



The back of the Canadian Memorial Cross that was sent to Sam's mother.

Samuel Alexander Hazlett, known as Sam, was born on September 22, 1914, in Belfast, Ireland. His parents, Henry Hazlett (1887–1917) and Margaret Jane Wilkins (1886–1960), were also born in Belfast. They married in 1906 and had four children: Annie, Henry, Minnie, and Sam. Henry Hazlett was a labourer. During World War I, he served in the British Army as a *pioneer* with the Royal Engineers; he was killed in action on March 1, 1917, in Belgium.

Sam left the public school in Belfast after sixth grade and probably went to work on a farm.

At the age of 15, Sam left for Canada under the supervision of the British organization *National Children's Home*, which played a key role in the *British Home Children* migration program. Between 1869 and the late 1930s, more than 100,000 orphans and disadvantaged children from the United Kingdom were sent to overseas territories. Sam traveled on the *SS Albertic*, which departed from Liverpool on August 1, 1930, and sailed via Belfast to Montreal, where the ship arrived on August 8. The passenger manifest listed a cousin William G. Hazlett as his contact in Ireland.



The SS Albertic in 1920.

Sam and the other children in the group he was traveling with were placed at the National Children's Home facility in Hamilton, Ontario. Advertisements were used to find families and employers to take in the children. Many older boys, like Sam, went to work on a farm. A contract specified the amount that, in addition to room and board, had to be paid to the National Children's Home, as well as the age at which the children would become independent.

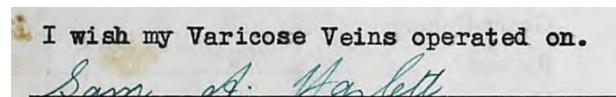
After arriving in Canada, Sam worked as a farmhand, a logger, a labourer, and a truck driver.

In January 1941, Sam was drafted into military service under the National Resources Mobilization Act of 1940. At the time, he was living with the McQuillen family in Dunnville, Ontario, and was likely working on their farm. After enlisting, he underwent 30 days of basic training in Brantford, Ontario, and served for one year — until the end of June 1942 — with the 2nd Reserve Battalion of the Dufferin and Haldimand Rifles of Canada. After that he was a truck driver for the Royal Canadian Air Force in Welland, Ontario, for nearly a year and a half.

On February 18, 1944, at the age of 29, Sam enlisted as a volunteer in the Canadian Army in Toronto. He claimed to have been born on September 22, 1918, to avoid being rejected because of his age. That date of birth ended up on his enlistment form and, from that moment on, became 'the truth' in the military records.

A selection officer had some doubts about Sam's mental stability because of 'fainting spells in boyhood' and 'moist hands.' He recommended that Sam have another consultation with a psychiatrist at a later date.

During his medical examination, Sam was found to have a severe case of varicose veins in his left leg. This



I wish my Varicose Veins operated on.
Sam A. Haylett

prevented him from performing military service. He gave his consent for surgery. The operation took place in March 1944 at the military hospital in Petawawa, Ontario. On April 18, he was deemed physically fit and ready to begin his training.

Sam was single. More than ten years after emigrating to Canada, he was still in touch with his family in Ireland. In his *Soldier's Service Book*, he listed the name and address of his mother and his youngest sister, Minnie. In the will that soldiers were required to draw up, he named his mother as his heir. His mother had remarried William Reaney and lived in Portadown, southwest of Belfast.

Sam was assigned to the infantry and trained in Ontario. He underwent basic training in Simcoe and advanced training at Camp Ipperwash. In Simcoe, in June 1944, he was interviewed by a psychiatrist who did not share the selection officer's doubts:

Pleasant, cheerful, cooperative individual who was at ease during the interview. [...] His attitude is excellent. Intellectually he is of low average intelligence. There are no objective signs of instability.

After completing his training, Sam was transferred to Camp Debart in Nova Scotia to prepare for his deployment overseas. On October 14, he was shipped from Halifax to England. He stayed there only a short time. In November, he departed for mainland Europe, and on December 9, 1944, he arrived at his unit, the *Royal Hamilton Light Infantry*, also known as the *Rileys*, which was part of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division.

The 2nd Infantry Division spent the winter near Nijmegen. After operation Market Garden, a static front had developed there, with a bulge into German territory — the *Nijmegen salient*. On February 8, 1945, the Rhineland Offensive began, which aimed to capture the west bank of the Rhine north of the Ruhr. On February 17, the 2nd Infantry Division was deployed to the front. Like the other Canadian regiments, the Rileys suffered heavy losses. During the Rhineland Offensive, on March 8, Sam was promoted to *Lance Corporal*.

On March 12, the 2nd Infantry Division was withdrawn to the Reichswald Forrest near Kleve to rest and 'absorb' reinforcements. By the end of March, the division was able to cross the Rhine after a bridgehead had been established on the other side of the river. A rapid advance into the northern Netherlands began.



*Eelderwolde, April 13, 1945.
Rileys in 'Kangaroos' on their
way to Groningen.*

*Source: Groninger Archieven.
Photo: D. Guravich.*

On April 13, 1945, after Assen had been liberated, the 2nd Infantry Division advanced toward Groningen. The lead troops consisted of a column of tanks from the *Fort Garry Horse*, followed by 'Kangaroos' — tanks without turrets — which were used to transport soldiers from the Rileys. They approached the city from the southwest. At the city limits, the Canadians encountered a roadblock. They came under fire from machine guns and *Flak* anti-aircraft guns positioned near the Stadspark. This marked the beginning of the Battle of Groningen, which would last until April 16.

As dusk fell, the Fort Garry Horse's tanks withdrew; they were too vulnerable to anti-tank weapons. The Rileys, however, continued to fight and succeeded in breaking the resistance in the Stadspark and around Paterswoldseweg. They also attempted to capture the strategically important Parkbrug bridge over the Hoornsediep — the Groningen section of the Noord-Willems Canal. The bridge was still intact but heavily defended. After two unsuccessful attempts, the Rileys gave up for the day.

During the fighting on April 13, Sam was wounded in the abdomen by machine gun fire. He was taken to a medical aid station, but it was too late. He died of his wounds that same day.

On April 14, Sam was buried at the Zuiderbegraafplaats cemetery in the Asserbos in Assen. In 1946, he was reinterred at the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten, where he rests in grave 09.E.15. His headstone bears an inscription chosen by his mother:

THOUGH THE SEAS
OUR HEARTS DIVIDE
IN SPIRIT YOU ARE BY MY SIDE
WE'LL MEET AGAIN

After his death, Samuel Alexander Hazlett was awarded the following Canadian military decorations: the *1939-1945 Star*, the *France and Germany Star*, the *War Medal 1939-1945* and the *Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp*.

In 2018, his name was added to the Portadown War Memorial in Northern Ireland in memory of the victims of World War I and World War II.



Sources

The birth record of Samuel Alexander Hazlett can be found at the *General Register Office (Northern Ireland)*, number U/1914/49/1007/146/445.

© 2026 Walter Ravenek