church, Forester's Falls⁷, and the Beachburg & Westmeath War Memorials^{12,13}



Image 1: Pte. Donald F. Coffey⁵



Image 2: WWI Honor Roll⁷



Image 3: Newspaper Clipping⁸

WW I Enlisted Men & Women of Whitewater Region Project

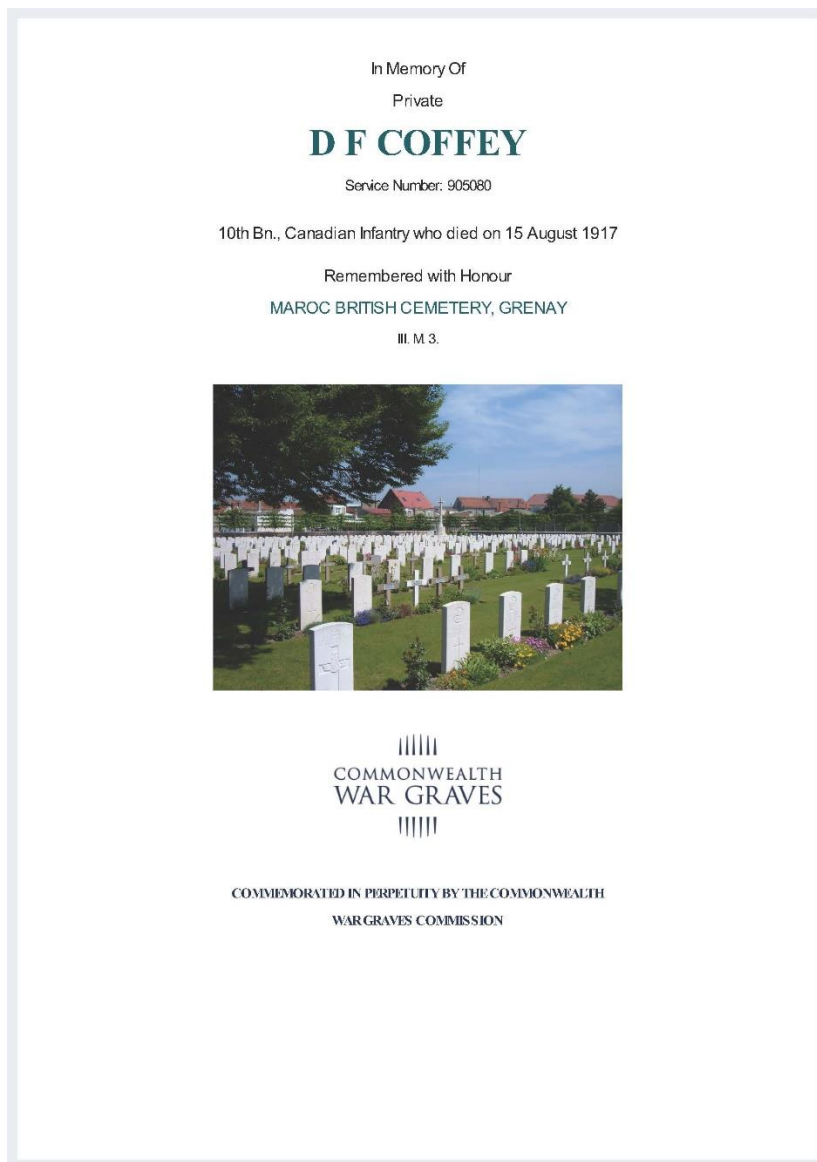


Image 4: Commonwealth War Graves Commission Certificate⁶

LETTER FROM FRIEND OF LATE PRIVATE D. F. COFFEY

Miss Hilda Coffey, formerly a resident of Foresters Falls, has received the following letter regarding the death in action of her brother, Private Donald F. Coffey:

Dear Friend,—I am now going to carry out my promise made to your brother, D. F. Coffey, or Jim, as I always called him. I was with him all the time in England, as we came over with the 194th, and I went to France with him. He was like a brother to me, and happy any time, no matter what was before him.

The time we went into the line Jim



The Late Private Coffey.

said, 'Roy, if anything happens to me, write my sister', and I promised that I would. I was with him on the spot when he got killed. It sure hurt me to see the best chum I ever had killed along side of me. He was the best man in the platoon, and always cool no matter how badly we were being shelled. I was wounded the same day and that is why I did not write sooner. I just came out of the hospital a few days ago and my hand is just getting so I can write. I don't know if the address is right as Jim gave it to me last August, and it might be changed now. The last thing Jim said was, "Be sure and write to my sister, Roy." I can rest good now that I have kept my promise. I hope this does not cause you pain, and I am sorry I did not write before, for Jim sure died a brave soldier's death. I will now close, hoping this finds you well.

Your loving brother's pal,
ROY WATERS.

Image 5: Letter from fellow soldier⁹

WW I Enlisted Men & Women of Whitewater Region Project

Sources:

1. Bennett, F. (2022). *Faysgenealogy.com*. www.faysgenealogy.com. family history database & images; 2001-present. Cobden, ON. (Original sources noted in database)
2. "Personnel Records of the First World War." Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Digital images. Library and Archives Canada. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/search.aspx>. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=108090>
3. "Circumstances of Death Registers, First World War." Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Digital images. Go to 549 of 1384 <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/mass-digitized-archives/circumstances-death-registers/Pages/item.aspx?PageID=42155>
4. Greenhouse, Brereton & Jon Tattrie, *Battle for Hill 70*, The Canadian Encyclopedia, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/hill-70>, Feb 7, 2006
5. The Canadian Virtual War Memorial: Veterans Affairs Canada. "The Canadian Virtual War Memorial (CVWM)." Database. Veterans Affairs Canada. Includes *Photograph of Pte. Donald Coffey* www.veterans.gc.ca/eng <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/522893?Donald%20Francis%20Coffey>
6. CWGC. "Private D F Coffey, War Casualty Details 522893, CWGC." <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/522893/d-f-coffey/>
7. Bennett, Fay. *Photograph of Ross Township WWI Honor Roll*, Trinity United Church, Foresters Falls, Ontario.
8. Newspaper clipping "Letter found in chair" by Evelyn Moore Price, scrapbook of Lena Bryce
9. "Letter from friend of Late Private D. F. Coffey", The Renfrew Mercury, Mar 29, 1918 posted on the Canadian Virtual War Memorial (source #3)
10. Book of Remembrance, Veterans Affairs Canada <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/books/page?page=218&book=1&sort=pageAsc>
11. "Private Donald Francis Coffey (1893-1917) - Find A Grave Memorial, 15 Aug. 1917, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24371749/donald-francis-coffey>
12. Bennett, Fay. *Photograph of The Beachburg War Memorial*. Beachburg, Ontario. November 2022
13. Bennett, Fay. *Photograph of The Westmeath War Memorial*. Westmeath, Ontario. November 2022.