

Barbaro, Antonio

Lance Corporal

23rd Field Company

Royal Canadian Engineers

C/90149



Antonio George John Barbaro was born on July 19, 1923 at 84 Norman Street, Ottawa. His parents were Catherine and Pasquale Barbaro, both Italian immigrants who met in Canada.

"Tony", as he was called, was the youngest in a family of seven boys and one girl. The Barbaro brothers entertained their mother with masquerades and jokes in the huge kitchen which was the center of all activities and socializing. Everyone in the family dearly loved the youngest son of the family.

He studied at the Ottawa Technical High School where he gained prominence as a basketball, football and hockey player. Tony was very artistic, sporting and musical and he played trumpet in a band. Loved by his friends, he was popular with the girls as a dashing guy with beautiful curly hair.

When he was visiting his brother Mike, he liked to drive on his motorcycle. He refers to this in a letter he wrote to his brother on March 14, 1944 from Europe.



Fragment of letter he wrote to his brother Mike



Tony enjoyed driving Mike's motorcycle!



Tony on the left

After the completion of his studies on August 3, 1942 he enlisted with the Canadian Army with the 9th Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers. He finished answering the list of questions in the Army enlistment papers with 'draftsman' to the question: "State any employment preference or ambition". Like most of the new Engineer recruits, however, he was to become a Field Engineer ("Sapper"). Within days he was transferred to 23rd Field Company and began his training in Canada.



Tony and his comrades

His father Pasquale was a veteran of four years' service overseas in the First Great War. Three of his brothers had joined the Army before him. Frank worked at the Military Hospital in Regina. William was a Corporal with the 'Corps of Military Staff Clerks' (CMSC) in Ottawa. Brother Sam was a Sergeant at CMSC too; later in London, UK.



Brother Willie and Tony in between his parents



Brothers William (Willie) and Frank

On July 16, 1943 the 23rd Field Company, RCE embarked to sail to the UK. In England they continued their training and employment in England leading up to their participation in the invasion of Europe. During one leave Tony visited his brother Sam who was stationed in London.



Tony with Don and Win, Sam's children



On July 6, 1944 he was promoted to Lance Corporal. The next day, the Company sailed for Normandy. Their first task was to ensure that the debris was cleared from the roads in Caen. Later, they build a Bailey Bridge over the River Orne and in several other places. After the advance through France they moved through Belgium to the Netherlands where they ended up in Nijmegen.

After Operation MARKET GARDEN failed on 25 September 1944 the Canadian and British Engineers received orders to evacuate the trapped allied military from Oosterbeek to the south bank of the River Neder-Rhine. This operation was given the code name: Operation BERLIN.

The Canadian Engineers were equipped, however, with motorized boats "storm boats" – unlike the British Engineers who use paddled boats. Thus they were able to recover the largest number of the trapped soldiers. Led by Maj. Michael Tucker, the men achieved an enormous accomplishment. In the dark under constant enemy fire and in pouring rain they crossed the river many times. Eventually 2400 exhausted soldiers were rescued by the end of the night. The 23rd Field Company suffered seven deaths, a severe blow to the morale of this staunch team!



Late 1944 after this operation Maj. Tucker said in the Montreal Gazette that two of his men were outstanding during this operation. One of them was Lance Corporal Antonio Barbaro. The other was Sapper Raymond Lebouthillier of Ste Bernadette Quebec.

The commanding officer of the 23rd Field Company Maj. M.L. Tucker was honored after the war with the Bronze Lion from the Netherlands for this remarkable achievement.

The end of 1944 saw the start of the run-up to the Rhineland offensive with the construction of bridges built to move a huge number of troops and equipment to the other side of the River Maas.

Immediately after the New Year 1945 it was the same 23rd Field Company that participated on the construction of the Walsh Bridge - a large Bailey bridge on

the piers of the railway bridge at Mook that was earlier blown up by the Germans. The Company was responsible for maintaining the floating bridge.



Destroyed Mook Railway bridge over the River Maas

*Photos: 23rd Fd Coy
Engineer John Schaupmyer*



On February 15 at half past ten in the morning Tony Barbaro and two other engineers launched a small motorboat to capture a boom to draw it ashore. The water level of the river was extremely high from meltwater after heavy snowfall in January. When they reached the boom the boat was swept up against the boom. Something on the boom cut a hole in the bottom of the boat and it quickly filled with water.

Lance Corporal Barbaro gave the two life jackets that were in the boat to his comrades and said he would try get ashore without a life jacket. Unfortunately he could not manage in the wild water and drowned; he was only 22 years old.

His brother Sam receives the heartbreaking message in London.

22 February 1945 his mother receives a letter from Padre Capt. J. M. Mongion.

His body was recovered two months later and buried in the cemetery near the temporary Bailey Bridge at Mook. In 1946 he was reburied in the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek, grave reference **III. D. 10.**

On 18 September 2014 a monument for Lance/Corporal Barbaro was set up close to the location where he drowned:

<http://nl.tracesofwar.com/artikel/72863/Monument-L-Cpl-Antonio-Barbaro.htm>



FACES TO GRAVES

Stichting Faces to Canadian
War Graves Groesbeek

Life story: Alice van Bekkum, Research Team Faces To Graves.

Information and pictures: Win McKenzie (born Barbaro) and Deb Robinson (born Barbaro), both sisters are the daughters of Tony's brother Sam.
Documents: Library and Archives Canada, Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



Grave Antonio Barbaro after first visit of his relatives...

Read a special story by Raffaella Cortese de Bosis:
<https://wartimefriends.netlify.app/docs/art%20ANTONIO%20BARBARO%2030-9-2020Eng.pdf>

Barbaro interview July 2019, Nijmegen International Four Days Marches:
<https://youtu.be/e17dY4Rvqso>