

## **Stories about his military service during the Second World War, and his life beyond** **By Len (Bucko) Brown**

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Hereafter is a collection of stories recounting the experiences of Trooper Len (Bucko) Brown during the Second World War.



### **Episode 1 - Memorable Stories by a RECRUIT**

My starting point in the service was on Sept. 19, 1942. The war had been escalating since the fall of 1939, and the Nazis were getting greedy. I had done a stint in a factory producing army truck parts. All my friends and relatives were gradually joining one branch of the service or another. Me - I had an itch to be a fighter pilot. Newsreels at the movies depicted a fast, daring, and fun life. My Dad (always knowing best) said, "No, you have a better chance of survival on the ground. You have been riding your motorcycle for three years now, so why not the Armoured Corps as a dispatch rider?" Little did he know how dangerous that was - me neither.

Anyway, that's when I jumped on my old Harley and rode to Windsor to join a Reconnaissance (Recce) Regiment. I was in barracks there for a couple of weeks - getting the finger, the cough, exams, the entire issue of clothing and gear (an unbelievable amount). All the webbing, pouches, backpacks, gaiters - what the h--l are gaiters?

Got to stop and tell you a story here. First day on full dress parade, the Drill Sergeant gave the order to fall in, and after some confusion we assembled in a line. Roll call was completed, then when the right turn and forward march was ordered, at each step there was this funny clicking sound. He yelled, "Platoon halt! Trooper Brown, two steps forward." Yep, it was me. I had my gaiters on the wrong feet, and it was the buckles on the inside clicking with each step. Immediately I learned how they should be worn, how to dress, and that everything was done on the double. Half of us wondered why such a big hurry.

We received two days' leave and then boarded the train to start training with the Regiment already in Dundurn, Sask. Most of us were on our first train ride, which lasted three nights and two days. We went across a good scenic part of Canada we had never seen before. It was thrilling and adventurous. We were in the Army NOW!

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#### **Episode 2 - Making of a soldier from raw recruit**

In Episode 1, I left you boarding the train from home, leaving for Camp Dundurn, Saskatchewan with several other civilians. The trip across Ontario, and into Manitoba, was truly an experience for a recruit. One highlight was a steam engine train stopping to take on water in Horn Payne, (wilderness) Ontario, where we could get off & stretch our legs for a few minutes. The meals on the train for the entire trip were SPECIAL. After the scenic trip through Ontario, the flat prairies were boring. We could not wait to arrive at our destination. In Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, trucks were waiting to take us to Camp Dundurn. It was exciting to say the least. What a weird mix of people thrown together, to be whipped into a fighting regiment; farmers, plain labourers, clerks, etc. Yes, they were from every possible walk of life; even clergymen, doctors, lawyers, government employees; from every walk of life imaginable. For religious denominations, it did not matter if you were protestant, catholic, Jewish, heathen, or if you had no religion. You all became BROTHERS for the same cause. Yes we would even die for each other, but we were so busy you never had time to think anything like that. What and whose strange powers determine who goes where with whom, what troop, what Squadron. That was always a mystery to me. Who will be my bunk partner, my buddy, my closest friend. That must just be determined by fate, and it required time to work it out. Fate put me in A squadron, # 2 carrier troop. That is with whom, and where I started my training to become a Canadian Armoured Corps Soldier.

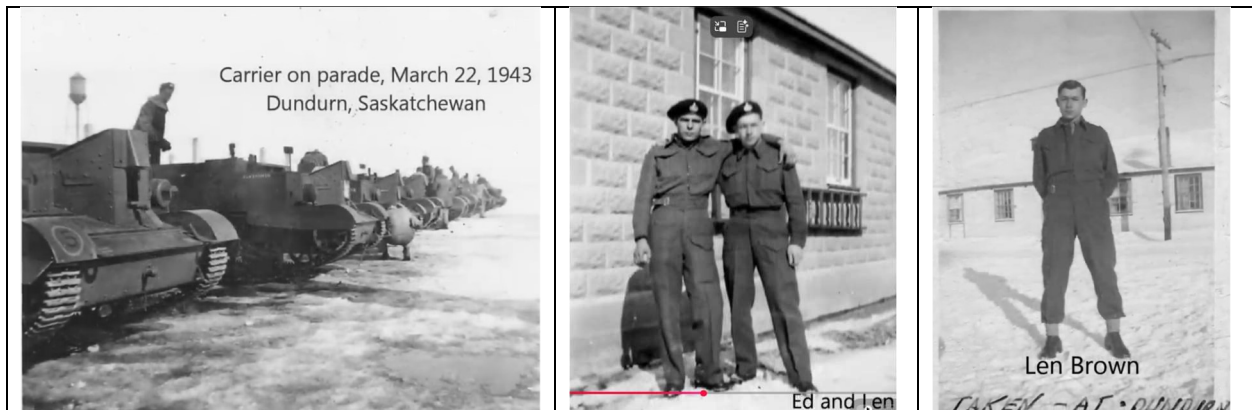
#### **Episode 3 - Making a civilian into a soldier**

So, I was assigned to 2 troop, A squadron, of the 30th Reconnaissance Regiment. Little did I realize that I would be sharing a life with the same 25 to 30 men, 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week, for the next 10 months, through some vigorous times. You get to know your Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO's) and the regiment's history, and the name of the commanding officer. What you did not know was that the Army, through the years, had made a doctrine from the following two rules: (a) never let the trainees ever get bored; and (b) you must have discipline to the highest degree or you have no army at all. Both are cardinal rules, and you better learn them right away, or you are asking for trouble. What do they do to correct boredom? They keep you on the move from 06:00 hours until 20:00 hours. Probably the average person thinks that soldiers' training is mostly route marches and physical training. Well, well there are plenty of both, but between them and meals, there is a never-ending series of learning classes, from weapons training, to map reading, to use of gas masks and simulations in gas chambers, to personal hygiene, even courses on venereal diseases, the use of prophylactics, and many other subjects in between, as the weather dictates.

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Then, being a mechanized unit, you must learn all about the type of vehicles you will be using, and weather permitting, there's the rifle, and small arms ranges, target practices, etc. We even had a timed competition to see who could disassemble a Bren gun and then reassemble it the fastest while blindfolded (in case that was required in night action). Of course, the fun part was driving all types of vehicles. When joining I thought I wanted to be a motorcycle dispatch rider, but I soon fell in love with tracked carriers, and became proficient handling them on the frozen salt flats of Saskatchewan. We held contests who could make them waltz the farthest without spinning out, and who could get them in a rhythm rocking motion the highest. Oh, what a devilish group of fun-loving cowboys we were. Surely, we gave our transportation sergeant some grey hairs. But as reckless as we seemed then, it proved to be an advantage in action to know just how manoeuvrable the carriers could be in tight circumstances.



Before leaving Dundurn, I was lucky enough to be chosen to go on a driver Mechanic's course in Saskatoon, and I would not catch up to the Regiment, which had moved into quarters in Camp Borden, Ontario, ready to deploy on next boat for the United Kingdom. But that's another story.

The Windsor regiment was mobilized for active service as the '30th Reconnaissance Battalion (The Essex Regiment), CAC, CASF' on 12 May 1942. It was redesignated the '30th Reconnaissance Regiment (The Essex Regiment), CAC, CASF' on 8 June 1942. It initially served in Canada in a home defence and training role as part of Military District No. 12. On 23 July 1943 it

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embarked for Britain where its soldiers were employed as assembly workers for unassembled vehicles arriving from Canada. The regiment was disbanded on 31 March 1944, and its members were used to reinforce other units.

#### **Episode 4 - Final time on Canadian Soil**

When my regiment left Dundurn on 1 June 1943, I remained in Saskatoon for another 25 days to complete a Mechanics Course, which I passed to qualify for an additional pay raise of 25 cents per day. Wow, a 25 % increase per day. Oh, happy day! I left Saskatoon for a 5-day home leave before reporting to the regiment at Camp Borden. On completion of my leave on 5 July 1943, three people came to the Chatham station to see me off. Of course, there was my Mom and Dad and a young 16-year-old girl from Detroit Michigan, who would later play an important part of my future (more on that later). Leaving the station was very emotional, but once on the way, excitement replaced the melancholy. We spent 7 days with the regiment in Borden before we boarded the train for Nova Scotia, arriving at Aldershot on 12 July 1943. Then on to Halifax to board the Queen Lizzie on 15 July 1943. We were the first unit to get on board. As such, we had the opportunity to inspect the whole ship from stem to stern, from the highest deck to the lowliest hold. This privilege was ours because the regiment was assigned all duties of security until disembarkation; an honour and duty we took very seriously. It took another 12 days in Halifax to complete the loading of supplies and personnel. They told us there were 20,000 personal total on board. Here, I must tell you of a specific incident. At every off-and-on location of the ship loading, part of our guard duties including checking the people leaving from and returning to the ship. One day a Navy officer came up the gang plank and was refused permission to board. He said, "But I am the Captain." "Sorry Sir, our orders are that no-one is allowed on board without an official pass." To solve the stalemate, one of our officers was called, and he phoned for another high-ranking Naval officer to come and confirm that this man was indeed the Captain. Problem solved! Later, the Captain posted a letter on the ships bulletin board congratulating the regiment for a security job well done and stating that if he had to leave the ship again he would be sure he had a pass. Darn it, I should have stolen that letter. What a keepsake that would have been. We finally left port on 23 July 1943. Luckily, we had an uneventful crossing. What an eventful sight it was to see Canada gradually disappear over the horizon and out of sight. It was very nostalgic. Four days later we were pulling into Firth of Clyde harbour at Greenock, Scotland. We were then loaded aboard trains, and headed south to London, England. We were about to enter advanced Army Corps training under war conditions with thousands of other units, but that's another story.

