

Behind each soldier in the cemetery there is a story. They are our brothers, fathers and proud Canadian sons. Villanova has not forgotten and considers these boys as their own sons and are working to ensure they will never be forgotten. They rest in a landscape similar to the Canadian prairies where many were from. Respected and loved in their Home away from Home.

Donna Maxwell



VILLANOVA

1944-1945



In Northern Italy in the Province of Ravenna, in the Commune of Bagnacavallo lies the Villanova Canadian War Cemetery. It was selected as a cemetery by the 5th Canadian Armoured Division which is heavily represented there. Most of the Canadian war dead belong to one of four regiments. The Lanark and Renfrew Scottish, the 4th Princess Louise Dragoon Guards, the Perth Regiment and the Irish Regiment of Canada. The majority of these four regiments were killed during the Lamone River Crossing in December 1944.

It was in the vicinity of Villanova that troops of this Division succeeded in establishing a bridgehead over the Lamone River December 10-11th, 1944. West of the bridgehead was heavy fighting in the following days when attempts were made to cross the three canals that run from Faenza to the sea. From December 12-15th the Lanark and Renfrew Scottish and the 4th Princess Louise Dragoon Guards suffered heavily in these attempts. 85 of the burials in the cemetery come from these two regiments. Others include those killed in the advance toward the final line held by the Canadians on the River Senio before they left Italy in February 1945.

The Villanova Canadian War Cemetery contains 212 Commonwealth burials of WW2, 206 Canadians, one an unknown soldier. The other 6 members of the British Army.



In the Village of Villanova lives Rosalia Fantoni. As a small child she lived in fear and hunger as war raged on around her. Her father and uncle (partisans) were hung by the SS in front of their home just two weeks before the Canadians liberated Villanova. Villanova was liberated December 11, 1944 by the Cape Breton Highlanders. For many years Rosalia remembered their sacrifice and wanted to know all she could about “Canadians”. She read books, travelled to Canada in her dreams remembering the kindness and peace brought to her by these men. She wanted to know about them to “understand the generosity that drove their actions.” She has written a book called Casa lontano da casa (Home away from Home). It is a collection of stories, poems, some military history and all the Canadian war dead resting in Villanova are listed in the back of the book. She feels so very strongly that these men be not forgotten.

An excerpt from Rosalia’s book is as follows:

“For many soldiers, time stopped on the soil of Romagna, in the town of Villanova on the River Senio. Their homes were far away in Canada, where the rays of the moon lay gently on the faces of children falling asleep in a young and healthy fatigue. Their “home away from home” was in the

war-torn country of Italy, in the towns of Villanova and Bagnacavallo. Here, a place where fear kept people indoors, holding their breath while the distant noise of bombs loomed everywhere. By night, only the voice of the fountains sounded through the streets of towns frightened into submission by the spectre of death, where only the innocent victims of unannounced aerial bombardments remained, their bodies strewn amid shards of glass and rubble. The liberators, caked in mud and dust, made their way through villages of destroyed houses, schools full of evacuees and refugees, unusable railways; and in the background, the constant rumble of bombs, the grenades that wrought havoc on so much human life, artillery fire that made the walls shake and the air tremble.

The memory of these days survives in its telling; and suffering, in its telling is like a great thaw - the thaw that turned the snow of Auschwitz to tears.

It is vitally important that we keep these memories alive!”

Every December 11th a ceremony is held at the Cemetery and each grave glows with a small candle.

