



Roland Denis was the son of Anthime Denis and Elizabeth Denis, née Blais. He was born on November 11, 1921 in Montebello, Quebec.

It was a large family. Roland had three brothers and four sisters.

Also four children in the family had died at a young age. His father Anthime died when Roland was still young, in 1929.

When he enlisted on July 21, 1943, it was noted that he had attended public school for seven years, was French-speaking and had a driver's license. His favorite sport: softball.

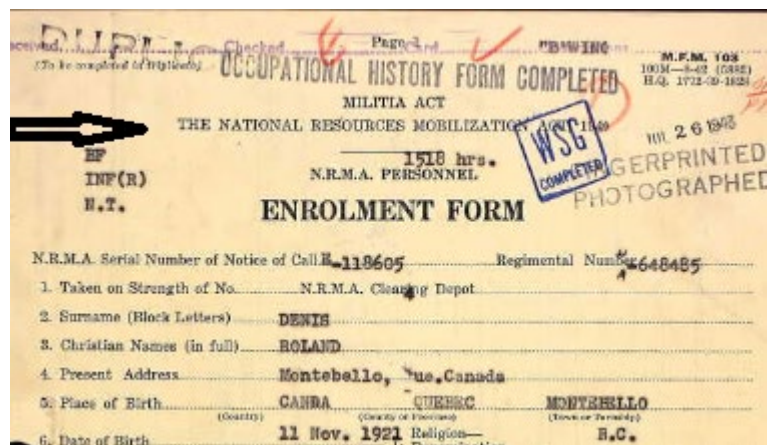
His first choice was the Royal Canadian Air Force.

His enrolment form reads that he registered because he had been called up for military service in accordance with N.R.M.A.

To clarify:

Conscription, or compulsory military service, divided Canada in WW2 and threatened the survival of political leaders.

In 1939, Prime Minister Mackenzie King, conscious of the opposition of French-speaking Quebec to conscription in the First World War, promised that there would be no conscription for overseas service.



By mid-1940, however, there was enormous pressure from English Canada for total mobilization of manpower. King introduced the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA), which called for a national registration of eligible men and authorized conscription for home defence. From April 1941 the young men called up were required to serve for the rest of the war on home defence duties.

But this was not enough for some in English-Canada, which provided the bulk of the volunteers for the armed forces. They had an uncomplimentary name for the NRMA conscripts, calling them "zombies" - the living dead, only half human, who peopled horror movies. Increasingly, there was pressure on the "zombies" to volunteer for overseas service.

The first N.R.M.A. call of May 19, 1943 applied to:

- Anyone born in 1917-1924 who turned 19 years old
- Anyone born in 1902-1916 who was unmarried, divorced or legally separated, or widowed without children on July 15, 1940.

Roland exactly met the conditions of this group.

He had worked for a number of years, namely as a "garçon de table" in a particularly prestigious establishment, namely the "Seignior Club Montebello".



The Log Château of the Seignior Club, late 1930s

To clarify:

In the late 1920s, Harold M. Saddlemire, a Swiss-American entrepreneur, acquired a site along the Ottawa River, on land that formerly formed part of the seigneurial system of New France. Saddlemire envisioned a private wilderness retreat for business and political leaders. He initially called this project "Lucerne-in-Quebec"; it subsequently came to be known as the Seignior Club.

The exclusive private retreat of the Seignior Club took its name from the French land grant system. "Seignior" is the anglicized version of the French seigneurie.

The club was only open to an elite membership for its first 40 years of operation.

The resort remained a private retreat, owned by the Canadian Pacific Railways (CPR) and leased to the exclusive Seignior Club until 1970, when it was converted into a public resort by Canadian Pacific Hotels, the hotel division of CPR.

During this time the resort was renamed the Château Montebello

For Roland, the transition to No.4 District Depot and then to the Basic Training Center Sorel-Quebec, must have been quite large.

In October 1943, Roland was transferred to A-13, an Advanced Infantry Training Center in Valcartier-Quebec. After further training there, he was assigned to the Régiment de Hull in February 1944.

Roland apparently had no objection to being sent overseas.

Roland made the crossing in May 1944. It was recorded that he arrived in the United Kingdom on May 7, and he was assigned to the Fusiliers de Sherbrooke.

An unclear note was made on June 6, 1944. Probably an accident during an exercise for the invasion, because he was registered by the 4th Canadian Convalescent Depot in England at the beginning of July 1944.

