

**Acorn, Wilfred Lorne**

**Private**

**L/74821**

**1st Canadian Parachute Battalion**



Wilfred Lorne Acorn was born on Wednesday, 6th February, 1918 in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada. He was the second youngest of eight children and had three brothers and four sisters. His mother Elizabeth Jackson Baird (1881-1976) was born in Ayr, Scotland and emigrated to Canada when she was eight years old; his father, William Edgar Acorn (1879-1966) was born in Pownal, Prince Edward Island and moved as a young boy to Saskatchewan.

The family lived on a farm which was situated about eight kilometres southeast of Prince Albert and one and a half kilometres from Davis. They were hardworking people, respected members of the community in Saskatchewan and belonged to the United Church.

Wilfred attended the Island Lake school in Davis for seven years. He walked to school with his sister Audrey, joined by other children who lived along the way.

In winter they sometimes went in a horse drawn sleigh with the teacher who lodged with them and taught in their school.



*In front of the barn of the farm. Wilfred left, his youngest sister Audrey and his oldest sister Gladys.*

The school building consisted of two rooms; grades one to seven occupied the Junior Room and grades eight to twelve the High School room. The two youngest Acorn boys, Edgar and Wilfred left school when they completed grade eight so that they could help with work on the farm. The Acorn farm had land in three different locations, Davis, Fenton and an area about three miles west of their house. They had a big herd of cattle, around a hundred pigs and ten horses.

*Photo Deborah de Kok*



*Photo: The Acorn family: (back row, L. to R.) Wilfred, Wesley, father William, Gladys, Arnold, Edgar; (front row) Blanche Audrey, mother Elizabeth and Edna.*

During WWII, Canadian farmers were allowed to keep one son from a certain age group at home to help run the farm. It was decided that Edgar, one of the older brothers, should enlist but Wilfred joined up without telling anyone. He registered on 30 March, 1942 in Saskatoon at the 12<sup>th</sup> District Depot, Canadian Army Active Force (CAAF).

He was described as 1.80m. tall, weighing 82 kilos, with brown hair and blue eyes. Asked about his interests, he said he enjoyed sports and played ice hockey and softball. He liked to go hunting too. In his spare time he read and watched films.

His first training took place on the east coast of Canada with the artillery. When recruiting for the 1st Canadian Parachute Regiment began, Wilfred asked for a transfer. After undergoing extensive medical tests he was accepted. He was first stationed in Camp Shilo, Manitoba and later, on 28 December, 1942 he went to Fort Benning, Georgia in the USA where the parachute training began.



*Camp Shilo, Manitoba*

Source : [www.junobeach.org](http://www.junobeach.org)



*Fort Benning, Georgia: 75 meter high training tower*

Source : [www.junobeach.org](http://www.junobeach.org)

It was a four week programme which first focused on the development of physical endurance and discipline, followed by familiarizing recruits with equipment and spring techniques. A ten metre tower was used for the first

jumps and later one of seventy five metres, before finally parachuting from a plane. At least five successful jumps from a plane were required before one could qualify for the parachutist 'wing'. Wilfred was successful and returned to Camp Shilo, Manitoba for a short time. On 24 July, 1943, 31 officers and 548 men of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion left for England on board the Queen Elizabeth.

The Battalion was placed with the 3rd Parachute Brigade under the command of Brigadier Stanley James Ledger Hill. More training awaited the Battalion which was stationed at the Carter Barracks in Bulford near Salisbury, The men had to work on their physical performance and take part in fighting exercises up to battalion level. Brigadier Hill believed strongly in an optimal physical and mental condition as the key to survival. To fulfil the Brigadier's conditions, the parachutists had to undergo a rigorous regime of jogging, route marches and fighting exercises. In August and September, 1943 they ran eight kilometre every morning. The battalions had to do one march of eighty kilometres, carrying full equipment and finishing within 18 hours. The Canadian battalion completed this successfully on 19 November, 1943. Exercises continued until April, 1944 when a landing on the French coast was simulated, On 24 May, the Battalion left Bulford for the transit camp in Down Ampney in preparation for D-day.

In the night of 5-6 June, 1944, the Battalion flew over the Channel and landed on the east flank of the area where a few hours later the amphibious invasion was to take place. Because of the bad weather and poor visibility, the soldiers landed very spread out, sometimes far from the scheduled drop zone. Nevertheless and despite German resistance, the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion achieved their goal and seized the bridges over the rivers Dives and Divette in Varville and Robehomme. They then protected the left flank of the 9th Parachute Battalion against the German artillery in Merville and took up a strategic position at a cross point in Le Mesnil. The Canadians were later involved in ground operations aimed at strengthening a bridgehead and supporting the advance of allied troops near the Seine. On 6 September, the Battalion left Normandy and returned to England, to the training camp in Bulford.

Of the 27 officers and 516 men of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, 24 officers and 343 men lost their lives. Before it was ready to fight again, the Battalion had to be brought up to strength and the reinforcements

trained. Airborne troops had to practise offensive combat; the capturing of enemy positions within towns and street fighting.

