

Joseph Patrick Egan
Adventurer and World War II Soldier



Christine Roth Rutherford

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Foreword

In 1993, my maternal cousin, Nancy Heffernan Williams, assembled and annotated an epistolary history entitled, **Family Fragments**. One section pertained to her mother, born Margaret Mary Egan, and her mother's older brother, Joseph Patrick Egan. A decade-and-a-half later, information contained in that chapter provided a springboard for this new work, **Joseph Patrick Egan: Adventurer and World War II Soldier**.

In 2001, journalist Tom Brokaw published **The Greatest Generation**. His work returned our nation's attention to the courage and sacrifice of its World War II soldiers. Statistics began cropping up in the media; our aging World War II veterans were dying off at an alarming rate. Soon their untold stories would be lost.

After retiring from librarianship in 2005, I spent two months in Westwood, New Jersey. During that time, I learned that the Westwood Heritage Society had recently featured a display honoring Westwood soldiers. I also visited River Vale's new veterans' memorial.

In 2006, publicity was a-swirl concerning Ken Burn's soon-to-be-released documentary, **The War**. This growing drumbeat of consciousness lent impetus to this new work. The relatives of Joseph Patrick Egan were also aging. The time was right to tell his story, as fully as possible, before it was lost.

Gratitude for allowing this telling to come to fruition is due three women: Honora Barrett Egan (Joe's mother), Margaret Egan Heffernan (his sister) and Nancy Heffernan Williams (his niece). Family history most often flows down through its matrilineal safe-keepers. Women repeat oral history to one another and squirrel away primary materials such as photos, letters, newspaper clippings, telegrams, and the like.

Honora Egan's training as an artist working with photographs made her an able archivist. She knew to inscribe documentation on the verso of photographs lightly and in pencil so as not to compromise the photos. Upon her passing, the materials were safeguarded by her daughter, Margaret. Upon Margaret's death, her own daughter, my cousin Nancy, fell heir to them. Nancy then shared them generously with me and made suggestions as this biography unfolded.

At some point Nancy's brother, Paul Heffernan, did an oral history interview with my mother, Eleanor Egan Roth. As part of Paul's research, he had photos of our uncle reproduced. He gave a framed copy, plus Joe's war medals to Eleanor. Upon my mother's passing these artifacts came to me. Connie Heffernan McGann, Joe Egan's eldest niece, was able to contribute a silhouette done by Hemia, Joe's wife.

I would also like to acknowledge the fine work of **The Westwood Chronicle** reporter who interviewed Joe and wrote a piece about his adventures crisscrossing America as "The Great Depression" was unfolding. The reporter's quotes ring forth Joe's

youthful voice. In 1929 tape recorders had not yet been invented, so it's quite possible the reporter was a woman skilled in stenography.

Thanks also are due Michael Pellegrino, a member of the Westwood Heritage Society, for photos garnered from his work, **Postcard History Series: Westwood**, published in 2004.

Especial thanks are due Canadian soldier Robert Wagner for his handwritten letter to *My Dear Mrs. Egan* dated 1945.

I petitioned Canada Bibliotheque et Archives (Library and Archives) for Joe's military service records. Without them, his story could not have been properly told.

A librarian myself, I researched "The Stock Market Crash," "The Great Depression," the phenomenon dubbed "riding the rails," Canadian medals and armorials, etc. Never an avid student of history, I slogged doggedly through World War II military tomes and wearily scavenged Internet sites.

Upon receipt of Joe's official service records, I spent hours peering through a lighted magnifying glass decoding military abbreviations and deciphering the handwriting of different scribes on different continents. Their entries were detailed and thorough until his unit disembarked in France on July 26, 1944. Then the nibs of their pens fell virtually silent amid the ferocity of battle and the fog of war.

Without further ado, this is his story.



Christine Roth
(nee Feb. 27, 1945)
Photos circa 1947



Margaret Egan Hefferman
with Nancy Hefferman
(nee Sept. 27, 1944)

We are the nieces born while Joe was away at war.

Joseph Patrick Egan Adventurer and World War II Soldier

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Joseph Patrick Egan was the first-born of four surviving children of Joseph P. Egan and Honora A. Egan. Joe's mother and father had met, circa 1900, on a Hudson River ferry boat.

At the time, Joseph P. Egan was working in New York City as an editor for Benziger Brothers. Honora Agatha Barrett, a professionally trained artist, was employed at a studio as a colorist. Honora transformed what began as black and white photographs into exquisitely rendered oil paintings.

I am not sure whether the "Mr. Kiem" my mother, Eleanor, spoke of was the artist Honora studied under, the owner of the studio she worked for, or perhaps both.

Joseph P. and Honora wed in a high nuptial mass at the Passionist Monastery in West Hoboken, New Jersey on September 26, 1904. Following their marriage, they moved to 74 Summit Street in Ridgefield Park.

Their first child, Joseph Patrick, was born June 27, 1905. A daughter, Margaret, followed in 1907; a second son, Kyran, in 1909; and a second daughter, Eleanor in 1912.

A late-term miscarried baby boy was named Pierce. An infant daughter, Rose, died an hour after her birth on April 30, 1918.



*Mother Honora, Margaret, Kyran, Joseph and Eleanor
(Counterclockwise)*

In 1921, when Joe was 16, the Egan family moved from Ridgefield Park to rural River Vale in Bergen County, New Jersey.

Edited excerpt from **The History of St. Andrew's Parish:**

"Bergen County, first designated a county in 1675, is situated in the northeastern corner of New Jersey. Colonization in Bergen began under the Dutch and continued under English rule. Some of the settlers came from Europe, principally from Germany, Scotland, England, and the Netherlands.

Almost the whole county is rich in historical lore. When the Revolution began, Bergen, because of its strategic geographical position, felt the weary feet of marching soldiers, including General George Washington's and General Nathaniel Green's.

Agriculture dominated the economy of the region from colonial times until the beginning of the 20th century. Farm produce was (at times) carried by water – down the Hackensack River to Newark and across the Hudson to New York. By 1850 a series of gristmills and sawmills were located along the banks of streams in Bergen County."



From Postcard History Series: Westwood

During the 1950's, as River Vale grew, the Egan house was renumbered 717 Westwood Avenue. By 2006, the original house was no longer standing.



Collignon's Mill was located on the Hackensack River in what is now known as River Vale. At the beginning of the (twentieth) century, Collignon's Mill used power from the river to mill grains and saw lumber. The structure on the left was used to store bodies during winter months until the ground thawed enough to allow burials.

From Postcard History Series: Westwood

Joe's sister, Eleanor, remembers during their first year at 152 Westwood Avenue, River Vale being roused repeatedly in the dead of the night by inebriated men banging on their doors. Eleanor wondered if the house had a "checkered past," perhaps as a speak-easy or brothel.



*Aunt May with nephew, Joseph Egan, home on furlough, circa 1942
Courtesy of Nancy Heffernan Williams*

A decade later when sisters Margaret Egan and Eleanor Egan married, each set up housekeeping nearby. Eleanor's husband, John Roth, had built his bride-to-be a bungalow right next door. Margaret and her husband, Paul Heffernan, lived for a time three doors further up the road.

Into these two houses, my cousin and I were born. Nancy Heffernan on September 27, 1944. Christine Roth on February 27, 1945. "Five-months-to-the-day-apart," as our mothers used to say. Nancy was the "baby" of five children. I was the third of six. Honora Egan was well on her way to being "Grandma" of eleven. And Joseph Patrick Egan was away at war.

During the 1950's, as River Vale grew, the Egan house was renumbered 717 Westwood Avenue. By 2006, the original house was no longer standing.

In the early 1920s, Kyran and Eleanor, the two youngest Egan children attended a small schoolhouse in River Vale. Later they followed their older siblings, Joseph and Margaret, on to high school in Westwood.



From Postcard History Series: Westwood

It was in Westwood that the family shopped for groceries; attended movies; socialized with friends; and boarded trains and buses headed for work in Hackensack and New York City.



From Postcard History Series: Westwood

Runaway

Excerpt from Family Fragments by Nancy Heffernan Wilbur (Montreal, 1941)



Theatre
From Postcard History Series: Westwood



Train Station
From Postcard History Series: Westwood

It was also in Westwood that the family worshipped together at St. Andrew's Catholic Church.



From Postcard History Series: Westwood

Mention of young Joe appears in **The History of St. Andrew's Parish:**

"In many ways, 1928 was a banner year from the standpoint of parochial activities at St. Andrew's. On February 21 and 22 of that year, the St. Andrew's Players, a newly organized dramatic group, presented a three-act comedy entitled "Applesauce." The parish hall (the basement of the church) served as the "Little Theatre" for the production, which received sterling praise from the local newspapers.

On both evenings the hall was filled to capacity; Constance Knowles and Joseph Egan played the "leads," with able support from Mary Carroll, Edward Fahey, Katherine Finnegan, Kyrán Egan (Joe's younger brother later ordained to the priesthood) and Daniel Mulqueen. The pastor himself, Father Lenihan, directed the play with the assistance of Mrs. J.A. Gill."

Runaway

Excerpt from **Family Fragments** by Nancy Heffernan Williams (Monterey, CA 1993)

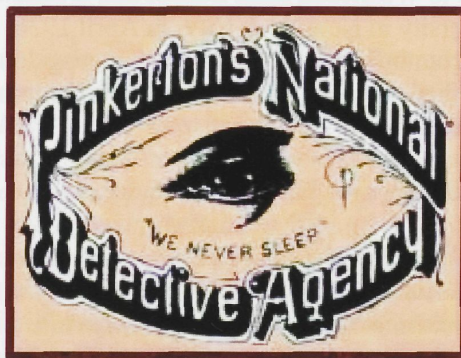
“Joe was more of a restless type than his father had been. Perhaps the word “adventurous” might apply. There had been much conflict between the father, a strict disciplinarian, and his spirited son. (Both were redheads.)

(Active in sports in high school,) Joe was also interested in drama. He was perhaps also interested in melodrama because at some point during his high school years he ran away from home. Having no leads to follow, his father, a lawyer, hired a private detective.” (12)

I remember my mother once saying that she thought the detective was a Pinkerton.

Excerpt from **Wikipedia** website:

“At its height, the Pinkerton National Detective Agency employed more agents than there were members of the standing army of the United States of America, causing the state of Ohio to outlaw the agency due to fears it could be hired out as a private army or militia.”



We Never Sleep

Joe was tracked down in Chicago, Illinois, where he was working as a hotel bell boy. Being redheaded probably rendered him more easily found than most teenagers.

He was summarily returned home and disciplined by being enrolled for a time in a military academy.



A chastened cadet

Later, Joe returned to Westwood High School and graduated at age 19. He then enrolled at Fordham University in New York City. In April 1926, Joe was not yet twenty-one when his father died from influenza. Records show young Joe left Fordham University at age 20. Whether it was at the end of the term, or immediately following his father's death, is lost to history.

Excerpt from **Family Fragments**:

"After his father's death he was employed for a time in a clerical position at the Hackensack Court House. According to his sister, Eleanor, in the wake of their father's death young Joe chafed under the burden of helping support his mother and disciplining his younger siblings."

By 1929, the "Stock Market Crash" and the "Great Depression" were unfolding.

Edited excerpts from **Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia** (online):

The Stock Market Crash

"(I)n the first year of the Hoover administration an event shook the very economic foundations of the nation, namely, the stock market panic of 1929.

During the period of boom, marked by high wages and increased production and consumption of goods, which the country had enjoyed since World War I, many had developed a tendency to invest savings and earnings in speculative ventures, particularly the buying of stocks on margin—putting up as little as three percent of a stock's price in cash and borrowing the remainder from the broker. The booming demand for stocks and the prosperous state of the nation as a whole led to a general rise in the prices of securities, which in turn led to increased investments in them.

The rise in stock prices reached its height in the so-called Hoover bull market during the first six months of the Hoover administration. In this period, individuals invested billions of dollars in the stock market, obtaining the money for such investments by borrowing from banks, mortgaging homes, and selling sound government securities, such as Liberty Bonds. In August 1929 stockbrokers were carrying on margin for their clients approximately 300 million shares of stock.

By October 1929 the feverish wave of buying had exhausted itself and gave way to an equally feverish wave of selling. Prices dropped precipitately, and thousands of people lost all they had invested, which frequently meant complete financial ruin. On October 29 the New York Stock Exchange, the largest in the world, had its worst day of panic selling. By the end of the year declines in stock values reached \$15 billion.”

The Great Depression

“The stock market panic preceded an economic depression that not only spread over the U.S. but in the early 1930s became worldwide. In the U.S., despite the optimistic statements of President Hoover and his secretary of the treasury, Andrew W. Mellon, that business was “fundamentally sound” and that a new era of prosperity was just about to begin, many factories closed, unemployment steadily increased, banks failed in growing numbers, and the prices of commodities steadily fell.

The administration began to take steps to combat the crisis. Among the measures taken were the granting of emergency appropriations for farm relief and public works, modification of the rules of the Federal Reserve System to make it easier for people in business and farming to obtain credit, and the establishment of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), with assets of \$2 billion, to make emergency loans to industries, railroads, insurance companies, and banks.

