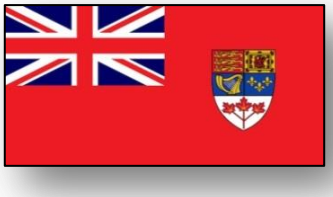


Lloyd and Ruby Bracewell

Courtesy of: **THE FIRST HUSSARS**

Written by: Nick Corrie

Assisted by: Marie Shervill

HODIE NON CRAS

The Wedding Party of Lloyd and Ruby Bracewell

Maid of Honour: Sylvia McDonald

Best Man: William Coleman

London, Ontario, October 7, 1939

Talbot Street Baptist Church

Celebrant: Reverend Stanley Inman

Name: Lloyd Frederick Bracewell

Rank: Corporal

Service Number: A 191

Born: November 27, 1909

Discharged: August 10, 1945

Served in: WWII

Service: Canadian Army

Battle Group: 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade

Regiment: First Hussars

Service Details: Corporal Bracewell joined the First Hussars on September 10, 1939, the day Canada declared war on Germany. His age and work background in England and Canada, marked him as a potential candidate for mechanical training to a higher standard expected from a Driver/Mechanic assigned to a tank crew. His service training was marked by many changes, eventually culminating with a much respected, highly functional, armoured designation: Fitter, Canadian Armoured Corps "A". A Fitter is trained to disassemble engines, especially in Lloyd's case – tank engines.

Service Notes: Corporal Bracewell was never assigned to a tank crew. His highly specialised training placed him in A Echelon, or also known as, forward echelon, of a Squadron. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, Bracewell went ashore likely with "C" Squadron. Unlike "A" and "B" Squadrons which had the distinction of powering to shore in floating DD tanks (Duplex Drive), "C" Squadron followed them ashore, landing directly onto Juno Beach from LCTs (Landing Craft Tanks). Working as a Fitter/Mechanic, he served with the regiment through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. His age, marital status and early enlistment, entitled him to early repatriation in June 1945.

HODIE NON CRAS

CANADIAN WAR MEDALS: NW EUROPE

Lloyd Frederick Bracewell – Personal History: Before, during and after WWII

Lloyd Bracewell was not a typical Army recruit in 1939. His birth date of November 27, 1909, places him in the category of older recruit, in contrast with the more typical younger twenty-year-olds, and younger, who lined up to join at the outbreak of war. His birthplace, however, in Barnoldswick, England, follows the trend set during WWI when British immigrants living in Canada flocked to the colours to fight for King and Country.

When Canada went to war again after a mere twenty-one years, even first-generation men from British families living geographically from coast to coast, felt compelled to follow their father's example to help their old homeland fight "the Hun." Lloyd, despite not having any direct family influence nearby, apparently felt strong ties as an ex-Brit and had no difficulty deciding the correct action to take.

September 10, 1939, is a date significant to both Lloyd and Canada. On that day he joined the First Hussars to become Trooper Bracewell, A 191. It was also on that momentous day that Canada after waiting and debating for one week, declared war on Germany. Canada was responding to Britain's lead, the Mother Country having declared war seven days before on September 3, 1939. This delay was the first display of the Mackenzie King government's political maneuverings for the entire war in an effort to preserve its voter base in Quebec, where French Canadians overwhelmingly rejected conscription. Many good men would die due to King placing politics above a determined war effort.

Fully kitted out in the best uniform the army could supply on that early day of the upcoming five-year war, Lloyd married Ruby Hazel McDonald on October 7, 1939. His Best Man was William Coleman accompanied by Ruby's sister, Sylvia McDonald, as the designated Maid of Honour. (Bill Coleman appears to have been in the Elgin Regiment.) In just one month of the newly declared war, Lloyd Bracewell managed to join the army and get married. In two swift strokes, he had truly changed his life, no doubt about it.

The uniforms proudly displayed in the wedding pictures by Groom and Best Man Coleman, are of WWI vintage; there were no others. In short order, Tip-Top Tailors would turn out 25,000 new Battle Dress uniforms per week, but at this early date, that was still in the future.

Bracewell had come to Canada in the late twenties, at about the age of twenty. His place of birth, Barnoldswick, or Barlick as it is known locally, is in the north of England near the Yorkshire - Lancashire border. This area produced vast amounts of coal and along with an abundance of water power, it played a big part in the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century. By

the twentieth century, with the introduction of electricity, the small industries associated with the earlier era gave way to bigger, more vigorous industries farther south. Barlick, a mere 30 miles from the larger centres of Manchester and Leeds, tried desperately to retain the woolen and cotton mills which had made the town and entire region a prosperous source of profit and employment. WWI changed many things, none more so than Bracewell's home district.

