

Lieut. Eric Reginald Dennis, M. C.

Killed in Action "Somewhere in France"

April 5th, 1917

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LIEUT. ERIC R. DENNIS M.C.

(Halifax Herald, April 10th, 1917)

Lieut. Eric R. Dennis Falls Bravely Fighting For Flag And Country

Thrice Recommended For The Military
Cross Within Thirty-five Days, Which
Was Awarded Him, The Heroic Young
Halifax Officer Now Gives His Life For
The Cause He Held So Dear

THE war is constantly bringing to us reminders of the danger in which our heroic men stand while battling for freedom, and the number of those who fall is growing at an appalling rate. A cable to the family late last night announced that Lieut. Eric Reginald Dennis, elder son of Senator Dennis, had been killed in action. The gallant young officer had very many friends in Halifax and thruout Canada, who will share in the universal sympathy which will be extended to his immediate family.

At the outbreak of the war Lieut. Dennis was a lieutenant in the 63rd Halifax Rifles and he went on duty with his regiment in the forts

and outposts around Halifax. He was nineteen years old, and he volunteered for overseas service in the first week of the war—one of the first in Canada to do this. The military authorities, however, directed him to remain with the 63rd regiment, but his insistent requests to be allowed to go on overseas service were at last rewarded by an appointment to the second of the battalions, (the 40th), recruited in Nova Scotia, and he went into training at Aldershot and later at the great Valcartier camp. He was promoted captain before going overseas in the autumn of 1915. The winter was spent in training at Bramshott and during part of the time at that camp he was adjutant of the 40th Nova Scotia battalion.

It was his desire, of course, to get across the channel and into France, but this was a matter of great difficulty. During that winter Captain Dennis made several applications for orders to go to France, but was met with the reply that the army had an oversupply of officers ranking above lieutenant. To overcome this he, with a Halifax friend, also in England, Captain William E. Doane, offered to resign his commission and both expressed their anxiety to be allowed to go in any capacity. Eventually Captain Dennis received orders to join a battalion on the firing line as lieutenant, and he and Doane, who also went as a lieutenant, were the first two Canadian officers to thus obtain a chance for service in France.

Lieutenant Dennis has been in heavy fighting on the front since the summer of 1916. Three times within thirty-five days he was recommended for the Military Cross, which he was awarded for heroic conduct, and was recommended for a captaincy and given command of a company.

Lieut. Eric Dennis was a graduate of the Halifax county academy and had taken two years in the arts course at Acadia university. He was a valued member of the staff of The Halifax Herald and was among the first of more than forty from The Herald building who have gone on active service, several of these, like himself, having made the supreme sacrifice, giving their lives for the noble cause in which they battled. His name is on the honor roll of Chalmers Presbyterian church, now St. Andrew's. He was twenty-one years of age.

Senator Dennis, who was in New York, left for Halifax last night. The young officer has one surviving brother and four sisters, one of whom, Miss Agnes, is in Patriotic work in England.

Colonel Vidito, of his old regiment, the 63rd Rifles, when informed that Lieut. Dennis had fallen, paid him a warm tribute as an officer in the 63rd, and spoke of the pride which he felt as he had heard, from time to time, of his splendid record overseas and of the honor conferred upon him in the award of the military cross. Colonel Vidito said that Lieutenant Dennis was a favorite with the officers and popular with the men. His old regiment was proud of him.

(Halifax Morning Chronicle, April 10th, 1917)

Another young son of Halifax has fallen on the Field of Honor, giving to his country and the cause of freedom the last full measure of devotion. Captain Eric Reginald Dennis was quick to respond to the call and amid the trying tests of war, he proved himself a worthy soldier of Canada, and a very gallant young gentleman. Going to the front as a lieutenant he earned his promotion on the field and won the high honor of the Military Cross for gallantry in action. He was scarcely more than a boy in years, yet he played a man's part and did his duty nobly in the heat of battle, and all Halifax will share alike in the pride of his worthy record as a soldier and in heartfelt sympathy for those to whom his heroic death brings the poignant sorrow of personal bereavement.

