

The Western Front

**Produced by:
H. Clifford Chadderton**

**For:
The War Amps of Canada**

Duration: 27 minutes, 30 seconds

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**War is not heroics, nor is it pride
It's a shame to lose all those previous lives
Life is too short, we could love for so long
Where's the Glory?
NEVER AGAIN!**

H.C. Chadderton: The Mayfair Movie Theatre. It's one of the oldest places like this left in town. I'm Cliff Chadderton, Chief Executive Officer of The War Amputations of Canada. I brought Louis Leduc here for a special reason. I want to show him that World War II is not at all as he would have seen in the movies. Louis is a member of The War Amps Child Amputee Program. As a CHAMP, he has had the opportunity to meet many war amputees like me.

I want to pass on to Louis the feelings of those who have fought in a war. I want Louis and other youngsters to understand that war is not glory and heroism, like the movies would have us believe.

Well Louis, are you ready for another one of our little history sessions on World War II?

Louis: I think I am.

H.C. Chadderton: Today you can see we're in a theatre. You like this place?

Louis: Oh yes, it's really nice.

H.C. Chadderton: A very famous old theatre this, and these were the kinds of theatres that Canadians flocked to during World War II to see what was happening, to get pictures of their boys in action. Because, you see in those days, you had to go to the theatres. There were no T.V.'s.

Louis: No T.V.'s?

H.C. Chadderton: No Louis. T.V. wasn't even invented until after World War II. The trouble with seeing war in the form of these newsreels in the theatres was that it didn't show the real picture.

Louis: Why is that?

H.C. Chadderton: Oh, I suppose it was just too shocking. And as a result of that, was as Canadians saw it in the newsreels - it was almost an up tempo thing. "Oh, look how great our boys are doing!" And they were doing great. But unfortunately nobody was telling the story in terms of showing the real cost. Rather than try to explain it to you, I tell you what I've done. I've gotten a hold of one of those old World War II newsreels. And I'm

going to show it to you. And then later on, I'm going to show you some actual footage of what the war was really like. So what we'll do now – let's roll that old World War II newsreel.

(Newsreels play)

Week by week until the fateful D-Day, Allied invasion preparation shaped up on a staggering scale. A million and one details took on a pattern against the backdrop of suspense and anticipation on the part of forces and civilians in Britain and jittery Germans across the Channel. Never before in the world's history, has a military operation been so heralded by both sides as was the second front. Troops, tanks and transport are all loaded on four thousand ships. They put to sea to await the crucial moment. Guiding them are the guns of two mighty task forces of the combined Navy. Overhead, the Air Forces provide an invulnerable protective ceiling. Before dawn, Tuesday, June 6th, the word is given – advance. The forces of liberation move to their rendezvous with destiny. The invasion is on. The advanced guard of freedom make their touchdown on the Normandy beaches just as the sun scatters the mists of early morning. The only complaint from the wounded lads is that they're sorry to be out of the fight. They want to be back with their comrades – who are fighting forever forward, deeper into France. With stealth hearts and enthusiasm for the contest, let us go forward to victory.

Louis: Sounds like it was really great.

H.C. Chadderton: “Really great.” It's hardly the way that I would have described it. But you'll see how great war is in the next footage and these scenes from Dieppe, one of the worst tragedies of the whole war. We'll roll the footage from Dieppe now and we'll show you.

The raid can only be described as a complete disaster. It was a terrible few hours.

Louis: What happened?

H.C. Chadderton: The Canadians had been training for quite a while and they wanted to see some action. It was decided that they could get their first test against the Germans at Dieppe. It was supposed to be a fast raid. They'd go in and get out again in eight hours. The raid was delayed many times because of bad weather. But finally at 4:50 a.m. on August the 19th, 1942, 250 ships approached the coast of France in the darkness just before dawn. The men were huddled in their landing craft. You know, they had no idea what horrors lay ahead.

Louis: Were there a lot of Canadians involved?

H.C. Chadderton: Yes, I'm afraid so. Out of a total of 6,000 men, 5,000 of them were Canadians. But for most of them, the war began and ended right there on those beaches.

Those who weren't killed were wounded or captured. Of the 5,000 Canadians who were sent out on the operation that morning, only about 2,000 came back. In some cases, entire regiments had been almost wiped out. More than 3,000 men were murdered or wounded at Dieppe. Nearly 2,000 were taken prisoners of war. All that in one morning.

Louis: They look so young. I always thought that soldiers in World War II were older than that.

H.C. Chadderton: Well that's one of the real, real tragedies of war. I brought along some pictures of some friends of mine. This is a fellow by the name of Neil Young. He was 18. He was shot down while he was flying a bomber over Germany. This is a soldier from my own battalion, the Winnipeg Rifles. His name is Kelly Giguere. He lied about his age. He was underage and he had to lie to get into the Army. He was killed when he was only 17. This is a picture of me. I was a young officer at the time, taken just before D-Day.

