

On The War Memorial Trail In Rouen, France

by Daria Valkenburg

While in France, Pieter Valkenburg, who is researching the names listed on the Cenotaph outside the Borden-Carleton Legion, wanted to visit the grave of Basil Cormier, who is buried at St. Sever Cemetery in Rouen. He dutifully followed the GPS instructions, and arrived at the address listed, only to find it was in downtown Rouen. No cemetery in sight! The streets are extremely narrow, jam packed with cars and pedestrians and most of the streets one way traffic only. With no idea where the cemetery was, we stopped by a huge government building behind a walled gate, and asked a passerby for help.

The man looked at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission info, and said that the cemetery was on a street by the same name in either Le Grand Quevilly or Le Petit Quevilly. He just wasn't sure which of the two cities, both near to Rouen, it was in. So, we

took a chance and went to Le Grand Quevilly, a short distance away.

There, Valkenburg pulled into a car dealership to ask directions, only to find out that France shuts down for lunch break. Everything was locked up, but he found a salesman in a tent on the lot, reading his emails.

"I'm from a different country," the salesman said, when asked about the cemetery. Then he went on to say, "I'm from Paris." But he found someone who could help us and that's when Valkenburg learned that we wanted to be in Le Petit Quevilly, and how to get there. Sure enough, on a street by the same name as in Rouen (what are the odds?), we were able to find St. Sever Cemetery Extension, where Basil Cormier is buried.

St. Sever Cemetery Extension has 8,348 WWI Commonwealth burials, 10 of them unidentified, 328 WWII Commonwealth

burials, 18 of them unidentified, and 8 foreign nationals. With such a large cemetery, it was not easy to find Cormier's grave. Our luck was that several gardeners from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission were on site. One gardener asked if we needed help. After explaining who we were looking for, the gardener immediately went over to the other side of the cemetery and found the grave, which was as far away as possible from where we were!

Private Basil Cormier was born January 6, 1898 in Tignish, the son of Joseph Cormier and Marie Arsenault. A farmer before he enlisted with the 105th Draft Regiment on December 4, 1916, he died of wounds received in the Battle of Amiens near Cacy on August 12, 1918, at the age of 21. At the time of his death he was with the 26th New Brunswick Battalion.

The War Graves Register Circumstances of

Pieter Valkenburg with a young CWGC gardener at St. Sever Cemetery Extension.



Death notes that "During operations east of Amiens, on the morning of August 8th 1918, he was hit in the head by a machine gun bullet. He was immediately dressed by a comrade and carried out, but succumbed to his wounds four days later."

We couldn't leave the cemetery without giving flag pins to the gardeners, who do such a fantastic job of keeping the cemeteries so well kept.

Asking For The Public's Help Valkenburg has no photo or further informa-



(The grave of Private Basil Cormier. Photos by Daria Valkenburg)

tion about Basil Cormier and asks the public for help in putting a face to this name on the Cenotaph. He can be reached by email at dariadv@yahoo.ca or through the project's blog at https://bordencarletonresearchproject.wordpress.com

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