

Ash, Ralph Leonard

Private

Lake Superior Regiment (Motor)

Royal Canadian Infantry Corps

D 145624



Ralph Ash was born May 5, 1927, in Blind River, Ontario, where he lived for the first three years. Ralph was the son of Frank, born in Beirut, Lebanon, and Delia Gagnon of Canada. Father and mother married on April 25, 1917; the family was Roman Catholic. The couple had eight children: the oldest was Norman, followed by sister B.A. Besner, Sergeant A. Ash (service no. D118894), sister Frances, and Sergeant W.J. Ash (service no. R174210. He was killed in France on Dec. 2, 1944, after first going missing). Brother R.J. Ash was next. He was also in the Army, serving with the South East Asia Air Forces under service no. R57879. Ralph was number seven in the family, and the youngest was sister Eveline.

Billy



Ralph had lived in Amos, Quebec, since age three and attended Public School for seven years. He then took three years of English courses. After



finishing school, Ralph worked as a mechanic at Perron gold mines in Pascalis, Quebec.

In 1910, gold was found in the Abitibi region, to which Pascalis belonged, and until then, the area was uninhabited. Soon, thousands of people moved there, and in the 1920s-

1930s, numerous settlements, hamlets, and villages were founded for



gold mining. In Pascalis, there were then four mines, including the Perron. On July 7, 1944, disaster struck, and the village of Pascalis was hit by a forest fire, almost destroying it. The town was not rebuilt, and most inhabitants, like the Ash family, moved elsewhere, including Val d'Or.

Main Street in Pascalis about 1940. Source: Library and Archives Canada

Ralph wanted to enlist, like his older brother, but he was still too young. He no longer wanted to work at the mine and reported for duty at Montreal South on June 17, 1944. He was only seventeen, but he said he was twenty. To look a little older, he had grown a mustache. His parents were now divorced, and his mother did not want him to enlist. Secretly, he ran away from home and enlisted anyway. But Father Frank had connections and got Ralph discharged because of his young age. However, the mother, Delia, had parental authority and had to give permission. She decided to leave him in the service because otherwise, he would run away again and report back under a false name. He might then disappear from the family's sight altogether. So, in the army, they still thought Ralph was twenty.

Ralph was single and, before joining the military, worked at Perron for 16 months. He spoke and wrote both English and French, and his medical application form stated that Ralph was 5 ft 6 tall and weighed almost 121 lbs. He had brown hair and brown eyes, with a scar on his forehead. He had kidney problems and occasional hernia and foot problems. He supported his mother monthly with \$60.00 from his salary, and he still lived with her. His siblings also contributed because his mother was alone. After his service, Ralph wanted to live in Perron, Quebec.

Young Ralph was transferred for his training on July 7, 1944, to the 48 Basic Training Centre in St. Johns, Newfoundland. By early September, he was at Farnham's A12 Canadian Infantry Training Centre. Around this time, Ralph received word that his mother had moved to Val d'Or, Quebec. In early November, he got a fourteen-day leave of absence and two

additional days of Embarkation Leave. This was soon followed by the passage to war in Europe, and on November 25, 1944, Ralph left his native country and arrived in the United Kingdom (UK) on December 5.

On December 6, he was called to active duty with the 4 Canadian Infantry Training Regiment. So Ralph was just in the UK when they got the sad news back home in Canada that brother Billy had been shot down during a flight over France and had initially been missing. It was December 2, 1944, and they later learned that he had been killed and buried in France.

After two months in the UK, Ralph left by ship for mainland Europe at the end of January 1945 and was assigned as a Private to the 1 Battalion Lake Superior Regiment (Motor).

The Lake Superior Regiment (Motor) motto is *Inter Pericula Intrepidi* (fearless in the face of danger).



