



Thoughts of Our
Canadian Soldiers
at War

1918-2008

by Brian H. Jones

2008 Edition





© 2008

Printed 2005 and Revised Editions, 2006, 2007
 Brian Jones, Newmarket, Ontario
 brian.jones6@sympatico.ca

All rights reserved. Permission to reproduce
 in any form must first be secured from the author.

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Jones, Brian H., 1960-
 Thoughts of our Canadian soldiers at war / Brian H. Jones.

ISBN 978-1-894183-44-4

1. Soldiers--Canada--Juvenile fiction. 2. War stories, Canadian (English).

I. Title.

PS8569.O4897T47 2003 jC813'.6 C2003-906131-0


The cover of this book portrays a likeness of the Vimy Memorial in Pas de Calais, France. The author's great grand uncle's name, Charles Alfred Swarbrick, appears on the monument as well as 11,000 Canadian Soldiers who were posted as "missing presumed dead" in France during the First World War.

Cover illustration by Gustavo Faraldo. Email: gfaraldo@rogers.com

Order from:

YNH Books, c/o Brian Jones
 10 McConnell Lane, Newmarket, ON Canada L3Y 7M1
 Email: brian.jones6@sympatico.ca

Produced and printed by
 Stewart Publishing
 robert@stewartbooks.com www.stewartbooks.com




Dedication







I would like to dedicate this book to all the men and women that took up arms in all countries of the world during The Great War of 1914-1918 and the many conflicts that followed. History proved that The Great War, the war to end all wars did not succeed in its effort.

One success though that did occur was the timeless show of remembrance for the soldiers killed in the battlefield, never to re-unite with their loved ones and respect for those soldiers that did return healthy or maimed by the hellish experience of war.

Remembrance Day, is a day that many of us around the world use to honour and show respect for those who went to war for our country's beliefs. I am proud of our fighting men of Canada and I hope that all of our citizens never forget what our nation asked of these many young men and women, so many years ago. God bless our Canadian soldiers, may they all live on in spirit across this great land.

2008 will soon be upon us and it will represent 90 years since the guns of the Great War fell silent. This book honours those who fought, died or since passed on. We shall hold their memory dear to us.



This photo is of the author's great grand uncle Charles Alfred (Chalf) Swarbrick and his wife and three of his four children. The fourth child was yet unborn when this picture was taken in 1915. Chalf signed up in Hamilton, Ontario and lied about his age so he would not appear too old. He said he was born in 1890 but was actually born in 1877. He thought it would be a quick war and he would receive a pension. He was killed in the Somme on Sept. 15/1916.

The Boer War

The year is 1899 and I am a young man looking for some worldly experience. I live in Canada and I am considered a British subject. Britain and its other subject countries around the world are united in a war in South Africa against the Boers. A Boer is the Dutch word for farmer. Being very patriotic and devoted to Her Majesty Queen Victoria I enlisted in an infantry unit and was sent over to the Dark Continent.

Africa has always been such a mysterious place, full of intrigue and wonder. When I arrived I could not believe how hot it was. I was used to much cooler temperatures. I also saw the sickness and disease carried to the people and our soldiers by the unclean water and flying insects.

My first duty was to escort reinforcements of food and equipment from the coastal city of Cape Town, with its scenic Table Mountain, over the open and scorching terrain to the British and Commonwealth forces. We had to be very alert because sometimes the Boers would launch an attack against our unit. If the Boers weren't attacking us, it was the lions and other large animals that wandered into our path. It was a large challenge.

I was very lucky to have spent my time during the war in relative safety. I did contract malaria, making my comrades and I very ill. The sickness did take some of the lives of the very weak.

I had a few friends transferred to more active units and one lost their life, another lost his leg after being badly wounded. I'm not so sure if my life became so worldly but I left the war with a better respect for life's conditions and simply life itself.



A Soldier's Thought



Dear diary,

I am now celebrating my twenty-second birthday in France, not where I had ever expected to. There is no champagne, no lovely women, only the stench of death and dying soldiers on this front line of hell. I have come to understand the saying, "war is hell."

At home on the ranch in southern Alberta I won many awards at local fairs with my skill riding a horse. I decided to be one of the first in my community to enlist in the cavalry.

I heard the sound to muster up so I put my diary away. We were fully mounted in long rows for an offensive attack. It was almost time for the charge and I heard the Sergeant recite a prayer. With my left hand gripping the reins and my right hand clenching my sword, I heard the trumpeter sound the charge into battle. Then I heard the Sergeant scream at the top of his lungs, "charge" from under his thick handle bar moustache.

The sounds of the horses' hooves were deafening and I could see some of the faces of the enemy. They showed the same fear and terror that I was feeling as the gap between us grew smaller and smaller. I lifted my sword and as I approached. Then my horse's hoof fell into a hole and my horse and I came crashing to the ground.



The next thing I remember was waking in the hospital with two broken legs caused by the horse's weight crushing the lower part of my body. My Sergeant was standing over me congratulating me that we claimed a victory and two thousand of the enemy were killed and we had suffered only one hundred casualties.

