

Burr, Kenneth Leslie
Bombardier
2 Survey Regiment
Royal Canadian Artillery
A104953



Kenneth Leslie Burr was born in Sarnia township, Ontario on August 9, 1923. He was the son of Gordon Nelson Burr and Hattie Bell Hemsley, who were married in Sarnia on March 28, 1918. His father was a pipefitter for the Imperial Oil company.

The family comprised six boys: John, Kenneth, Howard, James, Franklin, and Gerald as well as three girls: Helen, Mary, and Ruth Ann. The family belonged to the Church of England and attended Trinity Anglican Church in Sarnia.

According to his sisters Mary Scott and Ruth Ann Handy, Kenneth attended Clark's schoolhouse for elementary school which was a two-room schoolhouse and then took the technical course at Sarnia Collegiate Institute

and Technical School (which was the high school in Sarnia) from 1934-1936 and left high school at age 13 to start a job.

After school he drove a gravel truck for two and a half years and he worked as a blacksmith for three and one half years in a foundry. Prior to enlistment, he had been employed with Anglin-Norcross Ont. Ltd., general contractors in Sarnia. He worked as a coremaker's helper and a rigger.

Kenneth had a serious girlfriend before he enlisted at age 19, but had not yet married or had children before starting his military training (because of his age). He had no family members in the military making him the first to enlist in his family.



The only pictures that Ken's family had of him were his enlistment photo and a few photos taken during his military training that were forwarded to his mother.

Kenneth Leslie Burr enlisted in the Canadian army on October 23, 1942 in London, Ontario. He was assigned to the Royal Canadian Artillery.



Kenneth Burr is the soldier standing on the right.

According to his army record of his medical examination, he stood five feet 10 inches tall and weighed 174 pounds. He had blue eyes and fair hair. His personnel selection report described him as "quite mature" and being "a serious, conscientious young man of better than average aptitude." The document says he seemed to be well allocated for military service and that he was "friendly, neat, and healthy".

Kenneth Burr had stated he wanted to learn arc welding and start his own trucking business after the war. His favourite sports to play as he grew up were rugby, hockey, and baseball. Kenneth also enjoyed dancing.

According to family stories, Kenneth would borrow a car to bring home, park it at the side of the road and holler "Maw, I'm home" before he came into the house. He would then always take his youngest brother and sister on the rumble seat of the car to the corner store to pick out a treat, which was very rare in those times.

Gunner Burr completed his basic training in Chatham, Ontario and his advanced training as a Gunner on a medium calibre gun at Camp Petawawa. He completed a drivers and mechanics courses in Woodstock and London, Ontario.

After his training finished, he left Canada on November 25, 1943 and arrived in the United Kingdom on December 2, 1943. On April 24, 1944 he was transferred to the 2nd Survey Regiment of the Royal Canadian Artillery.



Kenneth attended the Labatt's Motor Mechanics army trade school in London, Ontario.

In early December of 1943, Ken's parents received his telegram informing them that he had arrived safely overseas.

Ken arrived in France on July 26, 1944. According to later letters that Ken sent, he had served in France, Belgium and Holland.

Ken wrote letters home regularly during the war and started them all, "Dear Maw". He always asked about his youngest siblings that he referred to as "the Angels" and talked about things at home such as the Brigden Fair and asked about his friends. He talked about looking forward to getting packages from home.

Ken wrote about becoming a "barber" and cutting the hair of some of the men in his troop. He spoke of the harsh conditions – very hot weather and no rain for an entire month of summer and then damp and chilly conditions at night. He talked about the Germans flooding the land making it even more uncomfortable.

He requested that some warm leather or hand-made woollen knitted mittens get sent from home to keep his hands warm. He spoke of riding a nice new motorcycle in the regiment and wishing that he could bring it home with him after the war. He planned to buy a new motorcycle with his bonus money after the war was finished. He said that he had a pretty good job with the survey regiment and was due for a promotion.

He stated that he believed that the war would be over soon and that he would be returning home, he stated that the war was "no damn fun" and the Germans were "playing for keeps". His Mother sent him care packages regularly, they were all numbered and he received every one of them.

Ken drove a motorcycle and would drive ahead of the lines and help scout for his regiment.

In October, 1944, he was promoted to Lance Bombardier and on November 20, he again was promoted to full Bombardier rank.

According to the contents of a letter written by his commanding officer, Bombardier Kenneth Leslie Burr died on December 28, 1944 when he was hit with fragments from a shell that had landed near him. He was 21 years old.

