

# Lest We Forget

REMEMBRANCE DAY

## ‘He didn’t want to live the simple, farming life’

Niece of Second World War veteran shares story of Victor Lemont’s service in Sicily

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British Prime Minister Winston Churchill did not get many things wrong when it came to his military strategies and predictions in regards to fighting the Axis Powers during the Second World War.

By the summer of 1942, the Allied leaders were attempting to determine the best way to secure a foothold on mainland Europe from which to launch a coordinated attack against Nazi Germany and pry Adolf Hitler’s grip off the continent which he had held for the better part of three years. Churchill had been pushing for a plan that would see an amphibious landing on the Mediterranean island of Sicily, which would then be used as a jump-off point from which to invade Italy itself. Churchill called Italy Europe’s “soft underbelly,” believing that the Allies would quickly overrun the Italian and German forces stationed there, and that the best Axis fighting forces were already committed to the Eastern Front against Russia and also defending the French coastal regions against the anticipated western invasion from across the English Channel.

While Churchill was ultimately successful in convincing American President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King and their allies to undertake this plan, Europe’s supposed ‘soft underbelly’ would prove anything but. Sicily and mainland Italy were heavily defended by entrenched Axis soldiers, supported by scores of tank divisions, anti-aircraft weapons and artillery. By war’s end in 1945, the Allied forces suffered



Royal Canadian Artillery Gunner Victor Lemont (pictured above), who moved to Listowel, trained there and married Mabel Ronald in 1940, would not see the end of the Second World War’s Sicily campaign and subsequent invasion of mainland Italy. The Paisley-area native was killed on Aug. 6, 1943, near the area known as Agira. (Above right) Today, he and hundreds of other Commonwealth soldiers are buried in the Agira Canadian War Cemetery, not far from where he fell.

approximately 330,000 total casualties during the Italian campaign, including 6,000 Canadians who never returned home.

Victor Lemont was born in Greenock Township near Paisley, Ont. on Jan. 3, 1914. The youngest son of David and Florence Lemont, Victor grew up on the family farm alongside his two older brothers, Walter and Irvine.

“I remember Dad always talking about Uncle Vic,” recalled Laureen Eby of Listowel, daughter of Walter Lemont. “He was always adventurous, he wanted to explore the world. He didn’t want to live the simple, farming life.”



Contributed Photos

Walkerton.

“Apparently the story goes, he and a bunch of guys went out drinking one night, and they all went down and signed up,” said John Eby, Laureen’s husband.

In the following months, Lemont would begin his training in Listowel. There he met Mabel Ronald, whom he would marry in 1940. The couple never had the opportunity to have children, as Lemont would continue his training in Petawawa before heading overseas to England in December 1941.

Lemont would serve with the 2nd Field Regiment of the RCA, achieving the formal rank of Gunner. He and his regiment would be dispatched to the Mediterranean in July 1943 along with 160,000 Allied personnel for the invasion of Sicily, dubbed ‘Operation Husky.’

“The Italians, who would shortly make peace with the Allies and re-enter the war on their side, offered little determined resistance but German opposition was vigorous and stubborn,” reads a summary of the Sicilian operation on the Canadian Virtual War Memorial. “The campaign in Sicily came to an end on 17 August when the two Allied forces came together at Messina, but failed to cut off the retreating Axis lines.”

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The Atwood Remembrance Day service will take place  
at the cenotaph at Main Street/Monument Road on  
Sunday, November 5 at 2 p.m.

Listowel

Saturday, November 11 at 10:45 a.m. at the Cenotaph  
Light lunch to follow service at Parkview Gardens

REMEMBRANCE DAY DINNER  
Listowel Legion Branch 259  
Saturday, November 11  
Cocktails at 5:30 p.m., roast beef dinner at 6 p.m.  
Adults - \$30, under 13 - \$13  
Veterans and spouses free  
Presentation by Tyler Schaefer's Westfield Class, followed by  
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Tickets must be purchased by Nov. 6 at the Legion

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# 80th anniversary of WWII's Sicily campaign marked this year

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Lemont would not see the end of the Sicily campaign and subsequent invasion of mainland Italy. He was killed on Aug. 6, 1943, near the area known as Agira. Today, he and hundreds of other Commonwealth soldiers are buried in the Agira Canadian War Cemetery, not far from where he fell.

