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# Words of Valediction and Remembrance

## The Beny-sur-Mer Canadian War Cemetery, Normandy, France

Eric McGeer

The Beny-sur-Mer Canadian War Cemetery lies at the top of a gently rising hill overlooking the landing zones assigned to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and its supporting units on 6 June 1944. To the north, the towns of Courseulles-sur Mer, Bernières-sur-Mer, and St. Aubin-sur-Mer, the latter two distinguished by mediaeval church spires profiled against the contrasting blue of the English Channel and the sky, punctuate the stretch of Normandy coastline codenamed “Juno.” In the rolling farmland around the cemetery, church spires also mark the first places liberated as the Canadians pushed inland: Graye-sur-Mer, Banville, and Ste. Croix-sur-Mer along an arc to the northwest, Reviers and Amblie to the southwest; Tailleville due east, and the village of Beny-sur-Mer itself, to the southeast.

These towns and villages have stood for centuries, but if their names strike a chord today, it is for a few hours of savage fighting that passed over them one spring morning six decades ago. Yet as one traces the path of the Canadian army in the course of the Normandy campaign, the past comes beckoning at every step. The settlements and rivers which Canadian soldiers passed bear names transformed into French from Celtic, Latin, and Norse origins. The Maple Leaf route through Caen to Falaise and on to Elbeuf and Rouen retraces the path of the armies led by Edward III and Henry V during the Hundred Years War. During the 1430s, Sir John Fastolf, one of the historical figures subsumed into Shakespeare’s Falstaff, was Lord Lieutenant of

Caen, the gateway to Normandy which Canadians would pay a heavy price to wrest from German hands. The *Route Nationale* 158 which formed the axis of the Canadian advance to Falaise follows a road first laid out by the Romans; and the castle at Falaise, looming over the scenes of the gruelling final stages of the battle of Normandy, rests on the site of an earlier castle where William the Conqueror was born.

*Nos a Gulielmo victi victoris patriam liberavimus*  
(we who were conquered by William have  
liberated the land of the Conqueror)

declares the inscription over the memorial to the missing at the British war cemetery at Bayeux, no more than a 15 minute walk from the museum where the Bayeux Tapestry illustrates the story of the Duke of Normandy’s invasion of England in 1066.

A sequence of scenes in the Tapestry eerily prefigures the reverse invasion staged nine centuries later. The preparation of William’s fleet, the loading of provisions and equipment, and the disembarkation in England anticipate the construction of the landing craft and specialised transport for the Allied armada and the effort necessary to keep the armies supplied once they had secured a lodgement on the Normandy coast. Troubling parallels appear in other scenes. A woman and her child look on as William’s soldiers set fire to a house in a scene calling to mind the gutted churches in Caen, left unrestored in memory of the old city’s destruction by Allied bombs in 1944, or a grave in the churchyard at



**Left:** Looking over Norman fields to the town of Amblie. **Right:** Memorial to the missing in Bayeux.

Soulangy of three French children killed in the bombardments which preceded the attacks on Falaise. The Tapestry's graphic depiction of the carnage at Hastings hints at sights which veterans of Normandy prefer to forget – the crumpled bodies of the dead, the burnt tanks and vehicles, crashed aircraft, the awful detritus of modern warfare.

As the summer of 1944 fades from living memory into history, memorials preserving the record of Canada's part in the Normandy battles have come to stand among the monuments of

other ages. A plaque honouring servicemen from Ontario is affixed to the 12th-century Chapelle St-Georges within the ducal chateau at Caen. Cairns in village squares commemorate Canadian soldiers and regiments, and local signs inscribed *Rue de Colonel Charles Petch*, *Avenue des Glengarriens*, *Impasse des Regina Rifles* mark roads and laneways. Interspersed among these testaments of heroism and gratitude are others recalling dark episodes: the murder of Canadian prisoners of war at the Abbaye d'Ardenne and the Château d'Audrieu, the decimation of the Black Watch at Verrières Ridge, and the fate of

The castle of William the Conqueror in Falaise.



the British Columbia and Algonquin Regiments on a lonely hill near the hamlet of Estrées-la-Campagne.

The presence of Canadian memorials in Normandy, a crossroads in the history of France and England, also evokes the unique character of the Canadian army that fought there. Alone of the nations engaged in the Normandy campaign, Canada was the heir to the traditions of two founding countries, and within her army's ranks were men mindful of their ancestral ties. The language and faith of the predominantly Norman settlers who peopled New France endure in the valedictory words chosen by the parents of Private Leo Joseph Quevillon, a French Canadian from Timmins who died on 31 July 1944, at age 21: *Nous l'avons donné à Dieu pour le salut de France. Son père et sa mère. Canada (We gave him to God for the salvation of France. His father and mother. Canada)*. Similar professions of fidelity to their heritage are found on the headstones of many Canadian soldiers of French descent, just as the first words of Lance Corporal William Gordon Thompson's epitaph, *For Canada, King and Empire*, proclaim the shared allegiance of English-Canadian soldiers to their own and to their mother country.