Nevertheless, the economic depression steadily worsened during the remainder of the Hoover administration. By 1932 hundreds of banks had failed, hundreds of mills and factories had closed, mortgages on farms and houses were being foreclosed in large numbers, and more than 10 million workers were unemployed.”

Vagabond

In 1929, as the stock market was crumbling, Joe Egan struck out on his own, traveling out west and experiencing life on the road. Although he was on his own, he was in no way alone. He was on the leading edge of a Depression-era phenomenon known as “riding the rails.”

Excerpts from **Riding the Rails: Teenagers on the Move During the Great Depression** by Errol Lincoln Uys (New York: TV Books L.L.C., 1999).

Note: Page numbers follow each excerpt. Definitive footnotes are provided, as an appendix, at the end of this book.

“At the height of the Great Depression, 250,000 teenage hoboes were roaming America. Some left home because they felt they were a burden to their families; some fled homes shattered by the shame of unemployment and poverty. Some left because it seemed a great adventure...”(11)

By summer 1932, the “roving boy” had become a fixture on the American landscape. The occasional girl was sighted too, mostly passing unrecognized in male garb...”(21)

A boy or girl’s decision to leave home was intensely personal, often spurred by naïveté and hope. Many held grand visions of finding work and sending money home...”(11)

Nels Anderson identified the main types of boy tramps, including the adventure-seeker; the boy rebelling against his parents; the boy fleeing a broken home; the work seeker; the mentally handicapped boy who drifted into the tramp class. The youth who hit the road in down-and-out America in the 1930s frequently did so for reasons totally beyond his control...”(22)

Young men and women lucky enough to have a job frequently found themselves “bewildered, baffled and engulfed”... Circumstances forced them to support unemployed fathers, brothers and sisters, and others living in the home...”(25)

“There isn’t any reason for me to stay home any longer. My parents find it impossible to keep our imitation home together because they lack sufficient food, clothes, rent and other necessities...” (25)

Poets painted a bucolic picture of the hobo life. “Tramp writers” fired the budding road kids with their stories... Jack London wrote lyrically of the freedom he felt beating his way across the West on the railroads, on occasion riding on the deck of a night freight: “Above me the stars were winking and wheeling in squadrons back and forth as the train rounded curves, and watching them, I fell asleep. The day was done – one day of all my days. Tomorrow would be another day and I was young.”(19)

The young nomads of the Great Depression struggled to survive in a county "dying by inches," in the words of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Resourceful, adventurous, and brave, they met joy and terror, loneliness and grandeur on their journeys...(11)

By the winter of 1931-32, in the third year of the Great Depression, hope and desperation drove an army of boys and a scattering of girls to swell the ranks of the migratory idle moving across America riding the freights or hitchhiking. Small towns in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, along the route of the Southern Pacific, reported two hundred transients a day coming into their communities...(13)

As the number of illegal riders soared, so did accidents involving trespassers. In 1932, the Interstate Commerce Commission recorded 5,962 trespassers killed and injured in the first ten months of the year...(13)

General Pelham D. Glassford of Washington, D.C., who made a special study of the transient problem in late 1932, was amazed by the intelligence and resourcefulness he found amongst the young men and boys on the road. "The more venturesome take to the road. Those without ambition content to remain in their communities, idle and hanging around street corners and pool rooms, and picking up a little food here and there, with few hours of employment, are not in any way comparable with the young men on the road today... The spirit of the (transient) boys is splendid. They will travel a thousand miles just on a rumor that there is work to be had."(14)

"It is a striking fact that when you see knots of young men and boys waiting around for freights, almost every one has a small valise," observed Wayne McMillen of the University of Chicago, who also studied the phenomenon. "They are the types of men and boys who have standards of personal cleanliness which make them think it is worth while to carry a small bag with them on the journey." (15)

Not everyone viewed the young nomads in a positive light. One who had made a journey of eight thousand miles to see for himself the condition of these "homeless boys" said, "I traveled, slept, and ate with them and got to know them well. The majority had left home for the greater glamour and adventure of traveling about the country on other people's money and sympathy. Many of them came from middle class families and had left homes of their own free will and still had homes to return to. Most of them are slackers and think the world owes them a living. I remember when about fifteen of us were given supper by a Minnesota farmer on condition that we would work in his grain fields the next day at \$3.00 a day. That night we slept in the barn and in the morning there were three of us. The others had sneaked off."(16)

For hundreds of thousands of young men and boys, the new trails they sought led them through a wilderness of unemployment. "We're foraging animals in thin pastures and we have to cover an incredible lot of territory to keep alive," Frank Bunce wrote. (20)

Said another, "There is no feeling in the world like sitting in a side-door Pullman and watching the world go by, listening to the cliky-clack of the wheels, hearing that old steam whistle blowing for crossings and towns ... Wanderlust really had me." (27)



Leonard McMillan rode the rails from Missouri to the California harvest in 1936. When his image appeared on the poster for the *Riding the Rails* documentary in 1997, he was identified by his family. "That's just the way I remember him," said his widow, Ethel Mae. Courtesy of the National Archives; photographer unknown.



"Naïve and fearful, overruled by ignorance and bravado, we walked to the nearest siding and caught a freight." —Donald Davis, age 16 when he rode in 1933. Courtesy of the National Archives; subjects unknown; photographer unknown.

Hitting the Stem

"Romantic ideas of life on the road vanished when a young hobo felt the first pangs of hunger. Pride and shame led many to go without eating for days, raiding garbage cans, picking up crusts of bread in the street, pilfering food. Finally they gave in and begged for a handout or a "lump," which they typically received in a sack. Sometimes they enjoyed a "knee-shaker," eating a meal on a back porch, and occasionally, a "sit-down," where they were invited inside the homes of sympathetic folks. In the lingo of old-timers, novice hoboes were also taught how best to "bum" a house or "put the arm on" passersby in the street.

The majority of homeowners and storekeepers helped the hard-luck kids. Sixty years later, the simplest acts of kindness were remembered by those who'd been half-starved and utterly dejected when they knocked at a stranger's door. Other kids, too, recalled seeing mothers and fathers help hoboes who came to ask for food. It was a lesson in giving that was never forgotten.

There were mean streets where young nomads were driven away without a crumb and towns where they were subjected to frontier-style justice. As young as sixteen, they were sentenced to work on chain gangs or labor on the "pea farms," and other fields where corrupt law officials supplied local growers with cost-free workers.

Destitute youths drifted from one shelter to another, paying for a bed at the YMCA when they had money, staying at the Salvation Army or other missions when they were broke. Some landed on "Skid Row," or in the newer "Hooverilles" that proliferated in American cities. Government transient shelters eventually provided wider relief, but still could not accommodate the human flood moving over the land.

The one place where the road kids were welcome was the "jungles," the hobo camps near the tracks – especially if they could "hit the stem" (Main Street) and scrounge scraps for a Mulligan stew. A boxcar boy, and girl – mostly they were in disguise – could eat their fill and then sit by the fire to hear the stories of old jungle buzzards, who had also been young a long time ago. (145)

The Jungle

The one place where the young hobo was assured a welcome was the "jungle," as the hobo camps were called. These were generally not far from the tracks, some nothing more than a clearing for a camp fire, some well-established sites overseen by old jungle buzzards who set up home there.

Bill Hackett, who was bumming his way around the country as a fourteen-year-old in 1930, recalls the jungle at Sandusky, Ohio, located beside a brook populated by red and gold carp.

“Sandusky jungle was a mecca for weary hoboes who came to the camp tired, dirty, ragged and whiskery. The stew pot was on, water from the brook was boiling. The ‘bos would empty their pockets in preparation for a stew. One might have an onion pinched from a fruit market, another brought potatoes and an ear of corn leased from a farmer’s field.

“Edible greens are gathered and added to the pottage: dandelions and sourdock, wild leeks and pigweed. A handful of navy beans carried in a pocket for a month are thrown in along with a smattering of lint and tobacco. Scraps of meat bummed from the local butcher.

“Dig in with your cans, men! We eat heartily and with bellies full take our ease and drowse. In the night, we sit around the glowing coals and swap tall tales of the road. Many talk of home and loved ones and jobs they held before the collapse of their world.”

Between stops at transient camps, Gene Wadsworth – “Ed Bebb” – dropped into hobo jungles. He found permanent denizens of the camps living in shacks made of flattened tin cans, boards, railroad ties, anything that could be scavenged to build a shelter. When a freight train rolled by and hoboes started arriving, the old buzzard would issue instructions: “Hey, you, Whitey, go up to the meat market and ask for scraps;” “Red, you go get carrots;” “You, skinny, go find spuds.”

“I’ve seen stuff go into a stew pot that I wouldn’t feed to a hog,” recalled Wadsworth. “We’d take a tin can and the old ‘bo would fill it. If he liked your looks, he’d dip down deeper for meat and vegetables; others got mostly soup.”

Even when there were no permanent residents, crude equipment would be left for the next visitor. Gene Tenold, who hoboed for three summers from 1938, would look for a Number 10-size can set in a sheltered place with a board and a rock on top of it for a cover: “It would contain coffee grounds, how many times used no one knew. You gave it one more boiling and if you got the flavor of coffee, you enjoyed a cup or two and left the grounds as you found them. If the flavor was gone, you emptied the can and pitied the next guy who came along.”

An innocent-looking road kid was always welcome as a forager more likely to appeal to a store owner than a weary old tramp. Kermit Parker, who made a twenty-five-hundred-mile journey from Walla Walla, Washington, to Chicago in 1935, recalled his introduction to the jungle at Pocatello, Idaho. He had climbed off a freight with a group of older hoboes.

“Anyone got the makings?” asked one.

“I’ve got spuds and onions,” another replied.

"Some bacon and a half a loaf of bread," chimed in a third.

"What do you have, kid?"

A hobo directed the question at Kermit, who had nothing to contribute to the stew.

"Got any money?"

Kermit said he had fifty cents.

"OK, kid, find a store and buy some stew meat."

First the hoboes showed Kermit where the jungle was, half a mile from the outskirts of Pocatello. He carried a small suitcase with his belongings. They promised to look after it while he went to buy meat, which he agreed to with somewhat less than peace of mind. He walked several blocks before finding a butcher, who sold him scraps from a box next to the butcher's block. When he arrived back at the jungle, he first checked that his suitcase was where he had left it.

"You did good, kid. There's enough meat to make us a fine Mulligan." The hobo inspected Kermit's package of scraps, cutting up the largest chunks and discarding some bones before adding the meat to a container of boiling water.

"The kid doesn't have any tools," one of the men said when the stew was ready.

The hoboes lent Kermit a dish and a spoon.

"Soon I was comfortably seated on a large rock with a bowl of hot stew. What more could one ask for?"

"Kid, would you like some bread?"

Kermit received a hunk of bread.

A hobo asked where he was headed. "Chicago," he replied. Was he taking the Union Pacific line through Green River or the Denver and Rio Grande Western route through Salt Lake City? Kermit's mother had friends in Provo so he opted for the southern route. The hobo was catching out for Ogden in two hours and offered to show Kermit where to board:

"Good luck, kid," came a chorus of good-byes as I left Pocatello jungle. It felt heartwarming to have so many total strangers wish me well." (181-83)

At Cottonwood, Idaho, William Loft – a local dentist’s son – would watch the freight trains pull in with tired hoboes riding on the top “sitting with their heads slumped down and looking more like sacks of grain.”

One day William saw one of the men put a mark on their fence. He ran out and asked why he did this. The hobo explained: “Son, when you’re starving and on your last legs, this means there’s a hot meal and friendly people you can trust.”

The mark on the Loft’s fence was one of many signs hoboes traditionally used to alert each other to houses where they could get a handout, what approach might work best, and what houses were best avoided.

	SIT DOWN MEAL		ONLY BREAD GIVEN HERE
	GOOD PLACE FOR A HANDOUT		KIND WOMAN
	RELIGIOUS PEOPLE		GOOD WATER
	SLEEP IN BARN		SAFE CAMP
	SOMEONE HOME		NO ONE HOME
	BARKING DOGS		UNSAFE AREA
	DANGER		HALT
	GOOD ROAD TO FOLLOW		BEWARE AUTHORITIES

Chart and text from p. 167 of *Riding the Rails*



Climbing to the carwalk. Courtesy of the National Archives; photographer unknown.



Hopping aboard a boxcar on the fly was perilous. In 1932, the Interstate Commerce Commission reported 425 fatalities and 1,344 injuries getting on or off cars or locomotives. Courtesy of the National Archives; photographer unknown.

Catching Out

*(S)oft-hearted railroad detectives were a rarity. It was more common for youths caught trespassing on railroad property to be handled brutally or marched off to jail. On a May morning in 1935, Vernon Roudebush was caught by the bulls at Sheridan, Wyoming. As the group he was with was lined up, the chief detective strode up and down the line, wielding a club in one hand, a revolver in the other. "What are you bums doing on **my** train?" he roared. Vernon was a seventeen-year-old runaway from Chicago, roving the country in summer.*

Whatever answer a hobo gave to the bulls, he was beaten. Vernon was knocked to the ground twice. "My nose was bleeding; my arms were covered with welts from trying to protect my head. I'd befriended a kid with an abscessed tooth. A bull belted him on the side of his swollen jaw. I'll never forget the kid's scream of pure agony."

