

Pte Colin Robinson MacLennan (K 55109) (1913–45)

KIA 23 April 1945



***“So I think you and I were more lucky”
(Heinze Brune to Lt Grover Proulx)***

Soldiers often consider luck to be a crucial element to survival in battle. German paratrooper Heinze Brune shot and wounded Lt Grover Proulx in a brief firefight on 23 April 1945. One of Brune’s comrades shot and killed one of Proulx’s men. For Brune, in reflection after the war, the difference in their fates came down to luck and nothing more. On that day, Pte Colin MacLennan, who had seen plenty of action from mid-September 1944 to late April 1945, was less lucky.

One hundred years before Colin MacLennan enlisted in 1940, his forebears had immigrated from the isle of Lewis in the Scottish Outer Hebrides to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The economic structure of the northwest Highlands that had taken shape between 1760 and 1815 was collapsing. Kelp was one of the mainstays of the Hebridean economy, and its price fell steadily through the 1820s and the 1830s. The potato crop, the new staple of Highland life, partially failed in 1836 and 1837; the result devastated the Outer Hebrides. In 1844, four years after Peter MacLennan and

his family left, the descendants of the Earls of Seaforth (Clan Mackenzie), who owned Lewis, sold it to Sir James Matheson, the great opium trader.

Colin's father, Peter Malcolm MacLennan (1887–1969), hailed from Baddeck, Nova Scotia. Prior to the First World War, he lived and worked for a time in Massachusetts. On 19 October 1912, he married Florence Robinson, another Cape Bretoner; they already had one son, Frederick. Colin was born in Boston on 1 November 1913. The family returned to Baddeck in 1914, and the following year, Peter, 6' tall with blue eyes and brown hair, enlisted and served with the renowned 85th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders).

MARRIAGE-BRIDE	
Name of Bride	Florence Robinson
Name of Groom	Peter Malcolm MacLennan
Residence of Bride	636 Tremont street, Boston, Mass.
Date of Marriage	October 19th 1912
Color	white
Age in Years	23
No. of Marriage	1st
Occupation	
Place of Birth	Cape Breton, Nova Scotia
Father's Name	Angus Robinson
Birthplace	Cape Breton, N. S.
Mother's Name	Rachel Gillis
Birthplace	Cape Breton, N. S.
Name Party Officiating	Rev. Edwin P. Stevens, Methodist Episcopal, Rutland, Vt.
Town City of Rutland, Vt.	Certified Copy <i>H. W. Matheson</i> City Clerk

Marriage certificate: Peter Malcolm MacLennan and Florence Robinson, Rutland, Vermont, 19 Oct. 1913.

"Improperly Dressed"

Colin received his schooling in Baddeck and left at the age of 12, having completed grade 8. Prior to his enlistment on 1 May 1940, he worked for his father as an assistant lighthouse keeper at Bay St Lawrence, Aspby Bay, Victoria County, in northern Cape Breton, a beautiful and remote area. For the post-war, his expressed ambition was "Radio Work." Colin was 5' 6", 144 lb, with grey eyes and light brown hair; he was a Presbyterian, as was the rest of his family. MacLennan's military career in Canada was a varied one. Taken on strength with the Cape Breton Highlanders on 7 May 1940, he was attached to the Home Guard on 10 July and No. 6 Heavy Battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery at Sydney, Nova Scotia, on 10 July 1940. After a furlough in December, he was hospitalized with measles and influenza from 20 December 1940 until 2 January 1941; he was in hospital again for 6 days in April and another 5 days with bronchitis in May 1941; he was attached to No. 103 Heavy Battery in Amherst, Nova Scotia. After another brief hospitalization in July, he lost 7 days' pay for his part in a disturbance in barracks. To add insult to injury, he was "Improperly Dressed" for the brawl. On 3 August, he went AWOL for 3 hours and 15 minutes, a lapse that cost him 7 days confined to barracks.

