

**Cannon, William Alfred**  
**Rifleman**  
**Regina Rifle Regiment**  
**Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**  
**F 9541**



William (Willie) Alfred Cannon was born on November 7, 1920, in Pownal, a village in Queens County on Prince Edward Island (eastern Canada) on the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Willie was the eldest son of a family of seven children, of whom John J. died at a young age. Father Daniel J. Cannon was born in Ireland in 1880; he died in 1968. Mother Cecelia was also originally from Ireland; she was born on December 13, 1891, and died in 1973. Their daughter Mary Agatha was born first, married Leo Doyle, and died in 2012. After William came Harry James (1925-2000), who also served overseas with the Royal Canadian Army; Harry married Alma Kendall. Son Daniel J. (1926-1961) was next; he married Phyllis Gerwitz. Leo Wilfred came after him, and then son Wilfred was born, married Margaret, and died in 2015. The family attended the Roman Catholic Church.

William spoke English and went to school up to Grade 8; he was fourteen years old in June 1934. His father needed him at home on the farm, and as William was the eldest son, he complied. He worked with his father for seven years and as a truck driver for four months, as well as eight months at the Halifax Shipyards. This shipyard is now called Irving Shipbuilding; in World War II, they built four destroyers and were vital in the repair of over 7,200 ships. William also took a short six-week course as a farm equipment mechanic. After his military service, he wanted to return to his father's farm.

William was twenty-two years old when he reported for the National Reserves Mobilization Act on December 3, 1942. The NRMA was established for the defense of the country. But due to outside pressure, it was decided in April 1942 that the men could also be deployed overseas. A total of 13,000 NRMA volunteers eventually left the country, but only 2,463 reached the field units before the war's end in Europe. Sixty-nine men died.



*William and his brother Harry, just before he joined the army.*

*With courtesy of the Cannon family and Pieter Valkenburg.*

The examination for the NRMA was on December 4, 1942, and William was then 1.80 m (5ft 11) tall and weighed over 65 kg (144 lbs). He had blue eyes, blond hair, and a scar between his eyebrows. William could drive a car, truck, or tractor and make minor repairs. He liked to play ice hockey, read science fiction, was in good health, had a youthful appearance, and was stable and reliable with good manners. William was suitable for regular training and was recommended as a truck driver in the infantry.

At the NRMA, William received 40 days of basic training in Charlottetown and 135 days of training in Aldershot, Nova Scotia. He was registered under service number F 610685.

On 14 October 1942, he underwent jaw surgery. In October 1943, he was in St. John, Prince Edward Island, with the 39th Provost Company. William was hospitalized twice during his time with the NRMA, which lasted until June 9, 1944. The first time was from July 10 to 23, 1943, at St. James Military Hospital in St. John, probably with pneumonia, and then in December for seven days at Prince George's Military Hospital in Charlottetown.

On June 10, 1944, William was transferred to the General Service in Nanaimo, PEI, and was given service number F 9541. He had put on some weight now and would like to cross the ocean. He continued his training from July 29, 1944, in the No 2 Transit Camp in Debert with the Brigade Training Group.

It was time for William to go overseas to the war in Europe. They embarked on August 28, 1944, and departed the next day, arriving in the United Kingdom on September 5. He was assigned to the Canadian Base Reinforcement Depot and left as a Private on October 9, 1944, for France, where they arrived a day later. William joined the Regina Rifle Regiment as a Rifleman.

William received the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp on December 5, 1944, and the second Service Chevron a few days earlier. This was given to the active military for each year of continuous service and was worn on the left forearm of the uniform or blouse. From 1944 they were also issued in the UK.

