



William John Looser was born in Toronto on July 12, 1925. His father, Wilhelm Looser, was born in 1892 in the canton of St. Gallen, Switzerland, and emigrated to Canada in 1914. His mother, Lillian Mabel Dowdall (1885-1969), was born in Québec. Before her marriage, she worked as a civil servant at the Carleton County Court House in Ottawa.

William's parents were married in 1919 and had two sons, William John and Ernest Alexander (1930-1983). The family attended St. Paul's Anglican Church in the Runnymede neighborhood of Toronto.

William attended Runnymede Public School for eight years and Western Technical School for two years. He then attended Northern Vocational School, which he left during his twelfth year. After that, he took a *Matriculation Course* to prepare for university.

William took part in track and field events at school. In the winter of 1943-44, he played in the Toronto Hockey League with the Western Technical School team. He considered himself a pretty good skier. He read a lot of mystery and adventure stories. His main hobby, however, was building large self-propelled model airplanes; he was a member of the Canadian Gas Model Club, which was founded in Toronto around 1937.

Flawil, the birthplace of William's father, had a thriving textile industry in the late nineteenth century. In Canada, William Sr. started his own business, the William Looser Company, which was involved in the textile trade and, over time, began investing in textile production. In the late 1930s, he purchased a factory in Owen Sound, 200 km north of Toronto, which subsequently served primarily for the production of wool and was therefore known as the Owen Sound Woollen Mill. During World War II, the factory mainly produced woollen blankets for the Canadian army. His son William spent one summer doing "odd jobs" in the Woollen Mill and worked for two summers in his father's office as a shipping clerk.

In April 1943, William was called up for military service under the *National Resources Mobilization Act* of 1940. NRMA troops were assigned a role in the defense of Canada. William was posted to the reserves of the *48th Highlanders of Canada* in Toronto. He was able to fulfill his military service obligations while attending school. Training typically took place one evening a week and on certain weekends. He also participated in a training camp with his unit.

In 1944, William volunteered for the Canadian Army. He underwent a physical examination in January and officially enlisted on February 8. As a child, he had suffered from bronchitis and he had a mild seasonal hay fever. That was not an obstacle, as he was otherwise in good health. However, his underweight was a problem — he was 5' 8" tall and weighed 118 lbs — but the medical examiner expected that he would gain weight after sufficient physical training, which is indeed what happened. William scored exceptionally high on the *M-test*, which was used during the selection of recruits to assess learning ability and aptitude: 191 on a scale of 0 to 211.

William began his training in March 1943. After basic training in Brampton, Ontario, he received further training at Camp Borden and Woodstock, Ontario, and in Farnhem, Québec. His evaluations were all positive. He had a pleasant but quiet personality, was smart and eager to learn, and showed definite leadership qualities.

Initially, William was allocated to the Canadian Armoured Corps for "possible clerical or stores work." In July 1944, this allocation was changed "in view of this man's high score on the M-test, high learning ability and desire to learn driving in the Army, as well as the current quota requirements." His intended role became *Driver in Charge* — a soldier qualified to drive and maintain a military motor vehicle — in the Canadian Infantry Corps. In November 1944, he passed his test as a Driver Mechanic (MV). With that, he was ready for deployment to Europe.

8. TRADE TEST	
Trade.....	Driver Mechanic (MV)
Class.....	Group "C".
Date.....	23 Nov 44.
Where Tested.....	A-12, C.I.T.C.
TRADE TEST BOARD	
1.	Lieut. J. J. Lane. President
2.	Lieut. G. Nowat. Member
3.	Sgt. Burns, A. Member
D-129483	

On December 18, 1944, William left Canada for England, where he arrived just over a week later. He was assigned to the *No. 2 Canadian Infantry Training Regiment* in Aldershot, Hampshire. There he completed his final training, after which he was sent to the front on the European mainland. On March 14, 1945, he joined his new regiment, the *Royal Hamilton Light Infantry*, also known as the *Rileys*. The regiment was part of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division. After the fighting in the Rhineland Offensive, the 2nd Infantry Division had withdrawn to the Reichswald Forest near Kleve. Like other regiments, the Rileys had suffered heavy losses during the offensive. They were given two weeks to rest and to incorporate reinforcements — including William — into their ranks.

