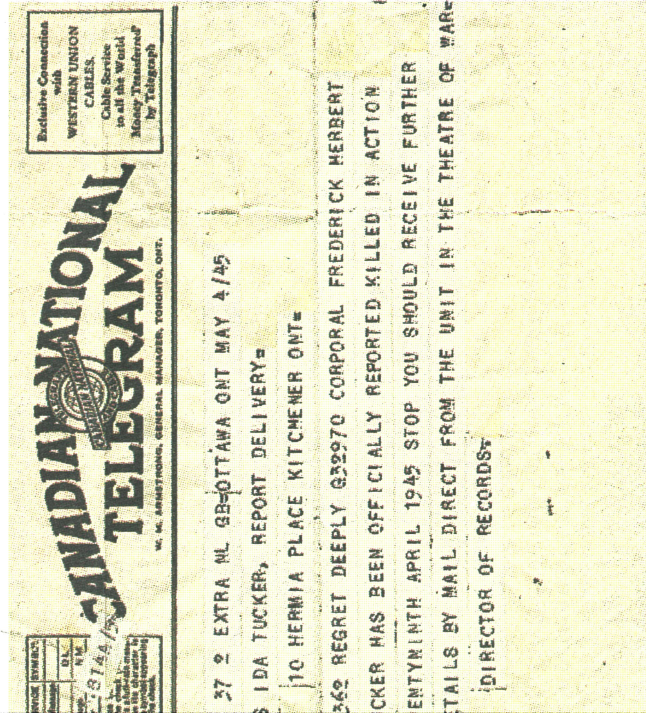


ed Tucker's mother received the telegram announcing her son's death on a Saturday in 1945. By Monday, the bells were ringing in Kitchener to celebrate the end of the war in Europe.



Angie Fritz looks at a 1942 photo of her grandfather Bill Tucker (left in photo) and great uncle Fred Tucker. Fred was killed in action in 1945, nine days before the war ended. Bill died in 1998.

MATHEW MCCARTHY, RECORD STAFF



Brothers in Arms

By Jeff Outhit
Record staff

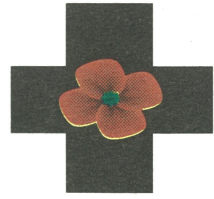
Italy, February 1945

Bill Tucker creeps forward, under orders to clear an enemy trench.

He reaches a room dug into the side of the trench, alongside another Canadian soldier. They point their rifles around the corner and fire, hoping to kill any Germans inside without getting shot.

The men rush inside to find a boy soldier standing, his gun on the ground a metre away. He looks to be about 16 years old, a member of the fanatical Hitler Youth. Bill, in combat for the first time, runs over and grabs the boy by the collar to take him prisoner. The boy looks at his gun.

The other Canadian starts firing.



Remembrance Week
Nov. 5 - 11

Bill, startled, can feel the boy's body vibrate as bullets thump into his chest. Puffs of smoke wisp from the holes they make.

"Why did you shoot him when I had a hold of him? He was just a boy," yells Bill.

"That boy is a trained killer and he

was going for his gun. It was either him or us," says the other soldier, a combat veteran. "I'd rather it was him."

This is the story of two Kitchener brothers who fought in the Second World War, and the loved ones who remember their courage.

Pte. Bill Tucker, 25, looked his enemy in the eye. He lobbed grenades at them and felt sniper bullets whiz past his face. He took a piece of shrapnel to the head; the blood soaked through his bandages. He refused to close his eyes through the next day, fearing he would never wake up.

Cpl. Fred Tucker, 23, skipped basic training. Prized instead for his typing, he sat behind a desk in an office, a military clerk kept away from the action, struggling to keep up with endless stacks of paperwork.

Bill came home. Fred did not.



Belgium, Tuesday, April 10, 1945

It amazes Fred Tucker how hard the Germans fight, even when it's clear their war is lost.

"Germany's armies are completely shattered and there's really very little to stop the Allies. It's funny they intend to fight to the end," he writes in a letter home.

"They could sure save themselves a lot of grief to give in now. Sooner or later you'll see them crack. It's amazing the way they stood up to it as long as they have."

