Harry and Mary Gristey

Courtesy of: **THE FIRST HUSSARS**

Written by: Nick Corrie

Assisted by: The Gristey Family

Name: William Henry “Harry” Gristey

Rank: Sergeant

Service Number: A 219

Born: 24 May 1917

Discharged: 26 March 1945

Served in: WWII

Service: Canadian Army

Battle Group : 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade

Regiment: First Hussars

Service Details: Harry Gristey joined the Hussars in 1935, a time when the regiment was truly a cavalry unit. Living on a small farm north of London, Harry was familiar with horses, earning extra money doing custom work for other farms. When the regiment was ordered to mobilise on 2 September 1939, Harry volunteered as a recruit to the Canadian Active Service Force (CASF). His past service in the militia quickly qualified him to become a Corporal on 19 October 1939. Eventually he and the regiment trained in armoured warfare at Camp Borden then all moved overseas in 1941.

Service Notes: Corporal Gristey was given advanced mechanical training at Oshawa and Windsor. He qualified as driver in wheeled and tracked vehicles with additional training in gunnery and wireless in the UK. On D-Day, he was a crew commander with “B” Squadron, powering ashore onto Juno Beach in a floating Duplex Drive tank (DD tank). Wounded twice, a minor wound in training by a grenade, followed by a serious bomb fragment impact to his wrist on 25 July 1944. He was hospitalised in the UK before invalided home to Canada in October 1944.

HODIE NON CRAS

CANADIAN WAR MEDALS: NW EUROPE

William Henry Gristey – Personal History: Before, during and after WWII

William Henry, known to one and all as – Harry, was born in Guelph, Ontario, on May 24, 1917. On that day, the Methodist family had his birth to celebrate, the coming of Spring and by happy coincidence, Queen Victoria's birthday. The "Old Queen" as she was still lovingly referred to, had died in 1901 but her memory lingered on. In fact, her role as head of the British Empire, transferred through succession to her grandson King George V, had become of extreme importance in 1914. In that year with the outbreak of war, all countries with strong British connections, Canada included, went to war in Europe battling the German Kaiser's army.

While Annie Elizabeth Gristey safely cradled her new-born son in Guelph, Canadians overseas in France were enduring incredible hardships fighting the Hun in a world of trenches, mud, rats, blood and gore. In the peacefulness of the nursery, she couldn't have possibly known that her baby Harry would fight in a future conflict against the same enemy, an enemy in which her British born husband William was about to encounter. He had arrived in England a few days before "to do his bit," but, the day after the birth of his son, on the 25th, his war came to a sudden halt. After a few days passed, a cable would have arrived at the Gristey household informing the new mother in simple, official language, the nevertheless shocking news, that her husband was badly wounded.

A search of Ancestry indicates that the name Gristey stems from the Scottish Highlands, an origin which brings about some confusion. Harry, while overseas and acting upon a request from his Scottish born father, was given by London genealogists a different direction leaning towards origins from northern Germany. In 2020, the family is most familiar and comfortable with Harry's findings. Taking Germany then as the most likely ancient family source, we recognise that Canada twice in the twentieth century fought against their army, as did the Gristeys.

This old-world connection brought on struggles of conscience for German immigrant families who, living contentedly in Canada, had long since removed themselves from the Fatherland's influence. They needn't have felt guilty. By a coincidence of similar birth, a German playwright of the twentieth century, Bertholt Brecht, wrote about men like the Kaiser of WWI and his successor, Fuehrer Adolf Hitler. Brecht went beyond his Germanic origins to recognise how tyrants of all nationalities arise time and time again through history. He wrote: *Do not rejoice in his defeat, you men, For though the bastard is dead, the bitch that bore him is again in heat.* Witnessing conflicts through the balance of the twentieth century to those arising in the new, they combine to prove how right his prediction was.

Despite Harry's German findings, father William Thomas Gristey's origin was from the land of the plaid. On his *Attestation Paper*[1] he declared: born Peebles, Scotland, 17 September 1890. (d. November 14, 1963, in London, Ontario. He was killed while crossing the road.) Though Scottish born, he was raised in London England, a Cockney no less. Historians reviewing Canadian involvement in wars of the early twentieth century, credit the rush to join the forces for some recruits, to their British ancestry; either those born in the mother country or influenced by the older generation who were. This "Over 'ome" ancestry, extending through William, may have contributed to the Gristey family's incredible determination to enlist in times of war.

Peebles, Scotland

The known military history of Harry Gristey's family is impressive. His grandfather served in the British army possibly during the South African war. Whether he was

[1] William Thomas Gristey, Regimental Number: 127088, had two *Attestation Papers* because he joined twice. On his first Paper the address is London, England, where his mother, Mrs. Laura Rixen, resided. He also gave that as his birth place, but changed it on the second Paper to Peebles, Scotland, likely the correct location. He also varied his occupation from farmer to brakeman. Between the first and second enlistment he married Annie.

killed in action or died later is unknown. His son, William Thomas, (sometimes written William Sr. to avoid confusion with his son of the same name) the progenitor of the Gristey family in Canada, came to this country early in the twentieth century as a Bernardo Boy. The term originated in England when Thomas Bernardo in 1866, created a charity by the same name to care for vulnerable children. A program developed around worthy children who were sent to Canada because of our wide open and healthy spaces, free of industrial slums so prevalent in Britain. Basically, the children arrived as indentured servants, placed and employed with farm families in many parts of the country where they acquired varying degrees of care dependent on whatever their employers felt inclined to give.

At a young age, William struck out on his own to work as a logger and farm labourer. His entire life was one of hard work and devotion to his wife and ever-growing family: four boys and four girls. Harry was the oldest.

At New Hamburg, Ontario, on 2 October 1915, William enlisted and was sent off to Camp Borden for training. Somehow, he managed to escape attention for poor eye sight until August 1916, when time and circumstances caught up to him. On his *Discharge Certificate* the doctor stated that he "Should never have been enlisted."

Our William wasn't going to take that lying down. Not him! Two months after his discharge, he traveled the short distance to Guelph to undergo once more all the enlistment protocols he endured the year before. Miraculously, he slipped through the critical eye examination, undetected yet again, allowing him to re-enlist on 30 October 1916. After more training in Canada, (by this time after copious amounts of training, if anyone had bothered to notice, he probably

qualified to be an instructor) he was shipped out to England on the S.S. Olympic[2], arriving there on 7 May 1917. (At some point his poor eyesight was noticed. As a consolation, the army kept him on - as a bugler.)

His charmed life was about to desert him. Unexpectedly, his barracks at Shorncliffe was bombed[3]. One bomb landed near William hurtling him into the air to land with a thud on hard ground, injuring his back. The worst damage, however, was inflicted on his mental and nervous state. He was quickly diagnosed as having "Shell Shock" and underwent treatment. After receiving the best care then available in England, his condition did not significantly improve forcing the army to send the nervous, trembling William Gristey home, where for a second time in the Great War, he was discharged on 13 March 1918[4].

With the outbreak of WWII in 1939, Harry's veteran father hearing the bugle calls to serve once again in the defence of his homeland, offered his services to a Guelph artillery battery, the 63rd. For age reasons (he was 49) he was turned away.

Was it simply an insatiable drive to serve in wartime or was it the call to defend his old homeland which drove William to keep on trying? Relying on the little trick learned years before in WWI of applying to different depots, on 2 May 1942, he simply went to London, taking along with him his youngest son, William Thomas Jr., where they both joined the First Hussars (Reserve). (William Thomas Sr. seems able to bypass all recruiting scrutiny given that he was allowed to join at age 52!)

[2] The Gristey story is one long string of coincidences. The S.S. Olympic also brought William home after his wounding.
[3] The bomb dropped possibly came from a two engine Gotha G. IV Bomber, on one of its first bombing missions over Britain.
[4] Upon discharge he was deemed to be 85% recovered and independent again.

