

“Serendipity”

Why I go to:

- The Manotick Legion Norm Christie and the 77th Overseas Battalion Club Sunday Afternoon History Events
- Terry Hunter’s History on Film Nights



“The occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way.”

- Being in the right place, at the right time.
- Pulling on threads.
- Following breadcrumbs.

A Few of My Examples of Serendipity

(From This Year)

1. Palm Springs Air Museum (early Feb 2025)
 - WW2 pilots talking about their combat experiences over Germany.
2. Planning Our Upcoming South Africa Visit
 - Breaker Morant – The Boer War
3. “Rescued From Obscurity” Am I Done Yet?
 - A follow-up to my presentation last November.
4. 80th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Netherlands
 - “Adopt a Grave” – a Morris family example of a great Dutch / Canadian relationship.



PALM SPRINGS AIR MUSEUM®

EST 1996

Saturday, Feb 8 - Museum Closed

**Sunday, Feb 9 at 11 am:
Special "Under the Cowling" Inside Pacific Hangar:**

DFC P-51 Pilot Col. Joe Peterburs, USAAC (Ret) and DFC Mosquito Pilot Flight Lieutenant Colin S. Bell, Royal Air Force will talk about their combat experiences over Germany during World War II.

Also on display will be a de Havilland DH.98 Mosquito Courtesy of Flying Heritage & Combat Armor Museum and the PSAM's 1-1 full scale replica of the first operational jet fighter the ME-262.

This very special presentation is included with Museum admission.

By T

During our visit to Vegas and Palm Springs in February, we found out that the Palm Springs Air Museum had a special event involving some elderly WW2 pilots who were going to talk about their combat experiences over Germany in WW2. You could not keep me away.

100 YEARS OF NAVAL AVIATION

AIRSHIPS
IN
WW II

A collage of historical photographs and text related to airships in WWII. It includes images of rigid airships like the USS Akron and USS Macon, as well as lighter-than-air balloons used for observation and bombing. Text snippets provide details about their operations and the challenges they faced.



A row of framed historical documents and photographs. From left to right: a newspaper clipping titled 'JAPAN'S FLEET CRIPPLED, DRIVEN BACK AT MIDWAY'; a photograph of a ship at sea; a document titled 'THE RCAF IN THE ALEUTIAN CAMPAIGN: 1942 - 1943'; and a portrait of a man in a military uniform.

JAPANESE AT MIDWAY SMASHED
The Japanese fleet, after a series of successes in the Pacific, was decisively defeated at the Battle of Midway on June 6, 1942. The U.S. Navy's carrier task force, under the command of Admiral Chester Nimitz, destroyed four Japanese aircraft carriers and several other ships.

THE RCAF IN THE ALEUTIAN CAMPAIGN: 1942 - 1943
In June 1942, the Japanese launched an attack on the Aleutian Islands. The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) played a crucial role in the defense of these islands, conducting numerous bombing missions against Japanese forces.

BLAINE MACK 1924 - 2024
A portrait of Blaine Mack, a man in a military uniform, with text indicating his lifespan from 1924 to 2024.



P-51 Pilot Col. Joe Peterburs, USAAC (Ret) is 100 years old (born in 1925).

Joe told us how, in April 1945, he was escorting 450+ B-17s near Berlin, and was shot down by ground fire and had to bail out over Germany. He was attacked by local German farmers, but was “saved” by a Luftwaffe pilot on a motorcycle. POW Joe was marched to Stalag III. He escaped and was picked up by a Russian Tank column.



Joe also told us he returned to New York in June 1945, right after the war ended, and got married. Despite his 49 combat missions and 269 combat hours, he told us he had to get his mother's permission to get married since he was under 21 years of age!

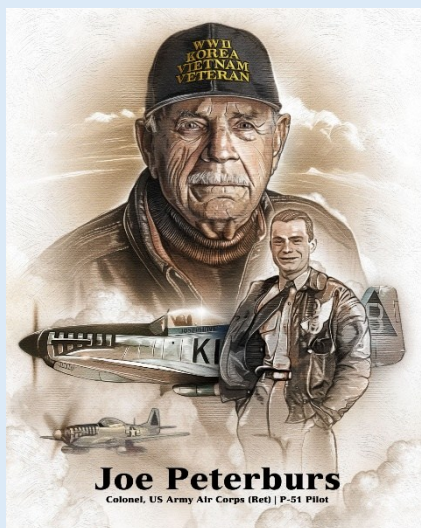
P-51 Pilot Col. Joe Peterburs, USAAC (Ret).

According to Joe's Bio, in addition to his WW2 service, he also:

- Flew 76 missions over North Korea, and was wounded.
- In 1954, participated in an Atomic bomb test in Nevada (in an observation trench).
- In 1955, ejected from a T-33 which was on fire.
- In the 1950's, served in Newfoundland, then in NORAD Headquarters in the 1960's.
- In 1967, served in Vietnam as staff operations manager.

In 1979, Joe retired after over 26 years of active military service.

- 2000 hours conventional. 2000 hours jet time.
- 125 Combat Missions. 407 Combat Hours in the P-51.
- Legion of Merit, DFC w/1olc, Bronze Star w/1olc, Purple Heart w/1olc, Air Medal w/7olc, POW Medal, ...



Flight Lieutenant Colin S. Bell DFC is 104 years old this year!

Colin is a Brit, and was a Mosquito pilot in the RAF. He survived 50 bombing raids over Germany. He also ferried newly built Mosquitos from Canada to the UK.

Colin told us he met his future wife on a blind date. She asked him to marry her on the blind date. He wasn't ready. 4 blind dates later, he finally said yes! They married in 1943, and have many children, grand children and great-grandchildren.

