



Roger Arthur Joseph Charest

Reg.nr: M38850

Roger Charest was the eldest son in a family of 17 children. In 1927, when he was six years old, the family moved from Matane, Quebec to the Falher/Girouxville area of northwestern Alberta.

He completed grade seven in 1936. He left school at 16 because he had to work on his father's farm for a few years.

Not interested in games, interested in hunting, but reads Western stories.

He had enlisted in Grande Prairie, Alberta in 1939. and trained for several years before being Taken on Strength (added to the military organization) in 1942.

The day after Pearl Harbor was attacked, on December 8, 1941, Roger was medically examined by Dr. J.C. Hardy in Falher, Alberta. Tonsils, a few bad teeth, 20/20 vision. Dr. Hardy wrote: "I have examined the man in accordance with the "Physical Standards and Instructions for the Medical Examination of Recruits" and declare him fit for Category "A".

In early 1942, he was 21 years old. His youngest siblings, Raymond and Lorraine, were born.

Roger then went to Grande Prairie, Alberta on January 9, 1942, to enlist. His enlistment papers paint a picture of the young man who became a soldier: 5'6", 120 lbs, blue eyes, blond hair.

A farmer with no military experience. He enlisted in the 132nd and was transferred to the Winnipeg Grenadiers after completing 35 days of basic training. He then went to Winnipeg where he completed another 85 days of advanced training.

He would receive more and more training over the next two years, but no active duty. He went from Girouxville to Grande Prairie to Winnipeg to Terrace, B.C. Courtney, B.C. to Kiska, Alaska for Operation Cottage, to Great Britain, Roger was with the Calgary Highlanders in Europe from early August 1944 until he was killed on October 8, 1944 during the 2nd Canadian Division's advance to Hoogerheide as part of an attempt to secure South Beveland in the Netherlands.

After Roger died, his platoon leader, Lieutenant William Syms Wills, wrote to my grandmother. "An enemy sniper caught him unprepared and he had no chance to defend himself. It was over very quickly and he could not possibly have suffered." "Your son was attached to one of the Rifle Companies as a wireless operator. His duty was to maintain communication with Battalion Headquarters by radio.

A very good friend of his, L'Abbe, was also attached to the same Company. These two boys were the two best Company signallers in the unit and were highly regarded by their Company Commander. They formed an unbeatable team and their constant devotion to duty and total disregard for their own welfare was an example to all.

The last battle in which your son took part was one of the most difficult we have ever seen. It took place in a small Dutch town called Hoogerheide. This town was very important to the enemy, as it commanded the entrance to the Beveland Peninsula. As you know, it was this enemy-held peninsula that prevented the opening of the port of Antwerp.

The Battalion took the town of Hoogerheide on that particular day and held it against a large number of German counter-attacks. Many prisoners were taken by both sides during the fighting. German prisoners had to be escorted to the rear so they could be interrogated. Once, when two enemy prisoners were captured, your son asked if he could bring them to headquarters.

There was a lot of sniping, but he got them back without any trouble. On the way back to his company, he was hit. An enemy sniper caught him and he had no chance to defend himself. It was over very quickly and he could not possibly have suffered."

He served 188 days from April 4, 1944, to October 8, 1944, when he was killed in action.

Cousin Paul Charest: "A few years ago, I found out who 'Jos' was."

In November 1990, I wrote a tribute to Uncle Roger for the University of Alberta student newspaper, The Gateway. Twenty-nine years later, Chantal Girard contacted me and told me that Joseph Labbe, mentioned in the article, was her maternal grandfather. He was on the front lines with Roger.

Chantal's grandfather often spoke of Roger and their adventures together. In a 2018 tribute to her grandfather, Chantal said: "He was a radio operator in World War II. He traveled with a heavy radio transmitter on his back all the time as he fought on the front lines, constantly delivering and receiving secret information for our Allied troops. As a child, teenager and young adult, I had the privilege of spending every Remembrance Day with him, hugging him and sitting on his lap as he listened to his stories of his time fighting for our freedom. Sometimes there was laughter, history, inappropriate songs and tears."