#### **Episode 5 - Arriving in Great Britain and getting settled**

Before continuing my story, I must regress to the trip on board the ship and clear my conscience. One night during the crossing, as part of our guard duties, I was placed on guard duty in the ships hold, at an iron jail cage, that was holding several scruffy prisoners, being returned to England (I didn't know why). I was in full battle dress including rifle and ammunition. Well, I must admit that things down there was pretty dull and after midnight, I got very sleepy. Yep, you guessed it. I opened the door and went inside the cell, sat down on the bench, and fell sound asleep. The inmates were all sleeping and snoring. The next thing I knew, my replacement was yelling at me to open the door, "what are you doing in there!!!?" I responded "well, if they escaped where can they go?" He never

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reported me and I never ever neglected a guard duty again, EVER! It was a recruits lesson learned the hard way.

To see all those troops filing off the ship and boarding trains was indeed a site to witness. When it was finally our turn, we travelled south, arriving at Inkerman Barracks, at No.1 Canadian Armoured Corps Reinforcement Unit (1 CACRU) on 29 July 1943. It was an unforgettable experience. There were straw-stuffed mattresses, that had been used by so many people before us that the straw was now just dust. Oh, the hardships of war! For the next week, it was just a matter of getting settled and organized. Then on 9 August, I was sent on a 4-week Driver-Mechanic refresher course, which I passed on 8 September. One day later the regiment was put on full parade to be inspected by General Sansom. That was quite an honour, with the marchpast, salute and all. It was very impressive. Hey, after all that it was time for a week-end pass, so I had to decide where to go. Well, LONDON of course; off to see the sights. My first stop was Canada House, of course, right off Trafalgar Square. The house specialty was pancakes with Canadian maple syrup, right from home, just for us. Oh, Boy, we stuffed on that, then took pictures on Trafalgar Square just like tourists. We walked some of the streets viewing bomb damage. Twice, we had to head for bomb shelters. Then, we went to Piccadilly circus, Petticoat lane, were they told us going in one end that you could buy your own watch back by the time you got to the opposite end. The thievery and pick pockets there were so numerous. On 13 September, we returned to the Regiment, I was sent back to 1 CACRU as a Carrier Driver Instructor, while the Regiment left Inkerman Barracks for Field Training out at Oxted, hoping to join other units in war games, but that's another story. At least, we were where the action had begun.

#### **Episode 6 - From Rookie to Soldier, but not a Veteran.**

In the 4 weeks I was at the 1 CACRU, I was promoted Acting Lance Corporal. This was the second time I received that promotion but had been demoted as a punishment for being absent without leave (AWOL). When returning from leave, I had missed my train and arrived a day late. Well in those four weeks away from the regiment, something strange began creeping into my thoughts. I was beginning to miss all my buddies. One year had slipped away, during which we had formed a bond, I did not realize until being separated, that the bond was a brotherhood, developed over 1 year of sharing, and developing together. We shared packages from home, cartons of cigarettes, letters even. We got to know each others families, having shared the good and bad news. There were notices of a death in a family, stories about kid brothers, sick cousins, etc. You get so their lives are tangled with your life. I guess you call it growing up or maturing. I came back to the regiment a different soldier. I knew I had bonded to a family, a military unit, THE REGIMENT. Two weeks later, on 2 November 1943, the regiment moved to house billets at Headly Downs. Some vehicles became available for manoeuvres, and we expected to get into some more serious war training.

In some of my correspondence with home, the addresses of distant family relatives started being revealed to me. So, on 9 November 1943, I applied for a privilege leave to visit Padstow, Cornwall to look up family relations and visit with my Aunt Doreen, mom's half sister. That turned out to be the nicest trip possible. I also met her family, and another half-brother of my mom's. Also, it was a very scenic trip all the way to the southeast corner of England. On my return on 19 November 1943, some very disturbing news awaited me, but that is another story.

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#### **Episode 7 - Disturbing news and circumstances**

I returned full of pride in the regiment and its personnel, knowing that we had bonded as brothers. The disturbing news awaiting me was that our training had been put on hold. The personnel in 'A' and 'C' squadrons who were drawing trades pay, were assigned to set-up and operate a production line to assemble vehicles arriving from Canada. Complete vehicles had been disassembled and put into crates to save space while being transported by ship. By early November, after many trials and errors, we eventually got production up to 26-30 vehicles per day. All other regimental personnel were transferred to No. 2 Canadian Armoured Corps Reinforcement Unit.

On 25 December 1943, we experienced our first Christmas overseas. It was emotional for some, but we were treated to a beautiful Christmas turkey dinner with all the trimmings of home, complete with gravy, dressing, squash, and of course Pumpkin Pie! They then brought out all the mail and packages from home. That was a celebration of sharing, with everything from cigarettes to fruit cakes.

Our assembly work gradually became a 06:00 to 18:00 hours boring schedule. Eventually, by February 1944, our output grew to 52 vehicles per day. Of course, a lot depended on what size vehicles were being assembled. I wonder if I ever used any of those vehicles later while in action. As you can imagine, this routine became boring, even though we all knew it was necessary and it used some skills we had been trained for. In the first week of February 1944, four of us got our heads together, and decided to apply for a privilege leave. We had had a couple of weekend passes locally, but never an extended leave. Where would we go? Let's visit Scotland. Well, they granted us official passes for a week, so we purchased our train tickets to DUNDEE, and on 4 February 1944 us four musketeers boarded a train heading NORTH, but that's another story

#### **Episode 8 - A new experience for a Canuck.**

We four musketeers travelled north approximately 590 kilometers aboard a U.K.-Express train to Dundee. This was a 6-to-7 hour run and the rolling hills through the highlands was too beautiful for words. The picturesque countryside kept us spellbound. Arriving in Dundee, we checked into a hotel, with Steve and I in one room, and the other two another. I can't remember their names right now, but they kept doing their own things. Steve and I made an odd pair, me at 5 feet, 10 inches in boots, and him at 6 feet, 3 in boots. They even dubbed us Mutt and Jeff. Our relationship at the regiment was more like father and son, but we were very compatible.

After checking in and freshening up, the other two went pub crawling (a popular pastime for many soldiers.) Steve and I couldn't decide what to do, so the desk clerk recommended the local soldier's canteen. It had good food, beverages, local lassies for dance partners, and was a wonderful place to get acquainted. Steve said he was hungry, so that is where we ate supper and mingled with all. After supper the locals cleared the floor, and dancing started. In no time, Steve picked a partner and after a couple of dances was heading out the door for a walk. That left me sitting all alone, sipping a slow beverage. Out of nowhere a young lass appeared and asked if I cared for a dance. It turned out, she was an employee. Her job was to socialize and be a dance partner for servicemen, but no fraternizing. I replied that I had never danced before. She said "Oh, right out of that Canadian bush, are you? Come on, it's my job to get you started." She coaxed me up and tried to get me

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moving. Another soldier cut in and whisked her away. That was my start. When she was free, she would return and get me started again. Well, by closing time at 22:00 hours, she had introduced herself as Coleen. However, I called her Kelli. She was 19, single, and lived close by, so being the gentleman I am, I asked if I could escort her home. Walking and talking, she asked what I was doing the next day. When I said I would be seeing all the local attractions, like any tourist, she offered to meet me at the canteen for breakfast, then give me a guided tour all day long until she had to report for work at the canteen at 18:00 hours. It seemed that we enjoyed each others company that quick. Well, I don't have to tell you, I went back to the hotel with a spring in my step anxious for tomorrow to start. I had enjoyed the company of a girl for the first time since leaving home. It felt good, but strange. What was I getting myself into, I didn't know. I went back to our hotel at 22:30 hours looking forward to the next day.

#### **Episode 9 – UK War Brides, God Bless Them, A near miss**

The morning broke dry and sunny. I told Steve my plans, and he also had a date. I met Kelli for breakfast and started our tour. She described everything about the places we visited, and we shared stories of our lives. We got acquainted, shared supper at the canteen, then she coaxed me to try a few more slow dances. Darn me if I didn't start to lose one left foot and gain one right foot. It made her laugh which was nice. I walked her home again at ten, and when she turned to go in, she gave me a quick kiss on the cheek, and ran straight in. As she closed her door, she asked "see you in the morn for more sights?" I yelled "Yes, breakfast at the canteen." Well, the next two days went on like this; we were both eager for more time together. We even started some smooching in the open parks. We started exchanging home addresses, names of relatives, and anything we could think of.

Things were getting serious, but I had to catch the train for our return. She came to the station to see us off. She had met my buddies the prior day, so she wished us all well, and said she wanted to write, so I gave her my regimental location, and army address. She promised to write my Mom. Now the trip back was not as exciting as the one going. Now, we were not going somewhere, we were leaving someone. Well, it was now 15 February 1944, and we were back to the production line, after such a wonderful week. The job seemed even more boring, but there was no recourse but to stick it out. I started receiving letters from Kelli, telling me how lost she was without me, how she missed me, asking if I couldn't I get another pass and come back again. Of course, I wrote back telling her how much I missed her, but that, no, I could not get another pass for some time.

