

**Juntunen, William**

**Rifleman**

**The Regina Rifle Regiment**

**Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**

**L/605265**



William Juntunen was born 3 December 1916 at Fort William, now part of Thunder Bay, Ontario. His father Fredrik ("Fred") Luoto emigrated from Finland to Canada in 1909. He married William's Finnish mother Amanda Wirtanen at Port Arthur (also part of Thunder Bay) in 1911. Their first child Reino arrived two years later followed by William. Fred, who worked as a labourer, died in 1918. His widow Amanda remarried Gust Hammerberg the next year and gave up her son William for adoption. The Hammerbergs had a son Albert in 1920 (half-brother to William) and Reino was adopted by Gust, taking his last name.

William's adoptive parents were Paul and Mary Juntunen a childless Finnish couple. They moved him to their 640 acre farm at Loreburn, Saskatchewan



(SK) near Strongfield, south of Saskatoon. William was raised under their Lutheran religion and spoke English and Finnish. He attended a rural school, quitting after completing grade 5 to work full time on the farm age thirteen.

William's adoptive mother Mary died sometime during the Great Depression. He was eventually told about his birth mother Amanda Hammerberg (who he later referred to as his 'friend') and siblings back in Port Arthur. His elder brother Reino married in 1939 in Ontario while William remained in Saskatchewan working on the Juntunen farm with his adoptive father Paul, where he learned to drive cars, trucks and operate tractors.

William was called up under the National Resources Mobilization Act for home defence, enrolling at Regina 3 March 1942 age 25. He was then 5'11" tall, 151 lbs with hazel eyes and a fair complexion according to his medical examination. After receiving some basic training in Regina William was assigned to the Prince Albert Volunteers and spent two weeks in the Prince Albert Military Hospital April/May 1942. He was granted the first of a series of seasonal farm leaves for spring planting and rejoined his regiment at Camp Vernon, British Columbia (BC) 24 June 1942.



*Camp Vernon, BC*

William was granted extended leave for the 1942 fall harvest. His adoptive father Paul died April 1943 and William was again granted spring farm leave. After returning from his fall harvest leave that year, William was posted to the Midland Regiment for coastal defence duty at Prince Rupert, BC on 10 December 1943. He was admitted to the Prince Rupert Military Hospital for a week later that month for otitis media (middle ear infection) treatment. William was back in the hospital for two weeks winter 1944 for chickenpox.

The Midland Regiment was stationed at Camp Vernon when William rejoined them following fall harvest leave October 1944. With his adoptive father's death he changed his next of kin to his friend Marten Christenson in Loreburn, SK. William travelled with his regiment when they were shipped overseas, disembarking in the UK 17 January 1945 where they were disbanded. He reported to the Canadian Infantry Training Regiment and was landed in Northwest Europe two months later. William was taken on strength with The Regina Rifle Regiment (RRR) 7 April 1945 as a replacement Rifleman.

The RRR, also known as the 'Farmer Johns' or Reginas were combined with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles and Canadian Scottish to form 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division. The Reginas along with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWR) were among the first Commonwealth infantry units to land at the Normandy beaches and suffered heavy D-Day losses.

The Reginas had battled their way through Normandy by the end of summer 1944 and helped liberate Channel ports in September. The RRR and 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade participated in the Battle of the Scheldt that fall, then had three winter months of static operations around Nijmegen, Netherlands patrolling and sniping against a well entrenched enemy.

They finally moved out with their 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division 8 February 1945 as part of the First Canadian Army under Operation VERITABLE and spent five days clearing the Germans from Moyland Wood 16-21 February 1945. The RRR and 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade were out of action during the next phase of the Rhine offensive, Operation BLOCKBUSTER.



The Allies decided to seize two crossings over the Rhine River with the main effort in the north in the Emmerich-Wesel sector for Operation PLUNDER. The Reginas were on the move the evening of 27 March, crossing the Rhine by means of a pontoon bridge that the engineers had constructed.

