

On July twenty-eighth, 1914, Canadian boys and men were sent to war to fight for their country. They were brave, selfless people who were willing to lose everything to protect their home. I've always wondered how they felt being shipped off to war. Were they sad to have to leave their families behind? Were they scared of what might happen to them? Did they feel pride that they were going to protect their country and fight for their rights? Did they feel forced to fight?

Growing up I always heard the story of my great-great-Uncle, Emile Leblanc. Chores around the farm were a big part of Emile's life growing up with his four brothers and five sisters. Emile took part in softball, swimming, skating and hunting. Work and games made a muscular young man who was well known in the small community of Belle Cote, Nova Scotia.

When the time came to leave for war, he had only 5 days to say his goodbyes to the many he knew and grew up with. George AuCoin, a family member, waited with a truck to drive Emile to the Inverness station, but before he left, Emile told George something he couldn't tell anyone else. Emile told George "This is my last goodbye to my family and to Cape Breton soil, I shall not be coming back."

Emile was trained as a pilot for the Wellington X3359. June sixteenth 1942 Emile and his crew were aboard the Wellington 17,000 feet near Limburg when the engine started failing, Emile told everyone to get out of the plane. Watson, the last one to leave, reported that front gunner Bradley and wireless operator Eric Winkler had done as told. Watson and Emile stayed in the Wellington hoping to make it to the coast. Watson left the plane at 1,000 feet and thought Emile would follow him, but Emile attempted to make a crash landing. Emile made a perfect landing but since he was not strapped in his seat, his skull fractured. Emile was 19 when he died. The Germans found his body and held a ceremony for him. Emile's first cousin Charles was in the Canadian Army serving in Holland, the Germans knew somehow that they were related and told Charles the news. Charles sent a letter to his family back in Cape Breton and in the letter the Commanding Officer of that German military wrote "Leblanc, the day before yesterday, was our enemy. Today we are burying him as a comrade"