In March 1943, Colin entered hospital in Amherst; by 6 May 1943, he was promoted from gunner to lance bombardier stationed with the 103rd Battery in St John's, Newfoundland; he spent 13 days in hospital there with metatarsalgia (inflammation of the ball of the foot); doctors hoped that an adjustment to his boots would help (apparently it did because there is no subsequent mention of the problem). On 19 November, he transferred to the 52nd Battery in Halifax, where he went AWOL in January 1944, resulting in a demotion back to gunner. In February 1944, he was "reallocated" to the Canadian Armoured Corps and underwent training at No. 24 Basic Training Centre in Brampton, Ontario. Old impulses did not die and, once again, Colin was AWOL until apprehended by military police in Woodstock; he received another 7 days of confinement to barracks. By May, he was in Calgary undergoing further training. He went overseas on 4 August 1944 and reported for duty in the UK on the 11th with No. 4 Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit. Taken on strength to the X-4 list (unposted reinforcements) with 2 Canadian Base Reinforcement Group, he joined the Argylls on 15 September.

Pte MacLennan was part of the first tranche of desperately needed reinforcements.

The Argylls had lost heavily during the fighting from late July through to mid-September 1944. Presumably, he was posted to a rifle company. As such, he enjoyed the relative respite from battle that lasted until mid-October. There was time for further training, patrolling, and integration at the section and platoon levels, which were critical to surviving the inevitable onslaughts that lay ahead. And come they did: Watervliet, Essen, to Wouwse Plantage to Bergen Op Zoom.

The winter on the Maas River provided another needed respite. There were more reinforcements, more training, some patrolling, and time for the modest relaxation offered up in a period of relative quiet. Pte MacLennan gave himself a Christmas present and went AWOL for the day and as well as for 9 hours on Boxing Day. In the circumstances he lost 9 days' pay. The unit was back in action for the battle of Kapelsche Veer in late January 1945 and the battle in the Hochwald Gap in late February and early March; all of these actions were bloody and the losses were heavy. From 11 March to mid April at Friesoythe, there were few casualties. Yet, once again, grim fighting resulted in gloomy casualty reports. By this point, MacLennan had joined the Scout Platoon and was with it for April's fighting.

“brief skirmishes with small enemy parties, rearguards and patrols”

In hospital in late 1944 recovering from severe pneumonia, Cpl Harry Ruch reread the scraps of paper that constituted his diary and found them inadequate expressions of the reality experienced. In the epilogue to his diary, Ruch noted, for example, “the brief skirmishes with small enemy parties, rearguards and patrols.” Patrolling was a constant feature of life for the rifle companies and the Pioneers; it was the stock-in-trade of the Scout Platoon. Because patrols were so common, the various war diarists rarely took notice of them except on days such as the 23rd when they stood apart from the day's relative calm.

On 23 April, it seemed to the unit's war diarist, Lt Lloyd Grose, that the worst was over for the time being; after all, bath parades had been ordered, and reinforcements were en route to the rifle companies.

War Diary. 23 April 1945. Küstenkanal [L.G.]

No major move was expected during the day, and it was arranged to have bath-

parades for the rifle-companies. One TCV load at a time made the trip to the outskirts of Friesoythe, where the Mobile Bath had been set up ... There were repeated Typhoon attacks on the wooded areas to our North and North West, where the enemy guns and Moaning Minnies were believed to be set up. Several "bomb-Happy" [i.e., battle-exhausted] Germans came out of their positions after the raids to surrender to our troops.

It was estimated that since crossing the Küsten canal the Argylls had suffered 150 casualties, and we were most happy to hear that 90 reinforcements were about to proceed to F-Echelon and the companies ... At last light, our company situation was as follows:

A Company ... two officers and 48 Other Ranks

B Company ... two officers and 53 Other Ranks

C Company ... two officers and 45 Other Ranks

D Company ... two officers and 59 Other Ranks.