Harry had joined the Hussars in 1935, going Active in 1939, making him the first of the Gristeys to enlist in WWII. With his father and younger brother recruited, there were three Gristeys in the Canadian army, and they are all in the First Hussars! But in the WWII, Gristey Canadian army saga, there are still two more of the Gristey clan to be recognised.

The 63rd artillery battery was a favourite enlistment prospect for the Gristeys. They had rejected William Sr. but another son, Mervyn, was accepted. He was the fourth male member of the family to join the army, eventually reaching North West Europe with the 63rd as part of the 19th Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery.

1941

Guelph War Veteran Offers To Enlist as Cook in Effort To Join 3 Sons in Service

William Gristy Disappointed as Officials Decline Services as Medical Requirements Forbade His Acceptance

GUELPH, Sept. 23—(CP) — William Gristy, widely-known Guelph man, and veteran of the First Great War, is not wanted by the Canadian Active Service Forces and is greatly disappointed.

Gristy offered his services to the 63rd Battery, now being mobilized here, but was unable to meet medical requirements. Gristy was willing to join the unit as a cook, so that he might join his three sons in the battle of freedom.

One son, Fred Gristy, joined an infantry unit in London, in 1939, when hostilities broke out and went overseas with the 1st Division. He was found to be too young for Active Service and was sent home. Last year he enlisted with a Galt regiment and is again in Britain. Cpl. William H. Gristy, Jr., is with the Canadian Armored Corps, and Mervyn Gristy, is a gunner with the 63rd, in which the father tried to enlist. Another son is anxiously awaiting the time he is of age to join up.

Youngest Soldier?

Probably London's youngest soldier now in England with the Canadian forces is Pte. Frederick G. Gristey, a member of the Royal Canadian Regiment and son of Mr. and Mrs. William T. Gristey, 436 Egerton street. He will be 17 years of age on May 27. A brother, William Jr., is with the 1st Hussars at Queen's Park here.

If a prize is to be awarded in the Gristey male line for the most impressive example of determination to join and serve overseas (undoubtedly a DNA induced family trait) it goes to another young brother: to Pte. Frederick G. Gristey, the fifth recruit. Imitating his father's deceptive enlistment success, somehow "Gibb" managed to slip underage through the recruiting process in 1939, to join the Royal Canadian Regiment and be shipped overseas in the first wave of the Canadian army to reach Britain. Once there, however, better trained eyes prevailed and he was sent home. This means Gibb has cheated death *twice* by making a round-trip crossing of the U-Boat infested Atlantic before the older Gristeys have managed to leave Canada even once. After a suitable aging period, he joined

another regiment, served overseas and came home unscathed, to marry, have children and live a long and happy life.

After the Militia Act of 1855, eleven Canadian cavalry regiments were created in the following year. The First Hussars regards 1856 as the year of the regiment's origin. From that point to 1939, they went through many transitions but remained a cavalry regiment. Harry knew and worked with horses on the family farm, adding custom work on neighbouring farms for additional income. With acquired horse-sense, what better introduction did he need to join a mounted regiment?

During the inter-war years, 1919 to 1939, the message embraced by the public of countries which had fought in the Great War was disarmament and ultimately – appeasement – anything but war. The war's futility and horrors of the trenches once exposed, had crept imperceptibly into the minds of thousands of families who were left to grieve over lost men and they wanted no more of it. Their governments were happy to oblige. When the depression of the 1930s took hold, with thousands unemployed, hungry and homeless, money for military use became almost sinful.

Chamberlain with "peace" from Berlin

This twenty-year period of fragile European peace became, for the First Hussars and all branches of the military in Canada, to put it politely, unproductive. In the upper echelons of red-tabbed officers, a state of impressive status quo was skillfully maintained. From an organisational standpoint, the army underwent divisional name changes, some shuffling about of units from place to place and sundry other changes of little merit.

To be fair, how do you train for a war which no one wants or will pay for? Generals typically train armies based on the experience of the last war fought. The Great War was in the past and the lessons learned in that conflict would not apply to the new war of the future which couldn't be foretold. So, they were obliged to carry on the best they could in a sort of "same old - same old" manner.

From Ottawa headquarters it all trickled down to the First Hussars' regimental level where they obediently embraced their familiar cavalry history in a blissful state of complacency. But despite all the handicaps and smugness, the regiment rose to the challenge with a certain degree of aplomb, a fact born out through evidence found in the regimental archives.

A big plus for learning about this era is contained in the regimental museum and archives located at Number 1 Dundas Street. A review of the surviving regimental photographs displays nothing but - a great time was had by all! In addition to photographs from the era, is archival film-footage from the 1920s and '30s showing mounted troops training in various types of uniforms at a variety of locations. Transferred now to DVDs, the footage shows troops of cavalry cantering along back roads, trotting along the beach at Port Stanley while encamped on the cliffs above at Invererie Heights. Seen under big straw hats issued to prevent sunburn are happy contented Troopers mounted on beautiful steeds. Oh, the joys of cavalry training!

The Heights offered large fields for troop gallops, parades and infantry tactical rifle training on the ground. Large kitchen and eating marquees with rows of bell tents for sleeping, stretched along under shady trees. It was an idyllic scene and Harry was part of it.

One of his duties was to set up jumps, an essential part of cavalry training meant to prepare a mounted soldier for charging across a field of action, then expertly spurring his horse on to jump fences and ditches. On the film, troops are shown skilfully galloping over these jumps. This basic action must have been great fun because, also shown in the off hours, are men in even greater spirits devising entertainments to display their jumping prowess.

Corporals Gristey & McShane, October 1939

Perhaps it was Harry who helped set up a bed three feet off the ground upon which a "volunteer" stretched out while mounted horsemen jumped over him. They arranged the same crazy stunt with two men sitting in chairs. Wrestling on bare-back mounts was another amusement. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

Aside from providing camaraderie among the troops, when war was declared by Britain on 3 September 1939, with Canada following suit on the 10th, the last twenty years of cavalry training amounted to naught. All cavalry equipment was either turned in or sold. The new war would be one of mechanised-mobility. The Hussars were mobilised on September 1st as an armoured regiment. If a song should ever be composed to mark the change, played to the tune of Bonnie Dundee, a suggested title is:

…….Good Bye Horse--Hello Tanks…or…..
….From Horses to Horsepower[5]….

When war was declared, the commanding officer of the First Hussars was Lieutenant-Colonel Tom Sanderson. On September 2nd he ordered a parade and called forth volunteers for the new Canadian Active Service Force (CASF). Without hesitation Harry stepped forward to become: Trooper GRISTEY, William H., A 219. (Actually, his service number was A 129, but he repeated the number incorrectly to the clerk as A 219, and so it became for all time.)

There is one other important event and date of note during the first few days of September 1939. In London on September 9th, Harry married Mary Elizabeth Worth. Not only would Mary become the mother to Harry's five children, but after the war, she attended nightly Harry's wounded wrist to ease his pain. All of

[5] This is the title of a colour film on DVD depicting the regiment's history.

this and the war itself lay before the newly weds as they stood side-by-side at the Altar.

Marriage September 9, 1939

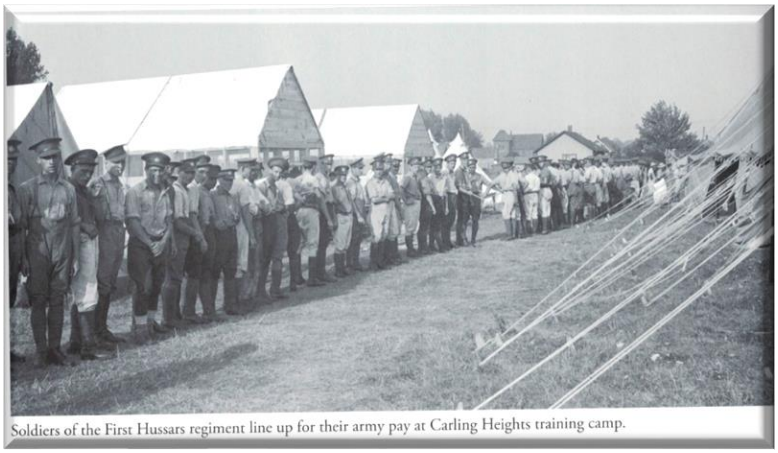
Harry and Mary, though very young, ages 22 and 18, were not unlike so many couples marrying at this early stage of the war. In fact, they were all too typical. Their nuptials helped fuel the onset of a peculiar statistical increase of war related marriages – the marriage rate almost doubled!

