

Lieutenant James Russell Martin



James Russell Martin was born on the family farm near the rural village of Bognor, Ontario, Canada on October 10, 1916. Bognor is located southeast of Owen Sound, Ontario. He was the second youngest child of William and Eliza Martin. Russell, as he was known, had 3 sisters (Margaret, Bessie and Mary) and 3 brothers (Willie, Dave and Arthur). All the children were very intelligent but Russell outshone them all and was adored by all his siblings.



The children all attended an 1873 stone one-room schoolhouse located near their home. Russell was a brilliant student. In order for Russell to attend high school in Meaford, Ontario, Canada, William and Eliza had to pay room

and board for him as the school was too far from home by horse and buggy or, in winter, when the roads were not plowed, by horse and cutter. During the depression era when few people could afford to attend high school, he not only completed Grade 13 but he was the top student at the Meaford High School. He was also a Captain in the Meaford High School Cadet Corps. As was common at the time, all the children, including Russell, spent many back-breaking hours helping out in the fields on the farm during a time when there was no electricity and cars were not in common use. All the boys helped with ploughing, planting, rock-picking, weeding and harvesting on hot afternoons although in that area there was often a slight breeze to help cool down the sweat-soaked men and boys. Russell was full of life and always had a twinkle in his eye. He saw humour in every situation. He was quick-witted and brought fun and life to everyone around him. There were enough children in the Martin family that they would get together in the field near the house and play baseball. Fishing was also a favourite pastime that William passed along to his children. Laughter was often heard as Russell would pull harmless pranks and then be the recipient of harmless pranks in return. The Martin family was very close-knit. Russell was also an adventuresome person and was very similar to his sister, Bessie, in this regard. Russell had no interest in continuing the family tradition of farming and he could not wait to experience the world off the farm. Due to his keen mind, his father worked extra jobs brick laying in addition to farming so that Russell could go to university. He enrolled at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada to study Mining Engineering in 1936. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Mining Engineering (B.Sc.) in 1940. He returned home for Christmas break in December 1939. His family was excited to see him and they all gathered at the family farm with Russell's brother-in-laws and his new nieces and nephew. Everyone brought contributions of food to add to the long tables set with tablecloths and filled with lots of food and jellies. Russell caught two rabbits to add to the table of food. After the Christmas Day feast which also included a stuffed goose, the Christmas candles on the Christmas tree in the living room were lit and the whole family gathered around the piano to sing Christmas carols. Russell's mother, Eliza Martin, played the piano and was accompanied by Russell's father, William Martin, who played the violin. All of the Martin clan had good singing voices.



The parents, William and Eliza, celebrated Russell's visit home when a formal family picture was taken on December 28, 1939 at a photographer's studio in Meaford. Front Row (Left to Right): Willie Martin, William Martin (father), Eliza Martin (mother), Arthur Martin. Middle Row (L to R): Dave Martin, Russell Martin, Margaret (Martin) Crosskill. Last Row (L to R): Mary Martin, Bessie (Martin) Shields. This was the last family picture ever taken and continues to be a treasure that is shared with the following generations in the family.

While at university, Russell met a girl from Sydenham, a village north of Kingston, who matched his wit, humour and zest for life. They were a perfect match! On November 6, 1940, Russell married Erma Leonard in Pembroke, Ontario.



After the wedding, he called his parents, William and Eliza Martin, to inform them of his marriage and he sent wedding announcements (not invitations) out to family the day before the wedding. His parents were hurt but were happy to hear he had got married in Calvin United Church. The whole family continued to adore Russell, forgave him and warmly welcomed him and his young wife whenever they came to Bognor to visit.



The family were so full of love for Russell and Erma that when Russell shipped out in July 1943 for England, the family had Erma visit in August 1943 and took her on a warm, summer's day to Harrison's Park (which is still there today) in Owen Sound for a picnic and then they stayed to listen to a band concert in the outdoor band shell. While Russell was in Pembroke, he was the assistant engineer of the camp with the civil service commission. He held this position for one year. On October 2, 1941, he enlisted in the Army and due to his university schooling he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant. According to his military record, he was 5 feet, 11 inches and 147 pounds. This would make him appear long and lanky which is still a Martin characteristic today. While waiting in the line at the recruitment centre in Toronto, Ontario, Russell Martin met another young man waiting to enlist named Russell Kennedy. Russ Kennedy was also an engineer who had studied at Queens University although they did not know each other as Russ Kennedy was a year behind Russell Martin. Due to their very similar personalities, a close friendship was forged as they went to Brockville, Ontario, Canada for training at the Officer Training Centre. The two men completed their training and moved to the Royal Canadian Engineers