(From The Acadian Recorder)

Another Halifax boy has given up his life for the Empire after winning exceptional honors on the field. When the war broke out young Eric Dennis, then an officer in the 63rd, was among the first to volunteer for service overseas, despite the fact that he was only a lad of eighteen at the time. His energy was equal to his pluck, and, tiring of being kept waiting in England, he accepted lower official standing in order to get to the front. He accomplished his desire, and in a short time won recognition for courage and resourcefulness in battle, and received the reward of the Military Cross, being thus one of the youngest officers in the entire service to gain such an honor. He has done his duty nobly and well, performed his part in making the name of Canada honored in the eyes of the world in doing her share in the defence of civilization. Honor to the young hero, and Senator and Mrs. Dennis and relatives will have the deepest sympathy of the whole community in their sad bereavement, in which the Recorder joins.

(Halifax Evening Mail, April 10th, 1917)

On all sides since news of the death in action of Lieut. Eric Dennis was received have been heard expressions of keen regret, these coming especially from the officers and men of the 63rd Regiment Halifax Rifles, as well as from the many who had known the young officer well and followed his career—the fact that he was thrice recommended for the Military Cross speaks for itself of the quality of his courage. Scarcely more than a boy in years, he has left a record which richly justified the pride of his friends—he was prompt to offer for the defense of the Empire; served faithfully and gallantly and gallantly died.

The following are exact copies of the three reports in which he was recommended by his commanding officer for the Military Cross—the documents speak for themselves:

HALIFAX, May 15.—Information has been received by his parents that Eric Dennis was shot thru the head and immediately killed, while commanding a raid on a Hun trench on the eve of the great offensive which resulted in the capture of Vimy Ridge by the glorious Canadians. The details of the trench fight may never be known, as the battalion was badly cut up in the fighting which followed, and the officers who were engaged with young Dennis in that trench raid have since all been killed. Following are extracts from some of the letters received from officers and men of the division referring to the death and burial of Lieut. Dennis:—

First Canadian Division, France,
April 16, 1917.

Dear Senator Dennis:—I have just come in from attending the funeral of your son, Lieut. Dennis, M. C. I have known him and admired him ever since he joined the division. Tho he was of a retiring disposition yet he had an enormous influence for good in his battalion. He kept always for himself a high ideal, and by his thoro knowledge of his duties, by his unselfish devotion to duty at all times, by his most gallant conduct on all occasions, he won not only the respect, but the love of his men. To them he was a leader in every sense of the word.

While all engaged in this terrible war must be prepared to make the supreme sacrifice, the loss of a loved one must come as a shock to those near and dear to him. You must bear your loss bravely. Your son died, as a gal'ant soldier like he wishes to die—on the battlefield, giving his life in the defense of the principles of liberty, honor and justice. May God grant to you and his mother some measure of consolation. With deepest sympathy, ever yours faithfully.

-----MAJOR GENERAL.

The officer commanding the famous battalion of "Canadian Ironsides," writes:—

"Your son was one of my most valued officers, and as a company commander was loved and respected by all his men. As a father myself, I know words are inadequate to express sympathy with your great loss. May it be some satisfaction to you to know how well he died and how gallantly he carried out his duty always. We were able to bury him in the cemetery near Arras. Major-General ----- was present with his staff."

Private Allan William Chapman, writing from a hospital in England, says:—

"I have just read in a London paper the official notification of the death of your son, Lieut. E. R. Dennis, M. C. I am writing to offer my sincere sympathy to Mrs. Dennis and yourself. I was in No. 2 Company of the ----- in France for many months, and acted as officer's servant to your son during that time, while he was in command of the company, and was compelled to leave him on January 19th, last, when I was sent to hospital suffering with acute inflammation of the kidneys, and have been in various hospitals since. I was deeply grieved to hear of your son's death. He was very kind to me, and I shall always have a lasting respect for his memory. He was liked and respected by all who knew and came in contact with him, and his best point was that he never asked his men to go where he would not go himself. I shall remember his last words to me when I left him, as he shook hands with me, saying, 'Chapman, this is just like breaking up a home,' and he wrote in March telling me to make haste to get well, as I was hoping to go back to him, if I got sent back to France again."

