

# Spr Neil Truman Sponagle, 11th Fd Coy

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Neil Truman Sponagle was born to George and Clara Mae Sponagle on 11 May 1919 in Coddle's Harbor, Guys County, NS. His father was a fisherman. Neil was the youngest child with brothers Earl and Ward who served overseas. He also had a sister named Annie.

Neil left school at age 15 after he completed Grade 8. His history of work was varied. For a while he followed in his father's steps and was a fisherman and he also serviced marine engines over some four years. Neil had received his Diesel Certificate from Nova Scotia Technical Institute in 1937. He was also a Power House Operator for four months in 1939 at Locarno Gold Mine in Goldboro, NS. Immediately prior to enlistment, Neil had been working at Pictou Shipyards as a rivet tester and as an acetylene cutter. During the enlistment process, he indicated that he would like to work in diesel engineering.

Neil enlisted in Halifax, NS on 5 January 1943 at No 6 District Depot. He had apparently attempted an earlier enlistment in 1940. At the time of his enlistment, he was living in Pictou. Neil was 24 years old and single. He later married Naomi Gertrude on 5 July 1943 before embarking for the United Kingdom. Naomi was a 26-year old school teacher who lived in Stellarton, Pictou County. They had no children.

A few days after enlistment, Neil was sent to No 60 Canadian Army Basic Training Center in Yarmouth, NS on 8 January 1943. After he completed his Basic Training, he was transferred to No 14 Infantry Training Centre in Aldershot, NS on 14 May 43 for more training. He embarked for the United Kingdom on 19 July 1943 and on his arrival in the UK he was assigned to No 1 Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit for several months. On 23 December 1943, he was assigned to the the 11<sup>th</sup> Field Company Royal Canadian Engineers. He qualified as Driver Mechanic "C" on 31 May 1944 and was to become qualified as an Engine Hand on 6 October 1944 during operations on the Continent.

Neil embarked for France 29 July 1944 when the break-out from Caen was underway. The 11<sup>th</sup> Field Company then supported the Allied advance in France and then through Belgium, Holland, and eventually into Germany. Among its operations, the company participated in the Battle of Falaise, The Scheldt, The Rhineland, and The Rhine. By the end of February 1944, the unit had arrived in Germany as the Allied forces continued to push back the enemy.

On 16 March, the 11<sup>th</sup> Field Company began to check a stretch of ground near Cleve for mines in order to make it safe for occupancy by The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada. By the next evening, the mine-clearing parties had found a number of German Riegelmine 43 anti-tank mines that they safely lifted and stored in two dumps. The next day, at 1300 hrs Lieutenant O. H. Taylor, Sergeant C. V. Richards and seven sappers set out to destroy the mine dumps. A half-hour later, something went terribly wrong. There was a terrific explosion and all were killed. No evidence was ever found to indicate why the tragedy had occurred.

Sapper Neil Truman Sponagle was Killed in Action at age 24 on 18 March 1945. He was given a temporary grave in the Canadian Temporary Cemetery in Bedberg, Germany. His final resting place is in the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery.