In 1934, when he was fourteen, Glenand Spencer was pistol-whipped by Texas Slim in the Fort Worth freight yards. Texas Slim, the notorious railroad bull on the Texas and Pacific line between Texarkana and El Paso, was said to boast that he had shot seventeen men. Spencer found railroad bulls from Georgia to Texas to be willing recruiters for local officials who wanted free labor on their farms.

The bulls would let hoboes catch out in their yards and then shake down the train at a prearranged spot outside town. Able-bodied men would be arrested by the local sheriff and sentenced to thirty to sixty days on the "cotton farm," which may also have been peanuts, sugarcane, whatever crop needed to be worked. Spencer was caught in two such roundups, but because of his age and small size, discarded like a too-small fish.

On his way west, coal miner's son Arvel Pearson was in Lahotta, Colorado, waiting to catch a freight to Dodge City. Two railroad bulls with sawed-off shotguns stood by to stop hoboes from boarding a leaving train. The fifteen-year-old Arvel saw the last car coming up. "It was now or never. I caught the eye of one of the bulls as I ran to the car, grabbed on and began climbing." The bull started shooting, the buckshot hitting just above Arvel's head. Then he heard a shout, "Swing in here, kid, that guy's trying to kill you." His rescuer was the train conductor, who was standing on the caboose. Arvel swung in between the two cars, the only hobo to make it to Dodge City that day.

Catching out "on the fly," when a train was already under way, was perilous: One misstep could cost a youth his legs, even his life.

After Leslie Paul's tearful farewell with his mother at their home in Duluth, the eighteen-year-old hitchhiked to Carleton to catch a westbound freight, reaching the yards in the fading light of a summer evening.

Leslie heard the blasts of a highball and saw a locomotive a quarter of a mile away at a water tank. Gray and black discs of smoke rose intermittently from the stack. The train began to move toward him, He raced alongside, trying to equalize the speed.

He held his mother's black satin bag with his belongings in his right hand, with his left hand free. Leslie still relives the moments of terror that followed. "My left hand grabbed the rung of a ladder and held fast. The momentum jerked me off my feet. Suddenly it was dark and like a nightmare. I was grasping for a hold with my right hand, still clutching the bag. I tried to get my feet on a lower rung and missed. I felt the motion of the wheels as my feet brushed them.

"The inside of a hospital flashed into my mind. I saw a young kid lying without his legs, suffering the agonies of hell. God erased that picture. Out of the dark, a strong hand grabbed me and pulled me into the boxcar.

Leslie's rescuer was an experienced hobo, who lectured him on catching out safely as the boxcar rattled through the Minnesota night. The noise from the wheels rose deafeningly, the car vibrating end to end.

"No further words passed between John and me," Leslie remembered. "His presence was enough to soothe my loneliness. It was my first night away from home and already I wished I was back. Was I leaving little for nothing?" (65-66)

Embarking early in 1929 on his odyssey as a vagabond, ahead of the gathering groundswell of transients, and at the more mature age of 24 probably made for a safer experience for Joseph Patrick Egan.

Upon his return to his hometown, River Vale, the *Westwood Chronicle* newspaper published an article on Joe's adventure:

Adventuring in Far Off Places

"He worked as a cowboy for a time and liked the life, saying, "Life on the ranch is the best in the world. It is just comfortable and easy - riding most of the time, rounding up the cattle and branding them, trapping and cooking."

Joe learned to cook in Apache, Arizona. "When I made friends with James Marion Gould, I couldn't boil water without burning it, but he taught me to cook beans, ham, eggs, (turkey eggs they were mostly) and biscuits. We made biscuits out of flour, water, and any kind of drippings we had for shortening. They baked quicker than bread and were easier to make.

Cottontail rabbits were often on the menu. Cottontails were better eating than jackrabbits - more tender and not such stringy meat. It took a cottontail apiece for a meal, they are so small."

Joe's advice on traveling, if you entertain any ideas of traveling in the manner in which he went, is to go alone. "It's easier to pick up rides," he says. "You don't look so much like a hold-up gang if you're alone." The roads he found generally good in the West, hard gravel roads, scraped twice a week, but sinking back into their natural washboard-like surfaces before the next scraping.

Motorists through the sparsely settled districts go like the wind - a zip and they are out of sight - no traffic and no rules of the road."

He met thousands of hitchhikers, a surprising large proportion of them girls, young and old, going everywhere and coming from everywhere. Work wasn't hard to find, but wages were so poor that it made living quite a problem.

From the first of February, when Joe hit Arizona, to July 9 there wasn't a drop of rain. There were tremendous sand storms, sweeping like curtains of clouds up from the horizon. Thunder storms were great clouds, full of sharp lightening, which seemed to roll along the very ground like black billows. But no rain came until July 9 when a heavy shower lasted about two hours, but the water didn't sink three inches into the ground.

Joe had a lot of thrilling experiences, too. In one place in the southwest he met a real old-time Texan. The old man was a trapper for the government. "He always carried at least one Colt revolver on his person. His home, to which he took me, was filled with every size and shape of gun, revolver and rifle. I had a long visit with the man. He gave me his age as 61 but I was pretty sure he was nearer 80. He told me stories of robbing mail trains in the old days - where the safest places were to hold them up, and all about how to do it. He seemed to like anything where shooting was concerned. He wasn't trying to convert me into a highwayman, it was only his love of the business. Before I left he told me that he was going to rob just one more mail train before he died, but I figured in my own mind that he'd have to get busy very soon or the end of his years would rob him of his plan."

Another time, up in Missouri, Joe decided his trip wasn't complete without hopping at least one freight train. Several people he talked to in the freight yard warned him that the officials were keeping pretty close watch out for riders and then proceeded to tell him just how to do it. Joe went down the tracks about a mile as advised and then awaited his train. A thundering westward express rushed by and following it, came the freight, slowly chugging along.

Joe hopped aboard, and climbed to the top remembering the warnings of the freightyard men. He crawled along a high car and then jumped down to a lower one where he was hidden from the cabooses. The ride was going fine.

The train stopped for water and Joe disappeared for a sandwich at a nearby stand. Upon his return, he saw the top of a head in his carefully chosen location on the low freight. Joe hid a minute then peered over the top. The other head raised and then dropped from sight." That can't be an inspector," thought Joe, so he made his way towards it. The head belonged to one of three fellows hopping a ride the same as he.

The four made friends and prepared for the night. A refrigerator car, with a trap door opening, looked best. Down they went, someone on top of Joe's straw hat. But that was all in a day and they went to sleep. In the middle of the night, the boys were awakened by the sound of footsteps - the inspector. The three friends jumped out and off into the night. Joe remained.

Sometime later, he decided that he'd better make his getaway. Stealthily, he crept up to the top. It was daylight. The inspector was back a few cars. Jump or get caught was the choice. Joe jumped, picked himself up and ran. Once away from the train he stopped, looked around, and found himself out in the wilds, five miles from the nearest town, and no transportation to be found.

In a town in Pennsylvania Joe was hungry and broke. A coal truck came along and Joe hailed the driver for a ride. "What's the chance of earning a meal?" he asked. "Shovel out this coal and I'll give you a dollar," was the reply. "All right," a dollar then was ten dollars later. But when he looked around at the load it wasn't such a bargain. There were six and a half tons of coal and the shoveling took four hours and covered seven miles. The truck was delivering coal to the suburban towns in the vicinity.

Back home in Westwood in September 1929, Joe said, "I've covered 28 states in the Union, and I'm going to do the other 20 when I get my shoes repaired and the wrinkles out of my stomach." (Newspaper clipping courtesy of Nancy Heffernan Williams)

Excerpt from **Family Fragments**:

"In the meantime, Joe went to work for the Wortendyke Agency selling cars. He does not appear to have made that second trip." (13)

Love and Marriage

During the Depression Joe Egan, son of an artist, fell in love with an artist, Hemia Calpini. Born in Mexico, Hemia had emigrated to New York City with her parents and nine siblings. She and her brother, Orestes, were employed by Fleischer Studios, producing cartoons. Hemia worked in the "scenics" department creating beautifully detailed silhouette cutouts.

On January 30, 1932, Joseph Patrick Egan and Hemia Calpini were wed at the Franciscan Monastery in Oakland, New Jersey.



Photos courtesy of Nancy Heffernan Williams

Excerpt from **Family Fragments:**

“(Hemia) gave Joe a small silhouette when they married. It showed a young woman in a long veil and holding flowers walking under an archway. On it was written:

Marriage

*The happy estate
Which resembles a pair of shears:
So joined that they cannot be separated;
Often moving in opposite directions;
Yet always punishing anyone who
Comes between.*

Hemia may have loved Joe, but unfortunately she also fell in love with Mr. Fleischer, her boss, who was a married man. Mr. Fleischer may have loved Hemia, but he also loved his wife, who sensibly produced a baby. The baby's presence brought about the end of the affair. But the affair brought about the end of the Egan marriage. (It had lasted only three or four years.)

Hemia and her brother Orestes left New York City and went west. Shortly after, Walt Disney bought Fleischer Studios and incorporated its expertise into the rapidly growing cartoon industry. (Under her maiden name, Hemia Calpini is listed as one of six artists who worked on scenics for the 1941 movie, "Mr. Bug Goes to Town.")" (p.13)

Ironically, the wedding poem the bride had given the groom better described the marriage of the Fleishers than the marriage of the Egans.

*Often moving in opposite directions;
Yet always punishing anyone who
Comes between.*



*Undated photo stamped "Ray Kraft Studio, La Crosse, Wisconsin"
Courtesy of Nancy Heffernan Williams*

In a 2001 obituary for her youngest brother, Orlando, Hemia, again under her maiden name, is listed as having predeceased him. It might appear that she had never remarried. As divorced Catholics, neither Joe nor Hemia could remarry in the church.

Very few Americans, and even fewer Catholics divorced in those days. To do so was a stigma. The only release for either of them would be the death of the other.

World War II

Excerpts from **Riding the Rails: Teenagers on the Move During the Great Depression**

“As World War II loomed, many young men left the road and joined up. Under fire they would be grateful for their boxcar experiences, which toughened them up for the ordeal ahead.

“It gave me the strength to live and survive,” said Charlie Jordan, who rode the rails for six months and served in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

Jordan enlisted in the army and was sent to the Philippines in April 1941. Captured after the fighting at Bataan and Corrigidor, he was a prisoner of war for more than forty months, thirty of which he spent working in coal mines in Japan.

Fighter pilot James Morehead credits three years riding the rails with teaching him self-reliance and ingenuity. (He) earned both the Distinguished Service Cross and the Distinguished Flying Cross.”(p. 237)

(A)s the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camps were winding down, thousands of “Depression Doughboys,” who had served in FDR’s “Tree Army,” were on their way to Europe and Africa.

As trains carrying troops and materiel were crossing the country day and night, the occasional rider could still be glimpsed in a boxcar door or sitting on the catwalk. It was the end of the last hobo era. The boys and girls who rode the rails had gone to war.”(p. 44)

Among them was Joseph Patrick Egan.

Soldier of the Commonwealth

In April 1941, Joe Egan, almost 36, was deemed too old to enlist in the United States Army.

So he enlisted in a special unit of the Royal Canadian Army: the Canadian Army Over-Seas American Forces.

CANADIAN ACTIVE SERVICE FORCE
ATTESTATION PAPER

WS
COMPLETE

1. Surname..... **E G A N**

2. Christian Names..... **JOSEPH PATRICK**

3. Present address..... **Y.M.C.A. WINDSOR ONTARIO**

4. Date of birth..... **JUNE 27th 1905**

5. Place of birth **UNITED STATES** **NEW JERSEY** **RIDGEFIELD PARK**
(Country) (County or Province)

6. Religion (state denomination)..... **ROMAN CATHOLIC**

7. Trade or Calling..... **TRUCK DRIVER**

8. Married, Widower or Single..... **SINGLE**

9. Name of next of kin..... **MRS NORAH EGAN**

10. Relationship..... **MOTHER**

11. Address of next of kin..... **GENERAL DELIVERY WESTWOOD NEW JERSEY U.S.A.** *54171 Do 4 - 29 Jan of 4*

12. Do you belong to, or have you served in the Active Militia of Canada?..... **NO**

13. Have you served in (a) The Canadian Active Service Force?..... **NO**
(If Yes, Give Unit and Dates of Service)

..... (b) Any other Naval, Military, or Air Force?..... **NO**
(If Yes, Give Regimental No. and Unit)

14. Did you serve during the Great War 1914-1918?..... **NO**
(If Yes, specify Regimental No., Unit and Dates of Service)

DECLARATION TO BE MADE BY MAN ON ATTESTATION

I, **JOSEPH PATRICK EGAN** do solemnly declare that the above particulars are true, and I hereby engage to serve in the Canadian Active Service Force so long as an emergency, i.e., war, invasion, riot or insurrection, real or apprehended, exists, and for the period of demobilization after said emergency ceases to exist, and in any event for a period of not less than one year, provided His Majesty should so require my services.

