

Mary Paterson to be on Roll of Honour on the Cenotaph

Milton woman killed in France in Great War is finally recognized

BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

Mary Paterson was once a resident of Milton and there was a time when she lived here, when she would have walked down some of the streets that are familiar to us. This would have been the place where she experienced some of the joys and sorrows of her short life. But it wasn't the place where she would be buried. We know she was alive in the early 1900s and that she was the eldest daughter of Private and Mrs. John Paterson. But other than that there's very little information available on her.

Recently, local historian Jim Dills located a letter reprinted in a local paper that he shared with the Milton branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. The letter was written to

Mary's parents by H. H. Gwynne Vaughan, Chief Controller of Queen

Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps; British Expeditionary Force. It's a sad one, and we can only imagine how her parents would have felt reading this message. Mary was a member of the Auxiliary during the First World War, and she was killed on the morning of May 30, 1918 when an aerial torpedo hit her underground shelter in France. Based on the letter, we know she was considered a good worker who did "excellent work" and that she was well liked by others.

All we have is this letter about Mary, only about 400 words in length. It's hard though to be satisfied with just what's in the letter; we need more information. As Canadians, we should be conscious of how important it is to remember. Most of us are familiar with *In Flanders Fields* by Dr. John McCrae, the poem that memorialized the Great War. Its last lines are disturbing, but they are intended to carry a powerful message: "If ye break faith with us who die/We shall not sleep, though poppies grow/In Flanders Fields."

In his book titled *World War 1*, Simon Adams

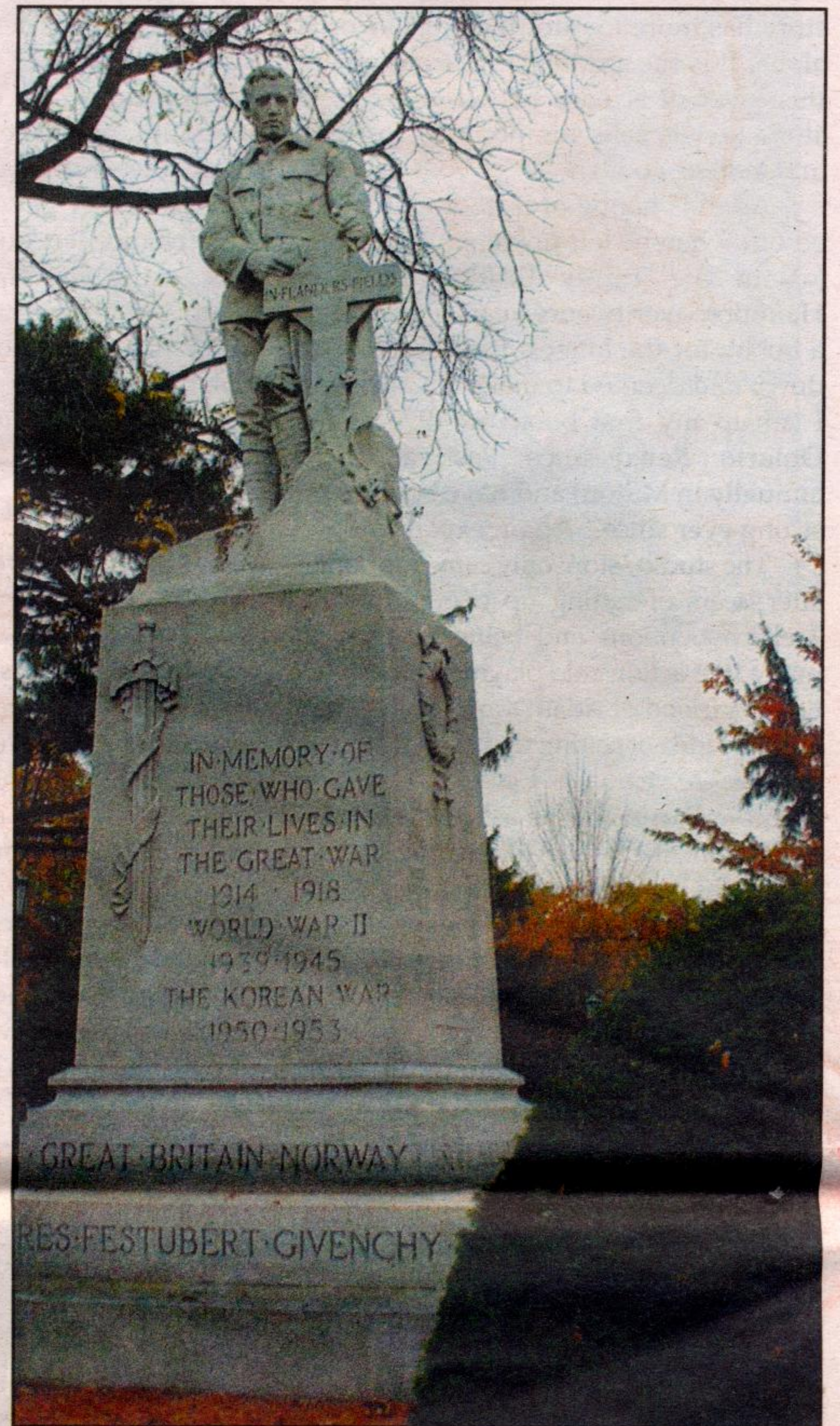
notes that many women enlisted in auxiliary armies so that men could fight on the front lines. Women in Queen Mary's Auxiliary Army, as indicated in a website found under regiments.org, provided "cooking and catering, storekeeping, clerical work, telephony and administration, printing, motor vehicle maintenance for the Army." We don't know what kind of a role Mary would have filled.

