Honouring Our Veterans' Personal Stories

Family Stories

These are cherished memories shared by families, celebrating the bravery and sacrifice of their loved ones.

Personal Accounts

Veterans share their own experiences, providing unique insights into their service and the impact on their lives.

Remembering Heroes

Poppies symbolize remembrance, honouring those who have served and sacrificed for our country throughout history.

Islington United Church
Let Love Be Here

PREFACE

Written by Dave Laughton

Each year on the eleventh of November people around the world gather to honour those who fought in military action to protect, defend and preserve their way of life. In Canada participation was voluntary. We gather in churches, synagogues, temples and at war memorials across our country. We pay homage by playing familiar music, reading scripture, placing poppies and laying memorial wreaths.

Who are these people? All we see is thousands of names carved into gray concrete and marble or engraved in memorial books. How did their names get to be added to these memorials?

Each of these people had a story that, by and large, are now long forgotten. Upon returning home most veterans would not or could not discuss their activities for confidentiality reasons or because they could not bear the trauma of reliving the horror they witnessed. Many kept their stories to themselves until shortly before their passing. Some stories were never exposed. It is the aim of this booklet to collect, record and share as many of these stories that can still be remembered.

These stories are intended as an anthology from people who are, in some way, connected to Islington United Church. Stories are those told by veterans, family, friends, neighbours, Islington members or acquaintances. This is a collection of stories of people whose lives were forever changed by the events of war. Each story in this booklet is presented essentially as submitted. This is Volume 1 as we hope to add to it in the future. While these personal stories offer meaningful insights into the experiences of some veterans within our community, we recognize that many voices remain unheard. This collection does not represent the full diversity of those affected by war and service, and we honour the stories yet to be told.

Next November the eleventh please take a moment to visit one of the memorials in your community or attend a service of remembrance and pay respect to those who gave liberty and freedom so much.

THEODORE ANEMA, Submitted by Kristen Derksen

My dad, Theodore Anema, volunteered for the U.S. air force in 1942. He was sent for training as a navigator bombardier on B-17 airplanes. Once he was trained, he flew through Gander Newfoundland to Bari Italy to begin his active service.

My dad experienced many dangerous missions. The B-17 airplanes were like flying tin cans. There was no heat, pressure control or oxygen. They had to wear masks to receive the necessary oxygen when flying at high altitudes. Several times he had to take over the landing of the plane because the pilot was unconscious and wounded from the exploding shrapnel they had to fly through. He flew a total of 36 missions and received the distinguished flying cross for a particular mission. He was in the lead plane that bombed a German jet fuel production plant. It's thought that if the Germans had been successful in getting jet airplanes off the ground, that the results of the war may have been quite different.

The last mission my dad flew was on Easter Sunday morning 1945. During that flight, his plane lost the use of 3 of the 4 engines due to shrapnel damage. The crew had to parachute out. The man sitting beside my dad was wounded and unconscious. So my dad put that man's parachute on as well as his own. He jumped from the plane holding on to the other man and pulled both ripcords. He watched the man safely hit the ground. Although his legs buckled on impact. Then dad and another man from his plane ran for cover. They spent the next 2 – 3 weeks hiding in different homes of people in that region of what was the former Yugoslavia. No one spoke English, but they managed to communicate enough so that one day, in the dead of night, they took my dad to a field where a plane came out of the dark and took him and others to a U.S. air base. He was given a leave and went to the island of Capri. While he was there, the war ended. My dad saw the man he had saved after the war. That man had been captured by the Germans and was very well cared for. They put pins in his legs to repair the broken bones. Dad said he thought this man was given good care because he had blond hair and blue eyes.

I struggle to imagine my gentle, lovely dad in such dangerous and difficult circumstances; to be so young and faced with incredible life and death choices. I do know my dad felt it was the right thing to do: to fight to defend and protect the world from the evil threatening it.

STEWART AXFORD, Submitted by Dave Laughton

Stewart (cousin to Marjory Laughton, Kenneth's wife) volunteered for the RCAF. He was an accountant. "Even the air force needs accountants" he was often heard to say.

Upon signing up Stewart was given the unusual opportunity to choose where he served. Either in Toronto or Newfoundland. Stewart chose Newfoundland. A spur of the moment decision by a young person that would come to have a very profound effect in the final days of his life.

Stewart subsequently admitted that Newfoundland was the place he learned to ski!

JAMES (JIM) ALLAN BELL, Submitted by Lisa Mazzariol

Our father, James (Jim) Allan Bell, was a prairie boy from Manitoba, a proud Canadian, and a proud Korean War Veteran. When Canada called for volunteers to go to Korea, he enlisted and served with the 2nd Regiment of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, of the 25th Canadian Infantry Brigade. He served as a Bombardier from 1950-1952, relaying signals from the infantry back to the artillery.

He proposed to our mother, Edna (Websdale) in November of 1950, but was hesitant to marry before being deployed. He had been training at Camp Shilo in Manitoba and was on his way to Fort Lewis, when all that changed. On November 21 st, 1950, he survived the Canoe River train wreck where 17 soldiers and 5 others were killed on the way to Fort Lewis. Our father was instructed by his commanding officer to switch to a car further back from his companions. Something at the time he objected to, but perhaps a decision that saved his life. Dad had a "change of heart" and decided he wanted to marry our mom before he deployed, so he sent a telegram and asked her to join him. So, she travelled alone (a small-town prairie girl) on a train, all the way to Fort Lewis, Washington. They were married in an evening ceremony, in a small army chapel filled with soldiers in February 1951.

Dad sailed to Korea in April of that year. He served for 2 years and was honourably discharged in August of 1952. His focus shifted from soldier to

his role as husband and father. Jim and Edna were lovingly married for 70 years. They had four children, a son, and three daughters. They suffered the heartbreaking loss of their beloved son in 1972. Edna passed away in March of 2021. She was the absolute love of his life.

Dad heard about veterans going into schools to speak to students to give them an understanding of the meaning of Remembrance Day. He decided he wanted to participate, so he researched three soldiers from the Korean War, and told the stories of their service. These stories were shared to hundreds of students throughout the years. A touching moment for me was an interaction with one of the student's mothers. After hearing her daughter retell what she had learned about Remembrance Day, she realized she needed to be speaking to her daughter more about things "that really mattered".

For many years Dad attended and participated in the Remembrance Day service at the Korean War Memorial in Mississauga. At one service, Dad was approached by a woman and asked if he had known her father, Paddy O'Brian. Dad replied "No, but I've been telling his stories for years," and went on to explain that Paddy was one of the soldiers he spoke about to the students. She said she went to lay a poppy on the stone by his name, but there was one already there. Dad said, "it was me; I lay it there every year". She reached into her purse and gave dad a poem that had been written by her father. She wanted Dad to keep this poem as a thank you.

Dad was an active member of the Korean Veteran's Association. He also worked on and helped run an annual golf tournament at The Board of Trade Golf Course, which was a fundraiser for various veteran charities.

In 2017, Dad received a "Quilt of Valour". They are quilts made by a group of volunteers for veterans. A patch stitched into the quilt reads "Handmade with love, respect and gratitude for your sacrifice to Canada. May the hugs stitched into this quilt give you comfort, strength, and love".

Our parents were active members of Bloordale United Church for over 60 years. Dad was a man of deep, quiet faith. A faith I know he would have called upon many times during his years in the

military. When asked to speak at church regarding his faith, he described it this way: “My faith is a simple faith- it may not suit the scholars or the cynics, and I might not be able to debate it. But I don’t have to! It serves me well and I cling to it as I strive (not always successfully) to live as God would wish”.

Dad passed away on June 3rd, 2025, at the age of 96. For many years he would proudly do the laying of the wreath and salute on Remembrance Day at church. He gave his final salute at Islington United Church, in November, 2024. He was a soldier and a gentleman, and his memory is a blessing to us all.

ROGER BLACKWELL, Submitted by Kim Blackwell and Meg Hoppe (Blackwell)

After Dad enlisted, he was sent to Windsor, Nova Scotia and was there for 6 months, from January to June. He hated it, and said the weather was terrible - very wet and rainy.

Anyway, so that would have to have been at least January 1941, because in Jan 1940, he wouldn’t have been old enough.

I (Meg) remembered that he worked after graduating from high school at Westclox in Peterborough for a while. So that means, the earliest he could have been in Nova Scotia was probably January 1942.

Dad volunteered for service some time after his 18th birthday in 1940. He said he had quite a bit of work to do to set it up for his dad to manage the farm while he was away.

He was probably based at the Aldershot base in Hampshire, working on service and repair of military vehicles. He says he was not eligible to go to the front because of a physical disability with his feet. (I think he also had some medical history of a nervous breakdown. I'm not sure why I suspect this, maybe it was something Mom said to me. If that was the case, it may have been a factor in his placement.)

He was there as far as we know until 1945.

At some point, probably fairly soon after he arrived, he received a letter from his friend Alden Bailey who said that he had arrived at the Aldershot base. Dad walked to a nearby building to meet a surprised Alden, who had no idea they were in the same base.

On their free days, Dad and Alden would go up to London, and socialize at neighbourhood pubs. Dad said he made some good Irish friends, and told his parents about this in a letter home. His mother responded by scolding him, and saying he was not allowed to marry an Irish girl.

On one of these trips (not sure when) they were not able to find overnight accommodation. They were advised to search out a local minister who might be willing to give them a room. So this is what they did, and found the Reverend W. B. Smith's home, who also happened to have a daughter named Rotha.

After the war, he and Rotha were married January 21, 1946 at Park Lane Methodist Church, in Wembley. Their honeymoon was in Cornwall and sometime after that, he returned to Canada with the army. Rotha arrived later as the only passenger on a freighter owned by the Reardon Smith Shipping Line. One of the owners was Douglas Smith, the husband of Rotha's Aunt Gladys. Dad mentioned that his mother was very concerned about Rotha being the only woman on the boat with all the men. Anyway I guess Grandma got over her suspicions once she met Rotha.

PADRE EAST, Submitted by Dave Laughton

(Excerpts from 48th Highlanders of Canada's Falcon)

Stewart Bland East was born in Manitoba in 1908. He graduated from the University of Saskatchewan 1933 and went on to study at Emmanuel College, the United Church seminary in Toronto. He was settled in the United Church's Pastoral Charge in Jarvis, Ontario. When war broke out he enlisted with the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry and subsequently transferred to the PPCLI and then moved to the 48th Highlanders of Canada.

Padre East was a quiet, unobtrusive and compassionate individual. His fundamental goal was supporting soldiers so they could carry out their duties and accomplish their mission. He displayed personal courage with an unflagging desire to help his men. As a Padre he ministered to all his

men be they Catholic, Jewish, Atheist or Christian. He was everyone's Padre.

The role of chaplain is complex. Part spiritual, part religious, part pastoral and social service. The primary goal is supporting the soldier so they can do their duty and accomplish their mission. When learned that church parades were not mandatory he requested a change of policy but was refused. This probably worked out for the best as his services were most often over subscribed. He held service wherever needed, in the field in any place he could find space.

The 48th landed in Italy at Pachino under very trying circumstances. They were forced on a 36 hour hot, dry, dusty route march without water or vehicles. These had been lost when their supply ships were sunk before landing. Lack of water was the worst factor in the ordeal. He carried water himself and seconded some local mules for the task. Padre East was always around with a mouth full of water.

