



IN MEMORY OF

**Albert
Edmund
McCreery**



1918 - 1945

SOLDIER OF GOD: The last Canadian hero

BY ALLEN ABEL

Special to The Globe and Mail Toronto



SOMETIME in the afternoon of May 4, 1945, in the final hours of Canada's engagement in the European phase of the Second World War, a 27-year-old officer named Albert McCreery, son of an Irish Protestant dairy farmer from Ingersoll, Ont., left his regiment's base camp in northwestern Germany to try to locate wounded Canadian prisoners. The injured men, Captain McCreery told his comrades before he set off, were being abandoned by fleeing Nazi troops. He had to find them. Another officer went with him. They never came back.

No one knows how Capt. McCreery died. The Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, written in 1955, can cite only "circumstances which remain obscure." His body, run through with bullets, was found a few days later in the boggy terrain between the Dutch-German border and the North Sea. (The body of his fellow officer, Lieutenant N. A. Goldie, was not found.) By then, the fighting was, in theory, finished. So it is quite possible that Capt. McCreery was the last Canadian killed in combat in the European war.

He was a chaplain, and he was unarmed.

Albert E. McCreery, padre to the Canadian Grenadier Guards, held the rank of Honorary Captain. He was first buried under a small wooden cross in the Lutheran churchyard in the German hamlet of Wiefelstede west of Bremen. A photograph taken a few weeks later shows Albert's brother, Kenneth, desolate and bewildered, wringing his beret in his hands as he stands by the grave.

Kenneth McCreery had been stationed in England and never had to go into combat. He was celebrating V-E Day, he remembers, on the green in Aldershot, Hampshire, when someone told him his older brother had been reported missing in the war's final action. He can no longer remember where he was when he heard that Albert, a soldier of God, was dead.

The Nazi capitulation in Holland and northwestern Germany was announced by the British Broadcasting Corp. at 8:35 p.m. on May 4. It was to take effect at 8 a.m. the following day. Some Canadian units had seen no fighting for more than a week. But the Grenadier Guards, most of them men from the Montreal area, were still rolling north out of Oldenburg, along with the Lake Superior Scottish Regiment and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Hamilton, Ont., Casualties were being suffered until the hour the Germans quit.

At the front, the cessation of hostilities brought little immediate joy. In Battle Royal, the diarist of the Royal Regiment of Canada wrote that the announcement "seemed to leave everyone a little dazed." A high-school history teacher from Ingersoll, Jack Herbert, commanding a company of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, wrote to his wife, simply, "it was quite a relief." The chronicle of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada said: "Ticker-tape frenzy does not seize the souls of men who, for a long time, had lived close to death."

Attestation - Albert McCreery

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Unit 78 DISTRICT DEPOT (AF) Cdn Chaplain Services LIEUT
C.O. (RESCUE) R WING #5 Coy. Regimental Number 84

ACTIVE FORMATIONS AND UNITS OF THE CANADIAN ARMY

ATTESTATION PAPER

WSG
COMPLETED

29

84
LIEUT

- Surname: McCREERY
- Christian Names: Albert Edmund
- Present address: R.R. 2 Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada
- Date of birth: JANUARY 4th, 1918
- Place of birth: Canada Ontario Ingersoll
(Country) (County or Province) (Town or Township)
- Religion (state denomination): Baptist
- Trade or Calling: Student
- Married, Widower or Single: Single
- Name of next of kin: Mrs. Loretta McCREERY
- Relationship: Mother
- Address of next of kin: R.R. 2 Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada
- Do you belong to, or have you served in a Reserve Formation or Unit of The Canadian Army? Yes
C.O.T.C. Training seasons 1940-1941 1941 - 1942 B424299
(If Yes, Give Unit and Dates of Service)
- Have you served in (a) an Active Formation or Unit of The Canadian Army? No
(If Yes, Give Regimental No. and Unit)
- Have you served in (b) Any other Naval, Military, or Air Force? No
(If Yes, specify Unit and Period of Service)
- Did you serve during the Great War 1914-1918? No
(If Yes, specify Regimental No., Unit and Dates of Service)

Verified
DO 215
8 Sep 44
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DECLARATION TO BE MADE BY MAN ON ATTESTATION