Joseph Labbé

"One story in particular was the day his best friend died in his arms after heavy fighting and bombing. This friend was special and his name was Roger. He was smaller in size and sometimes slower and weaker. My grandfather said that on some days he even had to carry Roger on his back with the radio to safety. They were a fearless fighting team and were crucial in the communications sector of the Second World War. After the war, stories were even written and published about my grandfather, or as we called him Pepere. He had many decorations and was invited to a D-Day celebration in France where he and my grandmother attended and again he was celebrated and received more medals of honour. They were accompanied by my aunt Sue and uncle Roger, named after the friend my grandfather Jos had lost so many years earlier."

On the morning of May 15, 1990, cousin Paul Charest was at the Bergen-op-Zoom Canadian War Cemetery, about 39 km northwest of Antwerp and 19 km after crossing the border into the Netherlands.

Paul: "I was thousands of kilometers from home and stood in a light rain looking at the gravestone of Private Roger Charest."

Paul: "I was the first family member to visit his grave in the 45 years since he was buried there. I thought about the sacrifice that Private Roger

Charest and 42,000 other Canadian soldiers made so that I could live in freedom today.



- And although I was born 20 years after his death and had no real connection to my Uncle Roger, I felt strong emotions as I stood before his gravestone at the Bergen-Op-Zoom Canadian War Cemetery. I was proud of the role he had played in the liberation of the Netherlands, sad that he was not among the returning veterans, and I didn't know what I could do to honor his memory. This was a beautiful country, but it was not his home. I wanted to pay tribute to his sacrifice and somehow bring "home" closer to him. Not knowing what else to do, I took a lapel pin with his birthplace name from my jacket and buried it in the ground next to his gravestone and said a silent prayer in his memory.
- He made his final sacrifice on October 8, 1944, 18 days before his 24th birthday. To put this in perspective, I had just turned 25 a month earlier. His younger brother Gaston was 21 years old and serving in another combat zone when Roger was killed in Holland (fifty-one years later, Gaston was at his brother's final resting place, the Bergen-op-Zoom Canadian War Cemetery).
- For a long time, I only knew Uncle Roger from a handful of photos, Roger's personal belongings, and a letter of condolence from his platoon commander.
- Regiment: Winnipeg Grenadiers and then Calgary Highlanders (TOS 8 August 1944).
- Eligible for the award of: 1939 - 45 Star, France-Germany Star, War Medal, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with clasp.
- NRMA service from 9 January 1942 to 3 April 1944 (during this time his regimental number was M605128). Served at Kiska in the Aloetian Islands from 12 July 1943 to 3 January 1944.
- Served in Canada from 4 April 1944 to 25 May 1944 (enlisted on strength).
- Served in the United Kingdom from 26 May 1944 to 4 August 1944.
- Northwest Europe from 5 August 1944 to 8 October 1944 (killed in action)
- Last receipt: bank statement from 1 October to 31 October 1944. Total: \$84.38.

It is somewhat sobering to look at his signature and the entries in his Soldier's Book. He was 21 years old when he enlisted.

- Occupation: Farmer.
- Blood Type: "O".
- Registered at: Grande Prairie, Alberta.
- He completed basic training on July 1, 1942.
- Completed advanced training on September 15, 1942.
- Educational Qualifications: Completed seventh grade in 1936.

His personnel selection file stated that he "left school at age 16 to work on his father's farm."

It also showed the following:

- "Worked on father's farm for 2 years;
- Worked with farmer with 2 tractors for \$15 per week in summer;
- Worked in bush for \$30 per month in Slave Lake, Alberta in winter."
- In addition to his "crime record is clean," it gave the following background:
- Health considered good. Says he has chest cold.
- Not interested in games, interested in hunting.
- Reads Western stories.
- Parents live in Girouxville, Alberta, father is a carpenter and runs a farm. 5 brothers: 1 works in a logging camp and 4 in school.
- Single: Church: Roman Catholic. Regularly attended.
- Alert, sociable bilingual youth with good appearance and cooperative manner.
- "M" score on second test is above average group, indicating good native intelligence, poor mechanical knowledge.
- Shows a willing spirit and reasonable adaptation to duty.
- Complains of severe chest cold, but says he will not go on sick leave because he fears he will be suspected of malingering.
- Good-natured, adaptable, reliable for service at medium level." (A later assessment said: "A most agreeable, cheerful young French-Canadian of good stability and prospects. He has adapted well to service, is handy with tools and shows mechanical aptitude despite scores on tests 4 and 5."