Set within a landscape where the echoes of the past resound, the Beny-sur-Mer war cemetery draws the visitor from the present back into the Norman summer of 1944. The entrance way leads through a corridor of maple trees to the Stone of Remembrance, placed between two flanking towers. Beyond this imposing threshold, the symmetrical lines ordering the layout of the cemetery reinforce the impression of military precision and dignity. In the centre stands the Cross of Sacrifice, at the intersection of two aisles which divide the cemetery into quarters. The headstones of the fallen are deployed in 16 sections, perfectly aligned along a frontal or a diagonal perspective, and face the beholder like an army drawn up on parade. The colours of the flowers and shrubs planted along each row relieve the uniform white of the headstones, and the trees planted between sections cast shadows in the sunlight. Shrouded from the sight and sounds of the outside world by the trees clustered around its precincts, the cemetery conveys a sense of isolation and permanence, of a place complete in itself. There are times when silence reigns,



#### Scenes from the Bayeux Tapestry

**Top:** They carry weapons to the ships...

**Middle:** Here a house is set on fire.

**Bottom:** The Anglo-Saxons and the Normans together in battle.

broken only by the singing of birds or the sighing of the wind.

*The war is over. Sleep on, dear son.*

Rifleman Lant Freeman, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 8.6.44 (age 22)



Gravestone in Soulangy

All but five of the 2,048 servicemen buried here are Canadian. In row upon row, the recurrence of maple leaves carved into the headstones commands the eye. Below this national emblem, a sequence of details identifies each soldier: enlistment number (for privates and non-commissioned officers), rank, name, regiment, date of death, and, in most cases, age. The headstone contained space for a cross or Star

of David to be engraved below this register, but if the soldier had indicated no religious affiliation, or if the family so wished, the religious symbol was omitted. Families also had the option to choose or to compose a personal inscription, not to exceed 66 characters, to serve as a last farewell. This was inscribed in the lower register of the headstone, beneath the cross.

Ruins of Vieux St. Etienne in Caen



The headstones have their own stories to tell. Each one retrieves the name of a soldier from the anonymous casualty figures cited in the accounts of the Normandy battles – 359 Canadians killed on D-Day, 658 in the first week of fighting to establish the bridgehead, 262 in the attack on Caen on 8 July, and so on. In many cases the combination of a soldier's date of death with his regiment points to the action in which he lost his life. The collation of 6 June with the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada places Private Robert Graham Burnett among the men killed in the costly assault at Bernières-sur-Mer. The date 7 June and the regiment North Nova Scotia Highlanders put Private Lambert Avery Fleet among the 84 soldiers killed in the vicious first encounter with the 12th SS Panzer Division in the hamlet of Authie. On 8 June, a harrowing day in the history of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 19-year-old Corporal James Lierris Kyle was one of the soldiers taken prisoner in the village of Putot-en-Bessin and subsequently murdered by his captors at the Château d'Audrieu. Private Frank Keleher was one of the North Shores from New Brunswick who died in the attacks on Carpiquet airport on 4 July. These and other convergences of dates and regiments – the First Hussars and the Queen's Own Rifles on 11 June at le Mesnil-Patry, the Highland Light Infantry of Canada on 8 July at Buron – chart the progression of the fighting, measured not in lines on a map or in objectives gained, but in the aggregate of individual lives lost.

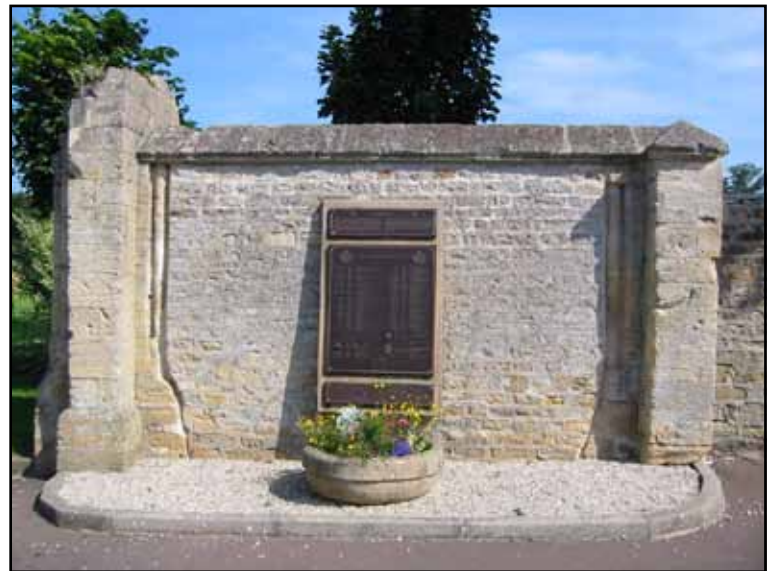
The headstones reveal different degrees of loss. Some note the death of an only son, in one instance of an only child, whereas others bear witness to the compounded tragedy suffered by a distressingly high number of families. No less than 11 pairs of brothers lie buried in the Beny-sur-Mer cemetery, a total of double bereavement unmatched in any other Commonwealth cemetery of the Second World War. Five families had to cope with the loss of two sons on the same day in the same action. The Westlake family of Toronto lost one son on 7 June, and two more just four days later. The tally does not end here. Five soldiers in Beny-sur-Mer have a brother buried in one of the other Normandy cemeteries; eight have brothers at rest in Italy, Belgium, or Holland. One family, the Wagners of Teeterville, Ontario, have a son buried in Bénys-sur-Mer, a second on the road to Falaise in the Bretteville-sur-Laize Canadian war cemetery, and a third in the Groesbeek Canadian

war cemetery in Holland. Yet another family, the Lanteignes of Caraquet, New Brunswick, lost three sons between 12 June and 15 September 1944; one is buried in Beny-sur-Mer, the second in Bretteville-sur-Laize, and the third in the Coriano Ridge war cemetery in Italy.



Above: Street sign in Bernières-sur-Mer.

Below: Commemorative plaque at the Chateau d'Audrieu.