I, Albert Edmund McCREERY, do solemnly declare that the above particulars are true, and I hereby engage to serve in any Active Formation or Unit of The Canadian Army so long as an emergency, i.e., war, invasion, riot or insurrection, real or apprehended, exists, and for the period of demobilization after said emergency ceases to exist, and in any event for a period of not less than one year, provided His Majesty should so require my services.
Witness: W. D. [Signature]
Date: 9th of September 1942. Al McCreery
(Signature of recruit)

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY MAN ON ATTESTATION

I, Albett Edmund McCREERY, do sincerely promise and swear (or solemnly declare) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty.
Al McCreery (Signature of Recruit)

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE, JUSTICE OF THE PEACE OR ATTESTING OFFICER

The Recruit above-named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answers to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided by law.
The above questions and answers were then read to the recruit in my presence.
I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as replied to, and the said recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me,
at Hamilton, Ontario this 9th day of September 1942.
78 DISTRICT DEPOT (AF) pyh.org. keit (Signature of Magistrate, Justice or Attesting Officer)
Captain, Recruiting Officer. (Officer or Rank and Unit or appointment)

N.B. ATTENTION IS DRAWN TO THE FACT THAT ANY PERSON MAKING A FALSE ANSWER TO ANY OF THE ABOVE QUESTIONS IS LIABLE TO A PENALTY OF SIX MONTHS' IMPRISONMENT

FINGERPRINTED

The Grenadier Guards, deep in German territory, were more nervous after the surrender than before it. One of them, a non-commissioned officer named Bruce de Cambra, recalls the anxiety: "There were refugees running around, 24 hours a day. Who were they? Friend or foe? Did they know there was a truce, or not? We heard small-arms fire all the time. We didn't get a chance to celebrate. We were never told to stand down. Our weapons were always loaded. We became a self-contained fortress."

On the last afternoon of combat, into this mad marriage of peace and war, Capt. McCreery and Lt. Goldie departed. Sergeant de Cambra remembers that the rest of the brigade was "a little bit skeptical" about the rescue mission. No one else seemed to know the whereabouts of the wounded Canadians. Outside the camp, all was confusion. But Capt. McCreery said he had "received information." He was needed. And so he went. On a concession road just north of Ingersoll, Kenneth McCreery hands me a photo of his brother. We're sitting in the living room of a brick house built on farmland that various McCreerys have owned and worked for more than 60 years, give or take the brief span when Ken and his wife Annie tried to make a go of the Aragon Restaurant downtown. The food-service industry, they soon learned, is not for everyone.

In the old curled photograph, Albert is a smooth-cheeked young man in uniform and beret, reclining in a sunny pasture somewhere in England, propped on his right arm, gazing at the camera through wire-rimmed spectacles. A fellow soldier lounges beside him. Perhaps the other man came home alive. Or perhaps he was another of the 11,336 Canadian Army soldiers who died in the campaign to liberate northwest Europe.



The living room is full with McCreerys this day. Kenneth is 73, a wry, gnomish fellow with an untended harvest of hair. He and Annie have invited his two sisters and their husbands to tell me what they remember of Albert. Major Jack Herbert, the former Ingersoll history teacher and high- school principal, has come as well, bringing some of the letters, on blue paper and lovingly folded, that he wrote from the front when he was rumbling through the boglands with the fighting Argylls.



McCreery home, Zorra

After 50 years, there is solemnity, not grief, and patience with a stranger's curiosity. Eva Baigent, the youngest of the four McCreery children of Albert's generation, recalls how her brother scored 100 per cent on his exams in Latin and Hebrew when he was studying at Toronto Bible College.

"Anybody gets a hundred in Latin," Ken McCreery pipes up, hearing this, "there's something wrong with him."

Albert McCreery went from Bible school to McMaster University in Hamilton, and it was there that he volunteered for the war in 1940. Although as a divinity student he had served churches in several Ontario communities, he did not join up to be a chaplain; rather, he became an officer in the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps. But when the padre of the Grenadier Guards was wounded, Albert agreed to be ordained a Baptist minister and to take his place. It may be that leaving the role of combatant cost him his life.

In other lands, the legend of an unarmed Protestant chaplain who became their last hero of a six-year war might be sung by every school child. But not in Canada.

