John (Jock) Purves

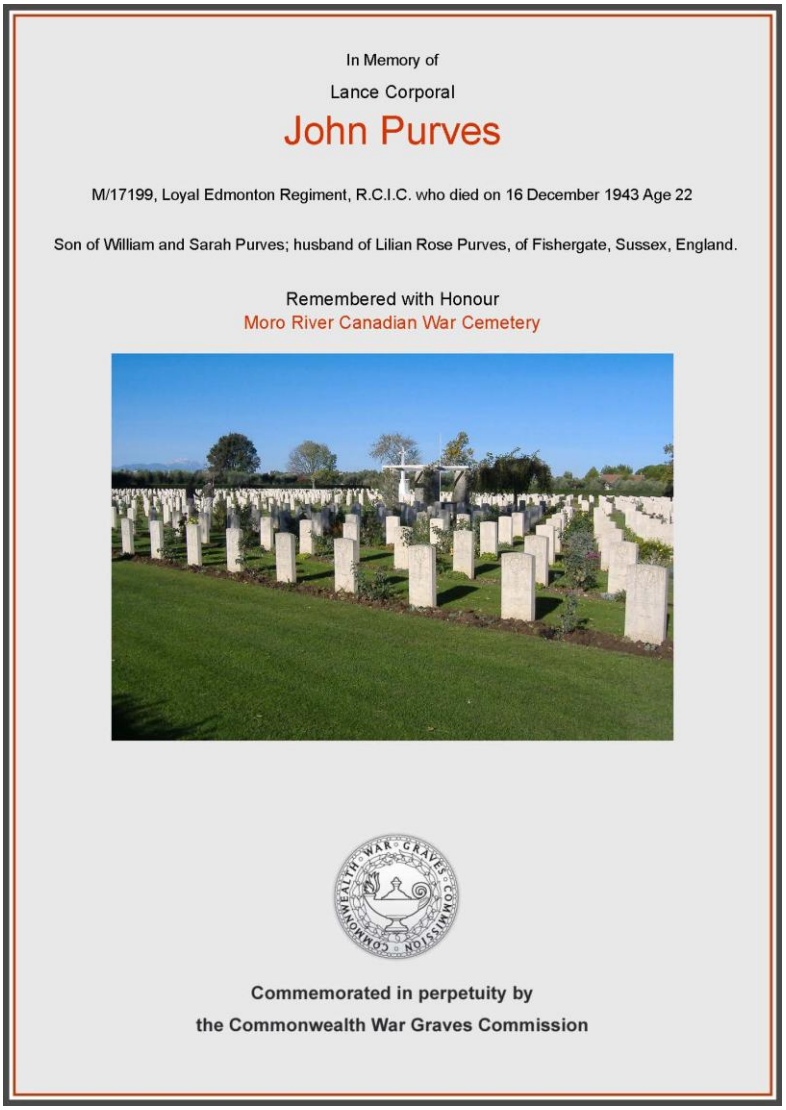
Lance Corporal
Army – Loyal Edmonton Regiment, Royal Canadian Infantry Corps - Regimental # M/17199
Bezanson, Alberta
Died: December 16, 1943
Commemorated at: Moro River Canadian War Cemetery, Italy



William Purves, a widower with two sons, Bill Jr. and George, married Sarah McSorely on December 19, 1919 in Edinburgh, Scotland. A son, James was born followed by a daughter, Margaret Jane who passed away. The family moved to Gorebridge where John, who went by Jock, was born on November 8, 1921; followed by a daughter, Agnes and another son, Henry Michael. They decided to move back to Edinburgh; however once there, an advertisement in the local paper about land opportunities in Canada caught their attention. The Purves' decided to immigrate to Canada in May 1926 and purchased land in an area west of Bezanson known as East Kleskun. As their trunks would not arrive for a month, the Community loaned the new family all the household goods that they would need in the interim. Hardships were common in the early days and the Purves' certainly encountered their share. Three months after their arrival, they lost twin boys. Over the next few years, two more sons were born, Bob and Mark. As education was a priority in the Purves household, it was expected that the older boys would attend school and work on the farm. The children all attended the East Kleskun School. They were a very hard-working, close-knit family that enjoyed the farming lifestyle. In 1932, the family suffered another tragedy when their house burnt down. While waiting for the insurance proceeds to arrive, two granaries were pulled together and once again the Community came to the aide of the family and provided them with all the household items necessary to set-up a temporary living arrangement.

Jock was a very gregarious and feisty young man who was always on the lookout for the next adventure in life. He enlisted on April 3, 1940 in Grande Prairie with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, Royal Canadian Infantry Corps attached to the 1st Battalion. His attestation paper stated that his birth year was 1920; however, his mother recalled that as Jock had wanted to appear older, he provided the wrong year and in fact one document in his service file showed the date of birth as November 8, 1921. He listed his occupation as farmer and lumberjack. Jock received his basic training in the Calgary area and returned home only once on leave before he was sent to England. At the end of the visit, he gave his mother the only thing he had – a set of rosary beads. That was the last time Sarah saw her son.

Jock arrived in England on July 17, 1940. While there, he met Lilian Rose Cornish whom he married in September 1942. A son, John Ernest, was born the following December. Jock's Battalion landed in Sicily on July 10, 1943 to enter the Italian Campaign. Once Sicily was secure, they crossed the



Strait of Messina and reached the toe of Italy on September 3, 1943. From there, the Battalion pushed the German line north until they closed in on the Moro River. Beginning on December 4th, four Infantry Divisions attacked the heavily defended German positions along the Moro River. Through the next two weeks, combat operations continued with some of the bitterest and fiercest fighting of WWII. The Germans finally withdrew to Ortona. Sadly, on December 16, 1943, Jock was killed in action near San Leonardo and buried in the Moro River Cemetery. On December 20th, the Battalion pushed forward and attacked Ortona. It was the culmination of the fighting on the Adriatic front in Italy during what was known as "Bloody December".

Jock left behind his wife, Lilian and a young son, John Ernest, who lived in Fishergate, Sussex, England. He received the 1939-45 Star, Italy Star, Defence Medal, War Medal, Canadian Volunteer Medal & Clasp.

After Bill Sr. lost his eye sight in 1942, the family moved to Edmonton where the Blind Institute found employment for both Bill and Sarah. Jock's brothers, George, William and James also served their Country and returned home. Once the Purves' sons and daughter reached adulthood, they engaged in the agriculture and pipeline industries. Bill Sr. passed away in 1956 after a lengthy illness. In 1962, Sarah married Robert Fleck and the couple retired in Sexsmith, Alberta. Sarah and Robert traveled to Italy in 1975 to visit Jock's grave at the Moro River Cemetery. It was a very poignant moment for Sarah as she clutched the rosary beads that Jock had given her while placing a wreath from the entire family on the headstone. The inscription on the headstone reads: *"From our happy home God had taken one we love away from sin and sorrow to a nobler rest above".*

Jock's son, John Ernest, joined the parachute regiment and served in the Middle East. He subsequently joined the merchant navy following which, he married and had three daughters and one son. Sadly, his son died in a swimming pool accident at eight years of age. John Ernest spent the

last twenty years before retirement, working for a charity that cares for ex-servicemen who were blinded. Jock's legacy will certainly live on through his grandchildren.

The Bezanson Community honours the memory of John (Jock) Purves – a young man who answered the call of duty to maintain the Country's freedom and died in the effort to do so.

Written by Wanda Zenner

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