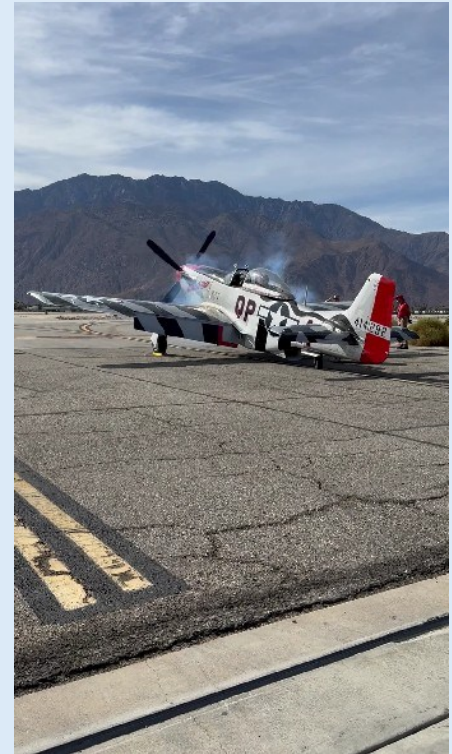




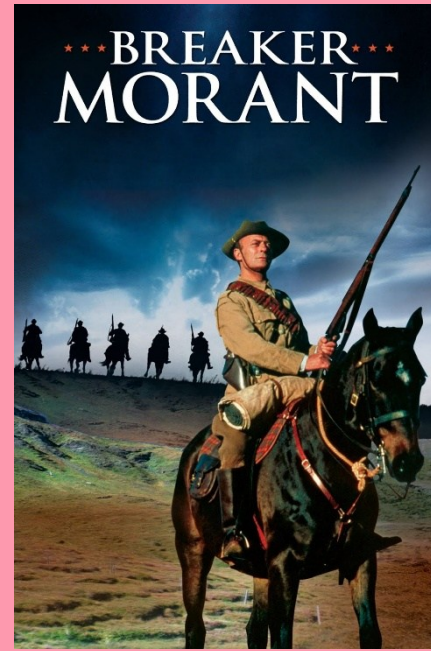
Joe and I discussing flying, and falling out of airplanes.



Joe “supervising” P-51 start, before a passenger flight.



2



Mary and I are planning a trip to South Africa later this year:

- Experience the critters (wildlife), scenery (Victoria Falls), etc.

I knew virtually nothing about the Boer War, and was unaware of Canada's involvement.

Discussions during the Breaker Morant History of Film Night have piqued my interest. I now have homework/research to do before our trip.

3

“Rescued From Obscurity” - Am I Done Yet?

Some of you may recall a presentation I gave back on November 24, regarding the WW1 and WW2 military story of various members of my family.

There is some new stuff (discovered this year)!

For context, here is a brief summary of some of the presentation I gave back on November 24.



Rescued From Obscurity
- Pte. Kenneth Allen Morris

Jim Morris
Second Edition - 2017 (Minor Updates May 2022)

1. The Story Of Three (Half/Step) Brothers - My Uncles



KIA Dieppe
August 19, 1942
Age 26



KIA France
July 1944
Age 22



KIA Germany
March 8, 1945
Age 19

My Family – WW2 Perspective Hagersville, Ontario

“Grampa Patton”

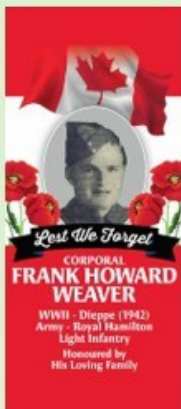
“Gramma Patton”



Dan Patton



Mary Jane (Polly)