training site at Petawawa Training Centre in Petawawa, Ontario. Russell Martin, now known as Russ outside his family in Bognor, and his best friend, Russ Kennedy were assigned together to the Brockville Officer Training Centre as instructors. This was surely a disappointment for Russell Martin considering his zest for life. Their friendship continued to flourish and they were fortunate to be assigned together to Trois Rivières (Three Rivers), Quebec, then Sussex, New Brunswick to join the 23rd Field Company of the Royal Canadian Engineers. This was the beginning of their true adventures and active participation in the War. On June 5, 1943, Russell Martin was admitted to the Sussex Military Hospital with acute tonsillitis until June 14, 1943. He was then granted sick leave from June 14 to June 19, 1943. Russell and his friend Russ Kennedy were shipped out to England on July 17, 1943. According to Russ Kennedy in his book "Boats, Bridges & Valour", their commanding officer decided it was too confusing to have two lieutenants named Russ so Russell Martin became known as "Jimmy" as his full name was James Russell Martin. Also according to Russ Kennedy in his book "Boats, Bridges & Valour", the two friends had some leave together and headed to London where they eventually found themselves at the dog races. Neither had ever been to dog races, so Russell Martin eavesdropped on some regular attendees' discussions and then he and Russ Kennedy placed their bets accordingly. This proved to earn them \$60 in winnings. This is another example of Russell Martin's clever intelligence. The two best friends would continue being in the same company until Russell Martin's demise in Operation Market Garden/Operation Berlin. According to a sapper from the 23rd Field Company named Don Sommerville, Russell Martin's troops really liked him. He was described as a "square man" which means he was an all-around man who knew his job well, spoke well and was well liked. The night of September 25/26, 1944, Lt. Russell Martin was voluntarily aboard the second storm boat launched from the south side of the Neder Rhine across from Oosterbeek. He was going to be the officer in charge of organizing the evacuating men onto the storm boats from the north side of the river. According to Don Sommerville, the night was very dark and black with lots of rain and lightning. Unfortunately, Russell Martin's boat received a direct hit by a German mortar and it killed all four men on the boat (Sapper Leslie Joseph Roherty, Sapper Harold Cecil Magnusson and Corporal William Daniel Ryan). Don Sommerville was told by someone who saw the boat get hit, that they saw a bright flash and the boat disappearing. The Martin family consoled each other when they received word that Russell Martin was listed as Missing in Action. When they received notice that he was officially declared dead, his wife, his parents and all his siblings were completely devastated. They could not talk about Russell for many years

after that. Even now, 70 years later, there are mixed feelings of pride and sorrow amongst the Martin descendants. He was a brilliant young man who was just at the start of his promising career. The world became a darker place for the Martin clan on September 25/26, 1944. The 23rd Field Company of the Royal Canadian Engineers also grieved the loss of Lt. James Russell Martin. As was their tradition to honour a fallen comrade, they built their next bailey bridge over the Albert Canal in Belgium and named it the Martin Bridge. It stood for 40 years before being replaced with a permanent bridge.



Russell earned 6 medals during his military service. He received the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, the France and Germany Star, the Defence Medal, the 1939-1945 Star, the 1939-1945 War Medal and posthumously, from the Netherlands, The Bronze Lion, Order of Orange Nassau with Swords. Russell Martin's younger brother, Arthur also fought as a rifleman during WWII and before he returned to Canada, he visited Russell's grave in Elst Cemetery.



In 1946, Lt. James Russell Martin's remains were moved and reburied in Holten Canadian Military Cemetery in Holten, Netherlands. Over the years, it has been mentioned many times amongst the Martin clan that they wished they could see Russell's grave. Russell's great-niece, Cathy, and her husband Scott Meyers were the next Martin kin to finally visit Russell Martin's grave at Holten Cemetery almost 70 years later in 2014. What an emotional visit that was!! Cathy had mixed emotions of grief and happiness to finally "meet" Uncle Russell.

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