The Regina Rifle Regiment (RRR) took part in the Battle of the Scheldt and the Breskens Pocket on October 10, 1944. This was the heaviest fighting since D-Day. It took until November 2 before the Germans surrendered, and the RRR returned to Ghent for a few days of well-deserved rest. Then, on November 11, they headed for the Nijmegen region, a journey of about fifteen hours. First, they were in an empty retirement home, then in various locations in Nijmegen and Groesbeek until the end of January 1945. During this winter, the main task of the RRR was to reconnoiter and find out where the enemy was and in what quantities. The conditions were harsh, there was much rain, and the water in the rivers was high. This meant that the low-lying land had been flooded, and moving was often only possible with amphibious vehicles. Yet there was also time for training and entertainment, although the living conditions in the destroyed houses, without electricity, were problematic. The situation was no more complicated than D-Day's, but with more tension.

At the beginning of February, the troops were ready for action, and Operation Veritable started on February 8, 1945. The German forces between Meuse and Rhine had to be pushed back and occupied the west bank of the Rhine. The RRR came close to Kleve, Germany, but remained inactive during the first week of shelling. They did not move south until February 15, some in vehicles, others marching to the area near Kalkar and the woods near Moyland. In the following three days, they fought a fierce battle and tried to clear the area of German paratroopers. Despite the British troops having already cleared the forest, they encountered much resistance from the Germans, who were still present in large numbers. A company of the RRR advanced through the woods on the

afternoon of 16 February but encountered the enemy northeast of the road. Several soldiers were killed that afternoon. Rifleman William Alfred Cannon also died during this battle for the Hochwald in Germany on February 16, 1945. He was 24 years old. The night before, cousin Andy Cannon of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders had been with William.

William Cannon was temporarily buried with his comrades at a Canadian military cemetery in Bedburg, Germany, on February 25, 1945, plot 1, row 3, grave 17.

He was reburied on 21 September 1945 at the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek, grave **XI. H. 4.**

Text on his tombstone:

BORN IN POWNAL  
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND, CANADA,  
MAY HIS SOUL REST IN PEACE.  
AMEN



*photo: Else Schaberg, Faces To Graves*

William received the following awards:

- 1939-1945 Star
- France and Germany Star
- War Medal 1939-1945
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp.



## FACES TO GRAVES

Stichting Faces to Canadian  
War Graves Groesbeek

Life story: Liesbeth Huisman-Arts, Research Team Faces To Graves.

\* Do you have a photo of this soldier or additional information please contact [info@facestograves.nl](mailto:info@facestograves.nl)

### Sources:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission  
Library and Archives Canada  
Veterans.gc.ca  
Findagrave.com  
War Diaries Jan Braakman (RRR)  
Pieter and Daria Valkenburg  
Cannon family



*Father and mother Cannon,  
With courtesy of the family.*

Mary Cannon Doyle, Williams sister, wrote a poem after his death:  
(Veterans.gc.ca)

*He was a young country guy, working with his Dad,  
Who had failing eyesight, which made our Willie sad  
I saw him walk before the plough at the age of eight  
To guide his Daddy's horses, so the furrow would be straight  
How he loved Mount Mellick and all the folks within,  
When he left our home for battle,*

Tears replaced this young man's friendly grin.  
 Our pastor brought the message  
 "Killed in Action" was how it read,  
 "Dear Lord, Please be with us"  
 was what our mother said.  
 In Holland, he met a girl,  
 and he regarded her as the Best,  
 Mom was first to tell her,  
 Willie has gone to rest.  
 Now we see pictures of his grave,  
 with flowers so bright,  
 Thanks to the people of Holland,  
 the Cemetery is a pleasing sight.

Memorial in Pownal



Below is a summary of the story of Irene Doyle, who visited her Uncle Willie's grave in October 2008, along with Uncle Wilfred. The Guardian published the story in Island Weekend on November 8, 2008. See a copy of the publication at the bottom of this life story.

