



Herbert (Bert) Thomas Baker was born on June 29th 1915 in Barnet, British Columbia. He was the first child born to Henry (Harry) Edward George Baker and Clara Harriet Purrott. They had both been born in England and had emigrated separately to Canada. They had known each other in England prior to emigrating.

The family, who were members of the Church of England, settled in Montreal, Quebec when Bert was very young. Their family life was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War when Harry re-enlisted. He had been in the British Navy from 1900 to 1908. He returned home to

Montreal after the war ended. The Bakers had a second child, Frank, in 1920. Harry was employed as a stationary engineer, a trade that I believe he was trained for in the navy.

On May 30, 1926, Clara Purrott Baker passed away, leaving her husband and children devastated. Two years later, in April 1928, Harry married Elizabeth York, a widow with three daughters. Their blended family worked well together.

Like many children of his generation in Montreal, Bert left school at the age of fourteen and went to work. At that time, public education was free until the completion of seventh grade, but higher grade levels had to be paid for. The majority of working class children at that time did not go on to high school. He had a number of jobs after leaving school, but by age 17 he had trained as a shoe-cutter in the Maxine Footwear shoe factory in Montreal. He remained in that job until his enlistment.



Bert with his brother and stepsisters
in 1929

Like his father, Bert was interested in military service and joined the Active Miliitia of Canada with the 17th Hussars in 1932, at age 16.

He voluntarily enlisted in the Canadian army on July 17, 1940 where they can surely use someone with 8 years of military experience under his belt.



Bert prior to enlistment

He was not married at the time of his enlistment, but had been living in a common law relationship with Kathleen Elizabeth Russell for four years.

The following is noted at the army medical examination: wearing glasses, healthy, small scar to internal side of patella, height 6'1", weight 145 lbs., brown hair, brown eyes. His "defective vision" puts him in category B. He is described as a "sober, considerable, average, slow thinking leisurely type, takes things very easy". After the war, he wants to go to Australia to work on a sheep farm as a sheep ranger.

With his military experience, he is found suitable to serve as an officer because he is given the rank of Acting Corporal with the 17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars. At the end of 1940, he stayed in a hospital for almost a month. After he recovered, he got his training at Debert Military Camp. On September 2, 1941 he arrives in Scotland from Halifax.

There he is promoted to corporal to the A Squadron of the 7th Recce Regiment (17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars).

Background

Recce is short for reconnaissance. Military reconnaissance is the gathering of intelligence for tactical military purposes. Specifically, this means information about the position, strength and capabilities of enemy units and information about the area in which they are fighting.

In November 1942, Bert was awarded the Canadian Efficiency Medal. This medal was awarded for 12 years of service to non-permanent active militia, Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Auxiliary and reserve. Ranks receiving the medal included Warrant Officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and non-commissioned members. Despite the fact that Bert served in the Active Militia for "only" 8 years.

On March 20, 1943, Bert was promoted to Lance Sergeant and passed the Mine Clearing Course. More training and preparation for the invasion of mainland Europe followed. Twelve days after D-Day, he and his unit arrive in France on June 18, 1944.



The 7th Recce followed the following route from that landing in Normandy until May 1945; Seine, Somme, Channel Coast, Belgium. During what was probably leave, Bert was in Brussels on October 25, 1944 because he

exchanged 1150 French francs there. The Canadians advance further via Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, Groesbeek, the Rheinland-offensivethrough the East and North of the Netherlands until they reach, Ost-Friesland, Germany. That's where the war and the regiment's long advance end.

From May 17, 1945 the regiment is involved in organising the retreat of German troops from the west of the Netherlands to Germany and is billeted near Zeist.

Job done, you'd think. But the war may be over, an accident can always happen. On May 28, 1945, around 6:15 pm. A convoy of heavy trucks is on its way from Utrecht to Amsterdam. In the opposite direction, Herbert Baker, on duty, drives his Norton Solo.

Just before entering Loenersloot, a jeep driving in front of him slows down and moves to the right to allow a truck to pass a horse and cart.

Without breaking Bert hits the jeep. The local doctor was quickly at the scene and declared Baker dead due to injury of the spinal cord and fracture of the skull.



Canadian soldiers working on a Norton Solo.

From the War Diary of 28th May 1945:

"The task of escorting the German 88Corps from HOLLAND was completed and "A" and "C" Squadrons returned to BILTHOVEN.D.3087

Sgt. Baker, H.T. was killed in a motorcycle accident.

Weather: Unsettled."

Herbert Baker was temporarily buried in the Canadian plot of the civilian cemetery in Hilversum, now Noorderbegraafplaats.

The administrative aftermath contains letters from Kathleen Elizabeth Russell, his "common law wife" since 1936. She writes to the army about Bert's last will and wants to know what her position is in regard to his estate. In the end, \$324.14 is awarded to her.

On March 29, 1946, Herbert Thomas Baker is reburied at the Canadian War Cemetery in Holten where he lies in plot 9, row F, grave 9. Remarkably, his age is not mentioned on his headstone.

Part of this story came about with the contribution of Bert's niece, Frank's daughter, Joanne Baker. Her father and Bert were very close and she thinks her father Frank never really got over Bert's death. He talked about him a little with her, but not much. It was too painful for him.

Awards:
1939-45 Star
France & Germany Star
War Medal
Defence Medal
Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp
Canadian Efficiency Medal

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Sources:
ancestry.ca
Wikipedia
<https://www.cwgc.org>
Joanne Baker

