

## ON THE WAR MEMORIAL TRAIL RESEARCH PROJECT..... WITH PIETER AND DARIA VALKENBURG

This includes the Borden- Carleton Cenotaph Research Project.....Let us never forget their sacrifice!

### On The War Memorial Trail..... The WWII Soldier Born In Broadacres Who Died During The Battle of Groningen



August 19, 2022. When researchers at the Information Centre at the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten, The Netherlands decided to honour 27 soldiers of Ukrainian heritage that are buried in the cemetery, they were missing photos of 4 soldiers. (See <https://onthewarmemorialtrail.com/2022/05/31/on-the-war-memorial-trail-the-canadian-war-cemetery-in-holten-pays-tribute-to-ukrainian-canadians-buried-there/>)

#### *....The 4 soldiers of Ukrainian heritage without photos ....*

Could Pieter help put a face to these names, he was asked? They were:

- **Elie ANTONYSZYN**, born in Rorketon, Manitoba, died July 15, 1945, aged 22
- **Andrew KERELCHUK**, born in Zbaraz, Manitoba, died April 19, 1945, aged 21
- **Sam MATVICHUK**, born in Broadacres, Saskatchewan, died April 14, 1945, aged 19
- **John RUSNAK**, born in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, died November 22, 1945, aged 21

All four had a connection to the Canadian prairies, and, in what has to be a first, families of all four soldiers came forward within a few weeks.

Over the next blog postings, their stories will be told. This posting begins with **Sam MATVICHUK**, whose photo was the first we received.

#### *...We hear from the family of Sam Matvichuk...*

The first contact came from Scott Matvichuk, grandson of Sam's brother Albert. He mentioned that Sam's sister, Annie Gregorwich, was 102 years old.

Then Pieter got in contact with Annie's son Larry, who had photos. Success! "*...The better one is with my father, Steve Gregorwich, who is sitting on the left...*" wrote Larry.



*Steve Gregorwich (left) with Sam Matvichuk. (Photo courtesy of Larry Gregorwich)*

Born July 13, 1925 in Broadacres, Saskatchewan, Sam was the son of John and Mary Matvichuk. His first 11 years were spent in Saskatchewan. The family moved to Alberta, first to Smoke Lake and then to Delph, where his father, a Ukrainian immigrant, operated a farm.

### *...Sam enlisted at the age of 18....*

The 5<sup>th</sup> in a family of 12 children (of which two had died before 1940), Sam spoke both English and Ukrainian, and worked for his father and neighbouring farms after leaving school. When he enlisted at the #3 District Depot in Calgary, Alberta on March 24, 1944, he was still only 18 years old.

An interviewer at the time of his enlistment noted in his Personnel Selection Record that Sam was “*...a reticent young man...who has been engaged in farming....He is the out-of-doors type....but shows a good attitude to the service. He states a desire for same Corps as his brother which he should find suitable...*”

Sam's brother Steve was in the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade. (See <http://www.canadiansoldiers.com/organization/1stcanadianarmouredbrigade.htm>) Steve survived WWII and returned home with a war bride and his son.

The Personnel Selection Record also noted that Sam “*...likes camping and hiking; swims; baseball...*”

On April 10, 1944, Sam was sent to No. 26 Canadian Army (Basic) Training Centre (CACBTC) in Orillia, Ontario. He was there until June 13, 1944, when he was transferred to No. 3 Canadian Armoured Corps Training Regiment (CACTR) at Camp Borden, Ontario.

Sam qualified as a driver - I/C Class III (Wheeled) - on August 17, 1944. A few months later, on October 4, 1944 he was transferred to No. 1 Canadian Armoured Corps Trained Soldiers Regiment (CACTSR) in Borden, Ontario.

### *...Sam went overseas.....*

Once Sam turned 19, he was eligible to go overseas. On October 15, 1944 he left Canada and sailed to the United Kingdom, arriving on October 20, 1944. After additional training with the Rocky Mountain Rangers, he was transferred to the Canadian Infantry Training Regiment (CITR) in November 1944.

In mid-December 1944 he was sent to North-West Europe and transferred to the Royal Regiment of Canada on December 24, 1944. (See [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Royal\\_Regiment\\_of\\_Canada](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Royal_Regiment_of_Canada))

According to the War Diary for the Royal Regiment of Canada, they were in the area of Groesbeek, The Netherlands at the time. On December 24, 1944, the war diary entry recorded that “...*The threat of a German drive from Northern Holland aimed through ‘S-Hertogenbosch and Tilburg at Antwerp has resulted in the withdrawal of our Brigade Group to act as a mob res....47 other ranks received....*” One of these other ranks was Sam. (‘Mob res’ referred to mobilization reserve - force of men remaining behind the lines to reinforce the front lines where needed)

On February 8, 1945, the war diary entry reported that “....*The stillness of a perfect night was shattered at 0500 hours by the opening of the barrage which was the prelude to the attack on the Reichswald...*”

On February 9, 1945, the war diary entry stated that “...*The battalion was concentrated in Groesbeek area prior to moving to brigade concentration area in preparation for our part in this op ‘Veritable’. The congestion in the area makes movement difficult. Roads are becoming quite bad in spots...*” (See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Veritable](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Veritable))

### *...Sam’s Regiment left The Netherlands for battles in Germany.....*

Late in the night of February 16, 1945, the Regiment began its move into Germany. The war diary entry recorded that “...*The CO gave orders for the move at 1145 hours at which time the marching troops....started the journey to Molenhoek...*”

