

Private Joseph Eloi Piché©

Regimental number: 61577

22nd (Van Doos) Battalion, Canadian Infantry

born: 15 June 1897 – died: 28 January 1919

Private Joseph Eloi Piché was born on 15 June 1897 in Portneuf, Quebec, the son of Joseph Piché and Félenise Frenette.¹ He was baptized the same day in the parish of Notre Dame in Portneuf. Both his parents were born in Quebec—Joseph in 1865 and Félenise two years later.² They had at least seven children: Marie Louise (born 1885), Rose-Anna (born 1887), Godias (born 1892), Eugène (born 1894), Eloi, Méthilda (born 1898) and Luzia (born 1900).³

Eloi's father was a labourer and the family lived in Portneuf.⁴ But Eloi was living at 393 Labrecque in Montreal when he enlisted in the 22nd Battalion (Van Doos) on 14 August 1915.⁵ He was a labourer, like his father. He was 5' 8½" tall and had a robust complexion, brown eyes and hair. On his attestation form it appears that somebody added his date of birth as 16 March 1894 or 1897. This is not consistent with his baptismal record.

Eloi arrived in England on 29 May 1915 and left for France on 19 September. In the less than four months he was in England, he had three disciplinary incidents for being absent without leave, for which he lost pay. His discipline problems continued in the field. In January 1916, he received 48 hours of Field Punishment No. 1 for leaving the line of march without permission. Two months later, he had two incidents of being absent from parade and was fined. In October 1917, he was once again sentenced to 14 days Field Punishment No. 1 for drunkenness when on active service.

On 11 February 1917, Eloi was hospitalized with infected scabies. He was discharged and rejoined his unit on 27 February. A year later he was diagnosed with an ulcer on his penis but, within a few weeks, his diagnosis was revised to syphilis and he spent the next three months in various medical units and convalescent depots. He rejoined his unit on 28 May 1918. He joined the 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion as a guard on 10 July 1918, but went back to his unit on 11 September. The next month, he once again was sentenced to Field Punishment No. 1 for being "absent without leave from 20.30 on 6 October 1918 until 15.00 the next day."⁶

He had had two periods of leave in the United Kingdom—one in November 1916 and another in January 1918.

The Van Doos moved to Germany with the Canadian Corps after the signing of the Armistice. On 13 January 1919, the battalion crossed the Rhine.⁷ The Van Doos had moved around a lot in the first half of January, but now that it was stationed in Geistingen, northwest of Bonn, it was engaged in training activities. Shortly after arriving in Geistingen, Eloi was taken to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station by the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance.⁸ He was admitted on 16 January with cocaine poisoning. He appears to have survived the cocaine poisoning, but had other problems. His condition worsened and, on 26 January, a cable was sent to his father to say that Eloi was dangerously ill. He died at 8:30 a.m. on 28 January and the cause of death was described as pulmonary embolism, sarcoma of right hip and possibly cocaine poisoning.⁹

A soldier from the Canadian Corps Survey Section, which was stationed in Bonn, had also died at No. 1 CCCS on 16 January of cocaine poisoning.¹⁰ A note in this soldier's file indicated that a second case of a similar nature had been brought to No. 1 CCCS by the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance. This

was Eloi. The report stated that Eloi recovered from the cocaine poisoning and could identify the store in Bonn from which he had obtained the cocaine.

Eloi's family was notified on 6 February that he had died. At the time, his parents' address was c/o Rock City Tobacco Company, rue de Varennes, Quebec City. This tobacco company was established in 1899 to make pipe tobacco, snuff, and chewing tobacco.¹¹

Eloi was buried on 30 January in Poppelsdorfer Cemetery (Grave 13, Plot B, Row A) in Bonn, with the Canadian chaplain James P. Fallon presiding.

