

Asplund, Bernard Allen
Lance Corporal
Algonquin Regiment
Royal Canadian Infantry Corps
M 10770



NE-KAH-NE-TAH (Let us lead)



Bernard Allen Asplund was born on Monday, 8 March, 1925 in Cardston, Alberta. His American parents, Chester Allen, born 1894, in Fairview, Utah, and Celeste Alston, born 1899 in American Fork, Utah, were married on 23 August, 1920 in Cardston, Alberta. Bernard had an older sister, Megan Rae and a younger sister, Janet. His father had a farm in Glenwoodville, Alberta and was also the project manager for the United Irrigation District in Glenwood. The family were Mormons, attending the Latter Day Saints Church.

Bernard grew up in Glenwood, a village in the south of Alberta, named after Glen Edward Wood. It lies to the north of the town of Cardston. When he was 15, he had completed grade 9 at the local school and enrolled at the Olds School of Agriculture where he stayed until June, 1942. He said of himself that he was not a serious student. The people around him found him a sympathetic and cheerful guy, who was always ready for some fun. He was determined and bold, and although he was rather short, never afraid to stand up to the bigger fellows.



Bernard Allen in 1929.

After his studies, he went to work on his father's farm where he learnt to handle a tractor and drive a truck. His cousin Doug remembers that they travelled in a 32 Chevy truck to the Ross farm, far away in the south of Alberta, for Christmas celebrations. Bernard enjoyed it there with his many good friends.

There was an article in the Lethbridge Herald about the old Glenwood shop Van Dans and the milkshake mix they made from skimmed milk. Jumbo Malts sold for 35 cents and few people could manage more than one.. On one occasion, Bruce Glines and Bernard were offered five of them without payment if they could drink them all up, but they could only manage three at one time.

On 1 May 1943, when he was 18, Bernard joined the Canadian army in Calgary, Alberta at the #13 District Depot and was found suitable to join a tank regiment, with his interest in mechanics and experience in truck and tractor repairs. He said that after the war he would like to run a farm with tractors and machines.



At the first interview he was reported to be in good health, 5 ft.7 ins. tall, weighing 159 lbs. with blue eyes and brown hair. He was judged to be a calm and sober type, more responsive to being guided than driven; once an officer gained his loyalty, he would be a strong man in the unit. He was keen to serve overseas and with his enthusiasm and above average intelligence, it was thought he would have little problem with the army training.



Two weeks later Bernard was assigned to the #131 Canadian Armoured Corps Reinforcement Regiment and moved to Camp Camrose. On 11 July he was transferred to the #2 Canadian Armoured Corps Training Regiment in Camp Borden. He spent a week in hospital in August with impetigo, a contagious skin complaint.

Basic Training Unit Camrose, Alberta

On 26 August, he was sent to London, Ontario, for a three month training course at the Army Mechanical Motor School and then returned to Camp Borden. After a five day Christmas leave, he passed tests as a Class III Driver (wheel and track) and qualified as Driver-Monteur Group C (track), Chauffeur/Monteur for wheel and caterpillar vehicles.

When his training finished, he was sent overseas to England where he arrived on 11 May, 1944.

On 25 July, Bernard was transferred from the Canadian Armoured Corps to the Royal Canadian Artillery as a Gunner; three weeks later he was moved again to the 1st Battalion of the Rocky Mountain Rangers, part of the 13th Infantry Brigade, as a Private.

On 9 September he was sent to France where he joined the Algonquin Regiment.

The name of this infantry regiment was that of an Indian tribe which, a few centuries before, had lived in south eastern Canada. The head of a

moose, an animal common to this region is represented on the regimental coat of arms. Many timber jacks, trappers and hunters joined the Algonquins.

The regiment arrived in France at the end of July, 1944 and took part in the battles near Caen to close the Falaise Gap, suffering heavy casualties. At the end of August they were in Bruges, Belgium, where reinforcements joined them; Bernard Asplund was one of these.