The mysterious "errand of mercy" of Lt. Goldie and Capt. McCreery receives only three sentences in the Official History. In *A Nation Forged in Fire*, by Jack Granatstein and Desmond Morton, it is stated that "an officer and the padre of the Canadian Grenadier Guards left their lines to try to assist German wounded. Both were killed."

The newspaper *Canadian Baptist* reported, years later, that Albert McCreery "went forward to give aid to the crew of a tank that had been hit. It was there that he was shot by a sniper." The *History of the Canadian Grenadier Guards* by Colonel A. Fortescue Duguid says that he and Lt. Goldie went off "to bring in wounded Germans said to be somewhere on a side road." What actually happened, no one knows.

"His youth and the closeness to the end of the war seem to add to the poignancy of his passing," Major (Hon.) Walter T. Steven wrote in *In This Sign*, a history of the Protestant chaplaincy in the Canadian military. "But perhaps they tie him all the more closely to the many thousands who gave their lives over there."

There are no statues of a Last Canadian Hero. Today, only his relatives and neighbours remember. In the entrance hall of the First Baptist Church in Ingersoll, there are photographs of Capt. McCreery and of four other men from that handsome town who were killed in action. An inscription on a plaque of honour reads: We of this place let this of us be said That we who live are worthy of our dead These gave their lives that we who live May reap a richer harvest ere we fall asleep. I have been escorted to the church by Sam Hamilton, who married Margaret McCreery, Albert's other sister. He can't stay long: Sam drives a school bus and the children will soon be out of class and ready for the ride home.



In the silence of the vestibule, Sam points out his own name, and those of his two brothers James and Joseph, now dead, on a roster of Baptist Church members who volunteered for the war. So many names, from a single house of worship, from a town of a few thousand people.

Commerative
plaque at First
Baptist Church,
Ingersoll



Fifty years ago, Sam Hamilton was in the Canadian army, rumbling toward the Reich. He was driving a transport truck when one of the Germans' V-2 rockets exploded at the side of the road. It was nasty. But he survived.

Bruce de Cambra of the Grenadier Guards remembers sitting with Albert McCreery not long after the new padre joined the regiment. (It was an honoured unit, formed in Montreal in 1760 from the remnants of the defeated militia of Nouvelle France. The Guards fought with distinction at the Somme, Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele in the First World War.) Mr. de Cambra says Capt. McCreery was "a very quiet guy. He didn't profess to be any big hero. War bothered him. The brainless killing. For what? For what?"

The irony of the death of the Protestant chaplain has stayed with his comrade for 50 years.

Honorary
NO.....Rank Captain Name McCREERY, Albert Edmund.....
Unit Cdn. Chaplain Services Date of death 4th May, 1945.
Died at.....Germany.....
Cause Killed in action.....
Death occurred on strength of Forces H.Q. 338-45-588.....
N/K Mrs. Loretta McCreery, Relationship Mother.....
Address R. R. #2, Ingersoll, Ontario.....
Remains buried in Prat Wiefelstede 254182 P 1 R 1 G 3 Cemetery
CHK
Grave location.....

OVER ✓

Albert McCreery's war service record indicates his final resting place.

BURIAL REPORT TO N.K. JUL 8 1946
RETURN TO BUR. OF STAT. JUL 13 1945
ROYAL MESSAGE DESP'D. JUN 8 1945
CAN. MESSAGE DESP'D. MAY 29 1945
Temp BR sent to NK & Map

REBURIAL

Holten Canadian Military Cemetery,
Holten, Holland.

Grave 5, row B, plot 12.

HI & CR Form Despd. DEC 6-1946

Photographs

Despatched

DEC 17 1948

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HOLTEN CANADIAN WAR CEMETERY

Netherlands



"I often wondered about it," Mr. de Cambra says on the telephone from Montreal. "A man of God, out to do good, and this happens. You expect it within the fighting echelons - I mean, if his squad car went over a mine; if he was in a tank crew, or the advance guard. But a man of God who carried no weapons. Why? Of all people, why?"

"Maybe it sounds crazy," says Eva McCreery Baigent, a slim, white-haired woman, dressed in royal blue. "But I guess I didn't accept the idea that he was killed. Anytime I'd see anybody with a beret on, I thought it was him. I always thought he was going to appear. Somewhere. Sometime."