Nineteen headstones bear a maple leaf and a cross, and the simple inscription, *A Soldier of the 1939-1945 War, A Canadian Regiment, Known Unto God*, reprising the formula composed by Rudyard Kipling for the myriads of unidentified



Point 140 and Monument as seen from Estrees-la-Campagne.

dead of the 1914-1918 war. Sadder even than these are the headstones recording the lonely details of a name, regiment, and date of death, but no age, no cross or inscription, as though the soldier had no attachments, nothing to embrace his memory, no one to mourn his passing.

Then there are the Jewish soldiers whose places are marked by a Star of David. Two of them, Private Joseph Gertel of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders and Rifleman Israel Freedman of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, rest beneath headstones which carry inscriptions in Hebrew:

*Here lies Joseph Mordechai, scion of Levi, the son of Israel and Miriam Gertel, who fell in battle in France on the seventeenth day of Tammuz 5704.*

*Our beloved son Israel Freedman who fell on the battlefield for the honour of his people and his government.*

Engraved within the Star of David are five letters forming an acronym based on the passage in I Samuel 25: 29: “*serura bisror hahayyim ... may his soul be bound up in the bonds of eternal life*”. In their own way, these graves symbolize what the Third Reich had set out to destroy, not only a race of human beings, but a whole way of life, a religion with its ancient language and traditions. In a letter of condolence to Rifleman

Freedman’s mother, a fellow soldier wrote, “Izzy, like other Jewish boys, had something more to fight for, a greater cause...a duty not only to King and Country but to the Jewish people the world over.” Equally poignant are the words on the headstone of another young Jewish soldier, Bombardier George Meltz of the Royal Canadian Artillery, who died on 8 July 1944 at age 25, fighting in defence of his country and people: *Deeply mourned by wife and family. He died so Jewry shall suffer no more.*

*A private in the army, he gave no less than the highest above him, his life.*

Private Jean Baptiste Lanteigne, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 12.6.44 (age 31)

*Tony was a Forward Observation Officer – the unsung heroes of the war.*

Captain Anthony Larratt Smith, Royal Canadian Artillery, 27.7.44 (age 36)

*In loving memory of a dear father and husband. Brave words of a brave man, “Take the others. I’m done for”*

Sapper Thomas Kelly Anderson, Royal Canadian Engineers, 22.6.44 (age 44)

Where histories of the Normandy campaign concentrate on the conduct of the battles and the decisions of the commanders, it is in the record of the headstones where the burden of the fighting

can be measured. It fell upon the soldiers in the rifle companies, the tank crews, the artillerymen, the sappers and engineers, signallers, stretcher bearers, the pilots, even the regimental padres, two of whom lie buried in Beny-sur-Mer. These were the men who “dragged the war forward an inch at a time” as they captured this village, secured that crossing, or occupied a crucial piece of ground. The achievement of these objectives depended on the courage and skill, elevated at times to heroism and self-sacrifice, of ordinary young men whose names are known to no one but the families who bore the blow of their loss:

*To the world he was just another one. To us, he was our darling son.*

Private Lawrence Burton Perkins, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, 7.6.44 (age 26)

*Though all the world forgets, lovingly remembered by Mother, Dad and sister Mary.*

Private Lorne High, Highland Light Infantry of Canada, 8.7.44 (age 22)

*A wonderful son, brother, husband and father.*

Corporal Hugh Archibald Munroe, Regina Rifle Regiment, 6.6.44 (age 24)

Variations of the three epitaphs above appear on many headstones, but in every case they retain a particularity reminding us that the death of each soldier took a young man from the service of his country, and ended a part of many other lives:

*A true Canadian. A brave soldier. A beloved son and brother.*

Corporal Alfred Thomas Morton, Essex Scottish Regiment, 30.7.44 (age 24)

*A good son, a loving brother, and a loyal soldier. Rest in peace.*

Private Arthur High Annett, Calgary Highlanders, 31.7.44 (age 34)

*In loving memory of a good soldier and a dear son. Ever remembered.*

Private Kenneth Neil Joseph Rozak, Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, 9.6.44 (age 18)

*Remembrance of a dear husband and son. A fine soldier and a true gentleman.*

Lance Corporal Ernest Archibald Gentles Bell, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, 8.7.44 (age 34)

*Life will never be the same now that we have lost you. Ever lovingly remembered, wife, son, Mom and sister.*

Rifleman Sidney Stephen Ryan, Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, 6.6.44 (age 27)

*Il laisse dans le deuil son père et sa mère M. et Mme Arsène Ouellet, deux frères et six soeurs.*

*(He leaves in mourning his father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Arsene Ouellet, two brothers and six sisters)*

Corporal Lionel Ouellet, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 6.6.44

**Left:** The approach to Beny-sur-Mer. **Right:** The burial ground at Beny-sur-Mer.







No age, no cross, no inscription.