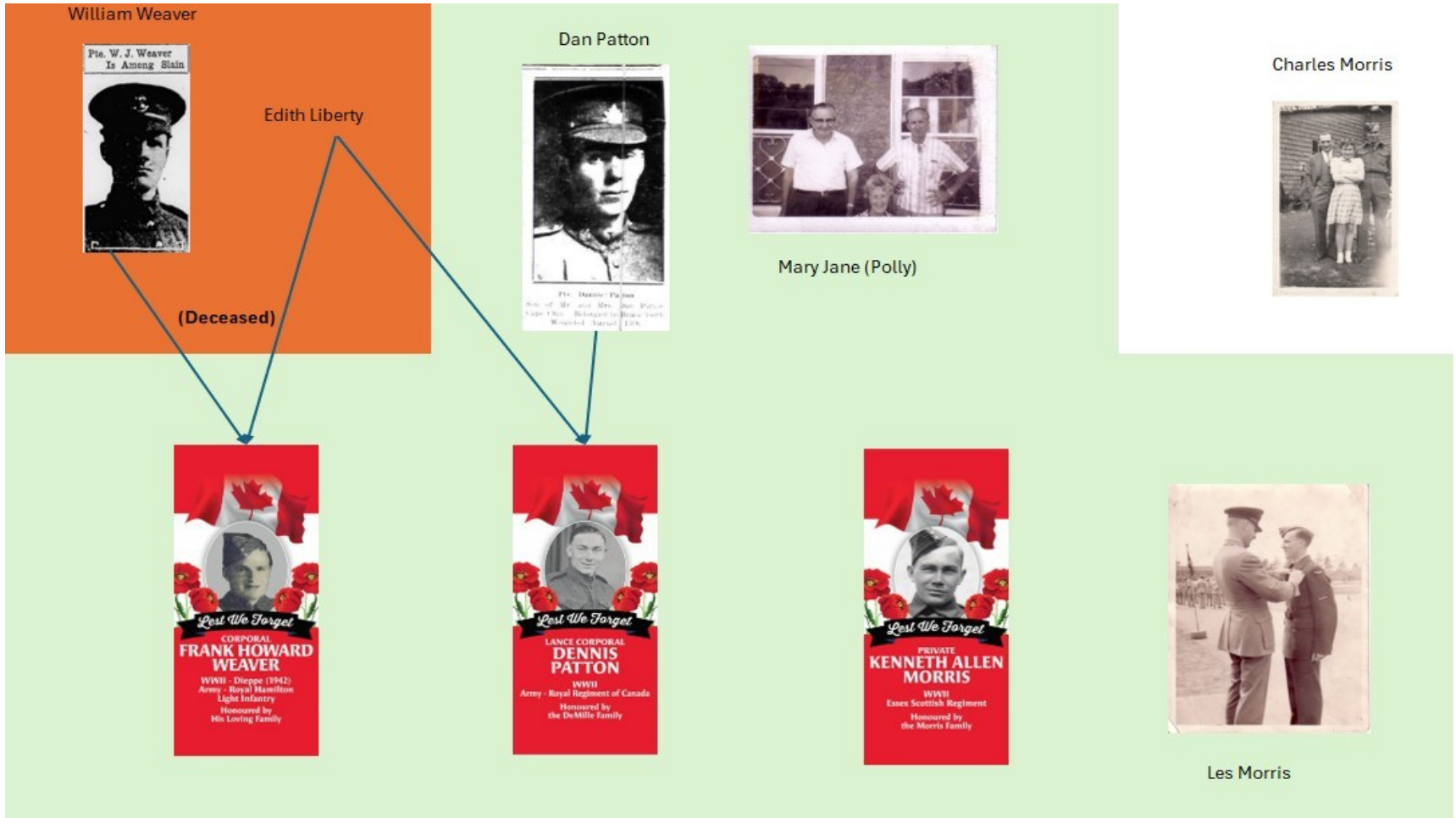
Les Morris

The Family

“Grampa Patton”

“Gramma Patton”

“Grampa Morris”




Family also included other siblings:

- One Weaver, Two Patton (mother Edith), Two Patton (mother Polly), Two Morris.


New Stuff!

“Serendipity” - While cleaning up my notes and files after my presentation, I happened to notice on Ancestry.ca that my biological Grandma Polly (Patton / Morris / Atherton) had a brother, Thomas Atherton. So Thomas would be my biological Great-Uncle.



Thomas Atherton

BIRTH 22 JUNE 1891 • Bolton, Lancashire, England
DEATH 29 AUGUST 1918 • Terlincthun, Pas-de-Calais, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France

granduncle 

[LifeStory](#) **[Facts](#)** [Gallery](#) [Hints](#) 12 [Explore](#)

Facts

[Filter](#) [+ Add](#)

1891
(AGE)

Birth
22 June 1891 • Bolton, Lancashire, England
[Explore](#)

1892
1

Birth of sister Margaret Atherton (1892–)
abt 1892 • Bolton, Lancashire, England

1896
5

Birth of brother James Atherton (1896–1962)
abt 1896 • Bolton, Lancashire, England

1900
9

Birth of sister Emily Atherton (1900–1972)
abt 1900 • Bolton, Lancashire, England

1901
10

Birth of sister Mary Jane Atherton (1901–1981)
1901 • Wigan, Lancashire, England

Possible marriage records
[Hints](#) [×](#)


1918
27

Death
29 August 1918 • Terlincthun, Pas-de-Calais, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France
[Explore](#)

Sources

[+ Add](#)

Ancestry Sources

 Ancestry Family Trees


[+ Add source](#)


[+ Add web link](#)

Family

[+ Add](#)

Parents

 **James Atherton**
1863–

 **Mary Davenport**
1865–

Siblings [v](#)

Spouse

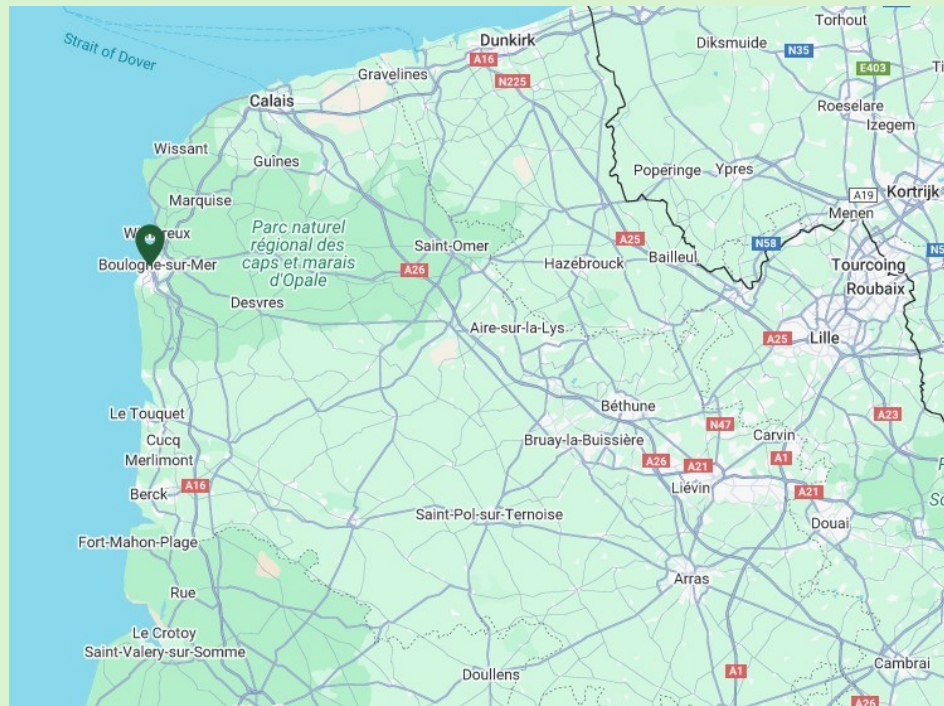
[+](#) Add spouse

[+ Add family](#)

Even though there was no specific WW1 military reference in his Ancestry record, the Death Fact quickly made me curious, given the date and the reference to a location in France.