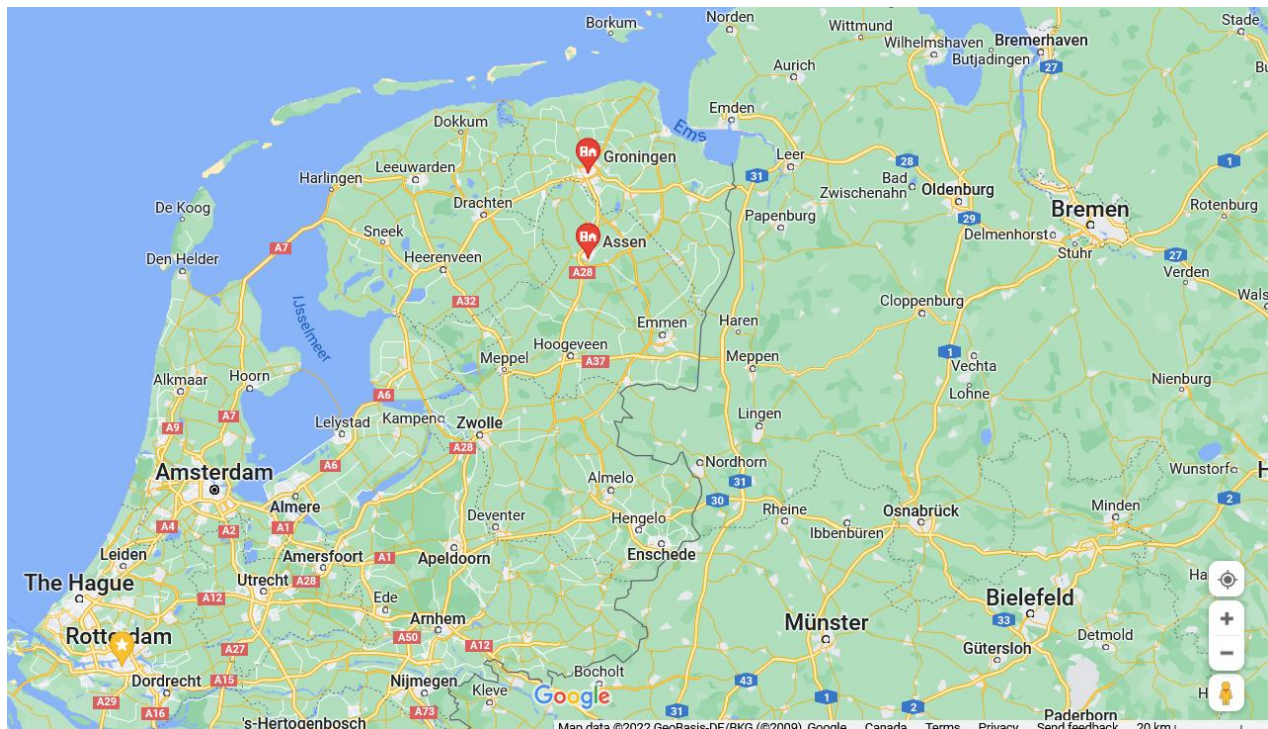
On February 17, 1945, “...*the troops were on the move again towards Calcar...*”

By February 27, 1945, the war diary noted that “...at 0430 hours opening barrage for op *Blockbuster* commenced...” (See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Blockbuster](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Blockbuster))

On March 1, 1945, the war diary recorded that “...the area of *Xanten* was firmly consolidated and the men of the unit spent the day cleaning up...”

On March 24, 1945, the war diary entry explained that “...with an amazing amount of air support the Rhine has been crossed and we are waiting in anticipation of what our role in this big push is to be....”

### *...The Regiment returned to The Netherlands...*



*Map shows location of Groningen, where Sam Matvichuk lost his life, and Assen, where he was initially buried. (Map source: Google maps)*

The Royal Regiment of Canada’s next task, as part of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, was to capture the city of Groningen, in the northeastern part of The Netherlands. It was during the **Battle of Groningen** that Sam lost his life. (See <https://www.canadiansoldiers.com/history/battlehonours/northwesteurope/groningen.htm> and <https://library.mcmaster.ca/battle-groningen-april-1945>)

During this battle, Sam received a bullet wound in his ‘right loin’ (the area below the rib cage to just above the pelvis) and lost his life on April 14, 1945. He was a few months shy of his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday.



*...Sam is buried in the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten...*

Sam was initially buried in Assen, and then later reburied in the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten, The Netherlands.



*Grave of Sam Matvichuk at the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten, The Netherlands. His age is incorrectly recorded as 20, when he was only 19. (Photo courtesy of Canadian Virtual War Memorial)*



Thank you to Larry Gregorwich for providing the photos, to Scott Matvichuk for contacting us, and to Judie Klassen for helping to find family members. Another story about a soldier buried in Holten of Ukrainian descent coming up in the next posting.

If you have a story to tell, please let Pieter know. Email him at [memorialtrail@gmail.com](mailto:memorialtrail@gmail.com), comment on the blog, or tweet to [@researchmemori1](https://twitter.com/researchmemori1).

*...Want to follow our research?....*

If you are reading this posting, but aren't following the blog, you are welcome to do so. See <https://onthewar memorialtrail.com/> or email me at [dariadv@yahoo.ca](mailto:dariadv@yahoo.ca) and ask for an invitation to the blog.



Daria's book '*No Soldier Buried Overseas Should Ever Be Forgotten*' is available in print and e-book formats. For more information see <https://nosoldierforgotten.com/>

You are also invited to subscribe to our YouTube Channel: *On The War Memorial Trail With Pieter Valkenburg*: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ591TyjSheOR-Cb\\_Gs\\_5Kw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ591TyjSheOR-Cb_Gs_5Kw).

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