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*A true friend, a son most dear, a loving brother lieth here. Great is our loss.*

Corporal Stanley Smith, Canadian Scottish Regiment, 10.6.44 (age 34)

*Remembered always in death as in life. Al., Mum, Dad, family and your princess.*

Corporal Wesley Collins, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 5.7.44 (age 24)

*Dearly beloved son of Ross and Elsie Johnson and brother to Claire.*

Flying Officer Ross Eveleigh Johnson, Royal Canadian Air Force, 15.7.44 (age 21)

*Johnny. "Soldier rest, thy warfare o'er." Mother, Sheila, Martin, Ellen and Michael mourn. R.I.P.*

Sergeant John Joseph O'Connell, Canadian Scottish Regiment, 1.7.44 (age 26)

*Father, we love you. Erling and family, Harold and Ernie.*

Lance Corporal Sverre Lea, Canadian Provost Corps, 12.6.44 (age 35)

*Sadly missed by friends.*

Lance Corporal Nicholas Prady, Toronto Scottish Regiment, 25.7.44 (age 24)

*Ever remembered by his parents, sisters and brothers and all in Canada.*

Corporal Alexander Rutherford, Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, 8.6.44 (age 23)

*He died to save us all. In our hearts he'll always be. Never forgotten by his wife and five children.*

Private Solomon Kline, Canadian Scottish Regiment, 8.7.44 (age 38)

*Beloved husband of Beth Montgomery. Father of Ann, Peggy, Geraldine and Jack.*

Sergeant Gerald William Leveridge, North Nova Scotia Highlanders, 12.8.44 (age 32)

*Never forgotten by loving wife Margaret and daughters Anne and Shirley.*

Private Henry Coltman, Highland Light Infantry of Canada, 7.7.44

*Ever remembered by his wife Joyce, son*

*Sometime we'll understand. Always remembered by wife and four children.*

Sergeant Murray Louis Burns, Royal Canadian Artillery, 5.8.44 (age 31)

*I have only your memory, dear husband, to remember my whole life through.*

Rifleman George Alexander, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 16.7.44 (age 21)

*A beautiful future planned, only to end in a dream. Dear, my thoughts are ever of you and what might have been.*

Trooper Robert Lawrence Morton, 17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars, 26.7.44 (age 24)

*Dearly beloved husband of Sylvia Dinari and fond father of Bruce Allan.*

Sapper Jack Allan French, Royal Canadian Engineers, 7.7.44 (age 29)

*Lonely, dreary are the days since one we love went away. Lovingly remembered by his grandmother.*

Private Raymond McEwen, North Nova Scotia Highlanders, 8.7.44 (age 36)

*He was ours and we remember. Father, mother, sisters and brothers.*

Trooper George Nugent McKinlay, Fort Garry Horse, 11.6.44 (age 30)

*Sadly missed and ever remembered by Mom, Dad, Joan, Calvin, Betty and pals Tommy and Matt.*

Corporal Herbert Smith, Lincoln and Welland Regiment, 3.8.44 (age 21)

*Georgie, Granny Berry, Mum and Dad Seabrook.*

Private George Frederick Leonzio, Lake Superior Regiment, 4.8.44 (age 23)

*In loving memory of Ewalt, a dear husband and daddy. Every day in silence we remember. Sadly missed by his loving wife and daughter Connie.*

Private Ewalt Brandt, Canadian Scottish Regiment, 10.6.44 (age 27)

Grand merci à notre héros. Maman s'ennuie, Fernand. Nous te pleurons.

*(In deep thanks to our hero. Mama misses you, Fernand. We weep for you)*

Private Fernand Jean Louis Hains, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 6.6.44 (age 28)

*"Lest we forget" as a family. Jack was the best of us, brave, unselfish and true.*

Rifleman Jack Silas Jacobs, Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, 11.6.44 (age 20)

*Ever remembered by Mum, Dad, Birnie, Gloria, Joyce and Marr.*

Private George Crawford Hadden, Canadian Scottish Regiment, 10.6.44 (age 19)

Rifleman James William Dunbar Hadden, Regina Rifle Regiment, 19.7.44 (age 20)

One by one the headstones present inscriptions arresting in their dignity and simplicity, conveying in a few words the impact of a young soldier's death on his family and a depth of sorrow moving even to strangers 60 years later. From the parents of Emerson Robert James, a private with the North Shore Regiment killed on D-Day, at age 18: *We have suffered since we lost you. Life will never be the same.* The words of parting, chosen or adapted from a list, or composed by the families themselves, reveal the terms on which they accepted the finality of their loss, its meaning, and the consolation by which they sought to allay their grief. Their responses emerged in many forms, as endearments, prayers, pledges of eternal love and longing, tribute to the soldier's character and courage, or gratitude for his sacrifice. Silence, too, was a choice. The absence of an inscription suggests that for some the loss was too painful,

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Rifleman Israel Freedman.

perhaps even too embittering, for words. Others may have preferred to bestow the respectfulness implicit in silence upon the soldier's grave.

Those who elected to bid farewell drew upon valedictory themes that were many and varied. Some dwelt on the prospects and hopes denied by death at so young an age, whereas others found comfort in the acceptance of God's will or in the hope of a reunion in a life to come. The prevailing theme, however, is the affirmation of an imperishable bond of remembrance:

*Le dernier cadeau de l'amour – souvenir.*

*(Love's last gift, remembrance)*

Private Arthur Bouchard, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 6.6.44 (age 28)

*We've known so much of happiness, one gift of God that death cannot destroy.*

Flying Officer Leonard Ralph Allman, Royal Canadian Air Force, 6.6.44 (age 24)

"Remembrance" To have known and loved him is our reward.