(CCD = facility where soldiers could recover from injuries and regain strength)

It is clear that Roland was assigned to a reinforcement unit on 2 September 1944 and landed in France on September 4, 1944. In October he was assigned to the Régiment de Maisonneuve.

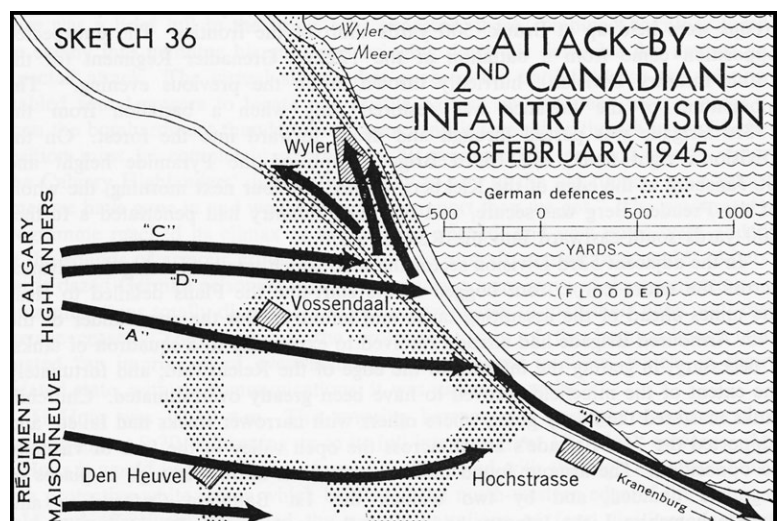
During the advance to the north, the Maisonneuves were deployed at, among others: Falaise, Dunkirk, the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal. In the south of the Netherlands, among others, at Woensdrecht and the terrible battles for the Walcheren Causeway.

How Roland managed it is unclear, but during this advance to the north he was "traceless" a number of times. He was not reported as "missing", but as "Absent Without Leave". It cost him a number of days' pay each time.

Roland must have survived the winter months on the Waal-Maas front well.

On 8 February 1945, the Rhineland Offensive began with "Operation Veritable" as the first phase. The Maisonneuves were also deployed. (see sketch)

A sad day for the regiment was the 26th of February 1945. The opening phase of "Blockbuster".



The regiment suffered 13 dead and 33 wounded.

Roland must have survived the actions well, there are no notes to be found in his military file at the time of the Rhineland Offensive.

To clarify:

The Rhineland offensive was set up in three phases. After the partial failure of Operation Market-Garden, the German units were to be pushed back to behind the Rhine.

The first phase was "Operation Veritable", launched on February 8, 1945 with the attack on the Reichswald. After the capture of Kleve and Goch, the restart was made with "Operation Blockbuster" and "Operation Grenade".

In "Operation Blockbuster", the last line of defence west of the Rhine had to be broken through, in order to advance southwards along the Rhine to Xanten, and to make contact with the Americans advancing from the south.

For this, the Canadian army deployed no fewer than three British and Canadian armoured and five infantry divisions. Their main obstacle was the German defence line Schlieffen-Stellung, better known to the Canadians as the "Hochwald Layback".

The fighting continued until the Rhine was crossed with amphibious vehicles at Wezel and Rees during the night of 23rd to 24th March. In support, 16,000 paratroopers had landed on the eastern bank of the Rhine.

The largest Airborne action in one day. The crossing of the Rhine was completed on March 29, 1945.

The toll for this: approximately 25,000 Allied casualties and approximately 60,000 German.

The regiment changed course to the north to fulfil its new mission:

1. Operating on the left flank of the main axis, clearing the eastern and northern part of the Netherlands of enemy troops.
2. Also cutting off the route into the "Heimat" for the German troops in the western part of the Netherlands.

Roland, assigned to the Maisonneuves (2nd Canadian Infantry Division) followed the advance via Terborg, Laren, Holten, Ommen, Beilen to Groningen.

After all these actions he crossed the border with Germany with the regiment. On April 17, 1945 Roland was nominated for Lance/Corporal.

On April 28th 1945 fate struck for Roland. Only a few days before Victory Europe Day, May 8, 1945.

It is not clear where exactly he died, his temporary grave was near Delmenhorst-Germany.

His final resting place is at the Canadian Cemetery in Holten, reference: 9-B-16.

He was awarded:

1939-1945 Star; France-Germany Star and the War Medal 1939-1945.

