

Pte. George Preston Smith

Private

**North Shore (New Brunswick)
Regiment**

Royal Canadian Infantry Corps

F82406



George Preston Smith was born September 3, 1923, in Kinkora, Prince Co. PEI. The son of William Wilfred Smith and Mary Mable Johnston. William was a teacher and later an inspector for the local school board. Preston was one of twelve children, three sisters Noreen, Edith and Margaret, and eight brothers Gerald, Louis, Carl, Lloyd, Alban, Carman, Leslie and Charles. Margaret died as an infant. Brothers Gerald and Louis also served with the Canadian Armed Forces. Preston's parents were both of Irish descent and the family attended St Malachy's Catholic Church in Kinkora.

Preston was a student at Kinkora High School. In 1939 after completing grade ten Preston left school at age sixteen. He had also completed a course in typing. His sister Edith stated that during the Depression their father lost his job and afterward life became very difficult. Preston was able to get work as a retail clerk and in the warehouse at Callahan's General Store in Kinkora. He was paid \$8 per week and held the position for over two years. He also spent nine months working as a clerk in the YMCA War Services Canteen at the Charlottetown Air Port earning \$20 per week. When not working Preston liked to play hockey, baseball and table tennis. Edith who was three years younger recalls that Preston was almost always happy. He walked everywhere and you knew when he had returned home because he would frequently be singing.

Preston enlisted in the Canadian Army on April 1, 1943, in Charlottetown. Records state that he was 5' 6", weighed 136 lbs and was alert and energetic. Preston completed basic and advanced training at the Canadian Infantry Training Centre (CITC) Camp A-14 in Aldershot NS. Then because

of his retail background and above average education, he was recommended for clerical training. In September 1943 he was transferred to the Saint John Vocational School, No. 7 VTS and completed the clerical course in late November. The winter was spent in additional training programs back at Aldershot and in Debert NS. On March 25, 1944, Preston was sent overseas.

After eight days at sea, Preston arrived in the UK and was placed with the Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit (CIRU). He trained in the UK for about three months. Preston was then transferred across the Channel to France and on July 13th was placed with the North Shore (NB) Regiment. He was assigned to D Company and the position of Batman (personal assistant) to Major D. L. Corbett.

Preston fought with the regiment in Normandy at Columbelles and Bourgébus in July, and in August at Quesnay Wood. In September the NSR captured French ports and towns along the English Channel near Boulogne and Calais. The regiment then moved into Belgium and the Netherlands in October and fought in the brutal and deadly month-long Battle of the Scheldt. In the first five months since D-Day, the Canadians and their Allies had made tremendous progress. The Germans were withdrawing on all fronts and had been pushed out most of France and much of Belgium. The Canadians, however, had suffered significant losses and the war would not be over by Christmas as so many had hoped. To meet the demand for urgently needed reinforcements Prime Minister Mackenzie King now implemented conscription.

The War Diary records that during the first few days of November the NSR took a break from the fighting and the men were able to spend several days in Ghent, Belgium where life had begun to return to normal. During his time in the Netherlands Preston met a girl by the name of Marie. She was nineteen. They spent time together and fell in love. Preston sent a photograph of Marie back to the family with a note stating that he would like to bring her home. Unfortunately, on the 8th of November, the NSR reassembled and joined up with a 3000 vehicle convoy of the Canadian 3rd Division. The Canadians were making a 200 km move northeast to the Nijmegen area of the Netherlands to prepare with other Allied forces for the invasion of Germany.

On November 12th, the NSR was now traveling towards Groesbeek, their newly assigned location. Preston was in the back of a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton truck and after a long while, at 1400 hrs, the truck stopped for a break. Sgt. A. J. Payne instructed the men to assemble as a platoon off the road. Preston jumped down from the back of the truck and reached for his Sten Gun that was partially covered by a pile of coats. Preston pulled the gun towards him by the muzzle but it caught on a rope cocking the gun. The

gun fired and Preston was killed. The incident is described in Will Bird's book North Shore (NB) Regiment pages 479 and 480. Preston was twenty-one years of age.