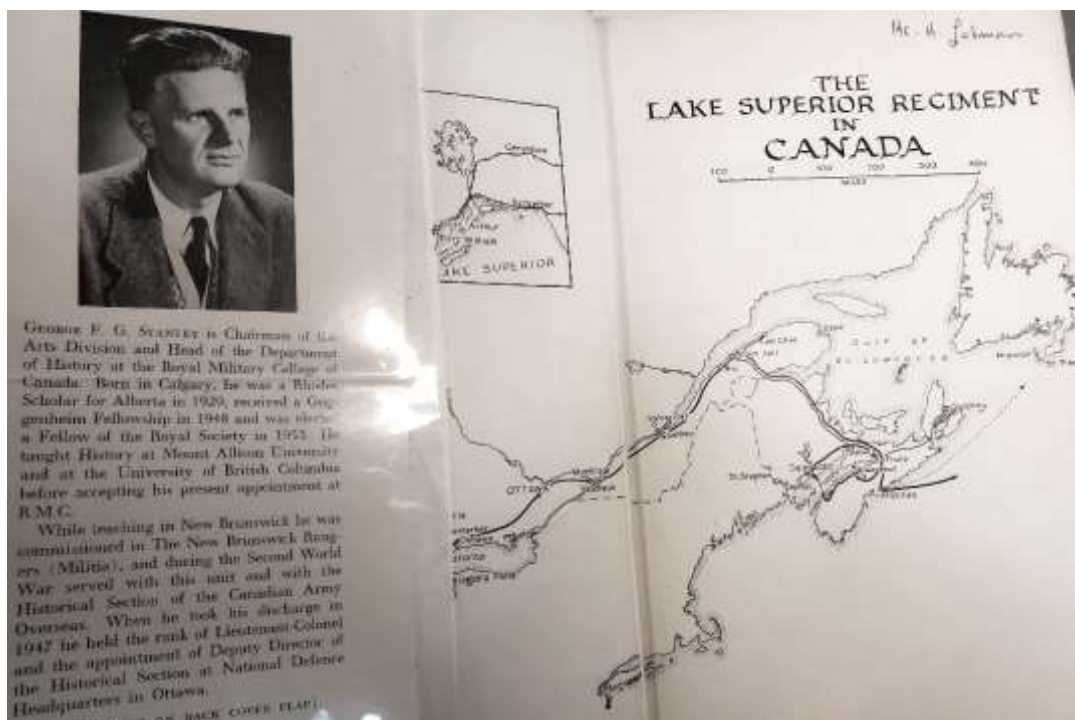
Headquartered in Thunderbay, Ontario, it was

converted into a motorcycle battalion in January 1942. In August 1942, the first soldiers had already been going to Europe, and from July 20, 1944, they were involved in all

battles in France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. The LSR was the first regiment to attack and sink enemy ships from the mainland. A total of one hundred



and ninety-nine were killed. After the war, the name was changed to Lake Superior Scottish Regiment.



Ralph Ash was one of the soldiers who also took part in these actions during Operation Churchill, the attack across the so-called Hochwald Gap, as part of Operation Blockbuster. The Hochwald Gap is a narrow strip of open terrain over a high hill between the Uedemer Hochwald on the one side and the old railway line Uedem-Kalkar and the Tüschenwald on the other side. This attack resulted in a catastrophe for the Canadians. Ralph Ash went missing on March 2nd. However, one day after the attack, when the Germans had withdrawn from Xanten, Ralph was found by the priest and the regiment's burial team. The priest mentioned that Ralph, together with Private William John Catto, had made a circumferential motion in the direction of a farm on the north side of the Gap. According to the team's findings, they had encountered a German mortar position there, and a firefight ensued. Not only were there ten German victims, but Ralph Ash and William Catto died there as well.

Along with many comrades, Ralph was buried in Uedemer Bruch, Germany, near Xanten, at the top of a hill.

Private Ralph Leonard Ash was still only seventeen years old when he was killed in action after 259 days of service.

On October 30, 1945, Ralph Ash was reburied at the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek, grave reference **XIV. D. 9**.

The text on his headstone reads:

HE DIED
THE HELPLESS TO DEFEND,
A FAITHFUL SOLDIER'S
NOBLE END

William Catto is buried besides him.



Private Ralph Ash was the recipient of the following awards:

- 1939-1945 Star
- France and Germany Star
- War Medal 1939-1945
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp



Life story by: Liesbeth Huisman Research Team Faces To Graves.

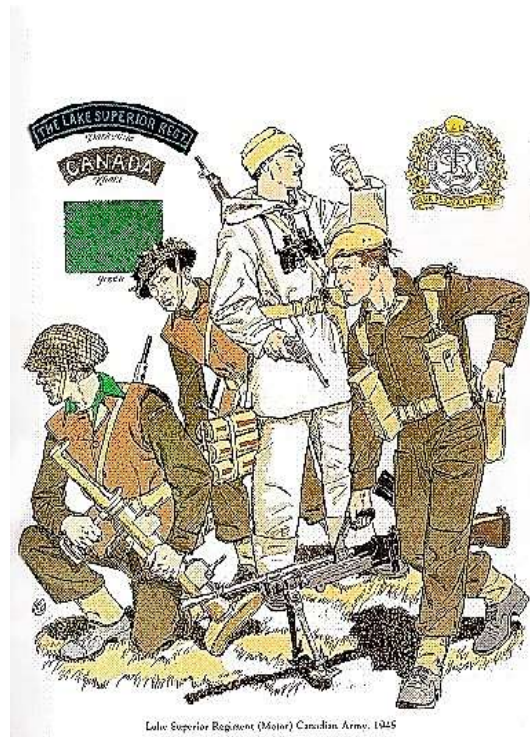
*If you have a photo of this soldier or additional information, please contact info@facestograves.nl

Sources consulted:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission
Library and Archives Canada
veterans.gc.ca (info LSR)
Edwin Popken
www.battlefielddiscovery.nl
War Diaries LSR

