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Modest Chaplain Thinks Heroism Ordinary Work

(By Jack Brayley, Canadian Press Staff Writer)

Ottawa, Feb. 12. — (CP) — The Victoria Cross winner drew deep on his short-stemmed briar, blew out a thick curl of smoke and then replied in a quiet, slightly hesitant voice that his exploit at Dieppe was "a very ordinary piece of work."

It was Major John Weir Foote, Canada's most recent and 14th V.C. winner of the Second Great War, fidgeting under the grilling of 25 reporters in the parliamentary press gallery lounge.

Goes With Unit

"I don't think a man should be a padre of a regiment and not go where they go," he explained with his black brows knitting in deep furrows. "Our regiment went to Dieppe and I went long strictly in the line of duty."

Pressed to give some of his impressions of the battle, he said it now was pretty hazy in his mind. He recalled the first spatter of enemy fire "seemed a bit alarming but after that I didn't have much time to think."

Recalls Cool Exchanges

He remembered the reassuringly cool exchanges between Royal Navy officers picking out limping craft. He heard an officer tell the skipper of one landing craft, "You shouldn't hang about too long there, you know."

They clambered ashore and the padre said he had helped Capt. Wesley Clare, of Port Credit, Ont., and now a doctor at the Kingston, Ont., Hospital, tend to the wounded.

Men of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry were falling on all sides and most of them already had given up their field dressings and had none for themselves.

"These were the brave ones who all did as much and more than I did," he said.

Never Ceases to Wonder

Moving about the beach, "I wondered why I wasn't hit and I have never ceased to wonder why I am alive to-day."

The front-line Germans at Dieppe had been correct in their treatment when the Canadians were taken prisoner, but as the Canadians moved inland treatment became brutal.

He disclosed for the first time that during the period when the Canadian prisoners were shackled, British prisoners slipped in past the guards and took over the shackles to relieve the manacled Canadians. The prisoners found they could undo the old-type shackles with sardine tin keys.

Great Food Getter

Describing his 30-day forced march from the eastern front before the Russian onslaught, Major Foote told of the work of Spr. Maurice Gauthier, a Quebec native who had worked in the mines at Timmins, Ont.

"This French-Canadian practically kept us from starving. He somehow managed to scrounge a pocket full of grain. Walking past a hen house he would lay a trail of grain to a spot where the guards weren't watching. Then he'd kill the unsuspecting chicken and that night we would all be given a leg or a wing or a piece of breast. How he managed it we never knew. His greatest feat was the theft of a pig."

Major Foote said that at one stage of the journey a group of Canadians broke into a bake shop and stole the entire night's production. But on the last seven days of their journey 50 of them were crowded in standing positions into one box car and were allowed only one loaf of bread. At one point the train stopped beside a station pump, but the guards refused to let them get water, even though Canadians inside the car were dying of dysentery.

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