



## Eerie Happenstance, Part I (from <http://www.timminstimes.com>)

By Diane Armstrong

Although she originally came from South Porcupine, I never knew Tina Pecore Bagordo before April 9, this year. I had purchased a copy of her book “Booyah”, memories of her father, Don Pecore, and wanted to ask questions about her publisher as I had just finished writing a book of my own. Although unaware of any connection with either Tina or her father, many years ago in a Remembrance Day column, I had written about Fred Tokar, a very young South Porcupine resident who had died in Italy during WWII. Fred Tokar was Tina’s uncle. Coincidence number one.

I called Tina at her home and we had a most pleasant and productive chat. The conversation was almost over when Tina told me about an upcoming trip she was planning to Italy at the end of the month. She was going to visit various sites that were liberated by the Canadian forces during the war. Her uncle Fred was buried there, having been killed by a German sniper. She also mentioned having contact with an Italian author, Rosalia Fantoni, who had been searching for Canadian families of those WWII soldiers buried in her town. Tina’s uncle, Fred Tokar was one of them. Coincidence number two. Tina said she would be meeting Rosalia in her village of Villanova, a town that was saved by the Canadians who had built a bridge over their river during the war.

Chills went up and down my spine. The name, Villanova, was oddly familiar. “Do you happen to know the name of the river?” I asked. “Yes. It was the Lamone.” I said, “Tina, you are not going to believe this, but just this past week, I wrote about my uncle Arnold’s connection with building that very bridge while under heavy enemy fire, and he was awarded the Military Cross for his efforts.” Coincidence number three.

Rosalia Fantoni and her researcher, Angela Rondinelli had been valiantly searching for information about those brave Canadians who had liberated their town from German occupation. The two women were members of a group who still remember and who still honoured our fallen soldiers. A meeting between Tina and me was quickly arranged, and I was able to give her photocopies of the citation, as well as a wartime photo of my uncle

that she was able to take to Rosalia in Italy. That this could be accomplished before her trip to visit all the sites of the Italian Campaign was coincidence number four.

“On the night of 11/12 December 1944 3 Canadian Infantry Brigade was ordered to establish a bridgehead over the LAMONE RIVER, in the area MR 4135. The Brigade was supported in this operation by 1 Canadian Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers, who were to build a bridge at the only suitable site in the area, MR 415358. Lieutenant Arnold Reginald BELANGER commanded No. 3 Platoon of this Company.

“The task of the platoon was to establish a Class 2 raft crossing at MR 415352 and subsequently to build a bridge for Class 9 vehicles at the same site. This area, as was subsequently established, was included in the enemy’s defensive fire plan, and was the scene of heavy and frequent mortaring and shelling from the start of the operation. Lieutenant BELANGER, showing the greatest tenacity and drive however, so organized and pressed the work that the raft crossing for anti-tank guns and jeeps was completed by 0800 hour on the 12th of December 1944. During daylight, as the operation progressed, shelling of the area increased in intensity. Lieutenant BELANGER realized the urgency of the task and by arranging shifts and reliefs to minimize the strain of the constant shellfire, was able to finish most of the approach work for the bridge by darkness. He himself, however, remained in control of the work throughout. During this period, the Platoon suffered casualties to personnel, equipment and vehicles from the enemy fire.”

“Immediately darkness began to fall, vehicles carrying the bridging equipment were able to come up, and Lieutenant BELANGER and his men turned to the task of erecting the bridge. All were tired by now and the shelling and mortaring continued unabated. Such was Lieutenant BELANGER’s drive, energy and example, however, that the work continued unchecked, and a Class 9 crossing over the river obstacle was completed by first light on 13 December.

GRANTED AN IMMEDIATE MC (Military Cross)

(Sgd) H.R. ALEXANDER Field Marshal,

Supreme Allied Commander-In-Chief, Mediterranean Theatre” –DND transcript

How three authors in three different towns on two continents have been connected by sheer happenstance is incredible in itself, but the story is just beginning. Next week, I will continue with this tale that began almost 70 years ago.

That's my view from Over the Hill.