

**Beange, Keith Allan**

**Private**

**Highland Light Infantry  
Of Canada**

**B/158407**



Keith Allan Beange was born on November 4, 1925, in Gore Bay, Manitoulin Island, Ontario. Keith was the son of Ethel Mae Spry and Robert Dunlop Beange.

He had three sisters: Donelda, Ethel Murdean and Marion as well as five brothers: Robert, Clifford, Laird, Murray, and James Elwood. His older brother, Flying Officer Robert Beange, served in the Royal Canadian Air Force, training as a wireless operator and air gunner. The family belonged to the United Church of Canada.

In Keith's military documents, it stated that he attended Gore Bay high school. It also stated that Keith held a few jobs such as a printer's helper for one year at the Gore Bay Recorder newspaper and in farming for a year. Before enlisting in the army, he worked as a shipyard fitter at Collingwood Shipyards for a year and a half. Keith played a little hockey, skated, and would attend shows and dances.

His personnel selection report described him as having a "neatly-dressed, and well-groomed appearance." The military assessment report also stated that he seemed to "enjoy a good time with his friends" but also had "no special hobby, craft or group interest."

He was also described as being "Very smart, steady progress noted. Learns easily. Well disciplined. Possibly N.C.O [non commissioned officer] material."

Keith Beange was 18 years of age when he enlisted on January 24, 1944 in Toronto, Ontario.

ITEMS 17, 18 AND 19 WILL NOT BE COMPLETED UNLESS A MAN ENLISTS FOR GENERAL SERVICE ANYWHERE.

17. DECLARATION TO BE MADE BY MAN ON ATTESTATION

Keith Allen BEANGE, hereby engage to serve in any Active Formation or Unit of the Canadian Army so long as an emergency, i.e., war, invasion, riot or insurrection, real or apprehended, exists, and for the period of demobilization after said emergency ceases to exist, and in any event for a period of not less than one year, provided His Majesty should so require my services.

Date 24 January 1944

Keith Beange  
(Signature of Recruit)

According to medical records, he had blue eyes and brown hair, standing five foot six inches tall and weighing 126 pounds. In his military documents he was described as being "quiet, unobtrusive manner, but seems alert, calm and polite with high-average general ability."

Private Beange's military training started with basic training in Cornwall, Ontario He completed small arms range courses, PIAT, mortar and grenade. He also completed full infantry training at Camp Borden and small Arms Range Courses.

Private Beange shipped out from Debert, Nova Scotia on December 18, 1944 and arrived in the United Kingdom on December 25, 1944. He reported for duty with the Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit and was sent to Northwest Europe on February 17, 1945.

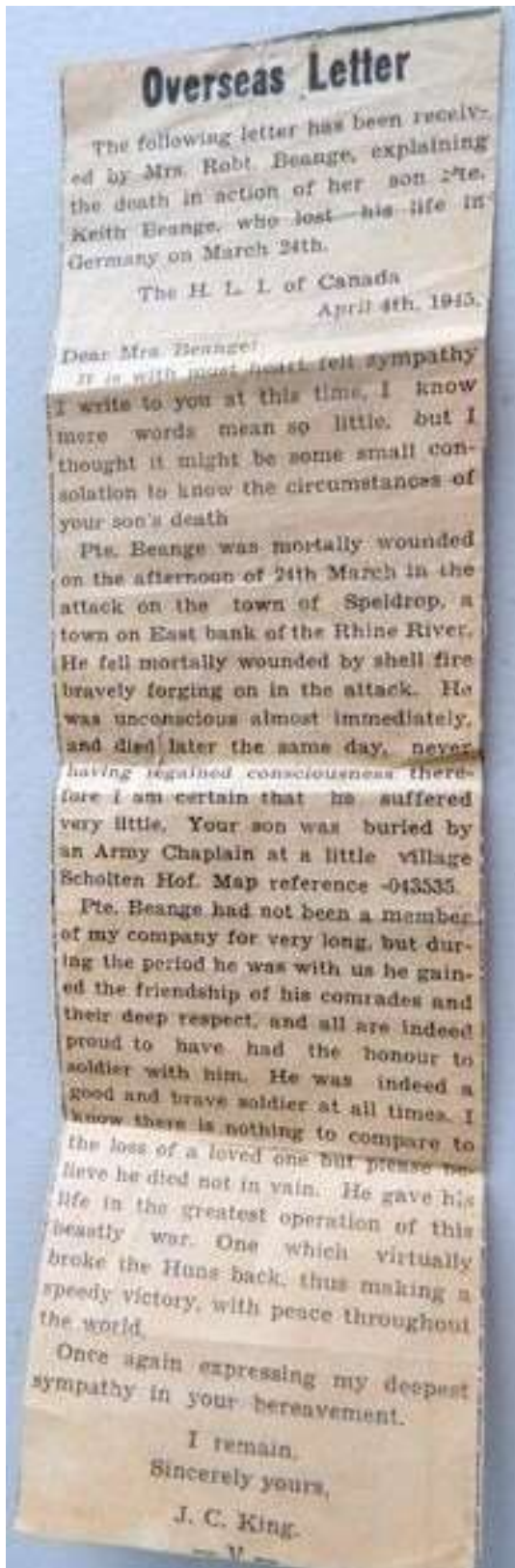
On March 3, he was assigned to the Canadian Highland Light Infantry and fought for two weeks until he died of wounds in battle on March 24, 1945.