A note here: Barlick, as Lloyd declares in his enlistment papers, was once entirely in Yorkshire. Since his days there, the boundaries have been redrawn to include some areas in Lancashire.

St Michael's Church circa 1100

It must have been a terrible wrench to leave the only home he had ever known. To compound his dilemma, close by, only a few miles away, was an old village of ancient vintage named – Bracewell. The name stretches back to the Doomsday Book of 1086 and over time, people living near the village adopted the name. The name evolved from the combined words of *Braegd or Breid*, old family names, and *well*, referring to a spring or stream.

In the end, the personal attachment to a family name didn't matter. With so few prospects as mills closed between the wars (once there were 13 in Barlick alone) people began to emigrate to the far corners of the Empire, Canada a favourite choice. According to a 2015 survey, there were 49 families named Bracewell in Canada, 26 in British Columbia. Lloyd Bracewell became part of the exodus.

Whenever an examination of a military career is contemplated, a good first step is to make application to Library and Archives of Canada for the individual's military records. These papers are quite comprehensive; numerous documents detail a recruit's progress as he moves through various stages of recruitment, training and development.

The primary paper properly entitled, Attestation Paper, provides the basic details of the recruit. At 5'-8" and 150 lbs. he proved a fine physical specimen with no sight or hearing problems. His "Handedness" and overall medical condition was "Category A."

Much of what is seen on these papers comes from the individual himself, details which must be correct or penalties can be applied for making a false declaration. Lloyd stated that he had the equivalent Canadian education of Grade 8. For the first half of the twentieth century in Canada, this was an acceptable indication that the person had a basic education affording him the ability to read and write and a willingness to learn. This submission conforms to a personal English family document dated November 16, 1923, headed "The Factory and Workshop Act, 1901," (a child labour code) in which Lloyd's father in written form, gives Lloyd, age 14, permission to, and further helps him apply for, work as an "Overlooker in a cotton mill." The above document was supplemented by a "Certified Copy of an Entry of Birth" in which Lloyd's father Frederick and

mother Elizabeth Mary Bracewell, formerly Windle, declare as correct his date of birth of November 27, 1909.


Frederick and Elizabeth Bracewell

When the Quarter Master issued Lloyd his new boots, he likely never guessed much less enquired, if his new recruit had ever worn anything else but leather boots and shoes.

A glance at the feet of most textile workers in Lancashire/Yorkshire during Lloyd's tenure there, would reveal the wearing of simple, inexpensive, but entirely serviceable footwear – clogs. Shoes made of wood are not peculiar to Holland alone. In fact, wood was utilised in footwear variants the world over for centuries. Better than leather soles for wet conditions and easily fashioned, clogs were the shoes of choice for the common man and woman. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain, hordes of manual labour were drawn into Lancashire to fill the labour demand expanding the use of clogs. The young Lloyd Bracewell, new textile worker and a Lancashire man, would not have balked at wearing a pair.

With the enlistment process completed, the last steps taken are serious ones. An oath is sworn to its correctness which if deliberately false, "…he would be liable to be punished as provided by the law." Over his signature given twice, he agrees first to serve in the Canadian Active Service Force "…so long as an emergency, i.e., war, invasion, riot…exists." Secondly, "…that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty." The paper indicates the candidate was fingerprinted and passed. The final line emphasises the penalty for falsifying the information given. Attention is drawn to a line that falsifying is "…A PENALTY OF SIX MONTHS OF IMPRISONMENT."

Lloyd on left

Part of what Lloyd had sworn to be correct was his work experience, details which became a determining factor in deciding his future in the army. Beginning with his early working life in England, he claimed eight years as a labourer rising to the level of "Weaver" at Nutter Bros. textile factory, followed by two more years as a farm labourer on a mixed farm. All ten years in England. Next, he declares six more years on a farm belonging to Alex Campbell of Embro, Ontario, paid at $16.00 per month plus room and board. For good measure he worked part time as a truck driver.

These sixteen years of manual labour in England and Canada placed Lloyd, in the estimation of the recruiting officer, as a good candidate for training as a motor mechanic. The officer, beyond recognising Lloyd's obvious intelligence, (ascertained through the interviewing process) cleverly deduced that he had been exposed to mechanical apparatus for all of his working life, not afraid of hard, dirty work, and with formal training, he would become an important addition to the newly converting, from horses to horsepower, First Hussars.

Trooper Lloyd Bracewell passed through enlistment and awaited the next step – training.

