



John Denison Jackson

Too young to die

1922 – 1944

Tim Martin

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Forward

As a member of the Rusholme branch of the Denison family, I have always been interested in the role the Denisons and Kirkpatricks played in early Canadian history. A focal point for the family history is St. John's Cemetery on the Humber located in Weston, Ontario.

Canada had earned its rightful place on the world's stage with the tremendous contribution and sacrifices in the Great War of 1914-1918. Despite having experienced significant war-time losses, the great depression and growth of non-British immigration, ties to Britain and the empire were still very strong and our family was a leading proponent of service to the mother country in its time of need in WWII.

The following story is about a very young man born into a prominent Toronto family.

In 1921, Mr. Gilbert Jackson married Marjorie Lillian Kirkpatrick of Toronto and they had two children, John Denison and Joan Mary. Marjorie Jackson died in the spring of 1927 when the children were still young. Mr. Jackson married Maria Elizabeth (Liesel) Ewringmann, the children's governess in 1932 and during the Second World War they adopted a young girl named Mary whose parents were lost at sea.

Lieutenant John Denison Jackson appears to have been a lost soul, was not married and had no children. Like many others at the time, he got caught up with war-fever, enlisted and subsequently died in France shortly after the Normandy invasion of June 6th, 1944.

He is buried at the Canadian cemetery of Bernieres-sur-mer along with over 2000 other soldiers killed in the early days of the Normandy invasion and campaign. He is memorialized at St. John's Cemetery on the Humber in Weston, Ontario.

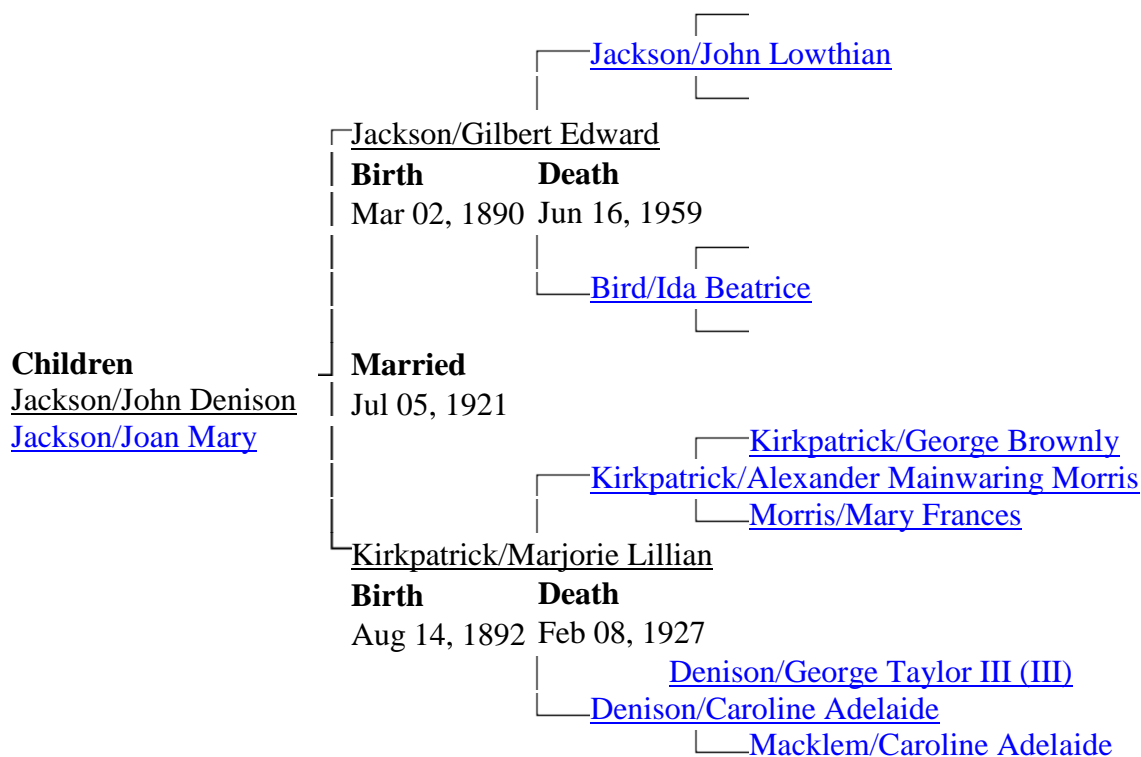
Although there are very few records about his personal life and short service I hope that this account will prove interesting. I cannot completely vouch for absolute accuracy of certain aspects of this story due to a lack of research material, fading memories and the passage of time.