Then we were hit with the shocking news. On 13 April 1944, the regiment was called on parade and the Colonel hit us with the news the Regiment was to be disbanded, and all personal were to be transferred as reinforcement to other units. About 50 % were to remain with Armoured Corps units and 50 % were to become Infantry or Service Corps. That hit us all like a death knoll. All our friendships, buddies, -our very -brotherhood shattered by one stroke of a pen. I for one took it very hard. On 14 April, 'A' (my)squadron assembled for the last time and had a photo taken. Today I would give 100 \$ for a copy of that photo. Those of us still assembling our last vehicles, stuck with it until the end of April. On 1 May 1944, I was transferred to 1 CACRU. Then, on 3 May, I was transferred back to 3 CACRU. Ah, that was better, as I was still in the Armoured corps and still entitled to my extra trades pay.

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But now, what did that mean to my future? Kelli was talking marriage in her letters, and I didn't think we knew each other well enough in about 5 days for that. My life was in a turmoil, and I was not taking it very well. I didn't know what my future held, and how much it was up to me. I guessed it depended on me, Kelly and the powers to be.

#### **Episode 10 - Sherman Tanks and I**

I was then assigned to tank training, moving from carriers to the heavier machines. I never knew why. It was just a decision by the powers that be.

Being hurt by the cancellation of the 30<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment, I saw later that I acted like a spoiled BRAT. I would not be confined in an Iron coffin, so while I accepted orders to report for classes, I would not take notes or talk to anyone in class. This went on for about ten days. The teacher reported my lack of co-operation and was told to ignore me and not let me upset the class. However, I could not shut out all the conversations. One day a big discussion was going on about carburetors. Finally, I could not stay out of it, stood up, and told them they all were wrong. I started orating almost word-for-word from what I had learned from reading the manual. The room was silent while I was speaking, and when I finished, the teacher started clapping. Then, the class followed suit from then on I was completely involved and part of the class.

On 11 May 1944, I was bedridden with pain and was finally taken by stretcher to # 20 Canadian Hospital with ailment Epididymitis. I started to recover and on 19 May I was transferred to # 17 Canadian Hospital. Finally on 30 May 1944, I was released on light duty and returned to 3 CACRU. I had been laid up for a total of 19 days. During this time, having been moved around so much, no mail had caught up with me. No word was received at all from Kelli, and I had not written her. I did not know what was going on there.

During the last days and nights recuperating, I was allowed to go for short walks where I could see the many bombers flying overhead. There were bombers, including B-29's with their four engines and long snouts, and the British Lancaster's, with four engines and twin tails, both unmistakable. Their were also their fighter-escorts, all fantastic. They were heading out to destroy the German weapons-producing factories. You could feel the tension in the air, that action was brewing in the very near future. While I was on light duty, my mood improved. I thought this might be an opportune time for to apply for a second trip to my Aunt's house in Padstow Cornwall, so that's what I applied for, and it was granted. On my return, I was taken off light duty and sent back to Tank training. Then the big day hit, the 6 June 1944. The allies had made the BIG assault landing on French soil. It was electrifying to say the least, but I was not a part of it. I wondered how many of my buddies and friends where? It really bothered me. On 7 June 1944, I requested permission to see the P.S.O. I had to go be a part of it. However, I was flatly refused. No dice, you just carry on with your tank training, and you will be a part of it soon enough. So, like it or not, I was back to the Sherman's classes.

#### **Episode 11 – From Tanks to Motorcycle, I'll get over there!**

I had completed my second leave to my Aunt's in Cornwall. I had to clear that up, in case I never got back there. After being denied a transfer, I decided to cooperate, even if it meant tanks, or whatever, even motorcycles. I just keep checking with the P.S.O. and volunteering. So, with that mindset, I was back to classes, written tank exams etc. Then off we went to actual driving and a bivouac, roughing

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it. They sent a truck to drive two of us to the training area and introduced us to the lieutenant in charge of the tank that we were assigned to. He was quite cordial and told us he had bad news and good news. He said the good news is you have me as your crew commander for the next several weeks and the bad news is that this tank you are assigned to has to go in for service maintenance. We must drive it there and pick up a replacement. Has either one of you ever driven before? I said no, but I will drive, Sir! I am itching for some action. He said "OK, Brown, I see from your record that you are very adept in carriers. Well OK, let's get started. I will guide you from the turret. We have about 10 miles to travel, and when we get up to the paved highway there will be a Motorcycle dispatch rider waiting for us. He will be passing you holding any cross traffic from entering your road, and you can proceed right through." Well, this went really good and as I became familiar with the controls I accelerated faster and faster. From the turret I was getting his guidance: "driver right" or "driver left." We came to an easy curve, which I could make without easing up on the throttle. This was a piece of cake. I got the tank humping along near all of 20 miles per hour. Next, over the intercom I hear "Driver, left," then the officer yelled "DRIVER LEFT!" and when I looked out my little viewing slit, I spotted the dispatch rider standing on the left shoulder of the road waving me into this field. It was the maintenance yard. Well, I grabbed the left tiller bar with both hands, locking the left track up solid, and the went into a side skid. The track dug into the sod so hard that the momentum tipped the tank up on a 45-degree angle and it just seemed to balance there. It did not know whether to go over on its side or fall back down on its track again. There was a dead silence while we balanced there. Flashing through my mind was the view of that dispatch rider, seeing the tank heading right at him, just turning and running away for all he was worth. Then, over the intercom, I heard one last gasp, and a final order: "OK, driver, advance! By the time, we reached our destination, I had had my first driving lesson.

#### **Episode 12 – Shermans versus carriers**

Well, the same motorcycle dispatch rider said he would escort me on the return trip, if I promised to go more slowly, and watch out for him. Well, that return ride was a lot more sedate. With caution, the lieutenant even complemented me on our return.

In the 6 weeks spent field training with the Sherman Tanks, from mid-August 1944, to end of September 1944, I was anchored in this area long enough for mail delivery to be stable for the first time in months. I received packages from home, each with a couple of goodies. My factory group from home would send me a carton of cigs which were much-appreciated, as we could not buy them. Also, if you are lucky, other old friends might send a carton now and then. The funny thing about your cigs, was that a whole carton could be gone in one day. I always shared them with my friends when the mail arrived. Same with them, they shared theirs. We all smoked, or we all went without. Same with our mail from home, we all shared the news. A case in point, was that 16-year-old from Detroit, Michigan. She used to write me, stand in line at her lunch hour, to buy and send me cigs when she heard they were available. She sent me her pictures, which I carried over my heart in my service book. She was now an 18-year-old girl working in a factory office job. The guys used to ride me about "You didn't leave her at home with all the wolves around, did you?" She kept up a regular correspondence with me all the months I was away. She used to tell me about her sports, work, friends, shows, and even shared what songs were popular at the time. She described her mom and dad, sent pictures from home, fishing in the summer, duck hunting in the fall and all

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that kind of stuff. I got no letters from Kelli though. They had dried up when I could not get leave to visit her, then went into the hospital for about 5 weeks. The last letter I received from my Mom before I headed for France, informed that she was still corresponding with Kelli and that Kelli was seeing another Canuck real steady. He was from the Maritime Provinces. More on both those two beauties later. Right now, it's back to the tanks. Our war front is making progress, and I am still stuck in tank training. Will I ever get out of this?

Field training, manoeuvres, group action, it was all carried out until we became familiar how to work as teams. In the meantime, with our tank radios tuning to BBC News on the war front, we anxiously followed the daily progress of the Allied Forces. I bugged the P.S.O. every chance I got. He would just see me coming, and say "No, not yet. Stick with your tanks. So far, we have lost more tanks than carriers." Later, I was to understand why. Tanks were needed in gaining that foothold, and the reconnaissance regiments would not be needed with their carriers until that good foothold was secured. So, other than the ones that went over on D-Day for liaison work, the regiment was held in reserve until they were required. This went on for me until end of September 1944. Then, for the next six weeks or so, the reconnaissance regiments had been in the thick of it and were suffering casualties. Well, you guessed it. On my next visit to the P.S.O., the answer was "Yes, Trooper Brown, You are off to France." Well, as efficient as the army is, and with me drawing trades pay, they supplied me with a truck that had to be delivered to a vehicle marshalling yard in the area where the 17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars was reorganizing and preparing for its move from the Leopold Canal to participate in Operation Switchback. Well, how I got through France and Belgium and how I arrived there at that precise time and became a "Duke" member, well, that's another story.

#### **Episode no. 13 - Truck delivery to destination**

I had just received my instructions, with my route directions to report for loading dock Victoria. My truck was already aboard a barge ready to cross the channel. The crossing was uneventful for me, but as we travelled I tried to imagine what it was like on 6 June 1944.

We unloaded at Courcelles-sur-Mer, my route starting point. From then on I was to follow the road signs from one destination to the next. If lost, I could check with the Provosts. They were on duty at some major intersections. I started to wonder if I would run into my Sergeant Rudball from the 30<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment. I heard he had joined Provost Corps when we disbanded. Well, I never Got lost, but I did need help a couple of times. You know, it put me to thinking about who made and placed all those signs. There were all kinds, to certain regimental headquarters, colour-coded routes, largest next town, city, etc. I guess it was the Service Corps. Then it struck me, I had heard before that it takes 10 men to support each man in action, and when you think about it, it may be more truth than fiction. I always wondered when in action, as we advance, who keeps moving our petrol, rations, even our first aid stations and field hospitals. All had to keep moving as we advanced, there was so much going on behind the lines, I never did realize. All these thoughts, no wonder it took me so long to find my way all alone. Then, there was all the destruction to witness. I don't remember how long it took me, but I finally made it. I can't recall the name of the place where I delivered the truck to at a marshalling yard, but the personal there gave me transportation to the

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Dukes Regimental Headquarters. I think it was in or near Poperinghe (not sure of spelling) I had arrived at the Dukes. I had a nice meal, and met an officer, but can't recall his name.