Louis: How old were you?

H.C. Chadderton: I was 21 at the time.

Louis: I can't imagine going to war at that age. It's horrible.

H.C. Chadderton: Yes, but I guess we just didn't stop to think about it. The country was at war and as you know Canadians were volunteers, and off we went.

Louis: Did the people at home in Canada know how many were killed?

H.C. Chadderton: Well, regarding Dieppe it was so widely reported in the newspapers and the newsreels and the list of the casualties were widely published, and certainly it was impossible to hide the facts in regard to that particular action.

Now nearly a year later, 1943, Canadian troops were in action again.

Louis: Where was it this time?

H.C. Chadderton: Sicily, which is a small island off the toe of Italy. We've got some great war scenes from the Sicilian and Italian campaigns. Let's have a look at those now.

They sailed from England in June. Late during the night of July 9th, 1943, the Canadians joined the invasion armada of nearly 3,000 ships and landing craft.

Louis: Wow, exciting!

H.C. Chadderton: Well, I don't think exciting is the right word. Dreadful would be more like it. It was one o'clock in the morning. The Canadians climbed into their landing craft. They could hear the roar of shells exploding on the beach.

Louis: I hope we had better luck this time.

H.C. Chadderton: Well, it was quite different. They waded ashore from landing crafts into shallow water. They didn't have much resistance on the beaches. But later on they did have trouble. The Canadians spent July and August in the choking dust and intense heat of Sicily. They were constantly plagued by fleas, scorpions and mosquitoes. They pushed forward over rough roads littered with mines. In the early stages of the campaign, the sun and the malaria were a bigger problem than wounded.

After nine days of fighting more than half of Sicily had been occupied by the Allies. Six days later the Canadians fought one of their toughest battles at Nissoria. On the evening of July 24th, the Canadians moved up to the hills behind the village. In the darkness, they accidentally stumbled upon a German unit. They were hailed with fire from machine guns and mortars and tanks. They couldn't go forward and they couldn't go back. They were trapped.

At dawn the Canadians found they were exposed. They held on as long as they could, but as you can see it really got as we say "hot and heavy" – gun fire, mortar fire, bullets.

That's one of the things that sort of gets under the skin of veterans, mind you, because television portrays this kind of action as being fun – winners and losers. But having been through it, I can tell you nobody wins.

*Orders came for sailing, somewhere over there,
All confined to battle...*

That song is called "Lily Marlene," Louis. I guess not many people of your generation know the song. Interesting history to it. It was written as a love song by a German soldier.

Louis: You mean it was really by a German?

H.C. Chadderton: Yup. Written by a young German soldier and it became very popular in

the German army. And during those quiet periods in a war, at night, the Germans would sing the song and the Canadians could hear it.

*Even though we're parted, your lips are close to mine
You wait where that lantern softly gleamed
Your sweet face seems to haunt my dream
My Lili of the lamp light
My old Lili Marlene*

You know, when there was a big show coming, a big battle coming, the soldiers always knew about it ahead of time, or they sensed there was going to be something taking place. And this was the time when they usually wrote very poignant letters home. Here's a letter that I'd like you to take a look at, and you can notice that this soldier's senses that something is going to happen. And that's when he tells the story to his girlfriend of how he feels about things. This is an actual telegram sent to a mother. I'd like you to read it.

Louis: "Deeply regret to inform you that your son R97324 Sgt. Donald Frank Sutterby was killed on active service. Letter follows."

H.C. Chadderton: Doesn't that shock you?

Louis: Very.

H.C. Chadderton: They reduce it all really to a service number. R97324. I wonder if they ever gave any thought to how a mother might feel. Imagine reading this – the son that she loved so much would never, ever come back again. I'd like now for you to hear a song that was written by two Canadian soldiers. It's very interesting because they were in the barracks just before D-Day, and they were trying to understand how their widows might feel if they got killed in the action the following day. So we'll just play that song for you.

Widow's Song

*I wake each morning and I promise to laugh,
I look each morning at your old photograph,
And I kiss you, my dear,
Just as though you were here.*

*When evening shadows start to lay down in the dawn,
I take the same old stroll we took through the park,
And I kiss you, my dear,
Just as though you were here now.*

Don't be afraid, let the distance and time

*Will finally tear us apart,
Cause the further you go and the longer you stay,
The deeper you grow in my heart.*

*And each night before I wander asleep,
I bring to light the one I cherish so deep,
And I kiss you, my dear.
Just as though you were here now.
Just as though you were here now.*

The day after that song was written, Louis, the Canadians engaged in one of the most important battles of the war. Did you ever hear of D-Day?