After reading this story, I would encourage you to reflect on his life and times and proudly share it with children and grand-children

Tim Martin

About John Denison Jackson

Born on July 8th, 1922, John Denison Jackson was the son of Gilbert Edward Jackson and Marjorie Lillian Kirkpatrick. She was the granddaughter of George Taylor Denison III, one-time police magistrate of the city of Toronto. The Denisons and Kirkpatricks were prominent families in Toronto and many are buried in St John's Cemetery on the Humber in Weston – an early village, now part of Toronto.



As I was growing up, I often heard my father (John Hamilton Martin) talk about his first cousin and boyhood friend “JayJay”. I knew he was killed in World War II and had even seen a snippet of film dated 1927 where he could be seen running around with my father at the wedding of his uncle George Denison Kirkpatrick (who had previously served in WWI as a fighter pilot). Both were little boys at the time full of energy and mischief.

Growing up, JayJay first attended Brown Public School and then moved on to attend the preparatory school of Upper Canada College (UCC). Tragedy struck with the suicide death of his mother in 1927 when he was just shy of five years old.



The photo to the left was taken in 1935. JayJay is on the right beside his sister Joan while vacationing on Heydon Island on Lake Muskoka.

Later in 1935 he and his family moved to England where he continued his studies at Haileybury College in Hertfordshire. Before long he returned to Canada and attended Trinity College School in Port Hope, Ontario. It is unclear when he went back to England but he was in London during the Blitz of 1940.

He returned to Canada in the fall of 1940 and enrolled in the Faculty of Arts, University of Toronto. The death of his mother and having a renowned economist as a father who travelled often and later remarried possibly contributed to a reputation of recklessness. For example, he once walked around on the rooftop parapet at the Park Plaza hotel in Toronto.

JayJay was keenly interested in soccer, cartooning and horse racing. He was underweight and aspired to be a jockey often spending time at the racetrack.

When he died his father was concerned that it might have been due to carelessness, so much so that after the war Gilbert went over to England and talked to as many of his fellow soldiers as he could find, and came back saying that JayJay had done nothing rash.

JayJay and the War

Wanting to get into the action like many others, he enlisted in the Queen's Own Rifles (QOR) on January 27, 1942 and was later commissioned as a second Lieutenant. He then went overseas back to England in late 1943 and was promoted to a full Lieutenant.

He landed in France on June 6th, 1944 at Juno Beach with the 3rd Canadian infantry division as part of the largest invasion in history. Over 10,000 Canadian sailors and 15,000 infantry troops took part with approximately 1,074 deaths on D-Day alone.

Taking Juno was the responsibility of the Canadian Army, with sea transport, mine sweeping, and a naval bombardment force provided by the Royal Canadian Navy and the British Royal Navy as well as elements from the Free French, Norwegian, and other Allied navies.

The objectives of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division on D-Day were to proceed inland, cut the Caen-Bayeux road, seize the Carpiquet airport west of Caen, and form a link between the two British beaches on either flank (Sword and Gold).

The Queen's Own Rifles was an important element of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. JayJay survived the dangerous landing only to meet his fate a month later.



To this day, Canadian travellers and history buffs seek out the Juno centre and the nearby beach itself. I had the opportunity to visit the beach and collected a sample of the beach sand. The beach itself is quiet and bears few signs of the momentous events of 1944. One exception is the famous house on the beach which sustained considerable damage in the pre-dawn bombardment by allied naval units.

The pictures below depict the shell pocked house on the day of the invasion and the restored house as it stands today.



1944



Present Day

For the next few weeks after D-Day, the Canadian forces faced fierce opposition from the German army and specifically the SS 12th Panzer division. More about the crimes committed by this German division later!



On the 4th of July the 3rd Canadian division was in position to attack the Germans defending the Carpiquet airport outside Caen. The local village was captured but the battle for the airport see-sawed back and forth. Caen itself was finally attacked on July 8th and the airport liberated on July 9th.

Records show that JayJay died in action there on the 9th, one day after his 22nd birthday!

As so often happens in the heat of battle, JayJay and other fallen soldiers were buried in makeshift cemeteries close to the battle-sites. Later on April 20th, 1945 his remains were exhumed and moved to a more permanent site at Bernieres-Sur-Mer, Calvados, France as part of an allied program to concentrate burials in fewer but larger sites in order to ensure they were memorialized correctly and could be maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in perpetuity.