Kenneth Burr was originally buried in Nijmegen and then reburied in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery. His grave is located in **II. F. 7.**

On his headstone the inscription reads:

AT REST

Bombardier Burr had been awarded:

- 1939-45 Star
- France & Germany Star
- War Medal
- Defence Medal
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp



According to his sister, his Mother received letters from Dutch people that were especially grateful for how he had assisted their families.

His Mother also received letters from his Commanding Officer, Lieutenant R.W. Emmans, dated Jan 3, 1945, regarding details of his death, giving his sympathy and to inform her of how much Ken was "admired and liked by everyone who came in contact with him, and letting her know that without exception he was considered by all to be a man, a fine soldier, and a gentleman". Furthermore, he stated that Ken had become irreplaceable in their period of fighting, and that he had played a critical role in "the most decisive phase of the war so that all who survive it may never again be subjected to the conditions which we have seen on this continent".

His Mother also got a letter from the acting Chaplain from the Church of England that had performed Ken's burial service overseas in Holland.

LIEUT. R.W. EMMAN'S
P. BATTERY
2 CON SURVEY REGT RCA
CAOS. 3 JAN 45.

Dear Mrs Burr:

This is a very difficult letter for me to write but I feel that as he was in my section, I knew your son better than any other officer did, and I think that you would like to know some of the circumstances surrounding his death.

He was hit by fragments from a shell which landed close to where he was standing and he died about five minutes later. He felt absolutely no pain as he was unconscious from the time he was hit until he died.

He was buried in a Canadian military cemetery, the location of which I am not at liberty to give to you at this time but which will be

due course be forwarded to you. The service was conducted by Honorary Captain Harry Exmouth Langworth and was a chaplain of the Church of England and was attended by representatives of all groups of the Regiment including the Commanding, the second in command the officer commanding the battery and about thirty five others including his closest friends & myself.

He was admired and liked by everyone who came in contact with him and without exception he was considered by all to be a man, a fine soldier and a gentleman. During our period of fighting he has become irreplaceable.

Although it will be of small consolation to you who have lost so much, I think that you would like to know that your son died

in the most decisive phase of the war so that all who survive it may never again be subjected to the conditions which we have seen on this continent.

His name will be placed on the Honour Rolls of the most important war in history and his memory will remain in the hearts of all who knew him.

I would like to submit the deepest sympathy of the entire Regiment & particularly of A Troop and myself to you at this time

Respectfully

Edward Eumans.

H. E. Langwith
C. C. S.
R. E. M. C.
Jan 22/45

Mrs. Harriet Buss.

Dear Mrs. Buss.

May I at this time express
my deepest sympathy for the great
sorrow that has come into your
life.

I am the C. of C. Chaplain, who
officiated at the burial service of
your son, Bdr. K. L. Buss, A104953.

The service which was conducted
according to the rites of his faith
was attended by a large group of
his fellow soldiers and officers.

He is buried in a Canadian Cemetery
in Holland. A white cross properly
engraved marks his resting place.

Know that neither words nor letters
can express one's deepest feelings or
take away the pain. As time goes
on and the pain becomes too
great. Please read the 11th Ch.
of St. John, 21st verse. Here, I believe,

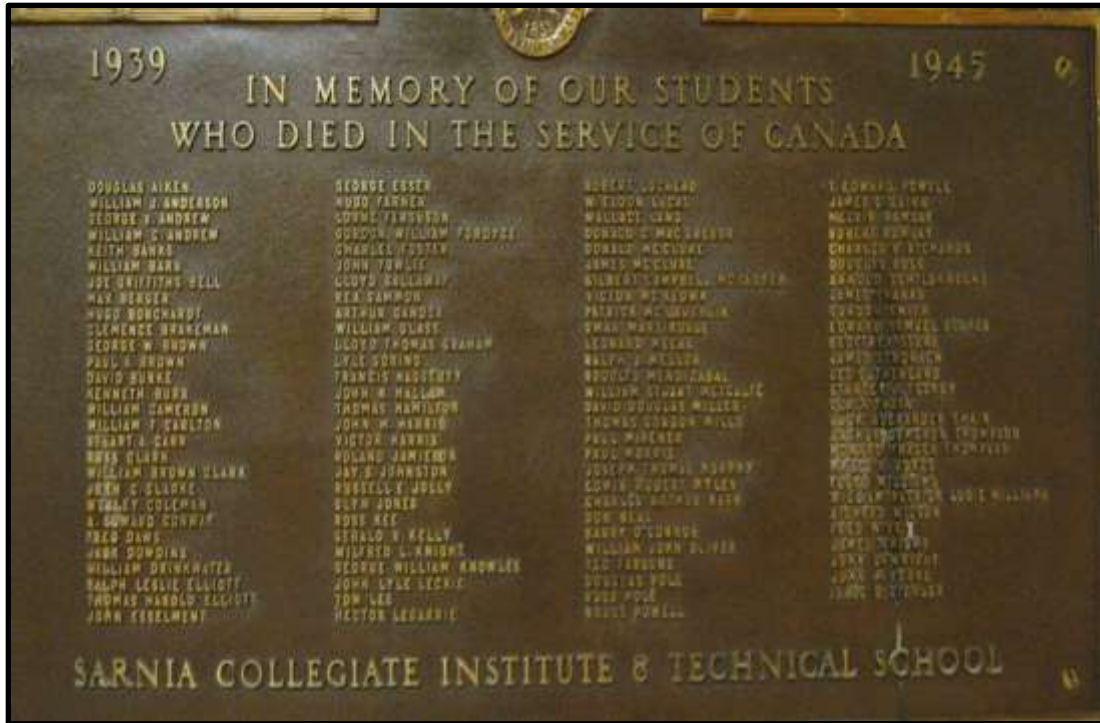
the heart can find some word
comfort. The burden lifted.