### **Episode 14 – A taste of front-line action**

After arriving at the Dukes Regimental headquarters about supper time, having a good meal and a rest, I received a brief speech from an officer about being placed in action with battle experienced veterans. I was warned not be surprised if it takes awhile for them to get to know you. Around midnight, another Duke escorted me up to a section on the banks of the Leopold Canal and settled me in with a troop on duty. It was pitch black, so I was not introduced to anyone that I can recall. The Germans keep raking the area with machinegun fire. Bullets were ricocheting off the rows of trees along the bank of the canal, some with a whine, others with a brr noise. One soldier looked at me and said, "Don't worry about the ones you hear, it's the ones you don't hear that get you." Well, all I could do was nod in agreement. Later a Sergeant came over to address me, and since he did not know my name, he said "Hey, Bucko." Another soldier spoke up and said, "He's new, Sarge, his name is Brown." So, the sergeant said "OK, Bucko Brown, here's what I want you to do." I still do not know what that Sargent's name was, but from then on everyone called me "Bucko." It kind of broke the ice, and I felt accepted. Even later, I inked "Bucko" on the gauntlets of my gloves.

The next day, I was introduced to Corporal Kenny Chapman and assigned to be his driver of a Wasp Carrier Mark 4 converted to a flame thrower. Before that, I did not know about flame throwers, but I sure was glad my vehicle was to be a carrier, as I had previously trained in them with the 30th. Carriers were my favourite vehicles; I could literally make them waltz.



Len in the flame throwing tank



As I was later to discover, we were to be part of the plan to defeat the German Forces that were defending the lowlands along the shores of the Schelte Estuary. Their orders were to fight to the death to prevent the Allied Forces from opening the Antwerp port, essential for war supplies. This turned out to be one of the toughest assignments the regiment had receive to date, and it took from 4 October to 5 November 1944 to accomplish, with many tough battles, and too many casualties.

On completion, all the members of the regiment were invited to be guests of the people of Ghent, Belgium for five days. They were billeted two-soldiers to a home. It was a wonderful sign of appreciation by the city of Ghent for their liberation.

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#### **Episode 15 - Operation RELAX - Ghent-Brugge**

After the Scheldt - Breskens Pocket campaign which ended on November 4th, 1944, the regiment formed up in mid-morning as a complete unit, and as we headed out in column. I was impressed. It was my first time seeing the regiment travelling together as a whole, and it made me feel proud to be part of it. We pulled into the outskirts of the city of Ghent at about 4 p.m., parked our vehicles, and headed for the pre-arranged hot coffee, outdoor hot showers, and a complete change of clean clothes - something we had not had for a month. That alone was a real treat. On November 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th, we had squadron parades and morning duties: vehicle maintenance, servicing our gear, firearms, ammunition, and so on. Afternoons and evenings were free, as we were guests of the city. Entertainment had been arranged - movies, plays, Canadian Army shows, ENSA performances, or simply sightseeing around town. One of my personal highlights was discovering an ice cream shop. I visited it daily, having neither seen nor heard of ice cream since Canada. The people I was billeted with were perfect hosts. They even joined us for some of the entertainment and treated us like royalty. As with all good things, it had to end.

On November 9th, we reported back to our vehicles and formed up in the same orderly fashion as on arrival, this time at the small town of Deinze, ready to head out for our next assignment - roughly 200 kilometers away at Nijmegen. We arrived there on or about November 12th, if my memory serves me correctly. Seeing the regiment travel together again as a unit was another thrill for me. During quieter moments over those seven days of rest and travel, I had time to think about what we had been through, and why the only person I had really grown close to was Ken. Of course, he had close friends in the regiment he had trained with over the years, and any free time he had was naturally spent with them. Looking back over my four weeks in action, it is no wonder I never really got to know anyone else. We were moved around so often on individual assignments. Even though we were part of the 3rd Division, that division consisted of three brigades and nine other regiments, and on any given day we could be assigned to any one of them - or even to British or Polish units, or to specialists such as artillery, engineers, or tanks. What was truly rare was being with other Dukes. So, no wonder I never got to know many other members of my own unit.

The trip to Nijmegen itself was uneventful, but the next three months of wintering along the Waal and Maas Rivers certainly had their share of troubles.

#### **Episode 16a - Winter on the Waal**

Following our arrival in the Nijmegen area in mid-November 1944, the regiment settled into what would become a long and bitter winter along the Waal River. Gone were the movement and excitement of recent operations. In its place came routine, discomfort, and constant alertness. The river marked the line, and across it the enemy remained very much present. We were billeted wherever shelter could be found—abandoned buildings, barns, cellars, or makeshift quarters. The cold seeped into everything. Vehicles required constant attention, fuel had to be guarded carefully, and weapons needed daily cleaning to keep them serviceable. Frostbite was as much an enemy as the Germans. Patrols were regular, often at night, and never entirely uneventful. Even when nothing happened, the tension never left you. You learned to live with it, the same way you learned to live with cold feet, damp clothes, and interrupted sleep. Mail became the one bright spot. Letters from home were read and reread until they nearly fell apart. Through it all, Ken and I worked well

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together. Without much discussion, we each knew our job and trusted the other to do it. That trust meant everything.

#### **Episode 16b - Routine, Rumors, and Reality**

By December, routine had become second nature. Stand-to before first light, maintenance, patrols, meals when they came, and waiting—always waiting. Rumors circulated constantly: breakthroughs here, setbacks there, the war nearly over, or far from it. No one knew what to believe. Occasionally, we were rotated back a short distance for brief rest periods, though “rest” was a generous term. Even then, the guns could still be heard, a dull reminder that the line was never far away. Christmas came and went quietly. There were small gestures—extra rations, perhaps a concert or a special meal—but mostly it was another day in uniform, far from home. It was during this time that you truly learned who you were. There was no glory in it, just endurance. You did your duty, watched out for your mates, and counted the days without actually counting them. The winter dragged on, but we held our ground.

#### **Episode 16c - The Stagnant 14 weeks of Winter**

Now you might think that this was a cushy assignment. Not so! Calling it a stagnant assignment is one of those deceiving statements, for we did receive many casualties and some fatalities. With the Germans holding one side of the Waal and Maas rivers, and us on the other side, you might think that things would get boring, but they never did. I don't know if they were an extra-mean crew of Germans or the other side, or if they felt they had their backs against the wall, getting pushed back to their homeland, but they turned into a mean, spiteful, antagonist crew. They kept shelling us with mortars, raking us night & day with intermittent bursts of machine gun fire, and even sending patrols over the rivers at night, killing, and trying to take prisoners. They came dressed in white camouflage snowsuits and were always up to some devilment.

However, at Christmas, we did have a nice turkey meal with all the trimmings. As well, there were some quiet spells when we were able to get back to corresponding with home. Being static in one spot, we received a steady flow of mail. In our free time, we were able to visit with the Burgomaster and his wife, and two children. They were the only citizens that stayed in the village of Wamel. I enjoyed sharing a few home-cooked meals with them. Though I called it a stagnant period, we did have to share regular duties, night guard duty, observation post duty in the second-floor level of a tile and brick factory, maintenance of our equipment and vehicles. We also manned a tracking station to record quadrants of launched Buzz Bombs and V 2 Rockets, so the air force could have a target. Although we remained in that area, it seemed like we were never idle. While there, and while preparing for a large spring offensive, I had three close calls with fate, all at that factory observation post. First, while manning the Observation Post, the building was raked with machine gunfire. We dropped prone to the floor and all the bullets passed overhead. I don't know if the enemy had seen something or just wanted to shoot. The second time was in the same building. We were being relieved by next shift. Just as we started out the door to make a run for the house we were using, the enemy launched a mortar attack. It started with a round of three mortars, then they were idle for two minutes, then they fired another round of 3, then they went idle. They had been known to keep this up, so we decided right after the next round we will make a run for the house. Well, you guessed it. They changed the length of the pause and caught us flatfooted right in the open. The shells flew

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right over our heads and exploded on the frozen ground just in front of us. The back pressure from the explosion was so great it caved my chest in. With my left hand I grasped at my chest and grabbed some metal. My mind flashed that I had a hunk of shrapnel buried in my chest, but as we dove through the door, I realized all I had grasped was the big brass button on my great coat. (Whew!) The third time was at the same house. I had my bed roll on the floor inside underneath an outside window. I had just got into bed when those mean and spiteful guys started firing mortars again. I felt one hit the ground right under my window and buried itself right against the foundation, but there was no explosion. The next morning, we went to look for it, and there it sat. It was a dud that never did explode. Thanks to the enemy's forced labour that may have purposely made it a dud. Well, while the enemy made our life miserable, at least the Allied Forces were busy preparing for the big spring offensive. And, that all depended on the weather.

#### **Episode 16d - Holding the Line**

As the new year approached, the regiment remained in position along the rivers. Conditions slowly improved as experience taught us better ways to cope, but the danger never disappeared. Snipers, artillery fire, and sudden alerts kept everyone sharp.

Looking back, that period taught me more about soldiering than any formal training ever could. There were no dramatic advances or headlines—just steady, disciplined work that had to be done. We were holding the line, and that mattered.

Little did we know then that before long we would be moving again, this time eastward, toward the final push into Germany. But for now, we endured, waited, and did our part.