Padre East made a decision to associate with the Medical Officer at a Regimental Aid Post near the front lines. He picked up first aid skills and led search parties going out to retrieve the dead and wounded and acting as stretcher bearer. He took time to speak to all the casualties, frequently going to the forward trenches with a " How you doing boys?"

Padre East was not shy about standing up to higher rank officers. When the stern General Volks chastised the padres for not doing enough for the morale of the troops, Padre East stood and said "Now, see here, General" and proceeded to tell the General that the army needed to show some concern and compassion for its troops. The General backed down.

Padre East did not frequent the regimental headquarters in the rear. He preferred to visit the men where they worked, in the trenches at the front line. His cherry visits drew reassurance that everything would work out. Burials of course were part of his duties. "I was alright as long as I didn't have to bury more than three. When there were more to be found and then searched for personal belongings, and then buried, I was upset." Every burial received a marker and was recorded. It was in Sicily that he buried his first Highlander. As casualties mounted he buried several more including two Jewish troops. He had crosses erected, two with the Star of David. "He was everybody's padre." Eventually he was evacuated to

hospital suffering from stress. However he only remained a week as he was anxious to get back to his men. When the 48th left Italy every grave was noted thanks to Padre East' devotion to duty.

Padre East was twice wounded when the regiment played an important roll in punching through The Hitler Line. He was awarded the Military Cross (MC). His citation reads:

The Chaplin was himself wounded in the arm but undeterred he continued to move among the men and encourage them. Later he was wounded in the leg but he dressed the wound himself and applied a tourniquet.

Before he allowed himself to be evacuated he insisted on going out to all company positions with the aid of a stick to prove to the men he was not seriously hit and to assure them he would return soon.

HONORARY/CAPTAIN EAST is held in such high regard by all ranks of his unit that his presence in the Bridgehead combined with his gallant action exerted tremendous influence on the men who were faced with a very serious situation.

On May 18th 1945 Padre East was awarded a MC (Miltery Cross). On the same day he was awarded an MBE (Member of the order of the British Empire). Both honours were presented by King George VI. When asked by a reporter what the MBE was for he responded, "It just happened."

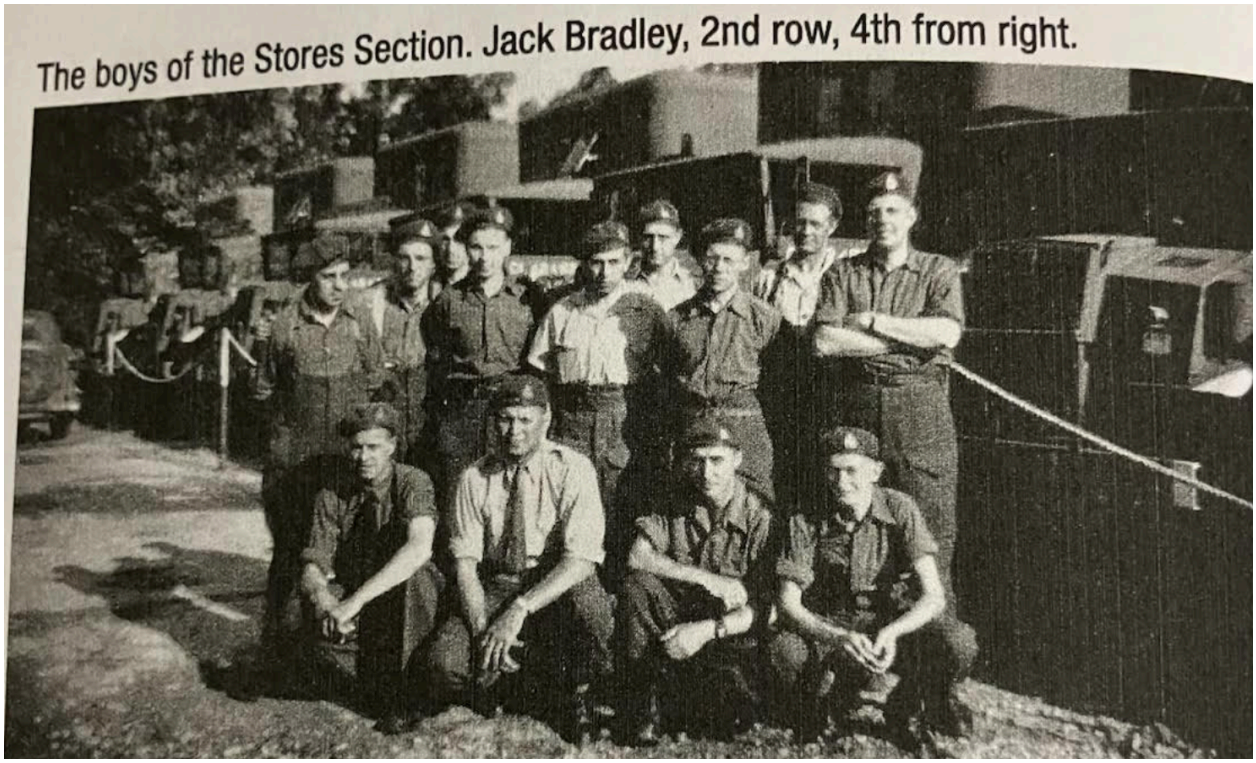
Upon discharge he returned to his church in Jarvis, Ontario. He was then called to the little United Church in Islington village. He remained there until retirement building a new cathedral style church which opened in1949. He retired in 1973.

After retirement Padre East was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity by Victoria College at the University of Toronto. He served as Padre of the Warriors Day parade and served as Alderman for Ward 2 in the borough of Etobicoke. Padre East was influential in the historical preservation of Etobicoke buildings and was a driving force in the saving, preservation and rebuilding of Shaver House.

Padre east died 29 Jun 1995. He was interned at the Village Burying Ground in his beloved Islington village.

JOHN (JACK) EDWARD BRADLEY, submitted by Dennis Bradley

Jack Bradley was a member of the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. During WWII, in August 1944 he helped on a project that converted Priest Tanks into the very first amoured personnel carriers to carry troops “safely” to and in battlegrounds. There is a small museum dedicated to the “defrocked Priests” as the new vehicles were called.



ALICE CHATER (Née BASSENETT), Submitted by Dave Laughton

Alice was a farm girl from south western Ontario. She died steadfastly refusing to relate any detail as to her involvement in WWII. We do know she was in the RCAF, and stationed on Canada's west coast. We think she was in the radio service, probably involved in the searching for invasions from the Pacific.

RUTH CURRY, Submitted by herself

I first saw the light of day in February of 1937, from a little cottage which bore the name “Cherry Cottage” on the island of Jersey in the parish of St. Lawrence. Jersey with a present population of 75,000 is one of five islands which make up the Channel Islands that are located off the coast of France. Jersey is the largest of the five islands and boasts a strong farming, financial and tourism Industry.

My life from birth flourished on this beautiful island until one day in early June 1940. My father came home mid-day from his work and announced to my mother that the Germans now occupied France. England has declared the islands open, which meant that our homes could soon be occupied by the Germans. Anyone wanting to leave would have to register to do so.

For one day, residents lined up at the City Hall to get their names on the list to leave the island or they just came down to the harbour and got on a boat as room was available. Approximately 10,000 people left, the island's population being 30,000 at the time of the evacuation. Boats of every description, from mail boats to freighters, came into the harbour to take people to England. The evacuation process took roughly three days to complete. On the day before our departure, while my father was registering for us to leave, my mother put me on the seat of the back of her bicycle and peddled up to her family home to tell them we were leaving the Island. But on our way back, I fell asleep and my left foot got caught in the spokes of the bicycle, injuring my ankle very badly. My mother took me to the hospital where I was attended to, and after bandaging my ankle the doctor told us I'd need to have my ankle seen right away when we arrived in England. The following day Mother packed a small suitcase for my parents and had only the clothes they were nearing (as one was limited to a maximum of 28 lbs) and we left our home just as it was. Upon arriving at the harbour, we boarded a freighter — the captain, seeing the state of the ankle, put my mother and me in his cabin. As we set off for England, not knowing what lay ahead nor what our fate would be, the German U-Boats lurked in the channel.

After an overnight crossing we landed in Weymouth, we were made to get into lines, (most of the men including my father volunteered to join up, but at this point men were exempt — this was due to the fact that we were homeless) we then boarded trains which took us to the North of England to

a city called Bolton in Lancashire. We had all been ticketed and were taken to School where we remained for 4-5 days following which the local residents of Bolton came to offer accommodation for us. I was placed in an infirmary for about six weeks while I received treatment for my ankle, and had to learn to walk again.

One can well imagine life during the war, we endured the bombing every night. The sirens would sound and we would get out of our beds to go into the underground shelters. As the war progressed we became cavalier about these raids, and gave up going into the shelters. My Father was working at Dobson & Barlow making the 25 to 1000 lb casings for bombs — Mother took whatever work was available, while my early education began in Bolton. We lived day by day during this grim period of our history. We remained in Bolton for about 3 years, and then my Father was transferred to Vickers & Armstrong in Blackpool, the famous seaside resort. The happy event during these difficult years was the birth of my sister in September of 1943. Once the war came to an end, we had to make the decision as to whether we would return to Jersey or make England our permanent home. Once the Islands were liberated and we were able to return, we went back to see what remained of our home and belongings. Most of the houses left by those who evacuated were taken over by the Germans, or residents of the Islands, and few, if any, of ones belongings could be found. Having visited the Island and being reunited with the family, we decided life on the Island was too restricting; our decision to make England our permanent home was made.

Soon after the war my father accepted work in Slough in Buckinghamshire. This was a market gardening estate where we were provided with a house. This was the first home of our own since leaving Jersey. Before setting up the house, we tried through the Red Cross to get some of the furniture that had been left behind before we evacuated. Very few pieces were sent over, and they were not in good condition. So it meant we had to start over and get a home together again. Father worked on the estate, I was enrolled in a new school and we started reconstructing our lives.

Living in this area of England was delightful. We were living in the shadows of Windsor Castle, we would picnic on the grounds of Windsor Great Park - very often we would see the Royal Family drive by going to the Castle. In May of 1947 my Uncle, my Father's brother and his wife came to edit us. *My* uncle had decided to immigrate to Canada. He had once lived in

Canada prior to the depression, but returned to Jersey and lived there during the occupation of the Islands. He started planting the seeds of change which would once again take our lives in a different direction.

During the summer of that year there was a campaign in the papers to get people to immigrate to Canada. After a family discussion it was decided my father would see if he was eligible for this change in career. Once he was accepted we started the task of applying for immigrant status in Canada. I must say I was not too keen on what was happening, as I had made friends at my school, and was enjoying my life at this stage. We finally learned that my father would be leaving us in October and we would follow as soon as passage would be available. We learned later that we would sail from Liverpool on the Ascania which had been refurbished, following its service during the war. Mother, my sister and I, sailed for Canada on December 18", 1947 to be reunited with my father. The crossing at that time of year was rough, we celebrated Christmas on board, life on the ship was great, and I was eating foods I had not seen in my life. We finally docked in Halifax at the now famous shed #21 after being held off shore due to a heavy snowfall on December 28th. We were excited to see my father after being separated from him for over 3 months.

