

Unidentified Soldier In Holten Canadian War Cemetery May Be Pte Arthur Vanance

Translated excerpt from 'Holtense gezichten', written by Jan Braakman, from the chapter 'Mission across the Maas'

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Three missing on patrol

Two months later, on February 15, 1945, a similar patrol was conducted. Again a unit of B Company from the Lake Superior Regiment was sent to the other side of the Maas to cross near Bokhoven. The intention was to take as prisoners of war German soldiers from the German Fallschirm Regiment 17, which was stationed on the other side. And again there was a skirmish on the north side of the Maas, causing the Canadians to retreat without success and with many losses.

The Regiment's war diary reported that the early morning action of February 15th led to the death of Private William Russel Lahoda and the disappearance of three others: Sergeant Herbert Carlbom, Lance Corporal Harold F. Hilderley, and **Private Arthur Vanance**. The patrol managed to recover Lahoda's remains.

Carlbon, Hilderley, and Vanance were not rescued. In a letter to Herman Carlbon, Herbert's father, Colonel C.L. Laurin wrote that Herbert was last seen by Sergeant Boomhower at about 7 a.m. on the morning of February 15, 1945.

Carlbon, Banks, and Boomhower tried to evacuate the injured Harold Hilderley and Arthur Vanance. The three climbed the dike along the northern bank of the Maas. They came under fire and Carlbon and Banks were injured. Boomhower asked both men how they were. Both replied that they were doing 'not too bad'.

Boomhower retreated to the boat, where, with the few men remaining, he concluded that the opposition was too strong and too numerous to rescue Carlbon, who remained behind, along with Hilderley and Arthur Vanance. Boomhower decided to return back on the last boat, with the remaining men, to the south side of the Maas near Bokhoven. Banks managed to join them on his own.

The action had left three men on enemy territory: Hilderley and Vanance, who were the first to be hit by the Germans, and then Carlbon, who was injured in the attempt to rescue Hilderley and Vanance.

Where Is Arthur Vanance?

23-year-old Rita Vanance's heart skipped a beat when she received word on Thursday, February 21, 1946, that her husband had arrived in Canada and was now in a hospital in Montreal. Rita had assumed for a year that her husband Arthur had died in Europe. She had received official

notice from army authorities that he was initially missing, and then it was believed he had died in skirmishes.

Rita had been informed a few days earlier that Arthur's personal belongings were not yet in Canada, but that she would receive them as soon as they arrived. Since the news of her husband's death, she had already collected the benefits that were due to her as Arthur's widow.

After the unsuccessful action in February, she had initially received word that her husband had gone missing. Later she received a telegram stating that Arthur was no longer listed as missing, but "for official purposes presumed killed in action." Rita was suddenly on her own with her son Arthur, who had just turned three in December 1944.

Rita knew her 25-year-old husband was someone who did not always allow himself to be constrained by the boundaries of the law. Born on January 5, 1919, Arthur Vanance had had several employers before joining the army. He was an experienced truck driver. He loved sports - softball was his favorite activity. He played the position of first baseman.

In July 1940 he joined the army. His main reason: adventure. He was assessed in December 1942.

Meanwhile, Vanance built up quite a reputation in the army. He was sometimes reprimanded for drunkenness. In 1941 he was imprisoned for 21 days for unauthorized leave. He received a suspended civil court sentence in June 1942 for a burglary in St John, New Brunswick. He was given one-year probation. But within months of the conviction, he was already on the ship to the UK. Morrison felt that Vanance had found his place in the regiment, and Vanance seemed to agree. He crossed the line several more times in England, but not as frequently as before he was shipped. A few weeks after D-Day, he was deployed on the European mainland.

In February 1945, his regiment was stationed near Bokhoven, on the south bank of the Maas, north of 's-Hertogenbosch. And there he was deployed early in the morning for the fateful patrol on February 15, 1945. Such patrols were undertaken from both sides. Germans tried to penetrate the Canadian lines on the Maas at Empel, Crevecoeur, and Gewande. Meanwhile, Canadians crossed the river to carry out reconnaissance on the north side and to check whether the Germans were still occupying their positions. Prisoners of war were captured on both sides during the skirmishes.

After the war, Lieutenant Colonel H.H.A Parker of the Lake Superior Regiment explained what had happened to the patrol that Vanance was part of.

The patrol returned battered. One soldier (William Russell Lahoda) had been killed, ten were wounded, and three had fallen into the hands of the enemy. Among them - probably - was Arthur Vanance. Parker stated in a letter to relatives of the deceased Earl Carlbon, that a rescue operation was set up.

What happened to Vanance after that remains unclear. One of the soldiers (W.R. Marsh) later reported that Lance-Corporal Hilderley had been fatally wounded, and that they had been unable

to recover his body due to intense enemy fire. But, said the same soldier, if they had had two stretchers, they could have picked up Hilderley and Vanance. Banks told Marsh that another NCO, Carlbom, would take care of that. But Carlbom was also ambushed in the action. He was killed. After the war it turned out that Carlbom had been buried by the Germans in the cemetery in Zaltbommel. **Hilderley had been buried in occupied Ammerzoden, along with an unidentified Canadian soldier.** Where Vanance had gone was unclear.

Arthur was missing. In Port Arthur (Ontario, Canada) his wife Rita received word that he was believed to be dead. **(NOTE: Port Arthur is now part of Thunder Bay)**

Hilderley and Carlbom are Buried in Holten

Hilderley's body was exhumed after the war and reburied in Holten. (plot XI, row H, grave 6). Carlbom was also reburied in the cemetery in Holten (plot XI, row H, grave 7). The unidentified soldier from Ammerzoden also ended up at the cemetery in Holten (plot XI, row H, grave 5).

More than a year after the disastrous Maas River patrol, Rita received word that her husband had returned to Canada from Europe on the Queen Elizabeth and that he was in hospital in Montreal. Suddenly there was hope for her and her son again. Captain Wardrobe speculated in the *Winnipeg Free Press* about the condition Arthur may be in. He may have been suffering from amnesia, Wardrobe said.

A day later it was clear that there was a mistake. Not Arthur, but his brother Albert, had returned. The army had reported this to Arthur's wife Rita in error. She had, of course, hoped that her husband had actually returned, but somehow she had reckoned there was a mistake.

Rita was never informed if or where her husband was killed or found. He remains a missing soldier, who is believed to have died. **The question remains: where is Arthur Vanance? Is he the unidentified soldier in Plot XI, Row H, Grave 5?**