Death

29 August 1918 • Terlincthun, Pas-de-Calais, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France



Searched, and Found Military Records

- **Thomas Atherton**

- Born in U.K. 1891. Came to Canada when a young boy.
- I found two Attestation Papers??
 - First – Enlisted November 1914.
 - March 1915 - Discharged “Undesirable”

No.	55971
NAME	Atherton, Thos.
MARRIED OR SINGLE	M
DATE OF ENLISTMENT	Nov. 12-14.
NEXT OF KIN	(W) Mrs M. Atherton
ADDRESS	23 Vine Street, St. Catharines, Ont.
REMARKS	Discharged Undesirable 4 th March 1915

OFFICE SPECIALTY 71672 2-25-15

Searched, and Found Military Records

- **Thomas Atherton**

- I quickly (and incorrectly) jumped to conclusions:
 - Deemed “undesirable”
(why not “unsuitable?” “unacceptable?”)
 - Character flaw(s)?
 - And what about married to Mrs. Mary Atherton – that was my grandmother’s name (his sister?). Fraud?
- But after some research on the term “undesirable” in WW1 context, I saw some were rejected because they did not meet physical requirements (health, size, etc.) at the time.
- Over time, physical requirements were relaxed due to shortage of soldiers.
 - Not unlike what the Canadian Military has done recently?

Searched, and Found Military Records

- Thomas Atherton**

- Second attestation papers - Enlisted again in 1916. Accepted.
- 21st Battalion, 28 March 1918.

Form R 122.
2153-1001-9-15-16.

Rank *Pte* Name **ATHERTON, Thomas** Reg'l No. **850146**

Unit **170th Bn. to 1st Cent. Ont. Regt.** If in perm. Corps }
What Unit? } Married or Single **Married**

Place and Date of Enlistment **St Catharines, March 9th, 1916** Place of Birth **Bolton, Lancashire, England**

Name and Address, Next-of-Kin **Mary Atherton**
23 Vine St, St Catharines, Ontario, Canada Relationship **Wife**

Assigned Pay Monthly \$ Payable to Relationship

Separation Allowance \$ Payable to Relationship

Discharge, Date and Place Reason Character

H. W. V., Ltd.—9545-15.

Report.		Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place.	Date.	REMARKS Taken from Official Documents.
Date.	From whom received.				
		ARRIVED IN ENGLAND 7-5-17 SS. OLYMPIC.			
		18.5 17 12 Res 10 S	W. D. 126	9.5.17 28 P 126	
		18.5 17 12 Res 10 S	W. D. 126	9.5.17 28 P 126	
4-6-17	12 Res Bn	SOS to 164 Bn	di	4-6-17 140	164th Bn D.O 3
12-3-18	125 Bn	Attk from 164 Bn	Witley	9-3-18 2739	164 Bn D.O 3
20-3-18	125 Bn	Awarded G.C. Badge	"	9-3-18 2044	164 Bn D.O 3
28-3-18	"	Leave to be attck 125 Bn	"	28-3-18 2044	164 Bn D.O 3
24-3-18	164 Bn	SOS to 21 Bn	"	24-3-18 2020	21 Bn A4
8-4-18	21 Bn	Awarded one G.C. badge	Field	9-3-18 2044	21 Bn A4
30-5-18	S.O.C.	"Surgically Wounded"	"	25-5-18 6.2.1506	SS. Head

Searched, and Found Military Records

- **Thomas Atherton**

- 28 Aug 1918 - “Dangerously Wounded. GSW Head”
 - But not clear Where? What battle?
- 29 Aug 1918 – “Died of Wounds.” “Killed in Action.”

Report.		Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place.	Date.	REMARKS Taken from Official Documents.
Date.	From whom received.				
30-8-18	60 R	"Died of Wounds" Pt.	Field	24-8-18	21st Bn 60 R. S.W. Head.
31.8.18	21 st Bn	Killed in Action ..	"	26.8.18	Pt. II 064.
4.9.18.	"	Pt. II 064 of 31.8.18 amended			
		to Read. Died of Wounds. Pt.	Field	29.8.18	Pt. II 066