#### **Episode 17 - Start of the BIG Spring Offensive**

On 4 February 1944, the entire regiment moved back up to the outskirts of Nijmegen where we had the opportunity to have Catholic and Protestant church services. From 5 to 7 February, we worked on maintenance and preparation of all our equipment. During these nights, the skies were filled with heavy bombers over Cleve. During the days, there were very heavy artillery bombardments on the Reich Wald area, so we knew the Big Offensive had started. On 8 February, flame throwers with smoke dischargers, which included Ken and I, were assigned to the British 49th Division, to keep laying smoke for an extended period to cover their operations. One advantage about being shifted from one unit to another you never stop learning more about other branches of the service. Being transferred to help the engineers you get the opportunity of increased knowledge. I had never realized before, how dangerous their job can be, repairing blown dykes and bridges under the fire laid down by the enemy, and, how our smoke screens allowed them to keep making progress so the foot soldiers could continue. Sharing weeks with their daily lives, it amazed me how they could have their tea breaks. In the meantime, the rest of the regiment was transferred to the summer dyke, where the Germans had blown out a section, flooding portions of the area. This made things very difficult for the rest of the regiment.

By mid-February, Cleve was captured and an advance party was sent into assigned quarters for the regiment where they would spend the next two weeks scouting and clearing up the area, between Nijmegen, Quaberg, and Horssen. It then spent four weeks in Cleve, for outfitting, training, and vehicle maintenance, in preparation for the next major offensive. We were ready to resume the

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advance around the end of March. I cannot recall how long Ken and I were laying smoke cover for the British Units, but I do remember an awful lot of dyke areas, which we had to cross over under shell and sniper fire.

#### **Episode No. 18 - Spring Offensive**

We re-joined our regiment and moved up to area around Bieven & Vraasset (*possibly Bienen and Vrasselt, former independent towns now part of Emmerich and Rees*). Being part of the 3rd Division's Reconnaissance Regiment, "A" squadron could be assigned to, or in support of any one of three Brigades, which consisted of the following:

- 7th Brigade – including the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, The Regina Rifles, and The Canadian Scottish Regiment
- 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, including The Queen's Own Rifles, The Régiment de la Chaudière, and the North Nova Regiment
- 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, including The Highland Light Infantry, The Stormont, Dundas, Lindsay Highlanders, and The North Nova Scotia Highlanders.

Just a little history on how diversified our assignment could become, at the beginning of this phase of the war, we reconnoitred out in front of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade. Striking in a northerly and westerly direction towards Zeddum, Zutphen, and Deventer. Resistance and enemy action were both very intense. The Germans had over four years occupying the Netherlands during which they had used forced labour to build pill boxes, road blocks, machine gun nests and other obstacles to block our advance. Plus, as we keep pushing them further back, they kept blowing up dykes and bridges impede our advance.

Our troop was in a convoy moving from one section to a new one. The Germans were retreating fast, so we were travelling through a virgin no-man's land when my carrier threw a bogey wheel in late afternoon. We had no choice but to pull out of the convoy. Ken reported to the Lieutenant in charge, who told us to make repairs, bunker down for the night and meet them in the morning. I had to break the track and replace the bogey wheel. By the time I finished, it was dark. It was a farming district, and our vehicle drew lots of neighbourhood onlookers, who had never seen a flame thrower before, with eight barrelled smoke dischargers on the front. All got lots of attention. Of course, we were invited back to some of their homes for a liberation drink. Ken rolled out his bedroll in the nearby barn but told me to go ahead. Well by 22:00 hours, I was a couple of farms away, and when I started back to bed down with Ken, I saw two strange Canadian soldiers approaching me from the opposite direction. I heard one speak in English so I was not worried it might be 2 Germans, I heard one say, "Let's make him walk between us as we get along side." But as soon as we met, the red-headed drunken Canuck jumped in front of me and buried a German luger so hard in my guts he hit my backbone. He yelled "You're a XXXXXX Hun, so I am taking you out right now." Well-drunk, red-headed, and reckless, I tried to explain who I was and why we were there. Finally, I convinced his buddy, who wasn't so sloshed, that I was a Canadian, and they went on their way. To this day, I have no idea what outfit they were with or who they were or why they were there.

I had several brushes with death, just like most of us did, but for some funny reason I was never afraid of bullets, or shrapnel, or stuff you could not see. It was left to fate. They either missed you or

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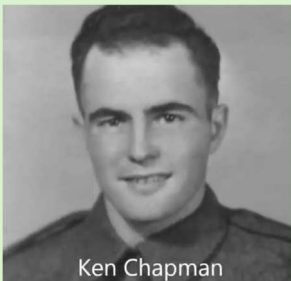
got you, there was nothing you could do about it. However, when I got to the barn, I was still shaking how close that almost was. Ken jumped up and wanted to go find them and find out who they were and what outfit they belonged to. He had become very protective of me, more like a big brother, and I respected him for that. I told him I would not even know where to start looking. We slept the night out, and at first light, continued our route to where the Squadron was harboured.

#### **Episode 19 - Continuing Episodes**

At the end of March 1945, we were near Vrasset, in the Zedham, Zutpen, and Vorden areas, working with the 9th Brigade. We helped clean-up a few areas with them. Then, on 1 April 1945, we were placed in support of the 7th Brigade, but under regimental command. Once again, we were involved with clean up actions of pockets of bypassed German troops. Many still contained German soldiers, road blocks, mines, etc. We rounded up several prisoners in the Dooseburg area.

Later, when performing a reconnaissance along the South bank of the Ijssel river, we came under heavy fire from the north side of river. It seemed that the enemy decided to make a firm stand along this river. They had blown hundreds of bridges and rail crossings all along our front. It must have cost a lot for the Dutch to replace them after the war. I am sure the Germans did not care; it wasn't their property they were destroying. We kept patrolling up and down the south river bank.

Then, on 12 April, our command was placed under the orders of the 7th Brigade. On the 13 April, Ken returned from a briefing with 7th Brigade officers and gave me directions were to proceed. As we approached a house near the river, he told me to park along side it. He then grabbed our only Bren gun, jumped out of the carrier, yelled for me to wait right there and not move. He disappeared running around the corner of the house. I waited, not knowing what to think or do, for maybe 5 to 7 minutes before he returned. He seemed excited, but never said a word, except for instructing me to get the vehicle back on the main road, where we were to meet the others, and carry on. Nothing was ever said about what happened, but now, 67 years later, I realize this is the moment he earned his Military Medal. I never knew all these years. I realize now he did not want me involved, when my only weapon was a Sten gun. The armistice came three weeks later, and I was flown out five days after that. The medal was awarded the following October, and I was never involved again until Dawn discovered Randy Klein, and Randy put me wise to the regimental retirees organization, and the Trumpeter. I can see now why this event not show up in the war diary, since at the time, we were under command of the 7th Brigade. It would be in their records, or in the diaries of one of the infantry units. Since I only found out just last year that Ken won the Military Medal, it has driven me bonkers. How could that be, when we were always together. Except of course, that time he had to go in the field hospital for 2 or 3 days with a cold, or flu bug.



Ken Chapman

On 14 April, one of the troops of "A" Squadron was near Ildhuizen on the River IJssel when it came under heavy machine gun fire and air bursts. After the troop tried to work its way around this position, the Germans launched a counterattack. Corporal Kenneth Amos Chapman dismounted from his vehicle and, ignoring the enemy fire, advanced up the street alone, firing the Bren gun from his hip. He killed three Germans and wounded seven others, causing the enemy to withdraw in disorder. For his action, Chapman was awarded the Military Medal.

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Ref: Fowler. *Valour in the Victory Campaign.*, 173.

### **Episode 20 – Saved from the mines**

On 14 April, 'A' Squadron was still involved along the south west banks of the IJssel river. It seemed like that was our boundary since leaving the Arnhem district and was to be until we reached the Zuider Zee area or, turned north easterly towards Groningen, and the German border. 'A' Squadron was still under command of the 7th Brigade working with the Winnipeg Rifles, or Canadian Scottish Regiment. One day we even crossed paths with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, which was a brief surprise. Enemy action for the following week was heavy. We had to deal with road blocks, craters, mines, mine fields, blown bridges, machine gun placements, artillery, and a few 88s anti-tank guns hindering our paths. There were exchanges of gunfire with the enemy who used weapons of all calibres. We also had to deal with many prisoners of war. Finally, there was also civilian jubilation upon liberation; sometimes they even made it difficult to proceed. Trying to keep up the pace of advance and keep probing the enemy's defences was Reconnaissance at its ultimate! The next 7 days, we made progress through the areas of Daltson, Mepel, Steenoijk, Sneek, and Leeuwarden. We had been so busy since leaving Nijmegen area, we only had one mail call, and that was back during a rest period in the Rochwald Forest area. There I received two cartons of cigs, 1 from my factory and 1 from that young Yankee. I also got two letters, one from my mom. She was still corresponding with Kelli, who had married the other Canuck from the Maritimes, and the other letter, well, it was also from the Yankee with a picture, showing a more, mature appearance. Wow! Had she ever changed in the last 2 years. That picture went right into my service book, right over my heart. Oh, while I am off the military action, this would be an opportune moment to tell you about Ken saving my life while in the hospital. It is a good example of the fickle finger of fate. The infantry we were supporting got pinned down behind a railroad embankment by an enemy machine gun nest about a half-mile up the road across open ground, at an intersection. It had been heavily concealed under logs and sod like they usually did. Well, the officer called for the flame thrower to go and take it out. I was in the lead, with a green corporal replacement. We had travelled half the distance, and he was still standing up in the carrier, fully exposed above the waist. Ken would have been seated, with the seat in a lowered position, readying the flame gun. Suddenly he yelled "STOP." Well, I hit the brakes so fast and hard I almost pitched him out over the front. He said "mines." I looked out and we had stopped inches from the raised bricks that had caught his eye, right in line with both tracks. It all happened in split seconds. In the meantime, the infantry officer who was following in close support, pulled along side asking the Corporal why we were stopping. My corporal told him there were three mines. Since we had no time to go around, the officer decided we had to go back across the tracks and clear the mines after dark. He backed up, but I spun our carrier around on a dime and pulled all the way back. It was a miracle that happened in 30 seconds. Why we were not fired upon as this all happened, we will never know for sure, but we figured they were so sure our carrier would go up in a great big ball of flames when it hit the mines, that they were mesmerized waiting for the explosion. Ken had a good laugh over it when he returned. I was so glad I had him with me once more.