We then boarded a train which would take us to Montreal the winter of 1947 was a particularly bad one. It took us 3 days bj train to reach Montreal due to heavy snow which held up the train. After arriving in ñlontreal we went to live with my uncle until we were able to find a home of our own. By the summer of 1948 we had found a home, I enrolled in school at the grade 5 level, but before the end of the term I was put up to grade 6. School in England was ahead of schooling in Canada. I soon got involved in the school choir and decided I could take instructions in violin - after taking 4 years I decided I would not make a concert performer. I lived what I thought were normal teenage years, and after getting my high school leaving, my thoughts turned to a working career. My first job was with an Insurance Brokers business. This proved to be a good position, after starting off as a policy typist, I soon learned the rating and claims side of the Insurance business and was promoted into a Brokers position. This soon put me on the career path in Insurance that was to last over 20 years.

It was during these working years that I was introduced to my husband Rick. He had been living and working in Toronto and was visiting an old childhood friend in Montreal one weekend. A blind date was arranged and it

was love at first sight. We dated back and forth between the two cities for about a year and a half and finally set a wedding date. This of course meant I would have to move to Toronto, I requested and received a transfer from my company to move to the Toronto office.

We married in October of 1965 in St. George's United Church, and took an apartment overlooking the Don Valley. We had not been living here for more than two years in Toronto, when Rick was approached by a head hunter to take up a senior position with Sun Life in Montreal. Rick accepted this new position and we moved back to Montreal. We set up home and in May of 1969 our daughter was born. I felt I should give up my working career to take care of our daughter.

During this time I became heavily involved in volunteer work. I was district chairman of the United Way Campaign, Red Cross worker — (which I worked at for some 15 years), Church Elder, and Meals on Wheels, just to name a few. The political situation was becoming increasingly bad in Montreal. After the election of Rene Levesque, the separatist threat was starting to affect our everyday lives. So it was with this thought in mind that Rick accepted a Government job offer here in Toronto. The year was 1987.

Rick moved up to begin this new job; I remained behind to deal with selling our home. We were finally together in the early part of 1988. I took on a position one day after arriving here as Office Manager with an Advertising Agency. After being a year with this company I felt my talents could be better put to use with a larger company. I accepted the position as Executive Secretary to the President of Lipton Monarch, a division of Thomas J Lipton part of the giant Unilever Company. This was an interesting position as I arranged conferences, planned produce launches, etc. I remained with this company until my retirement.

My husband passed away in March of 2008, but I remain active as a member of Islington United Church. I do volunteer work helping Sleeping Children around the World and am a member of Probus Club of Etobicoke and keep up with my hobbies which are cooking, gardening and listening to music, in particular the classics and I am a proud grandmother of a one year old granddaughter.

WINIFRED FIELDING CARLOW and TADEUSZ MICHAL CZULINKSI, Submitted by Irene Fair

Winifred Fielding Carlow

NB: Because of the nature of my Mum's work during the war, she was sworn to secrecy. Even after the required 50 years had passed, she was reluctant to reveal anything about her time at Bletchley Park. In her later years, after she had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, we were able to learn a bit about her experiences there.

My mum, Winifred Carlow, was born in Edinburgh Scotland in 1923. While studying English at the University there, she was requested by the government to report to Bletchley Park. At that time, many university graduates were recruited based on their language and/or mathematical aptitude. Although her parents were nervous about allowing their younger daughter to travel such a distance for "top secret" work, they agreed. From September 1943 - May 1945, she was assigned to Block D (Hut 6) as a modified Typex operator, where she and others decoded signals using settings found on the Bombe an electro-mechanical device*.

Winifred and many others were billeted at private homes in the area around Bletchley Park. The code-breakers worked in shifts round the clock and hers were often at night. She would cycle back to her room in the home of an older couple and tiptoe in so as not to disturb them.

After the war, Winifred remained in the area where she taught English to many of the Polish soldiers who had been resettled there. One of the soldiers was Tadeusz and they were married several years later.

Despite the long hours and "boring work", Winifred made many life-long friends. Several years before she died, the British government recognized the code-breakers by issuing and presenting surviving veterans with the Bletchley Park Commemorative Badge. Hers was framed and she proudly hung it in her home.

Her performance evaluation:

Miss Carlow worked from Sept. 1943 to May 1945 in a section of the country department of the Foreign Office of which I was in charge. She was engaged in confidential work of a skilled routine order.

Miss Carlow at first gave the impression of being rather slow and uninterested, but this impression was soon found to be misleading. She was, in fact, a very useful member of her room, proving herself to be a good, steady and conscientious worker. Her room had probably the most wearing job in the section: the work was not only monotonous but had to be done continually against time, and was also very tiring physically. Miss Carlow stood up to the hard conditions with determination and could always be relied upon.

Miss Carlow is a nice, quiet girl with a willing and equable temperament. She gets on well with everybody. I am sure that she would always do her best and I can recommend her for any post for which her qualifications make her suitable.

P.S. Milner-Barry

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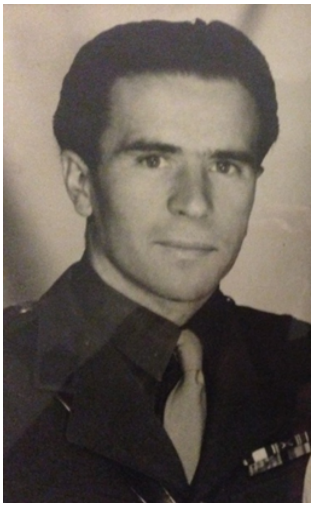
Tadeusz Michal Czulinski



NB: Because of the horrors my Dad endured during the war, he would never speak to us about his experiences. It was through his youngest sister, Yadwiga, that my cousin Anna was able to learn about this time.

My dad was born in 1913 in Poland. After his father died in 1924, Tadeusz and three of his four younger siblings were taken into care in a semi-orphanage owned by Count Stanislaw Skarbek. The Count took an interest in him and paid for his vocational education as a mechanic.

After two years of conscripted service, Tadeusz volunteered to remain in the Polish army and reached the rank of Second Lieutenant by 1939. After the outbreak of World War II, he fought in the battle of Modlin Fortress (headquarters of the defending Polish army). Although he was captured by the Germans, he managed to escape and was saved by a local farmer who hid him in his hay barn. After borrowing the farmer's clothes, he walked back home – a distance of over 400 kilometres – moving only at night. He reached home and tried to find his way back to the Polish army by listening to underground radio stations.

That winter, he along with his cousin Kazik and two friends, attempted to travel to Hungary via Romania. After losing their way in a fog, the four were captured by Russians and were sent to Siberia near the Kolyma River. During their detention there until 1942, they suffered hunger, freezing weather and severe depression. After the war, Tadeusz would say, "I survived thanks to Kazik. It was he who helped me to endure and cheered me on all the time."

In 1942, in accordance with international agreements, Stalin began to release prisoners from captivity. Tadeusz immediately enlisted in the Polish army which was formed in Russia by General Anders. Anders' Army left Russia through Persia (Iran) and reached the Near East in 1943. There, the men, who were starving and ill, slowly recovered from the "hell of Siberia."

From January 1944, Tadeusz and his cousin fought alongside the Allies in the battle of Monte Cassino in Italy. The mount was captured in May 1944 by the Second Polish Corps under General Anders.

After the war, Tadeusz travelled to England and searched for news about his family. It wasn't until 1948 that he finally received information from the Red Cross about them. While in England, he met Winifred who was teaching English to groups of resettled Polish soldiers after her work at Bletchley Park.

J. FLEMING, Submitted by Dave Laughton

I have no knowledge of any family members being involved in the Great War (WWI). However the memorial book in our church catalogues a J. Fleming (Our grandfather on our mothers side?) in the WWI section. He would have resided near and attended the church at Islington when the

memorial book was compiled and was of the correct age. He may have been exempt due to his involvement in farming and work in the railroad business.

MERVIN FREDERICK FISHER, Submitted by Lynn Valdegamo

Mervin Frederick Fisher was born May 7, 1926 in Collingwood Ontario at the foot of the Blue Mountains on the wooden kitchen table of his maternal grandparents home where he was rushed to the local hospital by horse and buggy. A few years later, his parents moved to work on the farm of Thomas Laird Kennedy, a former Premier of Ontario on land currently the region of Etobicoke and Mississauga, near Dixie and Burnhamthorpe. Sadly, his parents marriage was turbulent and and his mother not being able to support both Mervin and his two year older sister Vera, during the great depression, had to make the difficult decision to leave Mervin to be raised by his grandparents back in Collingwood, while she managed a rooming house at Dundas and Jarvist.

At the Collingwood farm, near Poplar Side road and 10th Line, Mervin woke at the crack of dawn to assist with farmhouse chores while also attending a one room school house. As soon as Mervin graduated grade 8, he left the farm of his abusive grandfather to live with his mother, where he was given permission to attend school only one day a week so as he could work the remaining days to help financially support his mother who worked several jobs to pay the bills as a single mother. No social assistance programs existed at the time. Mervin found work as a bicycle delivery boy, first for an uncle's automotive repair shop, and later at Ribbon's Limited where his older sister worked and where he would eventually meet my grandmother who as an artist painted the ribbons for Fedora hats.

When Mervin turned sixteen, for additional income, he joined the reserves as a Medic with 25 Medical Company. The following year he enlisted in the

full-time army, on the CNE grounds, where the Horse Palace had been taken over by the Canadian Army for enlistment. Mervin was never asked to show proof of his age. From the CNE, Mervin was sent to Brampton Armoury, followed by CFB Borden to complete his training in the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps. At CFB Borden, Mervin quickly advanced as a Lance Corporal, learning to drive and repair Sherman Tanks, as well as training new, older drafted soldiers and assisting in experiments to test the efficiency of different engine oils on the tanks radial engines.

During Mervin's training and service, he continued to send half his paycheques home to his mother to help support the family. On Mervin's 18th birthday he was sent by train to Port Halifax, shipped across the transatlantic to Gierlech Scotland, then transported by military lorries to Aldershot England to complete his final training. Sadly, at this point what the allies needed most were replacement infantry. What Mervin refers to as 'PBI's'- Poor Bloody Infantry, and he was sent to serve with the Essex Scottish Regiment "C" Company, across the English Channel into Belgium and then into Nijmegen Netherlands in the Groesbeek forests, during the brutal hunger winter of 1944-1945. Here, with limited infantry training, Mervin survived close encounters which left his fellow soldiers riddled with machine gun fire, and questioning how he was spared. Eventually, Mervin's platoon, led by Victoria Cross award recipient, Major Frederick Albert Tilston, was overtaken by the far superior, earth shaking German Tiger Tanks.

Miraculously, Mervin survived, buried in a gully trench, as the tanks and ground patrol clean up crew passed overhead. Later, Mervin escaped into the forest for shelter in an abandoned Dutch farm house, only to unintentionally have walked into a hidden German Headquarters, where he was captured as a Prisoner Of War by a cold rifle to the back of his head. From there he was marched for three days with other captured prisoners, any of whom could not complete the march being exterminated, and then transported by Box Car to Stalag 11B. Mervin remained in Stalag 11B for 30 days, where he lost 30 more pounds, and became deathly ill with dysentery, hepatitis, and body lice. Mervin says he was fortunate that Stalag 11B was run by the older guard of Nazi soldiers who treated their captured well, but had limited food, supplies, and medicine themselves. On May 7, 1945, Mervin's 19th birthday, Germany surrendered and Mervin was repatriated by Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, "General Monty" and sent immediately to England for treatment and recuperation.

