



## Harry and Margaret Hewitt



**HODIE NON CRAS**

(Today Not Tomorrow)



Courtesy of: **THE FIRST HUSSARS**

Written by: Nick Corrie

Assisted by: Irene Hewitt

*Name:* Harry Hewitt

*Rank:* Warrant Officer Class II (Headquarters SSM)

*Service Number:* SP1559

*Born:* July 4, 1906

*Discharged:* First Hussars to Queen's Own Rifles 1945

*Served in:* WWII - pre and post war Canadian Army  
(First joined Canadian Army December 10, 1925)

*Service:* Canadian Army

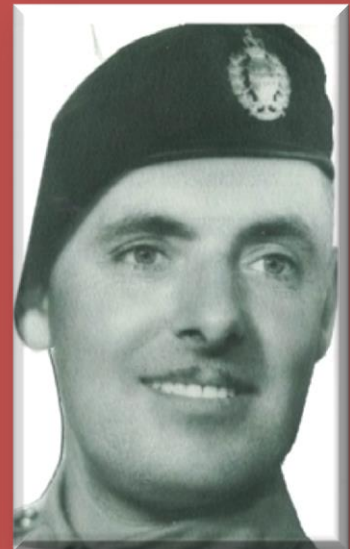
*Battle Group:* 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade

*Regiment:* First Hussars - 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment

*Event:* D-Day

*Service Details:* Squadron Sergeant Major Hewitt Landed on D-Day with the support echelon bringing in supplies. His vehicle, loaded with ammunition, was hit by enemy fire and exploded sending SSM Hewitt through the air but miraculously only slightly wounded. He was evacuated to hospital in England where he remained until June 18 returning to Headquarters Squadron.

*Service Notes:* To fully utilise the carrying capacity of the Landing Craft Tanks (LCT) bringing in the all squadrons of the Regiment, both DD tanks of "A" and "B" Squadrons and those landed directly onto the beach like "C" and Headquarters Squadrons, they carried other types of vehicles. These included scout cars and light tanks for reconnaissance (RECCE) along with support vehicles carrying supplies of all kinds necessary for maintaining an armoured regiment. Ammunition was a significant component. Conveyed onto the beach aboard an un-armoured truck loaded with ammunition while confronted by a still unsubdued enemy firing accurately at vulnerable targets, was undoubtedly more dangerous than inside an armoured tank.



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**Canadian War Medals - NW Europe**

## Harry Hewitt, Personal History: Before, during and after the war.

Harry Hewitt's arrival in England with the First Hussars was not his first time there, only the circumstances were changed. He was born on July 4, 1906 in York, England, but soon after at the age of six months, he was brought to Canada by his parents, to the far west, Calgary. Having an English mother and father (his mother died in 1912) was an incentive for the family to return to England when his father heeded his country's call to arms, joining the Canadian army to fight for "King and Country" against the Kaiser's Huns.

Whether it was an overbearing personality or extremely strong family ties, Harry's father in going overseas not only took his family of three boys, he included his brother's children as well, a total of ten adults and children. Unfortunately, the senior Harry Hewitt was killed at the Battle of the Somme in September 1916, throwing upon the grieving family a decision of where to live next; they decided on a return to Calgary.



Harry and his parentless brothers were raised by their aunt and uncle in rather harsh surroundings. When the time came in 1925, at age 19 to break away, the young Harry joined the Lord Strathcona's Horse (LdSH) a western cavalry regiment. The tank, introduced by the British in WWI, was still in its infancy, not yet an

acceptable weapon of war, armies still employed hoards of troops mounted astride charging horses which had ruled the battlefields for centuries. Give up a trusted steed of muscle and sinew for some cold, hard steel? Not likely!

The prairies are true horse country where an aspiring cowboy can hone his skills, something the much travelled young Harry did exceptionally well, recognised by other horsemen as somewhat of a "trick rider." Despite the post war austerity which dogged the Canadian military right up to 1939, a good rider undoubtedly qualified this recruit as a prime candidate to join a famous cavalry regiment

founded in the west to first serve in the South African War; "The Boer War" to some.

