

**Broten, Kenneth Owen**  
**Sergeant**  
**Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regiment**  
**Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**  
**H/1845**



Kenneth Owen Broten was born 11 January 1923 in Dacotah, Manitoba, a farming area located north of Starbuck, southeast of Winnipeg. His father Henry Albert Broten was of Norwegian descent, born and raised in North Dakota, USA. Henry joined the US Army near the end of World War One but did not serve overseas. Henry married Meta Selma Florence Piper, a German American, in 1922, and the couple moved north to Canada where they established a large mixed farm with 840 cultivated acres. Florence also owned land in the USA through her Piper family.



*Henry Albert Broten*

Three more children followed first born Kenneth, and the Lutheran Broten family enjoyed a happy, normal life. Kenneth's favorite activities were

skating, swimming and baseball, playing shortstop in the latter sport. Kenneth was educated at a rural school and left at fourteen years of age after completing grade 8 to help his family on the farm. He drove tractors and learned to overhaul them. He wanted to become a diesel mechanic.

*Broten children L-R: Warren, Kenneth, Shirley (in front of him) and Vernon*

In addition to working on his father's farm, Kenneth also laboured for a neighbour near Starbuck for several years and was earning \$12 weekly when he enlisted with the Canadian Army in Winnipeg 2 February 1943. His examination recorded him at 5'6" tall and a sturdy 147 lbs. Kenneth's medical history included a fractured forearm as a child, a dislocated shoulder in 1937 and rheumatic fever in 1940. He completed his basic training in Portage la Prairie and went to Camp Shilo for infantry training in April 1943. Kenneth was posted to the Royal Winnipeg Rifles in May.



Kenneth's personnel selection record rated him as having high average army ability in most respects. The interviewing officer described him as "quiet, stable manner, a thoughtful type". He was recommended for the infantry with the potential to become an N.C.O. (Non Commissioned Officer) and "should be useful in carrier platoon" given his extensive farm experience.

Kenneth was granted two weeks embarkation leave ending 11 July 1943, then sailed from Halifax, Nova Scotia in August, disembarking in the U.K. 2 September 1943 where he was attached to the Canadian Infantry Reserve Unit with the rank of Private. A month later Kenneth was taken on strength with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWR), also known as the Little Black Devils, and redesignated as a Rifleman. The RWR formed part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade along with the Regina Rifles and Canadian Scottish Regiments in 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division. When Kenneth joined his regiment, they were stationed in Bournemouth, England and he was assigned to D Company. By this time they were engaged with amphibious assault training exercises in preparation for the invasion of France the next year.



The Winnipeg Rifles along with the other 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade battalions were among the first Commonwealth units to land in Normandy on D-Day, 6 June 1944. Kenneth landed at Mike Beach, Courseulles-sur-Mer, with his Company under heavy enemy fire and was one of the estimated 130 casualties the RWR suffered that day.

*Royal Winnipeg Rifles in first wave of Landing Assault Crafts 6 June 1944*

Jim Busby, a military history researcher from Winnipeg and friend to the Broten family in the distant past determined from Kenneth's casualty card that he was wounded by shrapnel to his left hand at 0745 on 6 June 1944, mere moments after the RWR landed. He was evacuated to England for hospital treatment the next day on LCI(L) 177, a Landing Craft Infantry (Large) vessel, and admitted to 9<sup>th</sup> General Hospital on 8 June.



LCI(L) 177 at Normandy

With treatment and healing completed, Kenneth was discharged from the hospital 28 June 1944 and returned to France in early July as a casualty reinforcement. His early wounding precluded him from the tragedy that befell the Little Black Devils right after D-Day at Putot-en-Bessin, which resulted in another 300 casualties, almost half of the battalion's combat strength. Kenneth spent some time with the Regina Rifles before catching up to his regiment at a rest area near Colomby-sur-Thalon on 3 August, recovering from another costly battle at Carpiquet in July.

Kenneth was promoted to Lance Corporal with the RWR 15 August 1944. The Germans were by then in retreat, fighting delaying actions as Allied forces pursued them. Falais was captured later that month with many German prisoners taken. The RWR and 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade played a key role in securing the Channel port of Calais, France September 1944 before moving on to Belgium and the battle for the Scheldt.

There they participated in another tough fight at Leopold Canal along the Netherlands border 6-13 October. Kenneth was appointed acting Corporal 10 October during this battle, with the three battalions of 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade suffering 553 casualties by its conclusion. Having distinguished himself, Kenneth was made acting Sergeant 20 October as the RWR reorganized.