Fortunately, because of Mervin's grave health, he was not redeployed into the 'Pacific Theatre, which ended September 2, 1945 with the surrender of Japan. After the war Mervin lived with PTSD and survivors guilt until local teacher and author, Jean Miso approached him to participate in a book of Remembrance entitled "We'll Never Forgot", as well as participating in local No Stone Left Alone Remembrance Day Student ceremonies. Since then Mervin has participated in several interviews with the media and students, including the Crestwood Oral History Project, helping to educate the younger generation "Lest we Forget."

Post War Experience:
After brief work at the Abattoirs in the stockyards (very traumatic post war), followed by a longer stint on the the railroads near the CN- tower, with the guidance of his now father- in- law, a war-time inventor and precision machinist, Mervin was able to gain entry level with Ontario Hydro where he studied in night school advancing as an electrician and remaining with Ontario Hydro until his retirement at age 55, serving over 30 years with Ontario Hydro.

Mervin married his first wife, Bessie Viola Fisher, Nee Edwards, at Glebe Road United Church, July 12, 1947. As a very talented visual artist, Bessie worked as a Radium girl during the war. Bessie and Mervin had 2 children : Lorraine Joyce Chambers May 14, 1949 and Glenn Robert Fisher (July 7,1951- January 14, 2017). Glenn has two surviving children: Shaun Fisher, December 8, 1980 and Krystal DesRoches, March 11,1986 who has 1 daughter, Rylee - April 23, 2010. Lorraine has 3 children. Lynn Valdegamo, July 15, 1971 who has 2 children: Gaian Valdegamo -June 6, 2002, and Arwen Valdegamo, December 15, 2004.

From her second marriage: Christy (Chris) Fisher July 10, 1984 -August 7,2025 who has 1 daughter Sofia Herrera April 29, 2012 and Mary Chambers January 22, 1986 who has 1 daughter, Myra Chambers , November 6, 2008.

Mervin and Bessie remained married for 61 years, until she passed on May 2, 2008. Mervin found it very difficult being alone after the loss of his wife and remarried his second wife, Doreen Flockhart, June 28, 2009 whom he met at the Legion. Mervin and Doreen recently celebrated their 16th octogenarian wedding anniversary, shortly after Mervin's 99th birthday. Mervin Recently moved into Sunnybrook Veterans Centre January 2025,

where he continues to participate in acts of remembrance services, most recently celebrating the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands May 5, 2025.

JAMES GRADY and HAROLD RICHARDSON, Submitted by Jack Grady

In 1999 I was invited by my friend Dr Patrick Quinn to read a paper at a conference on WWI being held in England at Leicester University in England, where I was teaching at the time. I replied that I knew very little about WWI except that the great 20th century thinker, Bertrand Russell, was sent to prison for being a conscientious objector to the war. He said write about that in my paper and submit it to the selection committee; if it was accepted I was in. They did accept it, and Isla and I went to the conference, where I did read the paper. It was well received, but more to the point, I was exposed to a world about which I realised I knew very little. As a result of that experience, I embarked upon what has been a twenty-six-year journey delving into WWI. My PhD thesis is on WWI literature, but more to the point, I have learned so much about my own family history. The following is a brief outline of their experiences.

My paternal grandfather, James Grady, was born in Ireland in 1886, but grew up in Stockport, England with his grandparents. At the age of twelve, he enlisted in the Royal Lancashire Rifles as a drummer boy and went off to the Boer War in South Africa. His commanding officer was Lord Baden Powell, of Boy Scout fame. He returned to England aged sixteen, and soon left for a life in Canada, joining his older sister, my Aunt Maggie. By 1914, he had become a master mason with his own bricklaying company. When war was declared on August 4, 1914, he closed the shop and, because he was a war vet, and a British citizen, he was able to enlist in the newly formed Princess Patricia regiment. His regimental number was 10. In 1915, he was sent to France as a part of the CEF (Canadian Expeditionary Forces). He fought in several battles, eventually rising to the rank of Sergeant, which he lost for fighting with another soldier. He was wounded three times but always returned to active duty and the trench warfare.

In September, July 1, 1916, the British forces launched one of their largest offensives of the war—the Battle of the Somme. It was an unmitigated disaster; on day one, suffering nearly 60,000 casualties. My grandfather was not one of them, but on 22 September 1914, he was hit and wounded

by shrapnel from an exploding shell during one of the early tank assaults by the allies against the Germany infantry. He was very badly wounded, being moved to a field hospital, then to a convoy out of France and landing in England, where he convalesced until March 1917. At this point he was deemed unable to continue as an active combatant and he was convalesced home. I never met him, as he died from his wounds in 1943. My dad told me that his father was affected by this for the rest of his life because a piece of shrapnel was lodged near his heart, and it was inoperable. He was unable to return to heavy labour, and he could not raise his arms upon his shoulders. Interestingly, my aunt Thelma told me that one of my grandfather's friends was a man named Bruno, a retired German soldier, and they would share a drink and reminisce about the war.

My maternal grandfather, Harold Richardson. was born in Kingston Upon Hull, England in 1900. He came to Canada with my great grandmother in 1912, and they settled and found work on a farm near Beeton, Ontario. When the war broke out, he was only fourteen, so he was ineligible to enlist. It did look glamorous, though, the men marching by in their smart uniforms, teary-eyed sweethearts waving their hankies as their beaus left by train for guts and glory. Thus, it was that he felt the siren call and enlisted in 1916, well under age, only to have his mother down to the recruiting office and drag him back home. He enlisted again some months later, and again she brought him back. Finally, in 1917, he enlisted a third time and she said if he wanted to go so badly, then go!

So, he did, and like all members of the CEF, he was sent for training at Valcartier, Quebec. From there, he was shipped to England, to the mud of Salisbury plains (home of the famous Stonehenge) where he was bivouacked with his unit. By Christmas 1917, his commanding officer discovered that he was only seventeen years old, and therefore could not serve in front line duty; however, when he turned eighteen (his birthday was 17 July) he was eligible to go. On July 18, 1918, he was shipped to the front lines at Amiens, France. Three weeks later, he was machine gunned across his legs and put out of combat. In those days, there was little in the way of anti-biotics, and as a result of his wounds he lost his right leg up to his hip due to gangrene. This necessitated being sent to hospital and demobbed back to Canada. Let the reader pause here, for a moment and consider the accounts above. As a result of these two brave men surviving their injuries, I am here today; so are my children; so are my grandchildren.

How many children and their descendants were never to be born as a result of that war and wars that followed? Are you here today because of some quirk of fate that an ancestor survived?

I would like to close with a few observations. First, soldiers of that war always referred to it as “The Great War”—and not great as in “wonderful or exciting.” Secondly, one in eleven men who went out in the CEF never returned home. Those who did were irrevocably changed by it. Today we call it PTSD. This is true for ALL war and ALL participants. Thirdly, that war has never really ended; the consequences of it have shaped our world as we know it today. Fourthly, all sides have reason to mourn the loss of their flower of the youth. Go visit the graves in France and Belgium and look at the row upon row upon row of the dead. Especially, visit the Kindermorgue in France where 1,200 teenaged German soldiers died in one day, thinking they were on a lark until the reality of the machine guns taught otherwise; and think about the British soldiers who had to kill them, knowing that if they did not, then they could die.

My research is in literature, but one cannot help but delve into the minds of the authors who wrote about the war, usually condemning it, pleading for it to stop, and baring their souls so that the people back home could have some idea of their suffering. It is imperative that we hear their stories. I would be happy to speak to anyone who wishes to dig deeper into the literature and history of the Great War.

WILFRED GRUNDY, Submitted by Jackie Blackwell

My dad, Wilfred Roy Grundy, came from a small town, Erin, Ontario – his father Roy Grundy was the town Baker along with his uncle Russ. Dad left Erin to work for the H.J. Heinz company in Toronto – I am told he was an amazing salesman! The Second World War changed his life forever. Dad was later joining Canada’s Armed Forces as my mom was ill at the time – he was also older than most of the earlier volunteers. Then conscription came and my dad prepared to go.

He left Toronto initially for Camp Borden at the end of August 1943 – soon after left for Camp Debert in Nova Scotia – Debert served as crucial staging and training for troops during WW2 and was the final stop for Canadian troops before embarking for overseas duty.

Dad arrived in England in December 1943 where Canadian troops were training with the British for the D Day Landings as part of the Queen's Own Rifles.

The Queen's Own first action was in the leading wave of the D-Day invasion. The Regiment landed at Bernieres-sur-Mer at 08.12 hrs on the 6 th of June 1944.

My dad was on the tanks coming in the water – they were told no matter what happens keep going – do not stop to help anyone – I will talk about this more later – but the only thing my dad told me was that their equipment was very heavy in the water and he did pull one mate with him to shore.

When they came ashore at Juno Beach they continued fighting their way through Normandy – my dad made it to the Battle of Caen where he was wounded – from there he was transported to England and eventually back to Canada in September 1944. He then rejoined the H.J. Heinz Company – the company had held his job for him hoping for a safe return. Soon after my dad was transferred to London, Ontario and the Dept. of Veteran's Affairs had a series of houses built for Veterans and their families.

My Dad's medals included The Defense Medal, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal, and the France and German Star – none of which meant anything to my Dad!!!!

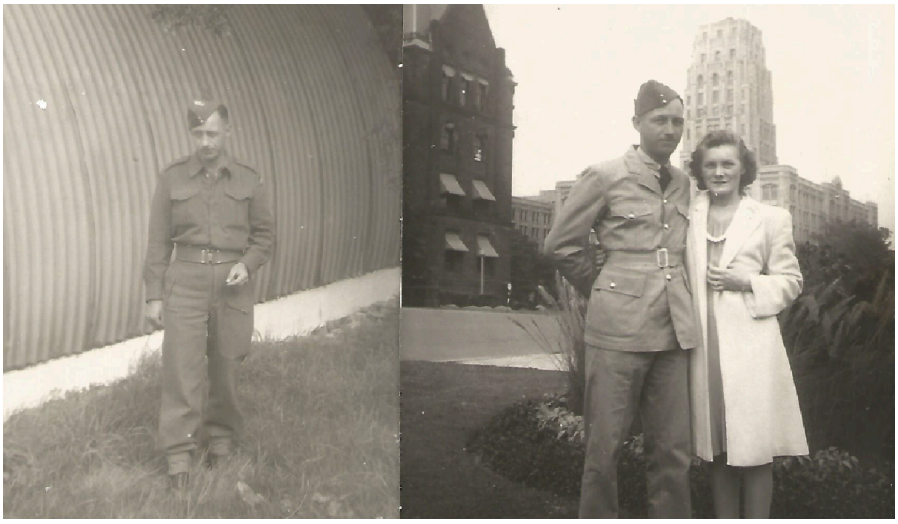
I have given them to the town of Erin as they were putting together a memorial for the men and women of Erin who served.