May God Bless and
Keep you at this time.

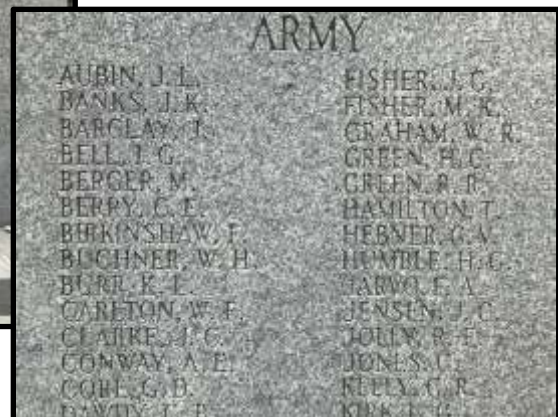
Sincerely yours,
H. E. Langwith
Chaplain

H. E. Langwith

In early February of 1945, a memorial service for Bombardier Kenneth Burr was held in Trinity Anglican Church, Sarnia Township, conducted by the Rev. G.C. Stone.



*This memorial was in the Sarnia Collegiate Institute and Technical School.
Burr's name is 14th from the top on the left-hand side.*



Bombardier Burr's name can be found on the Sarnia Cenotaph

Ken's brother, Jimmy and his wife Yvonne, did name their son who was born in March of 1963 Kenneth in Ken's honour. Ken's grave site was visited by his brothers and sister-in-law Gerry and Fran Burr, Frank and Barb Burr, his nephew Jim Burr, and by friends. According to his family, his mother was always very regretful that she was not able to visit his grave site.



Life story written by Jacob Brown and Rudy Muchmore, students from All Saints H.S., Kanata, Canada for Faces to Graves courtesy of Vanessa Kirtz, teacher at All Saints H.S.

Additional research and editing provided by Kurt Johnson.

Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- Canadian Virtual War Memorial
- Library and Archives Canada
- Pictures and family information provided by Kenneth Burr's youngest sisters Mary Scott and Ruth Ann Handy
- The Sarnia War Remembrance Project by Tom Slater
- Photo of plaque provided Lambton Kent District School Board
- Photo of Sarnia cenotaph provided by Tom Slater

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

Correspondence after the war:

Nijmegen,
Graenbeekseweg 147.
Holland.

13 July 1946.

Dear Mrs. Burr,

I certainly was very surprised to get your letter, but very pleased too. I am so glad to be able to be of any use to you. As soon as I received the letter, I set out to find your son's grave. That wasn't so easy, for I didn't know where to inquire after it. At last, after much telephoning, I found the right address for information. I went there and a Canadian officer met me. We both looked down long lists of names and found the name of your son. At least I suppose it is your son. As you have not given me his number or rank, I can't be sure. Will you please write back to me, whether this is your son: A 104953, BDR, BURR, K.L. 2nd Coy, Regt, R.C.A. He died on Dec. 28/1944. If this is right, I shall certainly go out to the cemetery and put flowers on his grave regularly. I am not allowed to take a photograph of his grave, but I shall give you the exact description of the place and its surroundings. My heart goes out to you in warm sympathy at the loss of your two sons. I am a mother myself; though the two children I have are only tiny tots, I

can very well feel what it must be like to lose any one of them. And it is the harder for you, because you can't attend his grave. Perhaps it will give you some consolation to know that a loving hand will look after your son's last resting place. His soul will surely be with God. If you possibly can, do tell me some more about him. Was he a Christian lad?

