

Mills, Charles Reginald
Sapper
G5393
Royal Canadian Engineers
8th Field Squadron



Personal Information: Charles Reginald Mills was born on October 23, 1923 in Chipman, New Brunswick to John F. Mills and Gladys N. Mills. He came from a family of 8 children: 6 boys and 2 girls. Charles' brothers were John, Lloyd, Garnet, Ronald and Hazen. His sisters were Francis and Marjorie. At the age of 7, Charles Mills and his family moved to Hawthorne Avenue Extension in Saint John. The family belonged to the United Church of Canada.

Charles was affectionately known as Reggie by family and friends. He and his siblings grew up near Lily Lake in Saint John. He enjoyed recreational activities such as swimming in the lake in the summer and skating on it during the winter. He also enjoyed the trades, plumbing in particular. At the time of his enlistment, he was in his third year of his apprenticeship to be a plumber.

Reggie was a cheerful young man who was always surrounded by laughter. Charles was a small man at the age of 19 as he was only 5'5 and weighed 120 pounds. However, even though he was small in stature and had no previous military experience or training, the un-married, blue-eyed teenager enlisted with the Canadian Army on January 18, 1943.

Military Movements: On April 1, 1943 Mills trained at C.F.B. Petawawa, 170 kilometers northwest of Ottawa as a Sapper. He trained there for more than 3 months and was granted a furlough (leave of absence) from June 3 until June 16. After his return, he stayed in Ottawa until July 20, 1943. At this point he was transferred to Windsor, Nova Scotia where he went to Transit Camp to complete his training on Canadian soil.

On September 2, 1943, Charles Reginald Mills was taken on strength by the Canadian Engineer Reinforcement Unit as he disembarked overseas to the United Kingdom. On December 2, 1943 Reggie was taken on strength by the 8th Field Squadron. He stayed in the United Kingdom until July 24 of the next year training and preparing for eventual battle.

On July 24, 1944, Reggie along with the 8th Field Squadron left the United Kingdom disembarking the next day in France. Being very religious, Reggie always had his copy of the New Testament with him in his pocket when he was overseas. He was awarded the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp. The 8th Field Squadron slowly made their way to the Rhine River where he would remain for the rest of his life. Reggie and his unit would take part on Operation Blockbuster and the fight against Germany for control of the Rhineland.

The Final Days: The Royal Canadian Engineers played an important role in Operation Blockbuster which took place in late February and early March of 1945. This was a part of the larger Operation Veritable. The objective of Operation Blockbuster was to take over the Rhineland, a strip of land between the Maas and Rhine rivers which was currently occupied by Germany.

After the Battle of the Scheldt, the Canadian Army did not participate in any large-scale operations for 3 months until Operation Blockbuster. The Operation began on February 8, 1945 with a series of aerial bombings. Many men were killed in action during this time, and even more were either badly wounded or were suffering from exhaustion and stress. The death toll at the end of Operation Blockbuster was approximately 4000 men and more than half of them were Canadian.

The Germans were very determined to keep the Rhineland. They were greatly influenced by nationalism and knew that they were now fighting

for their homeland, which made them fight even harder. There was an ever-growing issue among the Canadian troops of soldiers being killed and not being able to be replaced because of a lack of trained men. Even though this had become a problem, Mackenzie King (the Canadian Prime Minister) was reluctant to force Canadians to serve overseas against their will. The battle of the Rhineland was the first time that the Canadian Army would fight on German land and they knew it would not be an easy victory.

The area was very wet as the Germans had flooded it to wreak havoc on Canadian operations. The Royal Canadian Engineers built a road to facilitate transportation to headquarters, which was also flooded. Reggie and the Royal Canadian Engineers did much of their fighting in the woods. Often they would meet pockets of heavy resistance which they determinedly fought through. One day in March, Winston Churchill visited the Royal Canadian Engineers and the allied forces to encourage them to fight on.

March 7, 1945 was a cold and damp day in the Rhineland. There was a great deal of bloodshed. Many men had died fighting on the Rhineland and this is what brought the Canadians to the outskirts of Xanten and Veen. It was on this day, amid the fighting, that Charles Reginald Mills was killed at the age of 21, with his New Testament in his pocket. He was buried at the Bedburg Temporary Burial Ground in Germany.

Lest We Forget: Charles Reginald Mills was reburied at the Groesbeek Canadian Military Cemetery located about 4 miles south-east of Nijmegen, Holland. Grave Reference **VII. F. 10.**

His mother received his military medals such as: 1939-45 Star, France & Germany Star, Defense Medal, War Medal, 1939-45 CVSM & Clasp.⁸ He was 21 years of age when he died. His New Testament was sent home to his grief-stricken family and to this day remains a treasured possession of his niece, Doreen.

Biography courtesy of the Lest We Forget initiative of Belleisle Regional High School, Springfield, NB.

Video by a student at Belleisle Regional High School as part of the school's Lest We Forget initiative: <http://youtu.be/MO126hrnIeE>



Biography made available for Faces To Graves, with courtesy of Stephen Wilson, Belleisle Regional High School.

Personal information:

Doreen Woodroffe, niece of Charles Reginald Mills. Interviewed 2010.

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Archival Reference

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http://www.worldlingo.com/ma/enwiki/en/Operation_Blockbuster

<http://www.cwgc.org>

<http://www.legionmagazine.com/en/index.php/2003/01/operation-blockbuster-begins/>

Col. A.J. Kelly. Maj. W. A. McDill. *The History of the Royal Canadian Engineers: Volume 2*. Ottawa: The Military Engineers Association of Canada, 1966.



Charles Reginald Mills is the young man in the upper right of the picture. (Source: From the collection of Doreen Woodroffe, niece of Reggie Mills.)