Captain Hugh P. Bell, who was a comrade lieutenant in the 40th, wrote from "Somewhere in France":—

"I was deeply affected on hearing the news about Eric. There is no need for me to tell you how much I thought of him, for I told you when I was home. But I must repeat that I regarded him as one of the very best officers and truest friends I ever knew. He proved himself to be "true gold, 24k," both in Canada and in England, and again and most important, right out here in this war-cursed country. I cannot tell you how much I feel for you and how I feel the loss of Eric, one of my best friends. I hope and trust that in some brighter and happier day we shall understand all this needless confusion, destruction and sorrow. But I suppose all we can do at present is to "carry on."

Captains Willie Doane and Eric Dennis were great friends and chums. Delayed in England, in their anxiety to get to the fighting line, both boys resigned their captaincies and reverted to lieutenants. They are said to have been the first in the Canadian army to have made that sacrifice. Fate called upon young Doane to make the supreme sacrifice within a few days after he arrived at the front.

Major F. W. W. Doane writes:—

"I have just learned of the death of your noble boy. He was one of my favorite boy friends and I am sorry indeed to learn that he has paid the awful price. When his call came last year my boy, Billie, and Eric tossed for the chance to go and Eric won. Billie wrote to me telling what had happened and winding up with: 'Old Dennis (as he fondly called him) is sure to make good.' How his confidence in his friend was justified thousands of Canadians know today. Eric surely 'made good.' Nobody knows better than Mrs. Doane and myself how hard it is to lose them, and we feel for you and Mrs. Dennis from the bottom of our hearts. When time has somewhat softened the bitterness of your grief, you will feel a great and pardonable pride in the memory of your brave, splendid boy."

Colonel F. S. Ford, C. M. G., A. D. M. S.,
wrote.—

"Yesterday, at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, your son, Captain Dennis, was buried with full military honors in the military cemetery here. I was able to be present and I am writing to tell you how sorry we all were to lose him from the division. Altho I never met him, I know his colonel very well indeed, and he has spoken so well of him in the past that I felt almost a personal interest in him, coming as he did from Nova Scotia.

"The day he was buried was rainy, and nearly all the snow had disappeared. Just before the party arrived at the cemetery, however, the rain stopped, and the sun came out brightly, and lay warm upon the hillside sloping to the west, where your boy lies, with a thousand other gallant men. The cemetery is on the lower part of the hill, the upper part of which is covered with fine beach trees. Below the cemetery is a pretty meadow with a stream and poplar trees, and across the trees the grey spire of the village church shows against the sky. Not a thousand yards to the northeast one of the most picturesque ruins in France stands out against the sky line clear and striking. It is a beautiful spot even in this time of strife and conflict, and when the war is over and the cemetery is further beautified, it will be a still more fitting place for those who died victorious, for death can have no sting, nor grave a victory for those who gave their all in so glorious a cause.

"I have written you these details, hoping you may care to know just how and where your brave boy lay down to rest after fighting the good fight. May God be your strength in this sad time. We all sympathize with you most sincerely."

(Official Report, September 13th, 1916)

LIEUTENANT ERIC REGINALD DENNIS,
(—Canadian Battalion).

This officer is recommended for his gallant conduct and splendid work on the 9th and 10th Sept. 1916, for the very able manner in which he led his platoon during the advance, and the fine way he handled his men during the time they were consolidating.

The splendid manner which this officer led his men, was a great example to all ranks. He was on duty continuously for 26 hours, and at one time was the only officer left with the company, all others having been wounded or killed.

He superintended the digging of the one communication trench under a heavy shell fire and handled the matter very admirably.

(Signed) — LT. COL. COMMANDING
THE — CANADIAN BATTALION.

(Official Report, October 10th, 1916)

LIEUT. ERIC REGINALD DENNIS.

Lieutenant Eric Reginald Dennis on several occasions displayed great gallantry and resource, notably at Hill 60 when his battalion was in the trenches and at Pozieres.

On the 9th of September, Lieutenant Dennis, who was in command of the second wave of his company during an attack on an enemy trench N. E. of Pozieres rendered very valuable assistance in leading his party thru a heavy barrage and bringing up reinforcements when they were most needed. His work during the consolidation of the trench and in warding off counter attacks was of the very greatest value. I cannot recommend this officer too highly for his gallant conduct and general devotion to duty.