Initially, the recruits followed their WWI compatriots' experience of camping out under canvas at Wolseley Barracks. Cases of cold and pneumonia brought about a welcomed change in address: they moved into buildings at London's exhibition grounds, Queen's Park.

Canada in 1939 was totally unprepared for war. The few war materials available were of WWI issue. Uniforms, weapons, transportation, barracks - everything was old and even worse, quite useless to the task ahead. That task was: to fight against a modern mobile army equipped and determined to conquer everything in its path.

In a fog of ambiguity, the First Hussars began to institute the first steps of a recruit's, at this early date of a new war, outdated training schedule. Progress to modernisation was a ponderously, uncertain process. If there is one word which can summarise the Canadian army's overall record throughout the war, it would be – change.

Many of the changes which occurred during the war most likely went practically unnoticed by the average service man; they were merely paper changes. The first came about in January 1940. On that date the regiment lost its time-honoured name to became - the First Canadian Cavalry Regiment (Mechanized). Author Mike McNorgan in his 2004 edition of the regiment's history, suitably entitled *The Gallant Hussars*, (p. 71), makes the point that in a time of crisis, "…someone in Ottawa determines that the best way to meet the crisis is through the creation of *ad hoc* units."

The word “Mechanized” was largely at this early stage of war development, an illusion. There were few vehicles, only a hope for some at some time in the future. The final regimental identification which lasted throughout the war was: 6th Canadian Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars) or simply 6 CAR.

Military historians have long noted that with each new war a country faces, the senior staff tend to develop plans based on the experience of their last war. This tendency meant that during the early stages of the war, the red-tabbed cadre of officers sequestered in Ottawa were flying blind, dragging in their tail wind the lessons of the last war. WWI was a static war of trench digging, mud, rats, trench foot, bad food, and certain death from machine guns and artillery. Initially, no one had any reason to think the new conflict would be any different.

Example: It was at Queen’s Park, where they were taught the art of trench digging. This picture shows WWI veterans instructing men on the trenching technique which saved their lives in the last war. At that point it was supposed that the new army would eventually fight their old foe again in the same way, and hopefully, for the last time!

Beginning in 1940, until they departed for Great Britain in November 1941, the First Hussars were the first of the newly-formed armoured regiments to train at Camp Borden. The regiment arrived at their new camp only to find no permanent accommodation; it became a trial of tents again. If they were disappointed to see more tents, one wonders at their reaction after their first glance at the tanks on offer. Awaiting them were old WWI Renault tanks Canada had bought from the United States as scrap - a fair description given their age and German advancements in armour.

From the opening 1939 salvo in Poland, to D-Day, June 6, 1944, the First Hussars’ regimen was train, train and train some more. All this training was necessary in the main because of constant, as noted before – change.

Trooper Lloyd Bracewell’s training progress from his date of enlistment to June 6, 1944, when he landed in France, is somewhat convoluted. In fact, Lloyd’s training outline is a study in redundancy. Motor mechanics and driver training seem to repeat, layer upon layer? Early on, he

seems to be both a Batman and motor mechanic; only the army could make that odd combination.

Perhaps some of the confusion can be explained by another entry on his training syllabus: in March 1941, he receives a classification as Driver, Instructional Cadre, Class III. This prestigious assignment coupled to the trusted position of Batman, was perhaps in recognition of his age and sober manner; Lloyd was a teetotaler. The mechanical association of each assignment also inches him along towards the original assessment made at enlistment - mechanics. The next training segment confirms the army's determination to fully train him in that field.

In September, 1941, the army finally realised that Lloyd was capable of greater things or – maybe he made a point of asking for more responsibilities? In Hamilton, as a war training measure, the army operated a trade school for motor mechanic instruction. For three weeks he was trained at that facility to emerge as: Motor Mechanic Group "C" with appropriate pay (no amount indicated).

During the months of September, October and November, leading up to the biggest, and one can assume, best news, the news they had all been waiting for - departure for Britain – the time totally occupied Lloyd in particular. His itinerary was full.

On leave, 1941

First – leave. Embarkation leave restricted to only the first week in September seems rather paltry. No one knew the extent of the war or even if they would return at all. It would be forty-six months before he would see his wife again. One can picture a tearful goodbye - Ruby was eight months pregnant.

With his leave over, he and the entire regiment were on the move. After departing their familiar home of Camp Borden, their first stop was Camp Debert. This base in Nova Scotia served as a staging and final training area for troops awaiting transport to Britain. But for Trooper Bracewell this was no rest stop; his record is full of entries for October 1941. The most important for him at that time and for ever more he would attest, is a note that on October 11, 1941, his daughter Marie Elizabeth Bracewell was born in London, Ontario. He couldn't have known at that time what a great help she would become on the farm after the war. Surviving the war took on a new importance.

