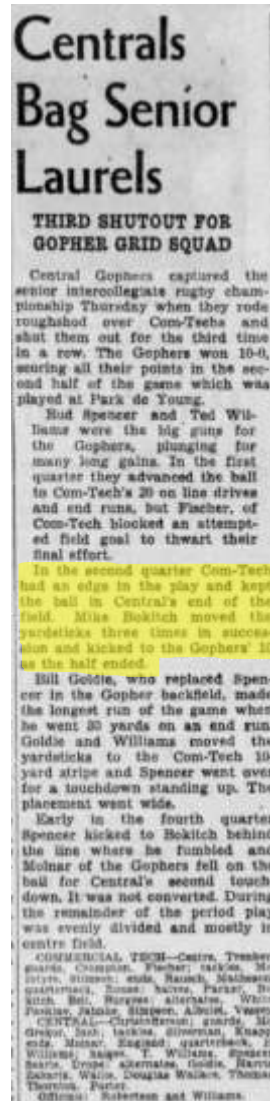


Bokitch, Michael Joseph
Rifleman
The Regina Rifle Regiment
Royal Canadian Infantry Corps
L/64502



Michael ("Mike") Joseph Bokitch was born 13 July 1920 at Regina, Saskatchewan (SK). His parents Martinus Bokitch and Magdalena ("Lena") Rochert both emigrated as children with their families from Yugoslavia to Canada in the early 1900s. They were later naturalized as Canadian citizens and married at Odessa, Saskatchewan. The Roman Catholic couple settled in Regina and had three sons: John, Martin (Junior), and Mike. Martinus was a woodworking foreman and eventually became superintendent at Western Manufacturing, a sash and door factory in Regina.

Mike was very athletic, competing in most sports including baseball, basketball, rugby, and hockey. He also liked swimming and later hunting. After completing public school Mike enrolled at Balfour Commercial Technical Collegiate where he took a two-year auto mechanic program and played on their rugby team. Mike Bokitch was highlighted in the intercollegiate championship game newsclip, although in a losing cause

Regina Leader Post October 1938

After finishing school age eighteen Mike played Junior hockey and performed odd jobs for a year. He then went to work for his father's employer as a glazier for 1.5 years

until he was called up under the National Resources Mobilization Act. Mike enrolled 4 December 1941 at Regina age 21. After completing his basic training there he decided to volunteer for active service, attesting 21 January 1942. Mike was then 5'9" tall and 159 lbs. Mike received NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) training and was promoted to Lance Corporal at Regina 4 March 1942. Following a period of instructing new recruits, he was allocated to the Canadian Armoured Corps at Camp Dundurn, SK 2 June 1942. Mike was sent to Nanaimo, British Columbia (BC) at the end of June and promoted to Corporal, then Lance Sergeant 21 July while stationed at Tofino. He was reduced rank to Corporal due to an infraction and transferred to Vancouver that fall where he was interviewed 7 October 1942.

Mike's receiving officer commented about him: "Was Sergeant until 30 Sept/42. Lost stripe for negligence. Has a good attitude; is hard and fit in appearance. Has initiative and aggressiveness. Mature and stable type. Keen athlete. Good recreational and social habits". Mike was deemed suitable for paratroop training and attached to 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion for training at Fort Benning, Georgia (GA) while a similar facility was being built at Camp Shilo, Manitoba. Mike was there for a month before fracturing both of his ankles in a training accident, returning to Canada 11 December 1942.



Jump training tower Ft. Benning, GA



Mike was reinterviewed after reporting for duty in Montreal, Quebec January 1943 and requested a transfer from the Canadian Parachute Battalion to the Royal Canadian Artillery. He instructed paratrooper recruits there until his transfer was granted the next month. Mike joined the Royal Canadian Artillery as a Gunner 27 February 1943 at Camp Shilo and was promoted to Lance Bombardier after four weeks of training. Mike qualified as a Driver Class III (Wheel) 21 April 1943 at Shilo and was granted leave time to marry Ruth Charlotte Schick at Regina 29 May 1943.

Mike and Ruth Bokitch

Regina Leader Post May 1943



Mike's oldest brother John was by then serving with the Royal Canadian Air Force and attended him as a groomsman at their wedding.

LAC John Bokitch

BOKITCH--SCHICK
At St. Mary's rectory on May 29 a wedding of interest was solemnized when Ruth Charlotte, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. G. Schick, became the bride of Bdr. Michael Bokitch, R.C.A., son of Mr. and Mrs. M. Bokitch, Sr. Father Burmel officiated. The bride, who was given in marriage by her father, was charming in a gown of white sheer. She wore an embroidered veil held in place by a wreath of orange blossoms and carried a bouquet of American beauty roses. She was attended by Mrs. Minnie Fox. The groom was attended by his brother, LAC John Schick. The house was decorated with streamers, bells and flowers. The bride's table was centred with a tiered cake. Wedding supper was served at the home of the groom's parents followed by a reception. Mr. and Mrs. Bokitch left for Saskatoon, the bride travelling in a tweed suit with corsage of Talisman roses. The couple will reside in Regina.

Mike played baseball and rugby after returning to Camp Shilo and given his automotive background was sent to Red Deer, Alberta for trades training, qualifying as a Driver Mechanic Group "C" 5 July 1944. Mike was soon cleared for overseas service and after reducing rank to Gunner disembarked 28 November 1944 in the U.K. where he reported to the Canadian Artillery Reinforcement Unit. A few days later Mike was remustered and assigned to the Canadian Infantry Training Regiment. Mike disembarked in Northwest Europe 4 February 1945 and was taken on strength 19 February with The Regina Rifle Regiment (RRR).