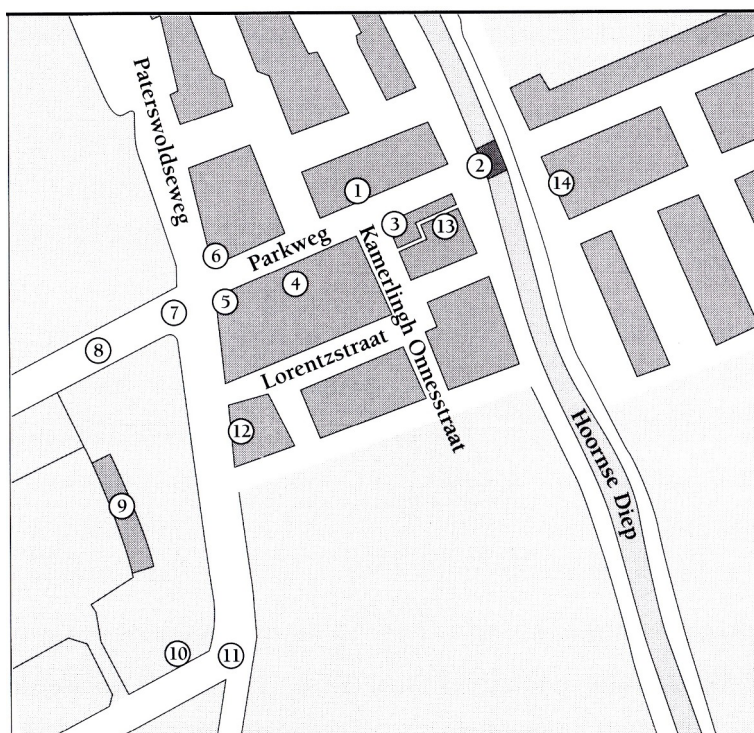
In late March, the 2nd Infantry Division was able to cross the Rhine near Rees after a bridgehead had been established on the other side of the river. A rapid advance into the northern Netherlands began.

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.

On April 13, the Rileys also attempted to capture the strategically important Parkbrug over the Hoornsediep — the Groningen section of the Noord-Willems Canal. The bridge was still intact but was heavily defended. After two failed attempts, the Rileys gave up for that day.



Southwest Groningen, April 1945.

02 – Parkbrug
10 – Flak anti-aircraft guns
13 – Firebreak with two fallen Canadian soldiers

Source: Piëst, J. (2005) The True Watcher. Groningen: Studio van Stralen.

On April 14, additional troops were deployed in the southwest of Groningen. During the night, the Royal Regiment of Canada managed to cross the Hoornsediep by boat, thereby opening a second front at the Parkbrug. By 7 a.m., they had secured the bridge. That morning, sixteen-year-old Jan Piëst, who lived on Parkweg, found the bodies of two Canadian soldiers in a firebreak near the Parkbrug. They were lying on top of each other at the exit of the firebreak near the Hoornsediep. They had likely used the firebreak to evade enemy fire on Parkweg, but unfortunately, they had ended up directly opposite a German machine-gun nest. William Looser was one of those two soldiers.

William was buried in Eelderwolde, a few kilometers southwest of Groningen. The family was notified of his death by telegram on April 19. A month later, his mother received the roses that William had sent her for Mother's Day.

In 1946, William was reinterred at the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten, where he now rests in grave 03.H.14. The inscription on his headstone reads

REST, O VALIANT HEART
WHO TO YOUR GLORY CAME.
THE BELOVED SON
OF W. AND M. LOOSER, TORONTO

After his death, William Looser 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*.



William's first high school in Toronto, now called Western Technical-Commercial School, has a memorial for students who died in World War II. William's name is also listed there.

