

Boulter, Ralph Schurman
Lance Corporal
North Nova Scotia Highlanders
Royal Canadian Infantry Corps
F 60349



Ralph Boulter was born on 25 December 1917 in Glenwood, Prince Edward Island, Canada; Glenwood is situated in the north of the island near O'Leary on the St. Lawrence bay. The potato industry has always been very important in this area and there is even a potato museum.

Ralph was the fourth child of Mcneil Amos Boulter, (1879-1954) and Ella May Schurman. (1884-1973.) His parents married in 1912 in Summerside and they had six children. Neil was first married to Ella's sister, Ada Jane Schurman but she died in 1912, 33 years old. They had a son, John Roland, born 13 March 1906. Ralph's mother Ella already had a daughter, Ruth Elaine born in 1906 and then had four more children after she married Neil: Elizabeth Isabel (Bessie, 1915-2016); Ralph. Helen Angelina who was born in 1915 and married Edison Smith; the youngest was Neil Harding, born in 1925.



Little Ralph and his sisters Helen dan Bessie

After he left school, Ralph worked on a farm; he volunteered for military service on 10 July 1940 in Charlottetown. At his medical examination on 28 June, he was found to be 5 ft 11.5 tall and he weighed almost 163 lbs. He was 22 years old, well-developed with brown eyes and dark brown hair.



Ralph as a young man

At the same time, his brother-in-law Edison Smith and his brother Nelson also enlisted; Edison with the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, like Ralph and Nelson with the West Nova Scotia Highlanders. At first, Ralph and Edison were not in the same unit but Ralph wanted to be with his brother-in-law; this only happened just before the Rhine battle in 1945. Ralph was first placed with the Prince Edward Island Highlanders for his training.

On 19 March 1941, he had to go to the hospital with a kidney infection where he stayed until 7 June; in August he attended the hospital in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Ralph was given two weeks' leave and given permission to marry Mary Catherine Mac Eachern from Halifax. The ceremony took place there on 7 February 1942.

Two months later on 9 April, he embarked on the ten-day journey to the UK; after first going to the training camp in Bordon, East Hampshire, he then took part in a battle drill training with the Cape Breton Highlanders. This was connected to the 5th Canadian Reinforcement Unit and the Armoured Division. After this they temporarily go to the Canadian Training School Whilst.

He was to remain training in Great Britain for the next two years until the end of 1944; Ralph was awarded the Good Conduct Badge on 10 July 1942, an award worn on the left arm of the uniform.



On January 15, 1944, Ralph was given the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp. While training with the 3rd Canadian Infantry in November, preparations were made for the journey to the European mainland where Ralph arrived on New Year's day, 1945. As Private he was placed with the North Nova Scotia Highlanders Regiment which was part of the 9th Canadian Infantry Division.



At this point in January 1945, the Novas as they were known, were stationed in the Nijmegen area in the Netherlands, situated close to the border with Germany. The regiment had taken part in the D-day landings on 6 June 1944 and fought its way east, more than 400 kilometers across northern France, paying a heavy price in the numbers of killed and wounded. It took a leading role in Operation Switchback and was involved in the liberation of Knokke in Belgium at the beginning of November. Soon after, the Novas with other Canadian forces were transported overnight some 150 kilometers north-east to Nijmegen. A three-month period of relative calm followed as the Allies prepared for the next big action.

On 8 February Operation Veritable was launched, a massive action that aimed to clear the enemy from the German territory to the south between the rivers Rhine and Maas. From the start conditions were atrocious - a thaw had set in and all the flat land by the Rhine was flooded to a depth of a meter. As the Novas tried to move forward through the Reichswald forest, the ground quickly became a sea of mud because of the constant rain. On 12 February, they had reached Kellen near Kleve. and on the 14th, they were sent forward in amphibious Buffaloes and cleared Warbergen on the road to Emmerich, their activities concealed from the enemy by a long smokescreen.

Towards the end of the month, the Novas were involved in Operation Blockbuster and the fight for Udem. On 6 March they were in Sonsbeck, but the Germans were already withdrawing across the Rhine bridge at Wesel. By 10 March there were no more enemy troops on the west side of the river but the last bridge across the Rhine had been destroyed.

In the meantime Ralph was promoted to Lance Corporal.

