

Sergeant Thomas Clifford Briscoe

Thomas Clifford Briscoe, son of **James A. Briscoe** and **Alice Adeline Beach**, was born on 17 Aug 1895 according to Attestation records², and 18 Aug 1895 according to birth records³, at Northcote in Admaston Township¹. Sgt. Briscoe's mother was born in South Gower but many of her siblings were born in Beachburg. Clifford had 12 siblings, 4 sisters and 8 brothers. Some of these siblings married Westmeath & Ross Twp. familiar names including Pounder, McEwen and Humphries.¹



Clifford was playing hockey with many other Briscoe relatives in the Northcote Hockey Club as early as 1914, but he may have played in earlier years also.⁴ At the time of his enlistment, his occupation of listed as merchant.²

Clifford enlisted on November 24, 1915 in Renfrew, Ontario.⁵ At the time of enlistment it was noted that he was 5' 5 1/2"; 140 lbs.; had brown eyes and black hair and was 20 years 4 months old. He served with the 38th Battalion of the Canadian Infantry, Eastern Ontario Regiment in France.^{2,5}

Sgt. Clifford Briscoe was wounded on April 19, 1917 and received the Military Medal for the actions he took that day. The Canadian Military Honours and Awards Citation Cards, 1900-1961 states:

Image 1: Sgt. Clifford Briscoe in uniform^{4,6,7} “For conspicuous gallantry on the early morning of the 26th March 1917 near Souchez. The enemy blew a camouflet at 5:20 am and broke into one of the Mining Shafts. The force of the explosion burst in the sides of a dug-out near one of the Mine galleries. Twenty men were in the dug-out when the explosion occurred. Three of these managed to make their way out but the remainder were unable to gain the surface. About a dozen men were standing in the trench near the dug-out entrance, amongst whom were Cp. Rainford, Sgt. Briscoe, Ptes. Edwards and Carey. These men, without consideration of their own safety, and also having seen the gas flame rush from the mouth of the dug-out, singeing the hair and burning the faces of some, entered the dug-out and succeeded in bringing 10 men to the surface. The remaining seven men were found to be killed. These men assisted in the work of resuscitation of those overcome by gas.

The men rescued were badly burned and gassed and must have been overcome by fumes but for the prompt and gallant action of these men. Some of the rescuers themselves were badly affected by the gas.

These four men have been selected from the rescuers as being those who rendered the best services.

Their prompt and gallant action undoubtedly saved the loss of 10 of their comrades and it is considered that they are fully deserving of an Immediate Reward. (A.F.B. 3121. April 18, 1917”)⁸

Only three months later, Sgt. Clifford Briscoe was killed in action on 28 Jun 1917 near Lens, France^{5,9} aged 21. The 38th Battalion were engaged in Battle of Arras and specifically the capture of Avion. The Circumstances of Death Register states:

"Killed in Action"

During the advance on Avion, this non-commissioned officer was one of the first to reach the objective, but at that moment was instantly killed by enemy shell fire."⁹

A letter written by Sergeant J Billings, of Sgt. Briscoe's company, spoke of his buddy's death to his parents and published in the Renfrew Journal and Ottawa Journal (partial):

*"We had orders to go forward on the morning of the 26th and take a French village, which we did with slight losses. On the morning of the 28th, at 2:30 am, we received orders again to advance and take another village, when Sgt. Briscoe got into the trench OK but as usual, Fritz, after being driven out, put a barrage on the line he left and, as they were all heavy shells, one of them burst close to Sgt. Briscoe, and he was instantly killed by concussion. Now, what I wish to convey to the people of Renfrew is that no braver boy left Renfrew, nor a more thorough gentleman. He was liked by all who knew him or came in contact with him. I was in his platoon in Canada and here. I was his 2nd Sgt here, and words cannot express my sympathy for such a friend. He was one of the many boys of Renfrew who made good over here. He was decorated here for bravery which he well earned, and in my opinion should have received the DCM. He was also recommended for a commission in the Battalion for his good work here. ***** Believe me, No 1 Platoon will avenge Sgt Briscoe's death. We buried him four miles back of the firing line in a well-kept soldier's graveyard, along with many other Canadian boys. The officers and non-commissioned officers and men of A Co 38th Battalion, join in sending their deepest sympathy to the friends and parents of a true soldier and a gentleman."*^{11,12}

Sgt. Briscoe along with many others were reburied at La Chaudière Military Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France.^{5,7,10} A commemorative stone was also erected at Rosebank Cemetery.¹ His name is also recorded on the Renfrew Collegiate Institute Honor Roll.¹⁴

Another local boy Pte. George Murdock of the 38th Battalion was also killed on the same day.



Image 2: Newspaper clipping *The Ottawa Journal*¹¹

A presentation made to Sgt. Briscoe's parents was documented in an article¹³

To the Parents of T. C. Briscoe.

Then came an address to the parents of Sergeant T. C. Briscoe. The address, accompanied by a medal and read by the chairman, was received by Miss Della Briscoe. The address is as follows:

To the Parents of Sgt. T. C. Briscoe.

Though almost two years have passed since your worthy son paid the supreme sacrifice, in freedom's cause, he is still living fresh in our memories, and we take occasion to present you with this medal as a token of the cherished and sacred memory in which he is still held by us. Your son Clifford had felt the call of duty for some time, this call had been deeply accentuated by the death of a school companion, Pte. Nelson Dempsey, and by the atrocious murder of Nurse Cavell. He joined the 120th at Renfrew in December, 1915, and by his qualities of heart and mind soon rose to the rank of sergeant-major. After crossing to England he reverted to the rank of private to get over to France; where he soon again became a sergeant. He was slightly wounded in the battle of Vimy, and later took part in the fighting around Lens, where he received the M.M. and was mentioned for a commission, and where on June 27th, 1917, he gave his all, for our liberties. We honor his memory tonight, and would offer you this great consolation, that no man ever gave his all more cheerfully nor in a greater cause; the sacrifice being like in kind to that which the Master made for us.

Image 3: Address to Parents¹³



Image 4: Sgt. T.C. Briscoe headstone⁷

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