



A Christmas Story of Remembrance The initial stillness of Christmas day is broken only by the gentle falling snow that begins to cover the trees of the surrounding forest and as time passes the roadways and the open ground. The woodlands create a protected place of reflection and peacefulness dedicated to the sacrifice of many. Within the woods and surrounding trees is a cemetery where one thousand, three hundred and ninety four are buried. This is the resting place of the men who died during the liberation of The Netherlands. As the daylight fades, the entrance gates are open for the arrival of children, each carrying a lighted candle. Footsteps pass between the snow covered grave markers and each child quietly moves throughout the vast cemetery to place a glowing candle before a grave. Before long the landscape glows in a brilliant golden hue across the snow laden ground and reflects upward on the names of the one thousand three hundred and fifty-five Canadians, the thirty-six British, the two Australians, and the one Belgian, men who have rested here for some seventy years. In the distance there is the sound of bagpipes that fades once again to the stillness of the night. It is now that the memories of the fallen can be felt rising in the cool air of the night to be remembered, lest we the living forget. Each one has a story to tell of life and death, of tragedy and sorrow, during wartime. The candle symbolizes their lives as husbands, fathers, brothers, and friends, and the need to be remembered even though, like the candle that burns for a time and flickers out, they too left us, the living, to continue on without them except in memory. This Christmas, I will remember one of these young soldiers. I didn't know him personally, but rather through his family, his letters, his journal, and his official war records. He was born on July 25, 1920. At the age of nineteen he had completed three years of high school, had taken a night school business course and was employed as a clerk-salesman with a furniture company. His hobbies included stamp collecting. He enjoyed skating, hunting and target shooting.

He played left-wing in hockey, half-back in football, and a pitcher baseball. He also played drums, piano, and could sing. He enlisted on June 14, 1940 in the Nova Scotia town of Truro where he lived and worked. At that time he was five feet, ten inches in height, weighed 136 pounds, had a medium complexion, gray eyes, and light brown hair. Taken on strength with the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, 1st Battalion, at Amherst, Nova Scotia, he held the rank of Private and given the Regimental Number F50171. He was a member of the Highlanders band, playing drums in Canada and in the United Kingdom. However, in 1942, while he liked the band well enough he didn't feel that he always wanted to be in it, but would like to drive and was eventually assigned to that position. He arrived in England on July 31, 1941 and served there until July 9, 1944 when he embarked for France. He was appointed Acting Lance Corporal but reverted to Private, as his request in 1943. In August of that year, the North Nova Scotia Highlanders were billeted near Steyning, in the South Downs of Sussex. Here he would meet and fall in love with a girl from Steyning. They met whenever he had leave and when apart he telephoned or wrote letters. In early May of 1944 they were married and began to make plans for after the war. Then D-Day came and he was fighting in France and part of the push toward Germany. On Valentine's Day, 1945 he was blessed with a daughter and was given leave to attend the Christening in March. Returning to France, he would write each day always looking forward to being with his wife and daughter. In one letter he would write, "At last, I have seen the big white cliffs of England. Boy did they ever look good to me. I must say though that I felt a little homesick and I couldn't take my eyes off them. When I look through the glasses I could see a village over there and radio location towers. They were so near I could almost touch them. It did bring you very close to me darling and for a moment it was just as if I was in England with you. I'll never forget the feeling I had and how sad I felt when I had to look away. To think you were just twenty some miles away from me and I couldn't get to see you. Darling it isn't fair. We don't deserve that. Oh well, someday I've been saying that for three months now, sometimes

I wonder just how much longer I will be saying it." On May 5th, 1945 the war in Europe ended. He was in Ihrhove, Germany, just across the Germany border with the Netherlands. The night before, on his wedding anniversary he wrote: "Happy Anniversary. I hope though, the next one will be much happier for both of us - meaning I hope we'll be together? Just this minute they announced on the radio that the Germans on our front are surrendering tomorrow at 8.am. Boy, are our boys ever happy. They are at the end of my truck making all the noise they can. ... I can hear German shells still landing and I suppose they will continue to do so until tomorrow at 8:00 am. So tonight I'm going to sleep in the deepest cellar I can find. The surrender includes all Germans in Holland, North West Germany and a couple of other places. In other words everything is almost finished ... Darling, I wish I was home tonight to celebrate with you. The war may be over and I can now sigh a huge sigh of relief but I'm not the least bit excited. I guess it's because my thoughts went immediately to you and our daughter. I can't get to you fast enough for my liking. We'll be moving along again very shortly. So I'd better close until tomorrow. At present, we are all lined up in the road and ready to continue our journey. So until tomorrow ... " There would be no more letters. At 9:00 pm on the evening of May 6, 1945 he was accidentally shot when another soldier was removing a magazine clip from a Stengun. The other soldier had pulled back the cocking handle to see there was no round in the chamber, but in doing so the cocking handle slipped out of his hand and the action went forward firing a round. It would be ten days before news of his death reached Steyning. He was buried with full military honours in Ihrhove, Germany on May 9, 1945 and later moved to The Canadian War Cemetery in Holten. Over the years he has been remembered by his wife, his daughter and others of his family. He has a grandson and a great-grandson who looks like him. Both play drums. On January 29, 2013 after sixty-eight years, he and the 'girl from Steyning' were finally reunited.