*During the war, as did several of his comrades, William occasionally spent a week at the Van den Berg family's house on Driehuizerweg in Nijmegen. Many families opened their homes to evacuees or soldiers. Here Willie met the daughter of the house, Annie, and they fell in love in late 1944 or early 1945. More than 63 years later, in October 2008, some family members crossed the ocean to visit Willie's grave and try to get in touch with this family. Irene Doyle, William's niece, made the trip with Uncle Wilfred. Irene was born when Uncle Willie was killed in action, but she heard many stories about him. They found the family and visited the grave. They were happy that the grave and cemetery looked so beautiful and that Willie was buried under a large tree. In the Vrijheidsmuseum (Freedom Museum) in Groesbeek, they met two women who visited the cemetery every year, and together, they looked up the address where the Van den Berg family used to live.*

*The current resident sent them to a shop where they sold electrical items, and the owner was related to one of the Van den Berg sisters. That same evening they visited Tonny and Nelly with their husbands. They said that Bill, as they called Willie, fell in love with their sister Annie, who was much older than Tonny and Nelly. The sisters reminisced and remembered well that their brother Adrie also loved Bill. He and his friends were allowed to join him in the tank (a heavy armoured scout car) and eat in the army*

kitchen. Likewise, Bill occasionally ate at their kitchen table. The older sisters sometimes went out with the soldiers to dance or listen to music. Nelly and Tonny saw the soldiers as their big brothers who protected them and set them free.



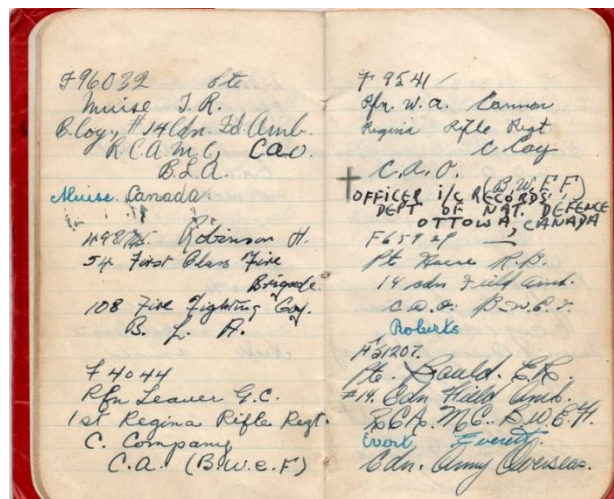
This photo was sent to the Cannon family by Annie, with this text on the back of the photo:

With thankful feelings  
to my dear friends  
in Canada.  
from your Dutch friend  
Nijmegen 27-2-48. Annie  
Holland.

Nelly still had a booklet in which she wrote down all the names of the soldiers. When the soldier died, she put a cross, and so she did with Willie, convinced that this helped him to heaven.

Willie's mother wrote a letter to Annie to say that Willie had been killed. But, even after that, they continued to write letters and send each other presents.

In a letter dated May 6, 1948, Annie informed the grieving mother that she sympathized with her because he was buried so far from home. She said that in the Netherlands, May 4 is the day to commemorate the victims of the war and that Annie also visited his grave. "God keeps his soul, dear mother Cannon, so don't feel too hard about him", she wrote, among other things. In March 1949, sister Nelly wrote to Willie's mother because Annie had been hospitalized. Unfortunately, they could not find out what was wrong with Annie, and she was sent to the hospital in Utrecht. Only later, Multiple Sclerosis was diagnosed, and Annie died in 1957. She was never married. Both families were delighted with the visit of the Canadians to the Van den Berg family. Willie's family was especially



pleased to hear how hospitable and kind this family had been to Bill and his comrades. The farewell was, therefore, emotional, and they parted as good old friends.

Annie's letters to Mother Cannon have always been kept by Willie's brother, Leo. Despite a fire and after a period of more than sixty years.

Pieter and Daria Valkenburg, a couple collecting stories of Canadian soldiers who fell in Europe in the Second World War, visited the Cannon family at the end of July and beginning of August 2018 and received some photos. The meeting occurred at Willie's childhood home, where cousin Carl now lives. Also present were cousins Carl, Alfred, Irene, Paulette, Anthony, and Bill. They were all born after their uncle's death but had heard many stories about him.

