

Dennis Akroyd Cooper.

*December 1916 - † March 1945

He grew up in South Elmsall in West Yorkshire, England.

Served in Palestine, Egypt, Arabia and France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Was loaned to the Canadian Forces, was killed in action in Germany and is buried in the Netherlands at the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten.

All this lived through in a life that ended at the age of 28.



With this, Dennis and Annie Cooper lost their son and only child.

But Florence Laura Amos lost her husband whom she had married in 1941.

Both her sons, Michael born in 1943 and Allen Dennis born in 1944, lost their father.

We could write thousands of introductions like this, only filled in with other names.

Why is Dennis Cooper chosen here?

Because the story of Dennis Akroyd Cooper has something special.

We already paid attention to the CANLOAN officers in a few earlier editions of our newsbulletins. A special group, because these young Canadian officers were loaned to British regiments.

But how special is it that a British service man was loaned to the Canadian Forces and even became [Company Sergeant Major](#) (CSM) in the First Canadian Parachute Battalion?

Doesn't that require a story?

From an interview with his father, we noted the following:

"Dennis was our only son. In the thirties (of the last century-hs) the economic situation in England was bad. He worked for an accounting firm but, like so many others, he ended up on the street. He was quite principled and did not want to come to our burden for long. Work in the mines was an alternative, but it was hard work for meager wages.

So he came home one day and told me he had signed up and was joining the military service. We had to take a breather. Was there no other solution? Could he not accept that so many like him were without work and income? Why volunteer? If you followed the news a bit, it was pretty easy to predict that it would turn out to be a huge conflict".

Dennis didn't want to hear about it. It was probably his independence that his father had instilled in him early on. His father—one of England's first Boy Scouts—had taken him on his rambles through the countryside around their hometown. Therefore Dennis had a good knowledge of animals, trees and plants in nature.

Because he was too young for the army, he joined the paramilitary police, a unit that had to maintain order in Palestine (now Israel-hs).

Later he was assigned to the Royal Army Service Corps. In 1936 we find him in Palestine, but also in Egypt and Arabia. It was already a trouble area there. While escorting a convoy to Jerusalem they were ambushed. Dennis, however, got off "without scratches".

Just before the outbreak of World War II, Dennis was recalled to England. His fitness, knowledge of nature and lifestyle were noticed by the army command and he was selected for training as a Physical Training Instructor. He was an instructor in unarmed combat and he also provided training for the "A.T.S. girls". ([Auxiliary Territorial Service](#))



Badge Royal Physical Trainings Corps



He had developed special training classes for the ladies.

He passed all tests easily and was promoted to sergeant. He had barely taken his uniform with the rank decorations on it from the tailor when England went into WW2.

Dennis Cooper was part of the first contingent of troops to make the crossing to France to help stop the German advance.

It is well known that this was not a success. If we just mention "Dunkirk" and see the pictures then no words are needed.



Waiting for evacuation Photo: Imperial War Museums

Dennis and several others arrived in Saint Malo after marching several hundred miles. There, they succeeded in getting a small boat in which the crossing to England was made.

Winston Churchill believed that the only chance of ever getting a foothold on the European mainland again would be to land on the coast. Prepared by deploying paratroopers behind enemy lines. The Germans had already used this tactic when they captured the Netherlands, among others.

The British armed forces were not or barely developed in that discipline. The sports instructors, who had gathered at Churchill's request, were asked to attend paratrooper training.

Dennis Cooper turned out to be a star at this too. He took under his care Canadian soldiers who had come to England for paratrooper training. Mutually, the cooperation went so well that Dennis was officially loaned to the Canadian Forces.

He was assigned to the [1st Canadian Paratroopers Battalion](#).

Life went on.

In 1941 Dennis married Florence Laura Amos.