The Winnipeg Rifles fought in some lesser skirmishes in the Scheldt that month before relieving a US regiment near Nijmegen, Netherlands on 11 November 1944. They remained there in static operations for the next three months, and Kenneth had his rank of Sergeant confirmed 20 January 1945 as a belated 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday present.

The Little Black Devils were on the move with their 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in February as part of First Canadian Army, breaking out of their winter positions in the Nijmegen-Groesbeek area under Operation Veritable. This was a new role for them, changing from being liberators to invaders, pushing the Germans deeper into their homeland.



Title: Infantrymen of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles in a Buffalo amphibious vehicle taking part in Operation VERITABLE en route from Niel to Keeken, Germany, 9 February 1945.



Initial progress was impeded due to severe flooding through a combination of a sudden thaw, heavy rains, failed dams and dykes blown by the retreating Germans. This required 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade and other Canadian formations to use tracked amphibious carriers called Buffaloes to advance. Cleve was the first major German city to be taken by the Canadian Army. By the time they got there, Allied aircraft had left it in ruins.

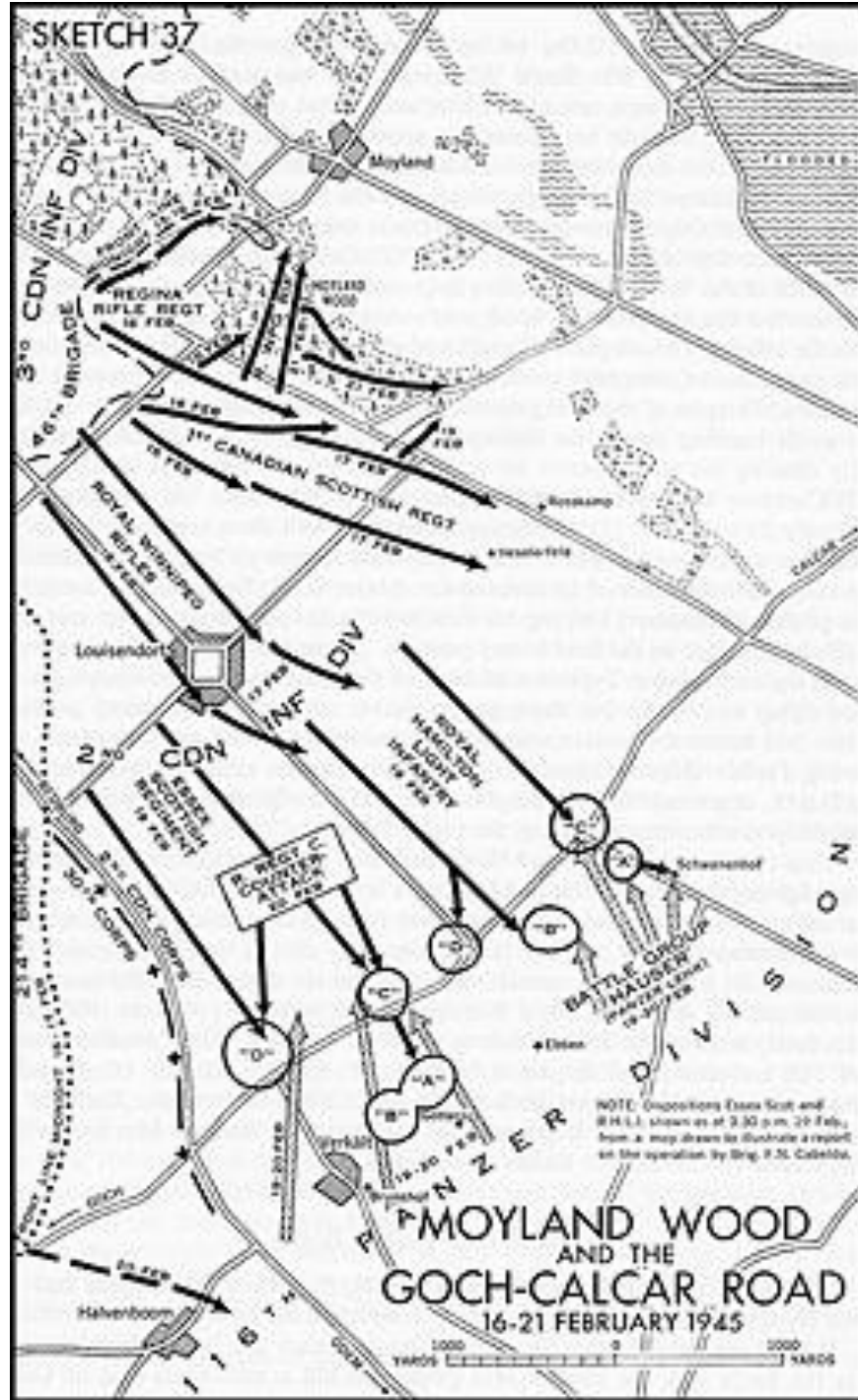
*Winnipeg Rifles advance at Cleve 13 February 1945*

New equipment and tactics were employed in 1945. For the first time in the war the Little Black Devils attacked mounted in Kangaroo armoured personnel carriers, supported by 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Personnel Carrier Regiment. On 16 February at 0730 hours, the RWR were picked up in their concentration area near Cleve by the Kangaroos and moved several miles forward to the forming up place for their part in the pending attack.