The feminist of today would cringe at the accepted pre-war notion placing young women in the mould of wife and mother without question. A popular woman's magazine of the time was *Chatelaine*. Their opinions expressed in issue after issue were firm as to the future prospects for a young woman – she was expected to wed. It was the thing to do for a girl.

Reasons for the uptick in marriages when war was declared are varied. There was the federal government's dependant's allowance if one looks for financial reasons but others are more compelling. The proper motive for marriage is love, a fact which coming at the time of war and all its dangers, brings with it the emotional comfort bestowed to the spouse who is going off to war. Through her marriage vows, the bride supports her husband who needs all the help he can get.

Chatelaine recognised the enlisted man's needs by quoting historian Joshua S. Goldstein's observation: "The moral support of family and friends, and most importantly a connection with wives or girlfriends, helps keep soldiers going." In a real sense, a soldier's wife became part of the nation's defences by staying home as housekeeper, wife and mother, creating stability so invaluable to directly helping the war effort. In our story, for all the right reasons stated above (above

all – love), Mary Gristey became indispensable to Harry's life in the army. (And, as explained below, to the regiment also.)



Wolseley Barracks September 1939. Picture courtesy J. Grainger

The regiment first "housed" the expanding recruit numbers in Bell tents at Wolseley Barracks. When troops filled the ranks on daily sick-parades with colds and pneumonia, everyone moved to heated quarters at Queens Park. In early 1940, preceding the regiment's move to Camp Borden later in June, Harry was part of an advance party to help establish under the direction of Colonel F. F. Worthington, the recognised father of the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps, the new armoured school where all armoured regiments would train before shipping out to the war zone in Britain. (Colonel Worthington, known as "Worthy" or 'Fighting Frank," was later promoted to Major-General.)

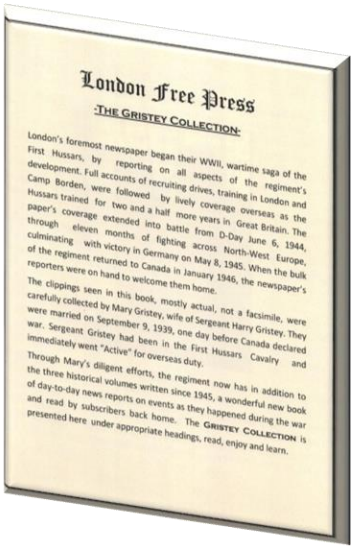
Recorded address changes in Vernon's 1941 City Directory and Harry's service record show the newlyweds scrambling to keep up with the army's moves. Mary eventually moved from their honeymoon apartment on Egerton Street, an address carefully selected to be near Harry at Queens Park barracks, back in with her parents on Stuart Street. This shift nicely coincided with Mary giving birth to their daughter, Patricia Maureen, on September 18, 1940. Even without a birth, the unpredictability of wartime affects everyone; moving about was common place since plans were hard to make and harder to keep.

By late 1940, both Canada and Harry had been at war for over a year. He went Active with the Hussars just days before Canada's declaration of war against Germany. His enlistment was followed by two more Gristeys who joined the Hussars Reserve regiment to boost the family compliment up to three. However, there was one other notable, unsung and unrecorded Gristey recruit – Mary!

Beginning shortly after Mary and Harry took their vows, the new bride diligently launched her own personal campaign to support her husband's wartime service in the First Hussars. With scissors in hand, day by day she carefully scanned the London Free Press to cut out and save any article outlining the regiment's progress. These valuable stories were carefully pasted in an album and put away for safe keeping. In total, more than one hundred newspaper clippings have been preserved for posterity and are now housed in the regimental museum's archives.

In the spring of 2019, to compliment and make these clippings more accessible, a book was printed comprised of the clippings with accompanying explanations added for clarity. Entitled the *Gristey Collection*, the book's fifty pages in colour now present a day by day account of the First Hussars in WWII as reported by the London Free Press and read daily by the public. The last thirty pages are devoted to the killed and wounded from London and area. These clippings have become an incredible historical record, containing personal family details not seen in the regiment's other printed historical accounts.

Today, the *Gristey Collection* has become a lasting and unique tribute to the regiment's Second World War history library and especially to the wonderful little lady who made it possible. The First Hussars are indebted to Mary Gristey for her wonderful contribution to the regiment's storied history.



London Free Press

THE GRISTEY COLLECTION:

London's foremost newspaper began their WWII, wartime saga of the First Hussars, by reporting on all aspects of the regiment's development. Full accounts of recruiting drives, training in London and Camp Borden, were followed by lively coverage overseas as the Hussars trained for two and a half more years in Great Britain. The paper's coverage extended into battle from D-Day June 6, 1944, through eleven months of fighting across North-West Europe, culminating with victory in Germany on May 8, 1945. When the bulk of the regiment returned to Canada in January 1946, the newspaper's reporters were on hand to welcome them home.

The clippings seen in this book, mostly actual, not a facsimile, were carefully collected by Mary Gristey, wife of Sergeant Harry Gristey. They were married on September 9, 1939, one day before Canada declared war. Sergeant Gristey had been in the First Hussars Cavalry and immediately went "Active" for overseas duty.

Through Mary's diligent efforts, the regiment now has in addition to the three historical volumes written since 1945, a wonderful new book of day-to-day news reports on events as they happened during the war and read by subscribers back home. The GRISTEY COLLECTION is presented here under appropriate headings, read, enjoy and learn.

The Hussars' unpreparedness for a new war was the product of Canada's dithering for twenty years. As recruits arrived for processing they were faced with little or no equipment for training and few uniforms. The only issue available was WWI vintage, an embarrassment which the Hussars shared with other regiments.

All five men from Hussars Militia

Farley Mowat, who later in life became a prodigious author and active environmentalist, early in the war he joined the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, the famous "Hasty Ps." In their regimental history, Mowat wrote that the new troops on parade resembled "a motley collection of comic opera soldiers from a third-rate vaudeville production." The uniforms, made mostly of wool, were moth-eaten and ragged, varying in age and style. Some men for a time continued to wear their civilian clothes. It was a poor start for the Hussars, but in time, as Tip Top Tailors mustered a large work force of skilled sewers, they began to turn out 25,000 uniforms a week.[6]

Once the horses were gone, the regiment eventually found its footing and settled in to train the new influx of recruits. With the emphasis on mobility, the logical training syllabus emphasised mechanical repair to vehicles and engines. To accomplish this goal, men already familiar with vehicle mechanics became favoured enlistment candidates. Regimental representatives scoured the surrounding area for trained mechanics who would both bolster the regimental technical roster and in turn, eventually act as trained instructors for incoming recruits. To a certain extent, Harry's civilian work record met the required standards.

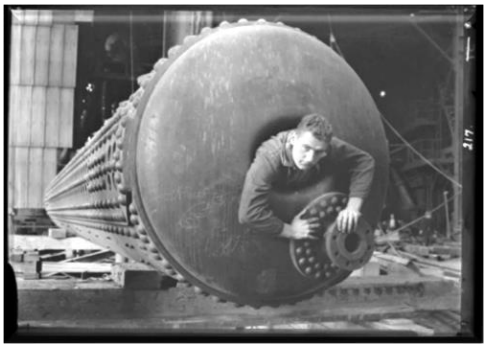
Bags of coal humped by hand; filthy work!