I thought of those men's faces, the look in their eyes and how death came to so many of them and likely with much pain and agony. There is such a difference in riding a horse for pleasure or farm work compared to warfare. I remember how proud I was being one of the first to enlist. Now I only think how happy I will be to be sent home to Alberta with all my parts, even though some of those parts will take some time to mend.





French Canada goes to War

My grandfather died in 1935 from complications from his shrapnel wounds he received at the Battle of Passchedaele on Oct 30/1917. The battle began in July and ended in November 1917.

He was a French Canadian who volunteered for the newly created French Canadian Battalion, the 22nd, known as the Van Doos. They were created on October 20/1914.

French Canada had originally not wanted to become involved in the Great War, believing this was not their fight. Influential people in French Canada lobbied the federal government to create the Van Doos.

The Van Doos went on to be a very honoured and highly respected regiment in the Canadian military.

My late grandmother spoke of how proud that Grandfather was of serving his country even though it had cut his life short at an earlier age than if he hadn't been injured during the war.



Ojibwa Warriors

George, as he was known to the merchants in Fort William (which today is part of Thunder Bay) in northwestern Ontario was an Ojibwa native 20 years old. He made a living trapping and hunting off of the land of his ancestors when he heard that war broke out in Europe in the fall of 1914. He volunteered for service and spoke no English at the time. He had been one of a hundred young native men in the area to enlist and head over to France.

In time he learned to speak very good English and he and his comrades would feel the sting of racism behind their front lines from fellow non native soldiers. At the front lines however George and the other Ojibwa warriors were admired for their fearlessness in battle.

George won respect for his bravery in the 52nd Canadian Light Infantry Battalion. Being a hunter he was a well trained sniper and was able to "take out" enemy positions that might pin down their unit.

He became highly decorated for his bravery and after the war settled back in the Thunder Bay area resuming his ancestral ways.

He rarely spoke of his war efforts but people close to him knew of his sadness of the lack of respect shown at the time to him and all native





Canadians who fought bravely for Canada in the Great War. That restitution to injustice would come years after his passing.

We of today honour the courage of those young native Canadians who volunteered and those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for Canada.



Doctors Play an Important Role in War

It was the evening of August 12/1915 and I had recently graduated from medical school and was looking forward to working along side my father at his medical practice in Hamilton, Ontario. I had just married my childhood sweetheart Christine and it appeared that I would not be joining my father as planned. I would be heading over to France as a much needed doctor in a medical station close to the front lines of battle. I had been given orders to leave for France in one week, not much time for a honeymoon with Christine.

I set sail from Canada on August 19/1915 and sailed into Southampton, a port city at the south end of England. I received my orders there and arrived at the front by mid September.

I never knew what horror was until I arrived in France. Young men praying not to die, some had lost limbs, some their insides lay bleeding outside of their bodies. I knew that I could not help them all and some of these men were destined to die, here on this blood soaked battlefield in northern France.

I had to be strong, stronger than I had never been before in my life. I had to show leadership with the other doctors and nurses and compassion for the sick and injured. That was the toughest test of my life.

I am retired now and living in British Columbia. Not a day goes by without experiencing flashbacks of those frightening days during the Great War. This "Great War" was to be the war to end all wars; I think that was a very naïve thought, even though an excellent one. Time only showed us that conflicts would still arise and civilians and military personnel would pay the ultimate price, their lives.





A Letter from a Soldier to His Brother



Dear brother,

My hands feel so cold and numb, and my stomach aches for food to fill its eternal void. Here I have to fight the rats that want me for their breakfast. My thoughts of huddling close to the woodstove at our home send shivers down my already rigid spine.

Do you remember how I used to curse the rooster when he woke us from our sound sleep at 6:00 am? How I would trade this living hell for that and a few hours sleep, compared to this background of continuous bombardment by enemy forces. The noise is deafening and sends us close to the state of madness. I would give my fortune, if I had one night of sound sleep, dry sheets and a warm room.

Dear brother do not think of glory when you think of me and where I am. I would rather you think of how glorious it would be to be home with you.

God bless to you, your loving brother.

This date of Sept 15/1915.



Desertion



I was a big, strong boy when I signed up in 1915 to go over to France to fight the Germans. I told those men at the recruiting center I was nineteen but I was only sixteen years of age. I didn't have much life experience and had never ventured far from our family farm.

I trained in Hamilton for a few months before boarding the train to Halifax. From there a troop ship carried us across the Atlantic to England. I had more training in the south of England. When it was time for us to be sent to the front lines we sailed across the English Channel to France.

When we arrived in France things looked fairly normal until we got closer to the front lines of battle. Then things became very frightening and the reality of war started to sink into my every thought.

The first night we arrived to our trench, I stepped into it and saw skulls and half buried bodies scattered in the endless mud. The stench was so strong I had to put a cloth over my face. The enemy cannons were bombarding us at the very same time our guns were returning our own deadly fire. The noise was so deafening and I felt so sick to my stomach I ran out of the trench. I looked in all directions to see if anyone could see me and I saw no one. I had noticed a farm house on the way to the trenches. By moonlight I saw the house and ran in that direction. When I got to the open doorway I dove inside and lay on the dusty floor crying for





my Mother. Just before the sun came up the next morning I moved on to the next farmhouse about three kilometers away.