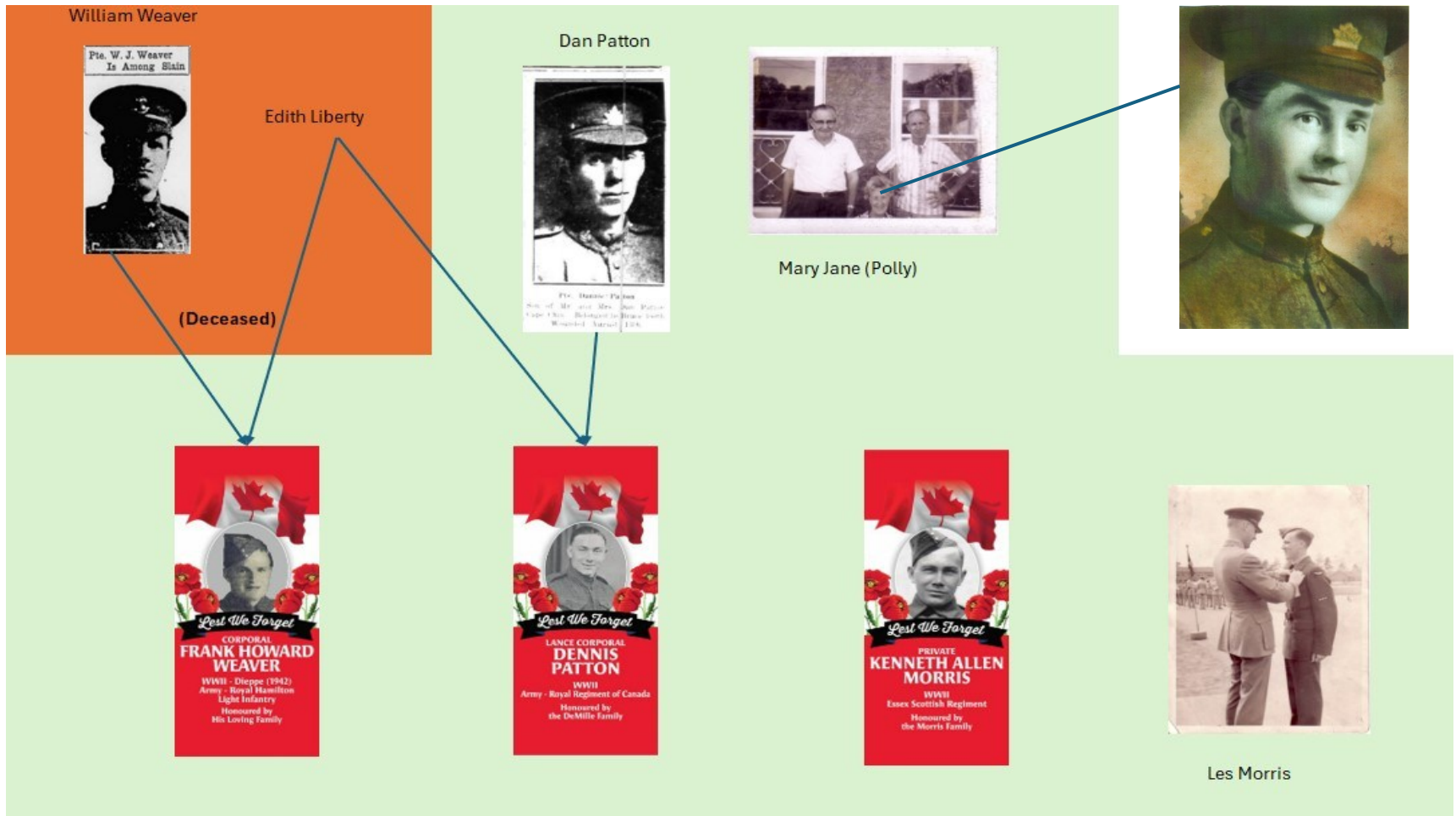


Another Family WW1 Military Member “Rescued From Obscurity”

“Grampa Patton”

“Gramma Patton”

Thomas Atherton
(Gramma Patton’s brother)
(my biological great-uncle)



Am I Done Yet?

- **Thomas Atherton**

- But Where? What Battle?
- Some very recent digging led me to more information on the 21st Battalion:
 - 4th Brigade, 2nd Canadian Division.
 - “Serendipity” (Google search (“21st Battalion Canada August 28 1918”)), led me to:

[“A Canadian Conscript Goes to War – August 1918: Old Myths Re-examined”](#)
(WLU Canadian Military History 18, 1 (2009)).

- The story of Private Hilaire Dennis, 18th Battalion (4th Brigade).
 - 18th Battalion fought alongside Thomas’ 21st Battalion.
- Contains a very detailed account of The Battle of the Scarpe
 - 26-28 August 1918.
- Both Thomas Atherton and Hilaire Dennis were badly wounded on 28 August 1918 (Thomas died the next day).
- Not only does this article contain a detailed account of the battle, it also contains details of the treatment and evacuation of the wounded.

Am I Done Yet?

Thomas Atherton

“Serendipity” - The Manotick Legion Norm Christie and the 77th Overseas Battalion Club Sunday Afternoon History Events.

- Thomas’ story leads me to recall October 27 Legion presentation by Michel Gravel:
 - “Recent commemorations honouring the CEF battlefields along the Arras-Cambrai road...”
- And also to recall Norm Christie’s documentary from December 29 Legion History event:
 - ***The Great War Tour Ep.8: The Wounded.***
 - Hard to imagine young Canadians, including my family members, experiencing that. I found it hard to watch. More so now that I know about Thomas Atherton.

Am I Done Yet?

28 August, 4th Brigade fought near Wancourt, East of Arras (Sensee River).

- Arras-Cambrai Road
- 4th Brigade “had suffered severe losses during the previous 2 days, and were essentially a spent force.”
 - “worst decision Curry would make during the “Hundred Days.”
- Hilaire Dennis describes finishing his rum ration and preparing to “go over the top.”
- Hilaire then describes being badly wounded, and spending 8 hours in a shell hole while the battle continued around him.

Am I Done Yet?

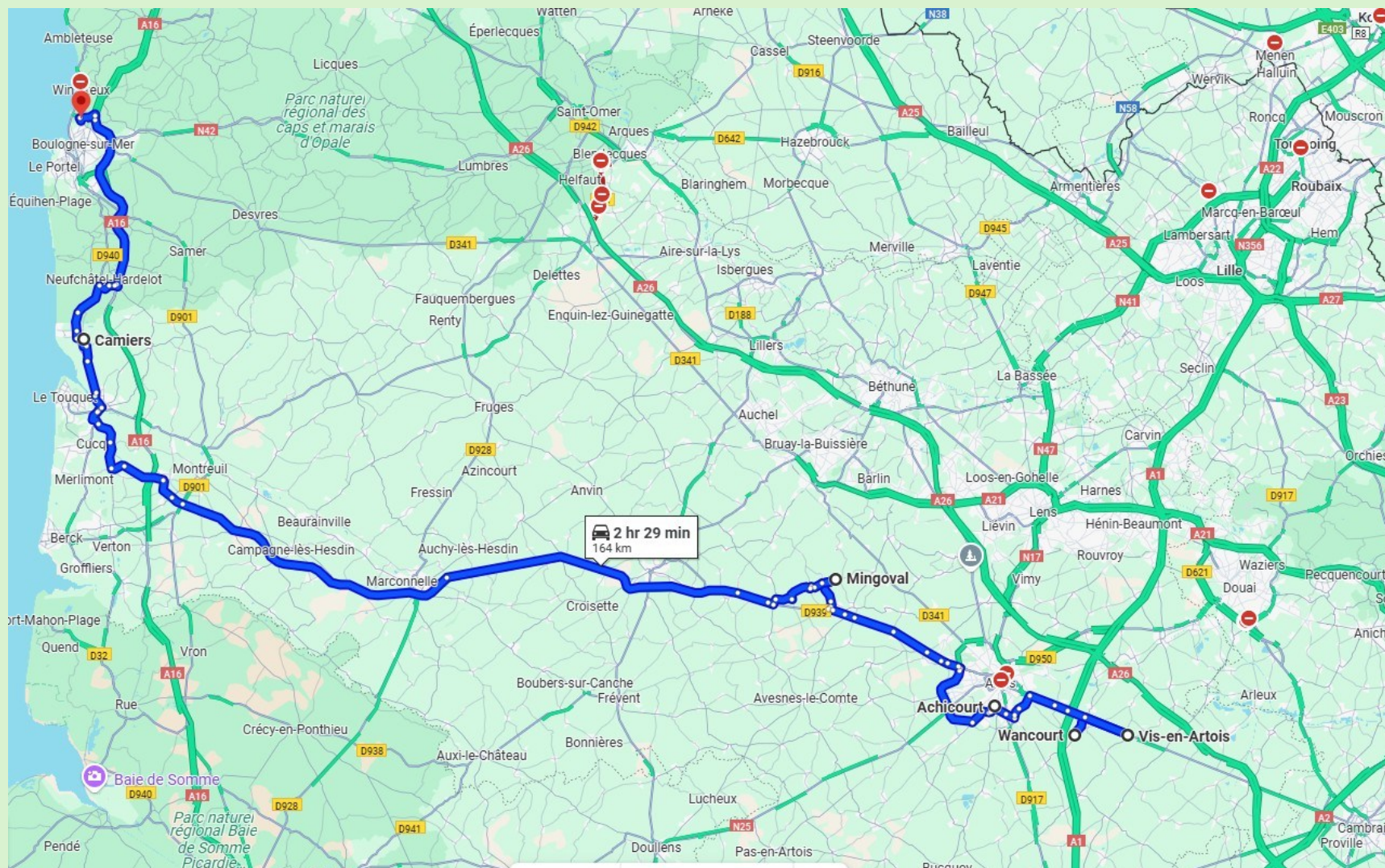
Recall Norm Christie – ***The Great War Tour Ep.8: The Wounded.***

