

Benjamin, Walter Conrad

Guardsman

21st Armoured Regiment

The Governor General's Foot Guards

Royal Canadian Armoured Corps

F 65779



Walter Conrad Benjamin was born in Fox River, Cumberland County, Nova Scotia on February 16, 1912. He was the youngest child of Charles Oscar Benjamin and Mina Beatrice Yorke, both of Fox River. Father Charles was a carpenter by trade, he was born on January 8, 1882 and died in Amherst, Nova Scotia, on June 30, 1956. Mother Mina was born on June 26, 1883 and she died at the age of 84 in 1968. They married in Parrsboro Shore on September 3 1903 and were affiliated with the United Church of Canada.

Together they had six children: Harry Oran (Olin), he lived from 1904 to 1980 and had seven children with Elizabeth Allen. As second Ernest Kerwin was born in 1906, he died in 1979. Hardy Albert was next and lived from 1908 to 1991. Sister Holly Keany was also from 1908 and she died at a young age on December 5, 1920. It seems likely that she and Hardy were twins. As fifth Kenneth Wilbert was born in October 1909, he died in December 1984. The Benjamin of the Benjamin family was Walter.



Walter went to school up to and including Grade 9, he was 14 or 15 years old then and spoke and wrote only English. First he worked as a woodcutter for three years, but for the next thirteen years he worked as a truck driver.

Photo: google.com

Walter had been employed by Gordon Dorsey for the last six years prior to his term of service. He did want to return there after his service. He also had a thing for working on a farm, but then a mixed farm, since he was also born on a farm.

On November 11, 1936 Walter married Ruby Bernice Allen of Fox River in Parrsboro, Nova Scotia. Ruby was born on August 14, 1912 and in 1937 their daughter Barbara Bernice was born. Ruby had lost a brother as well, he died in Italy after three years of military service.

On July 31, 1942, Walter was inspected for military service and he said that he could drive a car, a truck and a tractor, and could also carry out repairs. In his spare time, basketball and softball were his favourite sports. Walter was then 5ft6 tall and weighed over 135 lb. He was married, had a daughter, four brothers and did not want to pursue further studies. He wanted to work as a truck driver overseas, and go to Europe. The inspection report also indicates that Walter was well developed, also mentally, he had a good pronunciation, good manners, could learn well and was also technically (mechanically) minded. Walter took a positive view of the military and would become a useful soldier. The advice was: Canadian Armoured Car Regiment as Driver 1/C.

Walter had a medium-white complexion, hazel eyes and brown hair. A piece of his right thumb up to the phalanx had been amputated and he had a scar from an appendectomy. It was also striking that he could see well in the dark above average.

In Truro, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Walter volunteered for his service. He received his initial training at Camp Borden with the Army Tank Battalion of the Halifax Rifles with the Canadian Armoured Corps. In October 1942 he was a Qualified Driver 1/C Class III (Wheeled) and in November Class III (Carrier). He then was on leave for two weeks.

On February 1, 1943, Walter was fined \$1.50 (Dollar?) for not wearing a march badge. On June 17 of that year, he went to Aldershot to prepare for departure overseas. They embarked on June 18 and arrived in the United Kingdom on June 24. In August he was a Guardsman with the 21st Armoured Regiment. On January 27, Walter was awarded the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp for his voluntary service.

He continued his training in England and left for France on 17 July 1944, arriving the next day, on July 18. In August, due to a sentence, he received no wages for five days, in total 24 days were deducted from his pay overseas.



Soldiers from GGFG in Bergen op Zoom, Nov 6, 1944.

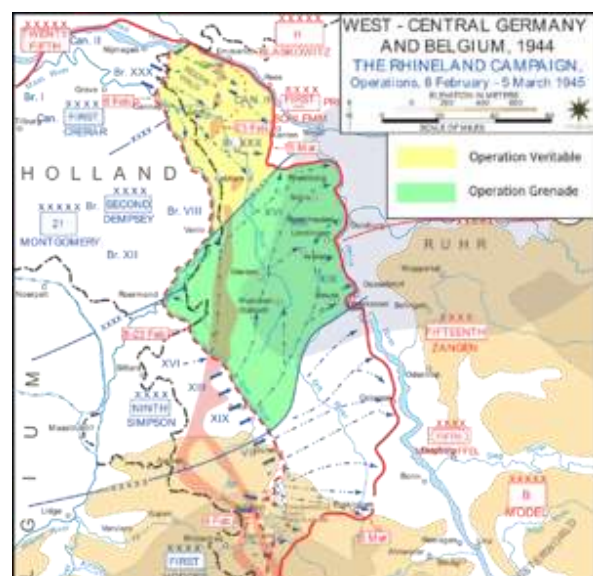
Photo: militaryhistory-fandom

THE GOVERNOR GENERAL'S FOOT GUARDS ROYAL CANADIAN ARMoured CORPS.