At the time I didn't know what the word desertion meant but in some eyes that is what I was doing. I ran away and had no plan to return to the front. I was able to remain undetected for four days until a British soldier discovered me and returned me to my unit. I was charged and found guilty of deserting my post and sentenced to death by firing squad.

On the day of my execution I was tied to a post and had a blindfold placed over my eyes. I was asked if I had any last words, and I replied "I am too young to die, I am only sixteen years old."

There was no mercy and the crack of six rifles was the last sound I heard. I was pronounced lifeless at 6:10 am, September 24/1915. My family would be notified in an official telegram sometime in the following weeks.

I didn't think I was a deserter, but someone who thought he was a man but in reality, a boy judged as a man.

(During World War One, 23 Canadian soldiers were executed for desertion.)



Mother's Dear Sons

The war had been declared by Britain against Germany.

Here in Canada, my fear came true within days. I have five sons all of an age to enlist to fight. My sons all believe in honour and by signing up they were brave and patriotic to the Monarchy. This was their way to see the world on the other side of the Atlantic.

I remember kissing and holding them all and sharing tears as they boarded the train in Toronto.

In the first year I received very light hearted and encouraging news, about them and their health in their letters. As time went on their letters became very sad and I felt their pain and anguish living in the deep muddy trenches in France.

Then one day I received a letter in the spring of 1915 that my eldest boy John was missing in action at Vimy Ridge. My heart fell to the floor as I cried for Johnny.

Later in the same week I had a visit from the military and the soldier explained how my son lost his life. John attacked and destroyed a German machine gun placement. His brave actions helped to save a group of soldiers that were pinned down, facing certain death. Those other soldiers were three of his other brothers.

I received four letters from my other brave sons, not quite knowing how to share their grief





with me. They were all very proud of their big brother and the bravery that he showed and the willingness to give his life for theirs.

Oh how they missed him cried from the words of each letter.

In the spring of 1919 the four boys came home to me, one was limping from shrapnel in his lower back and another had his arm in a sling. I had spotted them getting off at the end of the train. They walked side by side, very proud that they had served their country and King, defending what they thought was right.

I ran to them and we embraced and cried and laughed together. The youngest boy reached into his pocket and handed me John's gold watch that he had held for good luck.

I was so happy to have my brave men back; I couldn't stop thinking of my dearest John.

May he rest in everlasting peace.



The Newfoundland Regiment

Newfoundland did not join Confederation until 1949 and up to that point "The Rock," was administered by the United Kingdom.

Recently I came across a diary which belonged to my great granduncle Thomas Beckett. He was a young Catholic Priest during World War One in St. Johns. There was a red bookmark in the diary so I opened it. My uncle's notes of July 1916 were very sad and depressing to read. On July 1st at Beaumont Hamel (The Somme) approximately 800 young soldiers of the Newfoundland Regiment left their trenches with only about 70 answering the next roll call.

My Uncle Tom had the unpleasant task of visiting the homes of those soldiers who were killed. I could read and feel how his heart broke having to perform this task.

He knew many of these boys and their families. His notes also questioned his beliefs. How could God allow this? He knew they rested in the loving arms of God with their fellow comrades at arms. He asked for God's help to heal the community in this great time of loss and give him the strength to heal also, so he could spread the love he had dedicated his life to.





A Soldier's Lonely Ghost



I fought bravely that day.
It was cold, muddy and the rain reminded me of
my hometown of Vancouver.

It was September 1916 and I was a proud
Canadian here to uphold our tradition as tough
fighters in battle.

I had no idea that on this specific day
I would come to the end of what really was such a
short time on earth.



Somme was the place, a place surely the devil
would call home. I heard the whistle and scurried
up the ladder out of the trench and ran towards the
enemy with my comrades along side.

I tried to be strong as I heard some of my
friends screaming around me, some lay mortally
wounded, some screaming for a medic as they lay
wounded in the damp muddy French soil.

I dropped to the ground as I tossed a grenade
into the German machine gun nest. The explosion
and screams that followed numbed my senses.

I picked up my rifle and moved ahead, I
looked into the gunners nest and I could see a man
laying with his eyes half open with his gun pointed
directly at me. I had no time to react. I was shot in
the chest; I fell flat on my back.




For a few seconds I had time to think of home
and then I drifted into an eternal sleep.



That was so many years ago and now I stand
as an unseen spirit looking at my name and the
names of others of my friends and comrades on the
Vimy Memorial in France, a tribute to Canadians
who lost their lives.

We have not been forgotten and this Vimy
Memorial in its towering stature shows us our loss
was not in vain and is also a reminder of the loss
and pain of war.

We shall not be forgotten.