On Harry's *Attestation Paper*, the document a recruit completes upon joining the army, he declared, in addition to his farming background, a record of one year spent as a Boiler Maker's Apprentice and over seven more years driving trucks for Deviney Coal Co. of London and National

[6] In photo, Trooper on left was A 183, Berneche, Lawrence A. KIA, 11 June 1944, Bayeux Memorial, France

Grocers. This obvious familiarity with machinery and trucks placed him in a good position for more training to bring him up to army standards.

Referencing his truck-driving background, he was quickly pushed through driver training, army-style, to be certified as a Driver I.C. Class II. In due course, his good mechanical and driving ability was duly noted, marking him for a Special Automotive Course comprised of two weeks training at the General Motors plant in Oshawa followed by four more in Windsor with Ford. What a transition: from horses' oats to gasoline; from manure to exhaust. Harry would never be the same again.



Boilermaker: life of dirt and danger

There is one other notation in Harry's enlistment records which must have arisen to impress and strengthen the selection process. When he began work as a boiler maker in 1932 – he was only fifteen years old! At age sixteen, he began to drive trucks and continued right up to 1939 with the outbreak of war. His work ethic under rough conditions would earn him favourable recognition for tank training, which, for anyone who has undergone it, was unquestionably more of the same – rough, smelly, dirty and dangerous.

Message on tank reads: Good Luck Canada, Take 'em away!

When one thinks of armoured warfare and tanks, perhaps the picture which comes to mind is a formidable steel box, sporting a dangerous turret mounted gun, travelling fast over rough ground on caterpillar tracks. For the First Hussars in 1940, no such weapon existed at Camp Borden. Aside from a few old British light tanks, Canada at that time had no operational tanks. To remedy the training shortage, WWI Renault tanks were purchased from the United States as scrap metal. Given their ancient age, delivering a blistering three mile an hour top

speed and a lowly machine gun for a weapon, the Renaults only served as a tank facsimile. As modern weapons of war they were entirely left wanting.

Perhaps the most interesting segment of archival film retained on DVD, is colour film of the regiment training on these decrepit, so-called tanks. This footage, valued today as a visual historical record marking the early beginnings of the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps, represents “the before” period until the Hussars and other armoured regiments reached overseas for their final training in the American Sherman tank.

Determined to soldier-on despite no modern armour, by August 1941, the army training wing continued to seek out suitable mechanic candidates. Harry was tapped again. This time he was off to Toronto to No. 2 D.D. Voc. Trn’ng Wing. (Read: Vocational Training Wing.) He left there on 27 September 1941, to enjoy twenty days embarkation leave. The regiment was finally going to the war zone in Britain.

With all the goodbyes completed, and we may assume some were tearful, he finally fetched up at Camp Debert in Nova Scotia where final training and one last technical designation was bestowed: Driver Mechanic Group “C.”

That done, the First Hussars journeyed by train to Halifax to board the troopship *Oronsay,* a former Orient Steam Navigation Company liner built in 1925 for Mediterranean/Pacific cruises. A warm water cruise ship of dubious vintage crossing the North Atlantic in November – what could possibly go wrong? By all accounts, recorded after arriving in England and for as long as memories could recount, everyone aboard was seasick for the entire voyage. The bilge pumps worked overtime.

***Oronsay*: Torpedoed 9 October 1942**

About to sail: Webber, (POW, 11 June 1944), Harry, Erskine

As Harry stood on the quay sizing-up the *Oronsay*, he may have taken the time to look back over the past two years to reflect upon how much his life had changed. September 1939, would stand out because in that month he made two momentous decisions. First, he volunteered to go "Active," a gesture directly attributable to his imminent departure right then for Britain. Better still, September produced the happy marriage to his sweetheart Mary, and, one year later, the birth of their little girl. Not bad - there he was - soldier, husband and father, all in just two years which had zoomed by so quickly.

The complete lack of modern tanks at Borden in the 1940-41 year meant, when the Hussars decamped for Britain, they certainly were not trained tankers. That distinction would have to wait. More than two years would pass in Britain before the Hussars were in any way a competent and fully-trained unit ready for action. That day came on 6 June 1944, D-Day on Juno Beach.

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.

It is said that in war the first casualty is truth. One of the clippings Mary saved described the conditions awaiting the Hussars upon reaching Britain. To alleviate any anxieties felt by the recruits and their families alike, they were assured of a good and plentiful supply of food awaiting them, along with more than enough modern equipment to advance their training. In the margins of the *Gristey Collection*, beside this Free Press item is written: "Bull, bull and more bull." By late 1941, war-torn Britain had suffered food rationing for months. With the arrival of more mouths to feed, the troops were fed in accordance with the daily civilian rationing. Everyone suffered in equal measure.

The Problematic British Crusader Cruiser Tank

As for the tanks needed for training, the Canadian armour request coming at a time when Britain was fighting in North Africa against the superior armour of Rommel, meant first priority of all new production had to be given to British fighting units. The Canadians would play second fiddle to the active war's demands, receiving tanks in a piecemeal fashion until, and here is the irony, Canadian-built Ram tanks arrived to provide a full regimental training regimen.

A review of the facts in 2020 leaves one to wonder why the First Hussars had to brave the North Atlantic in winter when food, tanks, fuel and acres upon acres of training space was in abundance at home? C'est la guerre.

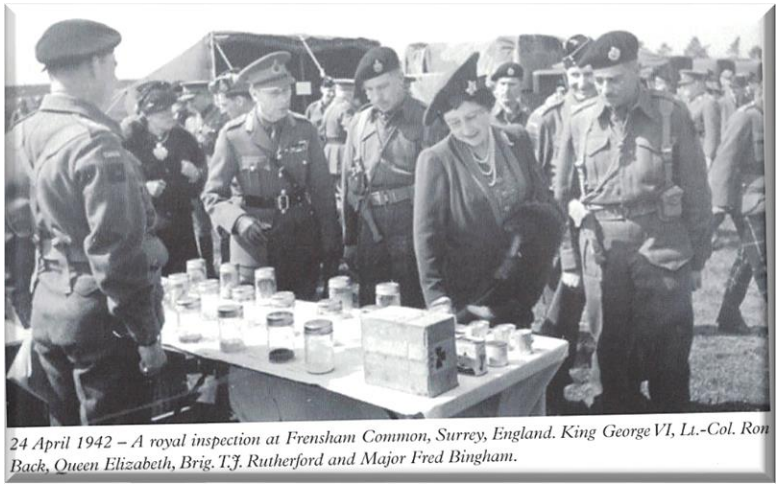
After a nine-day crossing, the regiment landed at Liverpool, then entrained for Aldershot, arriving shortly after midnight. Aldershot Garrison was the home of the British army since 1854 with some of the barracks almost that old. The Hussars' first stroke of bad luck found them placed within the confines of Willems Barracks. Quoting the regimental history written post war by Lieutenant Foster Stark, 1951, the barracks were described as "dilapidated greystone buildings, built after the Crimea War…the rooms were bitterly cold and damp, and beads of water oozed from the perspiring walls in streams to the floor." The old maladies of colds and pneumonia encountered at Wolseley, returned to challenge the MO's bag of medicinal remedies. With nowhere to turn to for better conditions, the Hussars invented quick fixes to make their surroundings at least habitable.

Ration books

Lieutenant Stark goes on to single out the food dished out to the troops. He noted, “During this period, the rations were undoubtedly the worst ever consumed by the regiment.” His observations go on to mention how the fussiness of the British military establishment ordered respirators to be carried at all times with far too many training sessions with them; annoying attention to blackout discipline; dress parades; and the bloody, bloody rain. It all “combined to make all ranks slightly on edge and irritable.” So much for the rosy picture presented in the Free Press.

To dispel the reader from believing that this was the first month of 30 more of the same, he concluded: “At any rate they had come to the conclusion that…it was a good country and everyone was glad to have a hand in the defence of it.” In other words – the Hussars soldiered-on!