His thoughts turn to Bill. They soldiered together in Canada and England but were separated in February when sent to Italy.

SEE CLERK'S: PAGE C2



BOOKS

Continent of contrasts

PAGE C3



IN PERSPECTIVE

Badges of honour

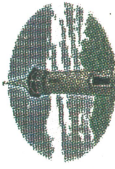
PAGE C4-5



FAITH

Battlefield pilgrimages

PAGE C8

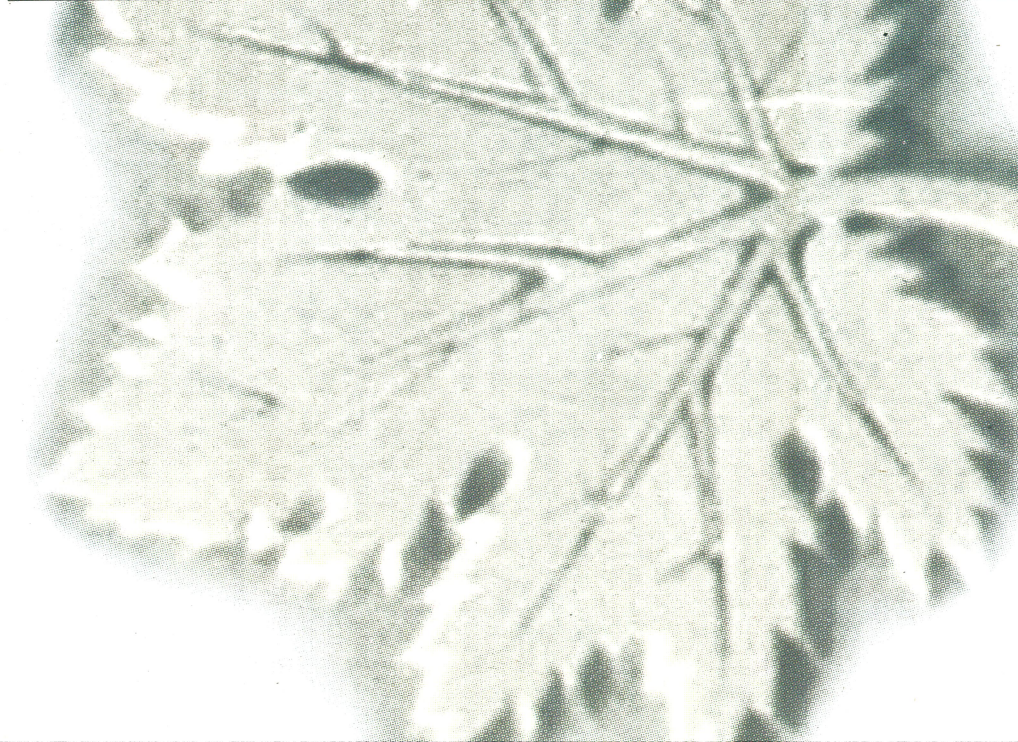


PERSPECTIVES

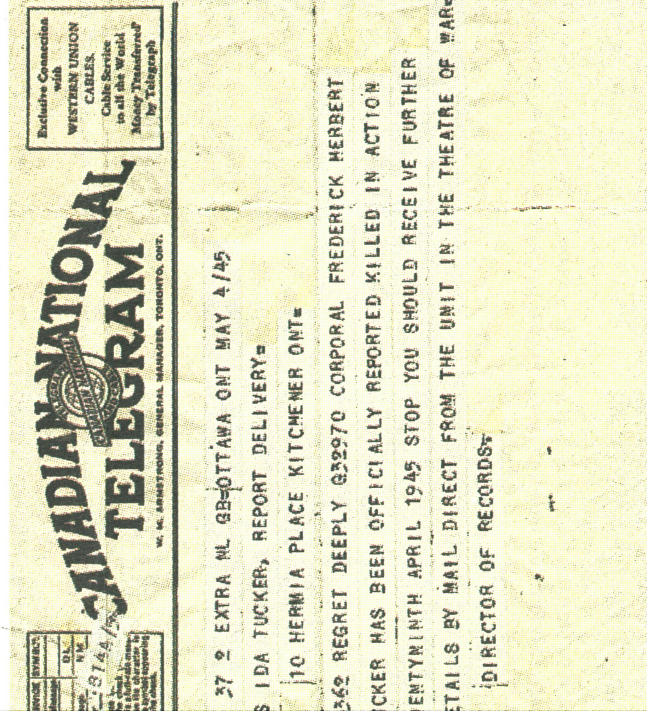
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2001