At 2030 hours our Scout Officer, Lieut. Proulx and three Scouts went on a patrol to recce our left flank. They ran into a German MG 42 ... Lieut. Proulx and Pte. McClelland were walking along the left-hand side of the road, Interpreter-Sergeant Mos and Pte. Luke on the right-hand side, when the MG opened up on them at approximately 50 feet distance. Sgt. Mos and Pte. Luke dove into the ditch and succeeded in making their get-away, despite the fact that the enemy was firing on them continuously. Pte. McClelland [Pte Colin R. MacLennan] was found the next day, shot through the chest, and subsequent PW statements led us to believe that Lieut. Proulx was taken prisoner.



Lt Grover Cleveland Proulx.

“very sticky and dirty”

Ruch’s point about the small patrols and skirmishes was that, although often overlooked, they could be “very sticky and dirty.” Such was the day’s four-man recce patrol by the Scouts. Grose, the war diarist, took note of the discovery of Pte MacLennan’s body and the wound – “shot through the chest” – and of Lt Proulx’s capture.

Grover Proulx survived the war after time as a POW and a considerable time in various hospitals before reaching a convalescence hospital in British Columbia. His survival is attributable, in part, to the actions that day and afterwards of the German soldier who shot him – Heinz Brune. They corresponded after the war, became acquaintances for a time, lost contact, and then reconnected and met in 1980. In the immediate post-war period, they exchanged letters, and in 1948 Brune also provided photographs of the area of the firefight.



Heinze Brune sent these and the following three images, all dated 23 Feb. 1948. He wrote on the back of the image above:

*"the street you came across
x our positions."*



Brune wrote on the back of the image above:

“xx lying in ditch

x our position behind hedge.”



*Brune wrote on the back of the image above:
"you two brought behind this hedge."*



*Brune wrote on the back of the image above:
“xx after being wounded your comrade and you in the ditch.”*

Lt Proulx remembered Pte Colin (“Buddy” to him) MacLennan. Grove’s stories about him, about the war, and the Brune letters became part of his bequest to his wife and sons. That bequest provides a sketch of what transpired that day.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here!”

Son Geordie Proulx's reminiscence reads:

According to my father, he had had very little sleep prior to his last patrol. His estimate was only two hours per day during the previous two weeks. His mission was to determine whether a particular farmhouse a few hundred yards ahead was occupied or defended. He set out at dusk with three other men, two of their names he told me – Nick Maas [or Mos] and Buddy MacLennan – and advanced up a small road beyond the Argylls’ line at Osterscheps ... In any event, my father had the

misfortune of encountering a German scouting patrol a couple of hundred yards in front of the target farmhouse.

The German scouting party saw my father's patrol coming, stayed hidden and opened fire on my father's patrol when they got within very short range. My father was hit in the leg and knocked into a ditch by the road which was half full of water. His rifle remained on the road. Buddy MacLennan also ended up in the ditch within arm's reach of my father ... blood was 'welling out of his tunic at the base of his neck' ... the Germans were throwing small grenades at Dad, who was attempting to crawl away in the ditch. My father told me that the first thing he said to Buddy was, "Let's get the fuck out of here!"

"Boss, I'm not going anywhere"

Buddy answered, "Boss, I'm not going anywhere." He was shot through the base of his neck and died "like a soldier" within a minute, according to my father.

The German patrol wanted a prisoner. Heinz Brune of the 21st Paratroopers, 6th Division, wrote to Grover Proulx on 16 Oct. 1946, mentioning Buddy:

I am the paratrooper who wounded you in the legs. But I am very glad that I am such a good shooter and hit you only in the legs. See your fellow-soldier who received a shot threw [sic] his chest by my comrade and died shortly after it. So I think you and I were more lucky."

405-77-47847
In lieu of Army Form B.2690A

FIELD SERVICE

REPORT of Death of an Officer or a Soldier to be forwarded to the War Office with the least delay after receipt of notification of death. See Table II, Appendix III, Field Service Regulations, Vol I.