What did soldiering-on mean once the Hussars settled in? Well, first on the list was a parade conducted for high ranking officers, attracted no doubt to the presence of newsreel film crews who intended to distribute the footage in the UK, Canada and the United States. In those countries, between the double feature and bags of popcorn at the local theatre or cinema, at least some of the world learned that the First Hussars had arrived in Britain and meant business! (This film in museum archives.)



24 April 1942 – A royal inspection at Frensham Common, Surrey, England. King George VI, Lt.-Col. Ron Back, Queen Elizabeth, Brig. T.J. Rutherford and Major Fred Bingham.

In April 1942, while at Frensham Common, Surrey, Their Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, paid a visit to the regiment. The Hussars no doubt felt honoured a second time, proudly recalling an earlier association when the regiment stood Honour Guard as the Royal duo passed

through London in 1939 on their cross Canada tour. The Royals timely pre-war presence, lifted everyone's spirits after ten years of Depression misery. For a chance to view the King and Queen with war clouds looming, seeing them in person helped dispel some of those deep concerns held by Canadians facing new war prospects.

Crews training on Mark VI tanks in England circa 1942.

Same crap they had in Canada

As time moved on, so did the regiment, to various locations around the British Isles to receive more and more training. They trained in practically every type of course on offer to make them efficient but it must be pointed out – it was also designed to keep them busy. The army hates to see idle bodies hanging about with nothing to do so they invent things to occupy their time. They had arrived in Britain probably eighteen months before actually needed, so they marked time until "the real need to know" training began.[7] In late 1943 and early '44, with the issue of Sherman tanks, the regiment got down to serious training driving on and off landing craft designed to take them across the Channel to France and there disgorged in a frontal assault against enemy fortifications on a beach not yet identified.

At last! The "real deal." Shermans are issued

Harry was carried right along with everyone else to receive more driving courses probably initiated as necessary with each new tank variant they were issued. In June 1942, he was posted to the Armoured Fighting School (AFS) for specialised training. The spell at the AFS was probably in preparation for his eventual promotion to Sergeant in April 1943. Then, in keeping with his new rank, he was off for Crew Commanders course in December '43.

[7] This extended training time no doubt contributed to some impressive post-war statistics: arriving by steamer in 1946, were 47,783, war brides, bringing with them 21,950 children. Ain't war hell!

Acting almost as a prelude to Harry's later wrist wound in France was a training accident in England. In December 1942, he and others from the regiment, were on a grenade range when a carelessly-laid grenade exploded, spraying his legs with shrapnel. He spent two weeks in hospital with no apparent lasting effects except temporarily excluding him from further training. Years later, back in Canada, he would occasionally complain of small pieces emerging from under his skin.

If truth is the first casualty of war, the second comes through censorship. All letters for home were carefully read by censors to incise any reference deemed useful to the enemy. No one ever explained how Hitler would benefit, much less learn, in a letter from Harry to Mary that the regiment had moved from England to Scotland for a fortnight of firing. Cleverly, the two devised a code system so secret and informative, that *Intrepid*, the Allies master spy, would have been impressed.

Before and after the war English breakfast

Mary at some point or perhaps more often, bundled up and mailed to Britain, a slab of bacon for Harry and his mates. Eaten along with a "fried slice," the Canadians could closely imitate a typical English breakfast. Washed down with mugs of hot-sweet tea, of course.

While the regiment trained with an increasingly professional approach readying them for war, behind the scenes details of how the allies would attack Europe were under way. One of the most exciting developments which directly involved the First Hussars was the concept of a floating tank. This secret weapon, known as a Duplex Drive tank (DD tank), was to be launched far out from shore, navigate through the sea under its own power to arrive on the beach *before the infantry*. To achieve this miraculous undertaking, special training was given to respective crews under secrecy. Not even unassigned Hussars knew about them.

To reach the beach on its own required special skills, but, even more important for the crews' survival, was learning the emergency procedure should the tank sink. Many tanks did on D-Day and are still sitting off shore in 2020.

Valentines used for training

On one exercise, to acquaint crews with the "floating wonders," something went wrong. To keep the tanks afloat, a canvas screen surrounded the entire tank while two propellers taking power from the track mechanism, moved the tank slowly through the sea. The key to a successful launch and arrive at the beach was the sea condition. If the sea was too rough, the screen could collapse and both tank and crew would sink.

Harry's luck gave out one day in training when his tank sank - only it didn't entirely, not all the way. The crew managed to escape alright thanks to their Davis Submerged Escape Apparatus (DSEA), but somehow the canvas captured enough air to keep the tank partially afloat. Harry to the rescue. He dove into the water, slashed the screen, and down it went, disappearing into the depths below. Harry didn't get "gonged" for his heroic and dangerous undertaking but maybe he should have received some recognition. Too bad.

Sherman launched on D Day

On D-Day, 6 June 1944, Harry was a crew commander with "B" Squadron, powering to Juno Beach, Nan Green section. His crew position, like all crew commanders, wasn't in the tank; it was standing on the back

deck manipulating a long tiller bar to help point the tank to the correct landing point. In the unprotected position, he would have been entirely exposed to all enemy fire, large and small calibre.

"Bold" fresh from watery grave

Unlike the bad luck experienced in training, Harry's tank didn't sink. But good luck escaped his squadron OC, Major Duncan, who wasn't so fortunate; his tank "Bold" sank, almost taking him down with it. Unfortunately, Trooper Roswell Toffflemire was drowned. Some years later, the tank's location off shore became known. In 1970, after twenty-six years submerged in the Channel, it was hauled out of the sea and today sits proudly on the shore of Juno Beach as the regiment's World War Two Memorial.

A passage in the regimental history, *The Gallant Hussars*, by Michael McNorgan, 2004, describes the complexity, and in retrospect, the absurdity from a nautical viewpoint, to implement a scheme of floating tanks assaulting a beach. The Landing Craft Tanks (LCTs) were huge, unwieldly floating barges with slab sides and flat bottoms. Prone to a following sea and cross winds, they had difficulty maintaining a course and keeping the pre-arranged schedules to get the tanks on the beach ahead of the PBIs - the poor bloody infantry. The DD tanks, with canvas sides providing the needed displacement for floatation, could boast a free-board above water of about three feet, but the canvas was held there by compressed air and struts – it was easily collapsed! Any wave or swell was potentially dangerous. Quoting from the GHs, describing the combination of LCTs and DD tanks, the opinion is that "No two less sea-worthy vessels ever took part in any naval engagement of the past, or ever will again in the future."

Nevertheless, of the nineteen "B" Squadron tanks launched, fifteen made it to shore, and incredibly, unlike "A" Squadron, they landed ahead of the Regina Rifles who they were to support. Whether this was a factor of good luck or clever management didn't matter. Hitting the beach ahead of the infantry was the

reason behind a floating tank in the first place, and in this one instance, it worked to everyone's advantage. The squadron expertly provided the necessary fire power to knock out gun emplacements and keep the enemies' heads down long enough for the Reginas to quickly attack, seize, and hold the beach against counter attack and win through the day.

The Beach-Head, 6 June 1944

By the day's end, 21 Hussars lay dead with 17 wounded. When the regiment went into harbour on the night of the 6th, from a total compliment of thirty-eight tanks comprising "A" and "B" Squadrons, "A" had nine tanks and "B" four; the rest had either been sunk or knocked out. Lieutenant Stark in 1951, summarising the regiment's first day of fighting with eleven more months to come, made this observation: "It was a combination of orthodox fighting coupled with sheer audacity and daring in the most unorthodox phase of warfare – establishing a bridgehead."

A statistic of note: the normal regimental assault configuration in numbers of tanks in four squadrons was sixty-one. After eleven months of fighting across North West Europe, the First Hussars lost 350 tanks.