Sapper Alfred James Leslie Martin, Royal Canadian Engineers, 6.6.44 (age 35)



*For immortal remembrance, in valour you have laid your life for freedom.*

Rifleman Mikie Wintoniw, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 6.6.44 (age 26)

*Peace, my son, my peace I leave with you. God is the messenger of love between thee and me.*

Private Robert Cameron Milburn, North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, 8.6.44 (age 19)

*Our darling.*

Sergeant Robert James Lidstone, Highland Light Infantry of Canada, 8.7.44 (age 23)

*Mother's hero.*

Lance Corporal James Albert Johnston, Regina Rifle Regiment, 8.7.44 (age 27)

*God will take care of you, Roland dear. We will all meet again.*

Private Roland Eugene Sothe, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, 16.8.44 (age 23)

*Sois assuré de notre immortel souvenir. Ta mère, ton père, ta soeur.*

*(Rest assured of our everlasting remembrance. Your mother, father, and sister)*

Private Roland Albert Giguère, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, 18.7.44 (age 23)

*To one who died before he had a chance to live.*

Sergeant Stanley George Machnee, Royal Canadian Artillery, 15.7.44 (age 28)

*He also gave.*

Trooper David Maurice Legassick, First Hussars, 11.6.44 (age 19)

*Dear Bud, nothing can take away the love our hearts hold dear. "Our loyal son"*

Corporal Albert George Mercer, Calgary Highlanders, 19.7.44 (age 21)

*Grace for all.*

Rifleman Edward Heinrichs, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 5.7.44 (age 19)

*Seigneur, rendez-lui en bonheur ce qu'il donna en tendresse et dévouement.*

*(Lord, grant to him in happiness what he gave in gentleness and devotion)*

Lieutenant Raymond James Lapierre, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 6.6.44 (age 27)

*Nous nous souvenons et nous prions.*

*(We remember and we pray)*

Private Georges Godin, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 18.7.44 (age 27)

*Dutiful, happy and generous.*

Lieutenant Robert Eliot Austin, Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada, 21.7.44 (age 23)

*He loved honour more than he feared death. Sleep on, dear Buddy, in peace.*

Corporal Horace John Smith, Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, 26.7.44 (age 20)

*"Jimmy" Always in my heart.*

Rifleman James Brisbane Morgan, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 16.6.44 (age 34)

*Two little words not hard to write, I will remember them all my life, "My son"*

Gunner William Stanley Daye, Royal Canadian Artillery, 13.7.44 (age 38)

*When duty called, he answered.*

Trooper Kenneth Middleton Hutchinson, Fort Garry Horse, 4.7.44 (age 22)

*Love like a bridge spans the spaces that divide. Parted, yet in dreams we walk together side by side.*

Corporal Roger Joseph Firman, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 8.6.44 (age 21)

*We will always remember our boy.*

Private John Erickson, North Nova Scotia Highlanders, 8.7.44 (age 19)

*Dear son, may we who remain be worthy of your great sacrifice.*

Rifleman Russel Kenneth Adamson, Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, 6.6.44 (age 19)

*Loved, remembered, longed for always.*

Private John Stewart, Highland Light Infantry of Canada, 8.7.44 (age 29)

*Some day I will join you in the great beyond unknown. Then my sorrow will be o'er, I will not be alone.*

Rifleman Raymond Morse Nelson, Regina Rifle Regiment, 12.6.44

*Our son and brother, never a father to be. Sacrificial child.*

Private Romeo Neault, North Nova Scotia Highlanders, 8.7.44 (age 23)

*Duty well done, Mate. There was, there is, no gentler, stronger, manlier man.*

Sergeant William James McLean, Fort Garry Horse, 6.7.44 (age 24)

*God alone understands.*

Captain Robert Gibson Shinnan, Regina Rifle Regiment, 9.6.44

In a far corner of the cemetery lies a soldier whose inscription evokes an age-old heroic ideal and imparts a timeless example of the suffering wrought by war. On the headstone of John Logan, a 27-year-old lieutenant in the Sherbrooke Fusiliers who died of wounds on 12 August 1944, are these words in Greek:

ΕΙΣ ΟΙΩΝΟΣ ΑΡΙΣΤΟΣ  
ΑΜΥΝΕΣΘΑΙ ΠΕΡΙ ΠΑΤΡΗΣ

Lieutenant Logan's epitaph was chosen by his father, Harry Tremaine Logan, for many years professor of classics at the University of British Columbia, and a veteran of the First World War. The lines come from book 12 of the *Iliad* and are spoken by the Trojan hero Hector. In the midst of battle, the Trojans have beheld an omen sent by the gods and are deliberating whether it counsels advance or retreat until Hector settles the issue by declaring, "one omen is best, to fight for your



country." These words are in themselves a fitting tribute to a young soldier who gave his life for his country; but the association with Hector confers a singular dignity upon his memory. Of all the warriors portrayed in the *Iliad*, Hector enlists the deepest sympathy, for his valour in battle, his sense of duty to his people, and for his refusal to retire from the fighting even though he has done his share and more. In a famous scene, his wife pleads with him to withdraw from the battle. You are my whole world, she tells him, as she recounts the loss of her father, her mother, and her brothers. But Hector cannot. He knows that in the end he is fated to die and that his city must fall, yet he strives with all his might to put off the day when Troy will be razed, his father and family put to the sword, his wife led off into slavery. Hector symbolises courage, in very human terms: he is no stranger to rashness or to fear, but his unwillingness to forsake his comrades or to dishonour himself in the eyes of others impel him to face what must be faced, even on the verge of death. And after death in battle has torn him from his family, it is left to his father to recover the body and to provide for his son the proper rituals of mourning and burial.

The *Iliad* is universal in its portrayal of men in battle, not only for its depiction of the savagery and emotional turbulence of the battlefield, but above all for its vision of the pitiless nature of war, revealed by the misery that it visits indiscriminately upon young and old, men and women, parents and children, even the uninvolved and the undeserving. The poem is uncompromising in its exposure of the transience and the expendability of human lives. Scores of young warriors are singled out for a brief recitation of their homes and parents, their qualities and distinctions, at the very moment when their lives come to an end. They are cut down before they have the chance to realise their hopes or to make their reputations, and their names survive only because they died in a famous war:

Then Telamonian Aias struck the son of Anthemion, Simoeisios, a strong young man not married. His mother had given birth to him by the banks of the Simoeis, coming down from Ida where she had gone with her parents

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Lieutenant John Logan's headstone

to watch over their flocks: and so they called him Simoeisios. But he could not repay his dear parents for the care of his rearing, but his life was cut short, brought down by the spear at the hands of great-hearted Aias...