Date **APRIL 1st 1941**
WITNESS *John J. Jones* *Joseph Patrick Egan*
(Signature of recruit)

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY MAN ON ATTESTATION

I, **JOSEPH PATRICK EGAN** do sincerely promise and swear (or solemnly declare) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty.
Joseph Patrick Egan (Signature of Recruit)

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE, JUSTICE OF THE PEACE OR ATTESTING OFFICER

The Recruit above-named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answers to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided by law.
The above questions and answers were then read to the recruit in my presence.
I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as replied to, and the said recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me,

at **WINDSOR ONTARIO** this **1st** day of **APRIL** 19**41**

John J. Jones **MAJOR** (Signature of Magistrate, Justice or Attesting Officer.)
O.C. NO. 1. A. DISTRICT DEPOT A.F. (Office or Rank and Unit or appointment.)
WINDSOR ONTARIO

N.B.—ATTENTION IS DRAWN TO THE FACT THAT ANY PERSON MAKING A FALSE ANSWER TO ANY OF THE ABOVE QUESTIONS IS LIABLE TO A PENALTY OF SIX MONTHS' IMPRISONMENT

The small print of the "DECLARATION TO BE MADE BY MAN ON ATTESTATION" that he signed on April 1, 1941 reads:

"I, Joseph Patrick Egan, solemnly declare that the above particulars are true, and I hereby engage to serve in the Canadian Active Service Force so long as an emergency, i.e., war, invasion, riot or insurrection, real or apprehended, exists, and for a period of demobilization after said emergency ceases to exist, and in any event for a period of not less than one year, provided His Majesty should so require my services."

His enlistment documentation shows that before moving to Canada, Joe had worked for four years as a truck driver for a "roadmaster" of the Western Pacific Railroad Company located in Winnemucca, Nevada.

He had recently taken a room at the Y.M.C.A. in Windsor, Ontario, designating it as his "permanent residence."

His papers show him as "unemployed" at the time. When asked what occupation he might be interested in when reintegrating into society after the war, he said, "clerical."

His enlistment papers also showed that he was able to read Spanish, although he could not speak it fluently.

Something else they showed was that in 1941 he was still helping to support his widowed mother by giving her \$20 per month.

By the time the ink dried on his induction papers, Joseph Patrick Egan was soldier A23036, a private in the Essex Scottish Regiment.

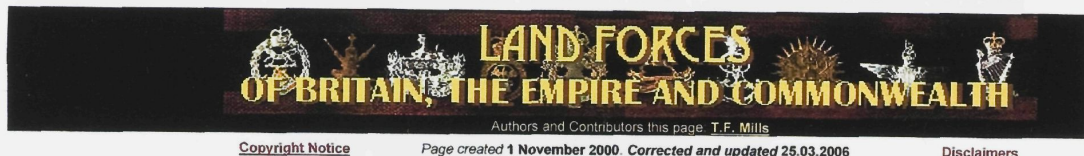
After basic training with the Essex Scottish, his first assignment is believed to have been as a recruiter, possibly at the very same No. 1. A District Depot. A.F. where he, himself, had joined up. The Essex Scottish Regiment included a "substantial number of Americans."

The Westwood Chronicle article clearly showed that he had a talent for making new friends.



*Ontario regiment Essex Scottish and its pipe band entering
Dieppe, France in 1944 with the forward-sweeping Canadian Army.
National Archives of Canada*

Excerpt from the **Land Forces** website:



The Essex Scottish Regiment



Armorial owned and worn by Joseph Egan

Edited excerpts from the **Essex Scottish Regimental** website:

Armorial Description:

“Two sprays of thistle supporting a scroll in the shape of a pointed arch, bearing the designation THE ESSEX SCOTTISH; across the thistles a scroll bearing the motto SEMPER PARATUS (Always Ready); in the center a shield bearing in chief three seaxes barwise (alluding to the arms of the County Council of Essex) ...; the whole surrounded by a lion’s head erased.”

Regimental Quick March: “The Highland Laddie”

Kilt and Trews: Hunting MacGregor (Trews were the tight-fitting tartan trousers or breeches of the Scottish Highlander dress, worn by soldiers in Highland regiments.)



MacGregor Tartan

Origin and Lineage of the Regiment:

The roots of the Essex Scottish date back to the first decade of the eighteenth century when the (Canadian) United Empire Loyalists and the local population were faced with attacks from Americans, Indians and French.

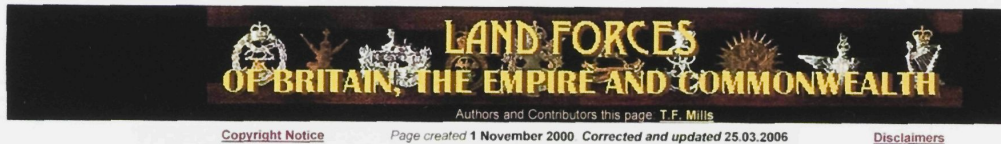
The regiment was the first unit in Western Ontario to be mobilized for service in the Second World War and within a few days it had recruited to full strength, including a substantial number of Americans.

The Essex Scottish Regiment, CASF was mobilized on 1 September 1939 and sailed for England on 16 July 1940. The first action for the regiment was the ill-fated raid on Dieppe on 19 August 1942 where the regiment was all but decimated during Operation Jubilee.



On 5 July 1944, it landed with the Fourth Infantry Brigade on the coast of Normandy. The Essex Scottish then fought through France, Holland and Germany until war's end."

On July 26, 1941, four months after joining the Essex Scottish, Joe was assigned to the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps in London, Ontario. Days later on August 6, 1941, he was posted to the 15th Field Ambulance at Valcartier, Quebec.

Edited excerpts from the **Land Forces** website:



Royal Army Medical Corps

In arduis fidelis	<i>Faithful in adversity (L.)</i>
	 RAMC
	 RCAMC, Medical Branch

crest and tie
©bv A. Melville-Brown



RCAMC cap badge owned and worn by Joseph Egan

“The unit’s cap badge depicts the Rod of Asclepius, surmounted by a crown, enclosed within a laurel wreath, with the regimental motto, “In arduis fidelis, (Steadfast in Adversity)” in a scroll beneath. The Rod symbolizes the healing arts by combining the serpent, which in shedding its skin is a symbol of rebirth and fertility, with the staff, a symbol of authority befitting the god of medicine.

The cap badge was worn 1 inch above the left eye on the beret. Scottish General Support Medical Regiment (previously Field Ambulance) and members of the 205 (Scottish) Field Hospital, wore the traditional Scottish Tam O' Shanter headdress with the corps badge on a tartan backing."



*Joseph Patrick Egan
15th Field Ambulance*

Joe's military records show a pattern of quick promotion. It appears his superiors quickly recognized leadership abilities. But over the course of his four years with the Canadians, his record also includes two incidents of infraction and demotion.

Joe enjoyed a furlough from October 1-14, 1941. A week after his return, he was promoted to Acting Lance Corporal. Then one month later, on November 21, 1941, he was charged with "neglecting to obey Camp Order No. 11c." As a result, on December 16, 1941, he was given 96 hours of detention and reverted to Private for having "disobeyed a lawful command."

This photo was taken during a rehearsal by the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps.



Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-113242
Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps Rehearse for Raid on Dieppe

On April 16, 1942, Joseph Patrick Egan was transferred to the Royal Canadian Artillery's 65th Regiment, then officially known as Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal. Joe was now a gunner in the Artillery's 5th Anti-Tank Regiment. There, he seems to have found his niche.

Edited excerpts from the **Land Forces** website:




Authors and Contributors this page: T.F. Mills
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Regimental Crest
© DND

Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal

Nunquam retrorsum	No one shall cause our retreat (L.) Fus Mont Royal
-------------------	---

Québec, Canada 

Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal



Armorial owned and worn by Joseph Egan

Edited excerpt from **Wikipedia** website:

“Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal (was) one of the oldest surviving units of the historical regiments of the Canadian army...The unit was created on November 5, 1869. They were first named the 65th Regiment, then the Mount Royal Rifles, later the Carabiniers Mont-Royal and finally in 1931, the name became Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal.

Enemy mortar and heavy fire came down but a narrow bridgehead (an area on the far side of a river obstacle occupied by an advancing army immediately after crossing) was established, and by September 10 a bridge had been built across the Ghent Canal to give support. The bridgehead was gradually extended, but the difficult terrain and enemy resistance slowed further progress.



*Temporary bridge built by the Royal Canadian Engineers and the Belgian Forces of the interior, Furnes, September 1944.
National Archives of Canada 131226*

The 2nd Canadian Infantry Division's 4th Brigade then moved to the southern outskirts of Bruges to assist the 4th Canadian Armoured Division in that sector. Fortunately, the enemy withdrew without contesting possession of the city, and the Canadians entered the city to an enthusiastic welcome from the Belgian people."



*18th Armoured Car Regiment and Belgian children, Blankenberge, September 1944.
National Archives of Canada 130264*

An earlier failed attempt by the 4th Canadian Armoured Division at Moerbrugge had demonstrated the challenge they faced. In addition to the formidable German defences on both the Leopold Canal and the Dérivation de la Lys Canal, much of the approach area was flooded. As a result, there were few areas where a determined assault had much hope of success.

A two-pronged assault commenced. The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division's 7th Brigade made the initial assault across the Leopold Canal, while the 9th Brigade mounted an amphibious attack from the northern or coastal side of the pocket. The assault began on October 6, supported by extensive artillery and "Wasps" (tanks equipped with flamethrowers). The Wasps launched their barrage of flame across the Leopold Canal, allowing the 7th Brigade troops to scramble up over the steep banks and launch their assault boats across the canal.

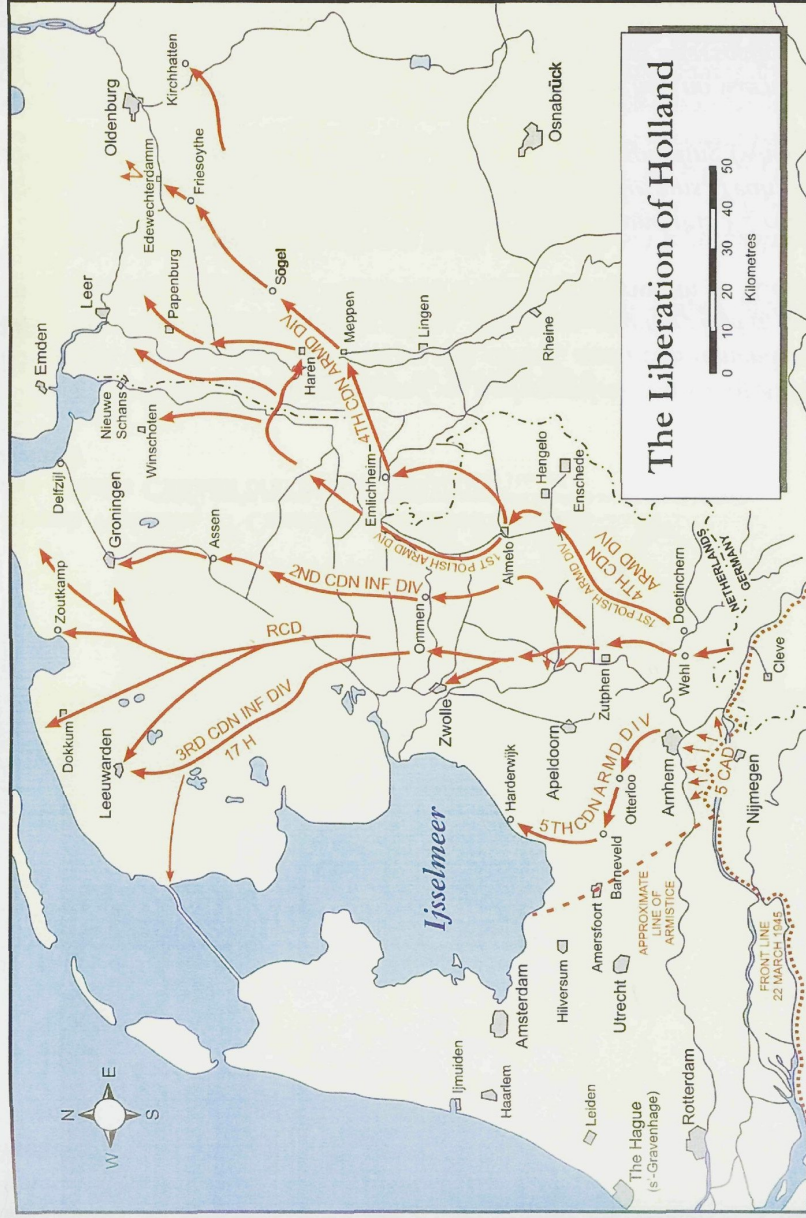


*The 4th Canadian Armoured Division demonstrating the use of flame throwers across a canal.
Balgerhocke, October 1944.
National Archives of Canada 131240*

Two precarious, separate footholds were established, but conditions for the Canadian troops were horrendous as the enemy recovered from the shock of the flamethrowers and counter-attacked. However, the troops clung with grim determination to their extremely vulnerable bridgeheads.