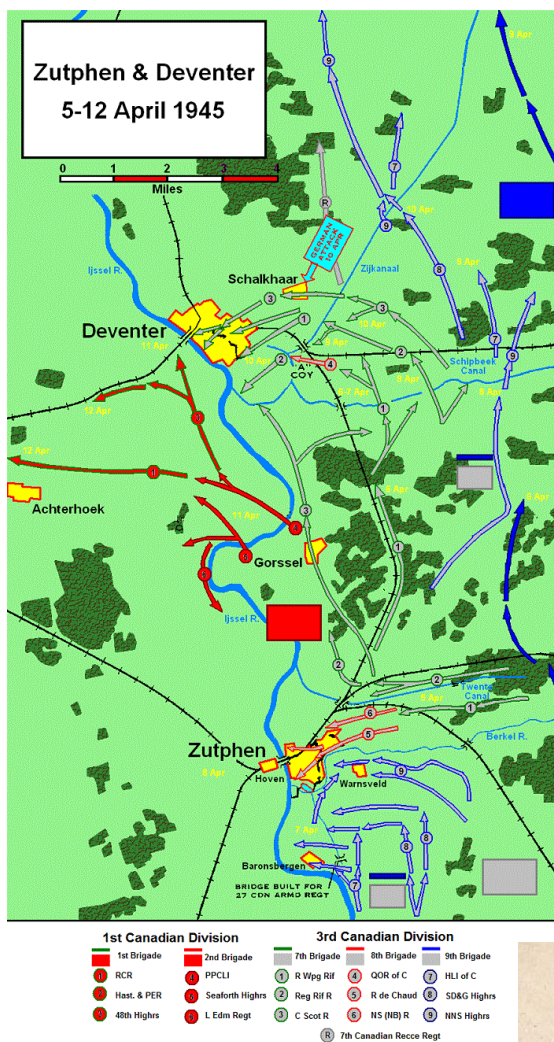
*Rhine River pontoon bridge 1945*

Following a tough battle to take Emmerich, Germany, the RRR and 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade headed north to help liberate towns in the Netherlands including Wehl and Zutphen. William was with "C" Company during a clearing operation and attempt at an assault crossing of the Zijkanaal in front of Deventer 8 April 1945. The bridge over the Zijkanaal was blown by the Germans in front of "B" Company later that day. "C" Company pushed across on 9 April to cover bridging operations to replace/repair. William Juntunen was killed in action that day, age 28.

*Canadian soldiers search buildings for enemy, Deventer, Netherlands*







**JUNTUNEN, William, Rfn., L605265,  
Marten Christensen (friend), Lore-  
burn, Sask.**

*Regina Leader-Post May 1945*

19th April, 1945.

Mr. Marten Christensen,  
Loveburn, Sask.

Dear Mr. Christensen:

It was with deep regret that I learned of the death of L605265 Rifleman William Juntunen, who gave his life in the Service of his Country in the Western European Theatre of War on the 9th day of April, 1945.

From official information we have received, Rifleman Juntunen 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),  
Major-General,  
Adjutant-General.

rem x Nil  
20-4-45



*Temporary cross gravemarker before permanent headstone*

Rifleman W. Juntunen was temporarily buried near Deventer, Netherlands and later relocated to Holten Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **II. B. 9.**

*Photo courtesy  
lestweforget1945.org*



William Juntunen's campaign medals:

- 1939-45 Star
- France-Germany Star
- War Medal



William Juntunen is listed on the Strongfield, SK Cenotaph as one of their local WW2 fallen.

*Strongfield, SK Cenotaph*

Juntunen Lake, SK was named after him as a geo-memorial site.



Biography by Jim Little, Research Team Faces to Graves.

#### Sources Consulted:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Library and Archives Canada

Veteran Affairs Canada – Canadian Virtual War Memorial

Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial <https://svwm.ca/casualty-display/?ID=A000008560>

Ancestry public trees

Newspapers.com

Loreburn, SK photo <http://www.prairie-towns.com/loreburn-images.html>

Camp Vernon, BC photo <https://vernonmuseum.ca/exhibits/vernon-serves/>

Kevin Lambie, Regina Rifles WWII <http://www.reginarifles.ca/index.htm>

Reid, Brian (2010). Named by the Enemy - A History of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles

Regina Rifles D-Day and Normandy information <https://warchronicle.com/the-story-of-the-royal-regina-rifles/#:~:text=The%20Landing,on%20the%20Isle%20of%20Thanet.>

Zutphen & Deventer, Netherlands April 1945 map and information <https://www.canadiansoldiers.com/history/battlehonours/northwesteurope/zutphen.htm>

