Sloan, James Gix. Private. **12-H-11**

James Gix Sloan was born on July 26, 1923, in Toronto, Ontario.
He is the son of Percy Ovida Sloan and Inez Sloan, née Grix.
He has a younger brother named Lorne Richard.
English is spoken at home, and the family attends the United Church of Canada.

James completed three years of high school and an additional course at Shaws Business College. He was an athletic type and played rugby and basketball during high school.

Besides reading current events in newspapers, Richard also enjoyed reading travel books.

On November 19, 1942, he enlisted for active duty. He had gained work experience as an office clerk at the Toronto Shipbuilding Company.

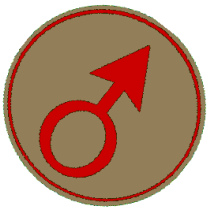
(The Toronto Shipbuilding Company was a government-established national corporation that played a major role in the Canadian effort during World War II, primarily by building minesweepers for the British Royal Navy.)

Before enlisting in the army, James had already trained for six months as a reservist with the Governor General's Horse Guards, which were initially deployed for local security.

His medical report states that he is 5'8" tall and weighs 140.
Brown eyes, dark hair and a scar on the outside of his left ankle are listed as characteristics.
During the first interview, James indicates his desire to be assigned to an anti-aircraft gun unit, not without success; he was assigned to the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA) A/A Wing.
James was could not avoid the basic training; on December 5, 1942, he reports to the Canadian Armoured Basic Training Center in Newmarket, Ontario.

He is granted leave during the New Year's Eve of 1942/43.
After the training, James is assigned to the infantry.
In March 1943, James receives his first increase of pay, ($1,30/day -> $1,40/day)

In May 1943 he receives a second increase of pay: $1,50/day.
On July 1, 1943, he is to be a Lance/Corporal and serves as an instructor in Newmarket.
A special note in James' files: he is allowed to wear the 'Mars Badge'.



Trained soldiers in Canada were designated by a cloth badge depicting the zodiac sign of Mars, the Roman god of war. The badge was rendered in red thread on a circular khaki background matching the Battle Dress.

In August 1943 James is transferred to the district depot N. 4 in Montreal, Quebec.
While awaiting passage to the United Kingdom, he is granted a few days' embarkation leave.
He is, already then, destined for the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion (1CPB).

On September 1, 1943, James arrived in the United Kingdom.
He is to be ‘a private’ again.
After several weeks of adapted training, he is taken on strength on September 2, 1943, by the Airborne Forces Depot/School at Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire.
Here he gets to know the British equipment and disciplines.
Besides packing and jump training also the tactical training for paratroopers is conducted here.

James received his final jump training at the Airfield Detachment at RAF Ringway.

By October 18, 1943, he successfully completed the training, qualified as a paratrooper, and was allowed to wear the Para Badge.

Mass drop training at Ringway

Barracks Bulford

James then reported to the 1CPB base at Carter Barracks in Bulford, England.
In October, he missed roll call once, which cost him five days' pay.
He spent New Year's Eve 1943/44 in the barracks, but was on leave during the last week of January 1944.
The training continued, all focused on deployment during the planned Normandy landings.

The following entry in James' files is simply one line long:
‘boarded a plane and parachuted into France on the night of June 5-6, 1944’

The men of 1CPB encounter the harsh realities of war.

The battalion fought fierce battles in Normandy.

Of the 534 paratroopers dropped by June 6, 21 men lost their lives, 94 were wounded, and 82 were taken prisoner.
A note in James’ files:
‘June 14, 1944, wounded’.

The note reads also:
"NYD head injury."
(NYD = Not Yet Diagnosed)

Courtesy of the 1 Cdn Para Bn Assn Archives.

Canadian paratroopers in their staging area prior to D-Day. Two individuals from the “Victory Rifle Platoon” stand in the background with their distinctive haircuts. They were actually two of nine paratroopers who had their hair cut to spell out the word “Victory.”

James is transported to England and treated there, returning to France by ship on August 8, 1944, to rejoin 1CPB.

The 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion returned to England on September 7, 1944. James is granted a week's leave. Just before Christmas 1944, 1CPB is alerted regarding the Ardennes Offensive launched by the Germans.
Due to poor weather conditions, they were not parachuted but instead sailed to Belgium.