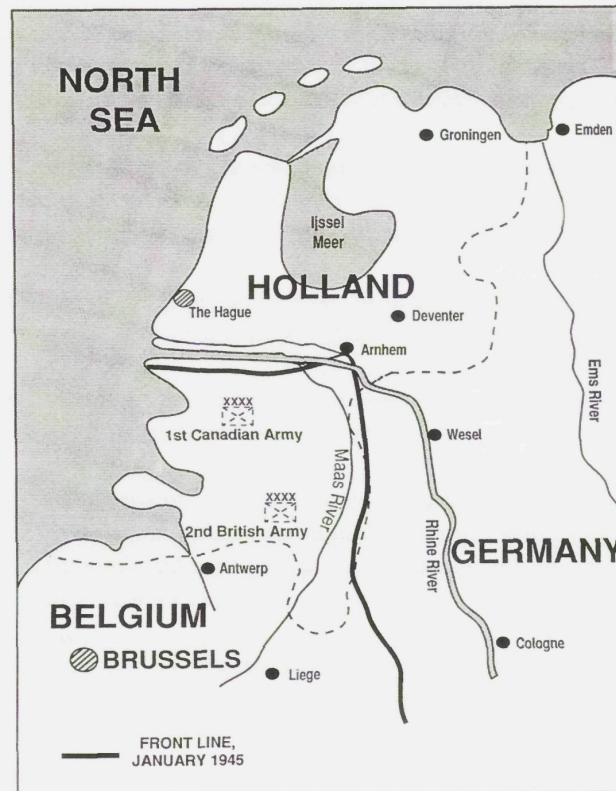
In spite of difficulties in maneuvering vehicles through the canals, the enemy was taken by surprise and a bridgehead was established. Once again the enemy recovered quickly and counter-attacked with ferocity, however, they were slowly forced back. The 10th Brigade of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division crossed the Leopold Canal and advanced at Isabella Polder.

Liberating Holland (The Netherlands)



Map from **Valour in the Victory Campaign** (p. 9)

The Front Line, January 1945



The Front Line, January 1945.

Excerpt from **Valour in the Victory Campaign** introduction:

“Midnight the 1st of January 1945. As the hands of the clocks clicked into the new year, the blackness of night on the border between Germany and the Netherlands was shattered by the artillery of the First Canadian Army. It was their way of saying Happy New Year, Hitler!

The New Year also marked the fifth year of the Second World War. With the world becoming weary of this devastating war, there was hope in the eyes of the Allied armies as they stood on the frontier of Germany. The despair of the dark months of 1942, when Nazi Germany stood as the invincible conqueror from the English Channel to the Caspian Sea, was now long past.

Northeastern Netherlands

The Canadian Army's role in these final days of the war was to open up the supply route to the north through Arnhem, and then to clear the northeastern Netherlands, the coastal belt of Germany eastward to the Elbe River, and western Holland.



British Columbia Regiment crewmen loading 17-pounder high-explosive rounds into a Sherman Firefly during the 4th Armoured Division advance toward Oldenburg, 8 April 1945. (NAC PA113696)

Photo from the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps

On the right, Major General Vokes' 4th Canadian Armoured Division crossed the Twente Canal and pushed forward to capture Almelo on April 5, before curving eastward to re-enter Germany."

Anti-Tank Regiments April 1945

During the closing weeks of the war, anti-tank personnel struggled.

Edited excerpts from **Valour in the Victory Campaign** (pp. 166-176):

- *On April 12...because of the blown bridge, the battalion had been unable to move their heavy anti-tank weapons across the canal. The situation hung in the balance, as the battalion's second in command collected a force of drivers and cooks to attempt to get the anti-tank weapons across the canal.*
- *By the afternoon...the battalion had crossed on foot the Overijssel Canal north of Heino. All bridges had been blown and it was not possible to bring across any vehicles or anti-tank guns.*
- *At about an hour before dark, an enemy counter-attack of armour supported by infantry developed against the bridgehead and seriously threatened the whole battalion position which was without anti-tank guns and not yet securely consolidated to meet the threat.*
- *The battalion was thus able to hold its ground while a bridge was constructed and anti-tank guns brought up to consolidate the bridgehead through which the brigade was able to continue its advance the next morning.*
- *On 18 April 1945, "C" Company of The North Shore Regiment, with the carrier platoon and two anti-tank guns under command, were acting in the role of a mobile battle group with orders to make a reconnaissance of the bridge on the approaches to Makkum. The company was embossed on carriers and were proceeding along when a huge crater was blown in the road. One carrier was blown up and all the troops on the carrier were killed.*
- *One anti-tank gun ran out of ammunition and Private James Benedict Lynch, whose gun was in the open and under severe fire from the enemy, handled his gun alone and returned enemy fire. This soldier did superb work and silenced one of the 88-mm guns. This allowed the forward platoon of the company, which was trapped in the crater, to crawl back approximately three hundred yards to the company without casualties. This was due to the efficient and courageous manner in which Private Lynch handled his anti-tank gun.*

The Ems River and Kusten Canal Germany

During this same week in April, Joe's anti-tank unit had curved eastward into Germany and was engaged in battle near the Ems River at the Kusten Canal. The canal linked Germany's Ems and Weser Rivers.

Edited excerpt from **Valour in the Victory Campaign:**

(T)he Ems ...presented major problems because it was tidal. If the crossing were to be made on an outgoing tidal, the turbulent currents at the confluence (of rivers) would make navigation very hazardous; a crossing at low tide, however, would force the troops to land in deep mud far from the actual river bank. The river was furthermore lined with dykes into which the Germans had dug their slit trenches and machine-gun posts. It was important to bridge the river as soon as possible after the assault troops had crossed in order to get supporting weapons and supplies across.” (pp. 199-201)



The Highland Light Infantry loading into assault boats, getting ready to cast off on the reedy flat shore of the Ems River to start the attack on Leer
Donald I. Grant, NAC, PA-192263

Edited excerpt from **The Royal Canadian Armoured Corps: An Illustrated History:**

“The two armoured divisions of II Canadian Corps, 4CAD and 1 Polish, reached the thirty-metre-wide, ninety-kilometre-long Kusten Canal, linking the Ems and Weser Rivers, on 14 April. The bridges all having been blown, the Algonquin Regiment crossed the obstacle in boats at 1 a.m. on 17 April, the tanks of the British Columbia Regiment providing the supporting fire.

The remainder of 10 Brigade crossed just in time to see off the enemy's counter-attack and, once the engineers had erected a bridge, suitably enough named "Algonquin Bridge," "B" Squadron of the BCR was able to deploy into the bridgehead.

At that point the enemy managed to destroy the bridge, leaving the rest of the regiment stranded on the "wrong" side of the obstacle. It took two days to replace the bridge; meanwhile "B" Squadron fought on in the isolated bridgehead..." (pp. 330-331)

During the course of his four years of service Joe was entitled to leaves of absence and furloughs.



*On U.S. soil
Lawn of River Vale, N.J. house
Courtesy of Nancy Heffernan Williams*

His mother Honora penciled this inscription on the back of the photo, "*Joseph P. Egan Jr. home for a few days furlough in 1942.*" On his uniform there is a white sleeve patch, an insignia denoting the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps.

Grass and flowers are in bloom, so this may have been his last furlough spent at home before shipping overseas on June 3, 1942. Joe looks quite well-fed.

“By April of 1945, Joe was eligible to return home because of his age, almost forty, and length of service. However, he declined, explaining in his letters that he preferred to see younger men get relief from combat.” (Family Fragments)

Late in April 1945, a telegram was delivered to Honora Egan. It said that Gunner Joseph Patrick Egan was “missing in action” as of April 18, 1945 while fighting in Germany. The date he was reported missing was 19 days before VE Day which marked the end of the war in Europe.

While the Egan, Heffernan, and Roth families anxiously awaited news of their missing son and brother, the end of the war was proclaimed with much rejoicing.

Excerpt from **Victory in the Valour Campaign**:

Victory and the End of the Campaign

“On 4 May 1945, a message was sent out from the Third Division Headquarters: “CEASE ALL OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS FORTHWITH. CEASE FIRE 0800 HOURS 5 MAY. REMAIN PRESENT AREA.” On May 5, terms were signed at Field-Marshal Montgomery’s headquarters for the unconditional surrender of all German troops in Northern Germany, Holland, Denmark, the Friesien Island, and Heliogoland.

Finally, two days later:

During the evening, news came over the radio of the unconditional surrender of all German land, sea and air forces...By the troops, this news was received with the same calmness as the news of the collapse on the 21 Army Group front. There were no celebrations. One still sensed that feeling of unbelief and of relief that, after almost six long years of fighting, the self-styled Master Race who had set out to establish a new Order in Europe and the world had been beaten to their knees. (RG 24, Vol 15123, Nth NS Highrs W.D., 7 May 1945)”

The war was over. On 10 May 1945, ...Division Headquarters issued the following message to all units:

CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE

PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

In the name of the Government, I desire at this hour to send you, the officers and men of the Canadian Army, wherever you are serving, heartiest congratulations upon the victory over the armed forces of Nazi Germany, to which you have all so greatly contributed...

Our country honours especially today those of you who have been in the thick of the conflict. By your valour, your skill, your endurance in the hardest fighting you have won battle honours of which Canada will never cease to be proud.

In tribute to those of our comrades who have made the supreme sacrifice, the whole nation reverently bows its head.

The record of achievements of Canada's fighting forces in the defeat and destruction of Nazi tyranny will constitute an immortal chapter in the history of our country. (RG 24, Vol 15170, The Queen's Own Rifles War Diary, May 1945)."

Edited excerpt from the **Wikipedia** website:

VE Day – “Victory in Europe” Proclaimed



“Winston Churchill waves to crowds in Whitehall on the day he broadcast to the nation that the war with Germany had been won.

***Victory in Europe Day (V-E Day or VE Day)** was May 7 and May 8, 1945, the dates when the World War II Allies formally accepted the unconditional surrender of the armed forces of Nazi Germany and the end of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.*

On April 30, Hitler committed suicide during the Battle for Berlin, and so the surrender of Germany was authorized by his replacement, President of Germany Karl Dönitz... The military surrender was signed on May 7 in Reims, France, and May 8 in Berlin, Germany.”

Nancy Heffernan Williams, writing in her epistolary history, **Family Fragments**:

"I remember my mother (Margaret Egan Heffernan, his closest sibling) telling me that when the news that he was missing came late in April, she was particularly pained to think that seven or eight days had gone by with Joe in trouble, perhaps dead, and life had proceeded normally, people had joked and teased and dined and slept. During the period between telegrams people went about in a state of apprehension and hope. The telegram confirming his death did not arrive until May 11, 1945, three days after VE Day."

CLASS OF SERVICE This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.	WESTERN UNION A. N. WILLIAMS PRESIDENT	1201	SYMBOLS DL = Day Letter NL = Night Letter LC = Deferred Cable NLT = Cable Night Letter Ship Radiogram
The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.			
NK 264 8167	53/41 DL	OTTAWA, ONTARIO MAY 11, 1945	
MRS. NORA EGAN, 152 WESTWOOD AVE., WESTWOOD, N.J.			
DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU PA 23036 GUNNER JOSEPH PATRICK EGAN PREVIOUSLY REPORTED MISSING IS NOW OFFICIALLY REPORTED KILLED IN ACTION 19 APRIL 1945 STOP			
WHEN FURTHER INFORMATION BECOMES AVAILABLE IT WILL BE FORWARDED AS SOON AS REPORTED			
DIRECTOR OF RECORDS			

Courtesy of Nancy Heffernan Williams

Honora's inscription on the back of one photograph says her son was killed near the Kusten Canal.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website says, "The great majority of those buried in Holten Canadian War Cemetery died during the last stages of the war in Holland, during the advance...into northern Germany and across the Ems in April." Holten Canadian War Cemetery is Joseph Patrick Egan's final resting place.

Text quoted from **The Royal Canadian Armoured Corps** describing the crossing of the Ems River (bottom of page 72 and top of page 73) places 4 CAD at the Kusten Canal and the dates coincide with those given for Joe being listed MIA on April 18 and KIA on April 19.

The telegram was followed by this letter:



OFFICE OF THE
ADJUTANT-GENERAL

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE
ARMY

17th May, 1945.

Mrs. Norah Egan,
152 Westwood Avenue, Rd. 1,
Westwood, N.J., U.S.A.

Dear Mrs. Egan:

It was with deep regret that I learned of the death of your son, A25036 Gunner Joseph Patrick Egan, who gave his life in the Service of his Country in the Western European Theatre of War on the 19th day of April, 1945.

From official information we have received, your son was killed in action against the enemy. You may be assured that any additional information received will be communicated to you without delay.

