



James was born on July 4, 1912 in St Peters, Manitoba to Harry (died 1925) and Margaret Thomas of Hodgson, Manitoba. James parents were married on January 9, 1902 in St Peters. He had 7 brothers, two of whom also fought in Europe and one sister who was a few years younger than James. He left school at the age of thirteen to help out at home, due to the death of his father.

James had many professions; he worked at home on the farm for more than six years, worked as a casual laborer for several years, he was also a miner in a "hard rock" quarry for six years and since

several months before enlisting, he was plumbing assistant in the wartime housing project. The Thomas family was First Nation of the Peguis band (Ojibway and Cree) and a member of the Church of England. James played hockey and he loved reading suspenseful detective novels, going to movies, and he enjoyed hunting and fishing.

James enlisted in Vancouver on May 21, 1943 and after military training in Vernon, B.C. and Calgary, Alberta, went overseas to the UK on December 21, 1943. On March 3, 1944 he was sent to the front in Italy and became part of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada Regiment. The fighting on the Italian mainland was fierce. On 23 May 1944 he was taken prisoner during a confrontation with German units. He was then transported to the German prisoner of war camp Stalag 7A in Moosburg in Germany. There he survived the hardships and when he was liberated by the Americans at the end of April 1945, he couldn't believe his luck. There was insufficient capacity to evacuate the POWs quickly. They moved west in large groups and spent several days in temporary transit camps.

On May 1, James was in a temporary camp in Ettringen (Bayern) and together with a number of other Canadian prisoners of war, he had been given drink by a Russian labor command. That drink was fatal to him because it contained methanol that poisoned him. He died on Wednesday,

May 2, 1945 at the age of 32 from alcohol poisoning. 5 fellow sufferers, who had also taken the drink, also died that day.

James was then temporarily buried in Reutti (Germany) and reburied at the British war cemetery in Durnbach (Germany). He finally found his final resting place on June 4, 1948 in Holten at the Canadian Cemetery.

His tombstone reads: TO MEMORY EVER DEAR

His medals were: 1939-45 Star; Italy star; War Medal 1939-45; CVSM & Clasp