Men of the Merchant Navy 1914-1918

I was a fifth generation sailor, born in Halifax, Nova Scotia and I loved the sea. Long before the Great War broke out I had had an accident that left me blind in one eye. When news of war came I knew that I could not enlist in the Canadian Navy but I could still play a vital role in the transporting of men and equipment from Canada to Britain. I soon learned that being a sailor in search of fish for the dinner table was an easy life compared to being hunted by the German U-boats.

The Atlantic Ocean was always unpredictable and icy cold. If a man fell overboard he was thought to be dead the moment he fell into the water, there was no search party, no heading back to look for him. Our ships traveled in convoys with destroyers amongst the group, to help protect the cargo and troops, the life line to winning the war in France.

On one occasion the enemy submarines attacked our formation. I saw four of our ships go down to the bottom, taking with them many good souls, some of them friends since my childhood. I'm not sure if I had the luck of the Irish that day, but I thanked God and prayed for all of them who would not return home to their loved ones in Halifax.



I was very fortunate, and my thoughts went out to those men who were fighting in the muddy trenches in eastern France.

When the war finally ended after four long years I was so happy to be a part of bringing those tired, battle weary men back home to Canada from the hellish battlefields of Europe. These men returned to the friendly shores of Canada and headed of in all directions to start a new life. They celebrated their victories and sweet sorrows with their families and friends.

My thoughts and prayers went out to my fellow shipmates, the ones not as lucky as I to return home. I will honor them by never forgetting their spirit of life and commitment to their fellow countrymen.





Dreaming of a Better World



The young lad from Winnipeg, could think nothing except the smell of his mothers baking, as he was repairing the fence post in front of their prairie farmhouse.

Back into reality; with enemy shells exploding all around him John realized that this was not the family fence to keep the animals in. This was a barbed wire fence used to slow down the enemy when they attacked. It was John's job to ensure that it was in good order otherwise the enemy could get closer to their trenches. He froze in his tracks as he heard his commander telling him to back in the trench. John knew not to stand upright or he might end up like many of his fallen comrades. Quickly he crawled back to the trenches and rolled head first into it. He sat up, cold, tired and sad.

John's thoughts returned to his family and the peacefulness of his farm. A person had to think of something other than the horror of war. He knew if he didn't he would lose his mind. John dreamt of the day peace would come and finally crossing back over the Atlantic and rejoining his loving family.

On one cool November day in 1918 the shelling ended and the men from both sides rejoiced. The four bloody years of war finally came to an end. John's first thoughts were of joy



and then of the many faces of friends that would never make it back passed through his mind.

They lay buried in the cold and wet soil of France. As he sat thinking of those men, tears flowed effortlessly from his mud caked face.

John had a lot to look forward to back in Winnipeg and he dropped to the ground and thanked his higher God for allowing him to survive. Home was a long way from this scorched land and he dedicated the rest of his life to assure the people of Canada appreciated the men who lost their innocence and lives in this no man's land.

Peace came at a price to those who prepared to pay for it.

Thank you John and the many thousands like you for your unselfish and courageous beliefs. We would not have such a great country today without your actions of so many years ago.

May you and your fellow comrades rest in peace.





Peace Comes On November 11th 1918



I swear the bells could be heard all the way from England as I stood atop my trench, here in France.

The war was finally over!

The hollow sound of the wind, blowing over miles and miles of barren land that had once been so fertile is all that could be heard.

The land with its crater-like holes looked like the moon in some ways.

Some rejoiced, some cried, some screamed in pain as each faced their demons that day.

How would we face our fallen comrade's family?

How could we tell the gruesome tale?

That their son was hit by a shell and only pieces of the man were left scattered in the mud.

We all realized that peace had been sought for a long time and life was hard to fight for in this ugly world.

We had lived life in hell for the last four years.

Oh the strong scent of the ocean breeze off of the shores of Halifax harbor, oh, how I missed home!

This should and would become the Great War, the war to end all wars.

Governments of the world should commemorate this date in our history, for all the people, to remind us that this carnage should not occur again, and a prayer for all these brave souls, who gave their youth and to those who gave their lives.

God Bless to them and long live the King.



The Battle of Hong Kong



My father would tell me horror stories of my grandfather's abuse at the hands of the Japanese in the battle to defend Hong Kong.

Granddad was a soldier during World War Two, a sergeant with the Winnipeg Grenadiers. He and his comrades set sail from Vancouver in late October 1941 for the British governed island.

One day after the attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, the Japanese attacked Hong Kong. The battle began Dec 8/1941 and lasted 18 days. The survivors became Prisoners of War (P.O.W.'s) and the tragedy became the fact that Japan did not recognize the Geneva Convention for the treatment of P.O.W.'s. More of the Winnipeg Grenadiers and other Canadian Soldiers died in prison camps than in the 18 days of fighting.

At the beginning, my grandfather was sent to a prison camp in Hong Kong and later to Japan. He and others were fed starvation rations yet they were literally worked to death and under threat of contracting tropical diseases. He went from a robust 100 kgs to a skeletal frame of 50 kgs.

He was lucky to survive the ordeal and was released after the Japanese government surrendered in 1945.