The Minister of National Defence and the Members of the Army Council have asked me to express to you and your family their sincere sympathy in your bereavement.

We pay tribute to the sacrifice he so bravely made.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Walford
(A.E. Walford),
Major-General
Adjutant-General.

Courtesy of Nancy Heffernan Williams

Are those stains a mother's tears?

Obituaries were published in *The Bergen Record* and in a Westwood newspaper.

SGT. EGAN DEAD AFTER REFUSING ARMY FURLOUGH

River Vale Man Killed
In Germany April 19—
Parsells Is Dead

M'KINNEY MISSING

Sergeant Joseph P. Egan of River Vale, 40-year-old soldier with the Canadian Army, who had been overseas since May, 1942 and had been eligible for furlough months ago but declined because he preferred to see younger men get relief from combat, was killed in action in Germany April 19, the Canadian Government at Ottawa has notified his mother, Mrs. Joseph P. Egan.

Two weeks ago Mrs. Egan had been notified that her son was missing. Her last word from him was a letter written March 28.

Gunnery Sergeant Charles H. Parsells of Closter, a member of the U. S. Marine Corps, was killed in action in the Pacific, the War Department announced today, and Staff Sergeant John C. Brennan of Cliffside Park, 19-year-old waist gunner on a B-24 Liberator, who was reported missing since April 21 over Germany, lost his life on that date, his parents were notified yesterday. Sergeant Brennan was a 1943 letterman in football at St. Cecilia's High School, Englewood.

Second Lieutenant James R. McKinney of Ridgewood was listed missing in action today by the War Department and five other Bergen County men and one formerly of this county are listed wounded.

ENLISTED IN 1941

Sergeant Egan, an anti-tank gunner in the Royal Canadian Army, enlisted in service in the spring of 1941, 8 months before the U. S. entered the war. After basic training with the Royal Essex Troop, an infantry unit, he was assigned to recruiting, but after 6 months of this activity in the provinces received a transfer to an anti-tank

(Continued from page 2)

battery and went overseas with the 65th Regiment. He took part in the fighting in France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany.

Born in Ridgefield Park in 1905, Sergeant Egan became widely known as a youth in the Pascack Valley when his family moved to River Vale in 1921. He was graduated from Westwood High School in 1924 and was active for years in sports and theatricals.

A Mass of Requiem was offered Monday at 9 A. M. at St. Andrew's R. C. Church by his brother, the Rev. Kyran Egan, S. J., who journeyed to River Vale from his station in Buffalo. Also surviving are two sister, Mrs. Margaret Heffernan and Mrs. Eleanor Roth, both of River Vale.

KILLED IN ACTION

Joseph P. Egan, of Westwood avenue, River Vale, an anti-tank gunner in the Royal Canadian Army, was killed in action in Germany on April 19, according to word received this week by his mother, Mrs. Joseph P. Egan, from the Canadian Government.

Two weeks ago Mrs. Egan had been notified by the Canadian authorities that her son was missing in action since April 18. Her last word from him was a letter written March 28.

Although eligible months ago for return home because of age and length of service, Egan declined because, as explained in his letters, he preferred to see younger men get relief from combat.

Born in 1905 in Ridgefield Park, Egan became widely known as a youth in the Pascack Valley, his family having moved to River Vale in 1921 and maintained residence there since. He was a graduate of Westwood High School, class of 1924, and was active for years in sports and theatricals.

A mass of requiem was offered Monday morning at 9 o'clock at St. Andrew's Church by his brother, the Rev. Kyran Egan, S. J., who journeyed to River Vale from his station in Buffalo upon being notified. Also surviving are two sisters, Mrs. Margaret Heffernan, and Mrs. Eleanor Roth, both of River Vale.

Courtesy of Nancy Heffernan Williams

Several months after her son's death, Norah received this letter:

ROBERT
WAGNER
RE: DEATH OF
JOE EGAN
102 Brubacher St.,
Kitchener, Canada
July 10, 1945.
My Dear Mrs. Egan, -
I write to offer you my very deepest
sympathy in the untimely end of
your son Joe. We were the best of
friends and when I heard from one of
my former buddies that he was
killed in action. I wrote to his
commanding officer and asked for
your address.
Red and I met in London Ont. when
he transferred from the Essex Scottish
to the 15th Field Ambulance. We
became pals and bunked together
until he transferred to the 5th ATK
Reg't. Even then we wrote each
other weekly and managed to
spend several leaves together
overseas. After I was invalided

II

Back to Canada and received my discharge. We kept a regular correspondence. and made many post-war plans.

In his last letter he wrote April 26 only 3 days before his death. He wished me happiness for me and my bride-to-be. He was hoping that the war would be over and he could be here for our wedding on July 28.

I don't think I can express the high regard held for him by all who he soldiered with. As for myself it seemed more like losing a father than a sol. I am only 22 now. and though there was quite a difference of age we got along swell.

His commanding officer wrote and told me of the circumstances surrounding this death. But I hesitate to write them to you.

Sometimes those things go better
un-said. But I'm sure you can
be very proud of your son. He
died seeking adventure, fighting for
a country, not his own. His outstanding
personality endeared him to all of
us. And I'm very proud to have
known him and soldered with
him.

I'm enclosing the only good snap I
have of him. And I'm sure that
you'll see in it something of the
fine soldier he made.

We shared many confidences and
you, his mother was his chief topic
when ever we talked of home.

Once again I wish to express my
deepest sympathy.

Sincerely yours.
Robert Wagner.

102 Brubacher St.
Kitchner, Canada
July 10, 1945

My Dear Mrs. Egan,

I write to offer you my very deepest sympathy in the untimely end of your son Joe. We were the best of friends and when I heard that he was Killed in action I wrote to his commanding officer and asked for your address.

Red and I met in London, Ont. (Ontario) when he transferred from the Essex Scottish to the 15th Field Ambulance. We became pals and bunked together until he transferred to the 65th A/TK Reg't. Even then we wrote each other weekly and managed to spend several leaves together overseas. After I was invalided back to Canada and received my discharge we kept a regular correspondence and made many post-war plans.

*In his last letter he wrote April 26 *, only 3 days before his death, he wished me happiness for me and my bride-to-be. He was hoping that the war would be over and he could be here for our wedding on July 28th.*

I don't think I can express the high regard held for him by all who he soldiered with. As for myself, it seemed more like losing a father than a pal. I am only 22 now and though there was quite a difference of age we got along swell.

His commanding officer wrote and told me the circumstances surrounding his death. But I hesitate to write them to you. Sometimes those things go better unsaid. But I'm sure you can be very proud of your son. He died seeking adventure, fighting for a country not his own. His outstanding personality endeared him to all of us. And I am very proud to have known him and soldiered with him.

I am enclosing the only good snap I have of him. And I'm sure that you'll see in it something of the fine soldier he made. We shared many confidences and you, his mother, was his chief topic whenever we talked of home. Once again I wish to express my deepest sympathy.

Sincerely yours,
Robert Wagner

- *This is an error. Joe went missing on April 18, 1945 and was declared "killed in action" on April 19, 1945 so the probable date of his letter to his friend was April 16.*

Joe Egan was “killed in the field in Germany” according to his military service record. Along with many other Allied soldiers who perished during the final days, his body was initially interred in a temporary gravesite in Germany. His service record marks the spot as PIRIG1 (plot one, row one, grave one). The gravesite may have been near the Kusten Canal and Ems River.

Along with his fallen Canadian “brothers in arms,” Joe was later reburied in Holten Canadian War Cemetery near Holten, Holland. His service record say he was laid to rest in grave 6, row C, plot 7. (The official cemetery website denotes his grave as: VII. C. 6.)

Early photo of Joe’s grave



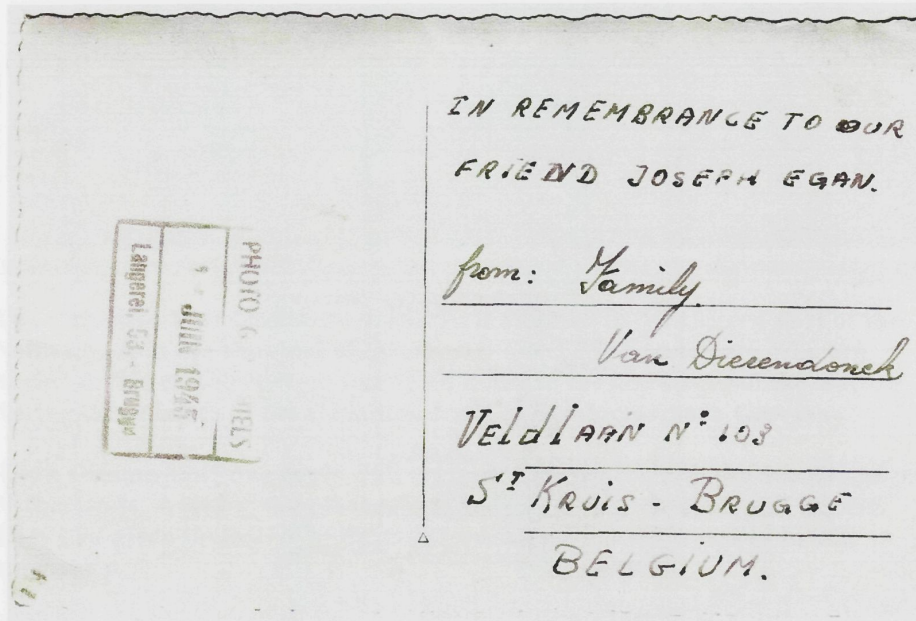
Honora’s inscription on verso: *Joseph P. Egan Killed in Action April 19, 1945 in Germany. Buried in Holten Military Cemetery, Holland Canadian Army Unit.*

Courtesy of Nancy Heffernan Williams

For some time a family in nearby Belgium cared for Joe’s gravesite and corresponded with Honora, sending photos of the grave and of themselves. It is believed this correspondence continued into the 1950s and possibly even up until the time of his mother’s death in 1959. (Family Fragments)



The Van Dierendonek Family



*Inscription on back of their family photo
Courtesy of Nancy Heffernan Williams*

Armorials and badges worn by
and medals awarded to
Joseph Patrick Egan



Over the course of several years following her son's death, Honora Egan received medals honoring his service in England, France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. These are the three medals that came into my possession after my mother's death, along with her brother Joe's Essex Scottish, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps and Les Fusiliers Mont Royal armorials shown on the previous page.

Joe's Defence Medal



Front



Back

His 1939-1945 Star

GRJ VI



His France and Germany Star

GRJ VI



British Medals -- World War II

These medals are specific to World War 2 service and were also awarded to Canadians.



Awarded for service as follows:

- Navy - awarded for six months service afloat in areas of active operations from 3 September 1939 to 2 September 1945.
- Army - awarded for six months service in an operational command during the period 3 September 1939 to 2 September 1945.
- Air Force - awarded to all aircrew who have taken part in operations against the enemy, subject to at least two months in an operational unit and to all non-air crew who served six months in the area of an Army operational command. A gold rosette worn on the ribbon signifies participation in the Battle of Britain, 1 July 1940 to 31 October 1940.
- Merchant Marine - awarded under the same conditions as Navy provided that at least one voyage was made through a specified area of active operations.

The 1939-45 Star

Awarded for entry into operational service on land in France, Belgium, Holland or Germany between 6 June 1944 and 8 May 1945.

- Navy and Merchant Marine - One days service afloat in the prescribed areas of the North Sea, the English Channel and the Bay of Biscay.

A person qualifying for this Star and the Air Crew Europe Star and the Atlantic Star is awarded only the first earned, plus Clasps for the others. A silver rose emblem is worn on the ribbon bar to denote the award of a bar.



The France and Germany Star



The Defence Medal

Awarded to members:

- serving for six months in specified non-operational areas subjected to enemy air attack or closely threatened;
- who served for six months at any time between 3 September 1939 and 2 September 1945 in the Northern Territory north of 14° 30' South and the Torres Strait Islands;
- serving for 12 months non-specified non-operational service overseas from or outside Australia; or
- of Mine and Bomb Disposal units employed in areas subjected to enemy air attack or closely threatened for three months within the periods stated.

WORLD WAR TWO MEDALS

59. THE DEFENCE MEDAL

Terms:

Awarded to Canadians for 6 months service in Britain between 3 September 1939 and 2 September 1945.

Bars:

Nil

Obverse:

George VI, uncrowned coinage head, facing left.

Reverse:

The Royal Crown resting on the stump of an oak tree and flanked by a lion and lioness. On the top left is the date 1939 and on the top right 1945. At the bottom is the wording: THE DEFENCE MEDAL.

Description:

Circular, 1.42 inches, silver 800 fine. British issues are made of cupro-nickel.

Mounting:

Plain, straight non-swivelling suspender with a single toe claw and claw supports on the rim with an inward scroll.

Ribbon:

1 1/4 inches; Orange (flame coloured) 1/2" central stripe flanked by 3/8" Light Green stripes with a narrow Black stripe in the middle of each green stripe. The Flame colour with green edges represents the enemy attacks on the green land of England and the black represents black-outs.