PERSPECTIVES EDITOR: BRIAN REID 894-2231 EXT. 2628 breid@therecord.com

PAGE C1



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Brothers in Arms

The last time Rita Smiley saw her brothers together was at the Kitchener train station before they sailed overseas in 1944.

There was Bill the older brother, always in trouble with Mom for some reason or another. And there was Fred his kid brother, who had more respect for some of the rules.

"They were very close. Very compatible. Fred would get frustrated with Bill sometimes. He wasn't as organized as Fred, in many ways," Rita remembers.

"Bill was very, very protective of Fred. They had their little differences of opinion. There was never a competition between them that I can recall, ever."

Their anxious family was there for the sendoff, along with some boys from the neighbourhood who had somehow escaped the army.

"You can't imagine, with a big family, a close family, the awful feeling to see these boys go, and know there's a chance you may never see them again," Rita says.

"We were very much afraid of what they were going to be into."

Years passed before Bill would talk about the war, his sister says. "It was a sad day when Bill had to come home alone, too."

Bill was the first Tucker boy taken into the army in May 1941. It was a bittersweet moment.



Bill Tucker, c.1996

By CHERRI GREENO

Record staff

There's no way Ed Mahar could have predicted his best friend dying, children being shot or a future where he gets the shakes every time he hears the song Silent Night.

If he had predicted any of these events, he might not have signed his name on the dotted line.

But on that hot July day in 1941, there wasn't a doubt in Mahar's mind that he was going to fight in the Second World War.

After all, honour runs in his family.

His father, James Patrick Mahar, fought in the First World War, he in the Second World War and the Korean War and now his son, Fraser, is waiting patiently at the air base in Petawawa to hear if he'll have to assist in the U.S. war against Afghanistan.

"I wasn't very happy about it," Mahar, now 78 and living in New Dundee, said of the day his son joined the Royal Canadian Air Force as a

See photo

PAGES C4 • 5

"I said, 'It is up to you, but make sure you know what you're doing.'"

The conversation couldn't help but remind Mahar of when he told his own father he was going to fight in the Second World War.

"I asked him what it was like and he said, 'You'll find out when you get there.'"

With those words, Mahar was off. He remembers the day he joined the army as clearly as he remembers the bloody days fighting it.

It was July, a hot day that could only be cured with a few cold beers at a local hotel in his hometown of Meaford. Mahar and his friends met there before signing their names over to the military.

It was 1941 and Mahar was just 17.

"Everyone in my hometown was doing it. It wasn't that we didn't have jobs. It was something we felt we had to do."

It was a feeling both his fa-

ther and his son had when they too signed up.

"I am quite proud of them — my dad and my young lad," said Mahar, although admitting he worries constantly about his son.

Fraser, 46, has already been to wars in Bosnia and Kosovo but waiting to hear if he has to go to Afghanistan to set up hospital care worries Mahar more than anything.

"They could come and rip that place (the hospital) apart just like that," he said. "I worry about him but I don't let him know."

Just like their stories, the Mahar family keeps their worries to themselves. Mahar's father never once told a war story, although Ed found out through other sources that his dad had inhaled poisonous gas twice. He survived the First World War and died in the 1970s of heart problems.

"He never really spoke about it. He just said to take my own judgment."

Just like his father, Ed Mahar now has trouble talking about his days in the war. He

only talks when he thinks his stories will help the younger generation realize the significance of Remembrance Day.

Only then will he tell stories of his time as an infantry man in the Second World War and as part of the military police in the Korean War.

Mostly, his stories are kept short of detail. He doesn't talk much about the loneliness, the cold or how his heart dropped every time he saw children dead in the street.

And he hardly ever talks about the day he saw his best friend shot and killed during the Second World War.

