



Gerald Joseph Burns—known as Gerald—is born on December 29, 1909, in Chapleau, Ontario. He is the first child of Solomon Burns and Annie Esther Burns (née Gribbon).

After Gerald, the couple has two more sons and a daughter. Two of the family's daughters die at a young age.

The family is Roman Catholic, and English is the spoken language.

Gerald attends school in North Bay, Ontario, where the family has moved when he is young.

Although relatively older than the typical recruit, Gerald enlists for active service in the Canadian Army on August 9, 1940. By then, he has already worked for several years as a baker for companies including National Bakery, Greco's, and City Bakery in North Bay.

Gerald underwent the standard medical examination. The report lists only basic details: age 30, height 5'7", weighed 134 lbs, blue eyes, and blond hair. No special physical characteristics were noted.

He is declared fit for all duties and is assigned to the Algonquin Regiment.

The regiment was officially mobilized in late May 1940. The unit was formally placed on active service in July 1940, with local volunteers from towns such as Parry Sound, North Bay, and Timmins joining the ranks. On September 4, 1940, the battalion departed for initial active-service training, arriving a few days later at Camp Borden, Ontario.

Gerald apparently struggles to adjust to military life.

A notable entry in his file is the permission to marry in early October 1940 while stationed at Camp Borden. The marriage never takes place, however, as he remains listed as "single."

Entries in Gerald's file follow in quick succession up to April 1941, all bearing the same notation: AWL (Absent Without Leave)

In the meantime, he also leaves the camp illegally on two occasions, despite a disciplinary order requiring him to remain within the barracks.

This results in two stints of detention; one lasting five days and another lasting three days.

In total, nearly forty days' pay is withheld.

The regular \$20 allowance he sent to his mother each month continues, though the amount is later deducted from his earnings.

Gerald remains assigned to the Algonquin Regiment, with several further transfers awaiting him. His next posting is Port Arthur, Ontario, in May 1941, where he once again is AWL for a day.

The next transfer for Gerald is Camp Shilo in Manitoba, where various units get their training.

It is here, in late October 1941, that Gerald is hospitalized with severe pneumonia. He is discharged from the hospital after three weeks and granted a further two weeks of sick leave.

Gerald's next posting is recorded in January 1942; he is then stationed at the Chippawa Barracks in Ontario.



Camp Shilo

Troops such as the 1st Battalion of the Algonquin Regiment were stationed at, or passed through, the Chippawa Barracks during the initial phase of wartime mobilization before moving on to other tactical training camps.

Here, too, Gerald managed to slip away for a day at a time now and then. In early March 1942, he returns to the barracks under the influence of alcohol. The standard punishment follows: forfeiture of pay and CB (Confined to Barracks). (CB means that, as a punishment, a soldier is not permitted to leave the barracks)

The next entry in Gerald's file dates from February 1943. He is admitted to the military hospital at Camp Debert in Nova Scotia. There, he gets, what is known as V.R.T. therapy.

Vestibular rehabilitation therapy (V.R.T) is a specialized form of therapy intended to alleviate problems caused by vestibular disorders, primarily vertigo and dizziness, gaze instability, and/or imbalance and falls. A customized exercise plan is developed from the findings of the clinical assessment, laboratory testing and imaging studies, and input from patients.

Gerald is discharged from the hospital after two weeks, but returns there in late April 1943—this time with the mumps. He is discharged again on May 13, 1943. By then, the crossing to the United Kingdom (UK) is imminent.

On June 10, the regiment—Gerald included—board the troopship *Empress of Japan* at Halifax; they set foot on land in the UK on June 19, 1943, and proceed immediately to Heathfield, Sussex.



Entrance to Heathfield Camp

From September 1, 1943, Gerald serves as an acting Lance/Corporal, and in December, he was formally appointed to that rank.

In the interim, he is attached for a few months to the Canadian Provost Corps with the designation "f.a.p." (for all purposes), meaning he could be deployed wherever needed.

