

***A Soldiers Story of a Consummate Re-enlister:
Thomas Clifford Shoebottom
Private 189666
Canadian Expeditionary Forces (CEF) 1914-17***

by

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Personal Life:

The story begins with the birth of Thomas Clifford Shoebottom on February 5th, 1884 in Kincardine, Bruce County, Ontario, (about 166 km from London, Ontario and along the eastern shore of Lake Huron) to Albertha (Parker) Shoebottom and Thomas Morgan Shoebottom.¹ The Shoebottom clan had settled north of London, Ontario beginning in the 1820s having come from Tipperary, Ireland. Raised in the Anglican faith, he was the fourth of ten children and the second son. His family moved to Lucknow, Ontario by the time he was seven. His father died in 1896 when he was 12. His mother and the rest of the unmarried children moved to London by the time he was 17 years old in 1901.² Thomas Clifford was a general labourer in 1901 and had learned to become a bricklayer by 1911.³

The initial war enthusiasm caught Thomas Clifford's attention and he enlisted in London, Ontario on October 22nd 1914, as part of the 18th Battalion. His enlistment date meant he did not travel with the first contingent to Valcartier and then onto England that fall. He was single and had previous experience with the 7th Regiment of Fusiliers (in London) for one month and as having three years in the 26th Battalion of infantry (in London). He spent the rest of 1914 training in London, Ontario. The 18th Battalion discharged him on February 11th 1915 for unspecified reasons. He re-enlisted on June 21st when he joined the 29th Battery of the 11th Heavy Field Artillery in nearby Guelph, Ontario. Less than 3 weeks later, he was again discharged on July 9th as medically unfit.⁴

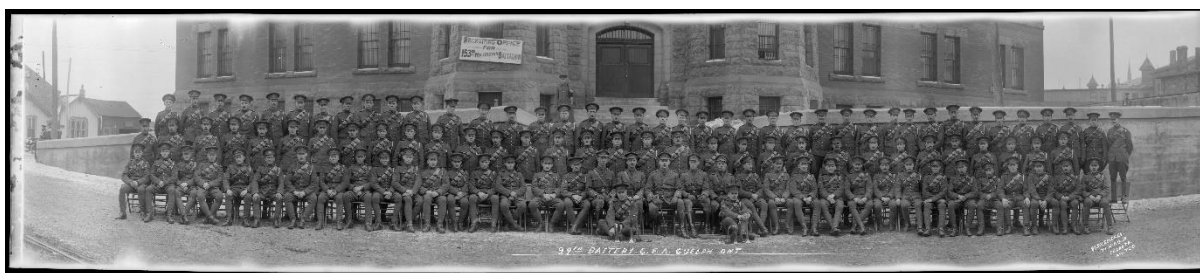
¹ National Archives of Canada. RG31 Statistics Canada, Census of 1891. Microfilm Reel T-6329 Ontario, Bruce West, Lucknow (Village), pp 26-27, no 1227921, image number 30953_148131-00203.

² National Archives of Canada. RG31 Statistics Canada, Census of 1901. Microfilm Reel T-6480 Ontario, London, 86, Ward 4, 5, p 3, no 3322359, image number z000080540.

³ National Archives of Canada. RG31 Statistics Canada, Census of 1911. Microfilm Reel T-20384 Ontario, London, 94, 25, p 8, no 7253746, image number e002001627.

⁴ National Archives of Canada. Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 8875 - 52, Shoebottom, Thomas C, 156-90842.

Figure 1: 29th Battery, Guelph, Ontario (late 1915).



Merrilees, Andrew and Library and Archives Canada. 720, 1971-318 NPC, MIKAN Number 4474301.

Thomas Clifford then re-enlisted on September 29th, in Toronto, Ontario under the pseudonym Clifford Parker Shoebottom, into the 81st Battalion.⁵ Thomas Clifford deserted only two weeks later while training at Camp Niagara, near Niagara Falls and does not appear does not appear in any further census historical records. The 81st Battalion struck him off strength as a deserter on the October 16th 1915.

Figure 2: 81st Battalion, Camp Niagara, 1915



Merrilees, Andrew and Library and Archives Canada. 452, 1971-318 NPC, MIKAN Number 4473064.

