

MILITARY CHAPLAINS

BRINGING SPIRITUAL SUPPORT TO THOSE INVOLVED IN WAGING AN EARTHLY BATTLE

CHAPLAIN JOHN FOOTE



John Foote was born in Madoc, Ontario and spent his youth there. In 1934, at age 30, he was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry, first serving a congregation in Fort-Coulonge, Quebec, (pop. c1200) before moving to our neighbouring town of Port Hope. In December 1939 he enlisted in the Canadian Army and was posted to the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (Wentworth Regiment) as the Regimental Chaplain with the rank of Honorary Captain.

Captain Foote was posted overseas in time to take part in the ill-fated Dieppe Raid. It is reported that as his ship, the *Glengyle*, was preparing for the landing on enemy-held territory, he led the men in the psalm, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, of whom then shall I be afraid?" In the disaster which followed the Allied forces were pinned down by murderous fire from well prepared German defences. Believing his responsibility was to be with his men, the Padre attached himself to the Regimental Aid Post which had been set up in a slight depression on the beach.

During a period of approximately eight hours, while the action continued, time and again he left this shelter to inject morphine, give first-aid and carry wounded personnel from the open beach to the Regimental Aid Post. On these occasions, with utter disregard for his personal safety, Honorary Captain Foote exposed himself to an inferno of fire and saved many lives by his gallant efforts.

During the action, as the tide went out, the Regimental Aid Post was moved to the shelter of a stranded landing craft. Honorary Captain Foote continued tirelessly and courageously to carry wounded men from the exposed beach to the cover of the landing craft. He also removed wounded from inside the landing craft when ammunition had been set on fire by enemy shells. When landing craft appeared he carried wounded from the Regimental Aid Post to the landing craft through very heavy fire. On several occasions this officer had the opportunity to embark but returned to the beach as his chief concern was the care and evacuation of the wounded. He refused a final opportunity to leave the shore, choosing to suffer the fate of the men he had ministered to for over three years. (from the citation: London Gazette, no.37466, 14 February 1946)



After Dieppe, survivors of the raid told of a heroic "Padre X", who had single-handedly saved the lives of at least thirty men, and he soon became a legend.

It was not until many months later that the 6ft 3 inch cleric was identified as Captain Foote. For 34 months he was held in German prisoner of war camps, where he helped maintain morale and provided ministerial services to all, regardless of denomination. In 1946 Honorary Captain John Weir Foote was awarded the Victoria Cross by King George VI. He remained in the army until 1948, rising to become Lieutenant-Colonel.

Entering politics in 1948, he served Durham County as its MPP until 1959, including terms in the Cabinet. He wrote as a columnist for the *Port Hope Guide*, the *Cobourg Star*, and the *Newcastle Times*. Padre Foote died on May 2, 1988, aged 83 years, and his funeral, with full military honours, was held at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Cobourg. The Grafton Branch, Royal Canadian Legion, was renamed the Lt. Col. John Weir Foote VC Branch, while the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry Heritage Museum, to whom he donated his Victoria Cross, is based at the Lt. Col. John Weir Foote VC CD Armoury, in Hamilton, Ontario.

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