

November 14, 1916: Private Benjamin
Levangie (Lavandier)



Date of Birth: May 28, 1880 at Frankville or North Sydney, NS*

Parents: Charles and Josephine (Lavandier) Lavandier

Siblings: Brothers: James, Simon, Allan John, David Freeman, Charles, Joseph; sisters: Anne, Jeanne, Elizabeth, Marie, Julie, Bertha. Two brothers and two sisters died in childhood.

Marital Status: Single

Occupation: Farmer

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Enlistment: Sept 24, 1914 at Valcartier Camp, Quebec

Unit: 2nd Brigade Canadian Field Artillery

Service #: 41161

Rank: Private/Driver

Previous Military Service: None

Next of Kin: Josephine Lavandier, Havre Boucher, Antigonish Co., NS (mother)

Date of Death: Nov 14, 1916 near Albert, France

Final Resting Place: Albert Communal Cemetery Extension, Picardy, France

* Date of birth obtained from Benjamin's attestation papers. Other sources list the date as May 24 and May 28, 1889. Records also differ as to his birthplace.

Benjamin Levangie was born at Frankville or North Sydney, NS, a member of very large Acadian family. The family home, no longer standing, was located on the grounds of the Frankville racetrack. The Levangie family was spread across Cape Breton, Guysborough and Antigonish Counties, particularly in the Frankville area. All are descended from Antoine Lavandier of the Diocese of Avranches, Normandy, France, a navigator who worked for Claude Petitpas, Port Toulouse (St. Peters), Cape Breton.

Claude Petitpas was a schooner captain and merchant who also served as a Mi'kmaq interpreter. He first married a native bride around 1686 and thus came to know the native language well. Claude first lived at Musquodoboit, his marriage producing at least seven children. He then

moved to Port Toulouse (St. Peters), Isle Royale (Cape Breton) around 1717, where his first wife passed away soon afterward. In 1721, he remarried Francoise, daughter of Pierre Lavergne, Port Royale. He met his 17-year-old bride while visiting the French settlement and took her back to his Port Toulouse home.

Claude's second marriage produced four sons—Jean-Baptiste, Jacques, Louis Benjamin and Joseph Petitpas. After Claude's death in 1731, three of his sons—Jean-Baptiste, Jacques, and Joseph—settled in the Tracadie area of Antigonish County, where they left many descendants scattered across nearby communities. Francoise (Lavergne) Petitpas, now a 28-year-old widow, remarried Antoine Lavandier at Port Toulouse and subsequently gave birth to two children, Abraham (b. 1734) and Marguerite (b. 1735).

Abraham Lavandier followed his half-brother, Louis Petitpas, to Chezzetcook in 1760. Twenty years later, he moved to Isle Madame, relocating soon afterward to Havre Boucher—close to his Petitpas half-brothers in Linwood and Tracadie—where he received a land grant in 1809. Three of his children were born at Port Toulouse, three at Chezzetcook, three at Arichat and one at Havre Boucher. His many Antigonish County descendants now spell their surname “Levangie”.

Abraham's son, Charles Lavandier, was Benjamin's great-grandfather, while his grandfather was Charles's son, Simon Lavandier. His father, Charles Lavandier, married Josephine Lavandier. At some point, Charles may have moved the family to North Sydney and lived there for several years, as Benjamin listed his place of birth as North Sydney on his enlistment papers. This connection is also mentioned in the Casket's notice of Benjamin Levangie's death, which states that he resided for several years with Rev. William Francis Kiely, North Sydney's Parish Priest from 1908 to 1939.

Benjamin enlisted on Sept. 24th, 1914 at Valcartier Camp, Quebec. His regimental number indicates he was part of the 1st Canadian Division's 2nd Field Artillery Brigade and thus he was part of the first Contingent of Canadians sent overseas.

The 1st Division arrived in England to great fanfare in October 1914. After a tough winter of training on Salisbury Plain, the Division crossed the English Channel to France in February 1915. Its units saw their first major action while holding the line in Belgium's Ypres Salient during the Second Battle of Ypres (April – May 1915). Benjamin and his comrades served on rotation in the Ypres area for another sixteen months.

In late summer 1916, the Canadian Corps—now three Divisions strong, a fourth soon to join its ranks—moved south to the Somme area of France, where its personnel participated in the later stages of the British offensive launched on July 1st. Canadian units captured the village of Courcellette, near Albert, in mid-September. 1st Division units later fought in the Battle of Ancre Heights (October – November 1916), a series of attacks on German positions along Thiepval Ridge, particularly a fortified location known as Regina Trench.

On November 4, Benjamin received multiple shrapnel wounds. He was evacuated to No. 5 Casualty Clearing Station, where he died of his injuries on November 14th, 1916 and was laid to rest in the Albert Communal Cemetery Extension.

Benjamin's surname was incorrectly recorded throughout his Canadian Corps service. It was spelled "Levanger" on his attestation papers and later altered to "Livanger", as Benjamin's signature made the first "e" appear to be an "i". This incorrect spelling is repeated throughout later military records, including the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's reference to his death and final resting place.