On December 15th 1915, Thomas Clifford joined again in St Thomas, Ontario under another pseudonym of Stanley Robert Shoebottom. He listed his address as Berlin (modern Kitchener), Ontario and birthplace as Chatham, Ontario with former service in the 21st Fusiliers of Windsor.⁶ His new unit was the 91st Battalion in St. Thomas, Ontario. He trained in St. Thomas during the winter, and likely went to Camp Bordon, near Barrie, Ontario for further training in the spring. He embarked from Halifax on June 29th 1916 on the SS Olympic (sister

⁵ It is highly probable that this is Thomas Clifford because the next of kin listed by Thomas Clifford was his sister, the physical description is highly similar, the job descriptions are of similar trade, and the handwriting styles are similar. National Archives of Canada. Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 8875 - 43, Shoebottom, Clifford Parker, 159192.

⁶ It is highly probable that Stanley Robert is Thomas Clifford because: the initial next of kin is Thomas Clifford's brother, Lionel Shoebottom, the physical description is highly similar, the job descriptions are of similar trade (lather), and their handwriting style is similar. Finally, the Canadian War Graves Commission has Thomas Clifford Shoebottom buried with the same Serial Number (189666) as Stanley Robert Shoebottom. Later in his records, it lists first Mena Shoebottom as a next of kin and then his Mother as the next of kin. His mother received the Silver Memorial Cross. National Archives of Canada. Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 8875 - 51, Shoebottom, Stanley Robert, 189666.

Correspondence with the Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment Archives in Windsor Ontario confirmed that no Shoebottom ever served in the 21st Fusiliers.

ship to the Titanic) and arrived in Liverpool, England on July 5th. Most battalions arriving in England in 1916 lacked either sufficient numbers or other units in England or France needed reinforcements. Accordingly, he transferred to the 36th Battalion (from Hamilton, Ontario) on July 17th 1916.

Figure 3: 91st Overseas Battalion, St Thomas Armouries, 1916.



Merrilees, Andrew and Library and Archives Canada. 113a, 1971-318 NPC, MIKAN Number 4473913.

His time in England did not go well. Less than a month later, on August 27th, his unit arrested him for desertion at West Sandling. At his court martial hearing, evidence by the orderly sergeant indicated that he was told on the 22nd of August that he was to join a draft to go to France on the 26th of August with the 1st Battalion, and he was to report daily for further instructions on his travel to France.⁷ The orderly corporal then gave evidence that after the parade on August 22nd, that Thomas Clifford tried to avoid going and sought a medical exemption by talking to the Medical Officer. He then was not present on the 26th of August and another man went in his place. Thomas Clifford, in his own defence, attests that on the 25th of August he went off drinking during the night and woke up in a field the following morning. The orderly sergeant spotted him on the 27th, “lurking” in C company lines and he was arrested. He claimed he was not avoiding going to the front and would be ready to depart now. However, due to a lengthy list of previous misdemeanors including four counts of drunkenness, 12 counts of absent without leave and 3 other offences, the court martial found him guilty of desertion and he received a sentence of 150 days in jail on September 5th.

He obtained an early release from jail two months later on October 27th when he unexpectedly received a transfer to the 4th Battalion in France. His early release came at a

⁷ Library and Archives Canada. Ministry of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada: Courts martial records, 1914-1919: T-8685, pp 647-661. http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_t8685

time when there was a need for more infantry after the severe casualties from the Battles of the Somme. It would be around this time that he would have encountered the real Stanley Shoebottom, his second cousin, since they both transferred into the 4th Battalion within days of each other.⁸ Just under a month later, on November 20th, he received admission to the 7th Canadian Stationary Hospital at Le Havre, France. Three days later his diagnosed was debility (exhaustion). After his discharge three weeks later, he went to the 1st Entrenching Battalion stationed at Villers-au-bois, just west of Vimy Ridge as a reinforcement awaiting to replace casualties in the 4th Battalion. All the Canadian Corps divisions had an entrenching battalion at this time to employ soldiers with useful work while waiting as reinforcements within the Corps area.⁹ When he got there, he received a dental inspection and tests on his abilities to fire rifles and his performance in tactics. He was with the 1st Entrenching Battalion and supported them in digging trenches, repairing roads and building and repairing light railroads during the winter of 1917.¹⁰ While here, he filled out a will leaving everything to Mena Shoebottom, his youngest sister. On the April 14th, he moved forward to the 4th Battalion at the front and on the 18th of April arrived at Farbus Woods, northeast of Arras with 97 other soldiers.¹¹

Military Movements:

The 4th Overseas Battalion (from Central Ontario) was one of the first raised in Canada and sent to England with the 1st Division in 1914. It went to France in 1915 and fought in the first gas warfare battle at Ypres.¹² In April 1917, this battalion was in the 1st Brigade of the 1st

⁸ Shoebottom, Bradley. *Bradley Shoebottom Family Tree*, www.ancestry.ca, Accessed May 29th, 2019

⁹ Holt, Richard. *Filling the Ranks: Manpower in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017, pp 233-244.