The article then goes on to describe the medical evacuation of the wounded that day.

- Treatment at a Regimental Aid Post (RAP) behind Vis-en-Artois, and a temporary Advance Dressing Station (ADS) in the ruins of a nearby factory.
- From the ADS, moved by stretcher to a “loading post” west of Vis-en-Artois.
- Then travelled via “motor ambulance” to No. 5 Canadian Field Ambulance, the Division’s Main Dressing Station (MDS) located at Achicourt, 12 kms behind the lines.
- After wound dressing, moved by lorry from Arras to the first Clearing Station about 30 miles behind the front line (No. 57 Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) located at Mingoal, which handled all seriously wounded men from 2nd Division).
 - Here the wounded would undergo preliminary surgery to remove as many bullet fragments as possible, and irrigation to help prevent infection.
- Within 24 hours, transfer (via 20 Ambulance Train) to No. 4 General Hospital at Camiers.

Unfortunately for Thomas Atherton, his next stop would be the Terlincthun British Cemetery in Wimille France.

Am I Done Yet?



Am I Done Yet?

So now I am motivated to learn more about specific dates and places in the Canadian role in WW1:

Pte. W. J. Weaver
Is Among Slain



William Weaver (78th Battalion)

- KIA December 30, 1916. Age 30.
 - “Front line trenches at Vimy Ridge.”
 - Villers Au Bois, 10 km from Vimy. A few months before Vimy.
 - Buried at Cabaret-Rouge British Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France.



Pte. Dan Patton
Wounded in Action
August 13, 1918. Wounded August 13, 1918.

Dan Patton (160th Battalion)

- Wounded in action (gunshot wound to arm) August 13, 1918. Age 33.
 - Amiens, France.
- Lived to 1985 (age 94).

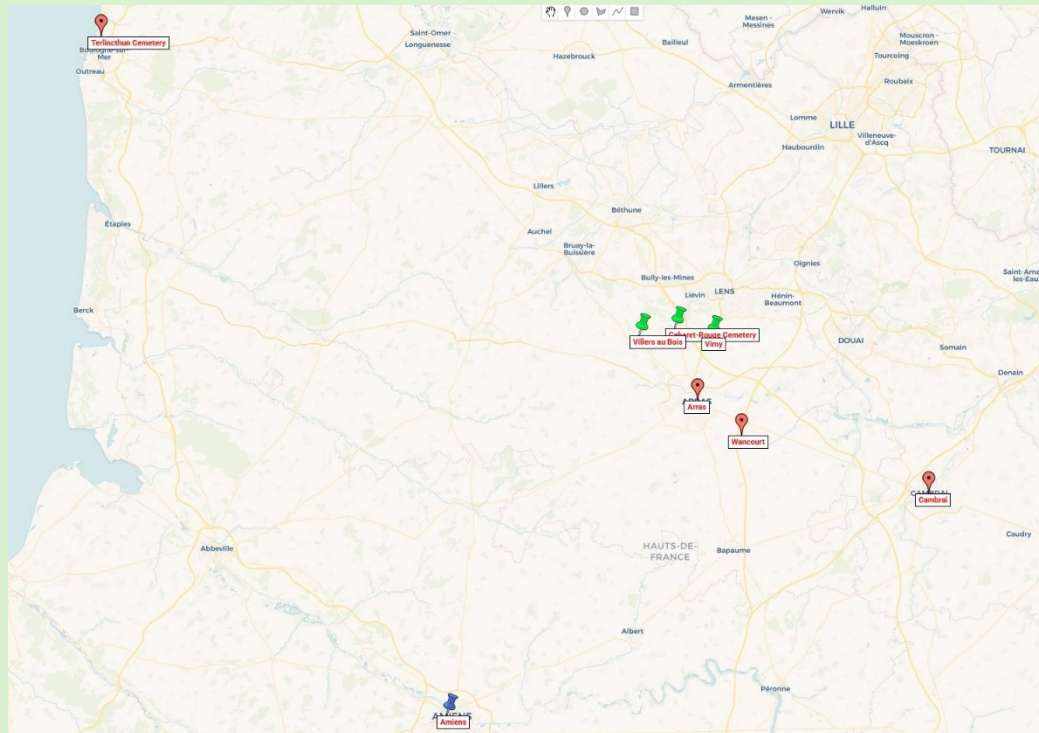


Thomas Atherton (21st Battalion)


- Wounded August 28, 1918 (died a day later). Age 27.
- Battle of the Scarpe. Arras-Cambrai Road, Sensee River
- Buried in Terlincthun, Pas-de-Calais, France.

