

# More Profiles in COURAGE

You continue to send us wonderful stories honouring Canada's war vets; here are more samples of the inspiring tales we received

## ■ Uncovering the Lost Story of a WWI Soldier

During the summer of 2017, I paid a visit to our nation's capital of Ottawa and saw both the National War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This brought to mind a small, worn-out, pocket-sized New Testament that my mother gave to me many years ago. She told me it was a prized possession of her father, my grandpa, Thomas Watson, as it belonged to his brother who went missing in World War One and was never heard from again. At the time, and to my discredit, I possessed no interest in a man who paid the ultimate price for our freedom, despite having served in the Canadian Armed Forces Reserves myself. I had other interests and did not try to find out more about this relative. From time to time, I would look at the New Testament and wonder who this long-lost relative was and what he went through but took it no further. Looking at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, I finally decided that if I was going to talk the talk about remembering our liv-

ing veterans, and honouring those who fell defending our country, I had better find out more about this man who paid the ultimate price.

My Remembrance Day project kicked off in September 2017, but I had very little to go on at first. I didn't know where my long-lost relative served in World War One, which army unit he served with, when he fell in battle or even his name.

I decided to gather as much information from the resources that I had. Those included Google searches, Wikipedia, Canadian Veterans Affairs, a collection of memorabilia owned by my cousin, Dr. Richard Haugen, and picking the brain of my oldest living relative,

my 89-year-old aunt, Francis (Betty) Haugen. Thankfully, I can now paint a pretty clear picture of the short life and service my long-lost relative—Private George William Watson—lived.

George was one of six children of my great-grandfather, Thomas Oats Watson, and was born on January 18, 1883. He was raised in a deeply devout family of Methodists in Arden, Man., and remained very religious to the end of his life. In the letters he wrote to his youngest brother, my



Dear Tom:-  
 Well another 24th of May  
 as passed and gone and we were  
 to the Folkestone sports in the after  
 noon. It was not to bad a sports day  
 base ball between two of the  
 reserves. When they had a relay  
 race and the 11th reserve won  
 by a long stride and I think that  
 they won the one hundred yard-  
 dash.  
 We are out of quarantine once  
 more and moved up to the 11th  
 parade ground. But I am still  
 under canvas.  
 We are having fine sunny  
 weather and the sun seems  
 very hot.

Shorncliffe Camp  
 May 25/17.

working in the  
 a little harder  
 think I can get  
 were prayed  
 hence. today.  
 Bett as you  
 my. Letters  
 ton  
 C. Comp.  
 serve. C.E.F.  
 Shorncliffe Camp.  
 England.  
 the news  
 lots of love  
 loving brother  
 George.



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Thomas Watson, in an attempt to discover more clues, and piece together George's training and postings in the Canadian Army.

In an undated fragment of a letter, George mentioned that he received a letter from his mother, which she had sent to Camp Aldershot with some Sunday school papers, while he was aboard ship in the Halifax harbour. George also makes mention of how military drills were conducted differently than Camp

Hughes. It can therefore be safely assumed that Private George Watson was assigned to Camp Hughes and Camp Aldershot before shipping out from Halifax.

I quickly turned my attention online, to a website run by Parks Canada. I learned that Camp Hughes, named after Sir Sam Hughes, Canada's Minister of Militia and Defence (1911-1916), was a major training area for the Canadian Army during World War One. In 1916, the year George Watson joined the army, Camp Hughes reached its maximum size—a total of 27,754 troops undergoing training. This made Camp Hughes, at the time, the most densely populated area in Manitoba, outside of Winnipeg. In order to train soldiers how to operate on a battlefield, Camp Hughes featured an extensive trench system, which is still there today for visitors to see. Despite the camp's closure in 1934, it is still recognized as a place of national historic significance by the government of Canada.

grandfather Thomas Watson, it is clear he was interested in horses, farming, local politics and even automobiles. My aunt Betty informed me that George most likely could have avoided military service, and lived to a very old age, but chose to come to his country's aid in its hour of need.

### MILITARY SERVICE HISTORY

From the Canadian Virtual War Memorial, I found George's Attestation Paper, which was filled out when he enlisted on June 10, 1916, in the 200th Battalion CEF (Canadian Expeditionary Force) of the Canadian Army. His battalion was formed and based in Winnipeg and began recruiting during the winter of 1915-16. George Watson would remain in the 200th Battalion CEF during his military service and training while still in Canada.