Today, his head-stone made of limestone from Arras, France can be found at Bernieres-Sur-Mer cemetery – Section X, Row H, Stone 14. Note the Canadian maple leaf!



Temporary Cemetery at
Bernieres-Sur-Mer



Permanent Cemetery at
Bernieres-Sur-Mer



John D. Jackson's
Headstone



He is also memorialized at Upper Canada College, the University of Toronto and the family cemetery in Weston (Toronto) as one of The “Fighting Denisons” who saw service in the Northwest Rebellion, the Fenian Raids, the Boer War, and the First and Second World Wars.

JayJay’s name can be found on the south face of the cenotaph honouring the contributions of the Denison and Kirkpatrick family members to the war effort in 1914-1918 and 1939-1945.

There is no separate tombstone at the cemetery as he rests at Bernieres-sur-mer in France not far inland from Juno Beach.

An Alternate Possibility

As stated earlier, the QOR and 3rd Canadian Infantry Division encountered stiff opposition from the German defenders during their mission to liberate Caen and the airport at nearby Carpiquet. In the confusion of the post-invasion days and weeks, individuals and small groups of allied soldiers were often separated from their fighting units and some were captured by the Germans.



During the course of the Normandy campaign an estimated 156 Canadian prisoners of war are believed to have been murdered by the 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 12th SS Panzer Division (Hitler Youth) commanded by Kurt Meyer at various locations in Normandy and near Caen. Most notable of these was the murder of 20 Canadian soldiers at Ardennes Abbey in early June, 1944.

On Meyer’s orders, each soldier was taken to the Abbey garden, shot in the head and secretly buried. The Abbey is very close to the Carpiquet airport. Similar massacres occurred at other sites before and after this atrocity where the QOR and 3rd Canadian Infantry Division were operational.

Kurt Meyer was himself captured by allied troops later in 1944 and stood trial after the war in Germany by a Canadian military tribunal for war crimes. He was sentenced to death for only five of the murders. His sentence was later reduced to life imprisonment. He died in Germany in 1961.

So, given that there are very few records about JayJay's activities and death in the area in question, and that some of the identities and exact number of all the prisoners murdered are unknown - is it possible that JayJay was murdered by Kurt Meyer and his fanatical Nazis?

Did JayJay really die in legitimate combat on July 9th at Carpiquet? Or was he somehow taken prisoner and murdered by the Nazis like so many others?

Why did Canadian military authorities only charge Meyer with five murders and later reduce the sentence?

Why is JayJay's military service number missing from archival records?

There is no evidence that JayJay was murdered, but there are very few records available to prove it one way or the other.

It's a real mystery - What do you think?



CROSS OF SACRIFICE.

Erected by the Imperial War Graves Commission at St. Jude's Cemetery, Englefield Green, Egham, Surrey.

Acknowledgements

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- Mrs. Shelagh Kirkpatrick Bowden

Epilogue

In September 2019, my wife Karen and I travelled to France and Belgium with Trafalgar Tours to visit WW1 and WW2 battle sites and memorials. It was an emotional tour which I had always wanted to do.

I made it a personal mission to find the headstone of my relative, John Denison Jackson at Bernieres-sur-Mer cemetery in Normandy. Jackson (known as Jay Jay) was a first cousin and boyhood friend of my father. He died in 1944 near Caen shortly after D-Day in WW2. An added bonus was to visit the place of my great-uncle Alexander Douglas Kirkpatrick's death and witnessing his name inscribed on the walls of the Menin Gate Memorial.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission and local authorities do an excellent job of maintaining records, preserving sites and ensuring these young men are memorialized.

Visiting Dunkirk, Dieppe, the landing beaches and visitor centres of Normandy can be truly emotional experiences if one has a personal connection. High schools in Canada regularly send student groups to learn about this important part of our history.

Local inhabitants still remember and thank Canada after all these years. If any war is righteous, surely the combined effort of all the allies takes its place in history as being justified in stopping the expansion and extermination plans of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi henchmen. Although the death toll was not as great as that in WWI, Canada lost 44,000 service men and women and played a major role in the liberation of Europe.

This story has a section called "An Alternate Possibility" because there are few records about the exact circumstances of JayJay's death and there is some doubt amongst family members about the conclusions of his father's fact-finding trip to England. The section is presented as speculation only.

This story is only one of thousands - many forgotten and lost over the last 75 years - and in the near future, there will be no veterans left to pass them on to future generations.

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