I still have the little testament my Grandfather gave him when leaving for Borden – with a little piece of cedar and a prayer that God would be with him.

I might add also that my mom worked for John Inglis at the time of the war – which under a cloud of darkness and secrecy were actually manufacturing the Bren guns and other equipment crucial for the war effort. I remember her telling me most people thought they were making household appliances unaware of this production.

A few years ago Kim and I visited Normandy and Juno Beach and Canada House – the tide was out and I stood on cement stretched into the Ocean

trying to picture what it must have been like – I couldn't imagine – the weather wasn't what they had hoped for – I looked toward Canada House where all the Nazi Bunkers lined the shoreline ready to attack the troops arriving by sea – how they ever pulled off this victory is a miracle – I felt so close to my dad and what it must have been like – I couldn't even cry.



Some of my story may not be totally accurate – you see my dad would never talk about it – except helping to pull one mate in the ocean – and there was shrapnel in his leg still. I learned much of this from tracing some history of the Queens Own Rifles and the town of Erin who did some research - If only I could talk to him now – he was an amazing father – he would have done anything for me. If I have any artistic talent it comes from my dad – he loved to paint and his gardens were gorgeous. I will never forget waking up on Easter morning to the cutest cut out and painted bunnies in the hallway.

The war left a huge scar and my dad struggled with the effects for the rest of his life – communication was very different then and most people – including my mom – had no idea what our troops went through – there was no mental awareness then and very little help. One of the many things he taught me was to always stay aware of politics and our government to speak loudly when our Democracy is threatened – what would he be thinking now!!!! God Bless Canada!!!

KENNETH HARRISON, Submitted by Dave Laughton

Kenneth tried to volunteer three times for the army in Toronto but was refused three times due to health issues. Becoming frustrated with the pace of his discharge process he asked the sergeant what the hold up was. The Sergeant replied that they were looking for someone who could type the

proper forms. Ken volunteered that he could type and just needed a typewriter. As a result, he was “hired.”

Being stationed in Toronto and living close to the exhibition grounds, he made arrangements to sleep at home most nights. However, when he turned up extremely late one morning due to a heavy snow fall the presiding officer had to call the TTC to make sure there really was enough snow to cause a hold up.

Ken found among his colleagues, a person, a singer, who shared his musical interests. Ken was the organist at a local church and invited this fellow to participate in Sunday services. “He was really quite good”. One day his comrade did not appear. He had been arrested as a spy!

Included in the 'clerical duties' was the responsibility to shepherd men who had tried to avoid signing up. These men were then handcuffed to Ken. This was a difficult duty since these men did not get their notice being stranded in the bush as lumber jacks or in the mines and were therefore considerably larger and stronger than himself. It was a case of who is leading who, two at a time.

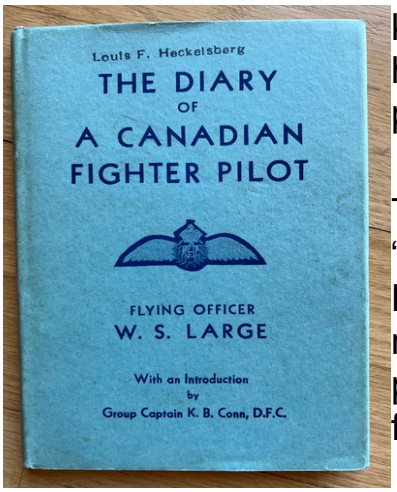
On one occasion the company was taken on a route march through the Toronto streets surrounding the Canadian National Exhibition grounds with full packs and gas masks. At a given signal all troops were to 'run for cover.' Ken went up on the front porch of a house where an elderly woman resident came out to see what the commotion was. Seeing a soldier in full battle armour including a gas mask in her rocking chair, she promptly fainted.

JIM AND BILLY HUNTER, Submitted by Don Hunter

During WWII both my mother’s brothers joined the military and went overseas. Neither one came home!

One (Jim) stayed in France and became a reclusive artist, doing in-residence sculpture commissions in castles for families who took lengthy vacations elsewhere.

The other was a fighter pilot (Billy) with many successful missions except the last one when he did not return and was presumed shot down and



killed. He had been writing a diary during his time at his airfield in Britain that was recovered and published as “The Diary of a Canadian fighter pilot”.

This book we still have that finishes with the phrase “just called to ……” was displayed in many school Remembrance Day displays as a personal remembrance of Billy and a way for us to personalize to our children the impact of the war on families.

BERT LAUGHTON, Submitted by Dave Laughton

Bert (brother to Kenneth Laughton) volunteered for the RCAF. Upon presenting himself for enlistment he was of course asked his name. “Bert.” Was that Gilbert, Egbert, Herbert, Albert etc.? “No sir just, Bert” Since the name “Bert” was not on the official list of names recognized by the RCAF, the presiding officer had to go away and consider what to do with this anomaly. Bert was finally accepted.

Like most veterans he never spoke much about his war time activities until the later years of his life. Knowing my interest in WWII, he and his wife invited myself and my wife to his home in St. Catharines ON shortly before his death where he showed us a very large collection of pictures and documents.

Initially Bert volunteered for the RCAF and trained as a navigator. He was later transferred to the RAF presumably in bomber command and wound up as a navigator in a Halifax bomber flying out of Kinross, Scotland. I do not know how many missions he was part of over Germany but he related one of note.

Bert said that they usually travelled sitting on their parachute and were in the habit of training & travelling with it unbuckled. They were over Germany, either before or after dropping their bomb load, when their aircraft was hit by enemy fire. The captain came on the intercom and told everyone that there was a fire and to prepare to bail out. Bert’s bail out position was a hatch on the floor between his feet. He loosened that hatch and threw it

out leaving a gaping hole and awaited the command to bail out. He said “I distinctly recall , as I threw the hatch out, “I hope this doesn't hit someone.” Subsequently, the captain came back on the intercom and said that the fire had been extinguished. At that moment Bert said I looked down and saw my parachute still unbuckled.

In the confusion resulting from being hit and separated from the rest of the flight, Bert, the navigator, lost his bearings. He said what I did was lay out the map and drew a straight line from where I thought we were back to Kinross Scotland. They arrived safely but incurred the wrath of the base commander. They had arrived 15 minutes before the rest of the flight.

Many years after the war, Bert’s son Bruce took him to the museum at the CFB Trenton ON. It was there that they learned that the museum was rebuilding/refurbishing a Halifax bomber behind the scenes out of public view. When they learned that a real Halifax navigator was on site, Bert was given a royal tour and I suspect asked many questions.

KENNETH LAUGHTON, Submitted by Dave Laughton

Dad volunteered for the RCAF but was restricted from overseas duty to medical issues. Instead he became a radio technician and served in Hamilton ON, Trenton ON and Mont-Joli PQ. You can still go to the airfield in Monte-Joli, now a small commercial airport, and see a few wartime buildings, memorials to the troops which served there, and a model of the airfield as it was during the war. If you are lucky, as we were, you can get the airport manager to show you around, between his duties directing aircraft and serving at the concession stand. The highway through town actually crosses the only runway but there are traffic gates and lights to stop traffic if the runway is being used.

Of course Dad spoke no French and didn’t pick up much in Quebec. Two particular phrases have embedded themselves in family lore. “Defence-de cracker and defence-de fumer”. No one seems to be able to translate them reliably.

Dad did not relate many of his experiences. I remember only two. He said many of the aircraft they serviced had been flown back from Europe for service by pilots who were somewhat 'affected' by their overseas experiences. It seems they delighted in flying very low over the base and

under the guy wires used to hold up the communications towers. I guess this was a very low risk event given what they had been through overseas!

Dad was a radio repair technician. He had no education or experience in that field before the war. He was trained, I believe CFB Trenton ON. On one occasion a pilot complained that his aircraft radio did not work and asked Dad to investigate. But, the only time it didn't work was when he was in the air. So he 'invited' Dad to go along and check it out. I'm not sure of the aircraft type but dad has shown me several replicas around Ontario. It was a two seater with the pilot in front and Dad behind. The floor had been removed from between his feet. After taking off the radio seemed to work fine but then the pilot said “oh, I forgot to tell you, it only malfunctions when I'm upside down” whereupon he flipped the plane over. Dad said I looked at my feet and all I saw was blue.

When Dad was in Monte-Joli he would get leave presumably several days in a row. Mom would take me down to Toronto's Union Station to meet him. I always got to make the decision as to how we travelled. We could take the bus to Union Station and the train home or visa versa. We travelled on a steam powered train from the Islington train station located near present day Bloor and Islington Ave. The station has long since been removed and is now only a work storage facility. I can still go to the spot in Union station where we stood and watched as the troops marched down from the track level and up the ramp on Front St. in front of the station.

JIM MCWHIRTER, Submitted by Dave Laughton

Jim (TJ in the family) was my mothers brother-in-law. I don't know much about Jim's war time experiences. He was a tail gunner in an aircraft equipped for that. I do remember him telling that as a tail gunner, that landing was rather a harrowing experience since his seat was only inches from the ground and it always appeared they were about to crash. Also as a tail gunner, he could only enter and exit his position while the plane was on the ground. The result was that if the plane had been hit, he had to ride it into the ground. He made it home safely. Given that, he must have served overseas and been involved in action over Europe.

ALLAN METHVEN, Submitted by himself

I Joined the Air Cadets at 14, gaining both a pilot's license and selection as one of a hundred cadets across the country to attend an 8 week Senior Leaders' Course at then RCAF Stn Borden while serving with them.. While still an Air Cadet I joined the Air Force Reserves and was qualified as a Fighter Control Operator, spending my summer after Grade 13 as such at RCAF Stn Edgar, one of the NORAD Pinetree Line Radar Stations, which controlled fighter aircraft flying out of North Bay and Buffalo. I had completed the 10 Day Air Force Officer Selection process during my Spring Break that year and was chosen for attendance at the Royal Military College as a Flight Cadet. Unfortunately, an eye defect prevented me from flying and a year later at my request I was transferred to the Army. I chose the Armoured Corps (tanks and reconnaissance) and on graduation was Commissioned as an Officer in the Royal Canadian Dragoons. I served with them for the following 17 years in Gagetown, NATO Germany, Cyprus and for two years, as an integrated exchange Officer with the US Army in Atlanta, Georgia. Postings included a range of command, instructional and HQ Staff Officer positions. I then took early retirement from the Regular Army, finding employment in Toronto working for the following 25 years largely with National and International HR Consulting firms. I was asked to become active militarily, coming into the Reserve Army initially as an instructor in Officer Training and then assuming command of the Governor General's Horse Guards, leaving again to complete an MBA sponsored by my civilian employer and returning on graduation to command 31 Brigade in the Reserve Army. There being no available positions in the Toronto area for an Officer of my rank (Colonel) , I retired again. from military service. As an aside I also added a Master's Degree in Individual Behaviour again on a part time basis to better equip me for my civilian career.

PTE WILLIAM METHVEN, Submitted by Allan Methven

In the autumn of 2023, my wife Lorraine and I extended a European river cruise vacation to include a visit to and the placing of poppies on the grave of a Canadian soldier. He was buried as it turned out among several rows of his Battalion comrades of the 116th Infantry, in a small Commonwealth War Graves cemetery named St Olle, just outside of Cambrai in northern France. I believe we were the first to visit Private William Methven's grave

since his internment in late September 1918, short weeks before the Armistice on 11 November that year. The Canadian Corps at the time was spearheading the final advance of the Allied Forces against the retreating Germans in what has come to be known as “The Last Hundred Days”. Judging by the numbers of his unit buried around William , 29 Sep the day he died, was a costly one for the 116th. What follows provides the story/background surrounding our visit.