Twenty-five years ago, the McCreerys made a journey of remembrance to Holland. The chaplain's remains had been moved from the Wiefelstede churchyard to a Canadian cemetery on Dutch ground at a place called Holten, east of Apeldoorn. The family visited the grave and took snapshots that now are passed to me, in the living room in the farmhouse on the Ingersoll concession road. I study a picture of Eva in the Dutch cemetery.

"After seeing his grave and stone," she says, "I stopped having those thoughts that he might come home one day. I must have found peace there."

Albert's father died in 1940. His mother took part in the European trip, posing blankly by her son's headstone with Ken and Eva. She would live until 1986, finding no peace, wondering always what really had happened to her eldest boy.

It is a riddle not likely to be solved; a minor puzzle from the thick-bound annals of death. I ask Ken McCreery if he finds any solace or symbolism in the sacrifice of his brother in the dying hours of the war.

"Last to die or first to die," he says. "Somebody had to be." Allen Abel is a Toronto writer.

CAPT. ALBERT McCREERY KILLED IN ACTION

Word was received here on Tuesday that Hon. Capt. Albert McCreery had been killed in action on Friday May 4th, in Germany. He was the son of Mrs. Loretta McCreery and the late Samuel McCreery. He attended Public School and Ingersoll Collegiate Institute here and graduated from Toronto Bible School. He was pursuing his studies at McMaster University, Hamilton and joined the University Officers' Training Comps. He enlisted as a combatant officer three years ago and went overseas. The Chaplaincy Commission requested the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec to allow him to be ordained in England in order that he might join the chaplain services. He was previously reported as missing.

During his university course he held student pastorates at Burford and Niagara Falls.

Besides his mother he is survived by two sisters, Margaret at Ottawa and Eva at home, a brother, Kenneth overseas and his grandmother, Mrs. E. Edmunds, Ingersoll.

Source Citation: "SOLDIER OF GOD The last Canadian hero. The final Canadian casualty on European battlefields was very probably Albert E. McCreery of Ingersoll, Ont., a padre to the Canadian Grenadier Guards. Unarmed, he died in German territory as he looked for injured soldiers from his homeland. (FOCUS)." Globe & Mail (Toronto, Canada) (May 6, 1995)



Zorra Cenotaph



JOHN DOWNING
GEORGE SERVANT
ALBERT MCCRERY
THOMAS HUTCHESON
JACK HOLLINGSHEAD
ROBERT CREE

DR. C.M. JOHNSTON'S PROJECT

Discover McMaster's World War II Honour Roll

Albert Edmund McCreery was the second youngest of a family of four children born to Samuel and Loretta McCreery, residents of the cheese-making town of Ingersoll, Ontario. Like his siblings, Margaret, Eva, and Kenneth, he was raised by his mother to be a devout Baptist, presumably with the approval of his Irish-born father, an Anglican. Some time after Albert's arrival on 4 January 1918, the family moved to the nearby countryside when the father decided to go into farming. The mother and children, however, continued to worship at Ingersoll's First Baptist Church, the virtual focal point of their lives. A country boy, Albert attended the local version of the little red schoolhouse and regularly showed up at the vigorously conducted Sunday School at First Baptist. Later on, besides being gifted enough to sing in the church choir, he showed a maturity and a leadership among his peers that made him an obvious choice for the presidency of the Baptist Young People's Union. But admittedly it was not all church-going and church activities, important as these were to him and his family. The young and outgoing Albert had also indulged the summer and winter pastimes common to the youth of his generation, plenty of baseball and swimming in the summer and skating and hockey in the winter. As his sister Margaret recalled, he enjoyed a "normal boy's life" in that pleasantly rural western Ontario community.

After completing his primary education Albert proceeded to Ingersoll High School. He stayed only a year, however, before going out to work for the Hydro office in Kitchener where he "made out bills", doubtless providing some extra income for the family. But he kept his foot in the educational door by going to night school and completing his Middle School requirements in Math and History. In 1935, however, having saved up his money, he decided to resume full-time schooling, at least in Biblical studies. Reminiscent of fellow student, Stanley Gaudin [HR], whom he doubtless knew there, he left the work place to attend Toronto Bible College (TBC). He studied there for three years and graduated in 1938

with a creditable standing overall. His grades in English and Biblical History and Geography were barely average, however, perhaps a reflection of his thin high school education. Even so, having been out in the working world for several years he may have brought a refreshing perspective to his college experience. As part of his requirements at the school he served at various Ontario missions of the Baptist Home Mission Board (HMB), ranging as far afield as Niagara Falls, Haileybury, and Burford. From all accounts he performed his duties well.