The RRR, also known as the 'Farmer Johns' or Reginas, along with the other 7th Brigade battalions (The Royal Winnipeg Rifles and The Canadian Scottish) of 3rd Canadian Division were among the first Commonwealth infantry units to land at Juno Beach (Courseulles-sur-Mer) and suffered heavy D-Day losses. The RRR battled their way through Normandy, helped liberate Channel ports and participated in the Battle for the Scheldt before being placed into static operations near Nijmegen, Netherlands November 1944.

They finally moved out with their 7th Brigade and 3rd Infantry Division 8 February 1945 under First Canadian Army as part of Operation VERITABLE. They advanced through bombed out Cleve, Germany mounted on Kangaroo armoured personnel carriers and spent five days clearing the Germans from Moyland Wood 16-21 February 1945. First, The Regina Rifles and then The Canadian Scottish had attacked but were stalemated and repulsed by determined German paratroopers. It fell to The Royal Winnipeg Rifles to finish the job when Mike joined the RRR as a replacement Rifleman. In summarizing events for February, the Regina's War Diarist commented that in addition to a number of casualties, they also experienced a high percentage of Battle Exhaustion cases. The RRR and 7th Brigade were out of action during the next phase of the Rhine offensive, Operation BLOCKBUSTER.

The Allies decided to seize two crossings over the Rhine River with the main effort in the north in the Emmerich-Wesel sector for Operation PLUNDER. The Reginas were on the move the evening of 27 March, crossing the Rhine by means of a pontoon bridge that the engineers had constructed.

Rhine River pontoon bridge 1945



Priority turned to securing Emmerich and the Hoch Elten ridge so that a maintenance route across the river could be established at Emmerich. The 7th Brigade opened the attack on Emmerich's eastern approaches on the night of 27-28 March, and the Canadian Scottish took Vrasselt, pressing on in the dark. The Regina Rifles occupied Dornick the next morning. Both units were able to reach the outskirts of Emmerich without meeting serious resistance. Units of the 6th Parachute Division and 346th Infantry Division were established in the city, however. The 7th Brigade continued its attacks inside the built-up area and the woods to the north while the 8th Brigade was ordered to pass through and attack the Hoch Elten ridge.

The Canadian Scottish, along with a company of Regina Rifles, attempted to expand a bridgehead over the Landwehr Canal on the night of 28-29 March, managing to do so in the face of heavy fighting. Engineers managed to bridge the canal in darkness, and further thrusts into the city followed. In peacetime a city of 16,000 people, Emmerich had been severely bombed such that only a single street had intact buildings remaining. The enemy used

the rubble to good effect, fortifying houses. On the morning of 29 March, the Regina Rifles attacked into southern Emmerich with tank and Crocodile support, finding the Germans again in fortified buildings and with tank support. Progress was slow as the ruins had to be carefully searched, and road blocks and rubble made it

difficult for tanks to manoeuvre. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles made steady progress in the northern portion of the city and turned back a German counterattack early on 30 March, the same day that the Canadian Scottish took over the lead of the divisional advance and secured a large cement works west of the city. In three days, the battalions of the 7th Brigade suffered 172 casualties, 44 of them fatal.

Courtesy Canadiansoldiers.com

Canadian Scottish Regiment with Sherbrooke Fusiliers tank near Emmerich, Germany 30 March 1945. LAC PA-131818



Mike Bokitch was one of the Regina Rifle casualties 29 March 1945 while with "B" Company, sustaining abdominal wounds from a mine explosion. He died of his wounds the next day, age 24.



RFN. M. J. BOKITCH
... died of wounds

DIED OF WOUNDS.

Rfn. Michael Joseph Bokitch, 25, whose wife lives at 6216 Windsor, died on March 30 as a result of abdominal wounds sustained in action with the Regina Rifles the previous day. He was wounded in a mine explosion, and is buried in Germany.

Son of Mr. and Mrs. Martin Bokitch, 2064 Quebec, he was born and educated in Regina, and before enlisting two years ago worked for the Western Manufacturing Co. He went overseas last October.

Besides his wife and parents he is survived by two brothers, LAC. John Bokitch, with the R.C.A.F. at Calgary, and Martin, in Regina.

The Province, Vancouver, B.C. May 1945

Rifleman M.J. Bokitch was temporarily buried at Vrsasselt, Germany and later relocated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands, grave reference **XX. A. 5.**

The inscription on his headstone:

MAY HE REST IN PEACE.
ALWAYS IN OUR HEARTS.
LOVINGLY REMEMBERED
BY HIS FAMILY



Photo credit www.lestweforget1945.org

Mike Bokitch's campaign medals:

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

Mike's widow Ruth moved to Vancouver, British Columbia and remarried.

Bokitch Island in Phelps Lake, Saskatchewan was named after him as a geo-memorial site.



FACES TO GRAVES

Stichting Faces to Canadian
War Graves Groesbeek

Biography by Jim Little, Research Team Faces to Graves.

Sources Consulted:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Library and Archives Canada – Accessed through Ancestry.ca

Veteran Affairs Canada – Canadian Virtual War Memorial

Saskatchewan Virtual War Memorial <https://svwm.ca/casualty-display/?ID=A000006803>

Newspapers.com

Brenda Rolfe – niece of Mike Bokitch

1st Canadian Parachute Battalion picture and information

<https://www.junobeach.org/canada-in-wwii/articles/1st-canadian-parachute-battalion/>

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Rhine River pontoon bridge 1945 picture

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The Rhine Battle Map 23 March – 1 April 1945 and Operation Plunder information

<https://www.canadiansoldiers.com/history/battlehonours/northwesteurope/rhine.htm>

Zuehlke, Mark (2010). On To Victory – The Canadian Liberation of the Netherlands, March 23 – May 5, 1945

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