**Receiving closure**  
Laureen Eby was born in 1947 and never knew her Uncle Victor. She said that her father had a hard time with his youngest brother's death, and in particular how he met his end, which remained unknown to the family for many years.  
"He talked quite a bit about him going off to war," she said of her father. "But they never knew exactly how he was killed. I was about nine or 10, and Dad finally got a hold of this gentleman in Teviotdale, and this man was in this group where Uncle Vic was."  
Eby, also through conversation with her oldest brother, Cecil Lemont, said that the family learned it was extremely hot that August 1943 in Sicily. After staying out of sight from the Germans for an extended period, water became crucial and Lemont opted to leave the relative safety of the trench.  
"They were in this trench hiding from the Germans, and it had been a while when everything was quiet," she said. "So Uncle Vic ventured out, and the Germans had hit a U.S. plane, and this gentleman from Teviotdale said a piece hit him right in the face. (Lemont) never knew what happened."  
"After that day, Dad seemed to have complete closure. He knew what had happened then."  
For his Second World War service, Lemont was awarded five medals both during the conflict and posthumously. He received the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal, Italy Star, Defence Medal, 1939-45 Star, and War Medal 1939-45, all of which Eby ultimately inherited, along with a silver tea set presented to her Aunt Mabel following her husband's death. Mabel Lemont never remarried, and passed away in 1989 after residing in Listowel for the rest of her life. "Uncle Vic was enough husband, and no more," said Eby.

**Honouring the fallen**  
Eby and members of her family were notified earlier this year that members of the Canadian Armed Forces, and in particular, Sgt. Rodney Lodge of the RCA, would be taking part in a 20-kilometre march to honour those killed in Sicily on the 80th anniversary of the invasion. The family was informed that Lodge would be laying a wreath at Lemont's gravesite.  
Eby reached out to Lodge shortly before his departure, and along with the wreath, Lemont's photo and a war memorial flag, the sergeant also laid a copy of a poem John Eby had penned in honour of Lemont five years earlier at the request of the Calvary United Church as part of local Remembrance Day services.  
Victor Lemont's name is also etched on the Listowel Cenotaph honouring those killed in the Second World War.  
"For all the years Laureen and I lived on the farm, poetry was second nature," said John Eby, referring



Dan McNea Photo

Listowel's Laureen Eby, pictured with her Uncle Victor Lemont's five war medals that she recently inherited. Gunner Victor Lemont was killed in action during Operation Husky in Sicily on Aug. 6, 1943.  
to the family's Britton-area farm that they moved to in 1979. John and Laureen later moved into Listowel in 2009, after raising three children. They are now also the proud grandparents of four. "I wrote her a poem every single morning for 35 or 40 years, and I always signed it, 'The Dog.' That's just the way I always signed it."  
"I never went to high school, but poetry was second nature."  
Laureen Eby said that it's difficult to remember the many stories of her Uncle Victor all these years later. Cecil Lemont recalled that prior to shipping out to Europe, his uncle always seemed to be in uniform, no matter what the circumstances.  
"One day my Aunt Phyllis wanted to have some apples picked from their orchard to make some pies. So Uncle Vic did that, and Cecil said he was amazed he was in full uniform, picking apples in the orchard," said Laureen. "However, it started to rain, and Uncle Vic came back to the house because he didn't want to get his cap wet because that would leave marks."  
Eby said that she recalled her father often spoke of the three brothers, separated by two years between them, getting into plenty of "mischief" growing up in rural Paisley when they were young.  
"I guess they were the three Musketeers," she said. Eby added that she and her family were happy to learn that her uncle was still receiving recognition for his service decades after his passing, and that she was honoured to be part of his family.  
"Myself, I feel like wow - that's my uncle. I never knew him, but I feel really appreciative that his memory is still being honoured 80 years later."

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Thoughts, Gratitude & Respect  
on Remembrance Day

On November 11th we honour the selfless service and memories of those in uniform who gave their lives for the greater good of our country. We salute their patriotism, courage, character, hard work, loyalty and dedication, and we will always remember the sacrifice they made to protect the way of life we cherish.

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Canadians, we will never forget.

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