After years of therapy to deal with nightmares, and with the love of our family, my Granddad made





peace with his captors by returning to Hong Kong in 1991 on a vacation. He was able to leave his nightmares where they belonged, in Hong Kong.

His life from then on was a happier and more peaceful one.



RCAF Bombing Raids



As much of Hamburg burned in the night sky, we knew our mission was clear, to bomb German factories preventing Germany to gain more military strength against the allies.

It was very hot in our Halifax bomber in late July 1943 when I made my first flight. The anti aircraft flak made the ride a very bumpy one. After we released our payload we headed back to our base in England so the plane could be made ready for more bombing raids. On this night our crew was safe but a number of men lost their lives. I had seen two men parachute out of their Halifax over Germany and hoped they would survive and prayed for the others that didn't.

These men were like my brothers. We trained and dreamt of better days when we could return to our loved ones in Canada. We were not trying to be heroes but knew that our job title earned us that level of respect.





The Invasion to Liberate Italy and Europe Begins



I am an Italian Canadian whose father emigrated to Canada after the Great War. When I was of age in 1942 I enlisted for military service and the fact I could speak fluent Italian and German qualified me as an interpreter and specialist in communications.

I became a part of the Canadian Infantry when Operation Husky unfolded and the invasion of the island of Sicily began on July 10/1943.

We found the Italian army there and they did not present a formidable resistance. It was my job to question civilians and captured Italian commanders about the whereabouts of the German Armies. We determined the major resistance would take place on the mainland, on the road to Ortona.

We lost 500 Canadian soldiers in July and August on the island of Sicily. To minimize casualties I had to extract information from the locals and Italian soldiers in a precise and efficient way. I determined the road that lay ahead of us would be much more difficult than the landing. We would be facing an intense and well trained German army. The days and months would prove my assessment correct.

The successful invasion to liberate Europe had begun.



HMCS Haida



I can remember as a young boy my grandfather and I spending one day each summer going down to the Toronto lakeshore and taking a tour of the HMCS Haida. The Haida was a tribal class destroyer of fine British design. In early 1944 the Haida was operating out of Plymouth, England clearing enemy shipping off of the French coast in preparation of D-Day. The Haida destroyed more enemy vessels during World War Two than any other ship in the Royal Canadian Navy.

I did not learn until my grandfather's death, when my Mother told me that my grandfather served on the Haida during the war.

The HMCS Haida is currently docked in Hamilton, Ontario. It had a sister ship the HMCS Athabaskan and that is where my grandfather's hurt rested. On April 29/ 1944 his childhood friend was one of 128 men killed when the Athabaskan was torpedoed in the English Channel. My grandfather was to have been his friend's best man at his upcoming wedding to a beautiful English woman. I learned that reading his diary that my Mother gave to me. The two men were as close as some brothers I know.

It tortured my grandfather that there was nothing he could do to save his best friend.

I pray that in after life they are captain and first mate somewhere sailing in the warmth of the Caribbean sun.





D-Day (June 6/1944)



That's what the commanders called it. It was hell day to all of us.

We had been training years for this day; this would be the largest invasion by an armed forces in the history of warfare. We would be liberating the countries of Europe that had been dominated, unwillingly by a so called master race.

I was a part of the Canadian group that would attack the coastal area of Normandy, France. This beach area was code named Juno. The British and Americans would have their work cut out for them in other areas along this Normandy coast. We all knew the fighting would be fierce and that some of us might not make it to see the end of the day.

I was in the middle of a landing craft. We were bombarded by enemy fire on all sides. Some of the shells hit the water, but not all of them, some hit our crafts leaving little but pieces of metal and men. A whole unit of men was blown right out of the water. As we came closer to the beach, the doors flew wide open. We scurried out one after another. We had two jobs to accomplish; one was to stay alive and the other was to defeat the enemy and to take control of the beach.

Our men took cover as soon as we hit the beach, but to stay alive we knew we had to move ahead and further inland. We later learned that our American cousins had it very rough, as they landed at a beach at the bottom of high cliffs. The



Germans had an easier time of spraying machine gun fire across their landing area. Our troops made it inland very quickly but we had to be careful not to be encircled by the enemy by moving to far ahead of our allies.

We began our mission of sending the enemy back to where they came from, and where they should have stayed, somewhere in Germany.

The day is June 6/1944 and it would take almost a year for the allies to defeat Adolf Hitler and his hold over Germany. Hitler, the leader of the Nazi Party had control over most of Europe and North Africa. His alliance with Italy and Japan would also come tumbling down.

There was a large sacrifice made by the men and women of Canada and their allies. The shocking treatment of the Jewish people at the hands of the Nazis still haunts people of today and generations yet to be born. My grandchildren have heard about some of my buddies' heroism and have come to respect the job we started back in early June 1944 in a thick mist and rolling waves.

Victory was hard won, but there were no regrets amongst us who survived or the families of those who didn't. We did the right thing.





Soldiers from the Clouds



My father was a very proud man, a very proud veteran. He was a member of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion of World War Two. He trained in Fort Benning, Georgia in the southern United States, in Shilo, Manitoba and was later stationed in Ringway, England where his elite strike force of paratroopers prepared for the Normandy invasion (D-Day) of June 1944.