Am I Done Yet?

- William Weaver (KIA 30 December 1916, Villers Au Bois, near Vimy).
 - Green pins.
- Dan Patton (Wounded in Amiens (13 August 1918).
 - Blue pin.
- Thomas Atherton (KIA 30 August 1918, Wancourt, East of Arras).
 - Red pins.




Back To Thomas Atherton – “Possible Marriage Records?”



Thomas Atherton

BIRTH 22 JUNE 1891 • Bolton, Lancashire, England
DEATH 29 AUGUST 1918 • Terlincthun, Pas-de-Calais, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France

granduncle 

[LifeStory](#) **Facts** [Gallery](#) [Hints](#) 12 [Explore](#)

Facts

[Filter](#) [+ Add](#)

1891
(AGE)

Birth
22 June 1891 • Bolton, Lancashire, England
[Explore](#)

1892
1

Birth of sister [Margaret Atherton](#) (1892–)
abt 1892 • Bolton, Lancashire, England

1896
5

Birth of brother [James Atherton](#) (1896–1962)
abt 1896 • Bolton, Lancashire, England

1900
9

Birth of sister [Emily Atherton](#) (1900–1972)
abt 1900 • Bolton, Lancashire, England

1901
10

Birth of sister [Mary Jane Atherton](#) (1901–1981)
1901 • Wigan, Lancashire, England

Possible marriage records
[Hints](#) [×](#)


1918
27

Death
29 August 1918 • Terlincthun, Pas-de-Calais, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France
[Explore](#)

Sources

[+ Add](#)

Ancestry Sources

 [Ancestry Family Trees](#)


[+ Add source](#)


[+ Add web link](#)

Family

[+ Add](#)

Parents

 **James Atherton**
1863–

 **Mary Davenport**
1865–

Siblings [v](#)

Spouse

[+ Add spouse](#)

[+ Add family](#)

Am I Done Yet?

- **Thomas Atherton**

- Military records identify “Mrs. Mary Atherton”, living in St. Catharines Ontario, as his wife (now widow).
- Unable to find her on Ancestry.
- But did on search of Newspapers.com
 - Never remarried.
 - Lived to 103!

ATHERTON, Mary Calder — At Niagara Arms on Saturday, December 27, 1997 in her 104th year. Born in Forfar, Scotland on July 6, 1894, she came to Canada when she was 18. Married briefly to the late Thomas Atherton who passed away on August 29, 1918. She lived a very long and quiet life. Loving Aunt of Selina and Rudy Baerg and sadly missed by family and friends.

Mary Atherton's story leads me to recall Heather MacQuarrie's presentation from the December 29 Sunday Afternoon Legion History Event:

- **Singled Out: Untold Story of How TWO MILLION Women Survived Without Men After WW1.**

Which leads me to reflect on the impact of war on the wartime women in my family.

Edith Emily Liberty / Weaver / Patton

Arguably the most tragic figure in the whole family story

Pte. W. J. Weaver
Is Among Slain



F. H. WEAVER
Weston
(missing)



“Gramma Patton”

Mary Jane (Polly) Atherton / Morris / Patton

The Family WW2 Matriarch, and “Silver Cross Mother”



- **Edith Emily Patton / Weaver / Liberty**
 - Lost her first husband in WW1.
 - Remarried.
 - Passed away between WW1 and WW2.
 - Lost two biological sons in WW2
 - (one from her first husband, one from her second).
- **“Gramma Patton” (Mary Patton / Morris / Atherton)**
 - Lost her brother in WW1.
 - Lost one biological son, and two step-sons in WW2.
- **Mary Calder Atherton / Munro**
 - After a very brief marriage, lost her first husband in WW1.
 - Lived to 103. Never remarried. No children.

Recall, last month's Sunday History Event led to an interesting discussion:



Second Edition - The Final Chapter?



“Canada Remembers” Facebook – Remembrance Day 2017:

Master Corporal Byron Greff was the last Canadian to die in Canada's mission in Afghanistan (October 29, 2011).

He was 28 years old. His wife was 26. They had two children, 6 years old and 2 weeks old.

<https://legionmagazine.com/byron-greffs-wedding-ring/>

Am I Done Yet?

- Giving back:
 - Update Ancestry.ca for Thomas Atherton, and Mary Atherton.
 - Update my “Rescued From Obscurity” book.
- Further check out WLU Canadian Military History.
 - Interesting, I had already previously found another WLU Canadian Military History article and included it in my First Edition (2010) of “Rescued From Obscurity.”
 - [“Back Door to War” A Canadian Infantryman at Hochwald and Xanten, February-March 1945, by Hugh McVicar.](#)
 - This article provided very detailed information about the battle and the day my Uncle Ken was KIA.
 - What else is in the WLU CMH?

Since its launch in 1992, *Canadian Military History* has become one of the premier journals in its field. *CMH* is a peer-reviewed academic journal published bi-annually by the Laurier Centre for the Study of Canada with editorial and financial support from the Canadian War Museum. Its purpose is to foster research, teaching and public discussion of historical and contemporary Canadian military and strategic issues.

4

80th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Netherlands



“Adopt a Grave”

A Morris family example of a great Dutch / Canadian relationship.

Earlier this May, most of us were following the 80th Anniversary of the Dutch Liberation ceremonies, including the Liberation of the Netherlands ceremony here at the Manotick Legion on May 4.