To clarify:
On December 16, 1944, the Germans launched a final large-scale offensive on the Western Front. No fewer than 24 German divisions were involved in the offensive.
The objective of the German attack was a breakthrough through the Ardennes that would split the Allied forces. The objective was then to push on to Antwerp and recapture the port city.
The 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion was the only Canadian unit to see action in the Ardennes Offensive, which was primarily an American-German battle.

On December 26, 1944, the troops arrived in Belgium and were transported by truck to the Ardennes. The German advance had by then virtually ground to a halt.
The task of 1CPB then becomes conducting patrols and clearing the assigned area of enemy groups. In doing so, the paratroopers also encountered the brutality of some enemy units.

Explanation:
During their march through the town of Bande, the men discovered one of the many atrocities that had taken place during the war.
Thirty-seven elderly men, children, and women were herded into the cellar of a house and then slaughtered by rifle fire and grenades.

On February 26, 1945, the battalion returned to Carter Barracks in Bulford, England, and James was granted leave until March 6.

James' files then contain only two more entries:

1. March 24, 1945, emplaned in UK, parachuted into Germany.
2. March 30, 1945, Killed in Action.

The paratroopers had by then penetrated deep into Germany.
A little more information about the movements of 1CPB:

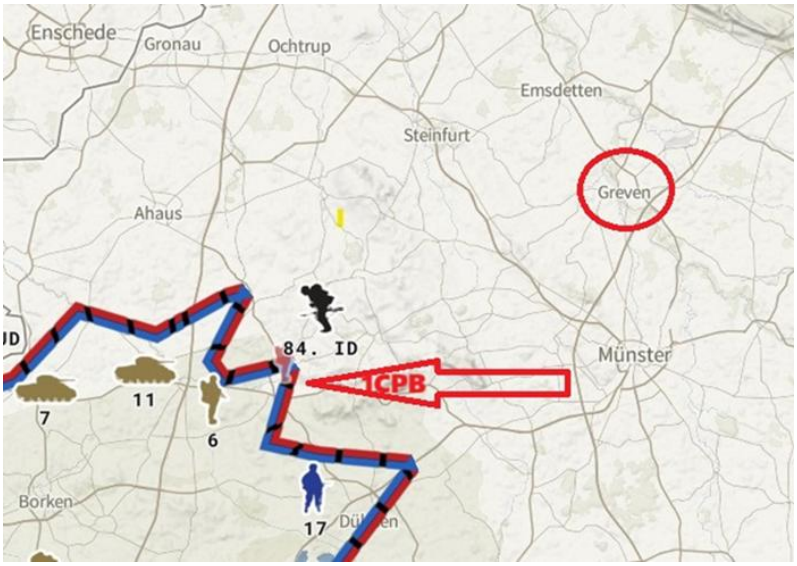
On March 26 and 27, 1945, the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion began moving from Bergerfürth, near Wesel, Germany.
Their final destination: the Baltic coast near Wismar, if feasible.
Their primary objective was to keep the Red Army out of Denmark, and preferably even further away.
Over the next six weeks, the men of 1CPB covered the 480 kilometers.
On May 2, 1945, they arrived in Wismar, just hours ahead of a Russian reconnaissance group.

Where was the unit on March 30, 1945, the fateful day for Private James Gix Sloan?

The War Diary of 1CPB reads:

'On March 29, 1945 the main part of 1CPB (the Rifle Companies) had reached Lembeck.
There was a warning that a push would be made to Coesfeld during the night. The move was postponed until the next morning.
On March 30, 1945 the men moved off and reached COESFELD.

A and B compagny debussed and climbed on tanks and the advance continued to Greven.



The A-compagny attacked GREVEN and crossed a bridge which was thought to be the objective. A short while later a great explosion was heard which was found to be a second bridge, their actual objective. It was an unfortunate error in map reading which caused the A-compagny to stop on the first bridge as they could have gone on to the second bridge with little trouble.
However, A-company performed admirably during the capture of the town and suffered few casualties.
The rest of the battalion entered the town shortly thereafter.
Heavy enemy shell fire occurred during the night, resulting in several casualties'.

One of those casualties near Greven (Germany) must have been Private James Gix Sloan.
James was given a temporary grave near Greven.

His final resting place became the CWGC Canadian War Cemetery in Holten.
The grave reference is: Plot 12, Row H, Grave 11.

He was awarded:
The 1939-1934 Star; the France-Germany Star; the Defence Medal; the 1939-1945 War Medal and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp.

Sources:
www.cwgc.org; www.ancestry.com; www.canada.ca/library-archives, project '44