Dates:

Established 16 August 1945.



There is also mention in his service records of other medals and awards. Fifteen months prior to his death, Joe Egan, along with many other Canadian soldiers, was given the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp.



The Canadian Volunteer Service Medal, awarded with a silver bar in January 1944 to all men who had completed 60 days of overseas service. The medals themselves were not issued until after the war, but the ribbon was worn. The troops often referred to it in a somewhat disparaging manner as the 'Spam' medal, since it 'arrived with the rations'.

Illustrations note:

British Medals – World War II – found in **Gallantry Decorations, 1945**, T. Robert Fowler, Ontario, Canada, 1995
World War II Medals – found in **Canadian Orders, Decorations and Medals**, 3rd edition, Surgeon Commander F. J. Blatherwick, C.D., Unitrade Press, Toronto, Canada.
Canadian Volunteer Service Medal - found in **Royal Canadian Armoured Corps: An Illustrated History**, John Marteinson & Michael R. McNorgan, Ontario, Canada 2000.

There is also mention of another war medal amongst his documentation. That medal appears to have been lost. Posthumously, he was awarded a memorial bar and a memorial cross. What became of the bar and cross, I do not know.

About twenty-five years after his death, a newly developed street in upper River Vale was named “Egan Terrace” in honor of soldier Joseph Patrick Egan. In this photo, the street sign with the star preceding his name appears to be spattered with mud. This does not trouble me.

It reminds me of the conditions Joe endured during the liberation of Holland. The intersecting street is named “Thurnau Drive” in honor of another River Vale soldier also killed in War II. Quite likely, they knew one another.

This final letter from the Canadian Library and Archives stated, "*This completes the processing of your request for information held by Library and Archives Canada.*" I knew then that the exact cause of my uncle's death would not be forthcoming. So I began combing the documents I had for clues.

Mr. Abbotts had actually sent a number of pages from two different unit war diaries. I extracted salient details from each and melded them together according to date and time. He had also included a statement from a Lieutenant A. Barclay. And a copy of a "Questionnaire on a Missing Officer or Soldier."

Statement of Lieut. A. Barclay, in its entirety.

"A-23036 Gnr. EGAN, J.P. was a gun number in my troop. At the time he was reported missing in (action) the troop was deployed as Infantry in area M.R.072983, sheet 2913, GERMANY. At about 0100 hours I made a check of the troop posts and on the way back to Tp. HQ. Gnr. EGAN came up to me and asked me permission to carry assault boats down from our position to D. Tp. position at M.R.068987, sheet 2913, GERMANY, which was granted. The LSRs (Lake Superior Regiment) were sending a patrol across the canal in front of D. Tp. position and we were carrying boats down to the canal. He was not seen after the time he left me at 0100 hours 19 April 45.

Sgd. (A. Barclay) Lieut.,
65 Cdn. Anti-Tank Bty, RCA.

Salient information garnered from "Questionnaire on a Missing Officer or Soldier," dated 23 April 45 from 5 Canadian Anti-Tank Regt, RCA to Officer i/c, Canadian Section G.H.Q. (General Headquarters), 2nd Echelon. (*Full questionnaire is included in the appendices of this book.*)

1. No. A-23036 Rank: Gnr. Name: EGAN J.P.

2. Circumstances leading to his disappearance.

Where was he last seen? *M.R.072983, Sheet 2913 1/25,000 Friesoythe, GERMANY*

He was last seen by: *Lieut. A. Barclay* Who was then engaged in: *making a check of post in troop area*

Where seen from? *Tp. H.Q. M.R.072983, sheet 2913, GERMANY*

Approx. distance: *two feet* Visibility: *dark*

About what time? *0130 hours* Date: *19 Aug. 45. (*error in month)*

Who was with him? *He was alone at the time*

To what task was he assigned? *None*

What was he doing? *Nothing – he had come off guard at his post at 2400 hours 18 April 45*

Give details of what happened: *Gnr. EGAN came to Lieut. Barclay at approx. 0130 hours to ask his permission to help carry assault boats to D. Tp. position at M.R.068987*

3. Physical Condition

Was he alive at the time? *Yes*

If dead, was any attempt made to recover the body? *A search was made of area*

If wounded, how seriously? *Not wounded*

4. Information re the Enemy

How far away were the enemy? *800-yards*

What sort of fire was he up against? *Small arms and light mortar fire*

Was he in danger of being taken prisoner? *Yes*

If so, why? *Area around troop position not flushed and there was possibility of enemy patrols*

5. Summary

Were any items of personal effects obtained? *Yes*

If so, by whom? *Capt. H.J. Champion*

What disposition was made? *Accounted for by Q.M. (Quartermaster)*

Number of witnesses signed statement attached? *One*

Rank, names in full, and unit of witnesses and/or other sources of information from which the above was obtained:

Lieut. A. Barclay, 65 Bty, 5 Cdn, Anti-Tank Regt, RCA

Missing 18 Apr 45. Sgd. A. SHINWELL, Major, Officer Commanding,
65, Canadian Anti-Tank Bty, RCA.

War Diary

- ❖ 65 Cdn A Tk Bty, 5 Cdn A Tk Regt, RCA
- ❖ Regimental Headquarters, 5 Cdn A Tk Regt, RCA
- 17 Apr 45; 18 Apr 45; 19 Apr 45

*Salient data surrounding the time of Joe Egan's death has been winnowed from two war diaries: the 65th Battery's and the Regimental Headquarter's. (Full diary entries are included in the appendices of this book.) **Joe was part of F Troop.***

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information
M.R. 075969 GERMANY	17 Apr 45	1300	Weather today is very good with good visibility. Bty moved to new location. Our role is strictly (sic) a holding infantry role.
		1630	Tp locations: D Tp – 072980 , E Tp – 059948, F Tp - 071982 , E Tp has a post at 054959, Sheet 2912, 1/25,000.
		1830	We came under command of 10 Canadian Infantry Brigade. Major G. E. Shewell went to see the B.M. who wants to have patrol contact with E Tp. This is some problem, due to the distance from Tac HQ and the fact that suitable route could not be reconnoissanced before dark. Three patrols by jeep, using known roads are planned for tonight and at first light E Tp carrier will try and make contact by most direct cross country route.
		2000	Periodically sniping reported in F Tp area. This continued throughout the night, otherwise all was quiet. D and F Tps acquired horse and cart for carrying rations and supplies, as they are cut off from vehicle transport by cratered road.
MR 075969 GERMANY	18 Apr 45	0500	We had a stand to with personnel manning their respective posts. We stood down at 0550 hrs. Visibility during stand to was poor due to a heavy ground mist.
		0900	Carrier from E Tp arrived and reported good cross-country going by shortest possible route. Similar patrols laid on for tonight. We came under command of 4 Cdn Armoured Brigade.
		0915	Acquired another horse, the first one having proved unsuitable due to advanced age and inability to pull a cart. There was a disturbance at RHQ last night. A BCR Trooper

			was drunk and in the company of three German civilians. Trooper was detained. Civilians were sent home. Statements were taken.
		1300	D Tp moved up to 068986 and established two machine gun posts on canal bank at bridge 066988 and E Tp moved to 055957 and established two posts at 047958.
		1600	Lake Superior Regiment personnel came up to make reconnaissance of area from which a patrol of theirs is to cross the canal tonight.
		1730	As there may not be any artillery support for the LSR crossing it is possible that an 8 Light Anti-Aircraft might help with Bofors (gun).
		2100	It has been decided to send a platoon instead of a company across the canal. They will cross at 2300 hours.
		2130	LSR platoon arrived with boats. The boats were taken up to the canal by horse and cart.
		2300	The crossing was unsuccessful. There was considerable noise in launching the boat which drew enemy small arms fire.
		2359	Patrol still had not gone across canal. Major G. E. Shewell is staying at F troop Headquarters tonight.
MR 134987	19 APR 45	0345	The weather today is bright but chilly. Perfect visibility. LSR crossing abandoned due to boats being holed by enemy small arms fire.
		1000	The 3 and 65 Btys are to cross the canal and protect the flanks.
		1100	The CRA explained the current situation and details.
		1330	The towed Batteries will take 2 guns and 12 half tracks each across.
		1725	(T)wo outposts cannot be relieved until after dark.
		1830	During the course of the evening shells from a self-propelled vehicle and "Moaning Minnies" landing in our area. Luckily the ground is soft and consequently the usual amount of shrapnel does not fly around. We did not have any casualties.

I was now ready to assemble the clues in hopes of pinpointing the time, place and manner of my uncle's death.

From the letter written by his comrade-in-arms, Robert Wagner, to my grandmother:

"I wrote to his commanding officer and asked for your address... His commanding officer wrote and told me the circumstances surrounding his death. But I hesitate to write them to you. Sometimes those things go better unsaid."

This led me to believe that information was purposely withheld from his record. And that his death was a particularly disturbing one.

From the statement signed by Lieut. A. Barclay:

"At about 0100 hours I made a check of the troop posts and on the way back to Tp. HQ. Gnr. EGAN came up to me and asked me permission to carry assault boats down from our position to D. Tp. position at M.R.068987, sheet 2913, GERMANY, which was granted. The LSRs (Lake Superior Regiment) were sending a patrol across the canal in front of D. Tp. position and we were carrying boats down to the canal. He was not seen after the time he left me at 0100 hours 19 April 45."

This led me to wonder if, in the dark, Joe Egan was accidentally killed by "friendly fire" as he went to help carry the assault boats to D. Troop.

From the "Questionnaire on a Missing Officer or Soldier":

Q. Where was he last seen? **A.** M.R. 072983, Sheet 2913 1/25,000 Friesoythe, GERMANY

Q. Was he alive at the time? **A.** Yes

Q. If dead, was any attempt made to recover the body? **A.** A search was made of the area

Q. How far away were the enemy? **A.** 800-yards

Q. What sort of fire was he up against? **A.** Small arms and light mortar fire (Mortar is a canon, short in proportion to its bore, for throwing shells at high angles.)

Q. Was he in danger of being taken prisoner? **A.** Yes

Q. If so, why? **A.** Area around troop position not flushed and there was possibility of enemy patrols.

Q. Where any items of personal effects obtained? A. Yes

Q. If so, by whom? A. *Capt. H.J. Campion*

Q. What disposition was made? A. *Accounted for by Q. M. (Quartermaster)*

Since a search of the area was made but his body was not found, might Joe have been hit by enemy mortar and therefore be unidentifiable without fingerprinting? (But wouldn't he have been wearing "dog tags?" And what, and where, and when, were the "personal effects" found?)

Or, was he taken prisoner by a German patrol, interrogated, tortured, and then killed? Lieutenant Barclay's statement says, "...we were carrying boats down to the canal. He was not seen after the time he left me at 0100 hours 19 April 45." If it was a joint effort (we), wouldn't one of his fellow soldiers have seen him either at the F. Troop location or at the D. Troop location? Unless...alone and on foot, he was captured by a German patrol.

Either of these two scenarios might explain why he was initially listed as MIA. (Although, why on the 18th when he spoke with Lieutenant Barclay at 1:30 a.m. on the 19th? And once his body was found, how was his KIA date determined to have been 19 Apr 45?)

The "Questionnaire on a Missing Officer or Soldier" was typed up on April 23, 1945, five days after Joe was designated MIA. There is an entry in his unit's war diary, "19 Apr 45; 1830 hours; Arrived in new area...MR 146991." The troops had advanced to a different geographic location without him.

The "Questionnaire" had asked where Joe had last been seen. The answer was MR 072983, Friesoythe, GERMANY. So might the Canadians have ultimately found his body deeper into GERMANY? Wouldn't that give credence to his having been taken prisoner? And might that also be the reason his friend, Robert Wagner had written, in his letter to Joe's mother, "His commanding officer wrote and told me the circumstances surrounding his death. But I hesitate to write them to you. Sometimes those things go better unsaid."

From the War Diaries:

Apr. 17, 1945

Periodically sniping reported in F Tp area.

Apr. 18, 1945

D Tp moved up to 068986 and established two machine gun posts on canal bank at bridge

As there may not be any artillery support for the LSR crossing it is possible that an 8 Light Anti-Aircraft might help with Bofors (gun).

The crossing was unsuccessful. There was considerable noise in launching the boat which drew enemy small arms fire.

Apr. 19, 1945

LSR crossing abandoned due to boats being holed by enemy small arms fire.

During the course of the evening shells from a self-propelled vehicle and "Moaning Minnies" landing in our area... We did not have any casualties.

References to sniping, machine guns, light anti-aircraft, enemy small arms fire, shells from a self-propelled vehicle, and "Moaning Minnies" gives indication that Joe could have been killed by stray gunfire. Yet the war diary says that on April 19th, "We did not have any casualties."

I decided to make one more attempt to resolve the mystery. I called the toll-free phone number Mr. Abbotts had listed at the end of his letter. I left a voice mail message for him. The following day he returned my call.

I explained my lingering suspicion that perhaps the cause of my uncle's death was left out of his service record because it had been either a "friendly fire" death or a gruesome death. I asked if that would have been military policy at the time in order to spare the survivors.