Finally, the army played catch-up with his training. He received a new qualification as: Driver Mechanic Group "C" and was promoted to Lance Corporal. He also received his two-year Good Conduct Badge. Then, in November, when the army thought it appropriate, the newly- trained and promoted Lance Corporal Bracewell, (there was more to learn he

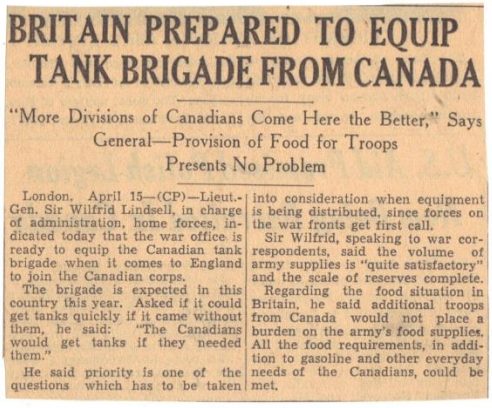
would soon discover) along with the entire regiment, crossed the turbulent North Atlantic in winter on the troopship SS *Oronsay*. A ship of 1925 vintage built for warm Mediterranean and Pacific cruises, it plunged about through violent, cold winter storms. The below deck scenes were indescribable. It wasn't a pleasant trip. (*SS Oronsay*, on October 9, 1942, while transporting a small compliment of personnel, was torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Liberia by the Italian Submarine *Archimede.* Most were saved.)

Before leaving Lloyd's Canadian army experience behind, the accompanying photo demands an explanation! Taking note that Lloyd is still wearing his WWI uniform, topped by a new greatcoat, the location would be in either London or Camp Borden. He and some of mates, junior ranks for sure, decided to add some humour to their serious, austere surroundings, by making fun of the senior NCOs. With rifle in hand, Trooper Bracewell is standing guard on the Sargent's Mess (a teetotaler guard no less!) lest anyone should interfere with their sanctioned, medicinal beveraging.

The army works in mysterious ways. They give a man a one week leave before departing Canada and then upon arrival in Aldershot in southern England, after first docking at Liverpool, they extend leave for a whole month. Go figure?

The boys perhaps didn't have time to realise it at first, but that leave was the best month they would spend at Aldershot. Willems Barracks where they were housed, was built mid- nineteenth century during the Crimean War. The freezing, damp cold, was only the first introduction to war-torn Britain. More was to come.

Unbeknownst to them, once posted overseas, their prospects were less then promising. Another truism common to wartime is that the first casualty is – truth. Example: This London Free Press article, circa. 1941, paints an almost idyllic life awaiting a Canadian armoured regiment in Britain. The reporter trumpeted the abundance of food available and the tanks on offer



BRITAIN PREPARED TO EQUIP TANK BRIGADE FROM CANADA

"More Divisions of Canadians Come Here the Better," Says General—Provision of Food for Troops Presents No Problem

London, April 15—(CP)—Lieut.-Gen. Sir Wilfrid Lindsell, in charge of administration, home forces, indicated today that the war office is ready to equip the Canadian tank brigade when it comes to England to join the Canadian corps.

The brigade is expected in this country this year. Asked if it could get tanks quickly if it came without them, he said: "The Canadians would get tanks if they needed them."

He said priority is one of the questions which has to be taken into consideration when equipment is being distributed, since forces on the war fronts get first call.

Sir Wilfrid, speaking to war correspondents, said the volume of army supplies is "quite satisfactory" and the scale of reserves complete.

Regarding the food situation in Britain, he said additional troops from Canada would not place a burden on the army's food supplies. All the food requirements, in addition to gasoline and other everyday needs of the Canadians, could be met.

(plenty to go around apparently) were faster and better than their German counter parts. Bull! Bull! And more of it.

Now that they were in Britain, perhaps in disgust, tinged with anger, they recalled that Free Press article praising English, war-time food; the reality was mutton, Brussels sprouts, powdered eggs and milky, sweet tea. Ugh! It was too far to swim home. All of Great Britain, including Ireland, was considered part of the "war zone." The First Hussars were in it for the duration.

Over and above the poor food, the defence capability of Britain after the Dunkirk debacle in 1940, found the country in a vulnerable state. The modern weapons rushed into production at a very late date, were lost, abandoned in France. The U-Boat menace sunk hundreds of supply ships bringing over badly needed food and weapons. Moreover, all new tank production was earmarked as replacements to those lost in North Africa. On desert sands, the British army was fully committed to fighting off Rommel and his combined German-Italian armies.

