

## Chapter Twelve

### Back in Canada

I had my travelling papers ordering me to be in Gourock, Scotland for July 7th 1945, to return to Canada, but I never got there until the 8th. The ship "Ile de France" was in the harbour ready to leave. They were very displeased with me as I was late and they had all boarded, ready to leave. I figured they would leave me behind, which wouldn't have bothered me. But no, they had a little boat and took me out to the ship, and we were on our way back to Canada.

When I came over to England, I travelled on the "Queen Mary," which was fairly new. The "Ile de France" was not. We went over in five days, but it took us almost eight days to get back. The food was a lot better, but maybe I was conditioned to a different food selection than I was two years before when I came over. We landed in Halifax and were put on trains leaving for Vancouver. This was another six days of travelling, but the train service across Canada was great! We travelled first class as most of us were aircrew as well as ex-POW and we were treated just

## "THE LONG RETURN"

tremendously. I think the cooks were very pleased because we ate everything they gave us.

I had a great welcome coming home but it is never as good coming home as one dreams of. When one is away from home, one sort of exaggerates the good things and forgets the bad things. You expect everything to be the same as when you left. I had been away four years and things had changed a lot. The fellows I knew were moved or back east and a lot were married with different groups of friends.

I was really surprised to see my little sister Nancy. When I had left home four years ago she was a little ten years old kid. Now she was 14 year old, very cute and grown up. There was a boy next door called Walter and she was kind of sweet on him. If we were outside and he came out of his house I would sing very loud "Walter, Walter, lead me to the altar." It would embarrass her very much. After she raised five children, had a divorces and forty five years later Walter and her got married and are living very happily.

I had been used to a very active life, so I wasn't very good at just sitting around. I was out of the habit of telling my mother where I was going. Ginger was still in England and I didn't know when she would be able to come over. My mother had a bit of a problem understanding. I would say I was going to town and she would say, "When will you be back?", I'd say; "I don't know." I enjoyed drinking and I liked to party and didn't know who I was going to run into.

In the first part of August I had a very sad letter from Dicky. Rakers had been killed in a car accident just three months after the end of the war. He had

## Back in Canada

collided with a Canadian Army vehicle. It was almost unbelievable.

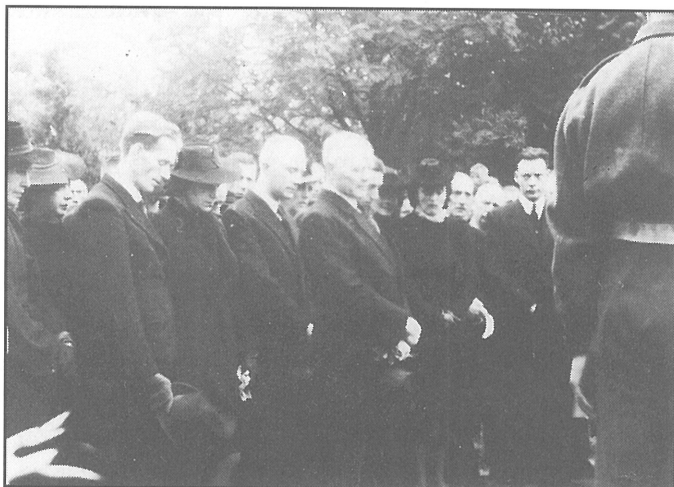


*Fig 12a Roger at Rakers' funeral*



*Fig.12b 21 Gun Salute at Rakers' funeral*

## "THE LONG RETURN"



*Fig.12c The Mayor at Rakers' funeral*

Here was a man who had been fighting in the Underground for five years, taking so many risks in life and death of situations, only to die meaningless in a automobile accident. So I never saw him again. Roger Schjelderup was in occupied Holland at that time, which was a help to Dicky. Rakers was given full recognition with a 21 gun salute. Roger was a Captain then and represented the Canadian Army at the funeral. He spoke over the grave. The Lord Mayor, the Underground Commander, the High Officer in the Dutch Police, Slim and many other friends also said their piece.

What a shame, after all he had done for Holland, and the Dutch people, also Canadians like myself, Roger and many others! Not to forget the 195 Jewish people he had helped feed and hide. The risk to his

## Back in Canada

family was so great, and so few people understand what people like Rakers have done.

On Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup> 1945, after my forty-five day leave was up, I reported to Jericho RCAF Station and started to get my discharge. By September 11th all the medical and paper work was completed. After four years less fifteen days in the service, I received a medical discharge as I had a few problems. My feet were in bad shape from being on the ice in bare feet the night I was captured on January second and my nerves were very bad.

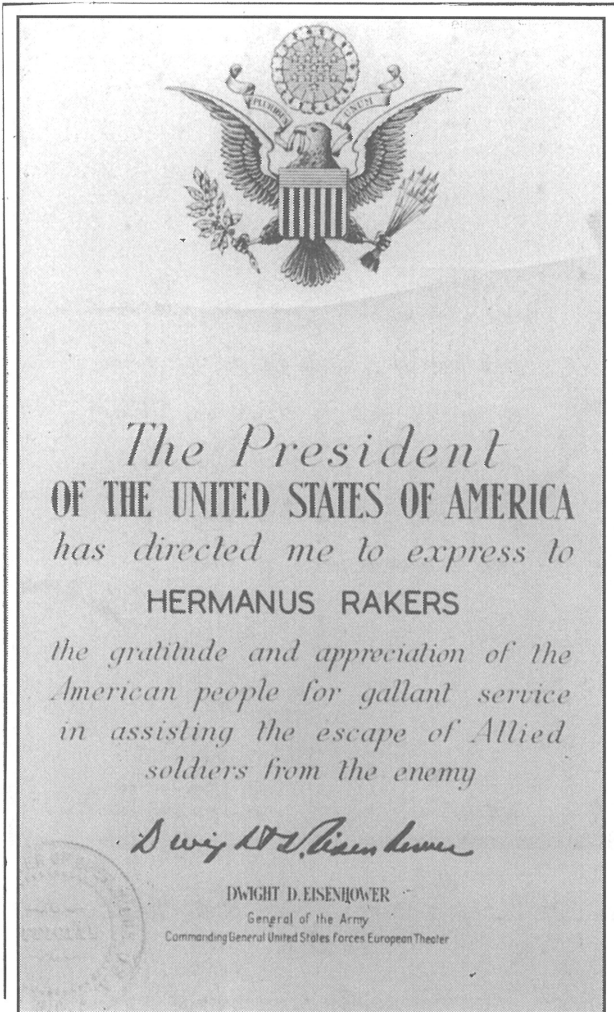
For bad nerves they treated you as follows. You laid down on a bed and talked about things that had happened to you, and they tried to get you to the point that bothered you the most and then gave you a big shot of electricity. This was called "shock treatment", which wasn't very nice and I don't think it helped. There were a lot of discussions at that time as to whether it was good or not.

They tried many experimental methods and they had lots of guinea pigs to try them on. One fellow was nick-named "Blackie" because he used to black out all the time. He would just go out like a light for a few hours. Another of the guys wouldn't go to sleep without a big baseball bat next to him. We would wait until he went to sleep and then take it from him. My shoulder was still giving me problems from the crash. In the different camps I was in I had spent a lot of time sleeping on bare, cold concrete floors and so had a lot of aches and pains in my joints.

My nerves hadn't been too bad but when a couple of orderlies started to give me a shot in the arm when

