

Buck, William Bruce

Private

**Highland Light Infantry of
Canada**

**Royal Canadian Infantry
Corps**

A/58259



William Bruce Buck
(Signature of officer or man)

William Bruce "Billy" Buck was born in Simcoe, Ontario on June 23, 1923. His family were longstanding residents of Norfolk County, a fertile expanse of land bordering the north shore of Lake Erie, known for its fruit and vegetable crops, plus a sandy soil ideal for growing tobacco. Norfolk is the historic tobacco-growing capital of Canada.

Billy's grandfather, Joseph Buck, (b. 1847) was a glove finisher, and married Nancy Jane Udell (b.1849). Together they lived in Nixon, had a son, William Austin Buck in 1888. He followed in his father's trade, also a glove finisher, lived in Delhi, and married 17-year-old Charlotte Myrtle Sharman (b. 1903) from Charlotteville, on December 11, 1920. Three years later the couple had young Billy, born in Simcoe. He had a brother George, and sister Lois as well.

The family were Baptists, and sometime later, they moved to Kitchener, Ontario about 100 kilometers north east of Delhi settling at 41 Ellen Street West. Kitchener, Waterloo County was a larger town known for its vast,

mixed industry and surrounding rich hilly farmland and forests, worked and owned in great part by the Mennonite community. The Ellen Street home still stands today, in 2020. Billy attended Kitchener Waterloo Collegiate for three years and took on a job as a shipping clerk at Burns company, a meat packer. At the age of 18, he enlisted in #10 Basic Training School. And began his short but very active and historic military career.



Billy's family was fully invested in the Allied cause. His brother George was a gunner in the Royal Canadian Artillery, and his father, William Austin Buck fought in WW1, and afterwards was a POW escort in Camps Gravenhurst and Petawawa, Ontario.

Private William Austin Buck (1889-1968)

Before leaving Canada however, he became engaged to his sweetheart, Mary Elizabeth Burkholder of Kitchener on February 4, 1943. He was 19 years old. She was 18, born June 22, 1924, just over one-year younger to the day.

In August 1941 Billy was ranked as a fusilier with #10 BTC, Kitchener. Twelve days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was assigned the rank of Private and for the next 27 months participated in training, alternately moving between Camps Ipperwash, Chatham, London and Woodstock Ontario. During that period, he was tested and qualified as a driver mechanic, for wheeled and tracked vehicles.

On March 11, 1944, three months before D-Day, Billy was shipped to Debert, Nova Scotia, a military port. Two weeks later he boarded a transport ship that arrived in the United Kingdom on April 12. He was assigned to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Reserve Unit (CIRU) and along with

his comrades prepared to embark from England for France, though the plan was very much a protected secret. No leaves were given for two weeks prior to the attack, and the troops themselves had no knowledge of what was in store for them.

D-Day June 6, 1944, Operation Overlord went into action, and volumes of Canadian troops and armour crossed the English Channel and landed on Juno Beach. Four days later, on June 10, Billy came ashore as a driver mechanic with the Highland Light Infantry of Canada, (HLIC) part of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. This group of fighters pursued the goal of being among the first Allied regiments to cross into Germany. For the next 8 months they succeeded in liberating territory in France, Belgium and Holland, enduring bloody conflicts and fierce resistance in German-occupied villages like Caen, Buron, Falaise, Chambois, Boulogne, Calais eventually entering the Scheldt River delta in Holland.

As part of Operation Veritable, the First Canadian Army had to take over the Rhineland, a narrow strip of land between the Maas and Rhine rivers. To slow down the Allies' progress, the Germans destroyed dykes and flooded the area. February's milder weather and thaw softened the muddy ground, hindering the advance of armoured vehicles and artillery. The HLIC used Buffalo craft to transport personnel and armour through the waters left by the Germans. The Waal Flats were an expanse of river land bordering the Waal River, which originates as the Rhine in Germany. These lowlands were the site for volumes of land mines which were unmarked, and within the firing range of German mortars and machine gun fire.

On February 1, 1945 the HLIC had entered the town of Nijmegen, Holland, close to Germany's border. From there they embarked on several different raids to liberate and occupy villages and neighbourhoods including Groesbeek, Kellen, Duffelward, Wardhausen, Griethausen, Spyck, Bienen, Cleve, and Calcar.

On the eve of February 25th, the HLIC was in possession of Calcar, Germany and prepared for the attack on Uedem the next day. Operation Blockbuster was underway and by evening on the 26th, Uedem was in Allied control. Unfortunately, the battle that day claimed Billy Buck. He was among 7 who were killed, and another 33 soldiers who were injured

in the attack. By February 28 the HLIC command was set up in Uedem's shoe factory, and from there, they planned their next action: to cross the Rhine. Billy Buck got killed at the age of 21.

Private William Bruce Buck was awarded the 1939-1945 Star, France Germany Star, War medal and CVSM and Clasp.

He was temporarily buried in a military cemetery in Bedburg, close to Calcar.

He was subsequently moved to the Groesbeek Canadian Military Cemetery south of Nijmegen, and buried in Plot **VIII**. Row **H**. Grave **16**.



Billy's fiancé, Mary Elizabeth (Betty) Burkholder had not married Billy as planned in 1944, and her life story is not known.

Billy's mother Myrtle died in 2009 at the age of 106 years, predeceased by William who died 41 years earlier at the age of 68.



41 Ellen Street West, Kitchener, Ontario, home of Billy Buck. His mother Myrtle lived here until she died in 2009 at age 106.

Life story and photos: Phil Brown, 224-321-2333, pmb1267@gmail.com
February 24, 2020.

Sources:

1. Simcoe Reformer, March 19, 1945

2. http://pipesforfreedom.com/webtxt/0502THE_HIGHLAND_LIGHT_INFANTRY_OF_CANADA.htm

3. History of The HLI by WLU Prof:
<https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=etd>

4. Another Good Account :
<https://www.junobeach.org/canada-in-wwii/articles/liberation-of-the-netherlands-and-capitulation-of-germany/>

5. And there is the Sugarsync Link for War Diaries:
https://www.sugarsync.com/pf/D7141212_08752732_8972982

6. Here is 41 Ellen Street Kitchener <https://goo.gl/maps/wx6TL6H9V2GwCZn49>

7. A legible recounting of Operation Veritable and Blockbuster:
<https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/Canada/CA/Victory/Victory-19.html>



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