Watching the ceremonies in the Netherlands, and listening to participants at the Manotick Legion ceremony like Allan Haan, I was struck by how close the Dutch and Canadians are still bound by those events 80 + years ago.

This led me to go back and look at the special relationship my own family had with a special person in the Netherlands.



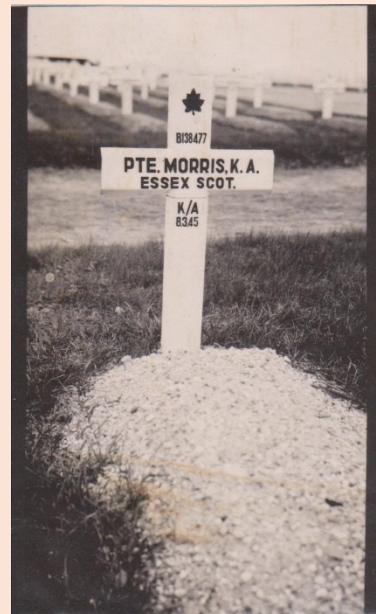
“Adopt a Grave”

A Morris family example of a great Dutch / Canadian relationship.

My uncle, Ken Morris, served with the Essex Scottish Regiment, which was based in the Nijmegen / Groesbeek area from November 1944 to early 1945, when the Regiment moved forward into Germany.

Ken was killed in action on March 8, 1945. He was 19 years old.

Ken was initially buried where he fell, in Xanten Germany. Ken was later reinterred in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands.



“Adopt a Grave”

A Morris family example of a great Dutch / Canadian relationship.



In 1947, when Groesbeek was officially opened, a young boy named Geert (Gerard, Gerry) Arts, who lived in Nijmegen, “adopted” Ken’s grave.

Geert was 12 years old.

He made contact with my Grandmother through official Canadian military channels. That started a long-standing exchange of letters and Christmas cards with our family - first with my Grandmother, then my Aunt (Ken’s sister), then my father (Ken’s brother), and finally with me (Ken’s nephew).

Happily I have the original copies of the letters and many of the cards from Gerry. Many are in Dutch, as Gerry spoke very little English.



“Adopt a Grave”

A Morris family example of a great Dutch / Canadian relationship.



In May 1997, my brother and I took our Dad (then 75 years old) to the Netherlands to visit Uncle Ken's grave in Groesbeek.

We took part in the May 4,5 Remembrance / Liberation Day observances, including the Silent March from Groesbeek town hall to the cemetery. Huge crowds.

We also met with Gerry Arts and his family. This was the first time our families met in person. Very special.

- This was almost exactly 50 years after Gerry adopted Uncle Ken's grave.



“Adopt a Grave”

A Morris family example of a great Dutch / Canadian relationship.



In May 2015, my wife and I travelled to the Netherlands for the 70th Remembrance / Liberation ceremonies.

Like this year's 80th celebrations, the crowds and the atmosphere were incredible.

We met with the Arts family again, both at the cemetery and at their apartment in Nijmegen.

There I gave Gerry a copy of the book I wrote about my Uncle Ken, entitled “Rescued From Obscurity.” Gerry gave us a copy of a book about Nijmegen, which I still possess.



“Adopt a Grave”

A Morris family example of a great Dutch / Canadian relationship.



It appears that Gerry passed away in 2021, as the last card we received from him was at Christmas 2020. Gerry was age 12 in 1947, so he would have been 86 in 2021.

What a privilege it has been for me and my family to maintain such a long-standing relationship with someone from the Netherlands who adopted and took care of my Uncle Ken's grave in Groesbeek.

Another “Adopt a Grave” Example



On September 17, 1944, British soldier William Edmond was killed during the Battle of Arnhem in the Netherlands. Shot in the back by a German sniper, his last words to his comrade were simple but profound: “Tell my wife I love her.” That day, his sacrifice became a part of history, but thanks to the devotion of a young Dutch girl named Willemien Rieken, his memory lived on for decades.

At just nine years old, Willemien began placing flowers on Edmond’s grave in the Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery. Her act of gratitude and remembrance continued for an astonishing 75 years, as she cared for his resting place, ensuring his legacy was never forgotten. She was one of the last remaining “Flower Children,” a group of young people who honored fallen Allied soldiers by laying flowers at their graves in a post-war ceremony.

Edmond had served in the 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron, fighting to liberate Dutch villages from Nazi occupation. His tragic death was witnessed by St David Christie, the comrade who had rushed to help him, but could do nothing to save him. Edmond’s final words carried the weight of a life suddenly cut short, and the enduring sorrow of war.

Willemien Rieken passed away in 2020, closing a chapter of remembrance that had lasted nearly a lifetime. Niall Cherry, secretary of the Arnhem 1944 Fellowship, paid tribute to her as “one of the last surviving Dutch civilian links to the Battle of Arnhem.” He described her as a kind, devoted woman whose dedication kept the memory of Trooper Edmond alive for generations. Her legacy is a testament to the power of gratitude, the deep respect between liberated and liberators, and the enduring connections forged in the wake of war.



A 9 year old Dutch girl adopted a British soldier’s grave in the CWGC Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery (“Airborne Cemetery”). Continued for 75 years, until she passed away in 2020.

Another “Adopt a Grave” Example



In Margraten Netherlands there is a 65 acre cemetery with 8,301 graves of American soldiers who died liberating Netherlands from the Germans. The land was gifted to the US after the war. Each of the American graves is adopted by a local family in the Netherlands as their own, and there is a queue to adopt a grave if a vacancy arrives. There is a 300 person waiting list to adopt one...

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Netherlands American Cemetery (Margraten Netherlands) is the only American military cemetery in the Netherlands. 8301 graves. Each grave is adopted by a local Dutch family. There is a queue of 300 waiting to adopt a grave.

“Serendipity”

The Manotick Legion
Norm Christie and the 77th Overseas Battalion Club
Sunday Afternoon History Events