Two weeks of preparation followed for the enormous task of transporting an army across almost a kilometer of the swollen river Rhine. Carefully organized, with aerial and artillery support, this operation named Plunder, took place near Rees on 23 March, using amphibious vehicles and landing craft to ferry men and equipment across, a formidable undertaking.

The following day in the afternoon, the Canadians came up against considerable German opposition near the village of Bienen, and on 25 March, the North Nova Scotia Highlanders attacked across open ground against a determined enemy. They soon lost the initiative according to the War Diary 'and contact between platoons was next to impossible because of the murderous fire and heavy mortaring'. 43 Novas were killed that day including both Ralph Boulter, aged 27 and his brother-in-law Edison Smith.

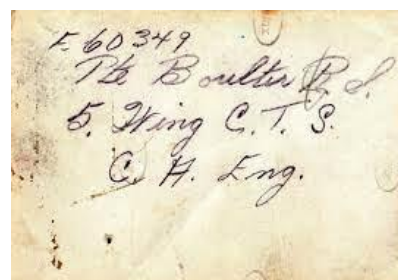
Ralph is temporarily buried on March 26 in Rees, Germany, in the military cemetery. He is 27 years old. His wife Mary receives a telegram of his death on April 4.

Ralph Schurman Boulter was reburied on December 7, 1945 at the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek, grave reference **X1X. C. 1.**



The grave as it was in those first days

Photos Harriet Jenereaux



In 1954 the crosses are replaced by tombstones, the family can then enter a text.

De tekst on his headstone reads:
BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS
FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED
THE CHILDREN OF GOD.

Accept the Good Conduct Badge Ralph received the next awards:

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



After the war the Memorial Cross is sent to his widowe Mary in Halifax and to his mother in O'Leary.



Life story: Tefke van Dijk and 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
- Edison Smith (cousin)
- Keith en Harriet Jenereaux (Ralph's niece and Edison Smith's daughter)
- veterans.gc.ca
- findagrave

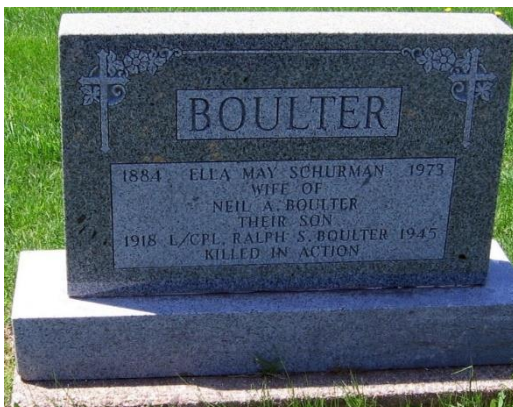
Additional information:

On December 26, 1944, Ralph makes a new will, it turns out that his wife is with another man. She still goes to her in-laws a few times to say she's sorry, but in consultation with his parents, Ralph leaves all his possessions to his mother Ella.

She writes in a letter to the army command:

"Ralph had only just married when he went to Europe in April 1942 and she has already cheated on him, after his service Ralph wanted to return to his parents, where he has always lived and whose support he was. His wife stopped writing to him and cheated on him. Ralph started divorce proceedings but it cost 600 Canadian dollars and he only had 300. He asked his parents for help in his last letter, but before they could give it, it was no longer needed."

Mother Ella says she respects military rules and that his widow is officially entitled to her husband Ralph's estate. Although, according to Ella, she is no longer entitled to that.



