

Buchanan, Norman Victor Holgate
Rifleman
Royal Winnipeg Rifles Regiment
Royal Canadian Infantry Corps
H/75052



Norman Victor Holgate Oakes was born 25 October 1914 in Miami, Manitoba, a small farming village in the south central part of the province. Family lore had his mother Elizabeth Jane Oakes marrying "Jim" earlier that year and his father dying in the fall of 1916. James Archibald Brissenden, a carpenter originally from England, is commemorated on the Miami, Manitoba War Memorial WW1 fallen soldiers plaque and may have been that man. Elizabeth's parents George Oakes and Georgina Cross had emigrated from the U.K. to Canada, establishing a farm and raising their family around Miami in the early 1890s. Elizabeth and her young son Norman were living with his grandmother there in 1916, but Georgina died the next year.

Elizabeth married an older widower William Buchanan who had two school age boys in 1918.



William adopted Norman, who took his last name. The couple had six more children over the next fifteen years, five boys and a girl, Hazel. Norman was raised with this large, mixed, Anglican family on the Buchanan farm, and seldom strayed far from Miami, Manitoba.

As one of the eldest, Norman worked on the Buchanan farm from an early age. He quit school at fifteen, having completed grade 6 at Miami Consolidated School. Norman had been employed with Anderson Brothers as a farm labourer for ten years when he joined the Canadian Army.



Norman enlisted at Brandon, Manitoba 7 June 1941 when he was 26 years old. His medical examination recorded him as 5'6" tall and 120 lbs. He was originally assigned to the 70th Field Battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery in Winnipeg with the rank of gunner. In September he was transferred to the Canadian Army Training Centre in Portage la Prairie. While there he spent 11 days in hospital for an undisclosed ailment, discharged 10 October 1941. Norman was then sent to the Kelvin Technical School in Winnipeg for a two month long woodworking course and earned his Class III Carpenter trade designation in December 1941.

Norman was furloughed from 22 December 1941 to 10 January 1942 and took advantage of this period to marry Lillian Warren on Christmas Eve, 24 December 1941 in Rathwell, Manitoba. Norman remained in Winnipeg until



March 1942 when he was transferred to the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps Training Centre in Camp Barrieffield, near Kingston, Ontario. He was assigned for additional training courses at the Canadian Army Trades School in Hamilton shortly after arriving there, returning to Barrieffield four months later in July 1942.

Norman was granted 9 days embarkation leave in November 1942 and sailed to England the next month, disembarking in the U.K. 18 December 1942. He was taken on strength with the Canadian Ordnance Reinforcement Unit the next day, which he remained attached to for almost two years.

Norman fell ill in the summer of 1943, admitted to 10 General Hospital in the U.K. 21 June and not discharged until 68 days later 28 August. Soon after he got news that his mother Elizabeth died on 1 September 1943. Following this trauma, Norman was Away Without Leave for a nine day period in September, resulting in a significant pay forfeiture penalty.

A year later and months after D-Day, Norman was advised that he was scheduled to join the fighting in Europe as a reinforcement. He updated his will in October 1944, dividing his small estate equally between his wife Lillian and half-sister Hazel, with his uncle Thomas Oakes names as his Executor.

Norman crossed the English Channel by ship, disembarking in Northwest Europe 4 November 1944. A week later Private Buchanan was taken on strength with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWR) 11 November and redesignated as a Rifleman.

The RWR, also known as the Little Black Devils, along with the other 7th Brigade battalions (Regina Rifles and Canadian Scottish) of 3rd Canadian Division were among the first Commonwealth infantry units to land at Juno Beach (Courseulles-sur-Mer) and suffered heavy D-Day losses. The next few days were even worse for them, experiencing another 300 casualties at the small village of Putot-en-Bessin, almost half of the battalion's combat strength. After a few weeks rebuilding with reinforcements, the RWR battled their way through Normandy and helped clear Channel ports such as Calais before moving on from France to Belgium where they fought in the Battle for the Scheldt. By the time Norman joined the regiment, they were engaged in static operations near Nijmegen, Netherlands and remained in the area for the next three months.

The Little Black Devils were on the move with their 3rd Infantry Division in February 1945 as part of First Canadian Army to break 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.



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 7th 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.

