

Inkpen, Harold Clifford
Sapper
11th Field Company
Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers
G/45452



Harold Clifford Inkpen was born to Cecil and Nesta Inkpen on 26 April 1920 in Cowbridge, South Wales. The family emigrated to Canada to Marchbank, Kings County, New Brunswick when Harold was seven years old and started a farm. After having completed school up to Grade 6, Harold worked on the family farm for the next eleven years.ⁱ He had a younger brother Dellwyn who fought in Europe with the Royal Canadian Artillery. There were also two younger adopted sisters.

Harold enlisted in the Canadian Army in Fredericton, New Brunswick on 25 September 1941 as a twenty-one year old single man. He took a blacksmith's course in Woodstock, New Brunswick from October of 1941 until March of 1942. Once he passed his Blacksmith "C" trade test he became a sapper in the Corps of the Royal Canadian Engineers (RCE). He then travelled to Petawawa, Ontario where he trained at the RCE Training Center for almost a month. Harold then returned to the Atlantic Provinces and embarked from Halifax, Nova Scotia for the United Kingdom on 14 June 1942ⁱⁱ

Harold arrived in the UK on 25 June 1942 and was initially assigned to No 1 Canadian Engineer Reinforcement Unit. Later he was transferred to 10th Field Squadron, then 12th Field Company and, finally, to 11th Field Company. The main work of the RCE in England at that time was to prepare the United Kingdom for war if it were invaded. They constructed beach obstacles, pill-boxes, anti-tank ditches, and minefields. Other work included improving British roadways for military traffic as well as building military facilities, hospitals and air bases. They also trained and prepared for the Invasion of Europe.

After the D-Day Invasion, Harold arrived in France with elements of 11th Field Company on 9 July 1944 and his company started obstacle clearance and bridge construction in the Caen area. After Caen, the company supported the Allied advance in France and then through Belgium, Holland, and eventually into Germany. Among its operations, the company participated in the Battle of Falaise, The Scheldt, The Rhineland, and The Rhine. By 25 February 1945, the unit had arrived in Germany as the allied forces continued to push back the enemy.

The work of the sappers was needed for the Battle of the Rhineland between 8 February and 11 March 1945, especially Operation VERITABLE. Because of all the bombing that the Royal Air Force, the Royal Canadian Air Force, and the United States Army Air Force had done (such as the bombing of Dresden) sappers had to ensure there was a path for the allied tanks and troops to advance.

The planners had decided in December 1944 that a Rhine crossing would be necessary in order to end the war by taking control of Berlin. In early March 1945, the allies captured Cologne that had been badly destroyed by their bombing and the sappers were there to help them make their way through to the Rhine.

Hitler wanted nothing more than to make sure that the allied forces did not cross the Rhine. All bridges except one were destroyed and that one was seized and crossed by American soldiers. Once the sappers were at the Rhine, bridges were constructed under heavy German air and artillery fire. While the allies' combat forces and the air forces tried to hold off the Germans, the engineers worked hard at constructing enough bridges to support the assault across the Rhine.

On 16 March 11th Field Company began to check a stretch of ground near Cleve for mines in order to make it safe for the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada. By the next evening, the mine-clearing parties had found a number of German mines that they safely lifted and stored in two dumps. The next day, at 1300 hrs Lieutenant O. H. Taylor, Sergeant C. V. Richards, Sapper Inkpen and six other men set out to destroy the mines in the two dumps. A half-hour later, something went terribly wrong. There was a terrific explosion and all were killed.



GIVES HIS LIFE—According to word received by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Inkpen, Poediac, their son, Spr. Harold C. Inkpen, (above), has been killed in action in the Western war front. Spr. Inkpen, who would have been 25 years old during this month, was born near Cardiff, Wales, and came with his family to Canada in 1927. He joined the armed forces in August, 1941, went overseas the following June and entered Normandy shortly after D-Day. He was expected home at an early date. Spr. Inkpen is survived by his parents and one brother, Gnr. Dellwyn Inkpen, now serving in Germany. The two brothers had been together many times in England and also while in France and Germany.

*Source: Kings County Record, April, 1945.
(From the collection of
Connie Cripps)*

The members of 11th Field Company, RCE, who perished in that explosion were :

Lt Taylor, Owen Howard
Spr Anderson, Erick Frederick Rask
Spr Brown, Albert Brown
Spr Inkpen, Howard Clifford
Spr McLellan, Donald Angus
Sgt Richards, Charles
Spr Sponagle, Neil Truman
Spr Steffler, Alphonse Anthony John

No clue was ever found to indicate why the tragedy had occurred.

Harold died a Sapper on 18 March 1945 fighting with the 11th (Lambton) Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers. He was first buried in the temporary burial ground in Bedburg, Germany.

Later he was reburied at Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **V. D. 6.**



Photo: Frans van Cappellen

The cemetery is four miles southeast of Nijmegen, Holland and holds 2,331 Canadian soldiers who died during World War II.ⁱⁱⁱ

All Canadian soldiers who were killed in the battle of the Rhineland were first buried in Germany. General H.D.G. Crerar, commander of the

Canadian land forces, insisted that fallen Canadian soldiers not be buried in German soil and so they were moved to Groesbeek.

Harold was the recipient of five medals:

- 1939 - 1945 Star
- France and Germany Star
- Defence Medal
- War Medal
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp.
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He was killed at the age of 24 – a single man, a farmer, a blacksmith, a hero.

See a video by a student at Belleisle Regional High School as part of the school's Lest We Forget initiative: <http://youtu.be/2dQRkleX9zc>



Life story written by Angela McMillan of Belleisle Regional High School, Springfield, NB as a "Lest We Forget" initiative and provided to the Faces To Graves with the courtesy of Stephen Wilson, Belleisle Regional High School. Additional information courtesy of Ken Holmes, Canadian Military Engineers Historian.

Endnotes:

ⁱ Military service files of Sapper Harold Clifford Inkpen obtained from Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario.

ⁱⁱ Canada in WWII – Juno Beach Centre. 18 May 2009
<http://www.junobeach.org/e/4/can-tac-rce-e.htm>

iii Paul Reed. Groesbeek War Cemetery. Battlefields of WWII. 09 Oct 2008, 18 May 2009. http://battlefieldsw2.50megs.com/groesbeek_war_cemetery.htm

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