

4 May 2016 - 4 May 1945

There are very few present today that experiences the second world war. However, we experience the shock of war daily through the television and other media.

War breaks a country and for its citizen; under pressure, no freedom, or wounded or dead or escaping to a safe place.

We can hardly imagine that. But 70 years ago the situation we see daily on the television played out here.

Today, the 4th of May, we have come together at the Canadian cemetery to remember the soldiers that saved us from the Nazi regime and in doing so gave their life and to reflect on our own freedom and democracy. I would like to illustrate the senselessness of war and the sacrifice of so many lives by telling you the story of Romeo Ciccone. He died on the 4th of May 1945, at the same time as the allied forces occupied all of Germany. Hitler committed suicide, and despite the horrible conditions of their army, the Nazi leaders pushed their soldiers to the front lines in order to provide resistance. These soldiers were specifically older, barely trained civilians and young boys of 15 or 16 that had no choice but to fight or be killed by the Nazi's.

On the 4th of May, exactly 71 years ago, Romeo Ciccone found himself with his regiment in the neighbourhood of Bad Zwischenahn, a well-known German spa. Romeo had been in Europe for about a year at this point. He was present when the southern part of the Netherlands was freed. He survived heavy fighting in Germany's Reichswald during the Rhine offensive. He began entering Germany again via the Achterhoek and Twente at the beginning of April. Ciccone's regiment spent three weeks making their advance to the North in appalling conditions and with large losses of fellow soldiers. But the Nazi's are almost defeated and everyone feels that the war will quickly be over and the chances of seeing their families back in Canada is close by.

Romeo's parents had already passed away, and as his last name would imply, he was of Italian heritage. His parents immigrated to Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century, met in Vancouver, and married in 1913, and became shopkeepers. In 1918, Romeo became their third child. However, seven months after he was born, his mother contracted the Spanish flu and died shortly thereafter. It was an extraordinarily difficult time for Romeo's father, with two small children and a baby. Two years later Domenio Ciccone married another woman of Italian heritage, Anna Coradi.

Romeo grew up in a large family, as four other children followed him. He left school early, at 15, in order to work at the sawmill in Vancouver. He worked there until he joined the army in October 1941. Romeo's father died of a heart attack in 1940, just prior to the beginning of the war and Romeo's deployment that eventually brought him into the deep swamps of northern Germany on the 4th of May, 1945.

This morning, Romeo and his friend Ubald Laneville, got a reconnaissance mission and thereby run into a German ambush, with fatal results for them both.

That same evening, at 20:30, a message that the Germans in the Netherlands and western Germany had surrendered. But this information was not yet known by all, resulting in the fatal confrontation.

A total ceasefire was issued the following morning. The Nazi's surrendered. V-E day was declared three days later, Victory in Europe.

Europe was free of the Nazi regime and there was a relieved festive mood in Canada; the war is over and the sons, brothers and loved ones would be coming home soon.

On the 10th of May, Anna Coradi received a telegram telling her the horrible news of the death of Romeo.

You can imagine how the news of the senseless death of Romeo hit the Ciccone family, a family that had been planning the festive return of their son and brother.

Thank you for your attention. You can become further acquainted with the detailed story of Romeo Ciccone at the Information Centre and you will find Romeo grave in plot.12 row: B stone: 10.