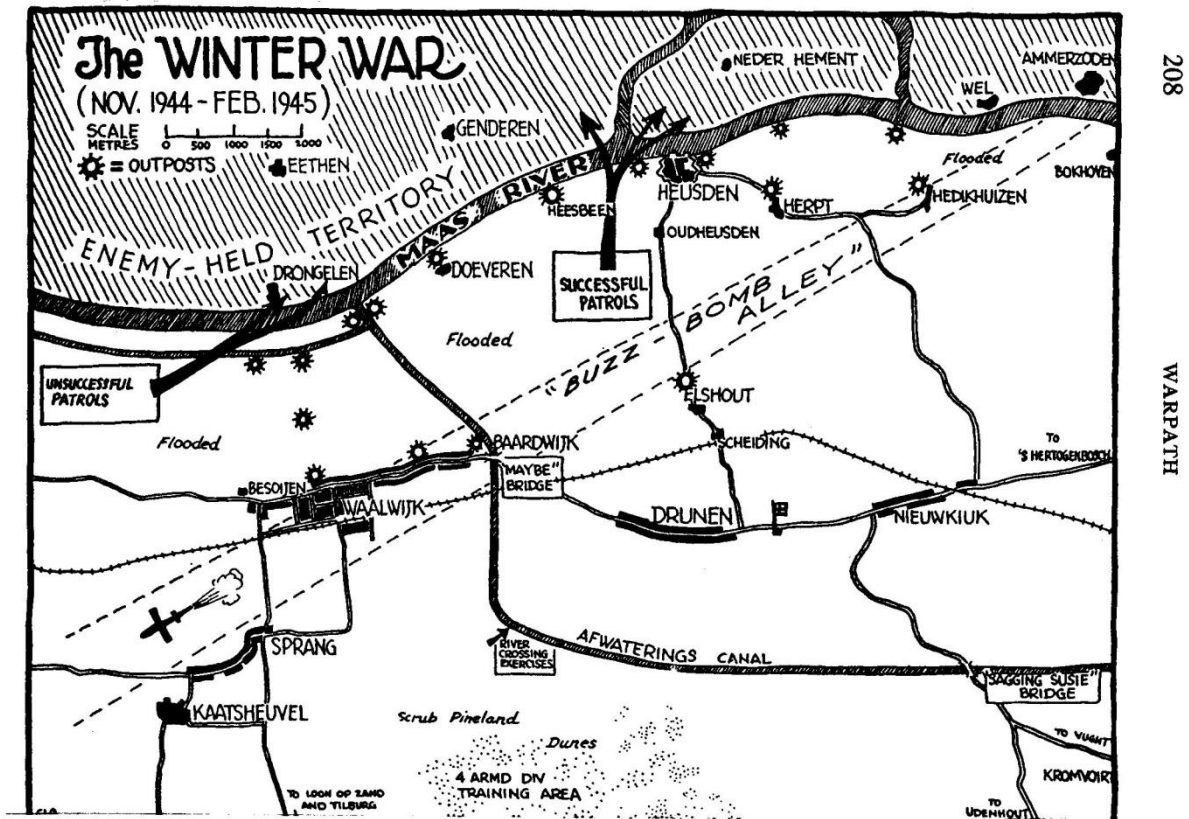
For the first time in his life, he experienced life at the front. The Algonquins, in the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, were involved in the fighting round Moerkerke. This was a part of the Battle of the Scheldt. The port of Antwerp was liberated in the first week of September, but the estuary and river leading to the port were still in enemy hands.

The Canadians thought that the German defense was weakest near Moerkerke and in the night of 13/14 September, the battle at 'Molentje' began at 22.00. They forced the enemy back, hoping to reach the canal. Using boats, four companies of the Algonquins reached the other side and a bridgehead was formed but German resistance was far greater than expected. The plan to build a bridge over the canal proved impossible. . The coastal batteries near Heist and Cadzand and the cannons in the Aardenburg and Draaibrug regions kept the bridgehead under heavy fire the whole night.

The next morning, the Germans counter attacked. Under heavy artillery cover, the Canadians withdrew. On 21 September, Phillipine, a village in Zeeland near Terneuzen, in the Netherlands, was liberated. From 22 September until 14 October, heavy fighting continued at the Isabella lock and polder near Phillipine

Bernard was promoted to the rank of Lance-Corporal on 11 October. After the allied victory, the regiment moved on to North Brabant and Bergen op Zoom, then to the village of Welberg near Steenberg. The operation to free Welberg began on 31 October but on 1 November they were driven back a few kilometers. The next day, they launched a new attack on the other side, fighting through the night; this time they were successful and Welberg was liberated. From 5-8 November the Algonquins enjoyed their well earned rest in Steenberg.

On 11 November, 1944, the regiment moved to the Waalwijk/Bardwijk region in the Netherlands, charged with patrolling the Maas river. They were to remain there until January, 1945.



The following is taken from the book 'Provinciestad in Oorlogstijd':

"On Sunday 19 November, a strong German patrol with snipers, crossed the Bergse Maas and occupied a house on the dike opposite Café van Bel, near the ferry to Drongelen.

A platoon of 30 men from the D company under the command of Lieutenant Hooper were sent to drive them out. If they were able to take some German prisoners that would make up for the failure of their river crossing mission of the previous night. However luck was not with the Algonquins. Lt. Hooper became disoriented by the flooded polders on both sides of him.

