

Kippen, Duncan Ray

Private

Highland Light Infantry of Canada

C/63348



Ray Kippen, 27, of Burnstown, Ontario, was killed accidentally by another Canadian soldier on March 28, 1945, in Bienen, Germany. His regiment, the Highland Light Infantry of Canada, had crossed the Rhine River from the Netherlands on March 24, and soldiers had engaged in fierce fighting with the German army throughout this border town. Four days later, soldiers in his platoon were cleaning their weapons in the cellar of a house on the outskirts of Bienen when Pte. Kippen was shot.

Born on July 7 in 1917, Ray Kippen was the middle child in this Eastern Ontario farming family of four boys and a girl who were raised by Duncan and Mabel Kippen. The Bagot Township farmland was first settled in the 1830s by his Scottish great-grandfather, Andrew Kippen, a sawyer by trade, who immigrated from Perthshire, Scotland. It is now being farmed by members of the fifth generation. The Kippen family members were very active in the Burnstown Presbyterian Church since the father, Duncan, served as a steward of the church and the mother, Mabel, played the organ and sang in the choir as well as she was a member of the United Church Women (UCW) organization. His father died at 68 years old in 1947 while his mother lived to be 100 passing away in 1992.

Ray finished Grade 8 education, walking rural roads to a nearby one-room schoolhouse. He, like his brothers, Campbell (1913-1999), Ivan (1915-2003) and Harold (1919-1993), as well as sister Greta (1923-present) all worked as farmhands on the Kippen farm.



1940 Valcartier, Quebec, Ray on the right.

Ray on the right.



In June of 1940, the 22-year-old farmer stood five feet seven inches and weighed 150 pounds when he enlisted in the Lanark and Renfrew Scottish Regiment and received basic training in Ottawa, Ontario, and Valcartier, Quebec. When he signed up for military service, Ray wrote that he hoped to eventually "start a store" for he was "saving money" to become "a storekeeper."

His oldest brother, Campbell Kippen, stayed home to help his father run the farm while Ivan, two years older than Ray, joined the Royal Canadian Navy serving as a petty officer and was stationed in Halifax, which was Canada's wartime staging area for the Atlantic Ocean convoys. Harold, two years younger than Ray, became a sapper with the Royal Canadian Engineers regiment and went overseas in 1943.



With some experience in the lumbering trade, Ray was assigned to the Canadian Forestry Corps and went overseas in February of 1941. A March telegram he had sent to the family via his aunt, Lizzie Stringer, showed his enthusiasm through the message: "Arrived safely overseas Wonderful trip."

Ray

After being stationed in Britain for three and a half years. with number 8 company of the forestry corps, mostly in Cawdor, Scotland, he was transferred in May, 1944, to the Highland Light Infantry of Canada, an infantry regiment which participated in D-Day landings on June 6, 1944 in the second wave of Canadians around noon at the "white" section of Juno Beach in Normandy. He fought with this regiment through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. Ray was wounded in action on Sept. 18 and Oct. 31 in 1944 but he remained on duty both times. Harold Kippen also landed on D-Day in France, fighting through Holland and Germany. More than 14,000 Canadians participated in the D-Day invasion with 340 killed and 574 wounded.

After his death in the spring of 1945 on 28 March, Private Ray Kippen was buried in a temporary cemetery in Bienen in Germany.

His brother Harold Kippen, who was a RCE sapper, came to Bienen in June, 1945, to his gravesite and placed poppies at the cross. Ray Kippen's remains later were exhumed and re-interred in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, where 2,300 Canadians are buried, near Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Grave Reference **XVII. H. 9.**



Harold Kippen visits the temporary grave of his brother Ray in Bienen June 1945,

The Canadian Army sent the family posthumously the five medals which were earned by Private Kippen: the 1939-45 Star, the France-Germany Star, the Defence Medal, the War Medal 1939-45 and the Canadian Volunteer Service medal with clasp. He had also been awarded a good conduct badge in 1943.

