

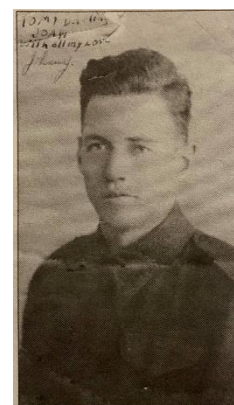
## WW II Enlisted Men & Women of Whitewater Region

### Lance Sergeant John William 'Jack' Gemmill

**L/Sgt. Jack Gemmill**, son of **William James Gemmill** and **Margaret Mary McElgrew**, was born on 17 May 1920 in Bromley Twp., Ontario. He was the 3<sup>rd</sup> child of 7 siblings, two older girls died in infancy. His siblings who lived into adulthood were Isabelle Dunlop, Pat, Wally and Ray<sup>1</sup>.

Jack enlisted in into the army in 1942 and served with The Black Watch (Royal Highland's Regiment) from 1942-1945<sup>2</sup>. The Black Watch is the oldest highland regiment in Canada. In WWII, the Regiment first saw action at Dieppe, 19 August 1942. When the Second World War finally came to an end in 1945, the Black Watch 2<sup>nd</sup> Division (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada returned home and was disbanded on 30 November 1945<sup>3</sup>. Jack was a driver of a Bren Gun Carrier<sup>2</sup>.

While in service, Jack married **Joan Irene Stone** on 15 Apr 1944 in St. Mary's Church, Mortlake Parish, England<sup>4</sup>. Joan was born on 10 Mar 1922 in Barnes, England<sup>1</sup>.



Jack Gemmill sent this photo to his wife Joan while overseas

Pic 1: A young soldier<sup>2</sup>

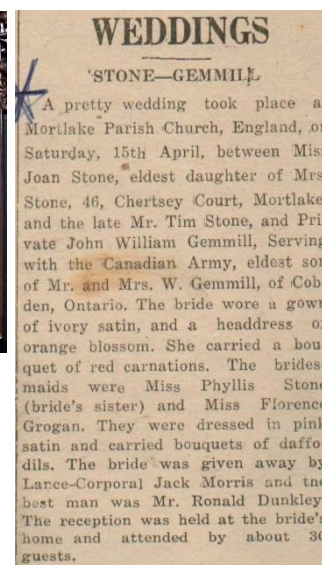


Pic 2: Jack & Joan's wedding<sup>2</sup>



Pic 3: Jack & Joan in England<sup>2</sup>

In Feb 1945, Jack was seriously injured in his arm and shoulder, and appeared on the Army casualty list on Mar 28, 1945, a member from the regiment of Quebec. He was flown to a hospital in Canada in June of 1945<sup>2</sup>.



Pic 4: Wedding announcement<sup>4</sup>

An article from the Ottawa Journal announces that 25 Ottawa area War Brides will arrive in Halifax on April 5, 1946 aboard the Ile de France<sup>5</sup>. Joan Irene Gemmill was one of those War Brides and finally able to re-unite with her husband.

Following the war, Jack was unable to take up farming on the family farm due to his injuries. He served as Cobden Post Master<sup>1</sup> from 1950-1964 and later was employed as a truck driver. He was an avid golfer and curler, and was a founding member of Cobden Curling Club<sup>6</sup>. Jack manufactured a special arm support with a hook to attach his broom when delivering a rock to compensate for his arm injury.

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Pic 5: Opening of Cobden Curling Club<sup>6</sup>



Pic 6: Jack Gemmill delivering curling stone<sup>7</sup>

Jack was a founding member<sup>8</sup> of Cobden Branch 550, Royal Canadian Legion and served as secretary on the charter executive. Jack was also awarded a lifetime membership<sup>9</sup>.



Pic 7: Jack Gemmill, Cobden Legion member<sup>2</sup>



Jack Gemmill shows the plaque he received as a D-Day, Normandy survivor.

Pic 8: Jack Gemmill receiving plaque commemorating D-Day<sup>10</sup>



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Pic 9: Jack Gemmill, Legion Member<sup>11</sup>



Former members of the Black Watch Regiment marched in a parade during ceremonies to honour them in IIs, Fraserburgh, Scotland, in the summer. Jack Gemmill of Cobden is in the foreground, second from left.

Pic 10: Jack Gemmill marching with Black Watch Regiment<sup>10</sup>



Veteran Jack Gemmill laid a wreath in memory of fallen soldiers on behalf of Cobden Curling Club and Tom's Barber Shop.