Then Diomedes, master of the war-cry, killed Axylos, son of Teuthras. He lived in well-founded Arisbe, a man rich in substance, and hospitable to all men – his house was by the road, and he would entertain all who passed. But none of them faced Diomedes for him then, and saved him from a miserable death, but he took the life from both of them, Axylos and his lieutenant Kalesios, his charioteer on that day...

Thirty centuries later, brief notices epitomise young men who came from the far-flung corners of a distant land to fight and die in their thousands in the greatest war the world has ever known:

*Died of wounds at Caen. Born at Margaree, Nova Scotia. "Rest in peace"*

Private John Charles McFarlane, Canadian Scottish Regiment, 9.7.44 (age 19)

*Not just today but every day in silence we remember. Son of Kate & Michael Kochan, Thorhild, Alberta, Canada.*

Private James Kochan, Calgary Highlanders, 26.7.44 (age 25)

*Only son of Roy and Florence Squire of Glencoe, Ontario, Canada.*

Private Howard Squire, Essex Scottish Regiment, 29.7.44 (age 19)

*Here rests the only son of William and Cora Samson, Albertville, Saskatchewan.*

Rifleman Alfred Samson, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 4.7.44 (age 32)

*Born at Egmont Bay, P.E.I., April 12th 1924. Son of Margaret and Prosper Gallant. R.I.P.*

Private Joseph Frank Gallant, North Nova Scotia Highlanders, 8.7.44 (age 20)

*Beloved and only son Rory S. and Margaret MacKinnon. A Roman Catholic. R.I.P.*

Lieutenant Donald Columba MacKinnon, North Nova Scotia Highlanders, 8.7.44 (age 26)

*Fils de feu Arthus Barrette et de Diana Laforest. Né à Chicoutimi, Québec, Canada.*

*(Son of the late Arthur Barrette and Diana Laforest. Born in Chicoutimi, Quebec, Canada)*

Sergeant Paul Barrette, Royal Canadian Engineers, 6.6.44 (age 33)

*Dearest youngest son of Robert and Mary, brother of John and Bob. Toronto, Ontario.*

Lieutenant Murray Joseph Fitzpatrick, Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment, 8.7.44 (age 24)

*"You will never be forgotten." Mother, Dad, David & Elizabeth. Gordon Indian Reserve, Punnichy, Saskatchewan.*

Private Kenneth Wilfred Pratt, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 7.6.44 (age 20)

*Of Weymouth, Nova Scotia. Harold, a loving son, gone but not forgotten. May he rest in peace.*

Private Harold Alexander MacGowan, Canadian Scottish Regiment, 15.7.44 (age 28)

*Fifth son of Fred and Edna Primeau, Chatham, Ontario.*

Private Joseph Primeau, Royal Regiment of Canada, 19.7.44 (age 21)

*Ici repose le fils de Edouard Fontaine et de Maria Désormeau, Montréal.*

*(Here lies the son of Edouard Fontaine and Maria Desormeau, Montreal)*

Private Henri Joseph Edouard Fontaine, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 6.6.44 (age 19)

*One of the boys from Barrhead, Alberta. "He shall give his angels charge over thee"*

Private Kost Suchow, Calgary Highlanders, 12.7.44 (age 30)

*Beloved son of Philomene Roussel, Edmunston, N.B., Canada.*

Private Adrien Leo Roussel, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 6.6.44 (age 23)

*Born in Thamesville, Ontario. Son of Dan Culnan and Ann Schnekenburger.*

Private John Windline Culnan, Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, 11.6.44 (age 21)

*Beloved son of Alex and Paraska Kindrachuk of Hafford, Saskatchewan.*

Private George Kindrachuk, Regina Rifle Regiment, 9.6.44 (age 25)

*Beloved son of Stephen and Matilda Bellefontaine, West Chezzetcook, Nova Scotia. R.I.P.*

Private Oswald Joseph Bellefontaine, North Nova Scotia Highlanders, 7.6.44 (age 24)

*Born in North Vancouver, B.C., 1922. Enlisted in Canadian Scottish 1940.*

Private Norman Ross Fairweather, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, 7.6.44 (age 21)

*He has gone across the river where the shores are evergreen. Ever remembered by Mother and the rest of the family, Riding Park, Manitoba, Canada.*

Gunner Chester Hebner, Royal Canadian Artillery, 11.7.44 (age 29)

*Né à St. Thérèse, N.B., Canada. Mort pour l'honneur. R.I.P.*

*(Born in St. Therese, N.B., Canada. Died for honour's sake. R.I.P.)*

Private Arthur Roy, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 8.6.44 (age 25)

*Nous de Val Alain, Lotbinière, P.Q., Canada, admirons sa mort pour Dieu et la patrie.*

*(We of Val Alain, Lotbiniere, P.Q., Canada, admire his death for God and his native land)*

Private Joseph Raoul Roch Bedard, Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, 18.7.44

*Graduate Royal Military College, Canada. Motto – Truth, Duty, Valour.*

Major Gavin Fraser Rainnie, Royal Canadian Artillery, 6.6.44 (age 36)

*A mari usque ad mare.* For every volunteer from Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver, there are half a dozen others from mining towns, parishes, counties, fishing villages, and farming communities whose names are engraved on the headstones of Canadian soldiers buried thousands of miles from their homes in St. Félix-de-Kingsey, Indian River, Yorkton, Easton's Corners, Owen Sound, New Waterford, Jonquière, Fassett, Stoughton, Cordova Mines, Matane, Arnprior, Cap-aux-Meules, Chatham, Windthorst, Pickering, Ste. Anne, St. Thomas, Camperville. These placenames recall a day and age when a larger part of Canada's population lived in small towns and rural settlements, when the still semi-industrialised country relied for its prosperity on the production of grain and raw materials, and when popular sentiments and attitudes were shaped by influences no longer current or fashionable.

