

## **BACKGROUND: Who was Joe Boyle and what did he do?**

Joe Boyle was a restless giant, a world traveller who grew up around racehorses, then earned a living boxing and promoting sports until he arrived penniless in the Klondike in 1897. Boyle's vision was to make a fortune by replacing hand-mining methods with mechanized methods. After securing huge concessions and bringing in giant dredges, Boyle literally moved mountains and rivers in the Yukon's Klondike gold fields, making millions. He vanquished his rivals to become King of the Klondike, Dawson City's leading and wealthiest citizen. When war broke out in 1914, Boyle was too old to enlist, so he financed a machine gun detachment to go overseas. Two years later, frustrated with military bureaucracy, Boyle left the Yukon to go to Europe and win the war -- single-handedly if necessary.

His exploits took him to Russia, Ukraine and Romania. He was given the job of fixing a flagging railway system in order to keep up the Russians effectively fighting the Central Powers on the Eastern Front. Soon he was providing advice on military strategy, and his accomplishments so impressed the Russian government that they awarded him medals, and put him in charge of all their railways in Europe. When the Bolshevik Revolution shocked the world in October 1917, Boyle was kept on by Lenin and Trotsky because he was effective and useful; wearing a Canadian officer's uniform, Boyle was not a threat to the new regime.

Then Boyle's greatest adventure: the Romanian government, which had sent its country's royal jewels and treasury to the Kremlin for safekeeping when they were invaded, appealed to Boyle for help in getting out of the hands of the Bolsheviks; they had heard of his ability to get things done. And help he did, organizing a rescue mission and a trainload of relief supplies as well as Romania's treasurers, which he secreted in Red Cross packages. The journey of more than 1000 miles in the deep cold of a dark Russian winter succeeded in overcoming a series of hostile threats and barriers as the train chugged slowly across war-torn and civil-war-torn Russia and Ukraine in an adventure the style of Indiana Jones and James Bond. Boyle's train finally arrived in Romania on Christmas Eve, 1917, the best news they'd had in a year.

Boyle had a falling out with the Bolsheviks when mob rule killed a friend, around the time Russia pulled out of the war. By now he was running a spy network for the British Secret Service, which grew to almost 500 agents by war's end. Exploit after exploit earned him more medals, this time from Romania, France and Britain. [He never got a medal from Canada because he didn't take orders from Ottawa and had no official standing with the army.] Boyle's appetite for getting things done never flagged: he negotiated the first peace treaty of WW1, between Romania and Russia.

Joe Boyle was in Europe to help win the war, not fall in love. But he was smitten when he met Marie of Edinburgh, the Queen of Romania, to whom he became utterly devoted. Some say they were lovers, others say just good friends.

After the war, Boyle had to leave the queen's court, because after all he was a commoner and she was a queen; his rank in the Canadian militia of Honourary Lt.-Col. would not normally earn him a seat close to the queen at a formal dinner. His close relationship with Marie was only tolerated while he was useful to the country in dealing with its wartime struggles. From a distance, Boyle kept working in her majesty's service. He became a regular visitor to Buckingham Palace, where he sometimes took breakfast with King George V, Marie's cousin. It irked Canadian authorities that Boyle presented himself in uniform as a Canadian officer, but the king told him to keep wearing it.

At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Boyle saw that Romania's future was at risk because their prime minister was failing in presenting their case. Boyle sent word to Marie, who came to save the day with her charm, good looks, and relationship with her cousin the King of England. When the maps of Europe were finally redrawn, Romania had acquired significant new lands, achieving its greatest size ever. It also had the benefit of foreign aid that Boyle secured for the country to rebuild, including \$25 million from Canada. To this day, after 50 years of communist rule, the memory of Regina Marie runs strong in Romania's people, who remember her fondly.

Boyle died in 1923 in England. Queen Marie was shattered by the news, and secured an ancient shrine to mark his grave near London. Sixty years later, the efforts of Boyle's daughter Flora and a group in Woodstock Ontario came to fruition: Joe Boyle's remains were reinterred from England, and he was buried in a ceremony with full military honours in 1983. It is said that every year on the anniversary of Boyle's death, a woman shrouded in black would visit his English grave. Those visits stopped when Marie passed away in 1938.

Boyle was born November 6, 1867, in Toronto, making him one of Canada's first home-born citizens. His 150<sup>th</sup> birthday occurs in the same year Canada celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup>. The year 2017 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary Boyle took his first steps into his series of wartime adventures in Europe.

#### **MEDALS AWARDED TO JOE BOYLE:**

1 – Order of Stanislaus, 2nd Class "with swords" (Russia) – a decoration initially awarded to Boyle by General Lavr G. Kornilov for "presence of mind, courage and leadership, by coordinating defences" which allowed the main body of the Russian Army to withdraw and prevented an enemy rout at Tarnapol, Russia, Summer 1917. *This award was subsequently amended, when all the details of the action became known, to the:*

2 - Order of St. Ann 4<sup>th</sup> Class on the sword (Russia) – for valour in the field during the incident at Tarnapol, Summer 1917; conferred by Gen. N.N. Dukhonin. *(This award is*

*actually placed on a sword, and is not worn around the neck or on the chest like other medals).*

3 – Order of St. Vladimir 4th class with swords (Russia) - for "re-establishing transportation on the Roumanian front in the autumn of 1917." (*This is worn with a red and black sash*). Conferred by General D.G. Shcherbachev. (*The Russian awards are all from the Russian Imperial Forces, before the Bolshevik Revolution.*)

4 – Order of the Crown of Roumania, Commander (Romania) - for return of the Foreign Ministry's Archives and Crown Jewels from Moscow. Conferred by King Ferdinand.

5 – Order of the Star of Roumania, Grand Cross (Romania) - for rescue of Romanian hostages from the Bolsheviks March 1918.

6 - Order of Regina Maria, First Class (Romania) - for prevention of the loss of Russian Red Cross stores and other essential equipment to the Central Powers and the use of these stores by the people of Roumania and the army. The award was presented to Boyle by Queen Marie, which "touched Boyle deeply."

7 - Crois de Guerre (France) 21 October 1919 – for close collaboration with the French Army and rendering previous service by the missions he accomplished in Bessarabia and the Ukraine; from Gen. H.M. Berthelot.

8 - Distinguished Service Order (UK) 3 June 1919 (King's Birthday Honours List) – on recommendation of Sir George Barclay – for distinguished services in Russia.

9 – Bronze oak leaf insignia of the Mention In Dispatches. Brought to the Notice of the Secretary of State for War for Valuable Services Rendered in Connection with Military Operations in the Field (MID A List 12/01/1920).

10 - Mystery Medal: Boyle's headstone provided by Queen Marie is inscribed "C.B.E., D.S.O."

The CBE stands for Commander of the Order of the British Empire, a very high honour from the British Government, the kind of award given to top spies *a la* James Bond. There is no official record of Boyle being granted such an award. Boyle's daughter Flora apparently knew the reason why CBE was engraved on the tombstone, but kept it a secret, which she took with her to the grave.

Note: Joe Boyle did not get any medals from Canada, because he didn't do any work on behalf of Canada, let alone take orders from them. However, in 1983 his remains were reinterred in Woodstock Ontario in a ceremony with full military honours, attended by the Minister of National Defence.



Yukon Archives photo