

Buchan, John Kenneth

Sergeant

A 59193

Royal Winnipeg Rifles

Royal Canadian Infantry Corps



John Kenneth Buchan, known by his second name Ken, and nicknamed Buck, was born 23 November 1918 in Lawrence Station, a small community that lies 17 miles southwest of London, Ontario. He was the youngest child of Alexander Buchan, who emigrated from Southdean in Scotland, and Christena March (Tena) born in Elgin County, Ontario. They married in London, Ontario on 9 April 1909. Ken had two sisters, Dorothy Stevenson and Katherine and, a brother, Donald. The family attended the Woodview United Church in Lawrence Station.

School went well for Ken; he attended the S.S. 17 Southwold for his elementary education and then continued in the Glencoe District High School; he passed the Junior Matriculation examination at the end of it. His father was the local blacksmith in the village and Ken spent a great deal of his time at the farm belonging to his aunt and uncles; here he learned to drive the farm tractor and a light truck, as well as a car, all without any accident as he reported later. In July 1936 he went to work at the Royal Bank of Canada, as an assistant accountant and teller; he had good reports and his job would be available for him again after his army service. He remained at the bank for more than five years and lived with his parents.

During this period he volunteered for army service as a reserve in the Middlesex and Huron Regiment; the training took place at the Noll BTC, Woodstock in November/December 1940. He enjoyed many sporting activities in his free time and listed the team sports: baseball, hockey (defense position) and, football as full-back, He also liked to play golf, badminton and, tennis.



IN THE MILITARY

Ken joined the army in London, Ontario on 2 January 1942, for active service, when he was twenty three years old. He was tall, 5ft.11ins., weighed 163 lbs., had brown eyes and, a dark complexion, He was well developed and enjoyed good health; a childhood mastoid infection was noted in his records. At his first interview it was clear that he was ambitious and hoped to get a commission. His preference was to enter the Pay Corps or to become an instructor. Unfortunately, there were no vacancies at that time. The officer reported positively: Ken had a good disposition

and presence and was eager to succeed in the army. Ken himself said he joined the army 'to do his bit'. His map reading and military knowledge were good but his knowledge of mechanics was rather limited.

He began his army life as a Trooper in the general list but by March, he was promoted to the rank of acting Lance Corporal and in September, to acting Corporal. His basic training which he completed in April, began at the Kitchener camp and continued in Camp Borden, both in Ontario. The year's advanced training lasted until April 1943 and in August he was sent overseas to England. In September Ken was attached to the CIRU (Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit). Here he did a rifle and small arms course; and also took part in gas training. He was confirmed in the rank of Corporal at this time but had already had periods as an acting Sergeant. At the turn of the year, he was awarded the CVSM and clasp (Canadian Volunteer Service Medal) and in March 1944 he took part in Exercise Dark.

On 10 June 1944, Ken was assigned to the Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regiment which was already engaged in the Normandy landings. A letter home indicated that he was on a ship heading for France on D-day, 6 June. In September he was promoted to the rank of acting Sergeant and by December, confirmed as a full Sergeant.

The Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWR) were in the first wave of landings in France on 6 June 1944 and came under heavy fire as they waded ashore. Viciously attacked, with no tank support, three companies were wiped out. With reinforcements, the regiment fought on through the Normandy campaign, taking part in the battle for Caen and the Falaise Gap.

Several channel ports were liberated before the Scheldt battle began in Belgium and the harbour in Antwerp was freed early in September.



The Winnipeg Rifles were transported 100 miles northeast to the Nijmegen area in the Netherlands in November and spent the next three months there rather quietly. Close to the border with Germany, regular patrol duties had to be carried out but there was also time for some recreation. Training courses took place in preparation for Operation Veritable (the Battle of the Reichswald) which was to begin on 8 February 1945. It was an enormous operation involving more than 300,000 soldiers, which aimed to drive the enemy back across the Rhine river; Ken's regiment took part in the operation. Conditions were hard; after a long frost, the thaw had set in and the ground in the forest soon became a sea of mud, hampering all the heavy army vehicles. Between the forest and the Rhine, the flat land was flooded to a depth of up to three feet; the amphibious Buffalos which the Canadians used, were constantly in need of repair. By 13 February, the enemy was driven out of the Reichswald and the Winnipeg Rifles moved southeast in the direction of Kalkar, experiencing the heaviest shell fire they had ever been under. On 18 February, Canadian forces began a stiff battle, round the area of Moyland wood; this was finally cleared on 21 February after a carefully coordinated attack by the Winnipeg Rifles Regiment Sergeant John Kenneth Buchan was killed on 21 February 1945 at the age of 26.

He was buried temporarily in Bedburg Hau, near Kleve in Germany and was later reburied in the Canadian War Cemetery, Groesbeek, in the Netherlands. Grave Reference: **XI. E. 8.**

Ken is commemorated on the Woodview United Church Roll of Honour, Lawrence Station, and in the Canadian Virtual War Memorial (page 499).

AWARDS

1939-45 Star

France and Germany Star

Defence Medal

Defence Medal CVSM and clasp



Stichting Faces to Canadian
War Graves Groesbeek

Life story: Gwyn de Jong Research Team Faces To Graves.

Sources:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission
Library and Archives of Canada
Official History of the Canadian Army: Col. C.P. Stacey
Jeannie McNaughton



John Kenneth Buchan – photo cousin Jeannie McNaughton