**O.H.F. COMPTD.**  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

**FINGERPRINTED & PHOTOGRAPHED**

**WILL COMPTD.**  
DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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(1) **SOLDIER'S NAME AND DESCRIPTION ON ATTESTATION**

Regtl. No. F-9541

Surname (in capitals) CANNON

Christian Names (in full) Alfred William

Date of Birth 7 Nov. 01

Place of Birth Pownal, P.E.I.

Citizenship British Subject

Trade on Enlistment Farmer

Nationality of Father at Birth Irish

Nationality of Mother at Birth "

Religion P.C.

Enlisted at Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Date 3 Dec. 42

Particulars of former service (if any) i.e. Regtl. No., Corps or Regiment and period. nil

Signature of Soldier W.A. Cannon

Signature of Officer W.A. Dauphinais Lt.

Place see hot no. Date 13 Jan. 43

Page from his Soldier's Service Book





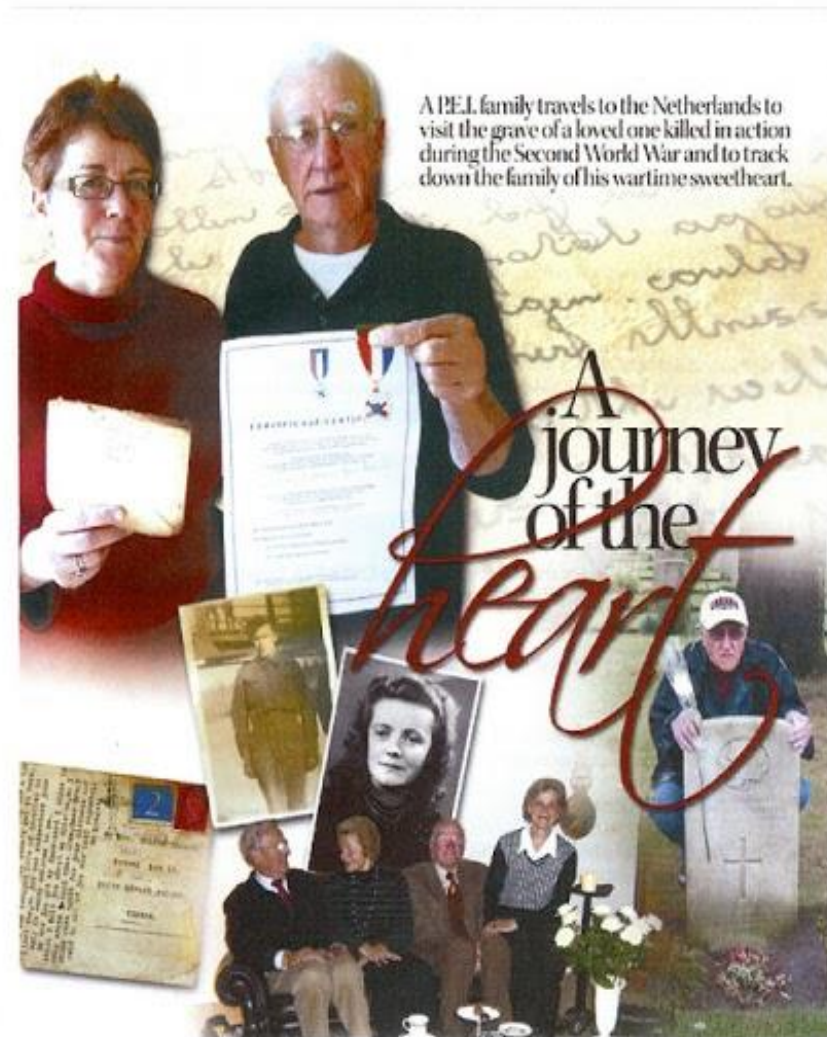
*The house of Willie's family in 1947, and how wit looks in 2018.*



The article of The Guardian, 8 November 2008:

## A journey of the heart

MARY MACKAY  
The Guardian



A P.E.I. family travels to the Netherlands to visit the grave of a loved one killed in action during the Second World War and to track down the family of his wartime sweetheart.