As to the quality of the British tanks, without doubt they were outclassed by the German marks. They often broke down, were poorly armoured and out-gunned. In Britain, the best the British could manage for training was a piecemeal issue of a few tanks at a time. The Canadian armoured units simply had to make do and train tank crews on a rotating basis. Not exactly the conditions expected from the glowing reports depicted in the press and from Canadian leaders, military and political.

Cruiser Tank: sleek but problematic

Fortunately, for the newly arrived and poorly trained First Hussars, the Germans had given up on a Great Britain invasion. The Nazi army was fully occupied fighting in Africa and after June 1941, a new front opened against their ultimate nemesis – Russia.

Canadian Ram Tank

Despite these shortages, as time passed the determination to win the war eventually resulted in good things happening in Canada and Great Britain. New tank variants emerged from factories demanding new skills. From the Montreal Locomotive Works, converted to war work, British designed Valentines presented new challenges for tank crews to become efficient in tank warfare. The first, near modern tank which the newly named Canadian Armoured Corps trained on, was Canada's own Ram tank, again from Montreal. As the war front moved from Africa to Sicily in 1943, then mainland Italy, new tactics were adopted from hard learned lessons.

Lloyd and sister Doris

Men like Lloyd, who were born in Britain, were in a sense enjoying a paid holiday to visit home and family. Up in Barlick lived his father, brothers and sister (his mother had died some years before). On his first leave, like a homing pigeon, Lloyd hopped on a train and headed north. In a letter written to his wife back in Canada, he gleefully relates a visit to see his father. He tells of his father constructing bicycles of two and three wheels for a grandchild. Mechanical ability must have been an inherited trait; it was no small feat for sure. Today's family photo album is filled with pictures taken at his English home. Cherished keepsakes today for Marie and extended family.

While at home, a big plus was to escape rationing. A small town nestled in a rural area would likely have access to some "extras."

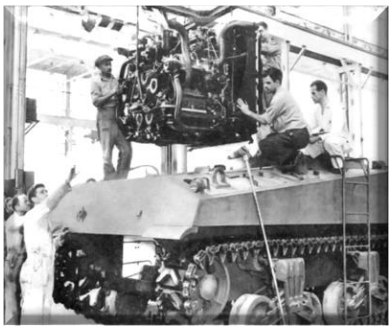
The big challenge for the Canadian senior officers after arrival in Britain, was to keep the troops occupied. Without proper transport and a dearth of armoured vehicles, i.e. tanks, the trick was to keep morale up. Bored soldiers soon get into trouble if left unattended too long.

Parades have always been a favourite tactic exercised by the army to keep troops occupied. Back at Aldershot, after leave in January 1942, film footage surviving from their first exciting days in the war zone, show them smartly parading, everyone fully, and hopefully, warmly wrapped in great-coats while sporting side arms. Lieutenant Colonel R.H.F. Back received the salute. Very smart!

The army had no intention of letting Lloyd lapse into boredom. His syllabus from February 2, 1942, through to D-Day, became a busy time. The training given in Canada was just a tickler for more intense, focused mechanical advancement. The highlight was taking a course in October 1942 from which he became a: Fitter Motor Vehicle Group "C." This "C" designation was given because he failed as a Group "A" Fitter. No explanation is given. This little set-back was eventually remedied. (See Fitter training below.)

What is a Fitter? A definition taken from today's description, is: a mechanic who can fit, install, maintain, service and repair engines related to a wide variety of vehicles. For Lloyd, those vehicles would involve a wide variety of types found on the field of battle, unarmoured and armoured, i.e. jeeps, trucks and – especially tanks.

Responding to the importance of having qualified fitters for tanks in sufficient numbers, Lloyd became in April 1944, a: qualified Fitter, Canadian Armoured Corps “A.” He was from that point on - a specialist and expert in tank repairs.



Chrysler multi-bank

During their training in Britain, the Canadians were faced with a plethora of tanks and types of engines: Diesels, multi-bank Chrysler configurations and even nine-cylinder, air cooled aircraft engines. It was the responsibility of the mechanics to learn their intricacies and keep them running. A well-trained mechanic such as Lloyd, became as indispensable as the the tank crews themselves.

As the invasion date neared, Lloyd would focus more on the tank which would carry the regiment through eleven months of battle. That tank was - the Sherman, Mark - M4A. These American-made, over 49,000 from busy factories, made up the 346* issued to the First Hussars during the eleven months in which they fought their way across North West Europe. The final tally of killed in action was 196.