This regiment was a reserve unit of the infantry with both part-time and full-time soldiers and Sherman Tanks. They also had their own band and a ceremonial role at festivities in the traditional costume, including the Bearskin Hat (high black bear hat). In addition, it was a tank regiment that was being prepared for the battles in northwestern Europe. They took part in many battles, including the Battle of Falaise (August 1944) and the Battle of the Scheldt (October 1944). Most of them left for Great Britain by ship on September 23, 1942 and from there for France on July 22, 1944. They advanced from France via Belgium to the Netherlands and finally to Germany.

In the final phase of the battle, in late February, early March 1945, they participated in Operations Veritable and Blockbuster, in which the Allies marched together to defeat the enemy. When they were advancing towards Kalkar they were under heavy artillery fire. The conditions were bad, the Germans had dug deep trenches and the vehicles could only continue by road. It was one of the bloodiest battles of this war. The Governor General's Foot Guards lost 101 men and 284 men got wounded. They had their own Regimental Museum in Ottawa, housed in the Cartier Square Drill Centre. Here was also the centre of mobilization and training of the soldiers.

In November 1944 Walter arrived with the Governor General's Foot Guards via Belgium in the Netherlands near 's-Hertogenbosch.





Cartier Square Drill Hall in Ottawa - Photo: GGFG history

It was November 11, Walter and Ruby's eighth wedding anniversary, when disaster struck and Walter had a fatal accident.

During his service, he brought water to the units by truck with several soldiers from his regiment. It was very dark that evening at 6.55 pm when a convoy of the 7th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment was driving on the "Maple Leaf Route" near 's-Hertogenbosch. They did not drive fast, about 35 to 40 km per hour and they continued their way with so-called black-out (obscured) lights. Walter and his buddies walked along the road and had to cross it to get to their truck. Walter crossed the first part of the road, wanted to continue through the convoy to the other side and did not see that a passing Daimler Armoured Car had no lights, they were defective. Since the cars were driving right behind each other and Walter did not see the car in the dark, he was run over.

The driver suddenly saw a head in front of his car, felt the collision and that the wheels hit something. He stopped immediately and together with two other soldiers he lifted Walter from the middle of the road to the side, a medic from the unit immediately declared him dead. Walter had fractures to his skull and both legs and several other injuries, which together proved fatal to him.

An investigation into Walter's accident followed, done by Lieutenant Colonel Smith, who was the Commander of the 21st Canadian Armoured Corps, to which Walter also belonged. Several witnesses were heard (see report), but everyone agreed that it was an unfortunate coincidence. It was very dark, the lights of the vehicle did not work, the cars were close together and Walter just had not seen it. No one was to blame there and it happened during an official army vehicle movement. It was a tragic accident.

Guardsman Walter Conrad Benjamin was 32 years old when he died on November 11, 1944 as a result of the accident. Initially, he was buried in a spot west of a church near 's-Hertogenbosch on November 12. Walter was reburied on 25 October 1945 at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, grave reference **XV11. C. 6.**

Inscription on his headstone:
 THE LORD IS MY SHEPERD;
 I SHALL NOT WANT

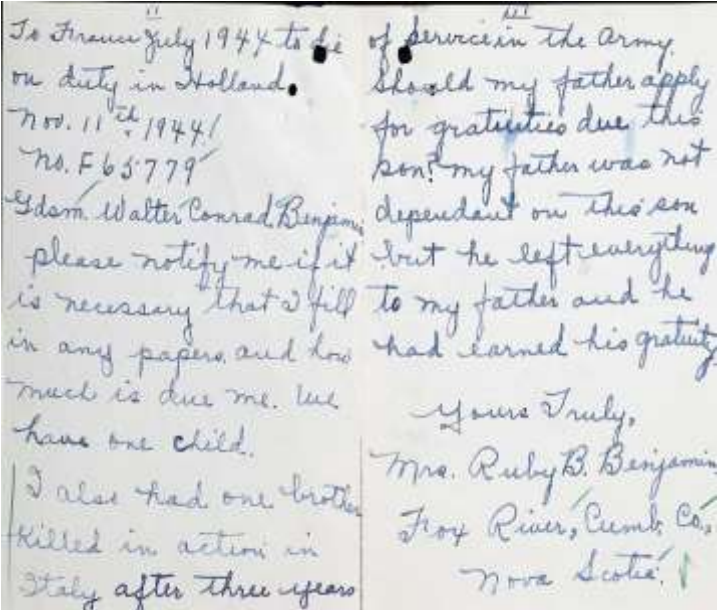
Walter Conrad Benjamin received the following awards:

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



Photo: Liesbeth Huisman

After the war the Memorial Cross was sent to his wife Ruby and his mother Mina, both from Fox River.