For the next five days, there was no let-up in fighting or deaths. Tanks and crews were lost as the allies struggled to hold on to the hard-won ground. Despite the incessant daily struggle, they were enduring, their next major encounter coming five days later on June 11, stands alone for disaster, particularly in regards to "B" Squadron.

One of the 350 knocked out

After the initial mauling, the regiment stood ready to receive new tanks and crew replacements which they did by the 10th. In the interim, Harry experienced the loss of three tanks to mines and enemy fire with no crew lost. The next main regimental objective involved the battle for Caen, an objective planned for but never achieved on D-Day. The orders given on 11 June directed the regiment to take the town of Le Mesnil-Patry with "B" Squadron working in support of "D" Company of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada.

Typical battle aftermath

The battle account is long and complicated; the full story is described in the *Gallant Hussars.* In those details, this fact stands out: when the sun set on this horrendous day, we can now proclaim that 11 June 1944 as the bloodiest single day in the history of the regiment. The statistical aftermath is the best proof: Hussars: 53 KIA; 37 tanks destroyed. QOR: 55 KIA.

Harry again survived. His tank, along with that of Sergeant Gariepy and Corporal Simpson, plus a handful of men, became the main survivors, duly recognised in Lieutenant Stark's account. He acknowledges, that over the intervening days, more men straggled in to raise morale if only by a small amount. It was, and remains, a sad day of remembrance each year beside our Holy Roller tank in Victoria Park, coinciding with the recognition of the successful landing on 6 June 1944 and those tragic losses.

One particular statistic which changed the attitudes of many Canadian troops towards the enemy was the number of men murdered by the SS Panzer Regiment: seven were Hussars, six Queens Own. And they weren't the last.

SS-Oberstumfuhrer

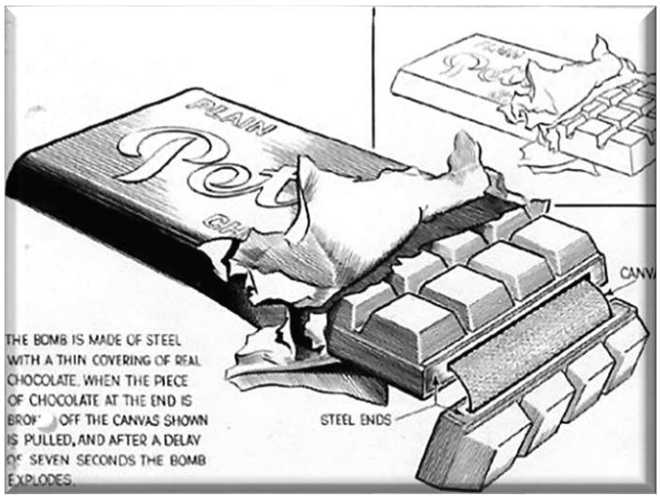
After witnessing the death and destruction and murdering of his mates, for the rest of the war Harry changed then and there "from a man to an animal" but he never

elaborated on the remark. Perhaps he simply meant, understandably, that he was no longer prepared to give any quarter to the enemy. He saw them as animals, and if that's the way they were going to fight, so was he.

A good illustration of this change which Harry alluded to years later, can be found in the outcome of an encounter involving a member of the despised SS troops. The details of how and when this occurred are obscure but the description of the encounter is very graphic. At some point Harry and his mates came across an SS officer holding a Doberman Pinscher dog on a leash. At his master's urging, the dog was attacking a Wehrmacht soldier, ripping and tearing away intent on killing him. Upon witnessing this attack, the entire crew took aim with small arms and killed both the dog and SS officer, thus saving the life of the terrorised German soldier. Greatly relieved, the man willingly allowed himself to be taken prisoner.

Summary: a Canadian soldier kills a German officer who was bent on killing a fellow German soldier, then the Canadian takes the rescued German prisoner. Where are you going to find stories like this away from a theatre of war?

Despite the sudden set-back, the regiment regrouped and moved on. Between days of fighting there were days of rest but it wasn't total rest, not like sitting in your own back yard nurturing a "cold one." In a 2017 interview with Hussars veteran Jim Fisher, he described everyone's mental and physical state as one filled with – tension. That's the word he used because no one could relax! The remnants of war surrounded them: buildings completely destroyed, some by their own fire; dead troops from both sides scattered about awaiting burial; bloated animals littering the fields; and the smell of death everywhere.



The Devil is in the details

Nothing was safe. Booby-traps made the most innocent objects untouchable: books, children's toys, a comfortable chair or tempting bottles of wine, all became possible death traps. Even the dead could be wired to explode if touched. The tension could build to a point where a man would suffer from "Battle Exhaustion." This was a poorly understood condition, but recognised to an acknowledged degree allowing the individual to be quietly removed to a peaceful area for treatment. When it was deemed the man was sufficiently recovered, he was returned to his unit. Too often, he wasn't properly recovered.

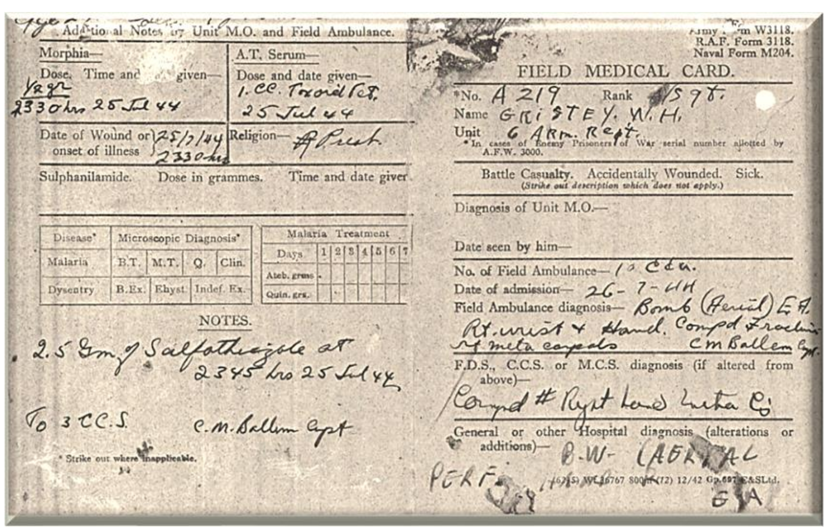
The regimental history compiled by Lieutenant Stark pays special attention to the troop's deteriorating state of mind. By July 12 he observes that "The crews were beginning to suffer from the nervous strain of the 24-hour shelling and mortaring." He goes on to note, "German aircraft were becoming increasingly active…" It is this last detail which becomes a significant development as the story of Harry Gristey in WWII draws to a close.

Throughout the month of July, the British and Canadians struggled to get past Caen and break out to the south towards Falaise. First there was *Operation Charnwood* which morphed into *Operation Goodwood* with the sub-set of *Atlantic,* a plan to cross the river Orne. The Hussars were mixed up in all these actions, big and small. In late July, the Luftwaffe bombed the Canadian lines at Vaucelles, knocking out tanks, wounding crews and inflicting some deaths.

Sherman with British 17-pounder anti-tank gun

When tanks had mechanical breakdowns or took hits which didn't completely knock them out, the crews often attempted to move them back to safer ground to seek necessary repairs. On 25 July, three such tanks were connected together with cables in a slave configuration to move back for technical assistance. Two of the tanks were only partial runners, but Harry's Firefly, the *Fighting Canuck*, with its Continental C1 radial engine in total working order, led the trio away from the action.

With Teutonic efficiency, the Germans would place explosives on bridges set to explode when a vehicle crossed. Harry and the crews he was with knew of this nasty little trick. As the crew commander of the leading tank, it fell on Harry to inspect any bridges for these dangerous explosives. When they came to the first bridge, his inspection was rudely interrupted. Out of the tank and on the ground, he had the bad luck of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Before he could take cover, a Luftwaffe plane swooped in to drop a bomb which bounced before exploding, scattering shrapnel in all directions. One piece struck Harry on the inside of his right wrist, almost severing the hand. His war was over!