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### **Episode 21 Liberating the northern part of the Netherlands**

I recently read a few articles about the advance from Leeuwarden to Groningen which gave a general idea of the resistance encountered. On 24 April 1945, 'A' Squadron was still in support of 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade. As it advanced, it cleared the area to the left of the Regina Rifles and contacted the 5th Canadian Armoured Division. During the advance, the squadron came under heavy shelling and encountered a road block with numerous mines. As they worked to lift the mines, they came under heavy fire and had to withdraw. The troop on the left flank pushed north and took 50-odd prisoners of war. A day of rest and maintenance was then needed, so the squadron stopped for the night and harboured. This pattern was repeated until we entered the streets of Groningen. All I can remember of that was that it was impossible to drive with people all around us, offering eggs or cups of fresh milk, which we had not seen in ages. By the time we got through, I must have received three dozen in my carrier. Come to think of it, I wonder what happened to them all – I can't remember. However, I do remember some young ladies being dragged out onto the main street and having all their hair clipped off. I felt sorry for them, really. I am not sure of the date or time we left the city to get back to the job at hand. We expected to cross the German border very soon and face an even fiercer resistance, even though over the last few days the number of prisoners surrendering was getting greater. On my final day of the war, I remember we had formed up on a highway on the outskirts of the German city, Aurich. It was dawn and we were ready to attack, but by 08:00 hours we had not yet received the order to advance.

When the word did arrive, it was "Cease fire." Well, no words could ever describe that moment. It followed with orders to move in and commence rounding up all types of weapons, both military and civilian. Our occupation of enemy territory had begun.

### **Episode 22 - Armistice**

When the armistice was declared on Saturday 5 May 1945, we entered the German town of Aurich.

My personal emotions varied from elation to shock. Things had come to such a sudden end, we were in awe. Was this really true? Pinch me, to see if was just dreaming. But reality was present, and we had to get on with the job of disarmament.

But little did I know, something else was happening. On the 2nd day, I did not feel so good. I was running a fever and had an open lesion festering on my left wrist. Feeling nauseous, I ended up on sick parade and was treated with a wonder drug – sulphanilamide. I think I slept a full day, but when I awoke, my whole left arm had broken out in a weeping rash, and the wrist was leaking puss and blood. My fever was on fire. A medic bathed my wrist and arm, and gave me aspirin to fight the fever, and told me to stay in bed. By the next morning, I was covered in a weeping rash, so I was sent to the field hospital, where the doctor looked at me and said, "my gaud man what is happening with you?" He started doing some tests and called for a plane to take me to a hospital back in London England, where I spent the next 6 months recovering. The field doctor, God bless him, diagnosed me as being allergic to the sulpha drug, and recognized that I had picked up the streptococcus germ in that open lesion on my wrist, and that it was affecting my whole blood stream. It took six months, plus radiation treatments for me to recover. The two things that bothered me most were that I left the regiment never to see or hear any news of what was happening to everyone, and that

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all my personal gear, service book, note book, papers, pictures,(pin-up girl,) were left in Germany. I didn't even have my tooth brush. But, about two weeks later, all my gear, and personal stuff, right down to my boot brushes arrived, all tied up in one big bundle. Whoever rounded it all up and was responsible for tracking it to where I ended up, I will never know, but to them I shall be forever grateful. Without all my notes, pictures, and letters, I would not have been able to be writing these episodes today.

Finally, after 6 months I was transferred back to, of all places, the 3 CACRU, where it all started when the 30<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment was disbanded. There, I was put on light duty while getting my strength back, doing night guard duty at vehicle compounds, stuff like that. I was really getting anxious now to catch the next boat home, as it seemed like every one else was going home. Why couldn't I? My turn would come.

#### **Episode 23 Slow Recovery and Good-Bye-Blighty.**

It looked like I was going to spend my third Christmas overseas, and that turned out to be true. For my first Christmas, I was in England working on the vehicle assembly line. For the second Christmas, I was at Wamel in the Netherlands. All were varied circumstances, but I must say, each time the Canadian Army came through with flying colours making sure we had turkey, and all the trimmings, complete with Christmas cake or pudding. Our bellies felt great.

Light duty and marking time at a depot were very boring, so one day in early Jan 1946, another soldier waiting for passage home, says lets apply for a weekend pass, and take the train from London south to the seaside resort of Brighton. It sounded better than the barracks, so with passes in our pockets, away we went. When we arrived, the sun was shining, and it was a nice warm day. We looked the area over. It had nice stores, parks, and beaches like most resort towns. We checked in at our hotel, had supper, then started what every soldier did in England; we started pub crawling. Well, I don't know if it was bad food, or mixing drinks, or my first binge in 6 months, but by the time we arrived back at our hotel, I was deathly sick with the heaves, then the dry heaves. It spoiled my friends week-end. I was ready to return to barracks a.s.a.p.

Finally, permission came it was time to head for Southampton. The Queen Lizzie was waiting to take us home. I cannot recall the exact date. I had quit keeping notes when I arrived in the London hospital, but it was late January or early February when we sailed. This boat trip was a lot more comfortable than the one I took going over. On this trip, we had our own beds. I think it was during the second day out we ran into gale force head winds, and the third day, the waves were running 60 feet from top to bottom. At one point, when the ship crested at top, then hit the bottom of the swell, it tore off the hand railing that enclosed the poop deck. The crew roped off that area and made it out of bounds. On the fourth or fifth day of sailing, we finally pulled into New York Harbour, passed the Statue of Liberty, and pulled into the dock side. From there we headed for the train station and the ride of our Life to Canadian soil, straight to Montreal

#### **Episode 24 – Travel from New York to home**

Without records or notes, I must resort to estimates. Docking in New York, had to be early February 1946. Then the train ride from there to Montreal. This may have taken several hours. What seems to take the most time is making connections from one line to the next. I remember there was a delay

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waiting to catch the next train to Toronto. This is when the anticipation started building. Every rail joint in the tracks was singing clickety-click,-clickety click, which was interpreted by my mind as, “we’re getting close, we’re getting close.” When I reached Toronto, there was another short delay, before transferring to the last train leg home. I wondered who was going to be there to meet me, and if they had changed much. I wondered if the army send the right message, if they knew the train schedule, and will there be anyone to meet me. I had my orders when to report back to the London Barracks for de-mobilization, and all that stuff, but I wondered what my family knew. When the train pulled into London station, and I no sooner stepped down, when I saw my MOM and DAD, with their arms open waiting for an embrace. It took my breath away. Thirty-one months had passed since we said goodbye at the Chatham train station in July 1943. I was shocked how they both had aged and had shrunk in stature. I guess the war had taken a toll on them also. We could not stop talking to the car, or all the way home. I had looked forward to this moment so many times, and now I could not believe it was happening. At that moment, I did not realize how difficult it would be to return to civilian life.

#### **Episode 25 - Is It Really Back to Civvy Street?**

Home at last. It was difficult to let it sink in, and actual dates I am at a loss to clarify.

I had a three-week furlough in my pocket, with orders to report back to Wolseley Barracks in early March. I spent several days trying to get the hang of home life. Everyone was glad to see me and pleased that I was back. But my mind struggled with the changes. For some unknown reason, your mind expects things to be the way they were when you left. Not so. Things had changed for everyone.

Mom and Dad were both older. My kid sister now a young, working, mature woman. My older sister married an Army Lieutenant, with three children. Of course, they had moved in with Mom and Dad while he too was overseas. Life had changed for everyone.

Everyone walked everywhere. Gas was still rationed, so driving was limited. Most luxuries were still rationed - butter, sugar, clothes to some degree, furniture, cars. I couldn’t even buy a pair of pants and stayed in my uniform to the maximum limit.

I did some visiting, but restlessness was settling in. I don’t know what it was, but I had nervous spells, became moody, wanted to be left alone. Then there was the young lady in Detroit I had been in constant touch with through letters—back and forth—sending me pictures, cigarettes, words to songs, all the time I was away. I kept putting off writing or seeing her. The more hyper I became, the more I put it off.

Finally, I sent her a telegram to meet me downtown Detroit at the Greyhound bus terminal on Saturday, the 23rd of February, finally a date I am sure of. We took the streetcar to her home in Dearborn, where I met the whole family. They wanted me to stay for a couple of days and made arrangements for me to stay at their neighbours next door, which worked out okay.

We talked, walked, went to the theatre, etc. That weekend in her company was so good I had to find ways for further visits. It was the start of something big.

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She took me back downtown, where I caught the tunnel bus back to Windsor, then the bus back to Chatham—with a promise to call or write her before the next weekend.