There mission would be to land in Normandy, one hour before the brigade and secure their objectives. The men were dropped 20 kilometers inland by Dakota aircraft. There mission was a success and they remained as regular ground soldiers battling the Nazi enemy out of France and back into Germany.

My father in his later years corresponded with some German veterans. Even though they hated one another during war times they became good friends during peace times.



Canadian Soldiers as Liberators



My desire to move to Canada from my birthplace of Holland came when I was a young boy. My grandfather had passed away just before our town had been liberated by the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry in late October 1944. I was the eldest son and stood by my father's side, walking behind the horse and buggy that carried my Opa, as our funeral procession headed from the Church to the cemetery. As we moved down the winding road we could hear loud marching steps coming towards us. We knew these were our Canadian friends. Suddenly their commander barked an order to halt and as we passed them they saluted to us in honour of my Opa and to our loss.

That show of respect these soldiers offered had a lifelong affect on my heart.

Later that evening my father returned his respect by bicycling out to the camp and thanking the commander personally. My father invited him and a few other officers for dinner at our home the next evening. I learned many English words that evening and that desire to learn more about Canada.





Korea, Where I Left a Big Part of Me






In 1951, I was an eighteen year old high school graduate. I was a little unsure of my future, so I enlisted in the Canadian Army. I thought this might be a way to see the world, but I knew first I would head over to the Korean Peninsula. Canada as well as the United States and other countries were involved in the Korean War.

I trained for six months here in Canada. Then I boarded a ship as I said my emotional farewells to my parents, brother and sister.

I finally arrived in South Korea and was given more training before being shipped out to the front lines in the north. The North Korean army with the aid of the Chinese Communists was attempting to attack the south and try to take over South Korea.

My first assignment was with a reconnaissance group. We went out on our first mission and as we carefully walked through the fields I heard a whistling sound. The Lieutenant screamed to get down, but I was too late. The whistling became an earth shattering sound. The next thing I knew I was screaming in agony and then I passed out.



I recall waking up in the hospital with a lot of pain in my legs. The nurses had noticed me wake and they came to my bedside. They asked me if I would like to speak to a minister or a priest.

Without thinking I replied a minister. A young man came to me with a cross around his neck and we started to talk about my family. He then told me that I would have to have both my legs amputated. I cried in the minister's arms for what seemed hours as he held me in his arms for all that time.

In a week I would be able to sit up and a wheelchair would be provided. I spent many years in therapy dealing with my mental and physical injuries.

When I was older and home from the war I started a bus service for disabled people. I became a very successful business man, married and have three beautiful children. I did not allow my life to come to an end when I lost my legs. I learned to live a very productive life without them.



Flanders, Belgium



In school we learn of the famous poem by Lt. Colonel John McCrae M.D., “In Flanders Fields.”

My Dad spoke little of his older brother Thomas who signed up for military service in World War One. Sadly he was killed in “No Man’s Land” in March 1916. My father looked up to my uncle, admired him, loved him and was devastated to learn of his death.

On my father’s death bed he asked me to make the trip to Flanders where he was buried. Dad did not have the courage to do so, so he left me money in his will allotted to make the journey.

In the spring of 1978 I went to Belgium and strolled the massive cemetery that lay in Flanders. With help I located Uncle Thomas’s grave. I touched the stone and cried tears for Dad and I. I unpacked my bagpipes as Dad had requested and played Amazing Grace. It felt as though Dad and Uncle Thomas were listening together as I paid homage to them both. I silently introduced myself to Uncle Tom and sat down. I read some of the letters that my uncle had written to Dad before he was killed.

I was greatly honoured to be at the resting place of my uncle and humbled by the thousands of other crosses that lay to mark other brave souls who gave the ultimate sacrifice to King and country.



Friendly Fire



In most wars, it is common, yet very sad to learn that accidents do occur. A small number of soldiers get injured or killed by their own comrades; this is known as “friendly fire.” This happens for a number of unfortunate reasons. A bomb from an airplane with incorrect co-ordinates, or a stronger than calculated wind could alter the course of a bomb. In the air a fighter pilot might lock on to the wrong plane and shoot it down or drop his load of bombs in the wrong place. Even the ground troops could make a grave error and shoot some of their own. It is such a tragedy but the men in battle are aware of the possibility and do their best to see that it doesn’t occur.





Canadian Soldiers as Peacekeepers

Canadian soldiers, as well as many soldiers in the world, accept active duties as peacekeepers in the troubled spots on the earth. Their skill to maintain peace between opposing sides may have arisen from an imbalance due to local or regional disputes.

Our soldiers go to these places often facing the risk of being injured or killed as they try to maintain stability as they help in some cases to rebuild a countries' government into a more democratic one. They may also help to protect a minority group of people in a particular country, or to separate feuding groups from one another. Peacekeepers assist in the dismantling of land mines that were left hidden in the ground. They were meant to injure or kill the enemy soldiers but often their victims would be the civilian population, many of them young children.

