



"Arthur was killed, but his mother didn't believe it."

Joseph Arthur Marcel Lessard, as his full name was, was born in Montreal on October 27, 1922.

In the Roman Catholic family, he was the youngest of four children. He had two brothers and one sister.

His father, Jean Baptiste Lessard had already died in 1926.

His mother, Marie Louise Lessard, née Auger, was 59 years old when Arthur reported for medical examination in November 1942.

It was his first encounter with the army based on NRMA 1940.

(National Resources Mobilization Act 1940)

The medical examination stated that Arthur was 5'4" tall, his weight was 120 lbs with brown hair and brown eyes. Extra note: luxation left shoulder at 6 years old.

After the basic training Arthur was taken on strength by "Le Régiment de Hull" as of July 1, 1943.

Already on July 12, 1943 Arthur was sent to Kiska, his return was on the 18th of January 1944.

To clarify:

"The Japanese had occupied the Aleutian Islands Attu and Kiska between June 1942 and July 1943. The reason: to protect the north flank of the Japanese Empire.

On August 15, 1943, the U.S. 7th Infantry Division, 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment of the 10th Mountain Division and the 13th Canadian Infantry Brigade from the 6th Canadian Infantry Division, landed on opposite shores of Kiska. Canadian regiments landed included the Canadian Fusiliers; the Winnipeg Grenadiers; the Rocky Mountain Rangers; and the Saint John Fusiliers. The invasion also involved the first combat deployment of the First Special Service Force, an elite special forces unit consisting of American and Canadian commandos.

When the landings finally went ashore on August 15, 1943, after three weeks of bombardment by ships and aircraft, the troop found that the Japanese soldiers had slipped away.

Both U.S. and Canadian forces mistook each other, after a Canadian soldier shot at U.S. lines believing they were Japanese, and a friendly fire incident occurred, which left 28 Americans and 4 Canadians dead, with 50 wounded on either side. Progress was also hampered by mines, timed bombs, accidental ammunition detonations, vehicle accidents and booby traps that caused further casualties".

Back in Canada he was granted 30 days special leave. Apparently, Arthur needed more time. He reported to duty several days late. Price: 12 day's pay.

In April 1944 the NRMA soldiers were attached to the Canadian Army (Active) Regiment No. 1. That also applied for Arthur.

In May 1944 he was granted 10 days embarkation leave before crossing to the United Kingdom, where he arrived on the 27th of May 1945.

On July 27, 1944, he set foot on French soil. He was assigned to Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal. During the Normandy campaign Arthur was reported "missing in action" on the 14th of August. His mother was informed by telegram.

As Arthur reported back to his unit some days later, a second telegram was sent to his mother that her son was safe. This second message was apparently never received or read by his mother.

Arthur Lessard experienced the entire campaign with Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal.

He was promoted to acting corporal, but at his own request, reverted to private in December 1944.

In February 1945, during the Battle for the Reichswald, Arthur was AWL for almost a day. It cost him 8 days' pay. On February 26, 1945 he was promoted to be Lance-Corporal.

The advance through the eastern part of the Netherlands went smoothly for Arthur. Until the fatal day in April 1945.

During the fighting at the crossing of the Schipbeek Canal he was killed on April 7, 1945.

The news of his death did reach the family in Canada and was particularly hard.

April 7 was exactly the date that his father had died in 1936.

The news of Arthur's death threw the family into great confusion. Officially, they were only informed that he was missing in action.

His mother could not and would not believe that her son was dead. Not when the personal belongings had been sent, not when word came where he was temporarily buried and not when she received a photo of the final resting place at the CWGC Canadian Cemetery in Holten.

In late 1946 she sent a letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs asking for more information.

"Killed by the enemy approximately 8 miles east of Zutphen", was the answer.

In April 1951, Gisèle Jean reported to the minister. She was Arthur's fiancée, she wrote. She also asked for more information, because Arthur's mother was ill. She received a detailed letter about his disappearance, his return and his death.

Early January 1954 a letter arrived at the Veterans Office from Arthur's brother. He too had never believed that his brother had been killed. He had heard from a friend, a lieutenant in the army, that Arthur was not dead. The lieutenant had not been able to give the exact information, because it was supposedly a "military secret".

The answer was clear; there was no doubt that Arthur had been killed. All the formalities had been neatly arranged with his mother.

The truth is harsh: Arthur is buried in Holten, grave reference 11-F-9.

He was awarded:

1939-1945 Star; France-Germany Star; War Medal 1939-1945 and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp.