Mr. Abbott said he didn't think that was the case. But rather that things were happening so quickly during the final days of the war that officers recorded the data they had, then moved on in an effort to prevent further deaths. "The fog of war?" I asked. "Yes," he said, "the fog of war."

From Veterans Affairs Canada

Remembering their sacrifice

Those Canadians who fought in Belgium achieved and sacrificed much in their efforts to help bring peace and freedom to the people of Europe. These combatants were among the more than one million men and women who served in Canada's Armed Forces during the Second World War. More than 42,000 Canadians gave their lives in the war. Canada and the world recognize the sacrifices and achievements of all the Canadians, like those who fought in Belgium, who accomplished so much and left a lasting legacy of peace.

From Valour in the Victory Campaign

EPILOGUE

So honour the men of the western plains,
Black Devils, Reginas too;
The Queens, North Shores and Chaudieres,
And Scots from the Western blue.
Victoria, Winnipeg, Ottawa
Sent sons for the treacherous trail,
Who must feed the guns and the tanks and the men,
The men who dare not fail.
There were gunners and sappers from homes which range
From the east to the setting sun,
And many lie where the ripening rye,
Danced to the devil's fun.
They do not ask a golden casque,
Or a tower of graven stone,
But that men may live in a world set free
From the guilt by their blood atoned.

H/Capt. Stanley E. Higgs
October 21, 1944

Soldier Poetry of the Second World War
Jane and Walter Morgan, editors
(Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1990)



*The men behind the guns—"F" Troop.
Christmas, 1944, Rijen, Holland.*

P. S. 1955

At St. Andrew's Grammar School, I had a best friend. Her family lived in Westwood. My family lived in River Vale. So there were times when I'd be invited to walk home from school with Joan to play till dinner time.

My father commuted via the Erie Lackawanna train from Westwood to Manhattan. After work, he'd drive to Joan's house to fetch me. Occasionally, I'd catch a glimpse of Joan's dad, who I'd overheard my parents say was "*an accountant*." He'd trudge wearily, lugging a weighty satchel, from his garage to his back door, looking like his thoughts were a thousand miles away. He had salt-and-pepper hair, a trim moustache, and appeared older than my own father.

One evening when I was waiting in my friend's yard for my dad to drive up, her father noticed me standing there. He asked who I was. I said, "Christine Roth." He nodded in name recognition and continued past me.

Then he slowed, stopped, and retraced his steps. He looked into my face. "I knew your Uncle Joe," he said. I said, "You mean my *Uncle Kyran*. *He is a Jesuit priest*." "No," he said, "I mean your Uncle Joe." I said, "My *grandfather's* name was Joe and *he was a lawyer*." His face clouded. I didn't have the adjectives to describe the shift in his expression when I ten, but I do now: baffled, disbelieving, dismayed.

Accountants add things up. He knew I knew nothing about the high school friend whose praises he had wanted to sing. He swung his head slowly, looked at the dirt, turned away, and continued toward his back door. I knew something had gone wrong, but not quite what. Too young to fathom it then, I filed the encounter away in a childhood mental folder, "Stuff to Figure Out Later."

Fifty years later, I undertook this book, in part, as expiation. In so doing, I have come to know my Uncle Joe. Well enough to weep for him, for my grandmother, and for all that was lost in the War.

And now I can say with pride, "*He was a soldier. He helped liberate Holland. He laid down his life for freedom.*"





Joseph Patrick Egan
Graduating senior, age 19
Yearbook - 1924



*Taken during his sophomore or junior year
Joe is at the center of the front row*



*Taken during his sophomore or junior year
Joe is in the second row, fourth from left*



*Taken during his sophomore or junior year
Joe is in the third row, second from left*

NO. A. 23036 Rank Gunner Name EGAN, Joseph Patrick 3

Unit R.C.A. Date of death 19th April, 1945.

Died at Germany

Cause Killed in action.

Death occurred on strength of Forces H.Q. 405-E-777

M/K Mrs. Werek Egan, Relationship Mother

Address 152 Westwood Ave., Rd. 1, Westwood, N.J., U.S.A.

Remains buried in in field sheet M-2 066990 Germany Cemetery

P R I G 1

CHK
Grave location

OVER

BURIAL REPORT TO N.K. JUN 20 1946

RETURN TO BUR. OF STAT. OCT 18 1945

ROYAL MESSAGE DESP'D. JUN 8 1945

CAN. MESSAGE DESP'D. MAY 29 1945

Temp BR sent to NK & Map

Holten Canadian Military Cemetery,
Holten, Holland.

Grave 6, row C, plot 7.

HI

& CR

Forms Despc. NOV 15 1945

Photographs

Despatched
JUN 15 1948

REBURIAL

Statement of Lieut. A. Barclay.

"A-23036 Gnr. EGAN, J.P. was a gun number in my troop. At the time he was reported missing in the troop was deployed as Infantry in area M.R.072983, sheet 2913, GERMANY. At about 0100 hours I made a check of the troop posts and on the way back to Tp.HQ. Gnr. EGAN came up to me and asked me permission to carry assault boats from our position to D.Tp. position at M.R.068987, sheet 2913, GERMANY, which was granted. The LSRs were sending a patrol across the canal in front of D.Tp. position and we were carrying boats down to the canal. He was not seen after the time he left me at 0100 hours 19 April 45.

Sgd. (A. Barclay) Lieut.,
65. Cdn. Anti-Tank Bty, RCA.

19

Instructions regarding preparation of War Diaries (which will be kept from first day of mobilization, creation or embodiment), are contained in F.S. Regs. Vol. I.

WAR DIARY

OR

--INTELLIGENCE--SUMMARY--

(Erase heading not required)

Title pages will be prepared.

Regimental Headquarters 5 Cdn A tk Regt, R.C.A.

Sheet No 8

M.F.M. 11
40/P & S/37 (8072)

Original, duplicate and triplicate to be forwarded to O. 1/c 2nd Echelon for disposal.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks, references to Appendices and initials
022865 M2 1:100,000		1300 1500 1600	Lieut Hinphy to Div Arty to give in our locations. Lt Col Quigley left for a visit to the Btys. 14 Bty is under command 10 CTR. News from Div Arty is that the LION group is being tied up for an attack North of FRIESOYTHE 0892.	
		1630 1700	Capt Manbert - Capt G 3rd Bty has received his Majority and will report to 4 A Tk Regt. We have been ordered to supply 150 men and one officer as a road working party. It will be composed of 50 men from 65, 3 & 96 Btys. They will report to the 8 Pd Sqn.	
		1930	The Engineers were contacted. They are to build a corduroy road and will have our boys as help. Plans are dependent on materials.	
		2200	Weather has cleared up and it is now quite mild.	
"	16 APR 45	0900 1200 1330 1400	The Victory Loan Campaign is in full swing. 96 Bty are to send a troop to ESTERWEGEN 9388 to support the Manitoba Dragoons. An Officer from 8LAA reported that the cooking arrangements for our working party were apparently not satisfactory as some of our men had not eaten. Capt Endel and the IO left to investigate the above situation. We found our men pretty well scattered along the roads but no sign of an officer. A check was made with the Engineers who reported that about ten of our men had eaten late through a misunderstanding but that the situation had been cleared up.	
		1600	Capt Lee in charge of the work party was contacted - He will see that cooking arrangements and reliefs are properly carried out.	
		1700	Lieut Hinphy visited the Algonquin Regt renewing some old friendships. Most of their "Falaize" officers are gone. Their regiment will cross the Canal at 130995 at midnight.	
		2100	Capt MacDonald RCAPC undertook to give the officers their first movie with a captured German projector and films. The film was entitled "Wasserwerke" - it was not very entertaining and had no propaganda value. "Pay" promises to do better in the future.	
"	17 APR 45	0845 0930	Lieut Hinphy left for Div Arty for the latest infm. The 41q Regt are firmed up across the Canal with three companies. Went on up to contact Major Andrews for news of "L" Tp. They are bogged down close to the canal. They will not be pulled out until the bridge is across and the main road fairly clear.	

Joseph Patrick Egan Biographical Data

- Firstborn son of Honora Agatha Barrett Egan and Joseph P. Egan
- Born 6/27/1905 in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey
- Family moved to River Vale, N.J. in 1921
- Active in sports and theatrics at Westwood High School, Westwood, N.J.
- Ran away – tracked down, by a Pinkerton detective, to Chicago, Illinois
- Disciplined by enrollment in a military academy
- Graduated from Westwood High School at age 19
- Enrolled at Fordham University, N.Y.C.
- Left college at age 20 following his father's death
- Worked for a time at Bergen County Court House, Hackensack, N.J.
- Depression era vagabond – “rode the rails”
- Married Jan. 30, 1932 to Hemia Calpini in Oakland, N.J.
- Divorced circa 1935
- Worked four years as a truck driver for the Western Pacific Railroad, Winnemucca, Nevada
- Soon to turn 36, he was deigned “too old” to enlist in the U. S. Army
- Took up “permanent residence” at the Windsor, Ontario, Canada Y.M.C.A. early in 1941
- Enlisted in the Royal Canadian Army: Canadian Army Over-Seas American Forces - April 1, 1941
- Soldier #: A23036
- Assigned to the Essex Scottish Regiment
- Rank of Private
- Believed to have served for a few months as a Canadian Army recruiter - Windsor, Ontario
- Assigned on July 26, 1941 to the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps – London, Ontario
- Transferred on August 6, 1941 to the 15th Light Field Ambulance of RCAMC – Valcartier, Quebec
- Furlough Oct. 1 – Oct. 14, 1941
- Promoted to Acting Lance Corporal on Oct. 21, 1941
- Dec. 16, 1941 - given 96 hours of detention for neglecting to obey Camp Order No. 11© on Nov. 21, 1941
- Reverted to Private for “disobeying a lawful command” – Sussex, New Brunswick
- Reported to 15th Light Field Ambulance on March 11, 1942

- Transferred to 65th Regiment (Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal) on April 16, 1942
 - Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA)
 - Anti-Tank Battery
 - Rank of Gunner
 - F Troop, 5th Anti-Tank Regiment (5th A/TK Regiment)
- Embarked in Canada on June 3, 1942
- Disembarked in United Kingdom on June 12, 1942
- Trained in Britain - weapons and maneuvers
- Underwent a series of temporary attachments to a variety of units for “rations and quarters”
- Appointed Acting Lance Bombardier on August 1, 1942
- Confirmed as Bombardier on October 26, 1942
- Appointed Acting Lance Sergeant on October 27, 1942
- Assigned to the Second Canadian Armoured Reinforcement Unit on Oct. 28, 1942 as Acting Bombardier
- Completed a number of training courses
- Personal leave - Jan. 19-26, 1943
- Appointed Lance Sergeant on Feb. 28, 1943
- Confirmed Sergeant on June 1, 1943
- Received the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp on Jan. 15, 1944
- Member of the First Canadian Army, Second Canadian Corps, 4th Armoured Division
- Embarked in the United Kingdom on July 23, 1944
- Disembarked in Normandy, France on July 26, 1944
- Fought in France, Belgium, Holland (Netherlands) and Germany
- Battles and Campaigns:
 - Caen, France
 - Falaise, France
 - The Coastal Ports, France and Belgium
 - The Battle of the Scheldt, Belgium and Holland
 - Liberation of Holland (Netherlands)
 - Wintered near the Maas River (Netherlands)
 - The Rhineland Campaign, Germany
 - Ems River and Kusten Canal, Germany
- Reprimanded for drunkenness (first offence) Sept. 5, 1944. Found guilty.
- Charged with drunkenness (second offence) underwent a field general court martial early Oct. 1944.
 - Found guilty on one charges, found **not guilty** on two others charges.
 - Given detention, fines, pay forfeiture, reduction in pay, and
 - Reverted from Sergeant to Gunner

- Christmas 1944 spent at Rijen, Holland with F Troop, 5th Anti-Tank Regiment
- Reported "Missing in Action" on April 18, 1945
- Confirmed "Killed in Action in the field" on April 19, 1945 in Germany near the Kusten Canal
- Initially buried in Germany in a temporary grave (P1R1G1)
- Subsequently reburied in Holten-Melsteyn Canadian War Cemetery, Holten, Holland (Grave 6, Row C, Plot 7)
- Canadian Army Medals and Honors:
 - Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, 1944
 - Defense Medal - Britain
 - 1939-1945 Star
 - France and Germany Star
 - Additional war medal
 - Memorial bar
 - Memorial cross
- Other Honors and Recognition:
 - River Vale, N.J. Veterans monument – starred entry
 - Street named for him in upper River Vale – *Egan Terrace*
 - **Joseph Patrick Egan, Adventurer and World War II Soldier** by Christine Rutherford

Copies donated to:

- Westwood Heritage Society
- River Vale Public Library
- Pascack Valley Historical Society
- Royal Canadian Armoured Corps, Canada
- Holten Canadian War Cemetery Library and Archive – Holten, Holland
- Kilkenny Library – Kilkenny, Ireland
- *Royal Canadian Artillery*
- *Library of Congress, D.C.*