I was close to my grandmother, my father’s mother throughout my youth and I will always wonder why William, her brother-in-law and my granduncle was never mentioned by her nor any other member of the family. I can only assume it was too painful a memory. She passed away some 35 years ago at 97. One of my grandsons discovered William’s existence while researching the family history on-line. I knew that my grandmother had emigrated to Canada from Scotland with her new husband Joseph Paton Methven pre WWI. What we learned was that William, the latter’s younger brother, emigrated with them and shared their house in Toronto. He was a mechanic and Joseph, a cabinet maker. War broke out and both men enlisted in 1915 going shortly afterward. Tragically, Joseph died in 1916, the victim of pneumonia caught in the trenches. His death left my grandmother a young war widow to raise two sons, my father, a toddler at the time and my Uncle Noel, a baby. My father was William Thomson Methven, no doubt named after his uncle William. Thomson was my grandmother’s maiden name. Once we learned of William’s existence and sacrifice, DVA was able to provide the location of his burial. Lorraine and I decided his grave merited a visit.

My grandmother had a number of siblings, two of which followed her to Canada following WWI and lived with her in Toronto for the rest of their lives. An older and deaf sister known to me as Aunt Kate, had already raised two children of a brother lost at sea late in the 19th century. A younger sister, known to me as Aunt Min had, I was told, lost her fiancée during WWI. She found employment with and worked at Simpson’s in downtown Toronto in the furniture department until her retirement many years later. Neither sister married and doubtless their incomes helped support the young family. In earlier times the owners of Simpson’s, the Burton family knew by name all their employees. The late Allan Burton, one of the sons was a pre war Officer in the Governor General’s Horse guards, was mobilized and fought with them through both the Italian Campaign and later in NWE. I came to know him during the time I commanded the

Regiment in the mid 1990's and one night over a drink mentioned my Grand Aunt Min had worked for Simpson's. He replied immediately "I knew Minnie well, she worked for me when I had the furniture department before the Regiment was mobilized.

Lorraine and I travelled by train to Cambrai. We had arranged a room in an AirBnB and when the owner learned of our "mission" he insisted he drive us to the cemetery saying it was the very least he could do as his country owed so much to Canada and Canadians. His childhood memories included the German occupation. He stayed with us throughout our visit and when he had delivered us back to our accommodation, he promised that now that he felt he knew Pte William Methven he would visit his grave from time to time.

PRIVATE ROY SAUNDERS, Submitted by Lynda Graham

In November 1942 an eighteen-year-old man headed down to Albert Street in Toronto to sign up for service in WW11. He wanted to be a pilot like his older brother who was already serving in the Air Force. He failed the eye test. Disheartened, he then walked down Bay Street to Toronto's City Hall and found an army recruiting tent that was just starting to be taken down. The recruiting officer was happy to see him and signed him up. Apparently, having good eyesight wasn't as important for participating in the army. This young man was my father, Roy Saunders.

In March 1943, Roy was given his orders to report back for duty at No. 2 District Depot in Toronto. June 1943 was basic training in Brantford. July was advanced training at Camp Borden. Come August, Roy was on the Queen Mary ship heading for England. When they arrived, the new recruits lined up to find out where they would be assigned. When it was Roy's turn the Sargent in charge asked him "What happens to rabbits in the wintertime?" Roy answered - "they turn white." Then he was asked "What's that for?" "Nature's camouflage", Roy responded. "Okay, you report over there." He had been selected to attend "battle" school - run by commandos. During training he started to have an issue with his foot. It had turned red and was painful. In the hospital an English doctor finally concluded that it was caused by ill-fitting boots that he'd been given. During recovery Pte Saunders was assigned to the Fifth Field dressing station to the medical corps. He was treated well and enjoyed his time there and thought that he

had "lucked out" with this assignment only to find out that it was only temporary.

December 1943, Private Saunders received an order to report to Aldershot for further infantry training. Early 1944 he sailed from Liverpool on the SS John Ericsson over to Italy as a Reserve. "We got off the boat, on a train and up to a certain spot, there we jumped on a bunch of trucks and before we even had our land legs after the voyage, we were at the front." March 1944, Pte Saunders joined the Perth Regiment at the Orsogna Front after they had experienced a devastating attack and lost 19 men with 18 wounded. They desperately needed the Reserves.

April 1944, the Perth Regiment moved into lines at Cassino. They suffered heavy shelling and 5 were killed and 7 wounded.

May 1944, they crossed the Melfa and Liri Rivers and captured Ceprano with more casualties - 4 killed and 27 wounded. The Perths continued on to capture Pofi and Arnara, Arielli and Points 111 & 147.

"At Point 204 on the enemy's heavily-defended Gothic Line, the Perth Regiment, "B" Company was given orders to lead an attack against the strongly defended Point 204. In the heavy fire which was brought down on the leading platoon, the Section Commander was killed and the second-in-command wounded. In spite of the heavy shelling, Pte Saunders went forward in an attempt to render first aid to his Section Commander. He then assumed command of the section and led it throughout the attack. Late that night "B" Company reached its objective. During the attack, Pte Saunders displayed exceptional courage and leadership in controlling his section. On arrival at the objective, Pte. Saunders organized the defence of his sector and ensured that his section was ready for any counter attack. At 0030 hours, September 1, 1944 a determined counter attack was made on the position. In the confused and bitter hand-to-hand fighting that followed, Pte Saunders and his section put up such fierce resistance that the enemy was forced to withdraw. The gallant actions of this soldier were an inspiration to all and under his leadership the section contributed to the success of the attack." The Perths had suffered more than ninety casualties in the past 36 hours, exhausted they had to pull back to recuperate. For Pte. Saunders' gallantry he was awarded the Military Medal presented to him in June 1945 by King George VI at Buckingham Palace.

In appreciation of their liberation, the villagers of the town Tavullia raised $100,000 for a large memorial and in September 1997 a dedication ceremony was held. About 80 Canadian veterans attended the ceremony. Although Roy Saunders was invited to attend, sadly he decided not to go. One of the attendees softly said "It brings back a lot of memories, this area. It was a long hard fight." The Perth Regiment was credited with the first to break through the Gothic Line.

In September 1944 the Perths again found themselves once again engaged with the enemy. This time for control of the Coriano Ridge. They met their objective in 90 minutes of difficult fighting. Ten Perths were killed. Pte Saunders was wounded in the leg and taken to a Field Hospital. He rejoined the Perths again in October.

For October, November and December the conditions were difficult. Heavy rains meant the fields were muddy and the many rivers that were required to be crossed were raging torrents. The Perths continued to suffer losses of men. December 12th while preparing a river to cross, Pte Saunders and a fellow comrade who had become a close buddy were fired upon and his friend was killed. "I remember the sergeant giving me a cup of tea and tears rolling down my face. It was the only time I ever cried in the army."

December 20th nighttime found "B" Company traversing the Fosso Munio. In the confines of the thirty-foot wide ditch flanked by eight-foot-high dikes they had travelled about 800 yards and were suddenly stopped by machine-guns which the Nazi Germans were firing on fixed lines directly at them. They had nowhere to take cover. Pte Saunders had been at the rear of the march and although wounded he managed to escape death. The entire platoon was wiped out except for 3 soldiers of which 2 were wounded. The total Perth casualties were 32 killed and 49 wounded. Pte Saunders was operated on at a Field Hospital in Italy. An infection set in and in March 1945 he was shipped to a hospital in England. May 7, 1945, while in the hospital, Pte Saunders was told by a member of the Salvation Army that the war was over.

While continuing his recovery Pte Saunders was attached to the Repatriation Camp Sports Office. March 1946, Pte Saunders arrived back in Toronto. He was discharged March 26, 1946.

Notes from Lynda Graham, daughter of Roy Saunders

In 2019 I had the privilege of visiting the memorial in Italy to honour my dad and those that fought to free the citizens of that area. It was very emotional to see this large and wonderful memorial and seeing my dad's name engraved on the plaque. The tour I took was called Canadian WW11 History - the Italian Campaign. The sole focus of this tour was to visit many of the places where the Canadians fought in Italy. It was the 75th anniversary of the campaign. I decided to research as much as I could to gain a better understanding of the history, the operations, conditions and so on. I created 2 binders filled with notes, stories, documents, photos, etc. Although I regret not having had the courage to ask my dad about his time during the war years, I learned so much of what went on through my research.

I learned that for every soldier at the front lines there were about twelve people behind supporting them. Supports such as engineers, doctors, dentists, medics, men who searched for drinking water, cooks, laundry workers, recreationists, chaplains, soldiers responsible for burying the dead and recording in detail the exact location so they could be reburied in proper cemeteries after the war, drivers carrying the soldiers large kit bags for use when not fighting at the front lines, drivers carrying the necessary supplies, mail and parcel delivery and so on. And of course, there were all the people organizing and coordinating the war machine both at home and abroad.

I learned that sleep was not necessarily done during the nighttime and that movement and marches were often done during non-daylight hours. Beds sometimes consisted of digging a trench or finding rocks and settling in as best as possible. Often the infantry went weeks without being able to wash properly. In addition to facing the onslaught of shells, mortars and machine gunning the men had to endure cold, rainy days and nights and then in the summer they faced blazing sun with unbearable temperatures. Equipment and apparel were often unsuited to the conditions. Food and water weren't always available when needed. Exhaustion had to be put aside when orders came. And then the reason they were all there - fighting the enemy. Infantry men were paid around $1.10 a day.

I also learned that "Infantry men had very tight bonds with each other. Much of the time the men were fighting for each other as much as they were fighting for their country. Their buddies were so incredibly important to

them and they had to keep up the fight and be as good as the men they were fighting beside."

While in Italy we visited many of the War Cemeteries. They were beautifully kept and very peaceful places. It was overwhelming to see row after row of cemetery markers. They were all uniform and stood firmly upright. It was very sad to read the young ages of the men and very somber to see markers with the words "Known only to God". More than 26,000 Canadians became casualties during the Italian Campaign, including almost 6,000 who lost their lives.

My dad was once asked "Was there a lot of fear for you?" His reply - "Oh yes, I was frightened all the time. Anyone who says they weren't frightened is lying. There was tyranny - we just knew there was a job that had to be done. Hitler had to be defeated."

On November 11, 1998 our son, Philip Graham, age 13 participated at a Remembrance Day school assembly. His speech was entitled "What is a Veteran". His grandfather, Roy Saunders was with him on stage. I was proud of our son and so very thankful for the sacrifice my father endured to make this a better world.

