



A promise is a promise. As a host at the Information Centre, I was once approached by a visitor who was very captivated by the text on a headstone on the Canadian War Cemetery. That was the reason for the following life story:

On December 4, 1924, a boy, Percy Joseph, is born into the Roman Catholic family Barry (father Patrick and mother Flora) in the coastal town of Stephenville on the island of Newfoundland.

He has three brothers, Joseph, John and Robert. His sister Helen died in 1932, aged 10 months.

Newfoundland had the status of dominion within the British Empire at the time and was not part of Canada.

It was therefore the British who agreed to have the Americans set up an air force base in Stephenville in 1941. It provided employment and prosperity in the town. Military aircraft were able to refuel here on their way between the USA and Europe.

After the war, in 1949, Newfoundland (with Labrador) became the tenth province of Canada.

After primary school, Percy goes to work and when he joins the military on February 12, 1943. He is a steel worker and lives with his mother in St. John, New Brunswick. He then served as a reservist at the St. John Fusiliers and therefore has had some military experience.

Percy is 1.73m tall, weighs 56kg, has dark brown hair and brown eyes and is healthy.



Stephenville Airforce Base

He receives further military training in Canada as an infantryman. He leaves a good impression on his instructors because he scores well on all tests. After training, he is deployed to the coastal surveillance of Canada's east coast.

Then something seems to have changed because from then on Percy is regularly AWL (Absent Without Leave), unauthorizedly absent. For example, he is sometimes absent for 2 days, but also once for 10 days. For that he was jailed for 14 days. He is also reprimanded for drunkenness.

At the end of August 1944 he is transported to the UK, where he stays for only 10 days. On October 16, he finds himself in France where he is assigned to the Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWR or the 'Little Black Devils') and receives service number G/4631.

His older brother Joseph William (born April 10, 1921) served with the same regiment. Perhaps the brothers had still had contact with each other in the last months of the war and Percy's life.

His regiment is involved in the liberation of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. During most of the winter of 1944-45 they are stationed in the Nijmegen-Groesbeek area. At that time, a huge army force was being built up to cross the River Rhine. Operation Veritable starts mid-February and after heavy fighting at the Hochwald Gap, among others, the Canadians manage to cross the River Rhine at the end of March 1945. The RWR moves up through the eastern part of the Netherlands via Zevenaar, Warnsveld, Almen to Oxe, southeast of Deventer.

The regiment is involved in the fierce battles in Colmschate, Schalkhaar and Deventer on April 9 and 10, 1945. For example, on April 10, the RWR was continuously in action for 10 hours, first to expel the Germans from their positions and then at an anti-tank moat that the Germans had made around Deventer. The anti-tank moat was conquered with the help of flamethrowers, after which some street fighting followed. The regiment lost 90 men (wounded and killed).

Probably Percy Barry was among them. In any case, he is seriously injured by a shrapnel in his stomach. He loses a lot of blood and goes into shock. He is still being taken to a field hospital in Lochem, but to no avail. He succumbed to his injuries on arrival. Percy Joseph Barry died as a 20-year-old on the 24th birthday of his brother Joseph William.

The next day he receives a Christian burial and his remains are buried in the Allied part of the General Cemetery in Lochem. In October 1946 he is reburied at the Canadian Cemetery in Holten in grave plot 3, row B, place 11.

Finally we arrive at the reason why this biography of Percy Barry has been written. His family wished to have the following text applied to his tombstone:

WE DO NOT NEED A SPECIAL DAY TO BRING YOU TO OUR MIND
THE DAYS WE FORGET YOU, SON ARE VERY HARD TO FIND

On a wall in the courtyard of Deventer City Hall hangs this plaque in memory of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles and their contribution to the liberation of Deventer.



Honours:

1939-45 Star

France & Germany Star

War Medal

Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp



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