I now turned to a series of letters that Private Watson wrote to his youngest brother,

As I continued my search on Wikipedia, I learned that Camp Aldershot, located near Kentville, N.S., was a training centre for the Canadian infantry during the First World War. More than 7,000 soldiers at any particular time were undergoing training there. While there were temporary buildings to house cooking faculties, mess halls and the camp hospital, the men undergoing training at that camp lived in tents. Odds were George went through basic and infantry training at Camp Hughes, Camp Aldershot, or both, before being shipped overseas. At 33 years old, George would have been older than most recruits, especially since most men who enlisted were in their late teens or early 20s. I personally went through basic training when I was 17 and it was a challenge, even at that young age. I cannot imagine trying to do it at 33!

### A SACRIFICE LIKE NO OTHER

The 200th Battalion shipped out to Britain and, shortly thereafter, became part of the 11th Reserve Battalion on May 14, 1917. In January 1917, the personnel of the numerous Canadian battalions in England were placed into 26 new reserve battalions, and reinforced other infantry battalions in France and Belgium. Private George Watson wrote to his brother, Thomas, on May 28, 1917, telling him how he was at Shorncliffe Camp in southeast England and was still living in a tent. He also described the sports day that was organized at the camp to celebrate Victoria Day and how he got paid the princely sum of one pound, sixpence. Sometime before November 6, 1917, Private George Watson ended his time with the 11th Reserve Battalion in England and was transferred, as a replacement, to the 27th Battalion, an infantry battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. It originally disembarked in France on September 18, 1915, where it fought as part of the 6th Infantry Brigade, 2nd Canadian Division, in France and Flanders until the end of the war. The battalion was disbanded on September 15, 1920.

Returning to The Canadian Virtual War

Memorial, I discovered Private George William Watson's military service number, and that he had been declared missing on November 6, 1917. I was lucky enough to find the war diary for the 27th Battalion, for the month of November 1917. It documented daily reports filed by an army unit in the field and contains orders, intelligence reports, unit strength, and casualty reports of friendly and enemy personnel. In this war diary, I found that the 27th Battalion took part in an assault on the town of Passchendaele in Flanders, Belgium, as part of the 3rd Battle of Ypres. Passchendaele was captured by Canadian army units on November 6, 1917, the same day that Private George William Watson and nine other soldiers from the 27th Battalion went missing. In addition, the 27th Battalion lost 45 other men, killed in action, and 187 more were wounded.

The brutality of war denied George a known and honoured resting place, but his name appears at the top of Page 346 in the World War One Book of Remembrance in the Memorial Chamber of the Parliament of Canada. To honour George's sacrifice, this page is displayed by a grateful nation every July 27th for public viewing. In addition, George's name appears in The Menin Gate Memorial, in the town of Ieper (formerly Ypres), West Flanders, Belgium, which is dedicated to the 55,000 men who were lost without a trace. If ever you'd like more information on George and his story, visit this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSSJ3kv7AHM>

George, I hope, wherever you are, that you are resting in peace. Thank you for going to a terrible war and helping to secure the freedom I enjoy today!

**Robert Fleming,**  
 Edmonton

**Clockwise from left to right: A pair of letters George Watson wrote during his time overseas; soldiers photographed in a trench during WWI; this Silver Cross medal was awarded to George's mother, as it is given to the mother or closest relative of a soldier killed on duty.**



## ■ Drafting a New Plan

Clarke Edgar Sheppard was born in Toronto on May 10, 1923. He joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in October of 1942, with hopes of becoming a fighter pilot. Unfortunately, poor vision in one eye (due to looking directly at a solar eclipse as a boy) meant he was not eligible for any flight crew positions. He even memorized several eye charts in an effort to fool the doctors, but was caught out every time. Once the air force determined that he was a qualified draftsman, he was stationed at #4 Maintenance Unit at Scoudouc, N.B., designing airframe modifications for Canadian aircraft. He served until his discharge in June 1945. He married Ailene May Jackson in December of 1944 and, in 1978, they retired to Sackville, N.B. Clarke passed away in June of 2011. Ailene passed away in July of 2014.

