

Balch, William Henry

Private

Essex Scottish Regiment

Royal Canadian Infantry Corps

B 81701



William Henry Balch was born in Batcombe, Somerset, England on 25 March 1907 to Edney George and Lilian Balch.



His parents married in Shepton Mallet, England on October 1905, and got six children, two sons and four daughters. William was the second eldest. The family lived in England and in May 1923 they immigrated to Canada. In Canada the youngest child – Ellen Joan Balch – was born.

The family attended the Church of England and lived in River De Chute, New Brunswick, for fourteen years. Then they moved to Ontario where they lived at the Placid Farm, RR #2 in Hornby, Ontario.

William attended two years of High School and worked on the family's farm, later he also worked as a taxi driver.

He enlisted in Toronto, Ontario, on 5 September 1939 as a Private. In 1940 he followed courses and training in Camp Borden and was posted to the 1st Bridge Company. In February 1941 he left Canada for England and was attached to the 1st Transport Company.

In 1942 William was stationed at Brixham, UK, two years later he was posted to the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps. In September 1944 he was posted to the Winnipeg Grenadiers and one month later he left the UK in 1944 and arrived in Belgium on 18 October 1944.



Upon arrival he was posted to the Essex Scottish Regiment (ESR).

At the time William Balch was transferred to the ESR, the regiment was involved in the Battle of the Scheldt.

On 14 October the ESR was ordered to move to Hoogerheide, two days later the attack on Woensdrecht started and lasted till 24 October.

The ESR was given a few days rest to regain strength in preparation for the push through to Zuid-Beveland.

The Germans had prepared themselves for the attack by flooding many polders, the only available route was via a railroad dike along the road. The ESR was ordered to advance along that side, via Rilland-Bath the ESR pushed through to Gawege and when they reached Krabbendijke on 26 October, the troops were exhausted after 48 hours of uninterrupted fighting.

The regiment was taken by truck to Kruiningen and from there across the canal to Kapelle. On 30 October ESR moved on foot 18 km further to Nieuwdorp west of the Sloedam.

A patrol action here was ESR's last deployment during this phase of the campaign. By 31 October, the last Germans had been driven from South Beveland and Walcheren and the goal of 'clearing the Scheldt estuary' so that the port of Antwerp was free again had been achieved.

ESR was able to catch its breath in the village of Bonheiden near Mechelen (Belgium). All ranks were given the opportunity to catch their breath and make visits to Brussels, Antwerp and Mechelen.

On November 6, new orders came in for advancing into the Nijmegen area. In the night of 8 to 9 November the ESR arrived in the area and went on foot to Groesbeek.

Now a period of patrolling and waiting began for the ESR. Two weeks later they move to Mook, here their daily schedule is filled with training, reorganizing and relaxing. They did not stay in air-raid shelters and could go wherever they wanted, so November was the easiest month for ESR in the war.



3-inch Mortar, Essex Scottish Regiment, Groesbeek, Netherlands, 24 Jan 1945.
(Library and Archives Canada Photo, MIKAN No. 3524605)

On 1 December the ESR had to move two miles and the men were given less comfortable quarters, sitting in foxholes while it was freezing cold and muddy. They stayed there for a fortnight before returning to Mook.