*He saw a wider vision, the empire and its need, and came with swift decision to do the utmost deed.*

Private Donald Rhyburn Morrison, North Nova Scotia Highlanders, 5.7.44 (age 21)

Duty nobly done for King and country.

Rifleman Frank Holmes, Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, 6.6.44

*"Be prepared" "To do my duty to God and my king"*

Lieutenant Fleming Ladd Irving, First Hussars, 6.6.44 (age 21)

*Itt nyugszik Gábor József aki hősi halált halt hazájáért. Béke poraira.*

*(Here rests Joseph Gabor who died a hero's death for his country. Peace be upon his ashes)*

Rifleman Joseph Mitchell Gabor, Regina Rifle Regiment, 18.6.44 (age 20)

*Hvíl í fri i ástkæri sonur. Ástvinnir blessa minningu þína. Móðir og faðir.*

*(Rest in peace, beloved son. Loved ones bless your memory. Mother and father)*

Rifleman Eggert Stefansson, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 8.6.44 (age 21)

*Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you and ye shall live. Ezekiel XXXVII.5.*

Craftsman John Loewen, Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, 4.8.44 (age 24)

*"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God"*

Rifleman Thomas Edward Forrester, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 4.7.44 (age 21)

*So he passed over and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.*

Lance Corporal John Ernest Walker, North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, 6.6.44 (age 24)

*Vous tous qui passez dites au ciel pour moi une ave. Mon Jésus, miséricorde.*

*(All you who pass by, say a 'Hail Mary' to heaven for me. Jesus, have mercy)*

Private Louis Philippe Lauzier, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 4.7.44 (age 26)

*All we have of freedom, all we use or know, this our fathers bought for us, long and long ago. Kipling*

Sergeant David James Byers, Royal Regiment of Canada, 20.7.44

*I will keep alight the torch of courage your dying hand passed on to me.*

Lance Sergeant William Stewart, Royal Canadian Engineers, 7.6.44 (age 43)

*Who could die a better death, for he gave his life for one and all. Mother*

Private William Sylvester Bousfield, Canadian Scottish Regiment, 8.7.44 (age 27)

The Canada from which these soldiers came seems in many respects a different country from the one in which we live today. Two generations ago Canada was a dominion that saw its security and welfare in connection with those of Great Britain and the British Empire. The names in the Beny-sur-Mer cemetery echo a time when the population was half British and a third French in origin; but alongside the Smiths, MacDonalds and Tremblays lie others with names like Chermishnuk, Ruggerio, Husak, Weitzel, Andrijouski, Cohen, Moenaert, Gavriolo, Sigurdson, Poniedzielski, Radocy, Kachor, Toivonen, Nokusis, van de Veen, Schumilas, Capraru, Tedaviè, and Tolstad which herald the evolution of Canada into a land home to people of all races and religions. The frequency of epitaphs drawn from Scripture or hymns reflects the beliefs of a generation more religious, or at least more church-going, than our own, one that turned for spiritual solace to the King James Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, or to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In their turn, many French epitaphs profess the Catholicism of an older, ultramontane Quebec, now changed out of all recognition in the wake of the Quiet Revolution. It was a generation of English Canadians schooled in the poems of Kipling and Tennyson exalting duty, patriotism, and sacrifice, ideals reinforced by the war poems of Rupert Brooke and John McCrae, the memoirs of Canon Scott, and the public monuments and annual ceremonies commemorating the Glorious Dead of the Great War. It was a country whose people read different books and newspapers, watched different films, turned on the radio for information and entertainment, and whose expectations and values during the first half of the twentieth century were tempered by the experience of two world wars and a prolonged economic depression, trials from which Canadians born after 1945 have been spared.

*De bien loin par l'océan ta mère prie pour toi.  
(From far away across the ocean your mother prays for you)*

Corporal Antoine Gionet, North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, 6.6.44 (age 25)

*Not in his native land, but under foreign skies, far from those who love him, in a soldier's grave he lies.*

Rifleman William Thomas, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 8.6.44 (age 36)

*If in a far off country you must lie, your image in our hearts will never die.*

Rifleman Norman Blue, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 5.7.44 (age 18)

*Peacefully sleeping, dear son and brother, with your dear comrades in a far and distant land.*

Private Charles Sweeney, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, 18.7.44

*He sleeps in a foreign land in a grave we never see. May God guide some kind hand to lay a flower for me. Mother*

Private Thomas Leo Laton, Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, 9.8.44 (age 28)