Additional Notes by Unit M.O. and Field Ambulance.

Morphia—
Dose, Time and date given— ½ gr 2330 hrs 25 Jul 44

A.T. Serum—
Dose and date given— 1. CC. Toxoid Tet. 25 Jul 44

Date of Wound or onset of illness 25/7/44 2330 hrs

Religion— R. Cath.

Sulphanilamide. Dose in grammes. Time and date given

Disease*	Microscopic Diagnosis*			
Malaria	B.T.	M.T.	Q.	Clin.
Dysentry	B.Ex.	Ehyst.	Indef. Ex.	

Malaria Treatment							
Days	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ateb. grms.							
Quin. grs.							

NOTES.

2.5 Gm of Sulfathiazole at 2345 hrs 25 Jul 44

To 3 CCS. C.M. Ballem Capt

* Strike out where inapplicable.

Army Form W3118.
R.A.F. Form 3118.
Naval Form M204.

FIELD MEDICAL CARD.

*No. A 219 Rank L/Sgt.
Name GRISTEY. W.H.
Unit 6 ARM. Regt.
* In cases of Enemy Prisoners of War serial number allotted by A.F.W. 3000.

Battle Casualty. Accidentally Wounded. Sick.
(Strike out description which does not apply.)

Diagnosis of Unit M.O.—

Date seen by him—

No. of Field Ambulance— 10 Cdn.
Date of admission— 26-7-44
Field Ambulance diagnosis— Bomb (Aerial) E.A. Rt. wrist & Hand. Compd Fracture of meta carpals C.M. Ballem Capt.

F.D.S., C.C.S. or M.C.S. diagnosis (if altered from above)— Compd # Right hand meta C

General or other Hospital diagnosis (alterations or additions)— B.W. CARPAL

PERF.

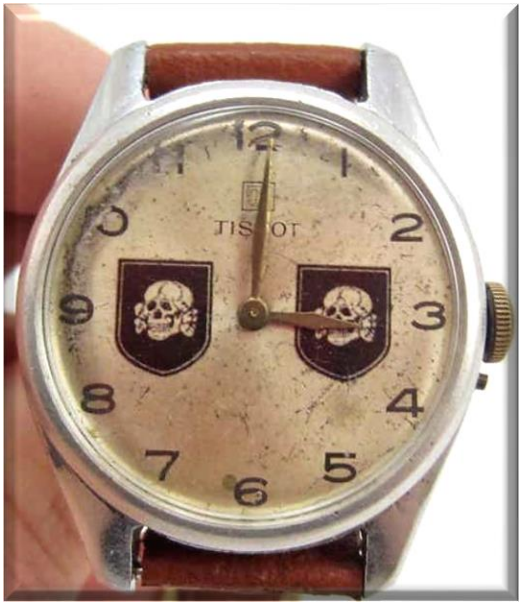
(6775) WL 26767 800M (72) 12/42 Gp.697 E&SLtd.

The medics are the unsung heroes to the many wounded. Operating near the front lines, they quickly attended the fallen to

offer in preparation for movement back to a field hospital, what amounts to advanced first-aid. Harry received immediate treatment as shown on the *Field Medical Card* dated 25 July 1944, 2330 hrs. Sometimes the hospitals were shelled and bombed, inflicting more wounds and deaths. On the battlefield, no one is really safe.

Harry was evacuated to the UK and admitted to No. 23 Canadian General Hospital where a thorough examination was undertaken and a plan for treatment outlined. At this point Harry's luck changed from bad to good. Though the hand was severely damaged (lessened by the protection afforded by a watch), a Canadian doctor believed that instead of amputation as first proposed, the hand could be saved by an Allograft procedure. (This is a bone from either a deceased patient or an amputated limb.) Disregarding the possible source, the fusing worked, allowing Harry to keep his hand, although it was largely crippled and gave him constant pain throughout his life.

Now the irony. When prisoners were taken, the tendency was to relieve them of any valuables. Both sides, reminiscent of peasant gleaners from ancient wars, engaged in the timeless ritual of scrounging about the abandoned battlefield looking for trinkets from the dead. For the troops, it was a simple case of "Spoils to the Conquerors."

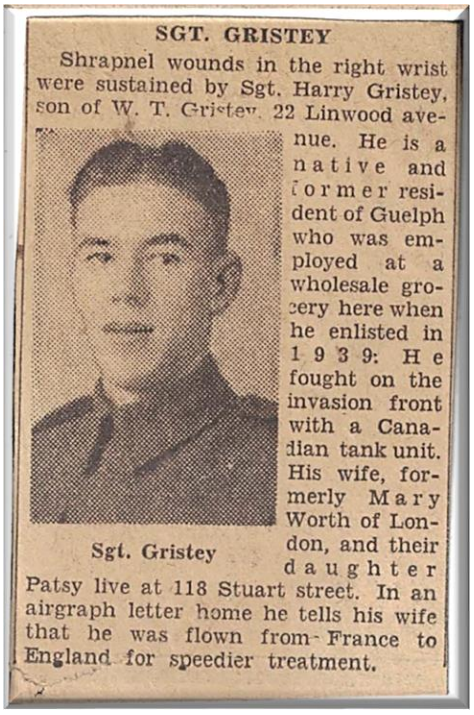


SS Officer's watch

At some point Harry "liberated" a wrist watch from a German officer, a rank which offers a clue to its good quality. Unlike most right-handed men, who would wear a wrist watch on the left arm, Harry opted instead to wear

this one on the right with the face to the inside. When the bomb exploded it was exactly that spot where the fragment hit. So, here is the ultimate irony: a German bomb fragment struck his wrist but a German watch saved it from both instant and later amputation. War can produce the most bizarre stories.

To complete a veteran's biography, the first step is to access his records from Library and Archives Canada. When the papers are finally received, two things stand out: the volume of material on file leading next to the extensive details listed within outlining the veteran's military history from start to finish. The credit for recording all this material is directly attributable to another army operating behind the lines – one of clerks. Without their dedication, a veteran's wartime contribution would be lost. They also performed duties requiring more immediate attention.



SGT. GRISTEY

Shrapnel wounds in the right wrist were sustained by Sgt. Harry Gristey, son of W. T. Gristey, 22 Linwood avenue. He is a native and former resident of Guelph who was employed at a wholesale grocery here when he enlisted in 1939. He fought on the invasion front with a Canadian tank unit. His wife, formerly Mary Worth of London, and their daughter Patsy live at 118 Stuart street. In an airgraph letter home he tells his wife that he was flown from France to England for speedier treatment.

Sgt. Gristey

When a man was wounded or killed, these same clerks sprang into action to inform family in Canada of the incident. Two telegrams sent from the UK via *Canadian Pacific Telegraphs* were quickly sent and arrived at Mary's door on Stuart Street. The first, on August 1st, informed her that Harry had been wounded. It was quickly followed by another on the 4th outlining to her the nature of the injury while putting her at ease with a promise to keep her informed of further developments.

Harry profited from three months of hospital treatment in the UK. Upon its completion, in October 1944, after a three-year absence, he was on his way back home to London for a joyous reunion with his wife Mary and daughter Pat.

The final entries in his records are short and sweet: arrived in London 27 October 1944; discharged from the army 26 March 1945. What is missing in these records is the amount and kind of medical treatment he received in the UK and at Westminster Hospital in London. But judging from the lasting results, allowing

him to keep his injured hand, the medical attention was professional and effective. Once released and at home, today's surviving family will attest to the loving care administered daily by Mary as she gently applied *Winter Green Ointment* to his wounded wrist to quell the pain which never completely left him for the rest of his life.

During a man's wartime service, there are two significant interviews conducted. The first, undertaken when a man joins up, determines what his qualifications are, which in turn, will point him in a certain, pre-determined direction for training. Upon discharge, the final, and perhaps for the veteran about to land on civvy street again, most important interview, is designed to gauge his future interests and offer help though various Veterans Affairs' programs.