It was Christmas Eve and troops stationed in Ancona, Italy were gathering for a turkey dinner.

Mahar waited anxiously while Hilton Thomas ducked into a deep trench to relieve himself. As Thomas climbed out of the trench, a sniper shot him directly between the eyes.

Just 300 metres away, those already celebrating Christmas could be heard singing Silent Night as Mahar stared hopelessly at his dead friend.

"I think that gets missed a lot, in history books."

Holland, April 1945

Canadian soldiers are trying to cross a river to attack the enemy on the other side. But they're pinned in the mud by a German machine gun protecting the river.

At least two soldiers have already been killed trying to knock out the gun. Now it's Bill Tucker's turn.

Night falls. Bill crawls as close as he can to the river and gun. He digs a small trench to hide himself and provide footing. He digs a shelf into the bank, eye level, and lines up grenades for easy grabbing.

He starts to throw, one grenade after another, again and again, without popping up his head to offer a target, until every grenade is gone and his arm aches.

One of his grenades disables the enemy gun.

Years later, an X-ray reveals an old fracture to his right elbow that did not heal properly, making it impossible to fully straighten his arm.

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Starving but jubilant Dutch citizens pour into the streets to celebrate the end of the war.

Dutch women kiss soldiers in the street and say "Thank you, Canadian heroes" in broken English. Children hug them and ask them to share the 'chokolat' that soldiers carry in their emergency rations.

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the war in Europe.

Bill Tucker will never figure out why his clerk brother was involved in the fighting.

"That was something that always sort of haunted Grandpa," says Angie Fritz. "He never understood why he would have been involved in any kind of action."

Fred's service record, secured by Angie, provides no clues.

Years later, Bill will speak often of his brother — so often that his family comes to know him even though he died before their time.

"Uncle Fred was and still is a household name," says Kathy Fritz, Bill's daughter. "Dad always kept him alive."

Bill Tucker was granted an early discharge on compassionate grounds in November 1945, to return home alone and help take care of his large Kitchener family.

"There was a lot of sadness but never bitterness," says sister Rita. "It was a big sacrifice, but we weren't alone, that's for sure."

Bill married in 1950 and raised six children. Before he died in 1998, he travelled twice to Holland to celebrate its liberation from Nazi tyranny, and to visit Fred's grave.

Rita has also seen her brother's grave. She marvels at how the Dutch tend the graves of their Canadian liberators, with manicured grounds and flowers and personal attention.

"They'll put holly on it at Christmas time, and special occasions during the year," she says.

The Tuckers remain deeply touched by the welcome Bill always received in Holland. He returned home with a renewed sense of pride.

"They made him feel like what he did for them was so important," says daughter Kathy.

Rita wishes Canada would teach its children about the Second World War like Dutch children are taught.

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Angie remembers that Bill taught his family that it was important to defeat the Nazis. He also taught them the importance of family, teamwork, and helping others in need.

Near his bed, for as long as she can remember, he kept a picture of Fred.

Honour runs in the family

SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

Some facts about Canada's participation in major conflicts in the past century.

Boer War 1899-1902
Served: About 7,000
Killed: 217

First World War 1914-18
Served: 650,000
Killed: 69,000

Second World War 1939-1945
Served: About one million
Killed: 47,000

Korean War 1950-53
Served: 27,000
Killed: 516

Gulf War 1990-91
Served: 2,700
Killed: none

SOURCE: VETERANS AFFAIRS AND THE OFFICIAL BOOKS OF REMEMBRANCE

Clerk's death always haunted brother

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

Brothers, they were told, are not supposed to serve together. Fred stayed with the Perth Regiment. Bill went to the Seaford Highlanders. Both have come to Holland for the war's last battles.

Fred hopes to see Bill soon.

"I haven't seen or heard from Bill for almost two months. I wrote him several letters and told him I thought it would be OK for us to get together again now that it looks like the war is on its last legs," he writes.

"At least we'd be sure of getting back to Canada together, which would be a lot nicer than if we both arrived home separately."

Home is on his mind.

"It shouldn't be long anymore before we're sailing back to Canada and believe me if I can help it that will be my last boat ride," Fred jokes.

