

# Truro's Walter Perrin had his share of narrow escapes during the Second World War

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Walter Perrin of Truro looks over the seven medals he received for his service to country during the Second World War, when he served as a tank commander on the front battle lines. Perrin recently turned 95 and on his birthday he was presented with certificates from Colchester County Mayor Christine Blair and Truro Mayor Bill Mills.

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**TRURO, N.S. –** They had taken out one German tank. A second got away.

After a long day of fighting along the defensive Hitler Line on Coriano Ridge in Italy, Walter Perrin and his four-man crew found a place to park and shut down their tank to camp for the night.

And then his world exploded.

“I was just sliding down over the front of it and this shell came right down into it,” the Truro veteran recently recalled, a day before his 95th birthday.

“That’s where I lost my tank and crew,” he said. “The tank burned all night long.”

Perrin, originally from Dean Settlement, signed on with the Canadian Army’s artillery division in May 1941, as an adventurous 19-year-old looking to serve his country during the Second World War.

After basic training in Yarmouth, he was shipped off to Pettawawa, Ont., where he volunteered for the 4<sup>th</sup> Gaspé, Anti Tank Regiment, 5<sup>th</sup> Division. From there, it was England, and on to the front lines where he ultimately served as tank commander.

The next several years were spent in battle after battle, as he moved across the war-scarred European landscape.

Early one morning, after stopping for the night while his division was working through the Gothic Line, Perrin and his crew were packing up their tank to head out once more. In the quiet of morning he heard some slight rustling and stopped to listen.

“I thought I heard somebody walking.”

Perrin stilled himself and waited. A few moments later he saw a German soldier sneaking through the bushes, looking as if he expected someone's head to pop out of the tank.

“So I just jumped out and grabbed his rifle and flipped him on his back,” Perrin said. “When he got up he started hollering that he wanted water.”

The soldier was relieved of his rifle, a revolver and smaller handgun, and turned over to fellow troops as a prisoner of war.

There were many other close calls and on May 27, 1944 – barely a month after being promoted to sergeant and while they were working the Hitler Line – Perrin was struck by part of an exploding shell that landed just behind his tank.

“I got a piece of shrapnel in my ankle,” he said. “I was some lucky that night.”

After being hospitalized for about a month, however, he resumed command of his tank once more. It was shortly after that he narrowly missed being struck by the shell that took out his tank.

“You didn't know whether you were going to be there tomorrow or the next day,” he said.

As hellish as war was, however, like the young soldiers they were, Perrin said he and his fellow troops simply took things in stride.

“We all jumped up, we volunteered,” he said, of signing on to fight.

Perrin was discharged from the army in November 1945 and got married shortly after returning home. He and his wife Lois (Dean) raised eight children while he worked at a number of vocations over the years.

For 30 years, the family lived in Great Village and for the past 41 years he has resided in Truro.

When he came home, Perrin said, he tried not to let the horrors he had witnessed and participated in, return with him.

“I just let it stay there,” he said. “And for years, I never talked about it.”

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Note: Corrected version re Perrin's enlistment date.