Have you got a snapshot of yourself or of you and the family? I would so like to know you better. I am sending you a snapshot of myself, taken with my daughter, now aged $2\frac{1}{2}$ yrs., in 1944. Since then I have a son, aged 3 months. Both children are very sweet. My husband is a clergyman. I myself am half English, as my mother was British born and bred. Most of her brothers (8) live in Canada and she had a sister in Newark (N. Y.) Her girl's name is Dawson, daughter of the Rev. W. F. Dawson. Maybe you know his name. My mother married a Dutchman in 1914. I have a brother, the eldest; he is in Foreign Affairs. A sister, 3 yrs. older than I am, she is, for some unknown reason to us, but God will surely know why, backwards and abnormal. Then there is me, age 16, and a younger sister, who is engaged to a clergyman-to-be.

Well, now you know something about me. If you care to keep in contact with me, do tell me. I'd love to be of use to you.
Yours truly
Rosemary Le Gras-Pierson.

Nijmegen,
147. Groenbeekseweg

28 Oct. 1946.

Dear Mrs Burr,

Let me start with an apology, because I am going to ask you for something, a thing I never intended to do and still never would do if it was for myself. But, you see, it is for our church that I am going to ask your help. As you maybe know, our church was destroyed during the war and now we hold our services in a building, belonging to others. Our parish life, I regret to say, is going to pieces for lack of a central gathering place and we are doing our utmost to raise the funds for the restoration of our own church. That is why I am organising a fancy fair, to be held in the early spring of 1947, solely for the benefit of our new church. But, as it is, many people have lost everything in the war, so only few have been able

ends left over, to make small useful articles out of. Would it be possible for you to get your friends interested in this, so that they would want to send us all sorts of odd bits of cloth, rags, ribbons, lace, I don't know what, so we could make handkerchiefs, bibs, baby's socks from bits of wool, etc. out of these. Of course, if there are any small articles available, fit to sell at a fancy fair, or perhaps even some tea or dainties or eatables, they too would be very welcome. But I don't want it to cost you a lot of money. We really are glad with the simplest things, any thing old you can spare. Our church would be grateful beyond words.

I have not been to Kenneth's grave since September, as the weather was very bad and there was so much work to do. You see, it is quite a distance from where I live to the cemetery. But I'll go some time next month and lay

flowers and pray for you all.

I am so glad with the photographs. I seem to know you now. So tell me honestly whether you want them back or any way Kenneth's snapshot on the jeep. So be honest, please! I'll return them gladly to you. Just say the word.

Is every one well at yours? My children are very well, thank God. The youngest is now 7 months old and is trying hard to sit up. His teeth are just coming through. He is such a dear, contented little chap.

Well, dear Mrs Burr, do give my kindest regards to Mr Burr and your family. I sincerely hope you don't mind my asking you this favor.

Yours truly

Rosemary Le Gras.

23 January 1951.

Dear Mrs Barr,

Though I am very late in answering you, I want still to thank you for your Christmas card. How very kind of you to think of us. Although I did not send you a card, that does not mean I have forgotten you. I have many very good friends in Canada like you, whom I'll never forget, but oh, time is so short and the days are so very full that I don't seem able to find time for my correspondence.

We are all well, both in spirit and body. Of course we have suffered the inevitable winter colds and sicknesses, but nothing serious, thank God. I am preparing hard for a concert in March, I have to give in Ankeny, so I have to practice my singing every day regularly.

I have a church choir of young people, which made its debut at Christmas. We sang "once in Royal David's city" and a French carol. Now we are busily practicing Easter hymns.

I don't suppose you'll ever see us in Canada. A minister who does not speak the English language fluently, has little chance to succeed.

The last few weeks we are contemplating going to the West-Indies, but whether our plans will realize themselves, I cannot tell.

I have still my two children, Luquerite, 7 years,

and André is 5 yrs old. Really, it may be simple, but one often wonders what the use may be of bringing children into this desecrated world. Honestly, I do believe that your son, who joined His Heavenly King a few years ago, is probably ~~is~~ happier and better off than those left behind in this world, ever over-shadowed by war and threats of war and bloodshed. It is such a terrible idea for me, when I look at my dear little André, such a sensitive, loving lad, that one day he will perhaps have to kill others or be killed in the hell of war. God forbid such a misery again! But I don't want to be a pessimist! Ultimately God is King over all men!

Well, my dear Mrs Burr, give my love to your husband. May God bless you in this New Year, you and your husband and your children!

Yours truly

Rosemary C. Gras.

Rotterdam reg. 142.
Deft.
Holland.