Ralph is also remembered at the family grave

Photo: Findagrave



Memorial Wall North Nova Scotia Highlanders in Amherst photo: Harriet Jenereaux

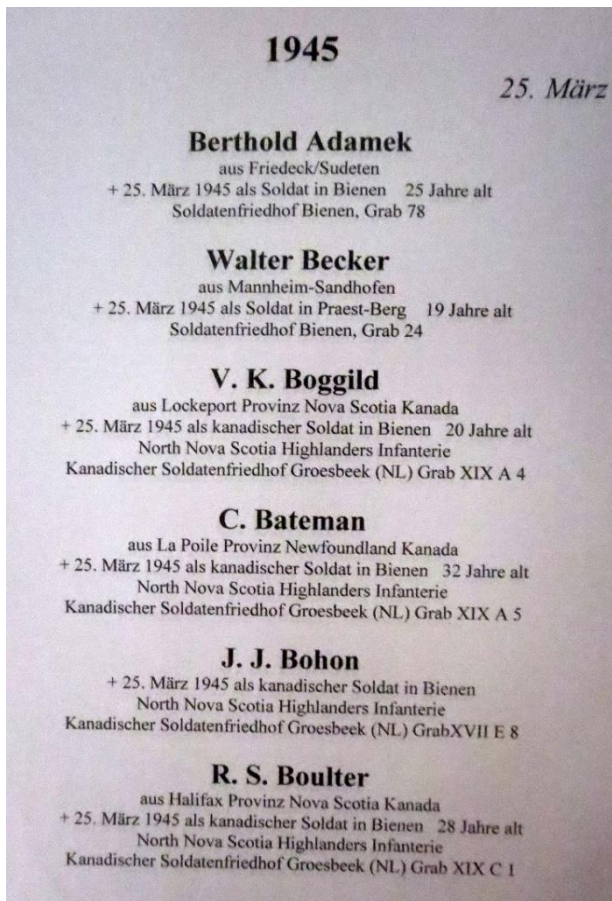
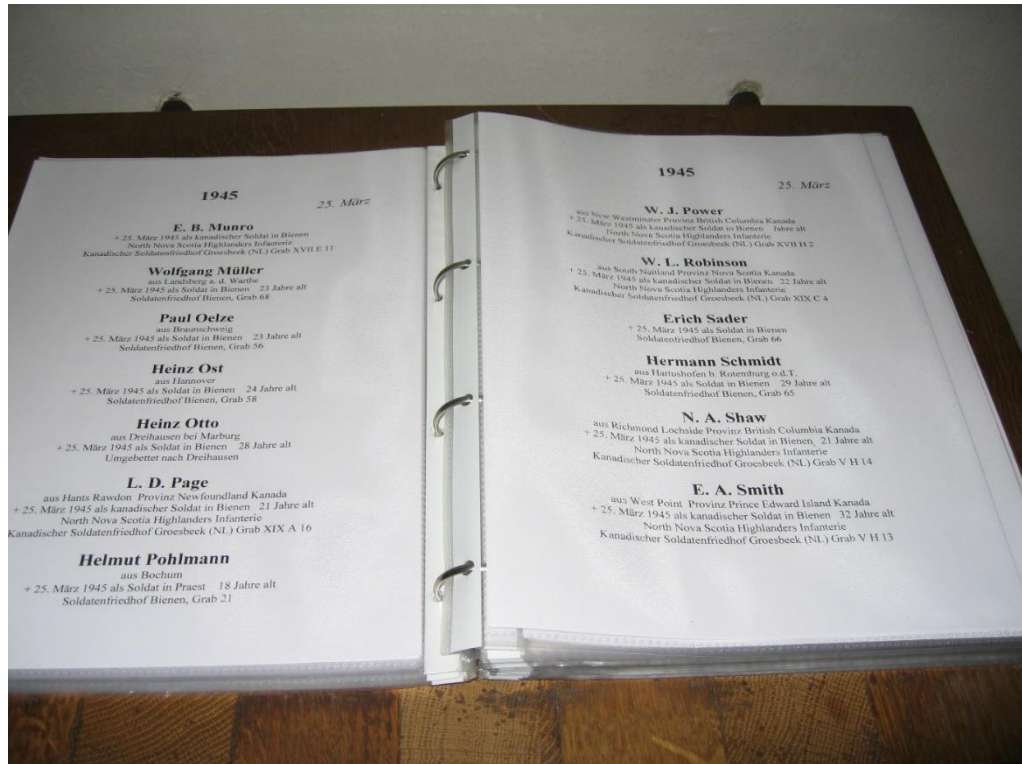
Ralph's brother-in-law, Edison Smith who was killed on the same day as Ralph. Was married to his sister Helen. Edison joined the army on 2 July 1940 in Charlottetown. He followed the basic training in Amherst until May 1941 and then left for England in July. Helen was expecting their second child Harriet whom he was never to see. On 15 September 2017, Harriet and her husband Keith visited Edison's grave in Groesbeek. Grave reference: V. H. 13.



Video of the 1st visit of his daughter to her father's grave:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yATf_bxXRaU&t=26s

In the church in Bienen you'll find the 'Roll of Honour' with the names of all victims of the battle of Bienen: British, Canadian and German soldiers all together. At the square in front of the church a panel remembers this heavy battle.



Roll of Honour in the church in Bienen, where also brother-in-law Edison Smith is mentioned..

photos Alice van Bekkum