His service work:

- Rifleman (9 January 1942 - 1 September 1942);
 - Batman (2 September 1942);
 - Regimental Signaler (17 July 1944).
 - From 9 January 1944 he was entitled to two service chevrons.
 - On 10 January 1944 he donated 500 cc of blood.
 - He trained on rifle, mortar, 303 rifle, LMG Bren, Sten and Piat.
-
- Estates Branch Inventory: Canadian Second GHQ 2nd Echelon 21 Army Group. Date 3 February 1945: leather pocket book, 4 souvenir banknotes, leather purse with 57 coins (souvenir), rosary, souvenirs, wristwatch (no name), snapshots, prayer book, folder and notebook, PR scissors, red identity disk, 7 religious medals.
 - August 9, 1945: "Dear Mrs. Charest, We are pleased to inform you that we have now received your son's personal effects and that they will be sent to you by registered mail in the coming days." War Service Gratuity Statement (June 5, 1946). \$199.82. Recipient Mrs. Cora Charest, mother.

The Municipality of Ossendrecht, Holland sent my grandmother a sincere note of thanks on December 10, 1945. On February 22, 1946, my grandmother was informed that "the remains of your son, M38850 Private Roger Arthur Joseph Charest, have been carefully exhumed from the original burial site and reverently reburied in Grave 11, Row G, Plot 2, Bergen-Op-Zoom Canadian War Cemetery..."

"IN MEMORIAM

We have the honor to inform you that the Council of the

Municipality of OSSENDRECHT:

considering that its re-installation was due to the restoration of democracy:

considering that this restoration was due to the victory over the dictatorship:

considering that this victory was due to the sacrifices of the allied armies:

considering that the sacrifice of life is considered the highest:

considering that this highest sacrifice was made more specifically by those who fell here in the municipality of Ossendrecht:

decided in its council meeting of November 30, 1945 to express sincere gratitude to the wives and children, or to the parents and guardians of the 142 Canadian heroes, who fell and were buried in the vicinity of Ossendrecht, for the sacrifice of their loved ones, to express their condolences in their sad loss and to inform them that in due time a war memorial will be erected in eternal memory, honor and gratitude."

KILLED IN ACTION - ALBERTA REGIMENT

Charest, Roger Arthur Joseph, Pte.:

Mrs. Cora Charest (mother), Girouxville, Alta.

The Vancouver Sun, 23 November 1944

November 2024: Framed Print on display at the

Royal Canadian Legion McLennan Branch #153

Roger Arthur Joseph Charest of Girouxville, Alberta, served as a Private in the Calgary Highlanders, RCIC during World War II. Charest was killed in action on 8 October 1944: he is buried in the Bergen-Op-Zoom Canadian War Cemetery, Netherlands. Bergen-Op-Zoom contains 968 Canadian graves, including 64 RCAF. Most of the soldiers buried here died in the fighting north of Antwerp during the Battle of the Scheldt, when the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, supported by the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, worked to clear the right (northern) bank of the Scheldt estuary of German forces.

117,000 soldiers from the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War and UN peacekeeping missions gave their lives for Canada. These memorial plaques are dedicated to honouring the men and women who died so that we can enjoy the freedom we enjoy today.

Sources:

[Service File: Charest, Roger Arthur Joseph](#)

[Canadian Virtual War Memorial: Roger Charest](#)

[Calgary Highlanders: Organization and Histories](#)

[Calgary Highlanders: Higher Formations](#)

[Faces to Graves - Bergen-Op-Zoom](#)

[Military abbreviations](#)

Note: Lieutenant Wills received a Bronze Cross for his actions during the Hoogerheide campaign. Neither Roger Charest nor Joseph Labbé are mentioned by name in the commendation document.

This story was created with the great help of Paul Charest,
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.