Reassigned to the Algonquins in January 1944, he is awarded the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with the Clasp.

At his own request, Gerald is reduced in rank to Private in May 1944.

By this time, Allied preparations for the planned invasion are already in full swing. The Algonquins are not included in the initial landing waves in Normandy. They land on Juno Beach on July 25, 1944, as part of the 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade and are deployed to reinforce the front near Hubert-Folie. This village has been captured after heavy fighting and at the cost of significant casualties, but the troops face fierce German counterattacks.

On August 18, 1944, Gerald is wounded during the final stages of the battle for the Falaise Pocket. The Algonquin Regiment plays a crucial role in the assault on the French village of Épancy. The attack turns into a prolonged and intense battle. Despite heavy German resistance, and following fierce hand-to-hand combat, the Algonquins succeed in completely clearing and securing Épancy.

No specific records regarding the nature of Gerald's injuries can be found. However, they are evidently severe enough to evacuate him to the UK. There, he is admitted to the 22nd Canadian General Hospital in Bramshott.

After a month, Gerald is discharged and assigned to the 'Hospital Conveyance Corps,' a support unit responsible for medical transport and other duties. In late November 1944, he is posted to a reinforcement battalion of the Canadian Infantry Corps.

On December 2, 1944, Gerald returns to the mainland of Western Europe, and in January 1945, he is reassigned to the Algonquin Regiment. At that time, the regiment is holding a sector of the so-called Maas-Line in the Netherlands, roughly between Drunen and Waalwijk. Weather conditions are harsh during this severe winter, characterized by heavy frost and snow. The 'dug-outs' along the dike offer hardly any protection.

The regiment is relieved in late January and early February 1945 and is granted a few weeks of rest. In March 1945, Gerald is promoted to the rank of corporal.

The final entry in Gerald's file is dated April 17, 1945: 'Killed in Action'. The Algonquin Regiment's war diary sheds some light on what he had to endure in the meantime.

The Rhineland Offensive starts in February 1945 with the aim of driving German troops back to the east bank of the Rhine.

The Rhineland Offensive consisted of three phases:

Phase 1: *The northern pincer and advance (Operation Veritable) – Starting February 8, 1945, British and Canadian troops launched an offensive from the Nijmegen salient into the heavily defended Reichswald and the area around Kleve to clear the territory between the Maas and the Rhine.*

Phase 2: *The southern pincer and link-up (Operations Grenade and Blockbuster) – Starting February 23, 1945, American units joined the offensive from the south (Operation Grenade). Next came Operation Blockbuster, aimed at defeating the final German units west of the Rhine and reaching the river itself.*

Phase 3: *Crossing the Rhine (Operations Plunder and Varsity) – On the night of March 23–24, 1945, the Allies crossed the Rhine in force near Rees, Xanten, and Wesel, supported by large-scale airborne operations (Operation Varsity).*

The Algonquins do not actively participate in Phase 1. However, they are deployed during the second phase for 'Operation Blockbuster'.

On February 26 and 27, 1945, the regiment sees action during the assault on the so-called 'Hochwald Gap' (the area between the Hochwald and the Balberger Wald).

Here, they encounter fierce resistance and suffer heavy casualties, particularly around the German villages of Udem and Veen.

Gerald appears to have come through this battles relatively unscathed; his file contains no records indicating otherwise.



Algonquin Regiment moving forward near the Hochwald Forest, Udem, Germany, March 1st, 1945.

Photo by Jack H. Smith. Department of National Defence / National Archives of Canada, PA-192879.

On March 31, 1945, the regiment crosses the Rhine and starts an advance into Dutch territory.

Passing through locations such as Millingen and Lochem, they head towards Bornerbroek (April 4, 1945).

A confrontation with the enemy awaits the Algonquins near the city of Wierden. Heavy fighting takes place during the liberation of Wierden. Here, too, luck seems to be on Gerald's side.

