

The request of his grieving Dutch girlfriend was not granted.



In October 1944 Cecil French's unit fought a bitter battle on the Scheldt with the regiment The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada. For Cecil, a good-looking, fresh-faced young Canadian soldier, there was also another experience. A relationship arose with the young Roosendaal Jeannette Heemskerk. However, there was no time to develop the relationship because duty called and after the liberation of Zeeland, the regiment was sent to the North to prepare for Operation Veritable.

There was heavy fighting in the German Reichswald and many of Cecil's comrades were left behind on the battlefield.

Cecil survived the numerous encounters with the enemy. He was a fine soldier with good health and attitude.

That he would be a fine soldier, his captain had already predicted in an earlier assessment, although he did not give that impression, he had above average abilities. During his education, Cecil was sometimes confused, mainly because he was very concerned about his mother, who had had little support from her husband in her marriage and was now abandoned by him. She also took care of his three younger brothers. His older brother and sister had already started their own family.

Cecil had entered the service at the age of 20 in 1940 after working on a farm and as a laborer in the metal industry. His education was limited to a year and a half of technical school in Hamilton. Where the French family lived then, Cecil was born on June 21 in 1920 in Halifax (Nova Scotia). Before coming to the United Kingdom in the summer of 1943, Cecil and his regiment spent some time in Jamaica, where he was hospitalized for almost a month for treatment of severe pneumonia. In August 1944, Cecil French arrived in France to take part in the liberation advance in Northwest Europe.

On April 14, 1945, the Argyll and Sutherland Regiment had reached the Küstenkanal in Northwest Germany. The Germans had blown up the bridges over the canal and entrenched themselves behind this barrier. They continued to put up heavy resistance. During one of those actions there, Cecil was fatally wounded. He was temporarily buried

with more than a hundred other Canadian soldiers in Friesoythe (Niedersachsen) and his remains were transferred in March 1946 to the Canadian war cemetery in Holten.

Cecil French's military file contains Jeannette Heemskerk's written request from 1946 to the Canadian authorities to give her boyfriend a final resting place at the war cemetery in Bergen op Zoom, so that she could visit his grave once a week. Unfortunately for her, that request was in vain and Cecil still lies between his mates in grave 5 row A plot IX in Holten. She kept Cecil's photos well until her death and only in 2016 were they transferred by her grandson to the Information Center in Holten.

Letter written by Cecil French:

Cecil French wrote a touching letter to his mother as he prepared for battle. There were things he knew had to be said in case he never returned.

"Today we got orders to pack our personal belongings in one kit-bag and send it to Aldershot in your name, so that it may be forwarded to you in case anything happens to me," he wrote.

"I guess we are just about ready to enter the field of battle and, if by chance, dear mother, I don't return, I want you to know that I went down fighting for you and everyone else at home who I love so dearly, and also for dear old Canada.

"I have caused you a great deal of heartaches in the past 24 years of my life, mom, and I want you to know that I am sorry."

That was March of 1944, only weeks before the invasion of Europe. He never returned to his job in the Tie and Wire Company division of Stelco.