Collection Thunderbay Museum

David Ratz





Lt. Styffe gives instructions to his soldiers sitting on a Universal or Bren Carrier. Aldershot, November 1942

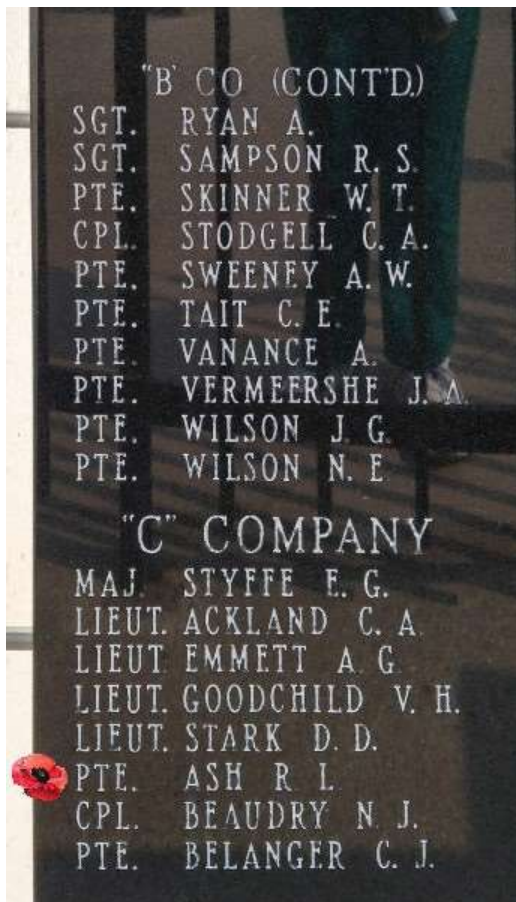
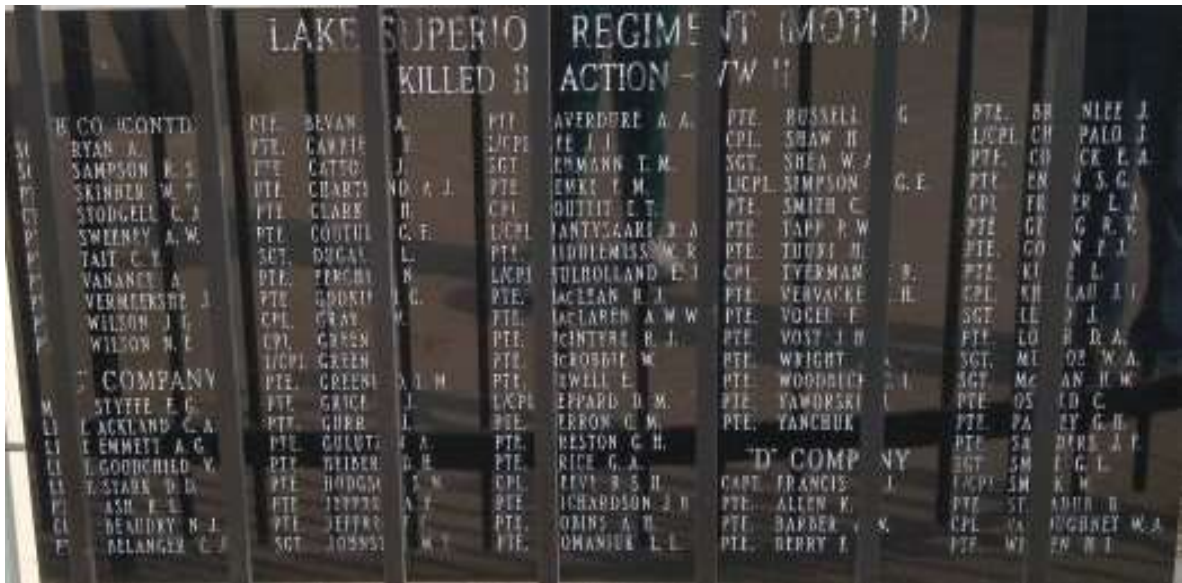
Photo: National Archives of Canada

Information from Edwin Popken, by email in May 2023:

On April 5, 1945, the Ash family received word that Ralph had perished. Mother Delia was already devastated and confused after Billy's death on December 2, 1944. On hearing of Ralph's death, according to a daughter of hers, she was utterly broken. She said that her mother lay in bed for a week, unable to function. Father Frank also blamed Delia for not letting Ralph come home when he could have taken care of that. Mother Delia flew to Europe in May 1965 to visit the graves of her two sons. Afterward, she told a local newspaper, "They are buried in a little corner of heaven, where pink blossoms grow on the trees, and the grass is deep green with poppies in full bloom."



Ralph, left, with his brother Billy



Memorial LSR (Motor) in Hillcrest Park, Thunderbay, Ontario

Source: veterans.gc.ca