In the 23 March 1945 summary written by Captain P. G. Flude, Army Examiner at Wolseley barracks, the still-enlisted Sergeant Gristey rejected any VA training offer. Despite that quick rejection, of seemingly great value to a man with a crippled hand, Captain Flude was generous in his personal assessment, finding Harry was "good in appearance…serious…pleasant…" Full of ideas, Harry went on to rattle off a plethora of work possibilities involving: wood working, plastics, trucker, bus driver, bread route (horses again), or even roofing. Quite a list!

"A" Block parade square

Perhaps the best part of this foretelling the future, pre-discharge interview, is found when captain Flude writes that Harry is "level-headed…constructive in viewpoint – the type of man who tries to plan ahead." The good Captain goes on to literally "hit the nail on the head" by adding, "The man's mind is fully made up as to spending his gratuities and credits on his own house construction." And that's what he did – he built a house, proving without doubt, true dedication to

his family: wife Mary, daughter Pat, and eventually, four more children: Wayne, Brian, Janis and Doug.

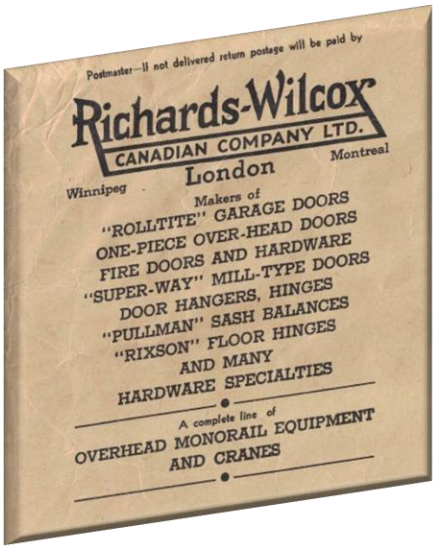
While Harry was overseas, Mary lived with her parents, Joseph and Elsie Worth, at 118 Stuart Street. This area, known as Mervin Heights, was in London Township and not part of the city proper. On this suburban street, the Worths owned more than one lot, perhaps bought with the idea of giving one to a family member – who better than Harry and Mary? With the lot severance completed, and despite his serious hand wound, Harry proceeded to build his family a house at 112 Stuart Street.

Typical post-war suburban housing scene

Harry Gristey's post-war history is so typical of many other returned veterans. They had experienced enough war and now, in peace time, they set out to build a normal life. Benefitting from the largesse of the Veteran's Land Act, dwellings sprang up everywhere to house the husbands and wives who quickly consummated their marriages to create the great post-war "baby boom."

Doug Gristey remembers well that his father was never handicapped by his crippled hand. As to that problem, some years later, while putting on a house addition, Harry managed to compound his liability by looping-off part of his thumb from his left hand. While these types of injuries may have limited the manual dexterity of most people, for this man, groomed to farm work before maturity, employed at age fifteen on rough work, surviving five years of war, then building a house with only one good hand - to him no obstacle was too much to overcome, as he would soon demonstrate.

Applying for work after the war as a veteran, often earned from the prospective employer, special appreciation for his service even to the extent of overlooking some physical infirmity. Upon completing the house, and needing an income to



feed and clothe his growing family, Harry applied for and received a job with Richards-Wilcox manufacturing.

It's to this company's credit that they extended the position despite Harry's obvious limitation. Or were they mistaken? Was their physical assessment wrong? How handicapped was he? The company would soon learn they had hired a capable, hardworking man whose damaged hand posed no problems where work was concerned; any type of work offered was mastered! During his tenure there, he was promoted from simple maintenance to installing industrial doors; only one of R-W's many products.

The factory custom at that time was for a worker to receive two weeks' vacation – with pay! Harry, forever the enterprising husband and father, having acquired a car, decided to build a house-trailer, load up the family (forever enlarging) and strike out each summer for fun and relaxation. A favourite destination was Cedar Beach Park, nestled beside Musselman's Lake near Aurora. After a stopover of a few days, the entourage would head out for Bracebridge, then on to Collingwood and Owen Sound. A fun time was had by all!

In the early 1950s, on the eastern outskirts of London, General Motors built a factory to build diesel locomotives: General Motors Diesel. Son Doug is adamant that his father's dexterity was never curtailed by having both hands limited through his war wound and construction injury. With the same power of persuasion exercised for work at Richards-Wilcox, Harry made application to GMD and was hired on as a welder. And this new employer wasn't disappointed either. Witnessing his welding ability, Doug is still impressed with the memory of seeing his father run a clean, straight bead.

Early GMD model at Brockville

One important distinction between the two employers: GMD paid better with more benefits than the smaller Richards-Wilcox.

For a more relaxing, sedentary holiday, Harry and Mary parked the trailer at Oriole Park just west of London, near Komoka. This location allowed weekend retreats with less summer driving, more suitable for a couple growing into middle age.

Leaving the kids behind at different times, the happy Gristey couple would venture out on their own to visit places like the Thousand Islands and other intriguing vacations spots suitable to their improving status in life. With a fine home and five growing children, life for Harry and Mary Gristey couldn't have been better.

LCol Finney leading the First Hussars mounted unit

Harry retired from GMD in 1983 at the customary age 65. Befitting their ages, a smaller trailer was acquired for short trips - sans children - and parked again near Komoka for weekend getaways. Life was sweet for the aging couple but time comes a cropper to all of us. At age 79, Harry was diagnosed with cancer, hospitalised, then slipped into a coma. With all of his grateful and loving family assembled at bedside, consoling their grieving mother, a radio was turned on in the expectation Harry could hear it, for this was November 11, 1996, Remembrance Day. With the dial turned to the Remembrance ceremony, while listening to military music and commands so familiar from years before, Harry slipped away to his rest.

Mary stayed on at the Stuart Street address, living in the home which Harry had built for her and their children. Living with her for those three years were son Doug and his sister Janis. As time moved on so did events. Doug bought a farm near St. Marys with a house large enough to house his mother, sister and Mary's bachelor brother, Doug Worth, who had moved with them from the Worth home at 118 Stuart, next to the Gristeys.

Forest Lawn Cemetery

Mary spent six quiet years on Doug's newly acquired farm. Finally, at an advanced age, suffering from osteoporosis and Alzheimer's, she spent her last few years in a nursing home in St. Marys. It was in that facility where she passed away on February 26, 2012, age 91.

William Henry "Harry" Gristey, b. May 24, 1917, Guelph, Ontario, d. November 11, 1996, London, Ontario.

Mary Elizabeth Worth Gristey, b. December 5, 1920, Guelph, Ontario, d. February 26, 2012, St. Marys.

Both Mary and Harry are buried at Forest Lawn Cemetery, London.

A very special note: Learning about the Gristey family as time moved through two world wars, one is struck by the number of re-occurring coincidences and an event of ironical proportions which saved Harry from a life-altering disability.

- Coincidences: Harry was born May 24, 1917. The next day, the 25th, his father, William Thomas, was wounded by an aerial bomb while in England. This in itself was another coincidence since he found himself to be exactly where the newly designed German plane chose to launch its first air raid on England.
- William made the round-trip to Britain and back on the S.S. Olympic.

- When Harry was wounded on July 25, 1944, it was caused by a German bomb. Both father and son disabled by the same weapon from the same enemy.
- Three Gristeys, Harry, his father and brother were all enlisted in the First Hussars in WWII.
- On William's second WWI enlistment, he was recruited into the Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMR). Initially, the First Hussars were designated as a regiment of the CMR.
- Irony: The bomb fragment which wounded Harry, struck his wrist exactly where he wore a German officer's wrist watch. The watch of his enemy saved his hand from instant amputation and later upon examination from a sympathetic and skilled doctor, from surgical amputation.

Medals and Decorations:

1939 – 45 Star

France and Germany Star

Defence Medal

Canadian Volunteer Service Medal

War Medal 1939 – 45