But we do know some things from the letter. We know that she died along with eight others on that day in May 1918. She was covered in sandbags on the day the torpedo hit and she was, in the words of Chief Controller Vaughan, "as safe as the skill and the care of the soldiers could make it." But something went terribly wrong.

An enemy airplane travelling overhead sent a torpedo down that hit her shelter directly, something that Chief Controller Vaughan said happened rarely. The letter goes on to state that she wouldn't have suffered and she was given a "soldier's funeral." Four of her comrades walked beside the wagon that carried the coffin draped in the Union Jack. She was buried, as many others were, in a grave "marked with the plain wooden cross."

This month Mary will also receive another honour. Members of the Royal Canadian Legion in Milton have requested that her name be engraved on the cenotaph at Victoria Park near Milton's Town Hall. Her name will be the first woman's on the cenotaph.

George Thornborrow, a Legion member who served during the Korean War, says it's about time a woman's name appeared on the cenotaph. "I feel they (women) have been overlooked. They got killed just the same as a man got killed. So why shouldn't they be recognized?"



Heroism of Canadian soldiers remembered in France

BY LEILA WILLS

June 6, 2004 was an emotional day for Georgetown resident Norman Douglas. The 60th anniversary of D-Day had inspired Mr. Douglas and his wife Mary-Lou to travel to France to be part of the ceremony honouring thousands of Canadian soldiers, including Mr. Douglas' father, who stormed Juno Beach and attacked Nazi forces on June 6, 1944.

Mr. Douglas' father Mel Douglas joined the Canadian army in 1942. Like many soldiers, he signed up voluntarily even though he was recently married with a young son. He was sent to England in 1943 and trained there for a year before allied forces attacked Nazi occupiers in France in the largest seaborne invasion in history.

The invasion of Normandy marked a turning point in World War II. Almost three million troops, including Canadian, American and British soldiers, crossed the English Channel from England to Normandy in occupied France. For most Canadian soldiers like Mel Douglas, D-Day was their first time in a war zone.

Mel Douglas survived, but his best friend Murray Kirby did not. Recounting a story he was told many times growing up, Mr. Douglas described how his father woke up the night before the invasion to find Murray Kirby shaving. When Mel Douglas asked him what he was doing, Murray replied, "Mel, you never know when you're going to meet your maker." Murray Kirby was killed by direct mortar fire the next morning before he even reached the shoreline of Juno Beach.

Mel Douglas returned to Canada in January 1946. Mr. Douglas said that his father rarely spoke about the war. "He never went back. A lot of the veterans did, but he didn't want anything to do with it." Mel Douglas died in 1988.

Mr. Douglas said he was overwhelmed the first time he stood on the beach where his father had stood 60 years ago. "You have a picture in your mind of what it was like...but actually being there and seeing how [the French people] honour the Canadians just blows you away."

Mr. Douglas and his wife visited the Juno Beach Centre to see the plaque bear-

ing his father's name. The centre was built to commemorate the contributions and sacrifices of Canadian soldiers. It showcases plaques donated by individuals and organizations in memorial of those who fought on D-Day, as well as a bronze memorial sculpture that was forged in Georgetown. Entitled *Remembrance and Renewal*, it was created by Canadian sculptor Colin Gibson.