Both Major D. L. Corbett, company commander and Major R. M. Hickey, chaplain of the regiment sent letters to the family expressing their grief and sympathy. Major Corbett also visited the family in Kinkora after the war.

For his service to Canada Private George Preston Smith was awarded the following medals. 1939-45 Star, France & Germany Star, War Medal 1939-45 and CVSM with Clasp. George Preston Smith is Buried in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands, Plot **XI. D. 6.**

Many of the Smith family members have traveled to the Netherlands to visit the grave of Preston Smith. Preston's great niece Kate McMahon (granddaughter of Edith) worked as a guide for two seasons at the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial site in France. The site is dedicated to the Newfoundland forces killed in WWI in the Battle of the Somme.

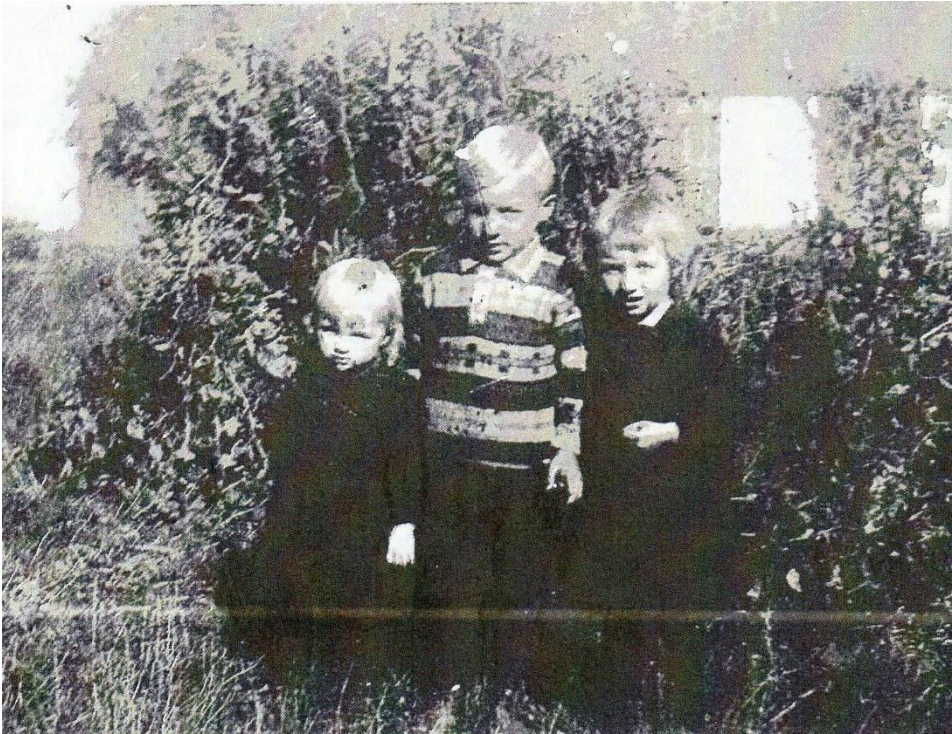
Biography by Bruce Morton, brucehmorton@gmail.com

Note that the photographs of George Preston Smith and much of the data for this biography were provided by Lou Daley of Charlottetown PEI.



Biography made available for Faces To Graves, with courtesy of Bruce Morton.

In August 2018 Pieter Valkenburg (Borden-Carleton Cenotaph Research Project) project) visited Preston's youngest sister, Edith McMahon on Prince Edward Island. Her husband also lost a brother in the war: George McMahon, who is buried in Holten.



She showed a photo of Preston with sisters Edith (left) and Noreen (right).



Edith has a photo that shows all Preston's brothers and sisters, on which the photographer added a photo of their brother Preston.