REGIMENT A & SH of C Squadron, Troop _____
OR COMP A & SH of C Battery or Company _____

Officer's Personal No (if known) E 55109 Rank _____ Pte. _____
Soldier's Army No _____

Surname MacLENNAN Christian Name C.R.

Date 23 Apr 45 Place Germany

Died Cause of Death BC Killed

Nature and Date of Report 3011C/150 28 Apr 45

By whom made A & SH of C

Specially state if killed in action, or died from wounds received in action, or from exposure while on military duty, or from injury while on military duty.

Place Germany, Edewecht Sh 2813 Ref 118024 SW Date 23 Apr 45
Burial corner of field left hand side of road going north P'1' R'1' C'4'
By whom reported En Capt. C.H. MacLean

State whether he leaves a Will or not (a) in Army Book 64 NO
(b) as a separate document NOT REPORTED

All private documents and effects received from the front or hospital, as well as A.B. 64, should be examined, and if any will is found it should be at once forwarded to the War Office.
Any report as to verbal expressions by deceased officer or soldier of his wishes as to the disposal of his estate should be forwarded to the War Office at once, supported by a certified statement of the person who actually received the information.
In the case of a soldier a duplicate of this report is to be sent to the Paymaster at the Base, together with the deceased's A.B. 64 (after withdrawal of any will from the latter), for transmission to the Paymaster who compiles the soldier's account.

Station and Belgium Signature of Officer [Signature]
Date 7 May 45 in charge of Section Adjutant-General's
Office at the Base Can See Ind Veh HQ 21 A Gp

Field Service form – Pte C.R. MacLennan, 7 May 1945.

“that bloody day”

Almost exactly a year to the day later, Brune wrote again: “Always [sic] when I think of that bloody day I thank God that you are healthy and well.” Brune’s pictures from

1948 show clearly how close the two patrols were to each other, where Buddy MacLennan and Grover Proulx ended up after being wounded, and where Buddy died. Proulx's exhortation declares his intention to save his comrade-in-arms. Buddy's response demonstrates the level-headed clarity of mind of a man close to death. And so he died but mere moments later. After capturing Proulx, the Germans removed both from the ditch to a nearby spot behind a hedge, as shown in Brune's 1948 photo and caption. The German patrol was anxious to get away with their prisoner, Lt Proulx, and Brune was now wounded. They left Buddy's body but made out, so it seems, a *verlustmeldung* (loss report) for him and, presumably, left it with his body, where it was recovered the next day by Argylls.

M 8411

Verlustmeldung

an das Deutsche Hauptquartier Nord, Abt. Fürsorge/WWV und Außenstelle WAST

<p>Familienname: <u>MacLennan</u> (Vorname): <u>E. R.</u></p> <p>Dienstgrad: <u>MACLENNAN</u>, <u>Gehilf.</u> <u>1. Klasse</u></p> <p>chem. Truppenteil des Toten (offen) und F. P. Nr.: <u>101A Canada</u></p> <p>Geburtsort: _____</p> <p>Todesort: _____</p> <p>Religion: _____ Beruf: _____</p> <p>Letzter Wohnort: <u>F 55109</u></p> <p>Erkennungsmarke: <u>F 55109 K. W. 4078</u> (Vollständige Aufschrift angeben)</p> <p>Nationalität (falls Ausländer): <u>Canada</u></p> <p>Ansehung der Angehörigen (Vater-Mutter-Ehefrau): _____</p> <p>Wo Nachlaß hinterlegt? _____</p>	<p>Tod nach Verwundung / Krankheit / Unfall / Selbstmord*)</p> <p>Ebenfalls Urteil: <u>EBEN</u></p> <p>Begräbnisort: Gemeinde: <u>Eden</u></p> <p>Kreis: _____ Provinz: _____</p> <p>Grablage: <u>Ostereke</u> Kriegerfriedhof / Gemeindefriedhof / Feldgrab*)</p> <p>Einzel- oder Reihengrab / Sammelgrab (Massengrab*)</p> <p>Grabnummer: _____ Grabreihe: _____ Feld: _____ (von links nach rechts fortlaufend zählen)</p> <p>Bei nicht bestatteten Toten Verlustort angeben: _____</p> <hr/> <p>Absendende Dienststelle (offen): _____</p> <p>F.P.Nr.: _____ Absendetag: _____</p> <p>Dienststempel _____</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Unterschrift) _____</p>
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Fragen möglichst lückenlos beantworten. — Deutliche Schrift! — *) Nichtzutreffendes streichen.

