

Bericht van Veterans Affairs Canada

Canadian soldier of the Second World War identified

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The Department of National Defence (DND) and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have confirmed the identification of a previously unknown Second World War soldier's grave in Holten Canadian War Cemetery, the Netherlands, as that of Private Arthur Vanance. The identity was confirmed through historical and archival research.

The Canadian Armed Forces' Casualty Identification Program plays a vital role in ensuring that those who made the ultimate sacrifice are never forgotten. Through meticulous research and collaboration, it reconnects fallen soldiers with their families, their units and the nation. The identification of Private Arthur Vanance's grave nearly 80 years after his death is a testament to this commitment. His story – one of service, courage, and sacrifice – now has the recognition it deserves. As we honour his memory, Canadians have the opportunity to reflect on the immense contributions of those who fought for our country.

Arthur Vanance was born on January 5, 1919, in Kenora, Ont., to Emmanuel (Manuel) Joseph and Annie (née Halley) Vanance (alternately "Vanasse"). He was one of six children. The family farmed in Melick, Ont., which is now part of Kenora, and later moved to Ottawa. His father died in 1934 when Arthur was still a teenager and his mother subsequently married George Henry Alcock.

In July 1940, Arthur enlisted with the 1st Battalion, The Lake Superior Regiment, Canadian Active Service Force, which had mobilized for active service in May. He gave his occupation as "labourer" and stated that he had worked driving a truck for a farmer in Bonville, Alta. His brothers Albert and Emmanuel (Buster) would also serve with The Lake Superior Regiment.

In October 1940, Private Vanance married Rita Margaret Meservier in Port Arthur, Ont. Their only child was born the following year.

In 1942, Private Vanance applied to become a motorcyclist with the regiment, giving his motivation as "Adventure." He qualified as a motorcyclist the same year, after completing training courses in Saint John, N.B., and the U.K. In July 1944, Private Vanance landed in Normandy and served with The Lake Superior Regiment throughout the liberation of France and the Netherlands.

In January and February 1945, as part of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, The Lake Superior Regiment held the line near the Dutch town of 's-Hertogenbosch and mounted patrols across the Maas River into German-held territory. In the early hours of February 15, B Company began a patrol into occupied territory. Private Vanance and a comrade set up a Bren gun on the German-held side of the Maas, helping to provide covering fire as the unit moved forward. The patrol came under heavy German machine gun fire and was forced to fall back. According to reports, men found Private Vanance badly wounded and his comrade dead but were unable to retrieve them. Private Vanance was officially listed as “missing.”

In total, four soldiers from The Lake Superior Regiment were killed on February 15, 1945, but only Private Vanance remained missing with no known grave, at the age of 26. His name was later inscribed on panel 11 of the Groesbeek Memorial.

In 2016, independent researchers raised the possibility that a grave in the Netherlands was that of Private Vanance. Following extensive research by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) and DND’s Directorate of History and Heritage, his identification was confirmed by the Casualty Identification Review Board in December 2024. His family was notified of his identification near the 80th anniversary of his death, and the CAF is providing them with ongoing support. A headstone rededication ceremony will take place at the earliest opportunity at the CWGC’s Holten Canadian War Cemetery.

Additional multimedia

Private Vanance and his mother. Photo courtesy of the family of Albert and Elsie Vanasse.

Private Vanance and his mother. Photo courtesy of the family of Albert and Elsie Vanasse.

Quotes

"The identification of Private Arthur Vanance serves as a profound reminder of the sacrifices Canadians have made in service to our country. His courage embodies the unwavering commitment of Canadians who have always risked everything in the name of duty. It is a debt that can never be repaid, but will not be forgotten. We will forever honour those who gave everything for Canada. To the family of Private Arthur Vanance, know that your loved one’s sacrifice will always be remembered, and his legacy will endure."

The Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of National Defence