¹⁰ National Archives of Canada. RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 5009. File number: 716. National Archives of Canada. RG9-III-D-3. T-10857. War Diaries, 1st Entrenching Battalion, January to May 1917.

¹¹ National Archives of Canada. RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4915. File number: 360, T-10707, 4th Canadian Infantry Battalion War Diaries, April - May, 1917.

¹² Nicholson, Gerald William Lingen. *Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War: Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1962.

Division at the south end of Vimy Ridge and assisted in the capture of Farbus Woods.¹³ Here, they were in reserve and did not suffer many losses. They remained in the reserve up until receiving 98 reinforcements on April 18th 1917, along with Thomas Clifford. During the remainder of April, they cleaned equipment, practiced trench attacks and rotated between support and front line trench duty. During this time, their brigade attacked the village of Arleux and the Arleux “loop”, or salient in the trench line, and captured it on April 28th. However, the 4th Battalion did not participate.

Figure 4: Google Map showing Fresnoy, Arleux and Aubigny



On May 2nd, the 4th Battalion received orders to move into support for an attack on Fresnoy, several kilometers to the east of Arleux. It cannot be determined which company Thomas Clifford was in, but on May 3rd, the battalion was to be temporarily split up, with A company going in support of the 1st Battalion on the left flank, B company going in support of the 2nd Battalion and C company going in support of the 3rd Battalion on the right flank. D company was to remain in a reserve position at Arleux. This arrangement was common with the reinforcing troops acting as “moppers up” to clear out trenches and bunkers bypassed by the attacking troops. On May 4th, at 3:30 AM, they commenced their attack on Fresnoy and by 7:00 AM, they had captured the German trenches. It was at 12:00 noon that the Germans

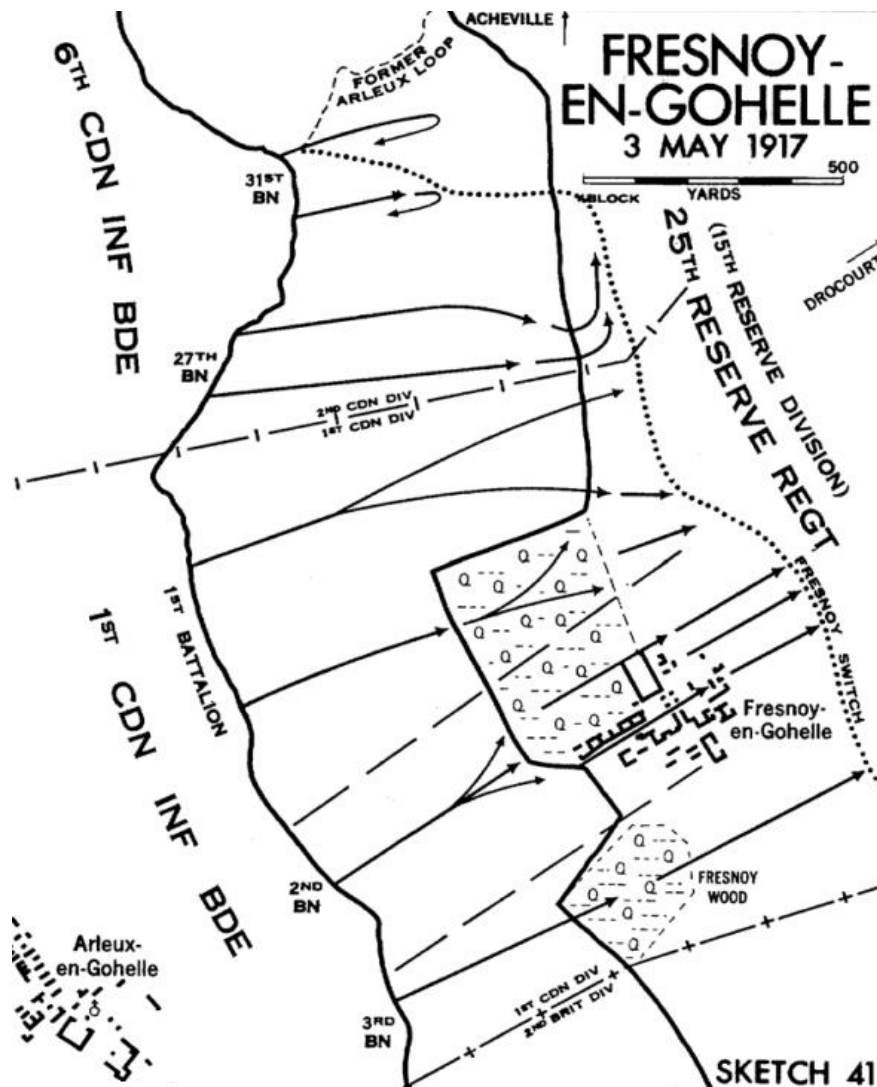
¹³ National Archives of Canada. RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4915. File number: 360, T-10707, 4th Canadian Infantry Battalion War Diaries, April - May, 1917.