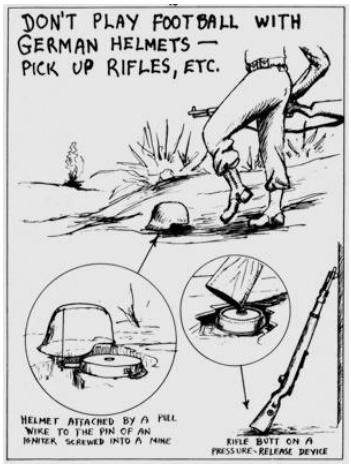
*A normal regimental compliment in Sherman tanks during WWII was 61. The final tally was 346 destroyed which represents a turn over of 567%. The Hussars’ Holy Roller is one of only two Canadian Shermans to survive in tact.

Lloyd Bracewell was never, according to the record on hand, one of a tank crew. His role as fitter and mechanic placed him in a forward position to assist the tank crews of his squadron. One record indicates he was part of “C” Squadron but no date is shown. If it was “C,” then on D-Day he landed on Juno Beach from a Landing Craft Tank, (LCT), along with the tanks and crews. Whether it was with that squadron or another, he was there on D-Day, in the thick of it.

Hussars' Juno Beach June 6, 1944

These regimental sub-units with each squadron, performed an indispensable service, skillfully maintaining the mechanical reliability of their tanks to fight from day to day. While the mechanics may never have fired a shot, their nearness to the front made them vulnerable to surprise attacks. If the enemy broke through the regiment’s front lines, they were suddenly part of the defence, the new front line was theirs to maintain. As the fighting intensified, they increasingly knew it was a possibility. Without warning, random shell and air attacks occurred all too often, sending

everyone diving for cover. The Germans tried many nights to infiltrate our lines to kill sleeping, worn out troops. The opportunity to completely relax was rare indeed.



During an interview with a Hussar veteran in 2014, despite his 96 years, he quietly related through total recall, how everyone felt during eleven months of combat. The operative word in his narrative was – tension. He said they could never relax. Beyond the all too obvious chance of being killed in your tank, at rest you also faced the unexpected. Mines were strewn about everywhere. One could never be sure where to walk or sit. The enemy had booby trapped the most innocent items waiting for some unsuspecting individual to pick them up. Bottles of wine, a Bible, magazines, pictures, a child's toy, an inviting, comfortable chair, even a dead body could be a lethal trap. Lloyd's wife remembered that for a time after the war, Lloyd had nightmares. No doubt they were caused by a release of latent, built-up tension he acquired in the so called "safe" echelon. A big release from this tension was a letter from home.

In today's world, the cell phone and emails keep the soldier serving somewhere on the planet in close connection to his loved ones at home. The Canadian WWII soldier wasn't so fortunate. His only contact was through letter writing, making - "Mail-call!" - music to a soldier's ears.

The plight of the soldier's wife, waiting and worrying at home about her husband's chance of survival while overseas, was played out across Canada by countless numbers of women. Of course, Ruby wasn't only a wife; she was also a new mother.

Ruby 1940s

Life during the early stages of the war, in a weird sense, was more difficult for her than for Lloyd. By comparison, his life before landing in France on D-day, was one of training, with accommodation and food, such as they were, provided. To provide food and shelter for herself and the baby Marie, Ruby had to work. A review of Lloyd's service record indicates that Ruby moved from one address to another and between towns: from London to Woodstock and finally to Beachville. Her income relied on securing jobs doing housework for residents in those areas. Marie remembers that her mother carried her along to each home where she received good care from kind and loving people. Hey, who doesn't love a cute little baby?

Ruby didn't spend all her hard-earned money on essentials; she spent some of it on picture taking. At some point she ventured to buy a Kodak Brownie camera. Every first-born child can

attest to having as a legacy, countless number of cute – oh-so-cute! - baby pictures. Marie Bracewell was no exception.

Lloyd was blessed to have such a devoted wife. While her income may have not been great, she willingly shared her meager income to send packages across the ocean to her husband. Included as a prize were pictures of their daughter.

The Home Front

The carefully selected snaps became obvious and warm connections to "back home." In a letter from Lloyd home to Ruby, he references the many she has sent and his total joy at seeing them while wishing he could be with them both. In an April 14, 1942 letter, his opening line was: "Well darling how are you keeping and how is that wee daughter of ours getting along?" As for those already received, they became a special connection to them both. He wrote: "I do treasure that one you sent with her sitting on your knee."

With the war over in May, Lloyd, given his age and marital status, further enhanced by his early recruitment on the very day war was declared, was tapped for early repatriation. In the middle of June 1945, he shipped out for Canada to embrace a whole new life as husband and father.