Well, that weekend was my furlough end. March 3rd, I had to report back to London for mustering-out physicals, paperwork, etc. A whole carload of us from this area was scheduled to return together. So, another visit to someone very special was put on hold. Does absence make the heart grow fonder? Well, in this instance, I can definitely say YES—but that's another story waiting to be told.

#### **Episode 26 – Mustering out**

At the end of my Home Furlough, I found that 3 weeks had flown by in a dream world, that my money was exhausted. I had contacted my American Beauty, but I had no funds for a return visit, without reporting back to the army. I went back to get my last payments, have a complete physical, attend some classes about re-habitation to civilian life, get a briefing on the jobs, work plans, or education that was available, and hear about the programs that the army had organized for veterans, housing, land grants, etc. I think I was there for 3 days during which my records updated. I got orders to return in about 2½ weeks for my final discharge. Well, with a fresh supply of cash, I headed back home, and yes, to catch the train to Windsor, the tunnel bus to Detroit, and to meet a certain someone at the bus terminal. And, yes, she was there waiting to meet every bus that came across. The two of us went back to her home for the weekend. Again, arrangements had already been made for me to stay at the neighbours. A romance developed from which there was no turning back. From then on, we were meeting every possible week-end with either me going there, or her coming here, staying at her aunt's, now living in Chatham.

On 23 March, my travelling home buddies and I all returned to barracks in London for the final army assignment and by 16:00 hours, we were all on our way home as civilians. Half-way home, we just happened to stop at a convenient hotel and hoist a few to celebrate our freedom and “no more Army Orders. Hip-Hip Hooray.” Again, and again. I cannot remember who drove the car home.

That young Lady, Dolores, who was eventually tagged “Del” for short, came to Chatham for Easter weekend on 23 April 1946. We were walking hand-in-hand down King Street in Chatham. Suddenly, I stopped and turned to face her and, looking straight into her eyes, asked her “WILL YOU MARRY ME?” Stunned to say the least, but without hesitation, she said “YES.” Would you believe we were right in front of Keats Jeweller's? I hugged and kissed her right on KING Street, took her by the hand, walked in the store, and told the jeweller to fit this young lady with the engagement ring of her choice, that will fast her a lifetime. And I must confess, it never left her finger for 64 years, but like all good things, they have eventually come to an end.

#### **Episode 27 - Closing a Three-and-a-Half-Year Journey — Embarking on One to Last a Lifetime**

I had returned to civy street, and was living with parents, ready to return to my factory job. Now, I needed to make some money. My bride to be had set a wedding date for 7 September 1946. We had no money, no car, no house, but we were madly in LOVE. I wondered what kind of a road I was traveling on; one that must last a lifetime. Del, and I tried to keep up visiting with alternating week-ends, me going to Dearborn, and her coming to Chatham and staying at her Aunt's house. Here at home, things were becoming more difficult. Mom and Dad decided to purchase another home of

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their own at Charring Cross, and sell their current home to their oldest daughter, Lucia and her husband Frank, and their 3 children. I and Berenice were to move with them to the new home. This all happened in early May, and it worked out well for all. In the meantime, at Del's home, her older brother married, then her younger brother got discharged from the navy and took on a bride. This meant that on our alternating trips, I could stay at her house instead of at the neighbours, and she could sleep at our house with my kid sister.

Our next problem, after 7 Sept, was to find a place to live. I spent all my free time after work searching for a house. I found some good ones, but no-one would loan me enough money for the purchase, because I didn't have any money for a down payment. We had to lower our sights for a cheaper, older home, through a mortgage company, but it was not available until October. This meant we had to move into an upstairs spare bedroom at my older sisters house, which made for a tough start for a young bride. In the meantime, my work was going well. I took every possible hour, or job, that was available, to make as much money as possible. I even worked as a farm labourer during the plant summer shutdowns. I did not know it at the time, but management had me in training in all phases of the operations, with a view to giving me greater responsibilities. During the summer of 1946, living at Charring Cross, Mom told me she was still corresponding with Kelli. After she married the other Canuck, she had moved to the Maritimes as a British war bride and made a home there. A year later, Mom had informed me she was now divorced. I'm sad things did not work out for her. On the other hand, Del and I were moving ahead despite a struggling start with the optimum "LOVE WILL PREVAIL."

I close this story with a poem Del cherished. It was inscribed on a pillow casing that I had mailed to her as a Christmas present in 1942. She kept it for 64 years and took it with her to her grave. God bless HER. She was, and is, a Jewel

#### **SWEETHEART**

*I thought that you would like to know  
That someone's thoughts, go where you go  
That someone never can forget  
The hours We spent, since first we met  
That Life is Richer,-Sweeter, by far  
For such a Sweetheart as you are, and,  
Now my constant prayer will be  
That,-GOD will keep you safe, FOR ME.*

Respectfully Len,(BUCKO) Brown.

*See notes on subsequent life on the following pages*

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### **Background to courting**

Back in the Great Depression, followed by the Roaring Twenties, my dad's half-brother—my Uncle Jim—left home, moved to Detroit, took work as a cab driver, met and married Del's mother's half-sister, Mae. When his job ran out, he returned to Chatham with his new bride. All Aunt Mae's family relations used to come to Chatham for weekend visits.

I was always close to my Uncle Jim through hunting and fishing, so my first memory of meeting Del was when she was eleven and I was fifteen and a half years old. At that age, I was heavy into woodworking, making duck-decoy lawn ornaments to sell. One weekend her family came to visit and, knowing me previously, came over and asked me to give her a wooden baby duckling—one of several displayed on our lawn for sale. You would think I had offered her the original golden goose.

After that, whenever they visited, she was over to see me, and we became best of friends. In later years, when I got my first Harley-Davidson at eighteen and was working a factory job, I took her riding when they visited. She loved it, and it happened on other occasions.

There was never anything but friendship between us. We just had pure fun doing things together. Then after I enlisted, I rode my bike to Dearborn, picked her up, brought her back to Chatham for the weekend where she stayed with her aunt. We rode all over together that weekend. On Sunday, her family came, she went home with them, and I returned to Camp Dundurn.

At that time, I purchased and mailed the pillowcase with the poem "Sweetheart." We wrote after that, but nothing serious. Then on my embarking last leave home, she came to Chatham to see me off.

After that, it was all letters back and forth while I was away, and she never failed to keep sending me cigarettes—hard to get in those days.

Funny thing, when I look back, there never was any romance between us—but a fire must have been smoldering deep inside all that time. Because the moment we met on my return, it burst into a roaring flame—and it lasted a lifetime.

Sorry it took so long to explain, but I appreciated the opportunity to put it into words.

— Len (Bucko) Brown

*More text below.*

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### Short timeline - jottings from Len's diary that prompted him to write his Episodes:

- September 23, 1942: Sworn into the Army at St. Luke's Road Barracks.
- September 24, 1942: Joined the 30th Recce, Essex Regiment.
- October 13, 1942: Left St. Luke's for 30th Recce, Dundurn, Saskatchewan.
- October 14, 1942: Travelled through Northern Ontario—rocky country, bush, & lots of lakes.
- October 15, 1942: Travelled across the flat, rolling prairies—a beautiful sight.
- October 16, 1942: Arrived in Dundurn, Saskatchewan.
- October 19, 1942: Started basic training—quite a grind, but lots of laughs. Continued with basic training—lots of hard work, but some very good laughs. Spent a few weekends in Saskatoon; had lots of fun. A nice city.
- December 29, 1942: Left Dundurn for New Year's leave—my first time home since joining. Had a wonderful time.
- January 30, 1943: Completed basic training—what a relief.
- Notes: Arrived back to camp two days late. Lost six days' pay and a ten-cent increase; received 30 days C.B.
- February 7, 1943: Started advanced training. Continued with advanced training; knowledge of the Army increasing.
- February 29, 1943: Had a ten-mile route march. Temperature 60 below zero. Froze nose, cheeks, chin, and left hand.
- March 12, 1943: Completed wheel course; qualified Driver, Class III (wheel).
- March 26, 1943: Completed track course; qualified Driver, Class III (track).
- March 27, 1943: Completed advanced Recce training.
- March 29, 1943: Left Dundurn for home on a 14-day furlough—oh, happy day.
- April 12, 1943: Arrived back in Dundurn after furlough—what a wonderful leave. Continued with advanced training and schemes.
- May 8, 1943: Left Dundurn for Driver-Mechanic course at V.T.S., Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.
- June 1, 1943: Regiment left Dundurn, Saskatchewan.
- June 4, 1943: Regiment arrived at Camp Borden, Ontario.
- June 25, 1943: Completed course and had final test—turned out okay.
- June 27, 1943: Left Saskatoon for five-day leave at home.
- June 30, 1943: Arrived home from Saskatoon.
- July 5, 1943: Rejoined Regiment at Camp Borden.
- July 10, 1943: Regiment left Camp Borden.
- July 12, 1943: Regiment landed at Aldershot, Nova Scotia.
- July 14, 1943: Regiment left Aldershot, Nova Scotia, and went into Halifax.
- July 15, 1943: Boarded the Queen Elizabeth at Halifax.
- July 16, 1943: Roamed over the "Queenie" and looked her over—a wonderful boat.
- July 17, 1943: Regiment placed on guard; the whole Regiment guarded the entire ship for the whole trip.
- July 23, 1943: Queen Elizabeth left Halifax dock.
- July 27, 1943: Queen Elizabeth pulled into the Firth of Clyde.

