

Backus, George Henry
Trooper
Elgin Regiment
Royal Canadian Armoured Corps
25th Armoured Delivery Regiment
A 104765



George Henry Backus (aka Gordon Gilbert) was born on December 13, 1907 in Wallacetown, Dunwich Twp, Elgin County, Ontario. His family was originally from Norwich, England. William Backus set foot in America at around 1634. He was one of the founders of Saybrook, Connecticut. From there he went to Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire and Maine. George's family branch went from Connecticut to Dutchess County, New York, to Erie, Pennsylvania, and then to Ontario, Canada.

His parents, Frederick Henri Backus and Sarah Jane Thayer, both had the English nationality and were members of the Anglican Church (Church of England). Mother Sarah was 19 and father Frederick was 32 when they were married in Middlesex, Ontario, on January 31, 1894. In total they had six children. George (on mother Sarah's lap) had two older sisters: Mabel (1895, with bow) and Florence May (1899) and three older brothers: Winfred (1897), William Albert (1903) and John Robert (1905, next to George).



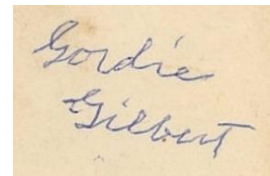
At the age of 35, his mother contracted a middle ear infection as a result of measles. She died on February 19, 1910. Father Frederick died of pneumonia on November 17, 1919, when he was 58 years old.

George was raised by his foster parents George W. Gilbert and his wife Hattie. He went to school until he was fourteen (grade 8). Miss Alderich was his teacher and she sent Gilbert's foster mother a condolence card



after his death. After an additional year in grade 9 at a rural school, George worked as a farmer for nearly twenty years on the 125 acres of his foster father George Gilbert.

Foster father George and little George, who is called 'Gordie'.



Later, a painting will be made of this photo.





School photo: George on the bottom step, second from the right.

George with his foster parents (before 1926).



At work on the farm.





From left to right: below George, Leslie, Mabel, right above John visiting Backus family.

On the farm he drove the tractor and maintained machines. He planned to do this again after his military service, he indicated when he registered with the army in London, Ontario on October 5, 1942. He was then a 34-year-old bachelor with blue eyes and brown hair. He was almost 5 ft. 4 tall and weighed just over 90 lb. He looked small, but he was strong and healthy. When registering, George did indicate that he had stomach and intestinal problems. He regularly suffered from diarrhea. After two months he took this to the doctor who found an inflammation of the colon. After that things went a little better, but it still bothered George now and then.

During his intake interview he came across as calm and deliberate. George played softball and soccer, was interested in horseshoes and enjoyed reading farm magazines. He was also active in the church. He did not dance, smoke, drink, or play a musical instrument and rarely went to the movies. The verdict was that George was moderately intelligent and he appeared very stable. The advice for his army position was (tank) driver. He completed his basic training on December 15, 1942 in Listowel, Ontario.

In July 1943 he got pneumonia and measles. After that he worked as a servant in the Mess and was afraid of crossing to Europe. In the military, given his age, they wanted to continue training him as soon as possible, although they did not think he was suitable for tasks on the battlefield. Out of a sense of duty, George preferred to be a servant or a cook.

His regiment was mobilized on May 24, 1940 and started recruiting at the beginning of June that year. In one month, the Elgin Regiment (the "Elgins") reached the full strength of 962 wartime men for the battalion. After extensive training they moved to Toronto in 1941 where they were posted to the 12th Brigade.

The regiment was converted into an armoured unit on January 26, 1942 and designated again as the 25th Armoured Delivery Regiment. Ultimately, the soldiers were shipped to the United Kingdom in the autumn of that year. In January 1943 the regiment was reorganized again. The Elgins then became the 1st Tank Delivery Regiment (and eventually the 25th Canadian Tank Delivery Regiment).

They were tasked with supplying tanks for frontline operations. The regiment was divided into several squadrons, each attached to different divisions of the Canadian Army. The Elgins supported armoured Canadian regiments in Italy (including Sicily), France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany.

George arrived in the United Kingdom on September 13, 1943. He spent time in the Canadian General Hospital between December 16 and 24. Due to changing tides, his regiment delivered tanks with a day delay on 8 June 1944 during the D-Day invasion of Normandy. The fighting around Caen and Falaise was fierce. George himself went to France on the night of 2 to 3 July 1944 and moved to the north with his regiment.

On November 19, 1944, he was killed in a fatal accident. George Henry Backus drowned in the South Willemsvaart at around ten o'clock in the evening. He was 36 years old then.

His belongings at the time were: a diary, a bunch of keys, three photos, a wallet, 2 business cards, souvenir coins and a wristwatch with Roman initials on the back.



This was one of the photos that George had with him. It was a picture of the farm, sent by his foster mother. The photo was taken from his body and sent home, hence the water stain.

On November 23, 1944, his sister Mabel received an official message that her brother had drowned in an accident. He was temporarily buried in Oss.

M.F.M. 258
S.M.-4-44 (105)
H.Q. 1772-39-1900

**CANADIAN PACIFIC
TELEGRAPHS**

DAY LETTER
NIGHT LETTER

2 MV 405-B-18,740

CASUALTY (REPORT DELIVERY) OTTAWA 23 NOVEMBER 1944

TO:- MISS MABEL BACKUS
R R # 1
WALLACETOWN ONT

18895 MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE DEEPLY REGRETS TO INFORM
YOU A104765 TROOPER GEORGE HENRY BACKUS OFFICIALLY REPORTED DIED
ACCIDENTALLY NINETEENTH NOVEMBER 1944 AS RESULT OF DROWNING STOP
IF ANY FURTHER INFORMATION BECOMES AVAILABLE IT WILL BE FORWARDED
AS SOON AS RECEIVED STOP TO PREVENT POSSIBLE AID TO OUR ENEMIES
DO NOT DIVULGE DATE OF CASUALTY OR NAME OF UNIT

PREPAID *Grb* DIRECTOR OF RECORDS *70*

George was later reburied at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **XX. A. 3.**

The text on his gravestone:

PEACEFUL BE THY REST

Awards:

- 1939-1945 Star
- France & Germany Star
- War Medal 1939-1945
- Canadian Volunteer Medal & Clasp.



Life story: Tefke van Dijk, Research Team Faces to Graves.

Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- Library and Archives Canada
- Photos Backus Page House Museum
- Dave Backus (Backus Family History)
- elgincounty.ca (Elgin Regiment)



#6 Platoon B. Company – 7 December 1942

The Boys of 6 platoon B. Coy.

Back Row	Centre Row	Front Row
Cpl. Parks	Opl. Boppre	De Baer
Prentice	Chappler	Compton
Purdy	Anderson	Bridge
Airdrie	Egoff	Boon
Toddard	B. Butler	Siepe
O. Connell	Madelle	Davis
Edgar	Cuneo	Craven
Cobe	Cowan	Backus
Colbourne	Yettler	Sgt Moyer
Ward	Yukowski	Lt. Childs
Dodge	Downing	Capt. Coombe
Colbeck	Doan	Fisher
Caplette	Dickens	Cranston
Steffler	Warner	Noble
Dobson	Riedel	Domianczuk
Drivens	Woods	Teller
Smith	Cpl Ingram	Drake
Ward		Burns

17
12
18
2
54