For a short time in 1944/45 William "Willie" Cannon of Mount Mellick, P.E.I., and Annie van den Berg of Nijmegen in the Netherlands were Second World War sweethearts.

Few details are known about their short-lived wartime courtship that sadly ended when Willie was killed in action in the Netherlands on Feb. 14, 1945. But after that an unusual cross-Atlantic bond was forged between Annie and Willie's mother in the form of correspondence that lasted until Annie's untimely death in 1957.

Now 63 years after the war's end, some of the Cannon family have crossed that same oceanic divide to visit Willie's final resting place and to meet the members of Annie's family who also got to know the 24-year-old Canadian soldier in his final year of life.

"When we were going to find Uncle Willie's grave, I said, 'I'm going to find Annie's family,' . . . and then I thought, 'oh that's so farfetched,'" smiles Irene Doyle of Charlottetown, who had yet to be born when her Uncle Willie died in battle.

Still, over the years she had heard plenty of stories about him and his Dutch sweetheart who he regarded as "the best." She also knew about the letters that her grandmother, Celia Cannon, and Annie had exchanged and the friendship they had

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formed.

So when her uncle, Wilfred Cannon of Mount Mellick, let it be known he wished to visit the gravesite of his eldest brother in the war cemetery in Groesbeek, which is only about 10 kilometres from Nijmegen, she included this search for Annie's family to their early October trip.

The letters were in the possession of another uncle, Leo Cannon. Having survived a house fire and more than 60 years of potential housecleaning heave-hos, they provided the one clue Doyle needed to start her search for the van den Bergs — an actual Nijmegen address scrawled in now-faded ink.

"I thought, 'I'm just going to write it the same way that they wrote it down and maybe somebody over there will know what it is,'" she remembers.

First on their must-do list was to see Willie's grave in the Groesbeek War Cemetery.

"It was just exactly how it was pictured; the care that is taken of it," Cannon says of the immaculately kept site. "He's buried underneath a big tree there and I liked it. It was good to be there."

While in the Groesbeek War Museum, he met two women, one of whom lives on the Belgium border, the other on the German border. Once a year they visit the cemetery in Groesbeek.

"When they found out we were Canadian . . . she said, 'Every morning when we wake up and open our eyes, we thank the good Lord for the Canadian soldiers going through and driving the Germans out of our land.' The thing is they still appreciate what the Canadian soldiers went through and did for them."

Meanwhile, Doyle was playing amateur detective. By fluke she found someone who knew instantly that it was a street called Driehuizerweg that she sought. Someone else nearby knew where it was and gave them directions. They found the exact address in no time flat.

"We went to the house and it looked like there was nobody home. And I said, 'I'm not coming all this way to not knock on the door,'" Doyle remembers.

Bicy Fischer answered the door.

"I was surprised; we went on holiday to Canada last summer so I thought they were maybe friends of my Canadian friends . . . so, I was wondering what brought these people to my house," Fischer, who is a dietician instructor, said via an e-mail interview this week.

"I invited them to come in the house and then they start(ed) telling their story. I got really interested and became anxious to help these kind and friendly people."

Although she was not a member of the van den Berg family, Fischer knew from the property deed that they had once lived there. She also knew a woman, Trees Francissen, who had lived in the neighbourhood for a long time.

And so with Fischer in tow as a translator, they struck off for this next destination.

The elderly woman remembered the van den Berg family. After some thought she directed them to a local electronics shop, the owner of which she thought was connected to one of the van den Berg sisters by marriage.

They hit the jackpot there and were given the telephone number of Tonny Seegers, who is sister to the late Annie.

Fischer called to explain what was up and they made an appointment to meet Tonny, her sister, Nelly, and their husbands later that evening.

All in all, the search lasted just one afternoon.

"I was just dancing. I was high as a freaking kite. They were really surprised that we would hunt them up," Doyle says.

When they met, Nelly shared the story of how the 24-year-old Canadian soldier and the 21-year-old Dutch girl from Nijmegen met.