It followed that one of Albert's college instructors, a McMaster graduate, could heartily recommend him to his alma mater as a worthy representative of the "fine new contingent of our students .." This was a far cry from the day when the TBC, concerned about the supposed liberalism of the University's theological curriculum, routinely discouraged its graduates from going there. In any case, he may have already steered himself in McMaster's direction with the prompting of a cousin, Rev. J. Wesley Bee, a theological graduate of the place. Albert could have attended McMaster in 1938 but decided instead to serve the HMB at their Eagle River Mission in northwestern Ontario and then enroll at Toronto's Harbord Collegiate to take the rest of his Middle School work. In the end, however, he did not write the examinations.

As a result, when Albert finally arrived at McMaster in September, 1939 - the fateful time World War II broke out -- he was admitted to the English Theology course but on a probationary basis. After completing the year's work satisfactorily his request was granted to switch to the Arts program so that he might take the General (preliminary) Year and a portion of the work for Year I. In part this was to make up for the shortfall in his high school requirements. Again, he satisfied his instructors but clearly the regimen absorbed the bulk of his time because he appears to have enjoyed little extracurricular activity aside from some debating and taking part in the activities of the McMaster Christian Union and the Chess Club. His sister Margaret recalled how she helped him out with his Greek.

After the grave Allied defeats in Europe in the summer of 1940 and Ottawa's subsequent mobilization of the country's manpower and resources, Albert, like most male students, was required to serve in McMaster's Canadian Officers' Training Corps (COTC). Clearly divinity

students like himself, unless they were "one hundred percent conscientious objectors" (COs), were not exempted from the regulations. Albert, who claimed no CO status, would probably have endorsed Chancellor Howard Whidden's blunt message that students in theology must "take their medicine like everybody else and learn to rub shoulders with students of all types". From all appearances the agreeable Albert had never had any difficulty "rubbing shoulders" with anyone and he turned out to be a committed cadet. His duties were carried out during the academic year, when drill and military lectures were the order of the day, and the periods of summer camp training at Niagara-on-the-Lake.

In the end, however, he chose not to take advantage of the military exemptions and deferments ordinarily granted undergraduates who maintained a satisfactory grade level. In other words, he was prepared to forego what the weekly *Silhouette* had called the "unique . privilege accorded to Canadian university students of being allowed to study uninterrupted throughout the year and at the same time accomplish part of the military training required under defence legislation .." Perhaps a deciding factor was the enlistment of his younger brother Kenneth for active service. In any case, in early September, 1942, in the midst of his studies, the "quiet, friendly theologian" known at the University as "Al", made the decision to enlist in the army. Up to that point he was still serving the HMB as well, having spent the summer at their Lorne Park mission.

At the time Albert enlisted the Hamilton area was still reeling from the grievous losses suffered by the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI) in the recent abortive raid on Dieppe. Elsewhere in that wartime world, to be sure, the news was mercifully better. The Americans had recovered from Pearl Harbor to defeat the Japanese decisively at Midway, the Russians were desperately aiming to turn the tables on the Germans at Stalingrad, and the British 8th Army was holding off Axis forces in Egypt and preparing an offensive of its own. These were heartening signs but as Albert and his classmates were constantly told much bitter fighting still remained before the tide would turn decisively in the Allies' favour and ultimate victory be assured.

In any event, Albert joined up at #2 District Depot in Toronto and was shortly assigned as Trooper McCreery to the Canadian Armoured Corps (CAC). In late September 1942 he was dispatched for basic training to the Canadian Armoured Fighting Vehicles School recently established at Camp Borden, the installation dating from the Great War. The former COTC cadet must have shown considerable promise because within a matter of weeks he was transferred to Borden's Officer Cadet School. There he successfully completed the course of training and on 13 February 1943 was judged qualified for a commission and accordingly promoted 2nd Lieutenant in the CAC. (A month later, after additional instruction, he was qualified to drive what was called a Class III Wheeled Vehicle). He continued to progress and was rewarded on 13 May with promotion to 1st Lieutenant. He had thus become a potential tank or mechanized unit commander.