Pic 11: Jack Gemmill laying wreath<sup>10</sup>



Pic 12: Three remaining charter members of Cobden Legion: Harold Robinson, John Stavenow, Jack Gemmill<sup>11</sup>

## WW II Enlisted Men & Women of Whitewater Region

Jack & Joan celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1994. A lovely tribute to them was published in the Cobden Sun.

Pic 13: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Newspaper clipping<sup>12</sup>

### Wartime romance is celebrated at 50th wedding anniversary

By Marie Zettler  
Sun Editor

It was 1943, and Londoners' days were being punctuated by frequent bombings. Life revolved around the war effort.

It was payday for young Joan Stone and her friend, who worked in a factory where aircraft parts were made. They wanted to go to the cinema, but they had already seen the picture playing at the theatre in their community. They decided to take a six-mile bus ride to Kingston, a community on the outskirts of the city, to see the movie playing there.

"Mother didn't like us to go too far because of the bombing," recalls Joan, now Mrs. Jack Gemmill of Cobden.

They were early and went to a cafe for a cup of coffee before the show. Two Canadian soldiers were seated at the table next to them.

After they had finished their first cup, one of the soldiers came to their table and asked them if they'd like another. He was Jack Gemmill of Cobden. They accepted, and the soldiers joined them.

They went to the movies together, and made a date for the next weekend. The girls showed them around the city.

For Joan's friend, that was the end of the relationship. But Joan and Jack continued to write to each other.

They were engaged later that year.

The couple was married in Mortlake, London, England, in St. Mary's Parish Church on April 15, 1944.

"We couldn't go on a honeymoon," recalls Mrs. Gemmill. "Jack was on leave, but they knew D-day was coming, and they wanted all the soldiers to be available."

The decision to get married was made with a great deal of serious thought.

"Jack asked me if I was sure I wanted to do this," she said. "He didn't want to leave a young widow. My brother had gotten married, and was killed in the war three weeks later. He left a 17-year-old widow."

"I decided to take the plunge. I've never been sorry."

A wedding in wartime London was a serious undertaking. Ration coupons were needed to buy anything. Joan's friends pooled their coupons so she could buy a wedding dress. Others pooled coupons to buy ingredients for a real wedding cake.

"Some just had cardboard cakes," said Mrs. Gemmill.

Jack was called back to participate in the Allied invasion of Normandy June 6. He was not to see his new bride again until February of the next year.

Mrs. Gemmill points to a difference between Canadian and British experience of the war.

"People here who had family members fighting were worried about them," she said. "But the soldiers knew their families were all right. Over there, the soldiers had just as much reason to worry about their families back home."

Air raid sirens could send people scurrying to shelters any time of the day or night. And if you were at

work you would have no way of knowing whether other family members were all right until you got home at night.

"At the factory, they finally decided production was suffering too much because we were spending so much time going to the shelters," says Mrs. Gemmill. "So we just ducked under our work benches when the alarm sounded."

Everyone carried a gas mask at all times.

"Most of us carried them in a knapsack," said Mrs. Gemmill. "Some of the young girls bought fancy cases for them."

"People showed a lot of spunk. They would sing in the shelters, and some brought their knitting and crocheting."

Young Joan got fed up with have her night's sleep interrupted.

"I finally just stayed in my bed," she said. "My mother was quite upset with me."

Being in a shelter was no guarantee of safety. In a cemetery near the Stone home, there was a mass funeral for three generations of one family, who had all been in a shelter together when it sustained a direct hit.

"There were five graves," recalls Phyllis Johnson, Mrs. Gemmill's sister, who came to celebrate the couple's 50th anniversary with them. "They put the adults' coffins in first, and then the children's coffins and the little white baby's coffins. It was so sad."

Pilotless planes would come flying over the city and crash, releasing their deadly cargo of bombs.

"My mother would watch them and pray that they'd

pass over us," recalls Mrs. Gemmill. "Then she'd think 'how awful.' It only meant they would come down somewhere else and kill somebody else."

"People prayed all the time, everywhere."

In February of 1945, the young bride received a telegram which told her that her husband had been seriously wounded.

"They didn't tell me what his injuries were," she recalls. "I didn't know whether he was blind, or had lost his legs, or what."

Subsequently she learned that he had a seriously injured arm and shoulder. He was flown to England to a Canadian hospital, and Mrs. Gemmill was able to visit him there.

"But I only was able to get one day off a week," she said.

In June, he was flown home to Canada. Mrs. Gemmill's travel arrangements were not completed until March of 1946.

She was part of a boatload of war brides, some with children.