England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916-2005 Marriage & divorce	Name Florence L Amos Spouse Dennis A Cooper Marriage Jan 1941 Blean, Kent, United Kingdom
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In the photo we see from left to right:
a bridesmaid, Dennis, Florence L. Amos and a witness. (Dennis' best man)



In these early years of the war, there was no question of permission for leave of absence being withdrawn or refused.

On February 14, 1943, his son Michael A. Cooper was born in Canterbury, Kent.

Dennis and Florence had a second son, Allen D. Cooper, in 1944.

Preparations for the invasion had increased greatly and the troops were consigned in the camps, no leave, no contact with the home front or outsiders. They were „the prisoners of their anymore own government,,.

After General Eisenhower's final "go" the planes, which would take the paratroopers to Normandy, took off. The highest commanders, including Winston Churchill, had come to the airfield to say farewell.

In the evening of June 5, 1944, the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion set out for France in fifty aircrafts, [Operation Tonga](#) had begun.



Dennis and his platoon were in one of the first aircrafts.

In addition to their normal equipment, the paratroopers were equipped with a [dagger](#), a toggle rope, an escape kit with French money and two 24-hour meals.



Toggle rope

All together about 32 kg per person.

The 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion landed an hour ahead of the rest of the 3rd Parachute Brigade they were assigned to. Their first assignment was to secure the drop zone.

The battalion landed on June 6, 1944 between 1 AM and 1:30 AM and became the first Canadian unit on French soil.

For various reasons, including unfavourable weather conditions and poor visibility, the soldiers were scattered, sometimes quite far from the planned drop zone.

Significantly more problematic was the presence of units of a German armoured division.

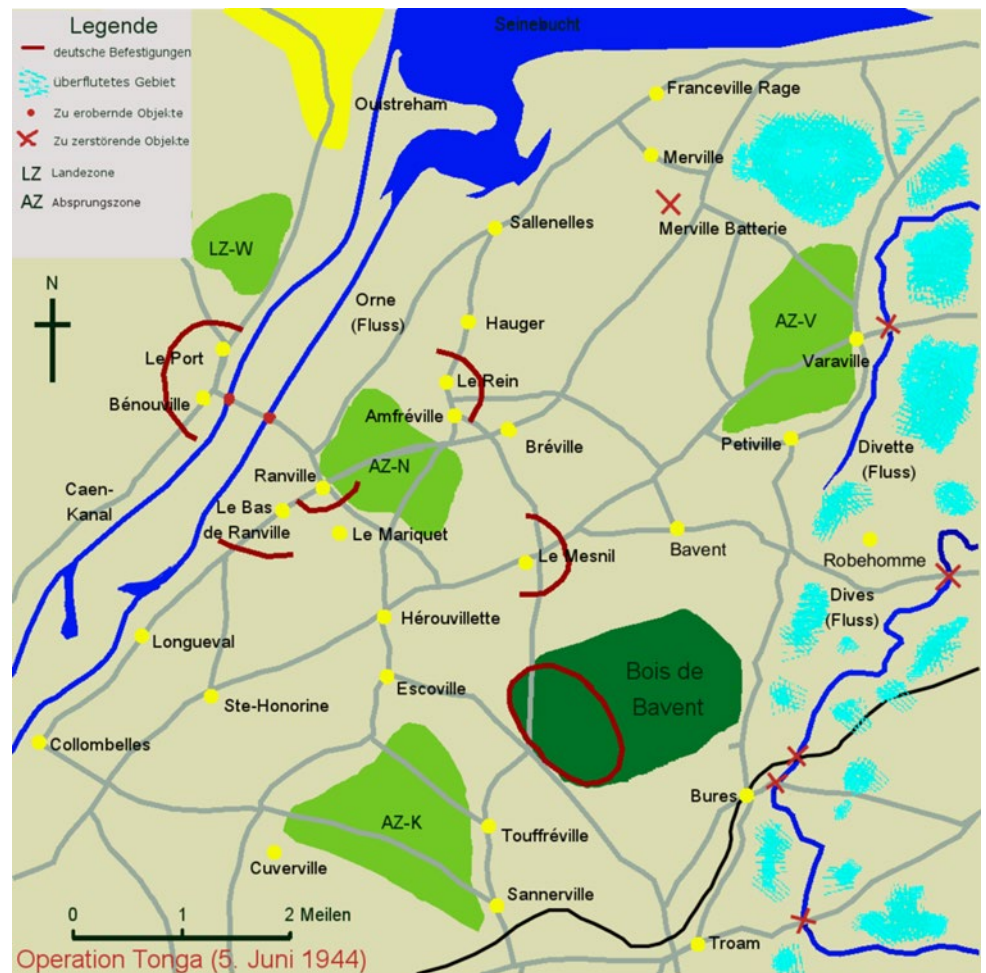
Reconnaissance had not identified these opponents. There must have been terrible battles.