From September 1944 to the end of the war, the van den Berg family, as did most residents in the community, opened their doors to civilians who were evacuated from the areas receiving heavy German shellfire. They then also made room for Canadian and English soldiers, one of whom was Willie, or Bill, as the van den Bergs called him.

"We, our family (father, mother and nine children), slept in the basement for safety reasons and lived on the ground floor. The evacuated civilians slept and lived for three weeks in the sleeping rooms on the first floor and the soldiers slept and lived, (when) they were not busy outside, on the second floor under the roof. Although it may seem strange nowadays, as far as I remember, it all went very well then," Nelly said via e-mail.

"Bill did stay with us three times for a whole week just as the other soldiers, being in the frontline for one week and then had a rest of a week in their quarters at the Driehuizerweg, then again a week in the frontline and so on for some months."

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Nelly also said her younger brother, Adrie, vividly remembers the young Canadian soldier.

"He was very impressed by Bill who gave him, with some other boys his age, the privilege to come into his tank (which was a heavy armoured scout car). . . . He (also) remembers that they sat together and ate food from the army kitchen and in return Bill ate with us at the family table."

Nelly had few memories of her sister and her Canadian beau dating, but she did remember Annie and two of her older sisters and their accompanying soldiers heading out in the evening for some music and dancing.

"I was 14 years old; Annie was 21 years old. At that age, seven years difference is very important. To me, my little brother and my sister, Tonny, the soldiers were our wonderful big brothers, having liberated us from the enemy and strongly protecting us against him, the enemy being still very dangerous."

Nelly did, however, tell a very touching story about a little book in which all the soldiers who stayed in their home personally wrote their names.

"I remembered Bill, his name in my booklet and very sharply, the awful moment I had to place a little crucifix behind his name as we learned that he had fallen in action. As a little girl at that time I was sure that it would help him to come in Heaven," Nelly said.

After Willie was killed, his mother in P.E.I. wrote to Annie to tell her the terrible news.

Their correspondence continued, and gifts made their way from P.E.I. to Holland, as well as photos.

In one, dated May 6, 1948, Annie provides comfort to the grieving mother and a connection to her son buried so far away.

"These days the people of Holland celebrate their liberation after a day of remembrance to our killed friends on liberation day (4th of May). I've been to Bill's grave, of course, to do so! God keep his soul, dear Mother Cannon, so don't feel too hard about him! I can and especially my Mother can understand your sorrow about Bill, but we all hope to see him again!" Annie wrote.

In another, Annie acknowledges receiving a parcel from Willie's mother.

"I'm very glad about your nice gifts and thank you with all my heart. I was really happy to get your little parcel with the stockings I was looking for (for) a long time. I still can't get them here. The war brought lots of troubles in this way so you can understand your help is very welcome to me . . . ."

By March of 1949, it was Nelly who was keeping up the correspondence because Annie had become very ill.

"My dear family, this time it is me again who is answering your letter," writes Nelly. "Very many thanks for the nice parcel. Annie was especially very glad with the woolen stockings. She is not able to write by herself for she is in the hospital again. The doctor in Nijmegen could not find the cause of her illness. Now he has sent her to the well-known doctor who lives in Utrecht. We hope they will find the cause. I hope they can cure her. . . ."

Annie's health continued to deteriorate from what was later diagnosed as multiple sclerosis. She died in 1957.

"She never married," Doyle says.

For Doyle and Cannon this recent journey into the past has brought loads of new insight into Willie's final year and his Dutch sweetheart.

For the van den Berg family, it was an unexpected but welcomed wartime reunion.

"It was a very good and highly remarkable meeting with very nice people," Nelly says.

"It gave a lot of satisfaction that we could give them, I do hope, a good picture of (those) days in 1944/45 from which we have the best of remembrances of their brother and uncle Bill and that we could give them the feeling of the hospitality, the friendship and the warmth that our family hopes to have given to Bill and his comrades.

"When we had to say farewell to our Canadian visitors it was more touching than you could have (thought), like good old friends leaving."