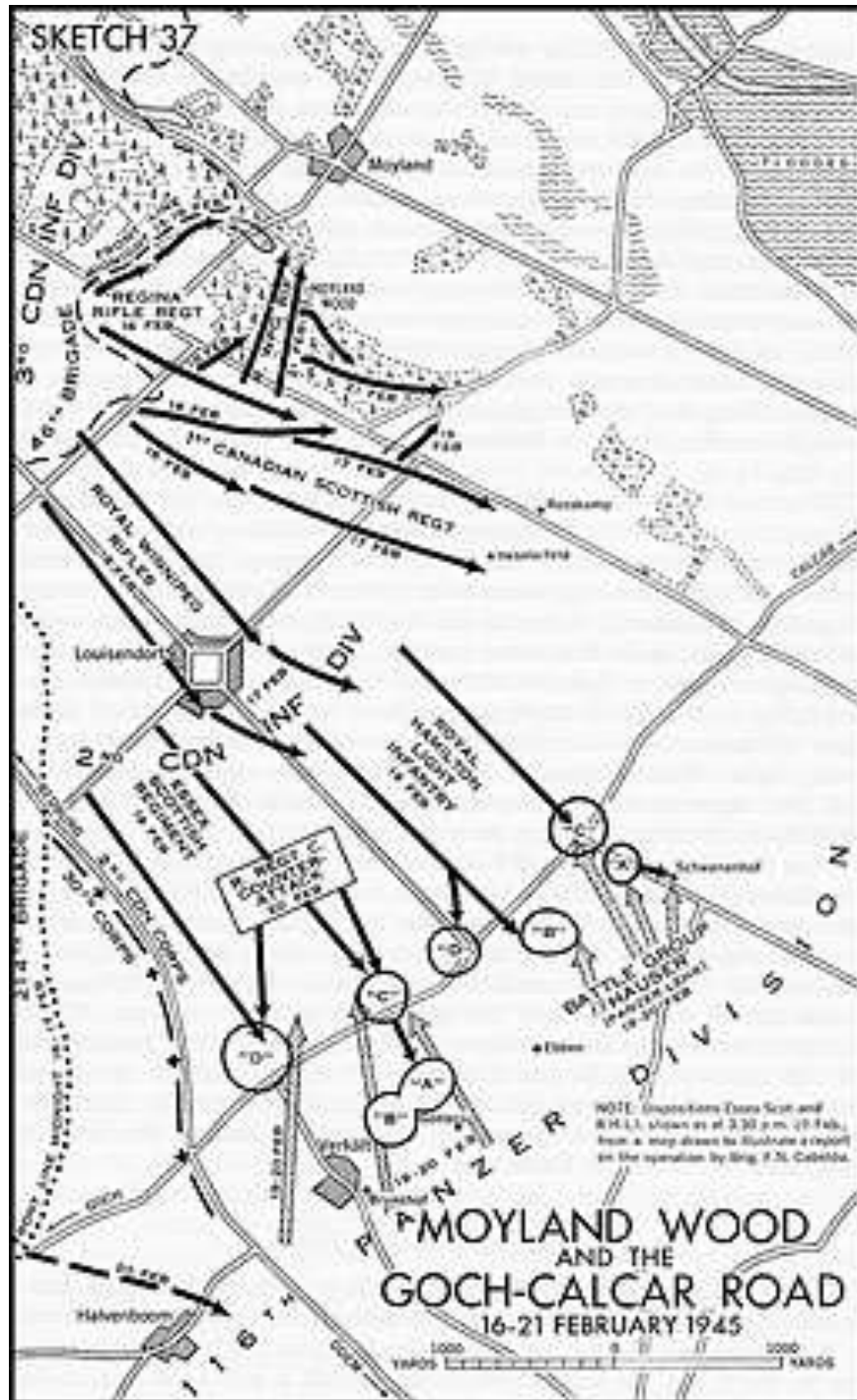
Winnipeg Rifles advance at Cleve 13 February 1945

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 1st 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.



7th 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.

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.



Norman Buchanan was one of the many Royal Winnipeg Rifles casualties that day. He was dead on arrival at the 129 British Field Ambulance, dying from a gunshot wound to the front of his head 16 February 1945.

26 February 1945

Mrs. Lillian Buchanan,
St. Claude, Man.

Dear Mrs. Buchanan:

Further to this Headquarters' telegram of the 20th of February 1945, informing you of the regretted death of your husband, H-75052 Private Norman Buchanan, in keeping with the policy of the Canadian Army of informing the next-of-kin of all details of battle casualties, the following paragraph informs you of the wounds sustained by Private Buchanan.

According to information obtained by this Headquarters from Canadian Army Medical Authorities, your late husband died as a result of a bullet wound to the frontal region of the head.

Please accept my sincere and heartfelt sympathy for the irreparable loss you have suffered.

Yours sincerely,

R. T. E. Hicks-Lyne
(R.T.E. Hicks-Lyne) Colonel,
Acting Director of Records,
for Adjutant-General.

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ND/RC

Rifleman Norman Buchanan was temporarily buried near Cleve, Germany and later relocated to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery near Nijmegen, Netherlands, grave reference **XXV. E. 5.**



Photo courtesy Alice van Bekkum

PA-28-3-18
405-B-25288
7D. 27-3-45

Director of Records
A. G. Branch
Claude Man.

Dear Friend
1945
Mar. 24. 1945.
Nat. Defence Hqr
Ottawa - Canada.

Minister of National Defence.

Just dropping a line to say I received the Memorial Cross & also the lovely big remembrance card that was sent to me & both of them are deeply remembrance to me and many thanks to all.

Yours Sincerely
Mrs Lillian Buchanan

Re. Pt. 7. 75052. Norman Buchanan.

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Norman's widow Lillian wrote this letter to the Department of National Defence to express her gratitude for sending a card and Norman's Memorial Cross to her. She never had the chance to get to know his family or even make a home together after they married.



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

Manitoba Vital Statistics

Photo Norman Buchanan with courtesy of Pieter and Daria Valkenburg

Miami School <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/sites/miamischool.shtml>

Canadian Army Trades School Hamilton <https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/2016/09/23/1939-hamilton-goes-to-war-again.html>

Canadian Ordnance Reinforcement Unit (C.O.R.U.) in United Kingdom (U.K.)
<https://www.canadiansoldiers.com/organization/unitlistingbycorps/rcocorbat.htm>

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*

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

Legion Magazine November 2002
<https://legionmagazine.com/en/2002/11/clearing-moyland-wood/>

Miami War Memorial <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/sites/miamiwarmemorial.shtml>

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



Miami, Manitoba War Memorial

Norman Buchanan is one of seventeen fallen soldiers listed on the WW2 plaque at the Miami, Manitoba War Memorial.

Buchanan Bay on McDennon Lake was named after him by the Manitoba Government in 1995 as a place of honour.