Upon discharge, the officer in charge interviews the soldier to determine what his future has in store; he also summarises his military accomplishments. At Wolseley Barracks, Lieutenant J.A. Poirier noted that Lloyd Bracewell was being discharged as Corporal Bracewell, (promoted on May 1, 1945) that he qualified as a skilled mechanic (fully noted here above) and paid accordingly. He went on to note: "Served as M.V. (Motor Vehicle) Fitter in U.K., France, Belgium, Holland and Germany until back in Canada 21 Jun 45."

War is over! Homeward bound.

He might have added Lloyd's award of a second Good Conduct Badge on September 10, 1944. A second Badge recognised, as the ranks were fond of saying, "Five years of undetected crime."

This interview was conducted after Lloyd enjoyed paid leave at home with his wife and daughter Marie, their first meeting. It was a happy time, no doubt, and a productive one too. Lieutenant Poirier noted that Lloyd had already secured employment with a trucking company as a mechanic. The army supplied him with a certificate outlining his mechanical qualifications which quickly came into good use. Poirier's first observation was: "Bracewell is a medium-built man,

serious with a clean appearance and nice manner." If asked, Ruby Bracewell could have made that endorsement. As for farming, no more farm labouring, but he was: "Considering seriously a small holding under the V.L.A." (Veteran's Land Act)

On this same document under "Action Recommended," the notation reads: "Primary – Employment already arranged as garage mechanic. Supplementary – Settlement under V.L.A. Small Holding." All information recorded was forwarded to the V.L.A. Regional Supervisor in London. In affect, that step taken by Lieutenant Poirier, became the first to secure for Lloyd as a war veteran, an application to buy a farm.

Over the signature of Major F.G.W Pannell, C.O. of No. 1 D.D. C.A., * on August 10, 1945, Corporal Lloyd Frederick Bracewell became a civilian again. To the very day, the 10th, he had served 71 months in Canada and overseas as a First Hussar.

*(Translation: Commanding Officer of Number 1 Discharge District Canadian Army.)

In the spring of 1946, the small family, soon to grow by one with the birth of son Gary in June that year, moved onto a farm at RR #6 Embro. This small holding of 65 acres near the intersection of Cody's Corners, was a small dairy operation. It came complete with draft horses, some pigs and chickens, and a smattering of old machinery, the lot. It even included the family dog.

The obligation to man and work the farm postponed Lloyd's declared discharge intention to work for the trucking company at that time; employment there came later. To get the farm into a working, paying enterprise, plus, his new found sense of responsibility as provider for his family, his priority became a plan of – "first things first."

Once Lloyd was satisfied the farm met his standards, he sought outside work to supplement the income from the dairy herd. Fortunately, he had five years of army motor mechanic training to barter with. He first worked for the trucking company alluded to at his discharge, then followed this with a more appropriate job working at a tractor dealership. In this way he kept the farm above board.

Marie, Morris, Fred, Gary

A farm is both a source of income and a home; the combination results in a way of life involving, in many cases, the entire family. As children grow, their curiosity to learn more of the work they see at their back door, coupled with the necessity for help asked from the farmer-father, draws them into working on what becomes - the family farm. Typically, the farm-wife is usually the first to be recruited as an extra farm hand.

A dairy farm is time consuming and work-intensive. Twice daily, the cows need milking, followed by a thorough cleaning of all equipment. Their diet is carefully regulated to produce milk in profitable proportions. On the Bracewell farm, after the cows were milked, the pigs and chickens required attention. Despite parenting a growing family of one girl and three boys, much of the farm labour in the early days was shouldered by Ruby. Over the ensuing years, farm hands were recruited by various schemes to answer the constant demands common to all dairy farms.

Horses gone. Sold off for tractor

And so, farm life went on with improvements introduced when the opportunity arose. There was one aspect of farm life in the 1940s and '50s which would become all too familiar to civilian Bracewell – change. He emerged from five years of constant change in the army, only to experience much more of the same as a farmer. But the change had to be managed, geared to income. It became slow but steady.

During the 1930s, Canada and much of the world had suffered through a terrible depression. No part of society was hit harder than the farm. Up and down the concession roads, bankruptcies were all too common. Before joining the army, Lloyd had worked as a farm labourer, work which placed him in the centre of the farmer's struggle to survive for a chance to see a better day. That day arrived when war was declared. Ironically, the tragedy of war increased farm produce prices and saved many destitute farms.

After the war, farm prosperity continued, which made Lloyd's timing in buying a farm bang on! Pierre Berton in his war chronicle, *Marching As To War*, 2001, makes the point that peace didn't slow the economy. "In spite of the huge cost of the war, the boom was on – housing boom, the baby boom, the mining and drilling boom, the new immigration boom." (p. 515). There was one holdover, however, that lasted for many years. A wise farmer, or anyone like Lloyd who was employed in farming, remembered the terrible grief-filled depression era scenes as they watched whole farms carted off to pay for outstanding debts. It was a lesson learned and something many silently vowed would not happen to them.