Letter Walter's wife wrote to the military authorities



Life story: Liesbeth Huisman-Arts, 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

Photo Walter with courtesy Donna C. Benjamin, on behalf of the Benjamin family

Veterans.gc.ca

Findagrave.com

Footguards.ca/history

Theakston.ca/getperson



Cumberland War Memorial, photo: nshdpi.ca/cumberland

ANSWER IN FULL ALL APPLICABLE QUESTIONS

STATEMENT of the Names, Ages and Addresses or Dates of Death, of all the relatives that the deceased ever had in each of the degrees specified below:

Degree of Relationship	RELATIVES required to be accounted for	INFORMANT'S STATEMENT			
		NAME IN FULL of any Relative, if any, in each degree specified	Age	ADDRESS IN FULL of each surviving Relative, opposite his or her name, and date of death of each deceased relative	
1	Widow of the Deceased.....	Ruby Bernice Benjamin	32	Fox River, N.C.	
2	Children of the Deceased and dates of their Births.....	Barbara Bernice Benjamin	7	Fox River, N.C.	
3	Father of the Deceased.....	Charles Oscar Benjamin	63	Fox River, N.C.	
4	Mother of the Deceased.....	Mina Beatrice Benjamin	61	Fox River, N.C.	
5	Brothers of the Deceased	Full Blood	Harry Oran Benjamin	40	Port Greville, N.C.
			Ernest Kerwin Benjamin	38	East Wentworth R.R.#1 Cumb Co. N.C.
			Hardy Albert Benjamin	36	Port Greville, N.C.
			Kenneth Wilbert Benjamin	34	Fox River, N.C.
		Half Blood			
6	Sisters of the Deceased	Full Blood			
		Half Blood			
7	Names of testators or executors (whether of the full or the half blood) of the Deceased, who are dead, and date of death of each.	Names and ages of their children (if any)	Address of their children		
	Hollie Keane Benjamin Dec. 5 th 1920				

Witness account of the accident on November 11.

(4)

Fifth Witness Cont'd.

The Tanks of my Troop were in position along T.W. highway at MR 370482, and I was on guard from 1800-1940 hrs on 11 Nov 44. There was a convoy passing from W. to E along this road when at approx 1855 hrs while I was standing beside my tank, talking to B 48596 Gdsm. Gilbert, A. I heard a thud. I did not pay any attention to the noise until Gdsm. Gilbert shone his light on the road, and I saw a body lying there. Gdsm. Gilbert ran to the body to examine it, and I stopped the convoy. When I returned the body had been carried to the side of the road. After some time the M.O. of the 7th Cdn Recce Regt arrived and pronounced the man dead.

Q-1 What was the visibility?

A-1 Pretty dark.

Q-2 Did the driver of the armoured car involved return immediately?

A-2 Yes.

Q-3 About how fast would you say the convoy was travelling?

A-3 About 15 M.P.H.

Attached: Appendix "A" Statement by Capt. J.A. Findlay, R.C.A.M.C., Medical Officer 21 C.A.R. (GGFG). Certified True Copy.

Appendix "B" Statement by Capt. W.W. Hyde, Commanding Battle Lorry Group, 21 C.A.R. (GGFG). Certified True Copy.

Findings of the Court:

The Court, having examined and considered the above evidence, arrived at the following conclusions:

1. That F 65779 Gdsm. Benjamin, W.C. received fatal injuries on the night of 11 Nov 1944 as a result of being struck by Daimler Armoured Car (W.D. No. 208640).
2. That the deceased was on duty at the time of the accident.
3. That the accident was not due to any negligence on the part of the deceased, or the driver of the armoured car, W.D. No. 208640, involved in the accident.


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OPINION OF OFFICER COMMANDING: Due to the darkness of the night and the fact that a part of the convoy was operating without lights on an operational move, it is felt that the death of Gdsm Benjamin was accidental and in no manner was anyone to blame.

OPINION OF Comd^d Cdn Armd Bde: I concur. There is no evidence of improper conduct on the part of Gdsm Benjamin.

REMARKS: Approved and passed to V A F

HAN/nr


(H A NEWELL) Lieut.
Adm 4(6)3