In the war diary for the Canadian Highland Light Infantry, the regiment was northeast of Calcar, Germany on the day before Private Beange's death.

According to a letter dated March 13, 1945, Private Beange wrote to his parents that he had still not seen any action. But 11 days later, he was killed in battle at the age of 19 years old.

According to the casualty report, he received shrapnel wounds to his head and the right side of his chest.

His company commander, J.C King of the HLI Regiment, wrote to his mother, Ethel Beange. The April 4, 1945, letter was published in the Gore Bay Recorder community newspaper.



"Pte. Beange was mortally wounded on the afternoon of 24th March in the attack on the town of Speldrop, a town on (sic) east bank of the Rhine river. He fell mortally wounded by shell fire bravely forging on in the attack. He was unconscious almost immediately and died later the same day, never having regained consciousness therefore I am certain that he suffered very little."

The King letter also stated:

"Pte. Beange had not been a member of my company for very long, but during the period he was with us he gained the friendship of his comrades and their deep respect, and all are indeed proud to have had the honour to soldier with him. He was indeed a good and brave soldier at all times."



Private Keith Allan Beange was initially buried in a battlefield cemetery at Boetzelaer, Germany, before being re-interred at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery after the war ended. Grave reference **XVII. D. 1.**

His headstone is inscribed with the words:

"IN LOVING MEMORY  
OF OUR DEAR SON AND BROTHER  
WHO LOST HIS LIFE IN ACTION"



*Photo Alice van Bekkum – April 2015*

A Dutch family from Velp, Netherlands, George Sr. (who passed away in 2020) and Tsien Ursulmann and their two sons Mischa and Georgie have maintained Private Beange's grave.

After his death, there was a Memorial Service held for Pte. Keith Beange in 1945 in Gore Bay, Ontario. The Manitoulin Island Recorder newspaper's account of this service is as follows:

"A solemn and impressive memorial service was held in Lyon's Memorial United Church on Wednesday night of last week for Pte. Keith Beange, son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Beange, Gore Bay who was killed in action on March 24, while fighting with his unit, the Highland Light Infantry of Canada.

The church was filled with friends who gathered to show their sympathy for the family, and to pay tribute to the memory of the gallant young soldier. Flags draped the front of the church for the service, and the High School Cadet Corps attended in a body. The service was conducted by Rev. W. J. Rayner, who brought a message of comfort and inspiration, relating also how Keith had volunteered in the defence of home and freedom and had laid down his life in the cause of humanity.

The choir sang "Oh Valiant Heart" and several appropriate hymns were sung by the congregation. At the close of the last hymn, "The Last Post" and "Reveille", were sounded, which brought the memorial service to a close."

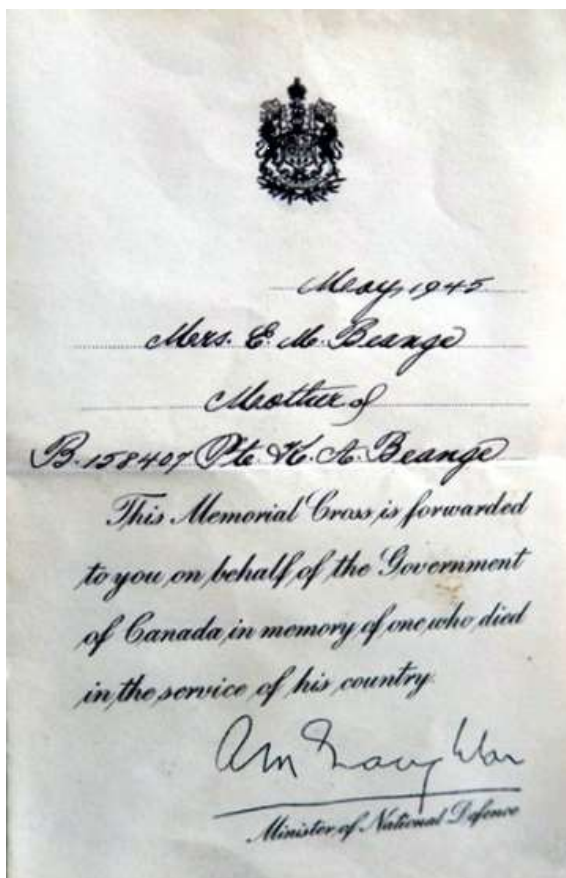


Private Keith Beange was awarded with the Canadian medals:

- 1939-45 Star
- France and Germany Star
- War Medal
- Canadian Volunteer Service medal with clasp



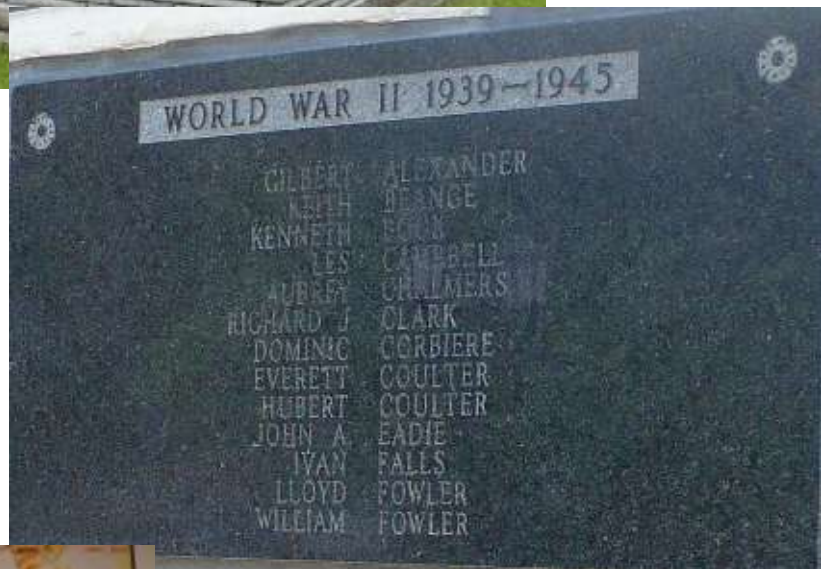
His mother received the Memorial Cross



Keith is also remembered at his parents grave



Keith's name is engraved onto the Manitoulin District Cenotaph at the corner of Highway 551 and Monument Road.



A township near Elliot Lake, Ontario was named after him in 1974.



## FACES TO GRAVES

Stichting Faces to Canadian  
War Graves Groesbeek

Life story written by Mariah Abou-Khalil and Maddox Bowker, students from All Saints H.S., Kanata, Canada for Faces to Graves courtesy of Vanessa Kirtz, teacher at All Saints H.S.

Additional research and editing provided by Kurt Johnson.

### Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial
- Library and Archives Canada
- Newspapers.com
- Photos and documents provided by Keith J. Beange, Keith's 1<sup>st</sup> cousin's son
- <http://ontariowarmemorials.blogspot.com/2017/09/manitoulin-district-cenotaph.html>
- <https://sites.rootsweb.com/~onmanito/obituary/Be.html>

\* Do you have a photo of this soldier or additional information please contact [info@facestograves.nl](mailto:info@facestograves.nl)

Additional information, issued by Keith J. Beange, Keith's 1<sup>st</sup> cousin's son:

### **Last Battle for Private Keith Allan Beange (March 24, 1945)**

#### **Private Keith Beange Assignment to The Highland Light Infantry of Canada**

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## **First Canadian Regiment to cross the Rhine**

In February 1945, The Highland Light Infantry of Canada Regiment was in the west side of the Rhine River. They had moved back to the Reichswald Forest area near the city of Cleve and were static after the battle for the Hammerbruck Feature. ... Sporadic incoming artillery fire let everyone present know there was still fight left in the Germans.

There was a training syllabus to prepare for the next operation, the crossing of the Rhine; where fanatical resistance was expected. Range work with the various weapons was conducted, as well as house clearing drill practiced in the ruins of Cleve (the city was for the most part demolished). Retraining was important even for the experienced men, but the green replacements would need it the most; by this time, soldiers who had been in the war since D Day were the minority.

## **Operation Plunder (Mar 23, 1945 – Mar 27, 1945)**

Operation Plunder was a military operation to cross the Rhine on the night of 23 March 1945, launched by the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group under Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery.