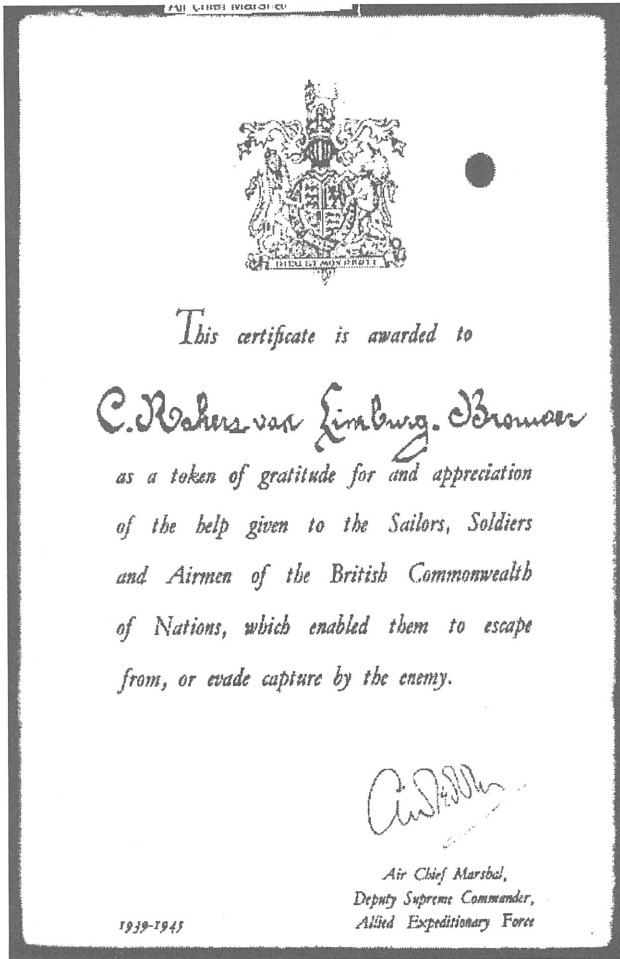
**"THE LONG RETURN"**

I was getting my discharge a lot of things started to come back to me.



**Fig. 12d Rakers' certificate from  
President Eisenhower**

Back in Canada



**Fig. 12e Dicky's Certificate from the Air chief  
Marshal**

I didn't want the needle, but two of them held my arm and gave it to me anyway. I started to shake. That started a reaction and my nerves began to give me big problems. They called it a delayed nervous

## “THE LONG RETURN”

breakdown. At times, I would start to shake, couldn't hold a glass to my lips, and even had problems eating. Then another little problem came up. Before I was shot down, I owed the Sergeant's mess "Four shillings and six pence". That is about one dollar and six cents. This bill had stayed in my file all this time. I didn't think I should pay for this. Surely when one is shot down and away for a whole year they could cancel this tiny amount. Maybe it was the way they approached me with it, but I told them they could go to hell. They said, "If you don't pay it, it will hold up your discharge." That was the least of my worries. I told them that I still wouldn't pay it and I got my discharge anyway.

I spent the next few months in Shaughnessy Hospital (The Canadian military hospital) trying to get my nerves settled down. There was a bunch of us in the same shape with a lot of different psychiatrists. I was assigned to Dr Hutton who I thought was great! One day a fellow took off in his pyjamas and with only a blanket around him headed to town. We chased after him, down Oak Street, and caught him just as he was getting on a bus. The ward we were in was called the "nutty ward" and I guess they had good reason to call it that. We were all a little nutty at that time. I always figured I wasn't that bad, (it was just the other fellows,) but sometimes I wonder.

Ginger came to Canada and we were settling down when I had another bad period. I went back into the hospital again for another month, and slowly everything got better.



## Back in Canada

In the early 1950s, when I was in Toronto, I met Shelah and Mr. Heitinga. They had immigrated to Canada. Mr. Heitinga wasn't feeling very well. He never got over his time in prison and how the Dutch people had treated him after the war. A couple of years later his wife died and I lost track of Shelah. That was too bad as I like to keep in touch with people.

In 1952 I got a letter from Frits, the fellow who had picked me up on the side of the road the night I was shot down. He sent it to the family of RE. Porter as he thought I had been killed the night of Jan. 2<sup>nd</sup>. It was amazing how I ever got this letter. My family had moved from this address seven years before. The postman mentioned this strange letter to my grandmother, across the street. My grandmother said, "That's my grandson", so I was very lucky to get it. I don't think I would have a chance in hell of ever getting it delivered today. Things have changed. Frits sent some things I had left with him when I first got to Holland, including the silk escape map of Holland, as well as other articles which were part of my escape kit, plus a few personal things. In 1955 Frits came over to Canada on Dutch immigration business, so we had a couple of days to reminisce. I was building a house at the time and working in the basement. He called out in Dutch, "I am English. Can you hide me." It made me have goose pimples all over me again.

It was a great day to remember. What a good talk we had. I found out what had happened to all the different people I had met but never heard from.