At some later point, Eloi's body was exhumed and reburied in the Brussels Town Cemetery (Grave Reference: Plot X, Row II, Grave 7). Brussels Town Cemetery is located in the northeast corner of Brussels, Belgium. Brussels was occupied by the Germans from August 1914 to the end of the Great War. There are only 54 Commonwealth Great War graves, which include the graves of 50 prisoners of war whose bodies were brought back from Germany by the Canadian Corps in April 1919.¹²

Eloi's older brother Godias also enlisted early in the war.¹³ He was a labourer, married with two children when he enlisted as a private (Regimental number: 417047) in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, on 23 October 1914 in Montreal. He served until 1918, when he was discharged. He was injured several times and, like his brother, his military career was plagued with disciplinary issues.

He arrived in England in June 1915 and went to France in September of the same year. Two weeks after arriving, he was injured and sent to No. 11 General Hospital in Boulogne, with a gunshot wound to his forearm and elbow. In mid-October, he was evacuated to England, where he remained until June 1916.

While in England in December 1915, he was sentenced to 21 days of Field Punishment No. 1 for "conduct predudical [*sic*] to good order and discipline." In January 1916, he was forfeited seven days pay for an incident in the hospital. He transferred to the 37th Battalion, but just two weeks later was absent without leave for two days and was sentence to field punishment and forfeiture of pay. He transferred to the 24th Battalion and went back to France in June 1916. In August, he was again sentenced to field punishment for drunkenness. In September, he was admitted to the No. 5 Canadian Field Ambulance with a shrapnel wound to his shin. A week later he was sentenced to 28 days of field punishment for "(1) Breaking away from escort (2) using insulting language to an NCO." He probably returned to duty in October 1916, but in early October or November he was "In confinement awaiting trial. Tried and convicted of . . . (1) [being] absent without leave from 6.30 p.m. 6.10.16 until 7 p.m. 10.10.16 (2) drunkenness. Finding Guilty and sentenced to 3 months F.P. No. 1 . . . [and] forfeits 4 days pay."

He received an accidental wound to his ankle in February 1917 and was admitted to No. 26 General Hospital in Étaples. On 9 March 1917, he was described as "dangerously ill" and was again evacuated to England, where he remained until he left Liverpool for Canada in September 1917. He was discharged from the 41st Battalion on 29 January 1918 in Quebec as "being no longer physically fit for war service." In his discharge papers, his military character was described as "bad."

¹ "Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1621–1968," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 25 January 2017), entry for Joseph Eloi Piche [*sic*], Event: Baptism

² "1901 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 24 January 2017), entry for Eloi Piché, Province: Quebec, District: Portneuf, District number: 181, Sub-district: Portneuf, Sub-district number: H-2

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ "Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 25 January 2016) entry for Piche [*sic*], Eloi, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 7810 - 45, Item number: 573949, Digitized service file - PDF format: [7810-45-u](#). Unless otherwise noted, all information about Eloi's military career comes from this source.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ "War Diaries – 22nd Canadian Infantry Battalion," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>: accessed 24 January 2017) File: RG9-III-D-3, Volume/box number: 4931, File number: 413, Copied container number: T-10732-10733

⁸ "Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 30 November 2016) entry for Kindree, Ernest Talmage, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 5156 – 8, Item number: 499266, Digitized service file - PDF format: B5156-S008

⁹ "Canada, War Graves Registers (Circumstances of Casualty), 1914–1948," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 24 January 2017), entry for Eloi Piche [*sic*], Service number: 61577

¹⁰ "Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 30 November 2016) entry for Kindree, Ernest Talmage

¹¹ "Rock City Tobacco Company," *Cigarettespedia*

(http://www.cigarettespedia.com/index.php/ManufacturerRock_City_Tobacco: accessed 26 January 2017)

¹² "Brussels Town Cemetery," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/>: accessed 22 November 2016)

¹³ "Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 25 January 2016) entry for Piche [*sic*], George Godias, Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 7810 - 59, Item number: 573963, Digitized service file - PDF format: [7810-59-u](#). Unless otherwise noted, all information about Godias' military career comes from this source.