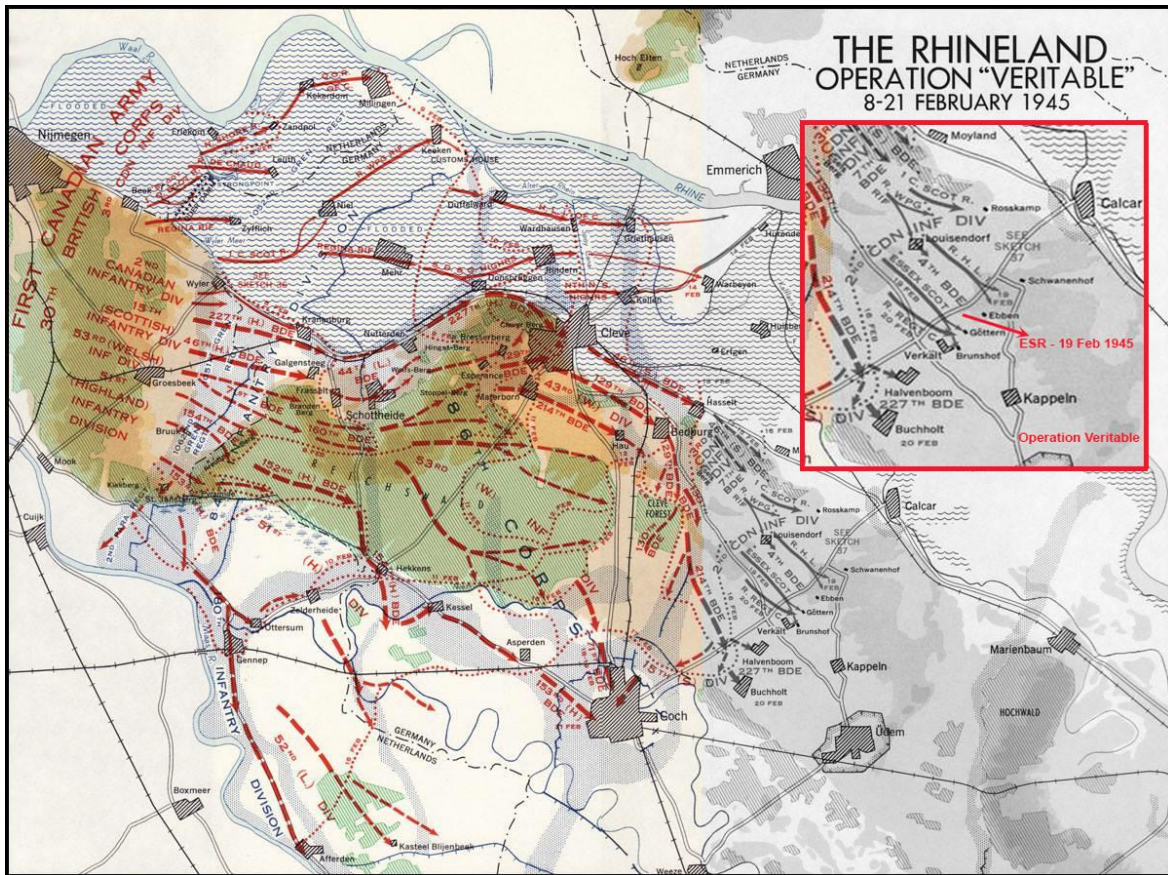
Concern about German advances in the Ardennes and indications of increasing enemy activity on the Nijmegen front caused ESR to return to the front position near Groesbeek. For the time being, the tasks appeared to be mainly limited to guard duty and reconnaissance patrols. Christmas was celebrated and on 26 December a reconnaissance was carried out in the area around 's-Hertogenbosch in preparation for a move to this area. Three days later the ESR moved to Boxtel and celebrated the last day of the year with a church service dedicated by Chaplain Joe Cardy.

On January 5, the ESR left for Vught, but two days later they must return to Nijmegen and the reconnaissance patrols and guard duty began again.

In January the Allied launched a new plan: the Rhineland Offensive. The Rhineland Offensive consisted of several large-scale offensives designed to break through the German defence line in Western Europe. Operation Veritable was an important part of this because of the famous 'pincer movement' which aimed to drive the German forces out of the area between the Maas and the Rhine, a front only 12 kilometres wide.

After a force of over 500,000 soldiers had been assembled in the east, around Groesbeek and Nijmegen, including the First Canadian Army under

General Crerar and the British 30th Army Corps under Lieutenant General Horrocks, Operation Veritable began on 8 February 1945. The British and Canadian forces were to advance from the north, while the American Allies were to close the gap from the south, closing in on the Germans.



When Operation Veritable started the Essex Scottish Regiment was stationed around Wyler and awaiting further orders. The soldiers were eager to go to Germany, finally beat the enemy in their own country!