Verlustmeldung X Hamburg 13 - Form. Nr. 116. 10100 XII 45

German loss report – Pte Colin Robinson MacLennan.

“cut down in an instant”

Forty-two years after the war, Capt Sam Chapman wrote evocatively about the “man who falls in battle ... He is cut down in an instant with all his future a page now to

remain forever blank. There is an end but no conclusion." Pte Colin "Buddy" MacLennan, the single assistant lighthouse keeper who had lived on a remote stretch of Cape Breton Island, hoped to be in "Radio Work" after the war; his ambition ended that day in a short firefight between opposing patrols, "an end," as Chapman would have it, "but no conclusion."

M.F.M. 267
SOM-9-44 (5634)
H.Q. 1772-39-1989

**CANADIAN NATIONAL
TELEGRAPHS**

EMG FILE H.Q. 405-M-47,847

CASUALTY (REPORT DELIVERY) OTTAWA 3 MAY 1945

TO:-
MR PETER MALCOLM MACLENNAN
PURCE ST BOX 478
NORTH SYDNEY C B N S

71730 REGRET DEEPLY P55109 PRIVATE COLIN ROBINSON MACLENNAN
HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY REPORTED KILLED IN ACTION TWENTYTHIRD APRIL
1945 STOP YOU SHOULD RECEIVE FURTHER DETAILS BY MAIL DIRECT
FROM THE UNIT IN THE THEATRE OF WAR STOP TO PREVENT POSSIBLE
AID TO OUR ENEMIES DO NOT DIVULGE DATE OF CASUALTY OR NAME OF
UNIT

PREPAID

DIRECTOR OF RECORDS 4

Killed In Action



Pte. C. R. MacLennan, son of Mr. and Mrs. P. M. MacLennan of South Bar, who was officially reported killed in action on April 23. He had served with the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada. A brother, Fred, was accidentally killed in Newfoundland in October, 1943. Another brother, Gnr. C. M. MacLennan, is serving with the Canadian Army overseas, and is expected home in the near future.

“I want to hear from someone who was with my dear son at the last”

Pte MacLennan left little, very little. The inventory of his personal effects is astonishingly bare; there is but one listing – 2 rings. Most soldiers had a collection of souvenirs, personal items, letters, and photos, but not Buddy. Peter MacLennan received the life-altering telegram reporting his son’s death on 3 May 1945. The family also received letters from the unit, almost certainly from Padre Charlie Maclean and probably from others as well. Certainly Maclean always provided as

much information as he had, and he knew its importance to families. When Florence MacLennan wrote to the Director of Records on 12 June 1945, she was "informed that Lieut. Proulx was with him and I would like to know if you can give me Lieut Proulx['s] address or was he too killed[?] My reason," she wrote, "as you can understand, is I want to hear from someone who was with my dear son at the last."

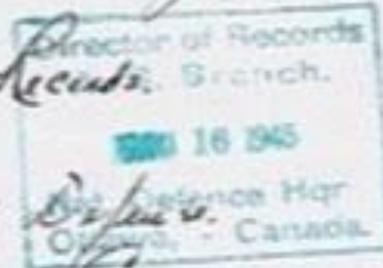
405-11-478
Whiting Pres. P.O.