A few days after clearing that hurdle Albert was re-posted to one of the CAC's Trained Soldier Regiments and then given an embarkation leave to say goodbye to family and friends. Early in June, 1943 he was formally transferred to the Canadian Army Overseas and shipped with his unit to the United Kingdom. On 18 June he arrived at his destination - after the usual and thankfully uneventful eight or nine-day voyage - and reported for duty. For the next several months he was engaged in learning the fine points of operating and driving a variety of vehicles, primarily the Canadian-designed Ram tank and the Sherman, the front line tank used by the Allies. He satisfactorily passed all the tests imposed. While stationed at Aldershot, he was befriended by local residents, notably the Walker family, who were impressed by his character and personality. Indeed, as later evidence showed - during his memorial service in England - he "won a large place in the hearts of the Aldershot people". It was at the Walker home that he was happily reunited with his brother-in-law and fellow serviceman, Samuel Hamilton, and together they enjoyed the family's Christmas hospitality.

Clearly Albert and Samuel were seen as a cut above the supposedly "roughneck" Canadians who sometimes made life difficult for the local population. On the other hand, as a veteran who was there observed, "Aldershot had lived off soldiers for a century and did so with cynical relish

which the soldiers repaid with anger and an occasional riot."

While Albert's tank training was nearing completion welcome circumstances intervened to change the course of his military service. Throughout his brief but busy army life he had invariably gained the confidence, respect, and liking of the men around him and had often offered sound counsel and advice to those in need who requested it. Once again his obvious decency and marked maturity had come into play. In effect, he had become at times a chaplain in all but name even while he was progressing steadily through the conventional military ranks and postings. Happily for him, there was a perceived need at this time for more official chaplains in the Armoured Corps and he seemed to be an obvious pick - a question of being in the right place at the right time. Certainly his superior officer believed so and strongly recommended him for the position while at home his former McMaster professors wrote on his behalf to the Baptist Chaplaincy Committee, the authorizing body.

These efforts produced the desired results. Though Albert still lacked technical credentials, on 30 March 1944 a special ordination was laid on for him, the necessary prerequisite for his chaplaincy appointment. It was arranged through the courtesy of British Baptists at Aldershot Tabernacle, in the heart of that military training town. To add frosting to Albert's cake, other padres and supportive soldiers from his own unit eagerly showed up for the ceremony. He was also pleased that H/Major Stuart Ivison, a McMaster graduate and Baptist minister now serving as Staff Chaplain, Assistant to the Principal Chaplain, was on hand to officiate. Also present was Rev. H.H. Bingham, Executive Secretary of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, who happened to be on a timely visit to the United Kingdom. H/Major R.F. Sneyd, another senior chaplain and a fellow Baptist from Toronto, also took part in the ceremony that paved the way for the next stage in Albert's military career.

Following his ordination, he was duly appointed H/Captain or Chaplain 4th Class on 17 May 1944. He served in a number of reinforcement units in the United Kingdom before being dispatched to France in September, some three months after D-Day and two years after his enlistment. In April, 1945, after serving with headquarters units, he fittingly became the padre of the 22nd Canadian Armoured Regiment, which formed part of

21 st Army Group in northwest Europe. The regiment, formerly the 1 st battalion of the Montreal-based Canadian Grenadier Guards, proudly wore the black beret identifying it as an armoured outfit. By the time Albert, a trained tank man himself, joined the regiment in Germany, it could, like so many others, grimly look back on the series of bloody battles in which it had participated, ranging from Normandy to the Rhine and the battle for the Hochwald.

While Albert presumably had his own personal way of discharging his chaplain's duties, he probably shared the essentials of what others experienced. As one chaplain described it:

"From the chaplains' view it's always the human story. They are the ones who can tell of the sweat and blood poured into [places like] Buron . Carpiquet . and Caen, for they with their units know just what it cost to take and hold [them]. To the chaplains these names conjure up vivid memories - as brave men fought and died and the noblest traits of men came forth .. "

"Bloody" Buron, Carpiquet, and Caen had been killing fields in the Battle of Normandy, which had raged all through the summer of 1944. A shaken front line chaplain who had served in those killing fields betrayed sentiments that may have been shared by many a colleague in the field. ". It is no use pretending", he wrote a friend,

"I am heartily sick of it all .. There is not much Glory, only sordid destruction. I look upon [this war] . as a very dirty job, which definitely must not recur. So many are the narrow escapes . that it has seemed a miracle has happened to save me . it is finally getting on my nerves. I am no longer the man [I was].".