Canadian soldiers are well respected throughout the world. Our government participates as much as possible in our commitment to the United Nations efforts to maintaining stability in the troubled spots in the world.

We need to remember that this has not been without cost. Canada has lost in battle and sickness a number of good soldiers while taking part in these UN missions.



1st Book of Remembrance

Living in Newmarket, Ontario it should take us about five hours to make the trip to Ottawa by car. We are going to visit the Memorial Chamber that is located in the Peace Tower at the House of Commons in the downtown of our capital city. In the Memorial Chamber lay the 7 Books of Remembrance of Canadians who fought and lost their lives in six wars.

We are off to view page 170 of the 1st Book of Remembrance which lists those soldiers who died in World War One. A page is turned every day and we were able to know when my great uncle Charles Alfred Swarbrick who died on Sept 15/1916 at the Somme would be showing.

His name is also inscribed on the Vimy Memorial in France, sadly though like many of his comrades his body was never recovered.

The 1st book contains 66,000 names and took 11 years to complete in 1942. To see the books in person or view the page on the internet website you may be the first of your family to view these important links to our loved ones past.

These books are touching and respectful in remembering our loved ones.





The War on Terrorism



I received a letter from my cousin Anthony last week. He is a military engineer attached to the Royal Canadian Regiment serving in Kandahar, Afghanistan. It is his job to clear land lines that were set by the Taliban fighters to hamper efforts of the Coalition forces. They are also there to eliminate the breeding grounds for the Al Qaeda terrorist organization that showed their destructive capabilities on September 11th/2001.

Anthony is emotional in his description of citizens in Kabul where he saw people missing limbs and lifeless bodies decaying along the streets, victims of sectarian violence.

He also says of the new fear that Canadian soldiers have not seen before, suicide bombers. Anthony described a situation where a car traveling at a high speed moved closer and closer towards a Canadian check point. By loudspeaker an officer screamed in Afghan to halt but the car kept racing forward. The officer ordered his men to shoot the vehicle and it exploded with the same power of heavy explosives. The car and driver were clearly on a mission of suicide and murder.

Anthony signed off his letter with love but asked me not to share his fears with his parents and mine.



Women's Roles have changed.



My granddaughter Annie received her papers last week informing her that her Battalion was heading to Afghanistan at the end of the month. I asked her over for lunch so we could share some special time together.

My Mother had served in England during the Second World War as part of the Canadian Women's Army Corps as a clerical worker.

I sat with Annie that Sunday afternoon showing her the many photos my Mother had taken and let her read the diary my Mom had so fondly kept.

It would be different for my sweet Annie as she was part of the 1st Battalion, PPCLI and would be in combat, attempting to locate and eliminate pockets of insurgents.

Annie knew that this was a dangerous situation for all soldiers' men or women. The trust and respect of soldiers had grown since the earlier years of integration.

We talked for many hours and then Annie had to leave. I gave her my Mother's golden locket to wear around her neck for good luck.

Annie is very proud to serve Canada and I am very proud of her too.





Yukon

The Yukon,
 home to the last great gold rush.
 If you want to enjoy
 peaceful nights
 but short summer months,
 you will find yourself right at home
 here in the northwest corner of our country.
 A citizen of the Yukon
 is a strong person
 in spirit.
 They also play and work hard
 representing a modern symbol
 of pioneerism and reflect
 Canada's beginnings.



Northwest Territories

The Northwest Territories is a very
 beautiful land, yet barren in places.
 It is home of large lakes
 and many animals that roam these
 open spaces.
 A person must show respect for
 the wildlife or they could find themselves
 in an uncompromising position.
 Independence and a strong will are
 the qualities necessary to befriend the land
 and call this place home.
 The growing season is much shorter than
 other parts of the country, but the land
 does offer its own treasure chest.
 The N.W.T. is a unique and important part
 of Canada, and we appreciate the role that
 it plays.





Nunavut

You were born on April 1/1999, the latest territory to be created in the federation of provinces and territories of Canada. The natives of this northern land have gained self-government, a former part of the Northwest Territories. This place is where learning to survive off of the land is a natural way of life. This is also the home of the polar bear, the large, white, furry creature. He has pride and respect for his home, equal to that of his native Inuit neighbours.



British Columbia

British Columbia,
 “God’s country,” indeed.
 You include in your resume,
 the breathtaking Rocky Mountains.
 Your fishermen cast
 their nets and traps.
 We are amazed at
 the feat of the salmon
 as they head towards
 their sacred breeding grounds.
 B.C.,
 home to many
 cultural backgrounds,
 all proudly declaring
 their pride in living here.





Alberta

You lay
 at the foothills of
 The Rocky Mountains.
 Pride comes from
 your beef cattle and
 wheat products.
 Pump jacks work day and night
 to bring the oil our
 country and world needs.
 Albertans,
 are a very proud people
 whose ancestors brought
 next to nothing
 yet created absolutely everything.