## "THE LONG RETURN"

In 1958 Ginger, my son Les, my daughter Shelley and I went to Holland for a visit. Unbelievable memories! We met Klaas and Ans Middelkoop who kept me for a couple of weeks in their house in 1944. The apartment above the bank was still their home. Les was thirteen years old and Shelley was nine, their oldest son Kees was a little older than Les, and their other two daughters Edith and Jacqueline were about the same age as Shelley. While we were talking inside the house the children were playing outside. Klaas and Ans' children couldn't speak English and ours couldn't speak Dutch, but they played together all afternoon. Dicky is living in Zutphen now, and her two sons, Hans and Theo have grown up. They were both away working so I didn't see them at all, but we met a lot of other people I had known. We went with Dicky to see the house I had lived in, in Groningen, and my hiding place was still there. The people living in the house didn't even know about it and hadn't known anything about the history of the house during the war. Frits sent my mother a letter with a few things I left in the attic

R.G. van der Haar

3.VI. '52

Steven van der Hagenlaan 2,  
Amersfoort - Holland.

Family R.E. Porter

3406 Imperial Street

New Westminster, Vancouver B.C. CANADA

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Porter,

Enclosed I send you some objects of your son Sergeant Porter, whom I met in Holland during the last war. I found these things in a garret cabinet, in which I after the war put away several souvenirs from

## Back in Canada

the last time of war and which I have no more seen into since that time. When my wife cleared away this case recently, she met among other things these objects.

I do not know if you have ever heard something about your son and for that reason I shall write you what I know about him.

One rainy morning I think it was about May-June '44 - I rode on my bicycle from Zeist to Driebergen (two villages in the province of Utrecht) when suddenly there came a person out of the bushes at the edge of the wood, who beckoned me to stop. When I complied with this request, he showed me a little yellow book, in which were found some Dutch sentences, among others things the question: Can you hide me ? ( In Dutch: Kunt U mej verbergen?)

I shall never forget the manner, in which your son pronounced this little Dutch sentence. At once I understood that he was a flyer, who had been dropped in the last night, the more as in this night there had been an air fight above these villages. Because there was a great deal of treason during the years of occupation, I asked him in broken English: Show me other things, so that I am convinced you are indeed an Englishman. Then it was evident that he was a Canadian. I put him on the back of my bicycle and we rode to Driebergen ( Three-mountains) where I had some friends, who took further care of him. I believe that one of them, Mr. K. van Middelkoop, wrote to you.

Some days later I had been arrested by the Germans and I was put in prison for an other affair. After three months I was set free and after that I still met your son occasionally at Groenekan ( municipality Maartensdijk) at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Rakers. Because I was removed I lost sight of him. A long time after the war, I heard that your son presumably was taken prisoner by the Germans and had perished. I think, that Mr. Middelkoop gave you further information about this event.

During the war I met very many airmen and other pilots in hiding, so that I cannot remember your son very well. The only thing I remember was that he told me at our first meeting, that he first wanted to stop

## "THE LONG RETURN"

some girls. He presumed that they were schoolgirls, because they all wore a black cap with an orange band. Because he was by military orders only allowed to accost a single person, he refrained from doing so. That was very fortunate, for these children were of the "jeugdstorm", a youth organization in our country, which was on friendly terms with the Germans. These girls would have certainly given up your son to the Germans or have warned the police.

I suppose that you will appreciate the possession of these simple objects. It is a last souvenir of your son and of the country, where your son offered his life for the sake of liberty. We owe great thanks to your nation and in it to your son for the important contribution to the rescue and liberation from the German army and occupation, and we pay respectful homage to those, who offered their lives for this sake.

I hope that you will be so kind as to write me if these things .

With kind regards,  
Yours

respectfully,

*R.G. van der Haar*

**Fig.12f Letter from Frits, the man who first picked me up. He sent this letter six years after the war ended**

We visited the cemetery where my crew were buried, and spent a while there just thinking back to a different time and how easily it could have been me buried there. After spending seven months with (Mamma) Dicky, in Holland in 1944, and writing back and forth for twenty-five years, she came over to Canada for a visit. We re-lived many days, had a great holiday and it gave me a chance to pay back a little to one great lady! Over the years Dicky and I have kept in contact. Dicky came over to Canada

## Back in Canada

four times and I went back to Holland five or six times. Each time I was over I would meet someone else I had met in 1944.



*Fig.12g Roger before he died on  
September 29th 1972*

"THE LONG RETURN"



*Fig.12h I married France Clémence  
St-Amand on July 5th 1992. This picture was  
taken on our wedding day. I call her "Fran"*