Tydney, N.S.

3
June 12-1945

The Director of Records
A.C. Branch.

Dept. of National
Defense
Ottawa, Canada



Dear Sir

My No. J 55-109
Pte L/Sr Robinson MacLennan
of the 1st Regt and 1st Bn
The Buffs, was killed in
Germany on April 23rd and I
am informed that Lieut. Pealy
was with him and I would
like to know if you can give
me Lieut Pealy's address
or was he too killed?

My reason, as you can
understand, is I want to

news from someone who was
with my dear Pop at the
last.

Thanking You.

Yours very truly

Mrs. Florence MacLennan

Letter from Florence MacLennan, Sydney, N.S., to the Director of Records, 12 June
1945.

“Buddy died like a soldier”

Many grieving Argyll wives or parents wrote similar letters, anxious for further details. Florence MacLennan got her wish. Grover Proulx survived the war and he did write to the MacLennans. Son Geordie Proulx remembered:

He did tell me, though, that he wrote to his [Buddy’s] parents or mother after the war but not exactly when he did so. I remember asking him, when I was just a young teen, what he said in the letter. I remember him simply saying that [he] wrote that “Buddy died like a soldier” as at that time he had not fully described to me the circumstances of Buddy’s death ... This is based upon my distinct recollection of what my father told me over 50 years ago as a boy. I knew enough even then that this was the highest of praise and have never forgotten my father's words.