This is not explicitly stated in the letters of Brigadier James Hill, commander of the 3rd Parachute Brigade.

But the role of Dennis Cooper has been cited by James Hill.

When the commander and the 2nd in-command were killed, Dennis was senior in rank and took command. Omnipresent, inciting and motivating the men, he managed to save the unit from total destruction.

By the afternoon of June 6, 1944, the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion had achieved its stated objectives.



The battalion remained in action during the advance through Normandy until the end of August 1944. 27 officers and 516 men of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion took part in the Battle of Normandy and the unit suffered 367 casualties. Of those victims, 5 officers and 76 men were killed or died of wounds.

In just three months they had built a respected reputation for their fighting spirit.

Back in England Dennis A. Cooper was promoted to Regimental Sergeant-Major of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion.

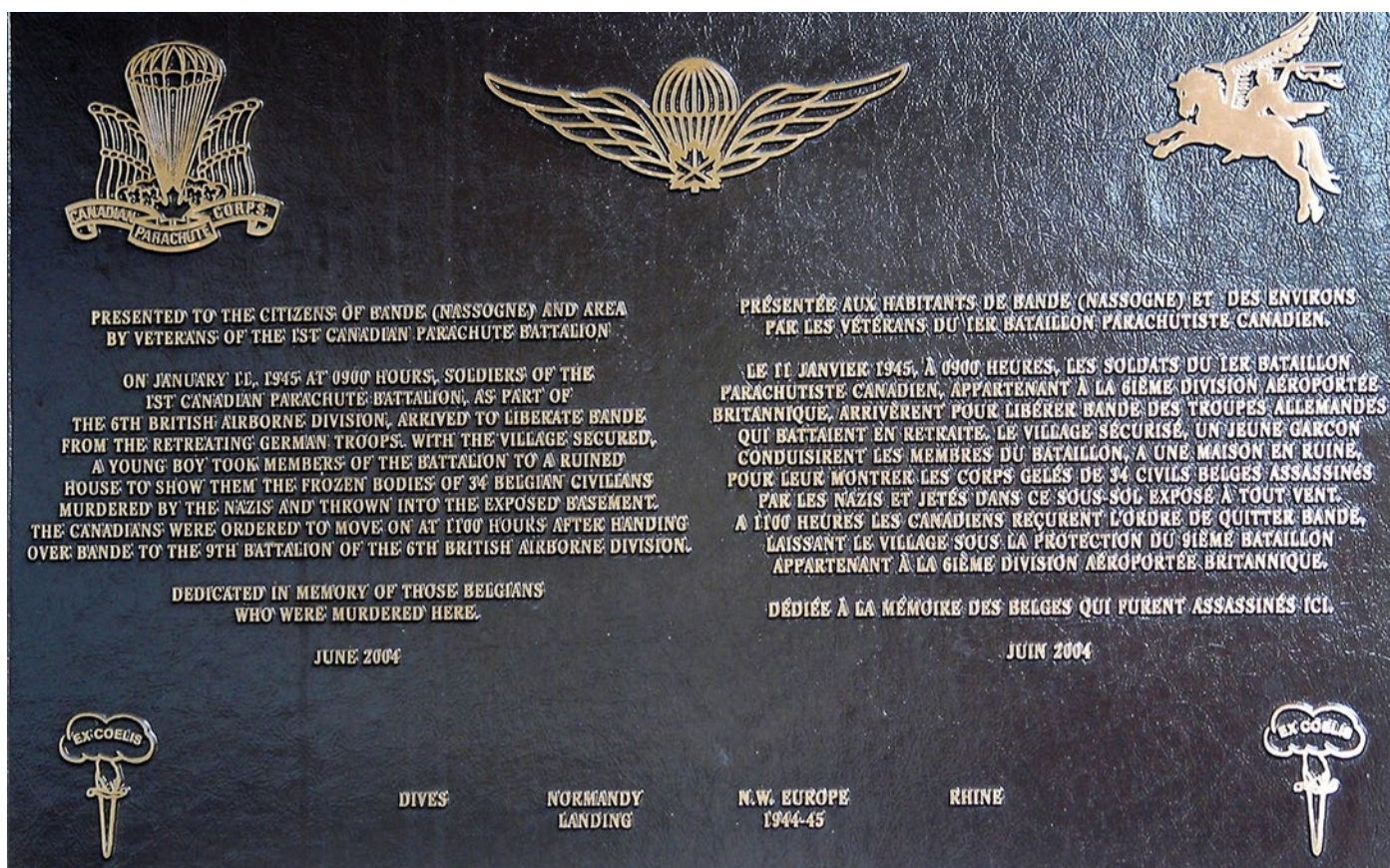
The battalion was restored to strength and training resumed.