The advance continues into German territory. Esterwegen is reached on April 11, 1945. Reconnaissance of the Küstenkanal (Coastal Canal) is carried out, and the regiment's next task—following the canal crossing—is to secure the road to Edeweicht and Friesoythe.

In the early hours of April 17, 1945, the north bank is reached and a bridgehead established. In the afternoon, they come under counterattack.

The Germans deploy heavy equipment for this, including a self-propelled howitzer. (SP Gun)

The resulting shelling by the SP Gun causes multiple casualties.

Support is requested from their own artillery, but it proves largely ineffective. However, some casualties are reported among their own troops.



SdKfz 124 Wespe

The War Diary of the Algonquin Regiment reads:

Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information Page 12.	Remarks, references to Appendices and initials
1945 17 APR		1. Weather: Bright, warm day. Visibility excellent. 2. The show kicked off at 0100 hrs with heavy arty sp. The narrow water obstacle was crossed in jig time against no opposition and the coys took up their posns as per plan. "A" Coy with a pl of MGS U/C gave excellent covering fire from their posns on the SOUTH Bank. By about 0400 hrs the posn was well consolidated. 3. The main object now was to hold these posns until tk sp could be got across the canal. Unfortunately, bridging operations had to be postponed because of heavy enemy shell fire. Our posns were poorly suited to a defensive role due to the thick hedgerows and drainage ditches that ran both parallel and at right angles to the C/L and our field of fire was consequently very restricted. The ground was very marshy and even the lightest vehs would bog down once they were off the rd. It was ideal terrain for infiltration tactics and it later developed that the enemy exploited this factor to its full extent. 4. After first light exploitation WEST, NORTH and EAST was achieved to lend some depth to our posn. "C" Coy confined its activity to clearing houses along the C/L, keeping their posn firm. 5. By 1300 hrs it became apparent that the enemy by infiltration, was preparing to exert pressure on the bridgehead. By 1400 hrs "C" Coy was being counter-attacked by fire from three sides and the enemy was closing in after being strongly reinforced. The fire fight continued until 2000 hrs and magnificent sp was given by arty, Tyffies and mortars and the posn remained firm. During the fire fight comm between pls was impossible but comm to Tac HQ was maintained by wireless. 6. At last light "A" Coy's 8 and 9 Pls crossed the canal to help hold the left flank. Also at this time an enemy counter-attack by an SP Gun with strong inf sp came down the C/L and "C" Coy's posn was made untenable. However, the coy hung on while Capt Taylor called for a conc of Med Arty in an effort to knock out the SP which was causing considerable damage and cas. The arty fire caused a few cas among our own men but it proved ineffective in stopping the SP which continued on down the C/L almost to the bridge. By this time "C" Coy had begun to withdraw and they pulled back through "D" Coy's posn. Eventually the SP about faced and returned the way it had come and another German counter-attack had failed to dislodge the Alq R.	Scw Scw Scw Scw Scw Scw

sheet M2 - 1/100,000.

Corporal Gerald Joseph Burns is 'Killed in Action' during these operations at the canal. It is unclear whether enemy fire was the cause, particularly since it was also noted that friendly artillery support caused casualties among their own troops.

He is given a temporary grave near Friesoythe.

On March 11, 1946, he is reinterred at the CWGC Canadian War Cemetery in Holten; grave reference: Plot 7, Row E, Grave 7.



Temporary graves near Friesoythe Germany

*He is awarded the:
Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with clasp.*

Gerald's file contains no record of any other decorations being awarded to him. This is actually unusual for someone who enlisted as early as 1940.

His headstone reads:
**In life Loved and Honored
In Death remembered
by his Family.**

Sources:

www.cwgc.org; www.ancestry.com; www.canada.ca/library-archives;
wikipedia,
wartimesproject.com; War Diary Algonquin Regiment.