**Norm Sheppard,**  
Sackville, N.B.



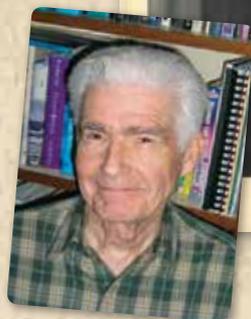
## ■ Honouring Dad

My father, Capt. Collison A. Blaver (Lieut. during the war), was a member of the Royal Rifles of Canada. The day after the Pearl Harbour attack was the day my father's war began. He was sent on that ill-fated mission for the Battle of Hong Kong. They fought the enemy from December 8 to 25, 1941, when they were captured. On the night of December 18, my father and two other officers were ordered to hold off the enemy on Mount Parker in Hong Kong, while the rest of the platoon retreated. The two other officers were killed, and Dad was wounded (after the war, he received the Military Cross for his actions that night). Dad was a POW until his release in September 1945. He survived the war, came home and was sent to the Chorley Park Military Hospital in Toronto to recuperate. That is where he met my mom, Jane Meaden, a nursing sister there. They married in June 1946. My sister was born in March 1947, and I followed in December 1948. Unfortunately, Dad died in October 1951. Sadly, he had taken a book to his boss's son in the hospital, the little boy had polio, and Dad died six days later. In 2009, the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association ([www.hkvca.ca](http://www.hkvca.ca)) erected the Hong Kong Memorial Wall in Ottawa. If you visit the city, check it out. The Memorial Wall is located at the corner of King Edward Avenue and Sussex Drive. On the side of the wall honouring the Royal Rifles of Canada, you will find my father's name.

**Marilyn Wright,** Wasaga Beach, Ont.



Clockwise from above: Clarke on leave visiting his parents in 1943; Clarke and Ailene's wedding photo in 1944; Clarke at 84 years of age.



## ■ A Warbird and a Veteran

The closure of Edmonton's City Centre Airport, first known as Blatchford Field, has not stopped vintage aircraft, warbirds and special interest airplanes from flying over Alberta's capital city. The airport was licensed in 1926 as the first federally licensed air harbour in Canada, and opened in January 1927. In a referendum held in 1992, Edmontonians voted to keep the airport open. A second referendum in 1995 saw 77 per cent of voters choose to keep the airport operating, although heavy aircraft and scheduled flights were moved to the Edmonton International Airport. Nevertheless, city council in July 2009 voted to close the airport in 2013. Thus ended visits from vintage aircraft, military jets, helicopters and warbirds that had proven so popular with the public at events staged by the Alberta Aviation Museum, located adjacent to the airport's runways.

Despite closure of the airport on November 30, 2013, Edmonton was still visited by a vintage twin-engine bomber. From June 30 to July 3, 2014, under the auspices of the Alberta Aviation Museum, the Villeneuve Airport was home to the "Maid in the Shade" B-25 Mitchell from the Commemorative Air Force base in Mesa, Arizona. Its schedule of flights was full with passengers taking rides in the aircraft, which flew 15 operational flights in November and December 1944.

### AN ALL-STAR SQUADRON

It was great to see the venerable Mitchell at Villeneuve Airport, but the highlight of my visit was meeting another war veteran at the Villeneuve Airport, former airman Manuel Sharko. He enlisted with the Royal Canadian Air Force at age 19 and completed 36 operational flights as a mid-upper gunner with the RCAF 432 Squadron. He completed a tour of duty that consisted of 30 operational bombing flights, and continued on through six more. All 36 ops were completed with a crew that was captained by pilot Flight Sergeant (later Pilot Officer)



Clockwise from top left: Manuel Sharko with four fellow crew members and one unidentified airman; Manuel Sharko at age 19 atop his Halifax bomber while in RCAF 432 (Leaside) Squadron; a frontal view of Halifax bomber "Q for Queenie" in which air gunner Manuel Sharko flew 36 operational flights; members of the air and ground crews of RCAF 432 (Leaside) Squadron, relaxing on base in East Moor, Yorkshire.

Robert Campbell, who was decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). All crew were RCAF personnel except for the flight engineer. Aside from the pilot, F/S Stewart Cassels, the navigator, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal, the equivalent of the DFC, which was awarded to non-commissioned officers. Manuel Sharko was born in a log house on his family's farm near Nisku, Alta., just south of Edmonton, on February 21, 1925, and lived there until he enlisted in the air force in 1944. After qualifying as an Air Gunner at No. 3 Bombing and Gunnery School in MacDonald, Man., he was shipped overseas and based with his squadron in England at East Moor, Yorkshire. Despite the odds, Sergeant Sharko and his entire crew survived the war. He says his scariest and longest flight was a bombing run



**Above: The Maid in the Shade taking flight at the Villeneuve Airport; a more recent photo of WWII veteran, Manuel Sharko.**

to Stuttgart, Germany; with their Halifax bomber shot up and losing fuel, the crew was able to land safely at an American base in England where the aircraft was repaired, then flown back to East Moor.