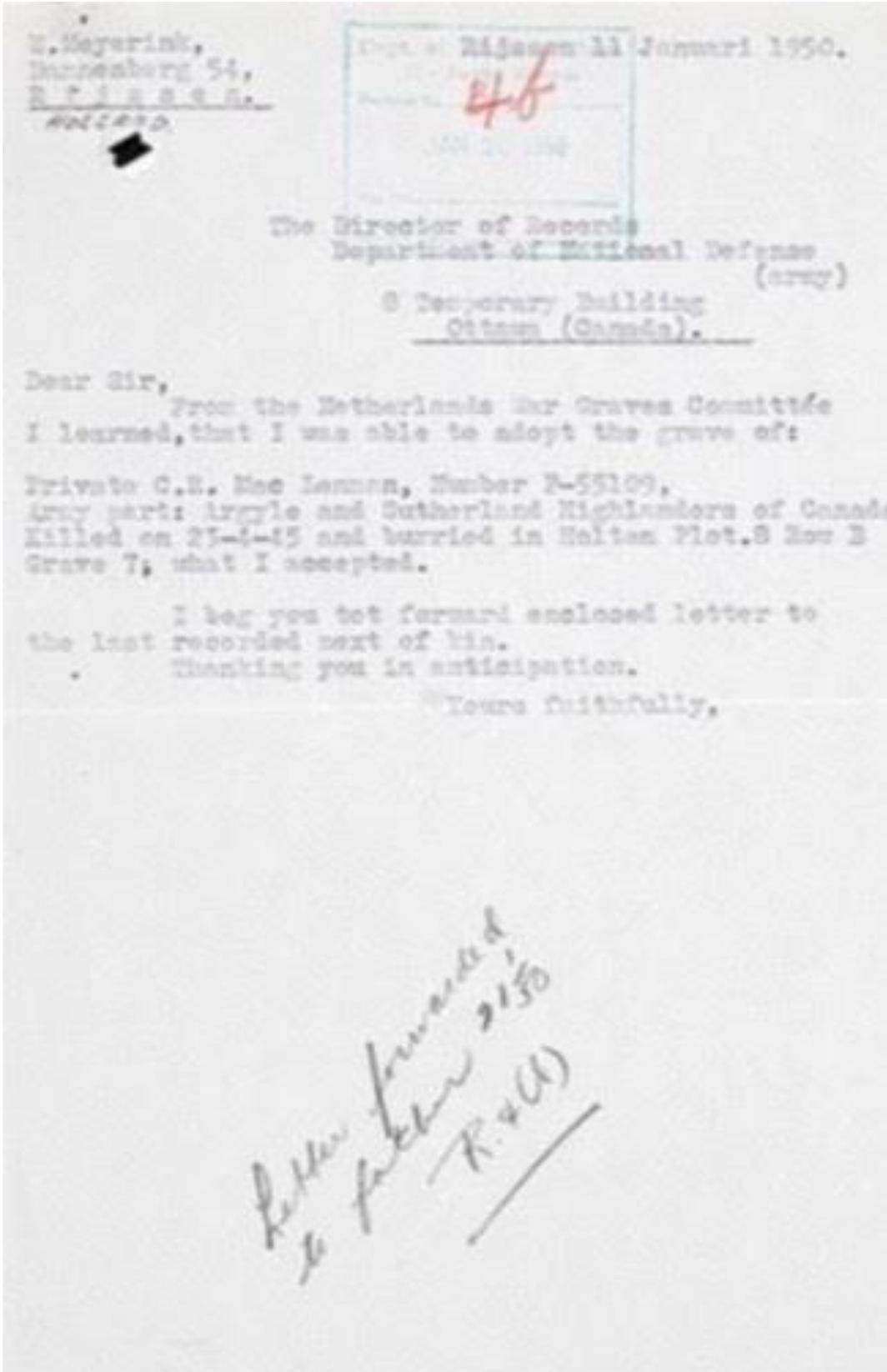


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MacLennan, Colin Robinson F55109
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‘Buddy’ was the son of Peter M. (World War I) and Florence (Robinson) MacLennan, Money Point/Baddeck. Private MacLennan served overseas in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Princess Louise’s), Royal Canadian Infantry Corps. He was killed in action on April 23, 1945, and is buried in Holten Canadian War Cemetery, Netherlands.

In a letter to the Paymaster General (19 December 1945), Florence inquired about the release of any moneys owing the estate. Her husband had been “released from his job as light keeper on account of ill health.” He had but a small pension and she used her sons’ assigned pay to cover his hospital bills. She had three sons: “two Made the supreme sacrifice and my third son [Calder Malcolm] is now at home with his wife and family.” Colin’s older brother, Frederick (1912-43), had died on duty in Newfoundland in October 1943.

“freedoms and benefits we enjoy today were paid for with the lives of countless thousands of the Buddy MacLennans of the world”



Letter written 11 January 1950 by E. Meyerink of Rijssen, Holland, regarding adoption of Pte MacLennan's grave.

In 1950, a Dutch family adopted Pte MacLennan's grave in Holten Canadian War Cemetery and tended to it; the Dutch do not forget Canadian sacrifice, Argyll sacrifice; neither did Geordie Proulx:

The words have stuck with me ever since. In the summer of 2016, I took my son, then 20, to Buddy's grave in Holten and told him everything I knew of how Buddy died. It was my way of teaching him that the freedoms and benefits we enjoy today were paid for with the lives of countless thousands of the Buddy MacLennans of the world. And he must never forget it.



Gravestone of Pte Colin Robinson MacLennan in Holten Canadian War Cemetery, Netherlands.

Between 21 and 23 April 1945, 8 Argylls were killed in action and 54 wounded.

“a history bought by blood”

– Capt Sam Chapman, C and D Coys

In memory of my father, Lt Grover C. Proulx, who was with Pte MacLennan when he died and never forgot him – 'he died like a soldier.'” – Geordie C. Proulx

Note: Pte MacLennan's poppy will be mounted in the virtual [Argyll Field of Remembrance](#) in the near future. The Argyll Regimental Foundation (ARF) commissioned Lorraine M. DeGroot to paint the Argyll Poppy (top) for the Field of Remembrance.

Robert L. Fraser
Regimental Historian