The Americans would cross on the south (right) end, the British on the north (left), while the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Army had a breakout role. The 3rd Canadian Division was lent to the British to beef up their attack. As part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, The Highland Light Infantry of Canada Regiment were tasked with establishing a bridgehead on the German side of the Rhine; the villages of Speldrop and Bienen among the initial objectives

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### Speldrop Farm 24 March



Officers of the H.L.I. of Canada at the Rhine River crossing, Speldrop, 24 March 1945.  
(L-R) Captain J.A. Ferguson, Lieutenant E.R. Izmer, Captain D.A. Pearce



8<sup>th</sup> Company, H.L.I. of Canada Universal Carrier,  
Speldrop, Germany, 24 March 1945. (L-R) Company Sergeant Major R.E. Bryant, Private L.J. Mullin and Private T.C. Galbraith.

The H.L.I. was the first Canadian formation over the river and the advance party crossed about 90 minutes after the first wave of Scottish troops. The first attack made by the H.L.I. unit was against Speldrop, a strongly held German town two miles north of Rees, where two previous assaults by Scottish troops were beaten back. Speldrop's widely separated farmhouses provided the Germans with wide fields of fire and they had the approaches to the village covered with self-propelled guns.

At 1730, The H.L.I. of Canada went in full force; each company taking a sector of the village.

Major Joseph Charles King was in command of "B" Company, the leading company of the battalion given the task of securing a firm base in the NORTH end of the town of Speldrop. Private Keith Allen Beange was in "B" Company.

Major King lead his company across one thousand yards of open ground, and seized the first group of buildings; though it was swept by German machine gun and mortar fire, and subject to direct faust fire from three German tanks sited to cover the approaches.

A group of fortified buildings beyond Major King's objective proved to be a strong point, and Major King called for Wasp flame carriers and anti - tank support. When these arrived, Major King organized an attack on the strong point, and captured Speldrop Farm with one platoon.

The battle of Speldrop Farm had cost approximately 13 dead and 23 wounded. Among the dead were Private Keith Beange and two of Major King's platoon commanders. It began to rain as the battalion was relieved to pick up its dead and wounded, and the Scottish carried on the advance.

Keith was mortally wounded by shell fire on the afternoon of March 24<sup>th</sup>. He was unconscious almost immediately, and died later the same day; never having regained consciousness. According to the casualty report, Keith received shrapnel wounds to his head and the right side of his chest.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was present at Field Marshal Montgomery's headquarters near Venlo on the eve of Plunder. Subsequently, Churchill and Montgomery watched the Varsity air landings on 24 March.

### **The Following Day, 25 Mar 1945 – Winston Churchill**

On March 25<sup>th</sup>, Major King's company successfully cleared a group of buildings in BIENEN, a nodal point which was blocking further advance by the bridgehead forces.

Later that day, Churchill and Montgomery visited General Dwight D. Eisenhower's headquarters. After lunch and a briefing, the party went to a sandbagged house overlooking the Rhine and a quiet, undefended stretch of the German-held riverbank. After Eisenhower's departure, Churchill, Montgomery, and a party of U.S. commanders and armed guards took a Higgins boat landing craft and landed for 30 minutes in enemy territory, without challenge. They next visited the destroyed railway bridge at Wesel, departing when German artillery appeared to target them.



## **PS on Major Joseph Charles King (16 Oct 1917 - 29 Nov 1963)**

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, Major King wrote a letter to Mrs. Robt. Beange explaining the death in action of her son Pte. Keith Beange who lost his life in Germany on March 24<sup>th</sup>.

Major King was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his initiative, leadership and courage during the battles of March 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

Sadly, Joseph King died, just 18 years later at age 46, in the crash of Trans Canada Airlines Flight 831 on 29 November 1963, shortly after take-off from Dorval International Airport. No one on the jet survived the crash. At the time, Joseph was Vice-President and General Sales Manager of IBM Canada.

Source Material:

- 1) WW2 Overview of The Highland Light Infantry of Canada  
[https://pipesforfreedom.com/webtxt/0502THE\\_HIGHLAND\\_LIGHT\\_INFANTRY\\_OF\\_CANADA.htm](https://pipesforfreedom.com/webtxt/0502THE_HIGHLAND_LIGHT_INFANTRY_OF_CANADA.htm)
- 2) Wikipedia on Operation Plunder ... [http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/cao-aco/doc/D2\\_JOH-KYD\\_087.pdf](http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/cao-aco/doc/D2_JOH-KYD_087.pdf)
- 3) Mar. 29, 1945 Approved Recommendation to Award Distinguish Service Cross to Major J.C. King. [http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/cao-aco/doc/D2\\_JOH-KYD\\_087.pdf](http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/cao-aco/doc/D2_JOH-KYD_087.pdf)
- 4) April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1945 letter from Major King to Mrs. Robt. Beange explaining the death in action of her son Pte. Keith Beange who lost his life in Germany on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1945.