

Bannister, Kenneth Robert

Corporal

Essex Scottish Regiment

Royal Canadian Infantry Corps

A 22618



Kenneth Robert Bannister was born in Windsor, Ontario, on 29 September 1922 to Robert and Beatrice Linda Bannister. The family lived at 1051 Hickory Road in Windsor and attended the Church of England. Kenneth had one older sister, Olive Musson and a brother Harold Douglas who died at the age of twenty-one months.

Kenneth left the Public School after finishing grade 8 at the age of seventeen.

He started working as an apprentice plumber at Walkerville Plumbing and Heating Co. Five months before enlisting he changed jobs and worked as an station attendant at Leo Ducette, Gasolene.

Kenneth was in good shape, he was 5ft 6,5inch tall and weighed 135 pounds. He was an athletic young man who loved sports, he liked skating, hunting, baseball and hockey.



Kenneth enlisted on 11 July 1940 in Windsor, Ontario as Private. Few days after enlisting he was transferred to No 1 District Depot, London.

A month later he moved to Camp Borden and was posted to the Essex Scottish Regiment, here he got his basic training.

He continued his training a year later at the A10 Infantry Training Centre, which was situated also in Borden. He got an injury at his knee and was hospitalised for a month in May 1941.

On 5 October he left for England and arrived on 19 October. Two months later he was posted to the Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit and after a month posted to the Canadian Ordnance Reinforcement Unit.



The idea behind fielding special reinforcement units was that once Canadian field units began to suffer casualties in battle, men from holding units would immediately take their place. Hence, they were supposed to be depots for field units' "first reinforcements," the authorized increments of men who would replace a battalion's first battle casualties.

At the end of 1942 he was a qualified Driver IC Q2 and was transferred to the Light Aid Detachment.

In August 1943 he went back to the Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit and two months later he was posted to the Head Quarters F-Group of this Unit.

On 23 September he left England and arrived in France and in October he was posted to the Essex Scottish Regiment.

At the time Kenneth 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.



3-inch Mortar, Essex Scottish Regiment, Groesbeek, Netherlands, 24 Jan 1945.

(Library and Archives Canada Photo, MIKAN No. 3524605)

On 6 November, 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 followed a period of patrolling and waiting for the ESR. Two weeks later they moved to Mook, here their daily schedule was 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.

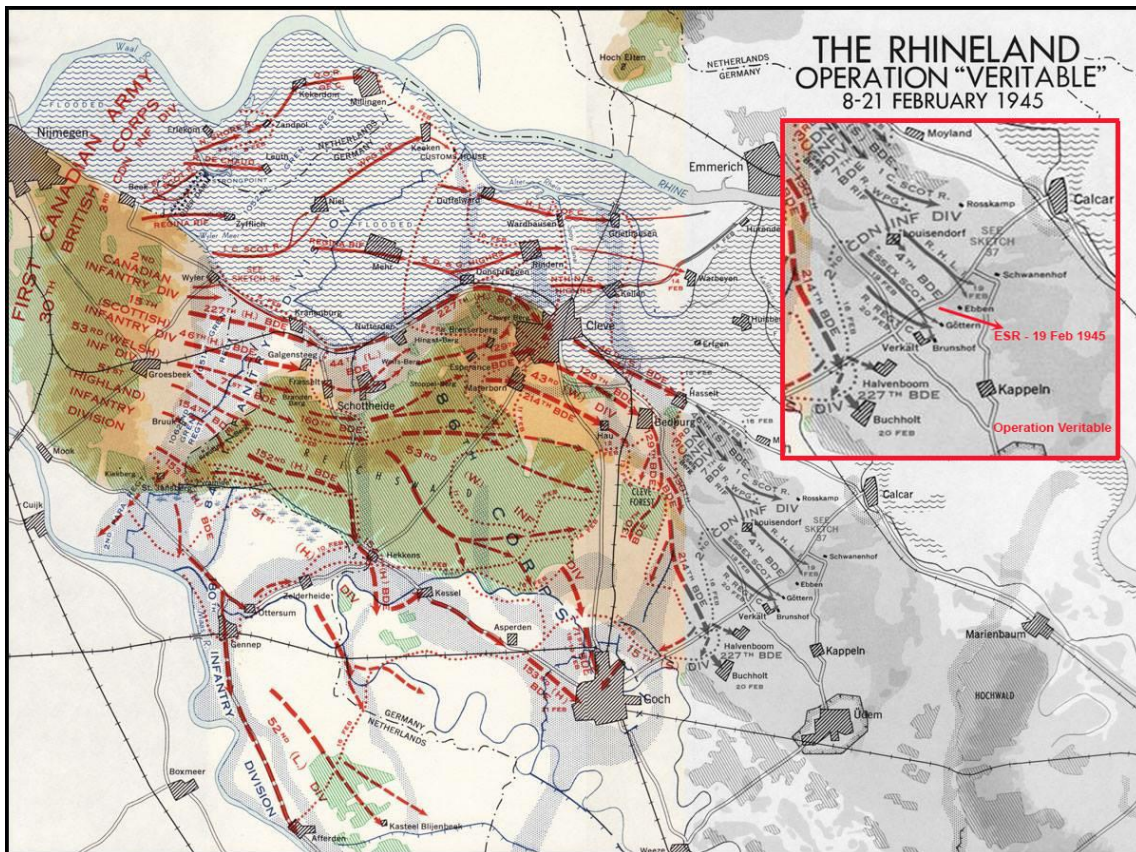
On 1 December the ESR had to move two miles and the men were given less comfortable quarters, sitting in foxholes while it was freezing cold and muddy. They stayed there for a fortnight before returning to Mook.

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 5 January, the ESR left for Vught, but two days later they had 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 was 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 Corporal Kenneth Robert Bannister died on 19 February and was buried in Bedburg, Germany. Later He was reburied and the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **IX. E. 6.**

Text on his headstone:

"I GIVE UNTO THEM
ETERNAL LIFE"
ST. JOHN X.28

Awards:

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



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)