On June 16, 1928, Harry Hewitt at his own request, was discharged from the Strathcona's. He wasn't fed up with the military and certainly not the cavalry because shortly after on October 27, 1928, he joined the Royal Canadian Dragoons (RCD) uniquely stationed at Toronto's Stanley Barracks, grounds now occupied by the Canadian National Exhibition. Quite a departure from the openness of the prairies.



Working at the barracks as a Governess for the family of a high ranking officer, was Margaret Cormack, a girl who came from Scotland at age 19 and settled for a time at Sudbury. With Margaret, an attractive young female living in close proximity to handsome Harry with his pencil thin Clark Gable, Cesar Romero styled moustache, the inevitable happened - they were married on October 6, 1930. The couple continued to live and serve from this urban location in the years leading up to the outbreak of WWII greeting along the way daughter Lois born in 1931 and Irene (Renee) in 1935.



**USA made Renault tanks**

The first two cavalry/armoured regiments to be activated in WWII were the First Hussars and the Fort Garry Horse. They formed the First Canadian Cavalry Regiment (Mechanised) (1 CCR (M)). The London based Hussars first lived under canvas at Wolseley Barracks, then escaped winter for indoors at Queen's Park, the local fair

grounds. Into this very temporary arrangement came two squadrons from the regular forces, a squadron each from the RCD and LdSH. On May 24, 1940, the 1 CCR (M) entrained for the newly opened Armoured School at Camp Borden. It was here for the next year and a half that these onetime cavalry regiments converted literally from *Horses to Horsepower*\*. Ancient Vickers Light Tanks, Carden-Loyd Machine Gun Carriers and the all too old WWI relic acquired from the USA as scrap metal, Renault Light Tanks, served as the basis for early armoured training.

Because there was no alternative, old uniforms, old equipment, outdated military tactics and inadequate training became the standard of the day. Drawing on this shaky background in October 1941, the entire force set sail to guard the British Isles against invasion from an experienced, victorious enemy poised to cross the Channel and conquer all. Fortunately for the unprepared Canadians, they didn't come.



Camp Borden 1940-41

In January 1941 the men from the RCD and LdSH returned to their respective units except - some didn't. Uncharacteristic latitude coming from the army was extended allowing those men who wanted to remain with the Hussars to do so. Harry Hewitt was one who stayed along with another RCD friend, C.W. "Charlie" Smith who figures later with two incidents involving Hewitt and future Hussars post war history into the 1960s.

D-Day, June 6, 1944. For Squadron Sergeant Major Harry Hewitt it wasn't like any other day. The Channel crossing on Landing Craft Tanks (LCTs) was in the beginning a welcomed relief after spending 2 days waiting aboard ships for General Eisenhower to give the go ahead once assured the weather would co-operate. Opinions began to change for army landlubbers as the ship flotilla of thousands encountered the remnants of yesterday's storm tossed Channel still abroiling. Despite rampant seasickness everyone was eager to "get stuck in" to the enemy they had trained to fight since 1939.

\* *Horses to Horsepower* is a DVD depicting the history of the First Hussars since 1856.



The first order of business for the Hussars while dodging shot and shell, was to disembark from the LCTs. Hewitt's craft carried both tanks and additional vehicles necessary to maintain the Regiment now in full battle array against a well fortified and dangerous enemy. Coming ashore amongst the DD tanks and infantry swarming about, an un-armoured truck loaded with ammunition was extremely vulnerable to all calibres of fire. The inevitable happened. Harry's vehicle was hit, blew up - and - he with it!