Manuel tells of one time when their aircraft was “coned” by searchlights on the ground converging on it, making it easier for anti-aircraft guns to target. Pilot Campbell put the Halifax into a steep dive, often an evasive corkscrew manoeuvre that would make the entire aircraft shudder, but a standard practice even for a large aircraft like the four-engine Halifax. Manuel’s son, Wayne, says, “Dad always said it was completely dark when they were flying, but when the spotlights found them, the whole plane would light up inside.”

### A STROKE OF LUCK

In September 1944, on a daylight bombing flight near Dortmund, Manuel’s aircraft suffered minor flak damage to the cockpit. However, a piece of flak struck pilot Campbell, hitting him in the face mask of his respirator, which quite possibly saved his life. Born in Scotland, Bob Campbell moved to Manitoba with his parents when he was young. Following the war, he stayed in the RCAF until 1968, leaving as a Flight

Lieutenant, and was the father of six children. Following his death in 1985, his family placed his uniform on long-term loan to the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum located in Hamilton. It can be seen today as a memento of the crew that flew together during the Second World War, defying the high-risk odds of being killed in action while flying with Bomber Command.

Although Edmonton’s historic City Centre Airport is now closed and its flying events will be held at the Villeneuve Airport, there is reason for optimism about developments concerning the Alberta Aviation Museum. Housed in the large 1941 hangar on Kingway (built during the Second World War for the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan), the building will continue to house the museum, and city of Edmonton funds will be used to upgrade the heating, ventilation and electrical systems. The city plans to take over operation and maintenance expenses.

Thus the future of the museum to preserve aviation history and heritage seems assured. The contributions of warbirds that flew, and the airmen like Manuel Sharko who flew in them, are sure to be remembered.

*John Chalmers, Edmonton*

## All in the Family

My grandfather, John (Jack) Davey, was born in 1888 in Somerset, England, and immigrated to Victoria in 1912. With the outbreak of World War I, he enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Forces on September 23, 1914, the day after his 26th birthday. As a corporal in the 7th Battalion, he fought in the second battle of Ypres and was wounded on April 23, 1915. Two days later, he was found by enemy soldiers and taken prisoner; his wounded leg was partially amputated in the POW camp. Five months later, he was repatriated to England where a further amputation of his leg was performed. He returned to Canada in February 1916 and was given a medical discharge on April 23, 1917. Ten days later he married his sweetheart, whom he had faithfully written to during his time overseas. He became a lifelong member of the War Amps Society of Canada, serving as the president of the Victoria Branch for many years. He worked for the B.C. Civil Service for over 27 years and passed away October 13, 1962.

His eldest son, my uncle, Flight Sergeant John Vernon Davey, enlisted in the RCAF in June 1940 and flew Kittyhawks over the



**Jack Davey (above) fought in World War I, and his eldest son, John Vernon Davey (left) fought in World War II.**

North African desert in support of the 8th Army Desert Rats. On May 17, 1942, at age 24, he was killed when his plane was shot down; his plane and body were never found. His name is inscribed on the Alamein War Memorial in Egypt.

*Corinne Davey, Calgary*

## Proud to do Their Part

My parents, Olga Mysak and Alfred Ball, both served in World War II, Mom in the air force and Dad in the army. They met in Ottawa when they enlisted and married after a short period of time. I was their only child, and gave them two grandchildren. These are the bios that appear on the Royal Canadian Legion website (Manitoba & Northwestern Ontario Command).

*Barbara Ball Ruston, Mission, B.C.*

**MYSAK**, Olga, WWII: Olga was born in Punnichy, Sask., in 1916. She enlisted in the air force and served as a cook in Ottawa during World War II. She received the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal. Olga passed away in 2005.



**BALL**, Alfred George, WWII: Alfred was born in Sydney Mines, N.S., in 1915. He enlisted in the army and served as a policeman out of Ottawa during World War II. He received the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal. Alfred passed away in 2000. ■