Mr. Douglas said sixty years later, people in France and Holland remain grateful for the sacrifice Canadian soldiers made. "We ran into some people who said, 'We still can't understand why these young kids would give up everything that they had and come over here to help us.'"

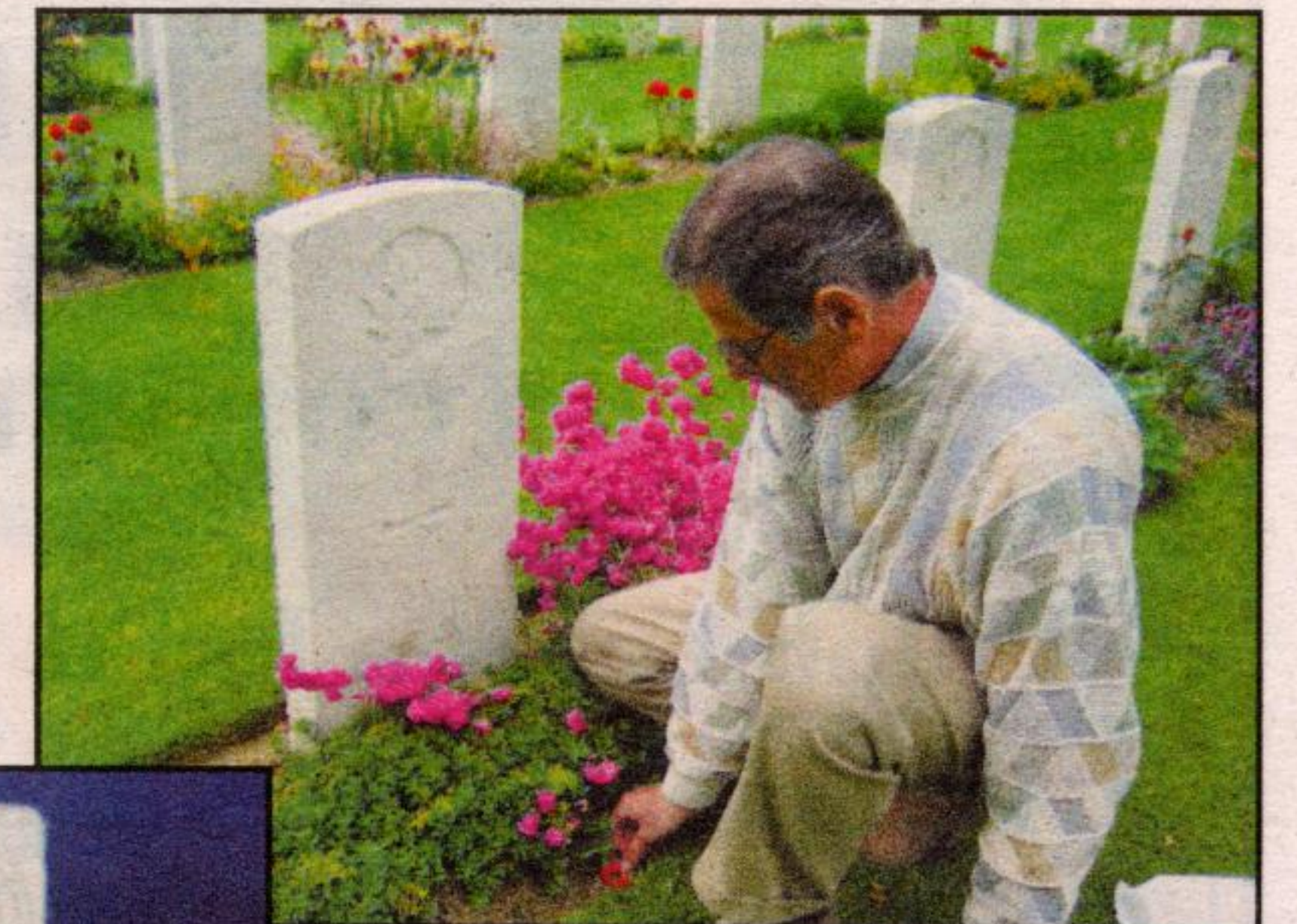


PHOTO BY LEILA WILLS

Norman Douglas places a poppy at Sergeant Murray Kirby's grave. French school children do yard work and plant fresh flowers regularly at the cemetery.



A plaque from the Municipality of Halton honouring Canadian soldiers.