Canada in 1939 was a country of nine provinces and 11,500,000 people which put over a million men and women in uniform, and lost more than 42,000 killed in six years of war. Military cemeteries around the world index the human cost of Canada's effort on land, at sea, and in the air. Beginning with Beny-sur-Mer, a series of Canadian War Cemeteries marks the route of the victory campaign from the landing beaches to the Rhineland. But where the Commonwealth cemeteries from Normandy to Holland attract a steady stream of visitors, others lie in the remote corners of the war where Canadian servicemen gave their lives in actions overshadowed by the D-Day landings and the victory campaign in northwestern Europe. One Canadian soldier who died on 6 June 1944 was 37-year-old Private Arthur Cloutier of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps: *Pense à moi sur cette terre, comme je penserai à toi au ciel* (*Think of me on this earth, just as I will think of you in heaven*) reads the inscription on his headstone, to be found not in Normandy but in the Minturno War Cemetery, an impressive but seldom-visited monument of the Italian campaign and one of 38 sites where Canadian servicemen lie buried in Italy. Few today are aware that 10 July 1943 was in fact Canada's first D-Day, when the First Division landed near the Sicilian town of Pachino and commenced the long climb from Sicily up



Veterans returning to Point 195 (Summer 2003).

through the Italian peninsula. Beneath the ruins of a Norman castle atop the hill town of Agira, against the backdrop of Mount Etna, begins a Canadian *via dolorosa* that winds through Ortona, Monte Cassino, Rome, Montecchio, on to Ravenna and beyond, recording the sad legacy of a lesser known chapter of Canada's military past. Contrasting with the long, grinding campaigns are the isolated tragedies commemorated at the Sai Wan War Cemetery in Hong Kong, and at the Canadian War Cemetery at Dieppe, while the scale of Canada's participation in the air war can be measured by the wide scattering of cemeteries where Canadian airmen are buried, from England to Germany, from North Africa to India, and even in southeast Asia, as far away as Japan.

*Here in silence his memory speaks for freedom.*

Private Willard James MacArthur, New Brunswick Rangers, 17.8.44 (age 27)

*He resteth not alone. God bless our dear boy, Mother and Dad.*

Private Gordon Joseph McBride, Regina Rifle Regiment, 6.6.44

Tranquil, unchanging, the silent cities of the war dead preserve the memory of Canada's contribution to victory in World War II. They represent a significant part of Canada's past and

meaning as a country that we do not see in our own land. They were constructed in accordance with the precepts and examples established by the Imperial War Graves Commission after the First World War and maintained for the war dead of the Commonwealth after the Second. Within the pattern of official and collective commemoration, however, remains a stark, heartrending record of individual response to the tragedy of the war, expressed and preserved in thousands of personal inscriptions. They, too, are part of the national memory of the Second World War, at its most basic level. The book in preparation is the result of an effort to collect these expressions of loss and consolation and to present a sample of them as evidence of the lasting cost of the war to untold Canadian families: *You said goodbye, we did not know it was forever* – where did bereaved families turn for words of comfort, or tribute to the fallen, and how might these words have reconciled them to the loss of a son, brother, husband, or father whose grave they would in all likelihood never see?

*Born February, 1919. Frank, beloved son of Mike and Katrina Oster, Shorncliffe, Manitoba, Canada.*

Rifleman Frank Oster, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 8.6.44 (age 25)



*Beloved son of Harry & Sophia Shineton. Born at Highley, England, 1921. R.I.P.*

Corporal William Shineton, Fort Garry Horse, 4.7.44

*Born 17th July, 1922, in Willowbrook, Saskatchewan, Canada.*

Sapper Howard Stolar, Royal Canadian Engineers, 6.6.44 (age 21)

*Fils bien aimé de Rose A. Jean. Né 5 Décembre, 1922, Montréal.*

Private Joseph Maurice Jean, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 4.7.44 (age 21)

This compilation is offered in memory of the young Canadians who, in kinder circumstances, might still be alive today, looking back gratefully on full, useful lives, enriched by family and friendship. Instead, along with young men of other Allied nations, they lost their lives in the struggle to turn back the worst threat to human life and decency ever to arise, and for this they are owed an abiding debt of remembrance. The epitaphs, and the ages, of these Canadian soldiers resting in Beny-sur-Mer present the most compelling reason for this collection:

*He went freely to fight beside other free men for the freedom of us all.*

Trooper Hugh Hjalmar Michael Lismore, First Hussars, 6.6.44 (age 21)

*Our dear son gave as others who are gone, and for us liberty won with our allied sons as one.*

Rifleman Norman Walker, Regina Rifle Regiment, 8.7.44 (age 20)

*From his native soil with others to give his all, like others, that liberty might be a heritage for others.*

Private Arthur James Fraiser, Highland Light Infantry of Canada, 8.7.44 (age 21)

*He died so young that we may live in freedom. Well done, son.*

Rifleman George Robert Coe, Regina Rifle Regiment, 9.7.44 (age 19)

*Let us not forget. He died that others might live in peace, free from fear.*

Private Howard Welch, North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, 4.7.44 (age 19)

*The earth is a better place because of him. "Rest in peace"*

Private Cyril McQuillan, Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, 11.7.44 (age 20)

*R.I.P. Son of Canada, you gave your life for our deliverance. May you be blessed in heaven.*

Lance Corporal Elmer Grenville Swan, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, 6.6.44 (age 23)

*He gave his life for us. What hast thou given for him.*

Private James Robert Mullis, Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, 21.7.44 (age 20)

Eric McGeer teaches Latin and History at St. Clement's School in Toronto, and is currently writing a book on Canadian epitaphs of the Second World War. He wishes to express his thanks to Professor Libby Garshowitz of the University of Toronto for translating the inscriptions in Hebrew, and to Ms. Andrea Kovacs of Victoria College for translating the inscription in Hungarian. The excerpts from the *Iliad* are cited from Martin Hammond's translation (pp. 106, 130), published by Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1987.