On 14 February they were called up, they had to advance from Nijmegen via Mook-Gennep-Hekkens through the Reichswald to Cleve and Calcar and with the support of Kangaroos (tanks) they were steadily successful.

On 18 February they were around Calcar and were ordered to start the attack on Moyland. During the night of 18 to 19 February heavenly rain started, the Essex Scottish Regiment was ordered to capture buildings in Gottern and Brunshof, the mud played tricks on the tanks and they progressed very slowly during the day.

On 19 February at 2.15 pm, the Germans launched a violent counterattack. The Essex Scottish Regiment were under heavy fire from the "Goch Kalkar" road. A fierce battle ensued, at 4.30 pm they were within 200 yard of their goal when German reinforcements.

Their Pantzer Corps was doubled and at 8 p.m. the Germans launched the attack, just as the Essex Scottish Regiment was out of tanks as they were being withdrawn to be re-manned and refueled.

The Essex Scottish Regiment could not withstand this violent attack and they were overrun by the Germans beyond their Head Quarter. Staff and survivors retreated to the basement of a farm. During the night reinforcements arrived, the counterattack was launched and they succeeded in driving the Germans back. Eventually they got hold of the Calcar Road.

The battle on 19 February was the bloodiest of the entire Operation Veritable, the Essex Scottish Regiment left 51 dead (out of a total of 400 dead on 19th and 20th February), 99 wounded and 54 became prisoners of war.

Also Private William Henry Balch died on 19 February and was buried in Bedburg, Germany. Later He was reburied and the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **IX. C. 9**

Awards:

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

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In 1956 William's mother died in Milton from coal fumes which caused her to pass out and fall behind the stove. Her husband Edney, was never the same after and was sent to New Brunswick to live with his daughter Rose until his death in 1963.



FACES TO GRAVES

Stichting Faces to Canadian
War Graves Groesbeek

Life story: Else Schaberg, Research Team Faces To Graves.

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

Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- Library and Archives Canada
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial
- The Essex Scottish Regiment, C. van Beek, Putte, 2004, speciale uitgave Tijding, periodiek Heemkundekring Het Zuidkwartier
- Horrall, Andrew "An "Eternal Memorial for Canadian Heroes": The Dutch Town of Putte Commemorates the Essex Scottish Regiment." Canadian Military History 20, 3 (2011)



PTE. WILLIAM H. BALCH

killed in action in Germany on February 7th, was a brother of Mrs. Vaughan Bedell, Georgetown. Also surviving are his parents and youngest sister at Hornby, two sisters in New Brunswick, and a brother, Jack Balch, of Hamilton. Sympathy is extended to the family in their loss.

15 January 1956 - Milton, Ontario

Alarmed Neighbours Call Police Woman Found Dead, Husband Ill

Tragedy struck a Robert Street home sometime late Saturday night or early Sunday morning, resulting in the death of an elderly woman and the hospitalization of her husband.

Dead is Lillian Balch, aged 71. Her husband, Edney George Balch, 74, is in Milton Private Hospital, suffering from severe shock and exposure.

According to investigating police officer Ron Rupert, Mrs. Balch died of asphyxiation, and her husband was nearly asphyxiated when he was found Monday afternoon in a state of shock at the home.

A neighbor, Mrs. H. McKenzie, became alarmed when she had seen neither Mr. nor Mrs. Balch since Saturday. She found their home locked late Monday afternoon. A milk bottle and a loaf of bread were left at the front door. She informed another neighbor, Mrs. James Cragg who telephoned for the police.

When Constable Rupert broke down two doors to get into the home he found Mrs. Balch lying behind the stove dead, and Mr. Balch seated in a chair in the kitchen. Mrs. Balch had apparently fallen behind the stove and struck her head on it, rendering her unconscious. The coal fumes were blamed as the

cause of her death.

The stove was cold, and Constable Rupert stated that it had not been going for a day or so.

Funeral services held this afternoon (Thursday) for Mrs. Balch from the MacNab and Son Funeral Chapel. She is to be buried in White Chapel Memorial Gardens, at Ancaster.

She is survived by a son, John, and a daughter, Mrs. Joan Ripple, both of R.R. 1, Burlington.