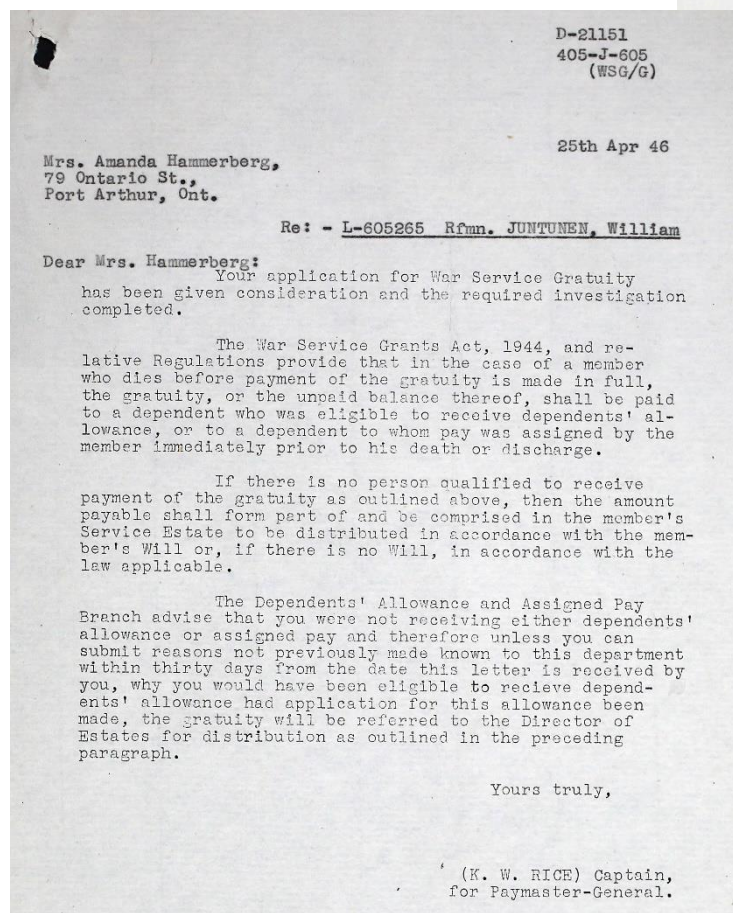
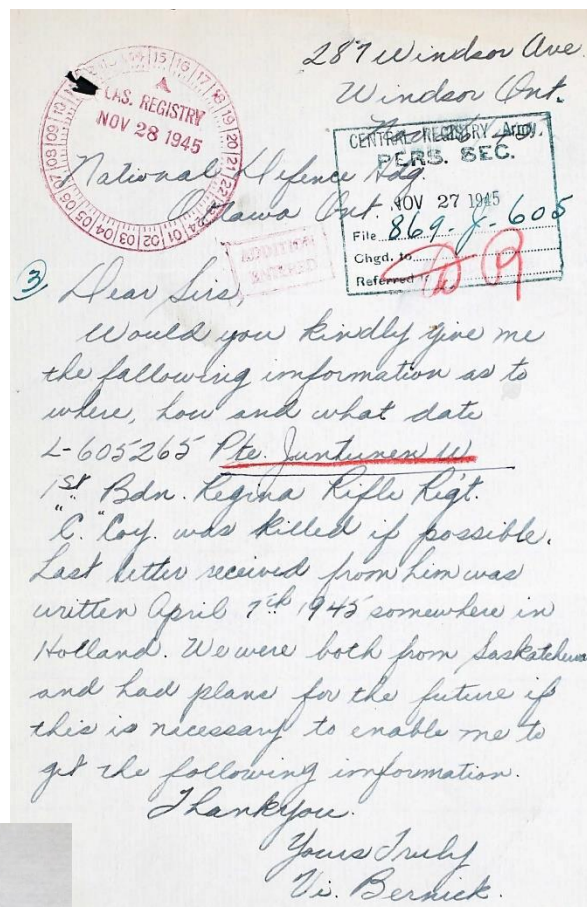
Battle of Deventer photo <https://www.battlefieldtours.nu/package/the-battle-deventer/?lang=en>

Strongfield, SK Cenotaph picture <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=196902>



William's mother Amanda Hammerberg received his Memorial Cross, and although he had listed his friend Marten Christenson as his next of kin, it was his 'friend' Amanda who completed his Estate documents for the Army after his death. He had named her as his beneficiary in his Army Will after joining the Reginas on 7 April 1945. William also wrote a letter that day to his girlfriend Vi Bernick, and she wrote back to the Army after he was killed to learn the details of his death.

William's mother Amanda later applied for a War Service Gratuity, which was denied in 1946. Her eldest son (William's full brother) Reino died that year from tuberculosis, age 32.



**HAMMERBERG—Passed away in hospital on Aug. 15, 1953, Amanda Hammerberg of 1758 Venables St., in her 65th year. Survived by her loving son, Albert, at home; 2 grandchildren and 1 sister, Mrs. Tekla Toyra, Port Arthur, Ontario. Funeral service Wed., Aug. 19th at 3 p.m. from the Grandview Funeral Chapel, Commercial Dr. and Kitchener St., Rev. Matti Hamalainen officiating. Interment Forest Lawn Memorial Park.**

*The Province 1953*