Louis: Oh yeah, I hear about that once.

H.C. Chadderton: Well, that was the invasion of Europe. Really the beginning of the end. Do you understand what I mean by that?

Louis: Not really.

H.C. Chadderton: Well, the war had been going on since 1939. This was June of 1944, and at last the Allied troops were back on the main land of Europe where they could drive towards the heart of Germany and dispel Hitler's hopes for all time.

It was dawn landing, just like Dieppe and Sicily. A gigantic fleet of 4,000 fighting ships lay off the coast. Just after 6:30 that morning the battle began. Hundreds of gunners fired from their ships. And through all that, a rough sea, the men managed to reach the beaches. You can see how they were crammed into the landing craft – 30 men to a boat.

Louis: Were they ready for it?

H.C. Chadderton: Probably. The men knew that the landing was dangerous. There were lots of obstacles and reefs screening the shore. They had to ride the swells over and around them. Objects called hedgerows were concealed under the waves with mines attached to them. They blew gaping holes in the small boats. Many men died that way. And you can see that once they got ashore the nightmare was only beginning. They had to cross 200 yards of open beach. There was heavy machine gun and mortar fire. Some of them never made it any further. Others struggled through the snarled mass of barbed wire. The fighting was bitter and savage. Canadians gradually worked their way into the town of Courseulles-sur-Mer. Then heavy street fighting began.

Louis, the military strategists have called it a smashing victory. But out of the 14,000 Canadians who landed in Normandy on D-Day, more than 1,000 men were hurt or killed. And it was not over for the Canadians. The war dragged on for another year.

You want to ask me a question, don't you Louis?

Louis: Yes, I want to know, you and your other friend, how did you manage to keep your cool?

H.C. Chadderton: How did we manage to keep our cool? Well, I have to say that most of us coped; some people in one way, some in another. A friend of mine, Joe Oldford, he actually wrote poetry right in the midst of the battle. He's a tremendous fellow too, and we have some footage of him and some of his poems. Would you like to see that?

Louis: Oh yes.

H.C. Chadderton: Let's roll that.

JOE OLDFORD: I watched them making crosses,
In the little hut close by,
Tiny wooden crosses,
For the men who go to die.

They whistled as they shaped them,
Maybe to hide a sob;
Or to show that wooden crosses
Meant just another job.

But I wondered as I watched them,
If some day before it ends,
Those little wooden crosses
Might represent my friends.

I pray they don't, but if they do,
Then each and every one,
Will mark the eternal resting place
Of a brave, Canadian son.

H.C. Chadderton: Another veteran, Louis, who can talk about the horrors of war, is The Honourable George Hees, the current Minister of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Hees and I have been overseas and we have visited many of the cemeteries and the memorials to Canadian soldiers.

Louis: Oh, so you mean you've been back since the war. How was it like?

H.C. Chadderton: For me? Terrifying. Terrifying to see those young graves, and by the way, I had a chance to talk to George Hees about this subject on camera. Would you like to see it?

Louis: Sure.

H.C. Chadderton: Yeah, let's roll that.

George Hees: There's nothing glamorous about a war. There's nothing exciting about a war. It's a terrible thing to see your comrades that you've know for a long time, worked with, served with, suddenly have their lives snuffed out; or receive a terrible wound that's going to debilitate them for the rest of their life. It's a dreadful thing to see, and my feeling was a feeling of great sorrow, as I walked through those graveyards, to see the names of some people that I knew, others that I didn't, of course. Most that I didn't realize – that these men had been denied the kind of life that you and I have been able to lead. And it was a feeling of great sorrow.

H.C. Chadderton: Going back to your question, Louis, about what it's like to visit the cemeteries, made me wonder why, as veterans, why we didn't come back and tell what it was really like – how horrible it really was. And if we had done that, maybe the post-war world might have thought a little differently about starting up another war. And of course, all of this in our mind, led to this **NEVER AGAIN!** project which you and the CHAMP youngsters are now a part of.

When I visit these cemeteries I make it a practice of writing down what is said in the inscriptions on the headstones. I'd like to read you just a few of the ones that I copied down over the years.

"To a beautiful life, come to a sudden end."

Listen to this one: *"His life a beautiful memory. His absence a silent grief."*

"I never thought our last goodbye would be forever."

And this one, Louis: *"His ship is on the river."*

You know what those words mean?

Louis: No.

H.C. Chadderton: That's a mother saying, *"My son has gone to heaven."*

*I never thought our last good-bye would be forever
You're gone from our home but not our hearts
But oh how we loved you
Your ship is on the river
Where's the glory? NEVER AGAIN!*