"However", he gamely assured his correspondent, "I will get over it."

For the front line chaplain especially, it was the challenge of boosting morale at the most demoralizing times and giving spiritual comfort in a chaotic world that all but denied the spirit. It was also a matter of holding religious services whenever possible during infrequent lulls in the fighting, and, above all, of making one's hopefully reassuring presence known and

felt during the violence that brought death, grief, and destruction. In many cases it also meant tending the wounded and, if possible, bringing them to an aid station, and sometimes under fire. One chaplain used a jeep with stretcher racks for the purpose. "I spent all day going up and back", he reminisced about one occasion. ". everyone helped each other. Come on out and help me get this fellow in, I'd call. And a couple of riflemen would get up out of their cover and give me a hand .." Another chaplain recalled how he had tried to help a stricken tank crew "but once you get doing this kind of thing, there's no end to it . so my small rescue party found ourselves with more casualties than we could keep up with". Albert's last days may well have been spent engaged in such activities with the men of the 22 nd Armoured.

On the afternoon of 4 May 1945, while on an "errand of mercy" trying to bring severely wounded German soldiers to safety, he and another Canadian officer were killed - to quote an official account - "in circumstances which remain obscure". For some his fate was not obscure at all. One account asserts that he was "shot by a German sniper when he went . to the rescue of a young German soldier trapped in a blazing tank". In any event, Albert was one of the last Canadians to suffer this fate, a mere forty-eight hours away from the cease-fire that led to the end of hostilities in Europe. At his moving memorial service held in Aldershot, where he had been ordained only the year before, the mayor of the town and five Baptist "padres" were among those who attended and spoke to the occasion. Following the sermon, in a final tribute, the assembled chaplains sang "The McMaster Hymn". Albert was among nine Canadian chaplains who were killed in action or died as the result of wounds and accidents in World War II. Their names are inscribed in the chapel of the Royal Army Chaplain's Department at Bagshot Park, England, a Commonwealth memorial.

After the war McMaster University received an anonymous financial gift in Albert's name. It set up a bursary enabling theological students, as the Alumni News put it, "to get the training which [he] was not permitted to receive".

Albert Edmund McCreery is buried in Holten Canadian War Cemetery, Overijssel, Netherlands.

C.M. Johnston

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: Albert McCreery's sister, Margaret (McCreery) Hamilton, and her husband, Samuel Hamilton, provided valuable recollections, documentation, and photographs that made this entry possible. Ronald Arkwright, Mary Clark, James Cross, John Dorsey, Melissa Richer, and Mark Steinacher also aided the cause with leads, information or reminiscences.

SOURCES: National Archives of Canada: Wartime Personnel Records / Service Record of Chaplain 4 th Class Albert E. McCreery; Commonwealth War Graves Commission: Commemorative Information, Chaplain 4 th Class Albert E. McCreery; letter from H/Major John Forth to Florence Dorsey (undated), in John Dorsey's collection of Lieutenant Robert Dorsey's wartime correspondence and memorabilia (see biography of *Robert Edmund Dorsey*); Canadian Baptist Archives / McMaster Divinity College: McMaster University Student File 7814, Albert E. McCreery, Biographical file, Albert E. McCreery: Toronto Bible College transcript and correspondence, McMaster admissions application and registration documents, letter from A.J. Milligan to H.H. Bingham, 28 May 1945, letter from Richard E. Ruggle, Canadian Forces Chaplain School and Centre, 28 Mar.1995, photographs, and newspaper cuttings (including *Canadian Baptist* [A.E. McCreery obituary by H.H. Bingham] 15 June 1945), Baptist Chaplaincy Committee records; McMaster University Library / W. Ready Archives: *Marmor* 1940 , 51, 75, 1942 , 67, *Silhouette*, 1, 18 Oct. 1940, *McMaster Alumni News* , 18 Oct. 1945; Charles M. Johnston, *McMaster University, II: The Early Years in Hamilton, 1930-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 89-91; Walter T. Steven, *In This Sign* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1948), 140, 162, 163, 176, 179; J. Allan Snowie, *Bloody Buron: The Battle of Buron, Normandy - 08*

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