

For the Journey

Nov. 7, 2025

Rev. Dave Crawford



MILTON — August 11, Thomas Milton, aged 58 years, passed away in the Veterans Hospital, Victoria, B.C. Born in Calgary, moved to Saskatoon, Sask., in 1951, later to Medicine Hat, Alta. He was a member of the Canadian Legion, having served with the 13th Field Company RCE in Europe from 1939 to 1945. He was predeceased by his wife, Grace, in 1961. He is survived by one son, Thomas, Victoria, two daughters, Mrs. H. (Shirley) Tangeman, Pembroke, Ont. Also, 3 grandchildren. Also survived by his mother, Mrs. Thomas Milton, one sister, Mrs. W. Pringle, two brothers, Jack and Dick, all of Calgary. Services were conducted by Padre D. Kendell, Aug. 14th at Thompson and Irving Funeral Chapel, Victoria. Interment Veterans Cemetery, Victoria.

(Friends, if I've already shared the story of my Great Uncle pictured here, I apologize. A few months back I lost all my computer files and so don't have a record of older reflections. Nonetheless my writing today is new)

I guess we all have our stories to tell, memories either lived or learned. I never knew William Thomas Milton but I knew his brother, my Grandfather Richard Herbert Milton, very well. He didn't speak much of his brothers. All three of them served overseas in some capacity during World War 2 - Dick, Jack, and Tom.

William Thomas, or Tom, as he was called, was born and raised in Calgary, in the home his father Tom built which still stands along 5th Avenue NW., backing onto Riley Park (1132 - 5th Ave.). The family attended St. Barnabas Anglican Church which was and is within walking distance. Tom was the eldest of the brothers and in the summer of 1934 he married a Crossfield girl, interestingly enough, Grace Morag Reid, whose parents, James and Sarah Reid, from Scotland, farmed in the Irricana, Rumsey and Crossfield areas, before retiring to Bowness when it was still a village.

I'm unsure of the path Tom followed into the military but what astounds me is he was overseas for six years with the Royal Canadian Engineers. More research is necessary but I'm told he served in Italy and the Netherlands, building bridges, roads, and clearing mine fields, among other tasks. His 13th Field Company supported the 1st Canadian Corp in May, 1944 in the major offensive on the Hitler Line in the Lira Valley, Italy, a battle during which Canadian and British forces broke through that Line, opening up the way for Rome's liberation. In many ways I can't fathom it, I'm humbled by Tom's and so many others' stories. From age 34-40 Tom Milton was in the thick of it. I understand Tom's postwar years were personally difficult. He and his family moved from place to place, never really settling down, much family strife.

My grandfather used to say, "They almost won, you know!", whenever I'd ask about the War. "They" were the Germans (and the Japanese), and if we know even a little about the Dunkirk evacuation, or Hitler's perilous decision to fight a war on two fronts, we know how true my grandfather's words were. Your ancestors and mine, in the prime of life, offered themselves to combat the global fascism and defend democracy. Regular people, mostly men and young men who faced down the evils of their era, whatever the cost.

Today in our world dictatorships and theocracies have risen up once again to threaten the world's fragile peace, or should I say the world's efforts at maintaining a fragile peace (Ukrainians would rightly challenge the claim of peace). Remembrance Day is perhaps even more relevant today than in recent decades, relevant for the lessons we must teach our young, learning from those who went before us, for us, for the young among us, those who sacrificed a great deal, sometimes everything, for us.

*"To you from failing hands we throw The torch; be yours to hold it high."
("In Flanders Fields", John MacRae)*