JACK SCHOFIELD, Submitted by Ann Woomert

Many Islington United Church members will remember Jack Schofield, an active member of our congregation for many years. Among such contributions as creating the Nativity Scene which is placed annually outside the church, Jack also was an important participant in many Remembrance Day services at the church. My recollections come from the many visits he made to local schools during Remembrance Day observances. Jane Allen and I would alternate years, "claiming" him to visit our schools, West Glen Junior School and Bloordale Middle School. In large assemblies and in small classroom groups, he was an inspiring veteran who enjoyed relating to our young students. We especially appreciated his personal stories about serving in Europe. As a cipher operator, he received Morse code messages and transmitted them to troops. At times his work involved receiving top-secret messages. His best memory was the day he received the message that "unconditional surrender was signed by Germany (May 7, 1945), and he showed us the original paper he used to record the message. Jack explained Morse code

to students, and we appreciated a 1943 coin he showed us with a Morse code message printed around the perimeter. He explained that it said, "We win when we work willingly." Jack shared how it was difficult to be away from his wife for so many years, and he described a friendship he developed with a family in Holland. Learning they had exhausted all their food supplies and were existing on tulip bulbs, Jack was able to secure some food for them. The generous sharing of his experiences was invaluable to deepening the students' understanding of the contributions of our veterans and very much brought their history studies to life. I will always remain grateful to him.

JOHN AND CEDRIC SURAT-ALI, Submitted by Lydia Rameshwar

Brothers John and Cedric Surat-Ali were cousins to Lydia Rameshwar. They lived in Trinidad and went to serve in the Royal Air Force in England. John died overseas. Cedric returned to Trinidad and became a lay reader at the Anglican Cathedral in Port of Spain.

PETER TOWER, Submitted by Linda Sutter and Steve Tower

Peter Tower enlisted in the Canadian Army in late 1943 when he was just 18 years old. His mother, Dorothy, knowing the risks her son was about to face, insisted he take a formal photograph before going overseas - a keepsake of the young man she was sending off to war.

Assigned to the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (R.C.A.S.C.), Peter began his military journey in early 1944, earning $1.50 per day, of which he sent $20 monthly to his mother. He was stationed first in Toronto, staying on CNE grounds in the Horse Palace, and marching out with fellow recruits to the firing range at Dixie and Lakeshore Road. After basic training in Orillia and advanced training in Brandon and Shilo, Manitoba, his mechanical abilities were recognised. He was encouraged to pursue driver training, mastering the control of heavy military vehicles, bouncing over rough, open fields. He qualified through two levels of driving certification.

By July 1944, Peter boarded a train to Halifax and then crossed the Atlantic on a troop carrier, the Empress of Scotland. His first taste of life at sea was memorable - an entire mess hall of soldiers dumped their salad after spotting an earthworm in the lettuce. That was the last time they saw fresh greens for over a year.

In the UK, Peter tested with an array of arms, earning a first-class rating with Bren guns. He also performed well in standard riflery, though not quite enough to qualify as a sniper. Due to issues with his feet and knees, he was formally assigned as a driver in the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps. He spent a short time in the UK, enjoying a soldier's nightlife before being sent to the Mediterranean. He sailed on the Queen of Bermuda and landed in Naples in October 1944.

From there, he joined a Canadian division moving north through Italy. They passed through cities like Avellino and Brindisi, then via ship again to Ancona, Rimini, and Cesana. Peter recalled moments that stayed with him for life: driving a jeep to the summit of San Marino until the engine gave out, then climbing the rest of the way on foot; sheltering in an abandoned house, cooking meals and distilling alcohol on makeshift jerrycan burners; diving for cover into a basement waist-deep in rabbit's feet; surviving a dud shell that passed directly through the walls of his sleeping area; scrambling beneath his truck as enemy aircraft strafed a cobblestone square.

Peter's military insignia and ribbons, including his R.C.A.S.C. title arc, cap badge, chevron & campaign-service ribbons

After reaching Ravenna in spring 1945, Peter was sent with other Canadian forces to southern France, where he joined a long convoy travelling north to connect with other units and ultimately consolidate the First Canadian Army. During this time, he drove supply trucks, ambulances for field hospitals, and jeeps for senior officers.

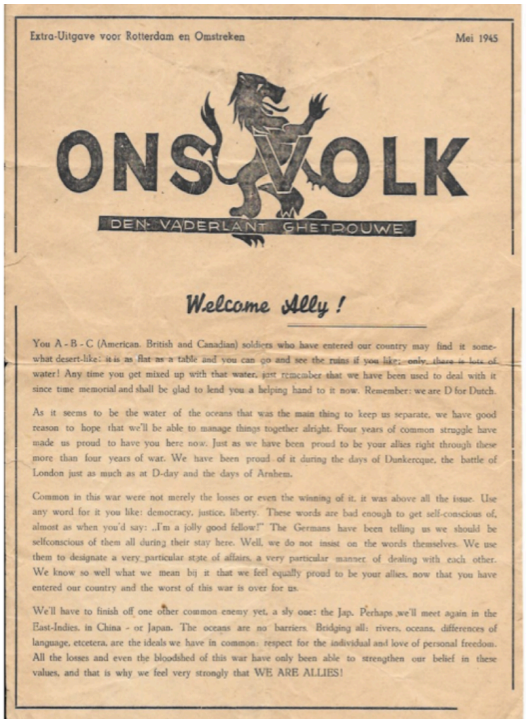
While driving ambulances, he pulled wounded soldiers directly from battlefield foxholes. His ambulance often carried up to nine wounded,

stacked three deep on either side, with additional men seated upright down the middle aisle.

While assigned to the 3rd Division near the Belgian-German-Dutch border, he unknowingly camped beneath a large and well-camouflaged Canadian artillery battery. When the guns opened fire, the blast launched him from his cot and left him temporarily deaf. He spent two weeks recovering in hospital, and although most of his hearing returned, damage remained for the rest of his life.

Peter later served proudly in Apeldoorn during the campaign to liberate Holland. He saw first-hand the destruction of cities like Rotterdam, the suffering of the Dutch people, and the desperation of German civilians.

Although soldiers could draw part of their pay in local currencies such as Italian lira, Dutch guilders, and German marks, these were mostly useless due to post-war shortages. Peter played cribbage for “a penny, a point” stakes. An accumulation of spare change was converted to barter with civilians, using cigarette and chocolate rations, for fresh food for the camp’s mess, or occasionally, to acquire keepsakes, including currency and other wartime memorabilia that would later become part of his grandchildren’s history projects.



Extra-Uitgave voor Rotterdam en Omstreken — Mei 1945

ONS VOLK

DEN VADERLANT GHETROUWE

Welcome Ally !

You A - B - C (American, British and Canadian) soldiers who have entered our country may find it somewhat desert-like: it is as flat as a table and you can go and see the ruins if you like; only, there is lots of water! Any time you get mixed up with that water, just remember that we have been used to deal with it since time memorial and shall be glad to lend you a helping hand to it now. Remember: we are D for Dutch.

As it seems to be the water of the oceans that was the main thing to keep us separate, we have good reason to hope that we'll be able to manage things together alright. Four years of common struggle have made us proud to have you here now. Just as we have been proud to be your allies right through these more than four years of war. We have been proud of it during the days of Dunkercque, the battle of London just as much as at D-day and the days of Arnhem.

Common in this war were not merely the losses or even the winning of it, it was above all the issue. Use any word for it you like: democracy, justice, liberty. These words are bad enough to get self-conscious of, almost as when you'd say: „I'm a jolly good fellow!" The Germans have been telling us we should be selfconscious of them all during their stay here. Well, we do not insist on the words themselves. We use them to designate a very particular state of affairs, a very particular manner of dealing with each other. We know so well what we mean by it that we feel equally proud to be your allies, now that you have entered our country and the worst of this war is over for us.

We'll have to finish off one other common enemy yet, a sly one: the Jap. Perhaps we'll meet again in the East-Indies, in China - or Japan. The oceans are no barriers. Bridging all: rivers, oceans, differences of language, etcetera, are the ideals we have in common: respect for the individual and love of personal freedom. All the losses and even the bloodshed of this war have only been able to strengthen our belief in these values, and that is why we feel very strongly that WE ARE ALLIES!

A Dutch flyer warmly welcoming Allied troops.

This edition, titled “Welcome Ally,” was preserved by Peter.

One of his final and most memorable wartime assignments came during the Canadian push into northwest Germany. Peter was chosen to drive a Canadian officer through enemy territory to deliver surrender terms to German commanders. Along the route, he motored-by more heavily armed enemy soldiers than he had ever seen before, leaving a vivid memory.

After the ceasefire, Peter was given the option to return home or stay behind to assist with post-war “clean-up”. Though he had long hoped to return to his birthplace in Virile, Ukraine, and reunite

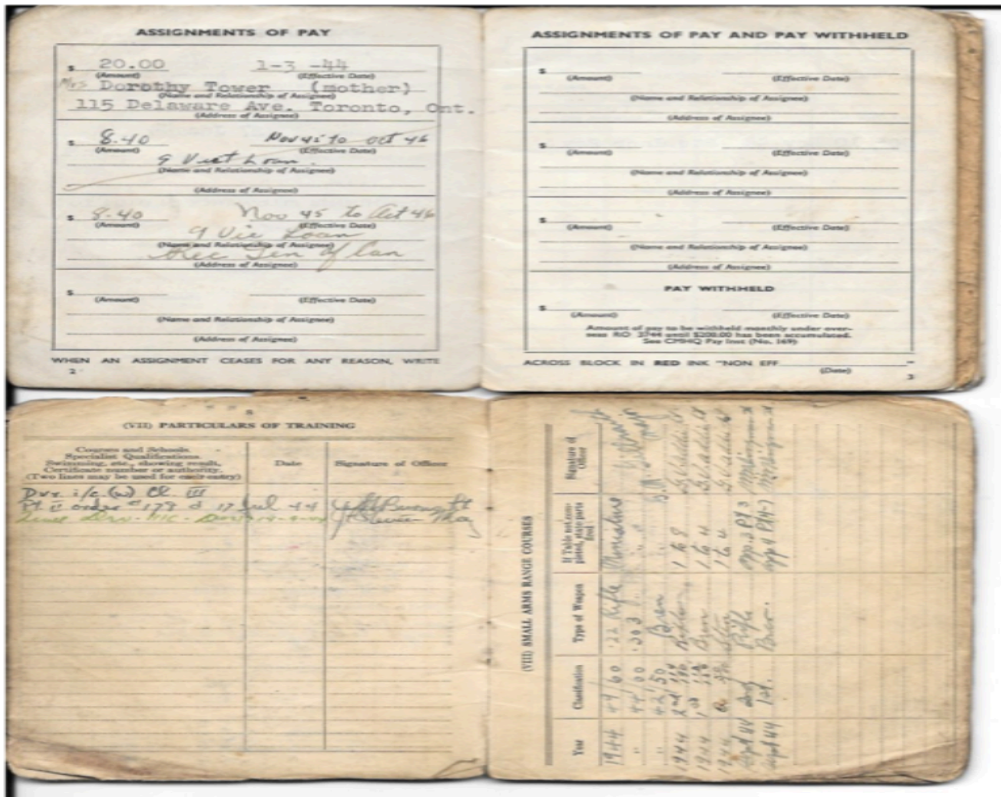
with his maternal grandfather, he reluctantly chose not to enter Russian-held territory. He knew there was a strong risk of being forcibly-absorbed as a Ukrainian national into the Soviet Army.

Instead, Peter spent the rest of 1945 and part of 1946 in Germany with Canadian forces working to dismantle prisoner of war camps and repatriate displaced persons. Many of these efforts were complex and emotional, as some returns were not joyful, but painful and life-threatening handovers.