Saskatchewan

If you ever
 take a drive out west,
 remember that Saskatchewan
 may have you imagine
 what life might have been for
 Christopher Columbus.
 You will not drive off
 the end of the earth.
 The earth is very round but
 does not seem so in this province.
 Farming fuels the economy
 of this prairie province.
 The people are very easy going
 and worry more about the changes
 in weather than the crime wave that
 seems to plague other areas like a disease.
 Saskatchewan is the bread basket of
 our land and we should be grateful
 for all of their hard, back breaking
 work providing Canada with top notch crops
 for our tables and tables around the world.
 Thank you Saskatchewan!





Manitoba

If I dare come to visit
in January without my parka
and winter boots
I would be quite foolish.

On the other hand,
if I came to visit you in the summer
I would find your plentiful lakes and streams
in need of my fishing gear and mosquito spray.

Winnipeg is the capital
of the province and inside
the parliament buildings lie
fierce sculptures of lions guarding
the integrity of all Manitobans.

In northern Manitoba,
on the shores of Hudson Bay
we can find the guardians of the cold north.
He is dressed in thick white fur.
The polar bear presides over the north
as no other creature.

Manitoba at a glance shows
how different people and animals
can co-exist
by sharing this beautiful land.



Ontario

Ontario,
is considered the engine
that drives Canada's economy.
Why they call Toronto Hogtown,
is something of a mystery to me.
The C.N. Tower,
Niagara Falls,
The Great Lakes,
Ontario has many wonderful things to see.
Ford, Chrysler and General Motors finds
this a good place to make
and market their vehicles.
Ontario has the Maple Leafs and Senators
with devoted fans, the Leafs haven't
won the Stanley Cup since 1967.
Ontario is a great
place to work and play.





Quebec

Quebec,
 you make Canadians appreciate
 a different way of life.
 Most young Canadians learn the
 French language in school.
 Old Quebec City,
 has a beauty of people
 and architecture, with a history
 protected for all of us to enjoy.
 During the winter we can visit
 the spectacular Carnival
 with all of its trappings.
 Speaking of trappings,
 a lot of the early Quebecois
 blazed the rivers and trails of Canada
 in search of furs and other trade with
 the native people.
 Bonjour!
 To all the people of Quebec.



New Brunswick

While passing through
 from the east or the west,
 New Brunswick
 is very picturesque.
 When you get close
 to the border of Quebec,
 you may converse
 in both of Canada's
 official languages.
 New Brunswick is one of
 the original provinces to join
 Confederation in 1867.
 The people have always placed
 others in high consideration.





Nova Scotia

Beautiful, beautiful
 Nova Scotia.
 In the summertime the
 many fields are painted blue
 with tasty blueberries.
 The fishermen are busy laying
 their traps, pulling nets is where it's at.
 People come from all across the
 country and the world to
 take in your beauty and hospitality.
 A look at Peggy's Cove,
 a drive along the Cabot Trail
 or having a feast of clams in Digby.
 Nova Scotia (New Scotland)
 you have much to see and
 offer plenty to do.



Prince Edward Island

P.E.I.,
 we know you
 for your spuds.
 But many now come to
 admire your bridge,
 linking your isle to the mainland.
 P.E.I. was the host
 of many of the early
 talks to unite the first provinces,
 without you, there might not have
 been a July first celebration.
 The people of this small
 province are very friendly
 and enjoy the visits to their isle.
 The beautiful home of Anne of
 Green Gables is a reflection
 of the people's warmth.
 P.E.I. is a fine place to hang
 up your hat and make you
 feel right at home.





Newfoundland and Labrador

It took a much longer time
for the people of “The Rock”
to join Confederation
to become Canada’s 10th province.
The year was 1949 when the people
decided to be more a part
of Canada than the United Kingdom.
Many trails wind through
the rugged coastline
bringing tourists from all
parts of Canada and the globe.
There are many jokes told
about Newfoundlanders (Newfies),
and a dog with that namesake.
The Grand Banks supply Canada
with many types of fish for our tables.
Canadians are happy that Newfoundland
and Labrador came on board in ’49.
Welcome aboard!



*“Thoughts of Our Canadian Soldiers
at War” (2008 edition) has new stories added
showing additional theatres of battle and
different groups within our cultural make up
who have contributed to make Canada what
it is today.*

*This book is meant to pay tribute to the
end of The Great War that demonstrated the
courage and strength of Canada as a young
nation. On November 11/2008, 90 years
have gone by since the guns fell silent after
4 bloody years of trench warfare. November
11th (Remembrance Day) is our official day
of mourning and we say thanks to our men
and women who gave unselfishly in battle
before and after the end of The Great War.*

*We as Canadians are proud of our
contribution to world peace and give thanks
every day in many different ways.*





Dear readers,

These short stories are fictionalized by the author based on human and historical accounts of true facts. They are written with the intent of showing nothing less than full respect for all men and women who ever lost a loved one or to have lost part of what could have been. We owe our Canadian servicemen and women the highest degree of thought, and honor them every day, and smell all the roses that they might not have.

*Sincerely,
Brian Jones.*

*Ask a Veteran to autograph
your book:*