In a personal letter to brother Harold Kippen on June 8, 1945, Lieut. Max A. Zink wrote to Harold that "We all felt badly about his (Ray's) death as it was a very unfortunate accident..." The official notices from the Canadian military authorities, including the Ontario certificate of the registration of death, had stated that Kippen was "killed in action" but Lieut. Zink's letter to his brother clearly indicated the tragic circumstances of the accidental shooting. As Ray's platoon commander at the battlefield, Lieut. Zink also had written to Mrs. Kippen, telling the mother that Ray was "doing a fine job & was very well liked by the remainder of the boys. We all feel his passing keenly."

H. L. Z. of C.
8 Jun 45

Dear Spc. Kippen:

Received your letter yesterday in which you inquired as to the circumstances surrounding the death of your brother, Pte Kippen P. V. C-63348.

We crossed the Rhine on 24 Mar & four days later had worked up to a small German town called "Bienen", which is just across the Rhine & a few miles below Emmuel. Our platoon was sitting in a house on the outskirts of "Bienen" preparing for our next battle. Your brother was in the cellar of the house with another of my men & they were cleaning their weapons. There was a shot & when we rushed to the cellar found that your brother had been shot in the head. We gave him immediate first aid & rushed him to the nearest P. O. P. all in a very few minutes. He died shortly after

2. / we arrived there with him. He was unconscious throughout so suffered no pain.

Our Padre Capt Anderson buried his remains in "Cienega" but of course they may be now removed to a cemetery in the area. Some registration could give you an exact location of the grave at the present time if you wished to know definitely.

I had known your brother for only a few days as I took over his platoon only a short time before the Rhine crossing. We all felt very badly about his death as it was a very unfortunate accident to have happened to a man who had fought for such a long period of time with this unit.

I wrote to your mother shortly after his death on the 28th Mar & passed on my deepest sympathies to her as I do to you now.

I hope that this letter answers your questions as you desired.

Sincerely yours.

M. A. Zink Lieut.



Capt. John Anderson, July 1944

--Library and Archives Canada--

In May, 1946, it was Capt. John Anderson, the chaplain of the Highland Light Infantry of Canada, who travelled to Burnstown, Ontario, and made a personal visit to the Kippen home where he talked to Ray's parents. In his report to the Department of National Defence, Capt. Anderson stated: "I explained to them the nature and severity of the (battle) action immediately following the Rhine Crossing and that many men were near the breaking point." During the lull in the ferocious battle with German troops, the Canadian soldiers were cleaning their weapons and "one of them suddenly turned around and shot Pte. Kippen." The official notices reported Kippen was "killed in action" because "this course of action would spare unnecessary suffering" for the next-of-kin. He noted that "the soldier who fired the shot was not fit to stand trial" due to his mental state. After fulfilling "my sad duty to give them all the details," Capt. Anderson wrote that "the parents of the above named soldier took the news very well and after having a word of prayer I left them in a comforted state of mind."

Capt. Anderson also noted that there are three sons in the family -- "one of whom (Harold Kippen) visited his brother's grave in the temporary cemetery at Bienen where I had buried Pte. Kippen. They have numerous snapshots of the grave."

In Canada, the name of Ray Kippen is etched on two cenotaphs to the fallen Canadians in World War II. These war cenotaphs are located in the Town of Arnprior and the Village of Calabogie, which are communities near to the Kippen homestead.



Calabogie Cenotaph, Ontario.

Life story and photos contributed by Kurt Johnson.

Source: Library and Archives Canada



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19 Mar 45
H. L. I. of C.
B. L. A.
C. A. O.

Dear Mrs. Kippen:-

A platoon commander of # 17 pl "D" Coy in the
H. L. I of C. I was your son's officer at the time he
was killed while on active service in Europe.

It is my wish to extend to you on behalf of your
son's friends & on my own behalf, our deepest sympathy's
in your loss. He was doing a fine job & was very well
liked by the remainder of the boys, we all feel his
passing keenly.

I wish to assure you also that he never regained
consciousness & suffered no pain. We were all close by when
he passed away & he was given immediate medical attention.

It is now our task to carry on where he left off, just
as he would wish us to do & we shall do so until this
terrible war is over & we can return to a normal human
life.

One's only consolation in a loss such as you have suffered
is to remember that it is people such as your son who
have made our world a better place in which to live for
all people of the allied nations who would over.

Sincerely

Lieut M. A. Zink