Until Christmas 1944. The troops of the 6th Airborne Division, including the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, were rushed to Belgium to help stop the German offensive in the Ardennes.

During these battles, the Canadian paratroopers were confronted with a horrific massacre by the Germans in the town of Bande (B).

(For those who are not aware of this (in French):

<http://www.arch.be/index.php?l=fr&m=actualites&r=toutes-les-actualites&a=2014-12-18-vivre-a-mons-aux-xviie-et-xviii-siecles.-le-temoignage-des-chroniques>



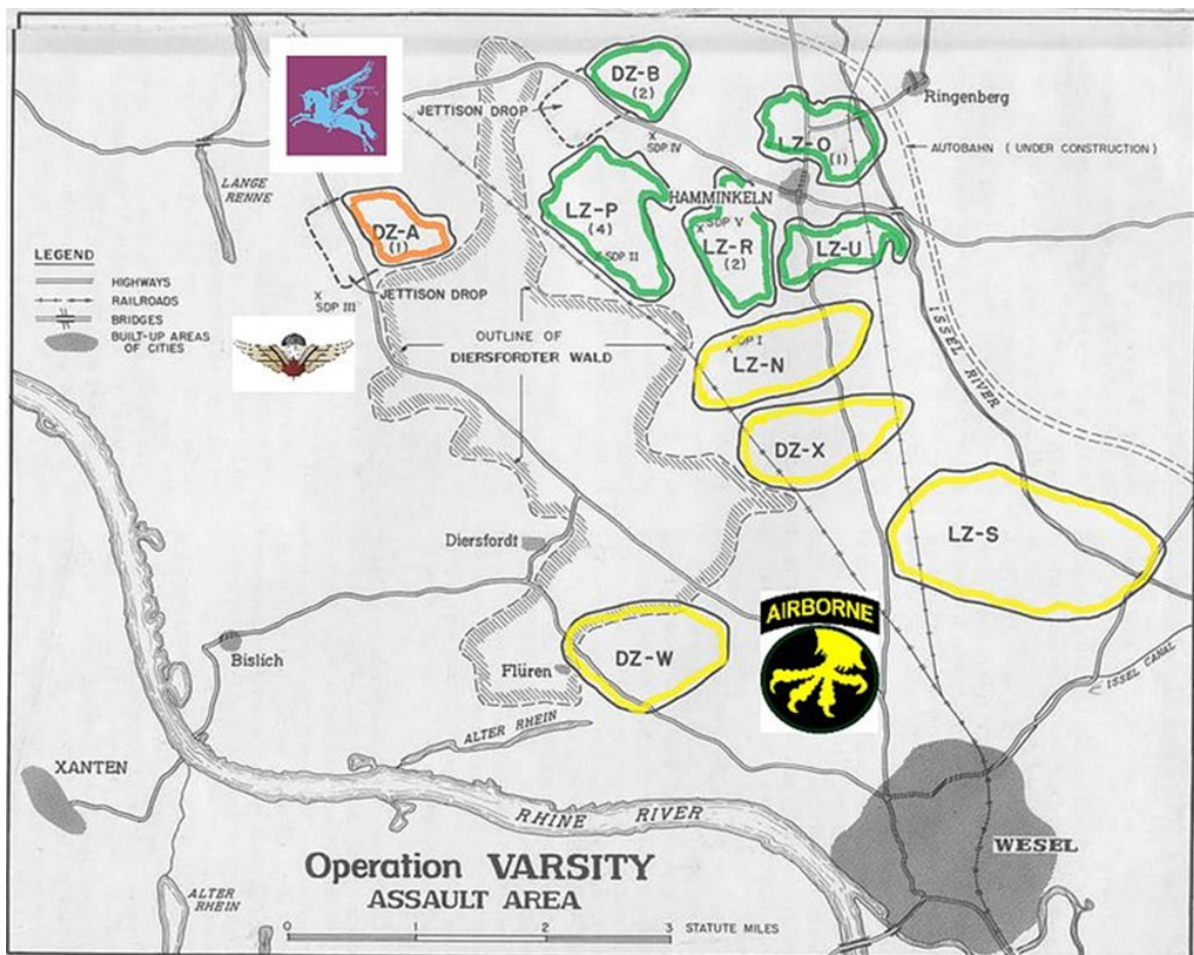
After the withdrawal of the Germans, the battalion entered Dutch territory. The paratroopers were stationed in the area along the Maas River between Venlo and Roermond. They patrolled on both sides of the river.

Precise information is lacking, but we can assume that Dennis Cooper, as RSM, was involved in all deployments of the Canadian Parachute Battalion.



Para's with wireless set in trench near Helden-Limburg. 03.02.1945

On February 23, 1945 the battalion returned to England to prepare for the next planned deployment, Operation Varsity.



Dennis Cooper would be dropped one more time. This time on German territory. The great attack on Germany had to start with the crossing of the Rhine.

By the evening of March 23, 1945, Operation Plunder, the crossing of the Rhine by the 21st Army Group, began.

The 6th Airborne Division, including the 1st Canadian Division, were deployed for the airborne landings preceding [Operation Varsity](#), part of Operation Plunder.

Dennis A. Cooper was one of the more than 16,000 paratroopers who were dropped.

The British 6th Airborne Division, to which the Canadians were attached, was ordered to capture the villages of Schnappenberg and Hamminkeln, clear a part of the Diersfordt Forest from German forces and secure three bridges over the River Issel.



During these fights it was "the end of the line" for Dennis.

It is not known exactly how and where he died.

With him, the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion lost its Regimental Sergeant Major, shortly after they had already lost the Commanding Officer [Lieutenant Colonel Jeff Nicklin](#).

From the interview with Dennis' father:

"The chaplain merely wrote: 'Fallen in action, We have nothing from him either, not even a button of his uniform. I wrote to the chaplain, to his boys with whom he had been with from day one with the Canadians and with whom he has fought, but to no avail. We have experienced that he was buried in Holten, in the Netherlands. (Initially Dennis was buried in the hamlet of Voshövel near Schermbeck in Germany-hs)"