7<sup>th</sup> Brigade's orders were to move eastward from Cleve to Udem, running parallel with the British advance to the Rhine through an area that was only wide enough to use one brigade at a time. They were tasked with the capture of Moyland Wood and the ground to the immediate south, opening the way to Calcar. The Little Black Devils supported by tanks from a Guards Armoured Brigade assaulted the village of Louisendorf to the southeast at 1200 hours. German artillery and rocket fire was extremely heavy, but both the speed and protection afforded by the Kangaroo's armour meant that casualties in the approach to the village were light. Each troop of Kangaroos carrying a company of Little Black Devils motored up to its objective, where the infantry leaped over the sides of the carriers and dashed into the village. Kenneth's D Company, mounted in the Kangaroos of No. 4 Troop remained in reserve at the start line until 1430 hours, then headed straight for the objective. They were ordered to reinforce A Company and dismounted in front of the church at 1600 hours.

Louisendorf was held by a battalion of Germans, and casualties were heavy in the ensuing fighting. However, the village was captured and approximately 240 prisoners were taken in what was a successful operation compared to the near disaster that befell the Regina Rifles at Moyland Wood.



Kenneth Owen Broten was killed in that action on 16 February 1945.

Sergeant Kenneth Owen Broten was temporarily buried near Calcar, Germany and later relocated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery near Nijmegen, Netherlands, grave reference **XXV. C. 15**.

*Photo courtesy Jim Busby*



Biography by Jim Little, Research Team Faces to Graves.

Sources Consulted:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Library and Archives Canada

Veteran Affairs Canada – Canadian Virtual War Memorial

Ancestry public trees

Jim Busby – military history researcher and former Broten family friend

Royal Winnipeg Rifles <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/military-history/history-heritage/official-military-history-lineages/lineages/infantry-regiments/royal-winnipeg-rifles.html>

Reid, Brian (2010). Named by the Enemy – A History of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles

LCI(L) 177 picture <http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/LCIL177.htm>

Moyland Wood map

<https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/Canada/CA/Victory/Victory-18.html>

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Buchner, A. & Holm, G. (2002). A Place of Honour – Manitoba's War Dead Commemorated in its Geography

\* Do you have a photo of this soldier or additional information please contact [info@facestograves.nl](mailto:info@facestograves.nl)

A photograph of a yellowed, rectangular AFW 3083 Casualty Card. The card is titled 'ALL ENTRIES IN BLOCK LETTERS.' and has a large number '3' in the top right corner. It features several rows of fields with handwritten entries in black ink. The fields include: 'LYING', 'SITTING', 'ABLE TO WALK', 'SLIGHT', and 'SEVERE' (with '3' written above it); 'Regt. No.' and 'A.S.N.' (with 'H 1845' written next to a bracket); 'Name' (with 'BROTEN, K.O.' written); 'Regt. or Corps' and 'Organisation' (with 'P.W.R.' written next to a bracket); 'Diagnosis' (with 'GSW L hand' written); 'Evacuating Unit' (with '207(0)FP' written next to a bracket) and 'Ship' (with 'LCI(L) 177' written); and 'Date' (with '7/1/44' written) and 'Signature' (with a handwritten signature). The card is partially covered by a white envelope flap on the left side.

AFW 3083 Casualty Card - Kenneth Owen Broten

AFW 3083 Casualty Card from the WW2 service file of Pte (later Sgt) Kenneth Owen Broten. He landed with D Company of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles on June 06, 1944. He was wounded by shrapnel in his left hand and evacuated off the beach aboard LCI(L) 177 the following day, as noted at the bottom right of the card. After three weeks in hospital in England, he rejoined the Royal Winnipeg Rifles in July. Sgt Broten was KIA at Kalkar, Germany on February 16, 1945 and is buried at Groesbeek Cemetery near Nijmegen, Holland.

*Courtesy Jim Busby*



Brotten Lake, southwest of York Factory was named after Kenneth Owen Brotten by the Manitoba Government in 1964.

*Winnipeg Tribune March 1945*