Finally they found the right house but all hell broke loose when the attackers failed to give the correct light signal to the sentries of B company, who were placed along the south drainage canal; they promptly opened fire on their comrades.

The chaos was complete as the shocked men of the patrol struggled to escape. In the darkness and confusion, the men walked into a minefield.

When these S-mines were activated, they sprang in the air and exploded at hip height. It was a bloodbath for the Algonquins.



The conscious house where the German Snipers sat.

Out of the thirty men, 10 were killed and 12 wounded, including Hooper. The rest of the mines were cleared the following day by Sergeant Campbell, who was awarded the military medal for this.

The soldiers (7 of them) were buried on Saturday, 25 November at the temporary cemetery at the 'Stationsplein'. The other 3 soldiers were buried temporarily by the pumping station.

Many of the local people came to the ceremony. 30 Canadians with the commanding officer Bradbury were present. Joseph Nanninck made a speech in English and Dutch.

After a minute's silence, two wreathes were laid, one in the name of the people of Waalwik, one by the National Armed Forces (part of the resistance). Finally, Lt. Colonel Bradburn saluted the fallen soldiers."

One of those killed was Lance Corporal Bernard Allen Asplund, who lost his life at the age of 19...

SPEECH BY THE BURGOMASTER

GENTLEMEN:

Waalwijk, 25 Nov. 44.

We are gathered here and have asked you the favour of your presence at this meeting, because we think it a point of duty to give evidence of our gratefulness to you, also and especially in this way. There is a wide space and a broad ocean between your people and ours, and what did we know of each other before this? Probably you never before in your life even heard the name of this town, of this quiet little Dutch place, in whose earth some of your fellow-countrymen have now found eternal rest. None of you have any personal interest in the low flat bottom and the moist and damp earth of this far-away country in a corner of the European Continent. And yet you came here, and you came for our sake, of your own free will. We are aware of the weight and the value of this sacrifice. You left your country behind you and everything that was and is dear to you there, your relations and friends, the comfort of your home, the peace and order of your daily life. And for what? Certainly not for your personal profit and advantage. It would have been much easier and much more comfortable to have stayed at home. The only reason why you made this great sacrifice for a foreign people on the other side of the world, can have been the call of humanity, the feeling and sympathy for your fellow-man, whom you knew to be bound in the fetters of the German usurper and his tyranny. Now that you are here and have freed us, you stand for us as a symbol of right and justice, expelling wrong and injustice, the menace of the enemy, from our horizon. We want to express our thankfulness for this deed of humanity in general, but we have another reason for gratefulness of a more special character with a view to the narrower relation between you, who stay here, and us, people of this place. For if it had not been for your presence and vigilant protection, what misery and misfortunes could have come over us from the Germans? We are fully aware of the fact, that it is merely owing to you, Canadian soldiers, that we can live here now in peace and security, in spite of the nearness of those, who want to do us wrong, and before this did so in many ways. We are also fully aware that our security at the moment depends on your readiness of sacrificing, if necessary, the dearest thing a man possesses on earth: your life. Those of your comrades, who are buried here, have given proof of that readiness. We shall never be able fully enough to express our sincere and deep-felt respect and thankfulness for these heroes, because it is not in the power of man to compensate for the loss of life. We can only thank and honour the dead in you, the living. As for them, we shall see to it that their graves are worthily kept and we shall pray God, that he may give their souls eternal-peace. And as an expression of our feelings which words are unable to phrase adequately, we shall put these flowers on the graves of these heroes, who in the sacrifice of their lives for our sake have come to belong to you and us together through the mystic bonds of death. May God rest their souls.

Waalwijk, Nov. 25th, 44.

The Algonquin patrol attacked the sniper's house in the night of 19 November and it lasted until the early hours of 20 November when the soldiers were killed. Their bodies were only recovered on the 21st, because of continuing enemy fire, when it was then confirmed that they were killed in action. Therefore the official date of death is 21 November.

He was temporarily buried in Waalwijk and on 7 February, 1946 reburied in the Canadian War Cemetery, Groesbeek, grave reference **XX. C. 8.**

Awards of Bernard Allen Asplund:

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



FACES TO GRAVES

Stichting Faces to Canadian
War Graves Groesbeek

Life story: Gijs Krist, Research Team Faces to Graves.

Sources:

Special thanks to: Allen Wilson

Commonwealth War Graves

Library and Archives Canada

Wikipedia

Canadiansoldiers.com

Provinciestad in Oorlogstijd



Cousins Bernard and Allen Wilson at the grave of Bernard Allen Asplund in 2015.



Several family members of Bernard Allen Asplund at a family commemoration for Bernard, in 2014 near Glenwood, Canada.



Cenotaph - Glenwood, Canada.