In December, 1944, the parachutists were ready and sailed for Belgium on Christmas day, 1944 in order to take part in the Ardennes offensive.. Between 22 January and 19 February, 1945 they were involved with the defense of Roermond, a town lying on the Maas river in the Netherlands.

On 18 February, some soldiers were cleaning their weapons in their quarters; the magazines were on the table and Wilfred saw that a comrade had taken his magazine by mistake. The soldier took it out of his gun and put it back on the table, replacing it with his own magazine. They were in a hurry because there was a meeting in the neighbouring house, with the commanding officer who wished to speak to them. As Wilfred went towards the door, his comrade laid his weapon on the table and put on his beret. He then grabbed the gun and there was a shot. Wilfred, in the door opening, fell to the ground. He had been hit in the head and died instantly. And so came a tragic end to the life of Wilfred Lorne Acorn at the age of 27.

He was temporarily buried behind the religious house in Roggel, lying between Weert and Roermond.



On 5 November, 1945, he was reburied in the Canadian Military Cemetery, Groesbeek, Plot **XV. B. 4.**

His parents chose this inscription for the gravestone:

'At the going down  
of the sun  
And in the morning  
We will remember him'



*Photo : Deborah de Kok*



Life story: Gijs Krist Research Team Faces to Graves.

Sources:

Audrey Evelyn Spencer(Acorn) and her daughter Deborah de Kok + photos  
Commonwealth War Graves Commission  
Library and Archives Canada  
Canadian Commission Book of Remembrance.  
1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion Museum  
Honourthem.Ca  
Wikipedia  
Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial  
junobeach.org  
Heemkundevereniging Roggel

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### ***Memories of Wilfred Lorne Acorn***

***“We lived on a farm about eight miles S.E. of Prince Albert, about one and one half miles from Davis. I walked to school each day but usually in group as there were quite a few homes along the route with other school aged children. Occasionally, in the winter I would get a ride with my brother, Wilfred. Since one of the teachers, boarded at our home, he was responsible for giving her a ride to school in the winter on the cutter (horse drawn sleigh). Island Lake School was a two room school house which included grades one to seven in the Junior Room and grades eight to twelve in the High School Room.***

***My two oldest sisters, Blanche and Gladys, were school teachers and were home only on weekends and holidays. The younger boys, Edgar and Wilfred, quit school after they passed the eighth grade to help with the farm. Back then you had to have your grade eight or be fifteen years of age before you could leave school.***

***Mom and Dad farmed land in three different places, Davis, Fenton and another area about three miles west of home. They kept a large herd of cattle, about a hundred pigs and ten work horses. At one point they had a better barn than house.***

***Before I finished grade twelve the Second World War was raging. Farmers were only allowed to have one man at home in a certain age group to farm and feed the families and soldiers. Any others could either sign up voluntarily to serve in the war or be conscripted. It was decided that one of my older brothers, Edgar, was going to volunteer but Wilfred went off first to enlist without telling anyone! My Dad would have been too old and since my two oldest brothers had their own farm they didn't have to go to war.***

***Wilfred was stationed on the east coast of Canada for about two years in regular army duty. When they began recruiting for the First Canadian Paratroop Battalion he applied for a transfer. He was required to go through many medical tests and was eventually accepted. His group was stationed at Camp Shilo in Manitoba and in 1942 went to Fort Benning, Georgia, U.S.A. for further training.***

***When the training was complete they returned to Camp Shilo for a short time and were called to action shortly before D-Day. On June 3, 1944, Wilfred and the other paratroopers***

***landed on the beaches of Normandy in France. Those who survived D-Day were stationed in Holland to await their next move which they expected would be Germany.***

***Wilfred wrote a few letters from overseas to the family. One of the stories he told while in Holland was an occasion where a few of them had to hide because they could see the Germans coming. In fear they moved a heavy iron stove in an abandoned house and hid in the chimney. They weren't discovered but when they tried to put it back they couldn't lift it! It demonstrated what a man could do under such stressful circumstances.***

***I remember while Wilfred was away during those years, everything my Dad did around the farm was for when Wilfred returned home. He would say things like "we better get the barn painted before Wilfred comes home". It seemed like he never thought about him not coming home or if he did he never let on.***

***We were told that during training overseas someone's gun went off and my brother was accidentally shot (February 18, 1945). He was 27 years old and is buried at Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in Holland."***

***By Wilfred's sister Audrey Evelyn Spencer-Acorn \*Dec. 28, 1922 - † Dec. 12, 2018***





A lake situated in the north of Saskatchewan (55°47' north 105°57' west) has been named Acorn lake in his honour.

Copyright photo: <http://woodlandaerialphoto.com/>



55°47' N, 105°57' W,

## Acorn Lake

Named in Memory of

## Wilfred Lorne Acorn

Davis, Saskatchewan

1st Canadian Parachute Battalion  
Private, L74821

On Active Service To His Country  
Killed in Action  
February 18, 1945  
Age 27  
Buried at  
Grosbeek Canadian War Cemetery  
Holland