started a heavy artillery bombardment but did not follow it up with an infantry counter attack. This lasted an hour and caused many casualties among all four companies.¹⁴ The Germans suffered 1,259 casualties including 500 captured.¹⁵ The battalion withdrew from the line just before midnight that night. Fresnoy was lost to a counter attack by the 5th Bavarian Division on May 8th, 1917¹⁶ and was not captured again until 1918.

¹⁴ Each company commander created a after action report as an appendix in the War Diary for the Month of May. A Company mentions casualties due to shelling but gives no numbers. B Company does not mention casualties. C Company mentions one officer wounded on the 4th. Captain JW Stagg of D Company reported 8 dead, 1 officer wounded and 15 soldiers wounded from May 2nd to May 4th, 1917. Major AT Thomas, acting CO of the 4th Battalion reported from the 2 to 4th of May that killed included 1 officer and 22 soldiers and wounded were 2 officers and 63 National Archives of Canada. RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 4915. File number: 360, T-10707, 4th Canadian Infantry Battalion War Diaries, Appendix 1 and 2 to May 1917.

¹⁵ Nicholson, Gerald William Lingen. *Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War: Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1962, p 277.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 277-8.



Nicholson, Gerald William Lingen. *Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War: Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1962, p 275.

Medical Records:

It was likely around noon on the 4th of May, during the bombardment, when Thomas Clifford received a GSW (gunshot wound) to his left leg.¹⁷ It would have taken at least a couple of hours crossing the battlefield to get to the light railway located near Farbus Woods to take him back.¹⁸ And then many more hours to get him to the 30th Casualty Clearing Station at

¹⁷ At this time, all injuries caused by bullets and artillery were considered gunshot wounds. National Archives of Canada. Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 8875 - 51, Shoebottom, Stanley Robert, 189666.

¹⁸ Farebrother, Martin JB, and Joan S. Farebrother. *Narrow Gauge in the Arras Sector: Before, During & After the First World War*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2015, maps on pp 104 and 115.

Aubigny-en-Artois (20 km northwest of Arras and 14 km west of Vimy Ridge).¹⁹ He died and received burial the same day in the Aubigny Military Cemetery Extension.²⁰ He most likely died from the shock, loss of blood, or both from the long transport time from the front lines to the 30th Casualty Clearing Station. (See Figure 4: Google Map showing Fresnoy, Arleux and Aubigny on page 5.)

Figure 5: Germans bringing in Canadian wounded from the Capture of Arleux (in the background) May 1917.



Canada. Dept. of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada, O-1343, 1964-114 NPC, MIKAN Number 3403096.

¹⁹Miller, Geoffrey M., Dr. "Location of Hospital and Casualty Clearing Stations in the Great War." from Director General Awards, Ministry of Pensions to Mrs Hutton, British Red Cross Society Record Office, 13 July 1923. *World War 1: The Medical Front*. August 18, 2017. Accessed May 30, 2019. <http://www.vlib.us/medical/CCS/ccs.htm>.

²⁰ Commonwealth War Graves Commission: Shoebottom, Clifford Thomas. <https://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/996451/shoebottom,-clifford-thomas/>

Lest We Forget:

Thomas Clifford Shoebottom is buried in the Aubigny Military Cemetery in Pas de Calais, France. The cemetery contains 2,853 First World War casualties.²¹ He left all his belongings to his sister Mena Shoebottom who after the war moved to Detroit with her mother and likely to be nearer her older sister who was married to an American. She received a plaque with the serial number 189666. During his service, he had received a total pay of \$515.82. He was 33 years, 2 months and 29 days old when he died.

²¹ Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Find War Dead Database, Shoebottom, Clifford Thomas, Service Number 189666. <https://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/996451/shoebottom,-clifford-thomas/>

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Veterans Affairs Canada, Books of Remembrance, Shoebottom, First World War Book, page 325.

<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/books/page?page=325&book=1>

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