German medal given to mother for loss of five sons, Dutch currency

Peter was ultimately discharged on August 13, 1946, in Toronto, where he recommenced work in the automotive parts industry.

His wartime service spanned countries, languages, and cultures —something that stayed with him the rest of his life, and explained some of his unassuming empathy, tolerance and humility. He was not only a soldier but also a witness to history and a quiet hero to the friends and family who knew him.



Pages from Peter's wartime paybook, including assignments of pay, driver training qualifications, & small arms results

JEAN ANNIE VANWART (Née Coulter), Submitted by Sandra Tully

This story about Jean Annie Vanwart was taken from Sherry Pringle's book "Extraordinary Women, Extraordinary Times" and is shared with permission.

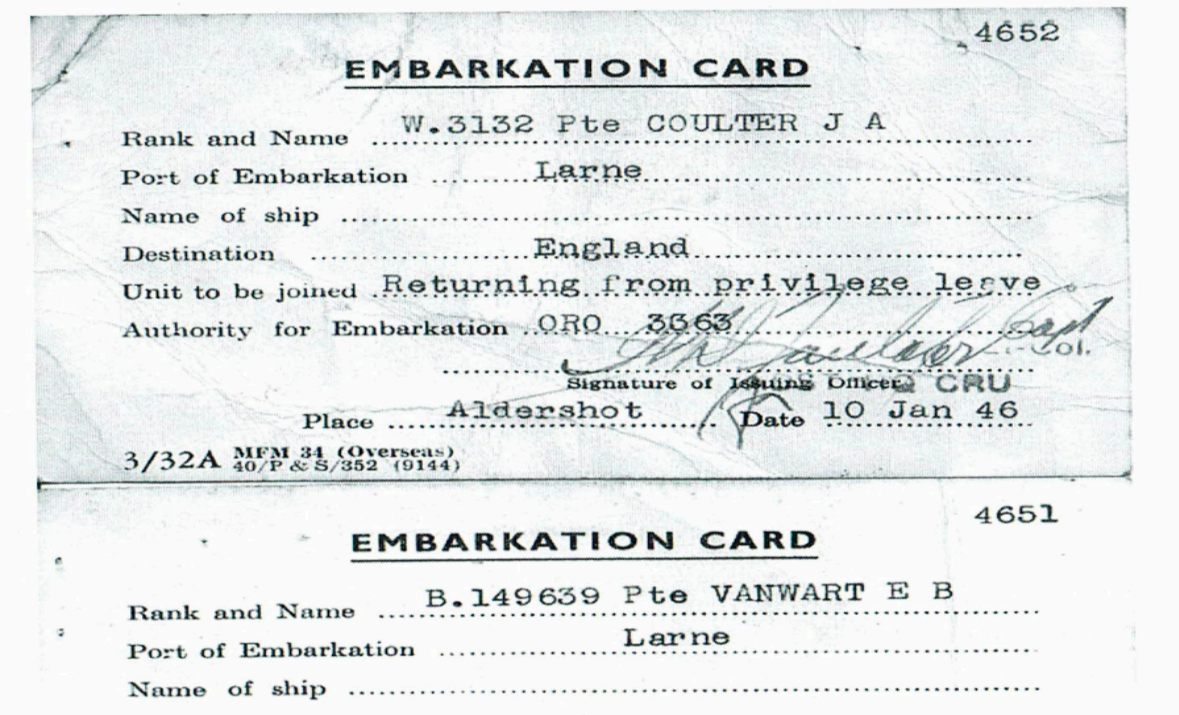
Growing up in the Eastern Townships of Quebec was idyllic for young Jean Coulter. Born into a farm family where everyone was expected to help with chores, Jean recalls rising early to help her dad milk cows in the barn. It was their family custom to sing as they worked. Jean sang soprano, her sister sang alto, and her dad sang bass. Singing in the barn not only helped the time pass quickly but also gave her practice for the church choir.

A hawthorn and a mulberry tree stood against the fence in the distance. Standing in the middle of a farmer's field, the school was surrounded by a dusty gravel road. At the far corner of the property was a well which pumped drinking water for the students. A communal dipper was used by all. One had to chop ice away from the pump in winter to get water to flow.

A potbellied stove sat in the centre of the school. It was the boys' responsibility to keep it "fired up." Washroom facilities consisted of two outhouses, one for boys and the other for girls. It was the age of corporal punishment. "If we were bad we got smacked with a ruler, if we were really bad we got the strap, usually after school. Then we had to take a note to our parents."

Winter brought fond memories for Jean. "Our transportation was by horse and sleigh or the two-wheeled buggy, depending on the weather. The sleigh bells were sweet music to our ears."

Jean joined the Canadian Women's Army Corps, or CWAC, in Ottawa in 1943. Afraid her parents would object, she did not tell them of her intentions, even though she was twenty-four years old and had already left home. She need not have worried, as her proud dad sent a photo of Jean to the local paper.



4652

EMBARKATION CARD

Rank and Name W.3132 Pte COULTER J A

Port of Embarkation Larne

Name of ship

Destination England

Unit to be joined Returning from privilege leave

Authority for Embarkation ORO 3563

Signature of Issuing Officer Lt-Col. CRU

Place Aldershot Date 10 Jan 46

3/32A MFM 34 (Overseas) 40/P & S/352 (9144)

4651

EMBARKATION CARD

Rank and Name B.149639 Pte VANWART E B

Port of Embarkation Larne

Name of ship

Basic training took place in Kingston, Ontario. From there Jean was sent to Kitchener, where she discovered she was "on draft" scheduled for overseas duty. It took two days to reach Halifax by train. Along with seventy CWAC recruits and approximately 1900 soldiers, she boarded the troop ship Aquitania, to cross the Atlantic. Walking up the gangway to board ship, the newly enlisted military personnel carried kit bags and haversacks (backpacks) loaded with personal possessions. There was no turning back now. It was a reality. "We were on our way to the greatest adventure of our lives!"

They were being shipped overseas. In what had once been a luxury liner, the girls slept in bunks in a large stateroom. Each bunk was equipped with army-issue blankets and a pillow. A communal shower spewed forth cold, salty water. Outside their stateroom- turned-dormitory, the door was guarded by soldiers. Escorted to and from the dining room and the Officers' Lounge, formerly a ballroom, the new recruits sat on life jackets on the floor and listened to the piano player and sang familiar songs. With the nostalgia of the songs came the reality of leaving home. Long before reaching their destination, many young tearful women were already homesick.

One night while travelling in convoy, the women were ordered to remain in full uniform and don their life jackets. The ship's engines were cut and the

women were told not to speak out loud. All lights were extinguished. An enemy submarine was close by. "The silence was deafening," recalled Jean. "We were in total darkness." Then the enemy was gone and once again the engines started to hum and they were on their way.

After five days with passengers living in close confines, the ship docked at Greenock, Scotland. Travelling by train again, the CWACs arrived at the spartan old army base of Aldershot, England. Daily routines were strict and involved rising early, rolling your bedroll for inspection, eating breakfast, and marching on the parade square at 7:00 a.m. with shoes shined to a high gloss and brass buttons glistening in the sunlight. In a couple of weeks the women were transferred to their permanent bases in London or other destinations in England. Barracks life also meant a constant lack of privacy.

Jean was sent to the village of Farnborough thirty miles south of London, England, at the Headquarters for Canadian Reinforcement Units, otherwise known as HQCRU. The base bustled with activity and the marching sound of army boots pounding the pavement. Day and night there was a steady beat on the sidewalk.

"Army duty-cars were always arriving or leaving on calls to London and outlying towns. Planes roared overhead-Spitfires, high in the sky, and Lancasters flying in formation below them, like our migrating geese. Broken formations when planes returned from their missions indicated how many had been lost in action. There were usually some. This of course meant that our boys were lost as well, some killed and some becoming prisoners of war."

Gradually, the CWACs became accustomed to the steady vibration of the planes overhead, day and night. "Our pictures and banners from home fell off the walls every day because of this." Night-time brought V-1 and V-2 bombs being dropped. One night, a V-1 landed in their camp, killing one soldier. Jean drove the vehicle that carried his grandmother in the funeral procession that followed.

"We could hear the sirens alerting us to the bombs from one town to another. One night we were at a lecture at camp and a bomb landed in a field behind us. We thought we were going to be casualties for sure!"

Jean had been sent overseas as a Clerk Typist. Initially she was placed in the army depot medical surveys unit, in HQCRU. Realizing she was missing a golden opportunity to see England, she transferred to the driving unit. After passing her military driver's licence, she faced driving a vehicle on the wrong side of the road for the first time in her life. Heavy fog was a great hazard while driving.

Jean recalled that the meals were not too bad. "We lined up to get them in queue, carrying our tin mug, knife, fork and spoon and mess-tin with us. We had to dip them in a tub of disinfectant after our meal, then in soapy water, then into rinse water and then wave them around until they dried. We sat on long benches to eat at wooden tables. Thanksgiving and Christmas were celebrated in the traditional way. We tried to include the village children. Our soldiers made floats and used army vehicles to pull them. The girls looked after decorations and small gifts."

At the unit, Jean noticed a new driver, one Elgin (Al) Vanwart, a Royal Canadian Engineer. When his unit landed in Normandy, the engineers were called on parade and assigned as infantry to regiments. Al became a member of the Calgary Highlanders.

As the Allied Forces made their way to Antwerp in the fall of 1944, through the newly liberated France and Belgium, the Canadian army was assigned the daunting task of clearing the Scheldt Estuary to bypass occupied Holland. In order to make Antwerp operable, it was necessary to maintain a hold on the estuary to bring in supplies. As Antwerp lies 60 miles inland from the sea, the Allies needed to manoeuvre past the Dutch Island of Walcheren, linked to the Dutch mainland via a bridge.

In the battle of the Causeway to Walcheren Island, 107 Highlanders perished and 227 were wounded, among them Private Vanwart, hit by enemy artillery in Bergen-Op Zoom, a Dutch town leading to the causeway. Rolling up against the basement of a building captured Bergen-Op-Zoom from the enemy and Vanwart was evacuated on a stretcher. After recovering from his wounds in England, he became a driver for the HQCRU while awaiting repatriation to Canada.

It was love at first sight, remarked Jean as she recounted meeting him at the driving unit. Jean also had been recently hospitalized, having fallen and hurt her back. As the pair awaited transportation home, their superior

officers arranged to have them travel home aboard the same ship, SS Île de France. Arriving in Canada on March 17, 1946, the couple married on May 11th of the same year.

This booklet was prepared for Islington United Church
by Jackie Blackwell, Kim Blackwell, Heather Childs,
Dave Laughton and Patricia Conway Willis.

Volume 1 - November 2025

HONORING OUR VETERANS

A JOURNEY OF HOPE

Submitted by Taz Khimani

I recently learned that volunteer pilots flew the planes that brought refugee families, my parents included, to Canada from Africa during the Idi Amin regime. The last plane left the runway in a storm of gunfire. The fear the refugee families felt was palpable and still is, 50 years later. My mom still has a rice serving dish that she received when she arrived in Canada so many years ago. For our family, Canada is a place where we can live without fear.

Remembering the courage of all veterans.