(Signed) ——— LIEUT.-COL. COMMANDING
THE ——— CANADIAN BATTALION.

(Official Report, October 19th 1916).

LIEUT. ERIC REGINALD DENNIS.

This officer is recommended for gallant conduct and conspicuous bravery.

In trenches northeast of Pozieres at about 10.20 o'clock on the morning of the 14th October, 1916, two men were killed and seven buried during an intense bombardment. This officer who was close by immediately took action, brought some men on the scene and regardless of personal safety finally succeeded in rescuing those buried. His prompt action undoubtedly saved the lives of at least six of these men. During some very heavy artillery fire which the enemy concentrated on our trenches, this officer's conduct was admirable. Walking among his men with the utmost coolness, his bearing was very inspiring to the men under his command.

The conduct of this officer stands out above all others and I cannot recommend him too highly.

(Signed) ——— LIEUT.-COL. COMMANDING
THE ——— CANADIAN BATTALION.

(From the Ottawa Free Press, December, 1916)

Lieutenant Eric Reginald Dennis, gazetted as having gained the Military Cross is the son of Senator Dennis, of The Halifax Herald, one of the leading newspaper men of Canada.

The young lieutenant's progress from the peaceful militia of Canada before the war to the battle line and honors gained in the company of veterans, is a very pretty sample of Canadian behavior in the game of life and death.

When war opened this young man was a lieutenant in the 63rd Halifax Rifles, aged 18 and eager for service. He and two companions were the first men in Nova Scotia to offer their services. He was told to stay with his militia regiment and help garrison the forts at Halifax. Home service did not suit Lieutenant Dennis and he sought to resign his lieutenancy that he might enlist as a private for overseas. He was not permitted to resign. Finally he worked a transfer to a Nova Scotia overseas regiment, under Colonel Vincent and crossed the Atlantic as a captain. In England he was made adjutant. As has happened to many regiments in England, the — was broken up; the men were sent to the front as reinforcements; the higher officers were left cooling their heels in England.

This young man, determined to see service; decided not to let dignity stand in his way. He took reduction in rank from adjutant and captain to become junior lieutenant with a famous Canadian battalion of the first division which had been shot almost clean out of junior officers. This took him to the front, where this battalion had already gained fighting fame.

Last summer Senator Dennis visited the front with the Canadian parliamentary party, and in the trenches of the muddy, bloody Ypres salient celebrated the young soldier's advent to legal manhood and his achievement of twenty-one years. A few weeks later the division was transferred to the Somme and the battalion, the day after it arrived, was called up to nip off a little "snout salient" which projected toward the British line, and had to be taken as a preparation for the general shove. Under Colonel Swift, the operation was most successful. In fifteen minutes, in the broad light of a sunny afternoon, the regiment took 400 yards of desired trench, inflicted 600 casualties on the gunners and gained for themselves twenty-eight medals and crosses, one of which was a Victoria Cross.

Lieutenant Dennis was recommended for the Military Cross on that day, but so much glory had been gained there were not enough medals for all recommended. It remained for him to gain his emblem of efficient bravery on a later day. It was deferred only ten days, but the details of that fight have not yet come thru.

Most of the men and officers of the battalion are from Eastern Ontario, many being from the Ottawa district. Lieutenant Dennis and Lieutenant Pringle, who single-handed captured a machine gun and died across its muzzle, were the only Nova Scotians in the battalion.

(Hon. W. S. Fielding in the Montreal Journal of
Commerce.)

Newspaper men, in the maritime provinces, especially, will be interested in the announcement that Lieutenant Eric R. Dennis, of The Halifax Herald, and son of Senator Dennis, has been awarded the Military Cross. The young man in question was mentioned in dispatches on a number of occasions, the last time being referred to as follows: "The conduct of this officer stands out above all others, and I cannot recommend him too highly." At the outbreak of war Lieutenant Dennis was on the staff of The Halifax Herald, but at once offered himself for service overseas. He has done splendid work at the front, winning promotion and being recommended for the Military Cross three times within forty days.

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