"When we first saw land, one of the others wondered out loud whether we'd see Indians with bows and arrows among the trees," said Mrs. Gemmill.

After a two-day train trip from Halifax, Jack and members of his family met her at the railway station in Ottawa. After almost two years, the young couple was finally together again. They stayed at the Lord Elgin Hotel for a week for a delayed honeymoon.

They came to Cobden and resided with Jack's parents, William and Margaret Gemmill, in Bromley Township, for a time before moving to Cobden.

After the rigors of wartime living, normally took some getting used to.

"Jack's sister, Isabelle, took me shopping for a new dress," recalls Mrs. Gemmill. "We went into a store and I asked how many coupons I would have to give up for a dress."

Although she was homesick, especially the first Christmas, she says she could never get over the wonderful hospitality she experienced in Cobden and area.

"She wrote the most wonderful letters home," said Mrs. Johnson.

The aftereffects of Jack's injuries prevented him from taking up farming. He was postmaster in Cobden for a while, before going to work as a trucker.

The couple raised four daughters, Sandra (Douglas) Shaw of Kincardine, Gloria (Dave) McLaughlin of Pickering, Shelley (Weldon) Gutz of Cobden, and Debbie (Steven) Findlay of North Gower. They have six grandchildren.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Gemmill are active in the Legion, and Mr. Gemmill is an avid curler and golfer.

When Mrs. Gemmill's sister returns to England in May, the Gemmills will accompany her and will stay there for four months. During that time, Mr. Gemmill will take part in a three-week tour to commemorate D-day.

Mrs. Johnson is Mrs. Gemmill's only surviving sibling. Two brothers are both deceased.

Mr. Gemmill has three brothers, Pat of Cobden, Wally of Brampton, and Ray of British Columbia, and one sister, Isabelle Dunlop, also of Cobden.



**Cobden couple celebrates anniversary**

Jack and Joan Gemmill of Cobden recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. Mrs. Gemmill is a war bride from England where the two met during World War II. After much thought, they were married April 15, 1944 in St. Mary's Church, Mortlake, London.



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Joan was active in the Cobden Legion Ladies Auxiliary.



Pic 14: Cobden Legion Ladies Auxiliary 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Receiving 25-year pins are Bk: Elizabeth Kohlsmith, Carmell Pope, Phyllis Adrain, Rita Dobson & Carolyn McDonald. Ft: Betty McCreedy, Lena Dagenais, Joan Gemmill & Edith Schauer<sup>11</sup>



Pic 15: Joan & Jack Gemmill<sup>13</sup>

Jack died on 7 Jan 2010 in Renfrew aged 89, and was buried in Cobden Union Cemetery<sup>10</sup>. Joan died later that year on 14 Aug 2010 in Renfrew, aged 88, and was buried along side her husband of 66 years. Four daughters survive: Sandra, Gloria, Shelley & Debbie.

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Pic 16: Gravestone, Cobden Union Cemetery<sup>14</sup>



Special thanks to the Gemmill family for supplying information on their dad Jack Gemmill.

### Sources:

1. Bennett, Fay E., Faysgenealogy.com. [www.faysgenealogy.com](http://www.faysgenealogy.com) : family history database & images; 2001-present. Cobden, ON. (Original sources noted in database)
2. Information provided by Gloria McLaughlin & Debbie Findlay, daughters of Jack & Joan Gemmill.
3. The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada  
[https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/second-world-war/dieppe-raid/black\\_watch](https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/second-world-war/dieppe-raid/black_watch)
4. Gemmill-Stone wedding announcement, Newspaper clipping The Cobden Sun, Jun 22, 1944 p. 1
5. 'List 25 Ottawa Area War Brides on Ile de France' The Ottawa Journal, April 1, 1946 p. 22
6. Photograph of Cobden Curling Club opening, 1960 from the collection of Gladys Francis
7. Newspaper clipping of Jack Gemmill delivering curling stone from the collection of Gladys Francis
8. Photograph of three remaining Charter members of the Royal Canadian Legion, Cobden Branch 550
9. Cobden Legion Life members appreciation award, newspaper clipping from the scrapbook collection of Millicent McIntyre
10. Newspaper clipping from the scrapbook collection of the Cobden Legion
11. Photographs from the collection of the Cobden Legion
12. "Wartime romance is celebrated at 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary" Article from The Cobden Sun, Newspaper clipping from the scrapbook collection of Lena Byce
13. Photograph from the collection of Beth Somerville
14. Photograph of Gemmill gravestone at Cobden Union Cemetery, photographed by Fay Bennett