He will be killed in 19 days.



The last time Rita Smiley saw her brothers together was at the Kitchener train station before they sailed overseas in 1944.

There was Bill the older brother, always in trouble with Mom for some reason or another. And there was Fred his kid brother, who had more respect for some of the rules.

"They were very close. Very compatible. Fred would get frustrated with Bill sometimes. He wasn't as organized as Fred, in many ways," Rita remembers.

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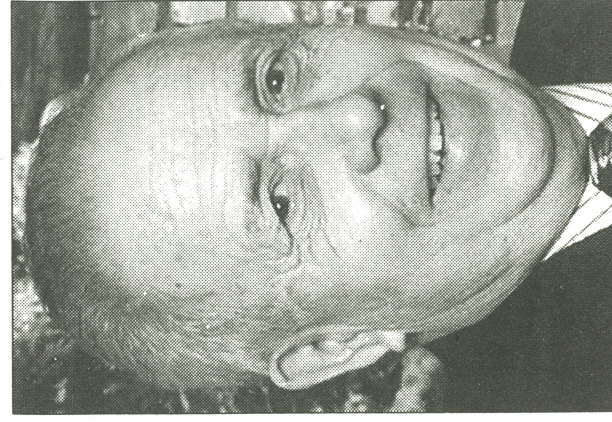
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Bill Tucker, c. 1996



Fred Tucker's grave in the Holten Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands.

He had seen many neighbours and friends depart for their service, and was excited to be leaving home for the first time, aged 21.

But he was leaving behind a family that needed him. His father had been dead two years, leaving eight children. Many of the family responsibilities rested on his shoulders.

He would send more than half his military pay directly to his mother Ida.

Bill trained in Canada for more than three years, travelling from Nova Scotia to New Brunswick to B.C. and Saskatchewan. He felt fortunate to see so much of Canada.

It was not long before Fred, 20 months his junior, came of age to be enlisted. They figured it would be a good idea to serve together, so Bill talked to some officers, pulled some strings, and got Fred assigned to join him in the Saint John Fusiliers, the first of several military units to which the brothers would belong.

The Fusiliers needed a typist. Because Fred could type, he skipped basic training and joined the unit right away. The Tuckers were pleased to have Fred in an office job where Bill could watch over him. "We felt he was pretty safe," recalls sister Rita.

The men had some good times. There was one soldier in barracks who got out of bed the same way every morning — he would swing out his legs, slip his feet into his boots, lace them up and walk away. Except one morning, when he laced his boots,

times, the girls at the army dances who thought the brothers were cute.

His eyes would twinkle when he talked about the army rules he flouted and the trouble he got into.

Not long after her grandfather died, Angie decided his stories should be preserved for the next generation that will not hear his voice.

She pored over family photos, interviewed relatives, scoured military records, and sent away for documents to prepare a history essay on the Tucker brothers, from which this story is drawn.

Last year, before graduating from the University of Waterloo, she presented their story to a conference on military history.

It was called The Story of Two Brothers: Fred and Bill Tucker.

"I think the most important thing to remember is that these are real people. They're not just statistics and numbers. They had families here. They had friends," Angie says.

"I think that gets missed a lot, in history books."



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Bill asks his commanding officer for leave to search for Fred, to find him so he can tell his grieving mother about the big mistake. He heads north to where Fred is supposedly buried. On

the way he runs into a soldier he knows from Fred's Perth Regiment who is also from Kitchener.

I'm very sorry, the soldier says, but your brother is dead. I was with him when he died.

Bill is shown the grave where his brother is buried. Fred's dog tags are hanging on the cross.

He can deny it no longer.



Holland, Sunday, April 29, 1945

The war is nine days from its end. Fred Tucker is at a Dutch farm, standing in front of a barn window.

There's a shot. Fred crumples to the ground. Another Canadian soldier rushes over to grab him and ask if he's okay. "Ya I'm fine," says Fred.

He dies right there, aged 23.

Ida Tucker will receive the grim telegram on Saturday morning. By Monday the bells are ringing throughout Kitchener to celebrate the end of the war in Europe.

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