Farm foreclosure sale, ca. 1933. National Archives.

Not all farms carried a mortgage. The older farms begun by homesteaders in the nineteenth century were established farms in a position to buy new equipment. These purchases produced used equipment at greatly-reduced prices. For a small bank loan, or ready cash if the farmer was so lucky, newer technology found its way on to farms like the Bracewells'.

A typical farmer's wife

By the mid-twentieth century, the farm work-horse was passé; a farmer's future depended on the tractor. This snorting, loud mechanical beast, once disdained for its expense and complications, meant the horse, so essential for hauling heavy loads, plowing and the sundry other jobs involved in farming, was retained only until technological advancements to the tractor evolved into a machine more acceptable. There wouldn't have been many farmers in his area or elsewhere who knew more about the internal combustion engine than Lloyd did. Time and circumstances were aligned for him to say "Good bye horse - hello tractor." In 1939, the First Hussars switched from horses to horsepower; now it was Lloyd's turn.

At one point, faced with the choice of buying equipment or making his own, Lloyd purchased plans for a buck-rake, made it and used it.

***Definition** of **buck rake**: a wide horse-drawn or tractor-mounted long-toothed rake for gathering hay from a windrow and carrying it. Also called a go-devil or hay sweep*.

That description didn't exactly apply to Lloyd's buck rake. His was mounted behind a pickup truck with the box off, then pulled along ready to receive bales which were hydraulically lifted for easier handling. An ingenious invention that sounds crude but it worked!

A young and spunky girl. Daddy's little helper.

One interesting incident occurred on the farm involving Marie at around age 9. Lloyd was seeding at a time when rain threatened. If the seed got wet it would be ruined. Fortunately, Marie was at hand, so he told her to run to the house, have her mother get a tarp, and for Marie to drive it back in the family car. One's imagination boggles at how this wee young girl managed such a feat. "It wasn't a smooth drive," she recalled years later. "Rather herky-jerky with some gear crashing." But she did it!

Life wasn't always work at the Bracewell farm-household. In the summer months, Lloyd and Ruby would take the kids to the beach at Port Burwell for a day of fun and hot dogs. Large family picnics were popular back then. Ruby's McDonald family would gather at a park each year to reconnect, tell stories, gush over new children and enjoy a big farm lunch, the type only skilled farm wives know how to provide.

Lloyd Bracewell by all accounts, enjoyed a relatively healthy life. From age 14 beginning in the English textile mill, he had worked hard as a labourer and skilled mechanic. His army record shows no illnesses nor, after the war, were any health problems apparent. In September of 1959, he was suddenly struck down by a heart attack. Rushed to hospital in Ingersoll, he died there on August 1, 1959.

The Bracewell family, 1953

Following Lloyd's death, the grief-stricken Ruby and children stayed on the farm. With the livestock sold and the land rented out, Ruby took up housecleaning in Woodstock, an old familiar job which had carried her through the war. In their own time, the children moved away to begin lives of their own, then in her own time, Ruby remarried to Rowland Parker. They were both on the farm when Rowland died in 1982.

Left alone in the country, Ruby sold the farm to son Morris and moved to Woodstock. Old age brought on challenges not uncommon to so many seniors, making necessary the inevitable move to a nursing home. On June 12, 2013, at age 96, Ruby Hazel Bracewell-Parker, died in Woodingford Lodge, Woodstock.

This short biography is an attempt to provide a profile of two people: a father, soldier, farmer, plus a farmer's wife and mother, who as a couple can both be honourably described as - ordinary. How do you summarise the lives of two ordinary people? At no time were they recognised in song or ballad. No statues raised in the park to their memory. In everyday terms they were normal, unpretentious, modest, homely, workaday people. Certainly nothing wrong with applying these terms to the lives of Lloyd and Ruby Bracewell, especially since they are common to most all of us. Ordinary is the norm, with no objection needed to be so identified.

The true appreciation of these two human beings comes from those who were the closest to them and mattered the most. To Marie and family, Lloyd and Ruby were their parents and loving providers, not ordinary at all. When their lives are viewed from the heart, a new status emerges – they were exceptional!

Lloyd and Ruby 1957

Medals and Decorations:

1939 – 45 Star

France and Germany Star

Defence Medal

Canadian Volunteer Service Medal

War Medal 1939 – 45

Hodie Non Cras

Today Not Tomorrow