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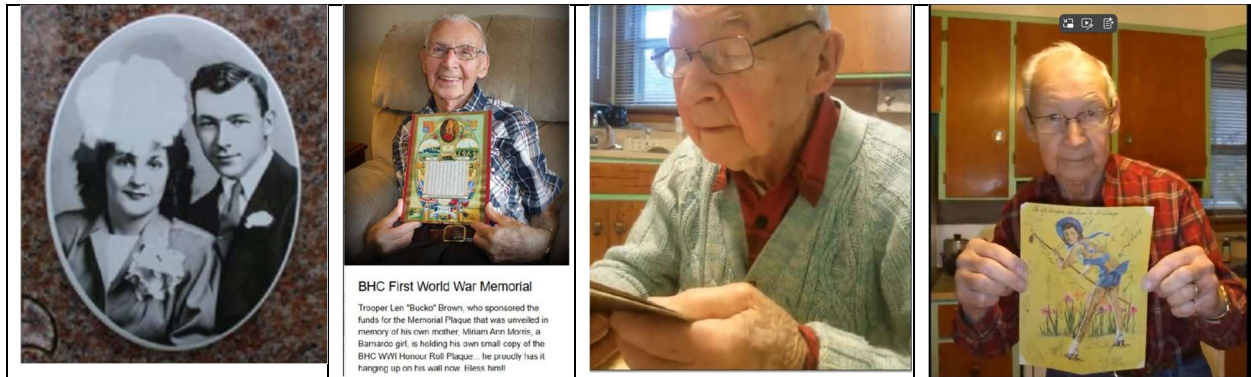
- July 28, 1943: Disembarked at Greenock.
- July 29, 1943: 0400 hours—Regiment arrived at No. 1 C.A.C.R.U., Inkerman Barracks, England.
- August 9, 1943: Went on a Driver-Mechanic refresher course at Inkerman Barracks.
- September 7, 1943: Completed Driver-Mechanic refresher course.
- September 8, 1943: Took Driver-Mechanic trade test at Blackdown—passed okay.
- September 10, 1943: Regiment inspected by General Sanson.
- September 13, 1943: Placed on carriers as an instructor at No. 1 C.A.C.R.U.
- September 15, 1943: Regiment left Inkerman and moved to Oxted.
- October 1, 1943: Promoted to Acting Lance Corporal, effective September 1st.
- October 18, 1943: Left No. 1 C.A.C.R.U. and rejoined Regiment at Oxted.
- November 2, 1943: Regiment left Oxted and moved into Headley Down.
- November 9, 1943: Had my first privileged leave; went to my aunt's in Padstow, Cornwall.
- November 19, 1943: Regiment sent to work at C.E.A.U., Camp Borden, to assemble vehicles.
- December 25, 1943: Pretty good Christmas dinner, but things very dull. Hope I'm home next year at this time.
- Notes: Regiment working on production all this time.
- February 7, 1944: Left on my second privileged leave, which I spent in Dundee, Scotland.
- April 13, 1944: Regiment called out of assembly line for regimental parade. Colonel stated the Regiment was to be broken up and used as reinforcements for other regiments.
- April 14, 1944: Squadron had its last parade; one final picture taken.
- April 16, 1944: Half of the Regiment moved to Camp Borden to work on assembly line—me included.
- April 17, 1944: Remainder of Regiment moved to No. 1 C.A.C.R.U.
- April 18, 1944: Working steadily assembling vehicles—sure monotonous.
- May 3, 1944: Moved from Borden to No. 1 C.A.C.R.U.
- May 4, 1944: Volunteered for Tank Regiment; moved to No. 3 C.A.C.R.U.
- May 7, 1944: Moved into bush for outdoor training.
- May 9, 1944: Proceeded to No. 17 Canadian General Hospital with the disease called epididymitis.
- May 11, 1944: Kept in bed and treated—not in very good shape.
- May 14, 1944: Starting to get well—awfully monotonous being shut in.
- May 16, 1944: Proceeded by stretcher to No. 20 Canadian Military Hospital.
- May 27, 1944: Feeling well again. Thought I would have been out of here by now.
- May 30, 1944: Left No. 20 Canadian General Hospital for No. 3 C.A.C.R.U.
- May 31, 1944: Placed on two weeks' light duty by M.O.—just killing time.
- June 1, 1944: Placed on light duty, fatigues—already getting tired of laying around.
- June 7, 1944: Still on fatigues—really fed up. Saw P.S.O. and tried to get out of here—no dice.

*More text below.*

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### Obituary of Leonard James Brown



Leonard passed away peacefully at the CKHA-Chatham Campus on Saturday, October 21, 2017, at the age of 96. Leonard was born in Chatham and was the son of the late John Ernest (Ernie) Brown (1970) and Miriam Ann Brown (Morris) (1973). Beloved husband of the late Delores J. Brown (Ziltz) since September 1946, sharing all those years together in every way, with love, devotion and happiness. Loving brother of Mrs. Berenice Hanemaayer of Chatham. Fondly remembered by a sister-in-law, Mrs. Maxine Everson of Michigan. Much loved by many nieces and nephews from Canada and the U.S. Predeceased by a sister Lucia Prangley (2004).

He was employed by Ontario Steel Products (1938) and retired from Rockwell International (1975), where he was superintendent of Bumper "A" stamping department for his last fourteen years.

Leonard served in World War II and joined the Canadian Armoured Corps in September 1942 and went overseas in July 1943 with the 30th Reconnaissance Regiment (Windsor Essex Tank) and on its disbandment in England served with the 17th Duke of Yorks Royal Canadian Hussars 7th Reconnaissance Regiment, through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany to the end of hostilities.

He was an avid member of Old Country View and Indian Creek Golf Courses. For many years he enjoyed five pin bowling and motorcycling most of his life, riding buddy to many bikers of Chatham. He was also a member of the Chatham Touring Club and Suzuki Intruder Club.

#### **Message from a friend upon hearing of his passing**

Leonard was the third child born to John Ernest Brown and Miriam Ann Morris. His obituary gives only tidbits of his accomplished life, but it truly missed the mark on what an incredible man he was. I wanted to be sure to share some of what and who this man was. I'd like to rewrite his obituary, well at the least, I'll add the following to it...

When he returned from overseas, he married his sweetheart, Del, returned to the factory he worked for, and built a long happy life together. Sadly, no children were born to this wonderful couple. One thing to share, is that he made an ironing board cover out of his uniform material for his new bride. He said he couldn't wear it again, so he made good use of it. He made lots of things out of wood. One to mention is a sitting hexagon bench for the ladies locker room at the curling club Del was a

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member of. Del passed in 2010 after 65 years together. He had a plate engraved in her memory to add to the bench.

Missing from his obituary and without a doubt, I know he'd want him remembered no matter how short his time here was, is the first-born child to his parents, his brother, Bunard (Bernard) Brown, who was born July 19, 1918, and sadly died the same day. He was buried in the paupers field in the same cemetery but sadly in an unknown plot. We tried to find the location as Len wanted to place a marker for him. Instead, we brought flowers and placed them in an open area of the many unmarked souls. This at least gave him a sense of closure.

Also noting an uncle, William E. J. Morris, that he came to admire more as he learned of his plight once we dug deep into how he and his own mother (Miriam) came to be in Canada as British home children through Dr. Barnardo's Homes. Throughout the years, Len had spent time going through the Ridgetown, Ontario cemetery seeking his uncle's resting spot but with no success. With the research information and the new caretaker locating his plot, he finally got a marker placed through the Last Post Fund for his uncle. This was a very emotional moment for Len when we went to his resting place, and he strolled up to his marker with his walker. It was then he finally found some peace within to be sure his uncle was not forgotten.

Len sponsored the WWI Memorial Plaque for the fallen British home children of Canada which was unveiled in July 2015 through the British Home Child Advocacy and Research Association (google that!). Don Cherry was an honoured guest for this ceremony, as his own grandfather was a British home child, he supports advocating their stories, especially the boys who went off to war. Through the same Association, a Memorial quilt was created with squares depicting some of the children, and as a surprise for Len, one was created of his mother and uncle. This quilt is constantly on display. This was another very emotional moment when the quilt was brought to him at the Residence for him to see it.

He sponsored a stone to be placed in the Remembrance Gardens in London, Ontario in June 2016, which we attended. It was a replica of the Memorial Stone wording for the fallen British home children of WWI placed in the Barnardo receiving home in Toronto in 1923. Come this August, the caretaker of this garden has sponsored and will dedicate a stone in Len's memory. He left that much of an impression behind in his 2016 visit!!

Last but not least, Len lost much of his vision and his family purchased a pair of eSight eyewear for him. Once gone, he wanted them donated to a Veteran in need since they are not a covered item. If a Veteran was not found in need, then he wanted to be sure that someone who was in need to have them, to have a gift of sight.

These are only achievements and tidbits that I know of in the short but blessed 5 years I knew him. I can only imagine all the other wonderful things of him for the other 91 years before that!! He was a humble, sweet and kind man. Light up a room with his smile and his giggle, oh that was the best!! Blessed are those who knew him. I miss him terribly.

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### **Acknowledgments**

- Most of the text comes from a series of e-mails sent by Len Brown to Randy Klein and Dawn Heuston
- The photos come from a video about Len Brown published on YouTube by 30mmavenger <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0UQy4gSYR4>
- The message from a friend was copied from the Find-a-Grave website, possibly written by Dawn Heuston

### **Notes on Author**

Veteran, Trooper Leonard James “Bucko” Brown, wrote all the above in emails to his friend Dawn Heuston, in 2013, and shared them with the 17th DYRCH as he wished. They have been corrected in grammar, spelling and punctuation, but his writing style, his emotions, and his story were left just as he wrote it.