

The unknown woman whose photo was found in the inheritance of



Turcotte, source Canada WW 11 service files of war dead 1939-1947.

Jean Baptiste Turcotte had not got a girlfriend when joined the Canadian Army in March 1944, but when he was killed more than a year later, a photo of a young woman in army uniform, was found among his personal possessions.

It was a special photo, not just because of the woman on it, but due to the fact that the picture of the woman had been cut from a picture postcard photo. The photo was old and damaged. The woman, laughing on the photo with a round face and had wavy dark blonde hair. She was standing in front of a wooden building, possible a military barrack in England, seen part of the visible notes on the back. The person on the photo next to her, carefully cut off.

Reverse side of photo WW II Service files of War Dead 1939-1947.

Who the woman in the photo was is still a mystery. Why the nineteen year old Jean Baptiste Turcotte had the photo on him when he died on 5th April 1945 in Laren (Gld), will possibly always be a question.

Jean Baptiste Turcotte was born on 28th June 1925 in Regina (Saskatchewan, Canada). As the night child of a family with twelve children. He lived as most of his brothers and sisters did in the province of Quebec, near Montreal. His father was a theologian, but worked mainly as a farmers merchant until his death in 1937. After his wife's death in 1934, he had hardly looked back on his children. Jean Baptiste got housing from his sister.

Two of Jean Baptiste's brothers were also in the army, one of them fought in Europe in the regiment Fusiliers Mont Royal.

Jean Baptiste worked as a fifteen years old boy in the mines. The step into joining the army was a way to avoid heavy work.

In the first assessment after recruiting. Lieutenant R. Chalifour wrote that Jean was an energetic healthy young man, had good manners, jovial, open and full of confidence. His only disadvantage was that his appearance was not very neat.

Jean Baptiste was described as being sensitive, serene, but without ambition and little idea about the future. " He is a light character, and never has been interested in learning any trade. He appears nevertheless honest and sober", judged Chalifour. In the army, he was a quick learner. He followed a driving course successfully and had the qualities to take charge. He also had setbacks. He was wounded on one of his legs and had to go to hospital. Later on had back problems and was chesty. His physical discomforts did not retain him from taking part in the battle in Europe. On October 14th he was shipped to England. On January 2nd he was taken to Northern Western Europe where served in the Black Watch Regiment (Royal Highland Regiment of Canada).

From the beginning of April Turcotte took part in the advance through Eastern Holland. Via Terborg, Doetichem, Hummelo, his regiment joined towards the Twentekanaal near Almen, where he crossed on April 3rd . The 4th brigade had already formed a bridgehead there.

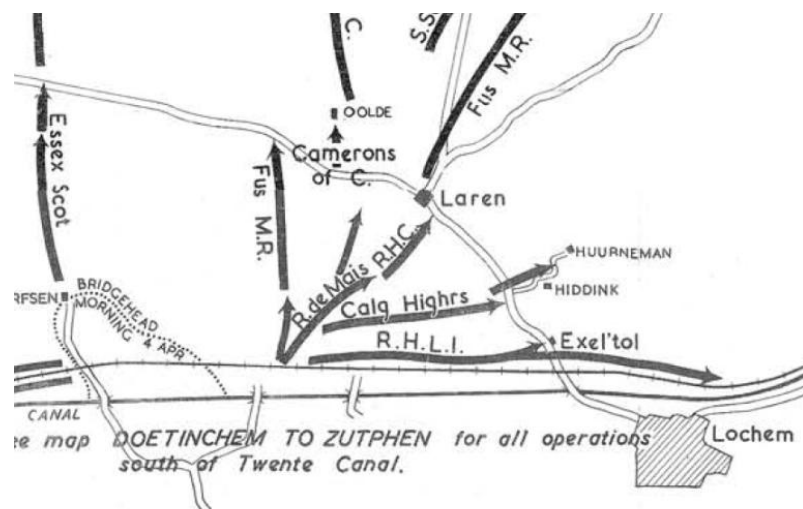
The job of th Black Watch was to extend the bridgehead in Northern direction, together with the Regiment de Maisonneuve and Calgary Highlanders and to take control over the village of Laren.

The crossing of the Twentekanaal was frightening, due to non ending enemy fire. But the Black Watch did not suffer any losses.

A day later it was different, when Laren (Gld) was to be taken.

The plan was that the Black Watch, together with the tank regiment Fort Garry Horse advance the village from the West (from the direction of Zutphen). The French spoken regiment de Maisonneuve were to cut off the village on the North side, while the Calgary Highlanders gave cover along the Twentekanaal. So the Black Watch had a strong base to attack the village.

The Black Watch and the tanks of Fort Gary Horse had hardly started the march when theycame across heavy anti tank fire. The firing came from one place which should have been taken from the village itself, by the Regiment de Maisonneuve. The men on the back of the tanks had to shelter in the ditch. The Black Watch suffered heavy losses and one of the tanks was out of action.



Liberation of Laren, map. Bron: REPORT NO. 32, HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.) ARMY HEADQUARTERS, THE CONCLUDING PHASE OF OPERATIONS BY THE FIRST CDN ARMY

Maybe Jean Baptiste lost his life in that action. The resistance of the German troops was too strong and the original plan of attack was abandoned.

First the German resistance had to be cut off with heavy artillery on the village.

This action was successful. Without hardly any difficulty the Black Watch was able to capture the village and the Canadian army took control at 4 p.m.

Jean Baptiste was buried temporarily in an orchard on the Zutphenseweg in Laren (Gld) together with his comrade Micheal Peter Brown, Frederick Taylor Forbes, Gordon Hume Hand, Gerald Paul MacKenzie, Howard Hector Muirhead, Chesley Edwin Nightingale, Ralph Piercey, James George Todd and Leslie Williams.

Later he received a final resting place at the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten: plot I, row E, grave 15.

The photo of the unknown woman remained in his file.

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