Near by was was Harry's old RCD buddy, WOII "Charlie" Smith, who witnessed the ensuing explosion punctuated with Harry's body flying through the air, a scene so vividly tragic that Smith assumed the worst, that he had been killed. Fortunately, he wasn't, only wounded. Harry had no doubt been bucked-off horses many times and perhaps injured a few times as well, always getting back on, never quitting; his D Day human cannon-ball experience was no different. By June 18 he returned to the fray, rejoining the Regiment to battle across North West Europe into Germany at war's end, largely, except for Day 1, unscathed.



**Harry & Charlie**

Because SM Smith assumed the worst, the bad news falsely drifted back to the family in Canada who would remain misinformed for sometime before the good news reached them. Harry escaped death that day perhaps because some people live charmed lives and Harry Hewitt was likely one of those if all the evidence is considered: there are two more outstanding close calls to draw evidence from.

At some point in the war, Harry was given a parachute and taken aloft in a small plane for some obscure reason today. Naturally, he asked the pilot how to activate the chute if needed. He was told to simply hit the round metal clasp on his chest and it would open. Luckily nothing happened during the flight to make that necessary. Upon landing he asked someone how to remove the chute, "Oh, just hit that round clasp and it will fall off." He hit it and it did just that – hit the

ground! Not much of a worrier was our man Harry, he always got a kick out of telling that story to an intrigued audience.



More good luck rode with Harry one day later in France when he and SM Smith while in a jeep together, were suddenly threatened by a German fighter plane about to strafe them. Smith suggested they take cover and hide in a hedge. Harry acting as driver, drew upon his horse training and thought otherwise, choosing instead to swerve and avoid fire that way. On

their way back past the hedge they noticed it was all shot up – saved again! Harry has used up three of his nine cat lives.

If there is one commonality between armies the world over it's soldiers with drinks in hand relaxing in their respective messes or canteens idling away time while spinning yarns. They may have witnessed terrible events they would never have thought possible, saw scenes no one should ever see, but after a beer or two their minds can wind back in time dispelling the macabre for lighter moments that are peculiar only to service life. Harry had a favourite story he would unwind on such occasions or whenever he felt it was appropriate.

Back in his early cavalry days with the Dragoons, there was a hapless Trooper who managed to break the blade off his sword. Resourcefulness in the army is recognised as the art of “making do” when there is no alternative or in this case and at all times for a soldier – hiding your mistakes! This Trooper obviously had some “time in” because he simply jammed a bit of wood onto the hilt then back into the scabbard – out of sight – out of mind he reckoned, that is until inspection. Oops! There is always the



unexpected isn't there. A Trooper's pay didn't go far back then (probably still doesn't) and for this one sad cavalryman paying for a new sword, it went even less far. Story over, "My shout! Drinks all round."

Canada entered the post war years with an abundance of experienced, highly qualified ex-soldiers if their country needed them. Harry Hewitt was not anxious to leave the army, a stance which got him the nod to remain if he would take a commission and go to Germany to police the defeated Fatherland. He would become the first of many Canadian service men and women over the upcoming cold war years to police and protect Europe against the new communist threat emanating from the Soviet Union. This posting included his family and that is where it ended – Margaret said no.

Instead, acquiescing to his wife's wishes to remain in Toronto, Harry joined the Queen's Own Rifles and served on their regular staff until 1952 when he took his final discharge. Back on civvy street, only briefly visited once since 1925, *Ontario Hydro* recognised his military background as eminently qualifying him to become a Security Officer, remaining there until final retirement. So in one way or another, in and out of the army, Harry Hewitt's life demonstrated a formal bearing and assumed sense of responsibility placing him in valued positions of authority.



**Hewitt family: parents and daughters**

Harry Hewitt, born July 4, 1906, in England, died in Toronto on March 29, 1966. His military career spanned some 27 years of military service to Canada in four different regiments.

His wife Margaret, born in Scotland July 3, 1907, died in Toronto on January 24, 1984.



## Medals and Decorations:

1939 – 45 Star

France and Germany Star

Defence Medal

Canadian Volunteer Service Medal

War Medal 1939 – 45

Canadian Forces Decoration (CD)

